

Discipled by the Grace of Jesus Christ

Home Bible Optimism Articles

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Welcome to *Discipled by the Grace of Jesus Christ!* This website is the teaching ministry of Jeff Martin, an outreach to those ignorant of Jesus' love for all mankind. I hope I can help you to know and walk with Jesus Christ through my [Optimism Out of Control book](#) (in print at [Amazon](#), [Lulu](#), and [alternate formats](#)), [DGJC articles](#), [Zinger 1 pagers](#), [WiseCrack cartoons](#), [Top Ten lists](#), [Musings](#), [Wallpaper](#), and [Media](#). Check out my [vision statement](#). Join a Christian fellowship in your neighborhood and be discipled by the grace of Jesus Christ! I'd love to talk to you in person. [Contact me here!](#)

The Bible verses I was taught at church and the testimony of my parents and others introduced me to Jesus. Several times during my youth I prayed to be saved from hell, but remained unsure if I was truly saved. Later as I prepared to enter college I concluded that my sin during high school surely would result in my damnation. I lost all hope before remembering the good news that Christ died for sinners. Happily I planned to start a new relationship with Christ based on his promise of forgiveness to me, rather than my efforts to be good enough. The Lord then immediately directed me into grace centered discipleship at college and afterward. As I dug deeper into the Word of God, with the help of godly men, I learned that my sin problem is much greater than I imagined. My continuing sin, even as a Christian, has shown me what sin really is, hatred of God. What began as a prayer to be saved from Hell has grown to a prayer to be saved from sin. Thankfully God has also shown me that he has oceans and oceans of grace and mercy toward sinners. Jesus is a super savior who has saved me from condemnation, and who I now know has paid for all your sin too!



This Christian teaching is validated by my confession that Christ's death applied to us while we were still his enemies, and thus I have become his friend. *"For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we will be saved by his life,"* (Romans 5:10, WEB). No permission is needed to reprint this content for free distribution. Scripture quotes are primarily from the copyright free World English Bible at <http://ebible.org/web> and <http://ebible.org/study>.

God's richest blessing to you!

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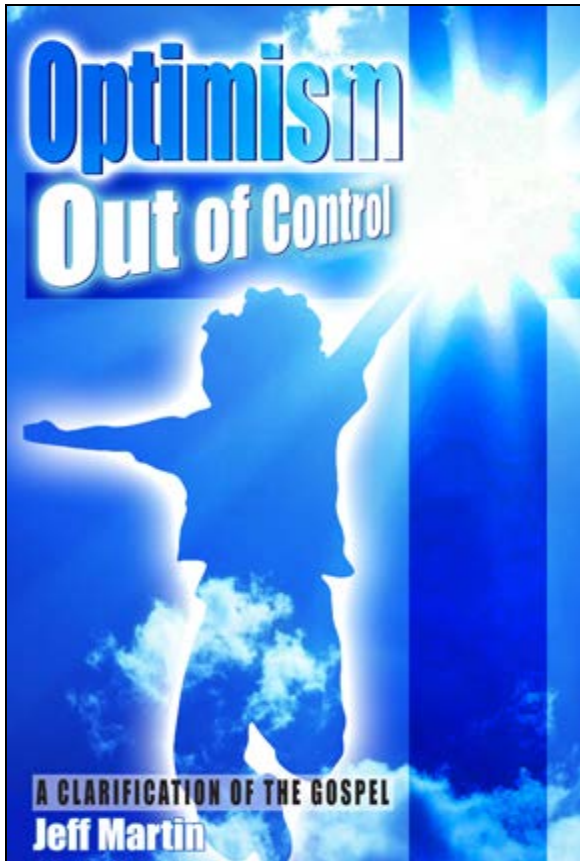
Aionian Bible

Check out the *Holy Bible Aionian Edition* at www.AionianBible.org and in print at Amazon.com and Lulu.com. Follow the project on Facebook at www.facebook.com/AionianBible and learn more at <http://AionianLife.signedon.net>.

This interesting project offers two hundred fourteen Bible translations in ninety-nine world languages. The Aionian Bible is uniquely called "*The World's First Bible Untranslation.*" Read the [preface](#) to learn more about their mission and reason for a new Bible effort. All the versions of the Aionian Bible are public domain or Creative Commons licensed and so can be freely copied. The Aionian Bible also helps the average Bible reader to reconsider the meaning of a number of underlying Greek words such as *aiōnios* and *Hadēs*. The original translations are left undisturbed with an inline note appended to alert the reader when these key words are used. For example, the word *aiōnios* is typically translated as *eternal*, yet Greek linguistics suggests that the word instead means *age, entire or even consummate*. Thus the *aiōnios* life promised in John 3:16 is not a simple ticket to *eternal* life in the future, but instead the invitation through faith in Christ to a *complete and restored* life beginning now, the *consummate* life! Likewise, *Hadēs* is typically translated as *Hell*, yet Revelation 20:13-14 makes it clear that *Hadēs* is a temporary place of punishment and finally thrown into the Lake of Fire empty of all inhabitants. So perhaps our understanding of the life and after-life destinies of redeemed mankind and fallen angels is incomplete. Check out the *Holy Bible Aionian Edition* for a better understanding of these important underlying words in context.

Aionian **BIBLE**

Optimism Out of Control



Now in print at [Amazon](#) and [Lulu!](#)

Years ago I shared a thought with a friend, an incredibly awesome thought. He responded by saying that perhaps my "*optimism had just gotten out of control.*" The phrase was so peculiar that it has stuck with me all these years. I am thankful for my friend's comment, which he has likely long forgotten. It served the good purpose of encouraging my deeper reflection. Also, the phrase has since developed a life of its own as the title of several articles in my [DGJC.ORG/ZINGERS](#) *Optimism Out of Control* series, and now this concluding *Optimism Out of Control* book.

How far would optimism have to go in order to be out of control? I would like to think that I have a pretty good answer to that question, being a husband and father of four. As a younger man, I might have said it was impossible for optimism to ever get out of control. After all, God is for us, so who can be against us? True, our lives are never out of God's control. Yet God also commands us to exercise *self-control*. God has given his

followers the mind of Christ to plan carefully while looking forward to the miraculous. We are not to optimistically leap off buildings flapping our arms expecting to fly, but neither are we to pessimistically conclude that we cannot fly. We *are* to optimistically trust God as we pray and work, fully expecting to fly. *Ora et Labora! Pray and work!* Optimism that has abandoned reason is out of control, and therefore out of bounds. However, optimism bolted onto the grace, truth, and power of God is unstoppable. In Romans 4:17b (WEB) we see that God "*gives life to the dead, and calls the things that are not, as though they were.*" Our God brings things that are not into reality! If miracles are not optimistic, what is?

Since God has our backs covered, is it okay for our optimism to run out of control? He will nonetheless save us. True, God does have our backs covered and protects us from many of our foolish decisions. Yet he also tells us not to put him to the test in Matthew 4:7 (WEB), "*Jesus said to him, 'Again, it is written, "You shall not test the Lord, your God." ' ' "* Leaping off buildings, flapping our arms and expecting to fly, is not okay. Yes, God is in control, yet his sovereign demonstration of grace still allows for great tragedies in our fallen world. Nail-biting parents may take the joy out of life, and I may be such a parent at times. However, losses will come and can be quite painful, but foolish losses are especially painful. So it is not okay to allow our optimism to put God to the test. God will correct us for taking leaps that require miracles to bail us out. Yet he does command us to obey and he provides miracles along the way according to his wisdom. Thus we should fuel the fires of our optimism. But rather than let them explode out of control, we must focus our optimism with good planning directed toward purposeful targets, with self-control.

That said, the purpose of the *Optimism Out of Control* book is to fully explain my incredibly

awesome thought, learned from the Bible. I hope to use careful reason and self-control to accurately fire at the target of your heart with this simple message:

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind.

That is it. That is my incredibly awesome thought. The thought is not my own, of course, but my understanding of the good news of Jesus Christ, as well as the understanding of a few good friends. My defense of this statement will be a thorough and surprising exegesis of the grand conclusion of New Testament grace theology found in the simply-stated verse of Romans 11:32.

The thought is optimistic, but readers beware. The propositions of this book will challenge your current notions about faith, grace, Heaven, Hell, the Lake of Fire, and destiny.

You are invited to post comments and questions online at each page or at DGJC.ORG/CONTACT. Also read alternate formats of *Optimism Out of Control* at DGJC.ORG/FORMATS. Turn the page to the [Optimistic Outline](#) and God bless!

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DGJC

'In' Doctrine!

To indoctrinate is "to teach (a person or group) to accept a set of beliefs uncritically ." This is not good. When Jesus commands us to follow him he invites us to "taste and see that the Lord is good." He also warns us to "test the spirits to see whether they are from God." The Holy Spirit does not indoctrinate those that follow Jesus, but urges us to think critically the whole way. ... [read more](#).

A Brief Theology of Food and Clothing

Introduction Christ and his Scriptures set an example for us of very practical teaching. Once one has entered the world of theology, Bible college, or seminary it can be too easy for ministry to become quite cerebral. Subjects such as atonement, prophecy, and eternal decrees may keep a Bible student entranced for years. Thankfully, the Lord remembers that we are but flesh and that as much as he wants us to know him, he reminds... [read more](#).

A Brief Theology of Houses

I was pretty mad at God. I am sure there are many who have suffered more financial difficulties and just as many who never have. However, my own family's money problems were enough to leave a bitter taste in my mouth toward God. My mom and dad always wanted to have a nice house and financial freedom to compare with their friends and family. They bought an old farm house with the accompanying barn and... [read more](#).

A Brief Theology of Name Calling

Last summer while struggling to connect with a group of cool and quiet 21 st Century teens I relished in a fleeting moment of fraternity with one young man in the high school Sunday school class that I taught. You see I recently turned 42 years old and it is no minor task to appear hip (or groovy or stylin' or cool or chill or whatever) to such an audience. This particular Sunday we studied... [read more](#).

A Brief Theology of Rest

Growing up as a kid I hated to go to bed. My brother and I would argue, complain, and whine to our parents hoping to stay up a few more minutes or watch one more TV program. I am not sure we were even consciously aware of why we did this, until later in our youth when one of us had to go to bed before the other. At this point the complaining and whining... [read more](#).

A Brief Theology of Wine

Do you really know Jesus? 1) The third day, there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee. Jesus' mother was there. 2) Jesus also was invited, with his disciples, to the marriage. 3) When the

wine ran out, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no wine." 4) Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does that have to do with you and me? My hour has not yet come." 5) His mother said to the... [read more.](#)

A Brief Theology of Work

Growing up in the heart of Pennsylvania Dutch Country, Lancaster County, the general philosophy of life was often, "Work is never wrong." A friend of mine once joked about the insanity of the German work ethic, "I caught my grandparents sweeping the forest floor one weekend, for Pete's sake!" More recently, a friend from church commented, "Young men need work. It keeps them out of trouble." I also agree that work is good, in fact... [read more.](#)

A Brief Theology of...Something Better Than Wine

Better Than Wine! Many unbelievers mock Christians as ignorant of the pleasures of sex simply because we strive to avoid their sexual jokes and their sexual immorality. We Christians, however, have the fullest tap into the goodness of God and his gift of sex to mankind. In fact one whole book of the Bible is dedicated to the physical love between a husband and his bride. "The Song of songs, which is Solomon's. Beloved: Let... [read more.](#)

A Look at the Body in Ephesians

Through high school I was basically a weakling. I barely tipped the scales at 140 pounds when I entered college and so I determined to do something about what I considered to be a problem. I began to lift weights and eat masses of carbs and protein with a goal to gain a muscular physical body. Though I continue to advocate exercise, I regret my excesses and wish I had instead applied this same energy... [read more.](#)

A Look at the Book of Colossians

The Christian Scripture is filled with beautiful literature. For example Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is classed by believers and unbelievers alike as one of the most glorious speeches of all time. The letter to the Romans stands as the foremost example of elegant argument while revealing grace! The gospel of John handsomely tells the story of Christ's life from the heart of the disciple whom Jesus loved to our hearts. The book of Hebrews... [read more.](#)

A Look at the Book of Ephesians

Today we apply high school learning. In the ninth grade Mrs. M was my English teacher. She was the most frightening teacher a student could imagine. We have all met perfectionist types who demand absolute attention as well as unquestioning obedience. In a man this is militant. In a woman this was Mrs. M. I just looked at her picture again in my yearbook and chills still hit my bones. My fright was compounded because... [read more.](#)

A Look at the Book of Hebrews

A Theory The author of the book of Hebrews is unknown. Some speculate Paul, Apollos, Barnabas, Luke, or others. One might deduce from the text that the author was not an eye witness of Christ or at least not an apostle. Hebrews 2:3 (WEB) says, "How will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation—which at the first having been spoken through the Lord, was

confirmed to us by those who heard." So we... [read more](#).

A Look at the Book of James

Great benefit is to be had by personal study of God's Word. Recently I learned of a Christian who claimed that he no longer needed to read or turn to the Bible on a regular basis. He claimed that because of his maturity as a Christian and previous Bible knowledge that all his thoughts and actions were now automatically based on the truth every moment. God protect our brother and ourselves from this thinking! We... [read more](#).

A Look at the Book of Philipians

The Pocket I have always enjoyed most of Jack London's literature. I was fascinated by the Call of the Wild as a youth. I read it over and over. However, most of his world view went sailing right over my head. I have since regretted that the life of such a great writer ended in destruction due to his existential foundation. Yet, today I write about the foundation of Jesus Christ and the fruit promised... [read more](#).

A Look at the Books of I and II Timothy

Paul's letters to Timothy demonstrate the height of passion and purpose in Christian discipleship. Unfortunately we often pit things like love and truth, people and project, form and function, mercy and discipline, or worship and work against each other in our thoughts. This is unfortunate because God has designed beauty and strength to be both intimate and hard-working companions. Paul demonstrates both these ideals in his relationship to his young protege, Timothy. Paul reveals the... [read more](#).

A Quintessential Defense of FREE WILL

My Position Clarified Recently while discussing the amazing grace of Christ with a number of Christian friends I have learned that many still hold the belief that God has given man a free will to either receive or reject Jesus. The belief in free will has become a palatable answer to the question of 'how could the grace of God choose some and not others?' Many have come to peace of mind over this difficult... [read more](#).

Absolutely True, However...

I was raised in a dear Mennonite fellowship and the women wore a cloth covering over their hair. The church understood 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 to teach that a woman's head must be covered with a cloth to symbolize her submission to man. Tragically this teaching and other issues became a source of division, sweet fellowship was divided, and each believed as they individually chose. Why bother to raise this subject again? God has introduced me... [read more](#).

Be Strong in Grace

Impossible Commands? God has at times through history commanded His chosen ones to do impossible things. In the book of Genesis we read that Abraham was commanded to leave his homeland and go to a place that God would show him later. In other words, "Abraham begin your trip now and I will let you know where you are going when I choose!" In the book of Exodus we read that Moses was commanded to... [read more](#).

Beautiful Savior / Trustworthy Lord

Jesus Christ's relationship with us has been identified by many titles within Scripture. Jesus calls himself a prophet in Mark 6:4. The writer of Hebrews identifies Jesus as our permanent priest , who offered His own blood for us, in Hebrews 7:18-28. Jesus was also revealed to be our king in John 18:33-37. In Luke 17:5-10 Jesus compares himself to a master while we are his slaves. In John 15:13-15, in Jesus' final hours with... [read more](#).

BODY BUILDING

Build the Body Years ago anxiety attacks and irrational sinful choices nearly took me out of the race. Yet our unchanging Christ and his unfailing grace enabled me to run again in his service, though not without difficult hurdles to overcome, also with his help. On the physical side the anxiety attacks removed sweet sleep and the anxiety medication added 50 pounds to my body. On the spiritual side God used these years to remove... [read more](#).

1 2 [next >](#) [last »](#)

Disciplined by the Grace of Jesus Christ

Home Bible Optimism Articles

Zingers

Acts 17:22-31, A Coherent Worldview Test

Today at lunch my kids rejoiced at the announcement that our weekly Philosophy discussion was cancelled. I can appreciate how even the most zealous academic teens might not be so thrilled about wading through the words of ancient pundits. I wondered to myself, "where are those who muse today?" The masses of today's prevailing culture have been hypnotized by the expert marketers of materialism, the fast pace of Facebook and social media exhibitionism, and popularity's... [read more.](#)

Acts 21:35-39, Search > Bible > Terrorist = Apostle Paul???

I love the Word of God. It is so perfect and has just the right word for every occasion. Recently I was reading more in the newspaper about the President's war on terrorism. At the same time I read another article titled " Christian Terrorist. " A columnist deftly pointed out that some things that people have done in the name of Christ, such as murdering abortionists, are actually terroristic. I wholeheartedly agree that murdering... [read more.](#)

Acts 4:28, They Did What God Willed!

The natural mind refuses to believe the Bible. This is understandable. The Bible makes plain statements that will send our socks screaming down the sidewalk while we are left standing barefoot on the pavement in a cold sweat. The only real choice we have is to stand still while our feet warm on the foundation of God's grace. Unbelievably, the Bible states that God is love. He chose to forgive, love, and bless us through... [read more.](#)

Acts 9:15-16, Suffering

I paged through a pastel colored Christian calendar one time many years ago. The calendar had one page per day with an encouraging verse on each page. As I read through the calendar I was encouraged. However, I noted that all the verses quoted, like the calendar, seemed to be "pastel." Moreover, some of the verses quoted were only quoted in half, while the other more disturbing half was unquoted. Unfortunately, it really is in... [read more.](#)

Christian Discipleship 365 Boot Camp like a Soldier, Athlete, and Farmer

Paul said to his man in 2 Timothy 2:1-7 (WEB), 1) You therefore, my child, be strengthened in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2) The things which you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit the same things to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. 3) You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4) No soldier on duty entangles himself in the affairs... [read more.](#)

Colossians 1:15-23, Out of Control Optimism Part 10, The

Parable of the Pew!

Jesus is the best. Check out Colossians 1:15-23 (WEB)... 15) He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. Jesus is the best for WHO HE IS, the image of God! 16) For by him all things were created in the heavens and on the earth, visible things and invisible things, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things have been created through him and for him. Jesus is... [read more](#).

Colossians 2:20-23 and 3:5-7, Interpreting and Sanctifying Style

We live in odd times. The other day while walking to work I passed a young man who was working on his car on the street. Though nothing odd about that, I noted that his pants were hanging so low over his rear end that he was walking on the pant legs which completely covered his shoes. What? I guess this is a teen hip hop thing, though the man was not a teen. Yet... [read more](#).

Corinthians(1) 10:1-11, The Baptism of Moses Compared and Contrasted with the Baptism of Jesus

There is both a comparison and contrast to be made when considering the baptisms of Moses and Jesus. Christian camps often remain divided on this point by emphasizing either the comparison or the contrast between Moses and Jesus. Yet the Holy Spirit himself notes a both comparison in I Corinthians 10:1-6 and a contrast in Hebrews 3:16-4:3a. So this is a useful study for all Christians to consider. 1) Now I would not have you... [read more](#).

Corinthians(1) 10:12 plus, Paul, John, Luke, and Jesus: Can Sin! Do Sin! May Sin! Hate Sin!

Remaining sin has got to be one of the most difficult realities facing the Christian and all humanity. Understanding God's wisdom in binding all humanity to disobedience is unfathomable (Romans 11:32) and facing the fact that sin still remains after the Lord Jesus personally made payment for our sin is equally mind boggling. We can only say that his infinite patience with our sin and mysterious purpose for our sin must demand all our worship.... [read more](#).

Corinthians(1) 13:12, Fully Known!

"Please understand me!" How many times have those words passed through our mind or lips? A child makes a plea to their parents and parents to their children. A brother argues with a sister and a sister with a brother. A wife entreats her husband and a husband his wife. A worker presents their request to the boss and the boss to the worker. A student asks a teacher for patience and a teacher asks... [read more](#).

Corinthians(1) 4:7, Butterfly Kisses Misses

Several months ago our family received a generous gift. While discussing the matter with a friend they casually commented, "That is great! You deserve it!" As I thought about this I was reminded that our casual conversation is often not very precise and unfortunately all too often not rooted in grace. I returned comment to my friend that actually we did not deserve

it, but we were very thankful for the gift even so. They... [read more](#).

Corinthians(1) 7:10-14, Marriage Part 5, Union with the Defiled?

God calls his people to holiness, that is separation from anything corrupted. He is holy and he has set us apart for his holy purposes. Most homes have special things that are set apart for special purposes. Growing up as a child in my parents home we had a set of fine crystal glassware to be used only for very special occasions. These glasses were set apart from the commonplace and you would hear it... [read more](#).

Corinthians(1) 7:20-21, Romans 11:36, Nation of Slaves Be Free!

No offense, but today I was silent while my church family celebrated the 4th of July with the rousing choruses of the Star Spangled Banner . Perhaps if our faith never gets further than Federer and America's God and Country we could sing along without question of conscience. However, for myself I could not stomach the smiling faces singing of the " land of the free and the home of the brave." We are... [read more](#).

Corinthians(1) 7:29, Marriage, Part 3: As Not Married

As a married man, Scriptures touching on marriage capture my interest. One such Scripture is 1 Corinthians 7:29 (WEB), "But I say this, brothers: the time is short, that from now on, both those who have wives may be as though they had none;" This is a striking command in view of the high value placed on marriage by the Christian faith. What does it mean for the married to live as though not married?... [read more](#).

Corinthians(2) 5:13, Insane Faith

When I share my faith and doctrine in the neighborhood, at the workplace, and with friends and family many feel that I am a strange bird, even Christians. However, my goal is simply to reverberate Presbyterian Calvin's doctrine of man's sinfulness, Catholic Augustine's doctrine of predestination, Methodist Wesley's doctrine of Christ's atonement, Anglican Tyndale's doctrine of irresistible grace, and Anabaptist Simon's doctrine of perseverance. So on these points if I am strange then I am... [read more](#).

Corinthians(2) 5:14-15, Out of Control Optimism Part 9, Jesus Loves All the Little Children of the World!

We sing the great majestic hymns of the faith in my church. Recently we sang one of the most majestic hymns of all time, Jesus Loves the Little Children. You might not think of this simple children's song as majestic, but the message is powerful. Clare Woolston wrote the words to the famous Christian song, Jesus Loves the Little Children . Woolston was a preacher in Chicago Illinois and lived from 1856 to 1927. This... [read more](#).

Corinthians(2) 5:16, The Matrix

Second Corinthians 5 has always been a favorite chapter, especially verse 16 (NIV), "So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in

this way, we do so no longer." My wife and I often remind and correct each other when we are regarding someone from a "worldly" point of view. By "worldly" Paul means from mankind's natural viewpoint apart from... [read more](#).

Corinthians(2) 5:21, Jesus Took My Wheel

My friend D. was explaining to me the challenges of teaching prison inmates his Life Skills class and said many of them could care less because they 'got the wheel.' I asked him what that means. It is prison slang for 'the wheel of life' or in other words a 'life sentence' in prison. You can imagine that would remove your motivation for a life skills class. There is no need... [read more](#).

Daniel 12:1-4, Further Reflection

Bill Saxton wrote Daniel's Prophecies of Covenant Change. Saxton does not address the scope of mankind's salvation. However, he does give thorough treatment to Daniel's prophecies that relate to my proposed understanding of Daniel 12:1-4, Matthew 24-25, and Revelation. Eschatology is not my strength and so I would be glad to take a wide path around these debated and divisive subjects in order to simply enjoy brotherhood trusting God with unanswered questions. Yet the grace... [read more](#).

Ephesians 1:11-14, Archie Bunker and The Praise of God's Glory

I misunderstood Ephesians 1:11-14. I originally understood the passage to teach that we have the privilege of praising God. This is true, however, a closer examination reveals that God is praised for saving us whether we have a heart of praise or not. Read for yourself, "11) We were also assigned an inheritance in him, having been foreordained according to the purpose of him who does all things after the counsel of his will, 12)... [read more](#).

[1](#)

[2](#)

[3](#)

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Wisecracks

Proverbs 01:05

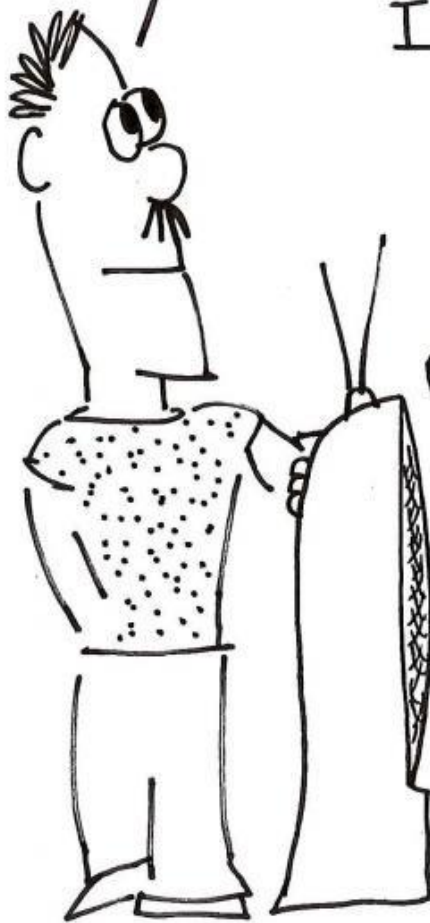
"That the wise man may hear, and increase in learning; that the man of understanding may attain to sound counsel." Proverbs 1:5 (WEB)... [read more](#).

WISE Crack

The wise listen
and add to their learning

Hey! I'm listening, but
I keep losing brain cells

Jeff Martin - Proverbs 1:5



Marry a
Multi-Millionaire

Survivor
Temptation
Island
cheaters



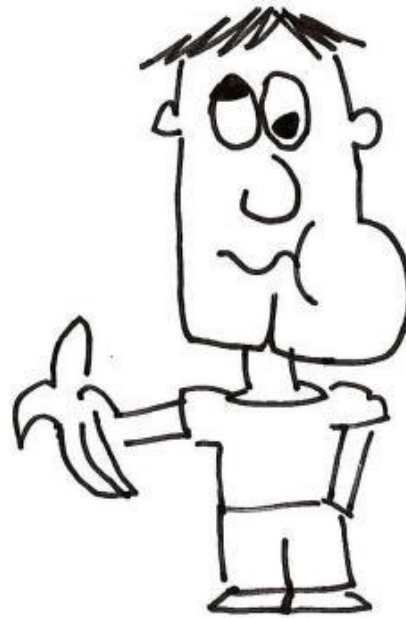
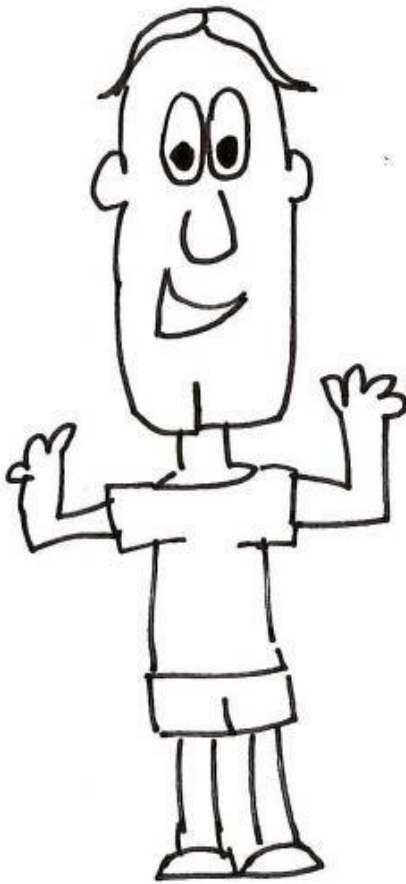
"My son, listen to your father's instruction, and don't forsake your mother's teaching." Proverbs 1:8
(WEB) ... [read more](#).

WISE Crack

Listen, my son, to your father's instruction!

Problem is my dad is an ape !!

Jeff Martin - Proverbs 1:8



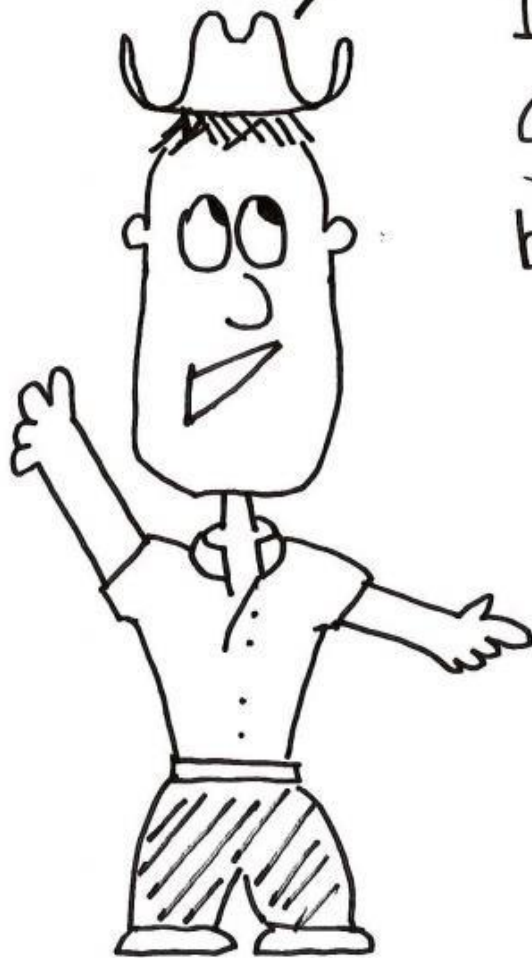
Evolution 101

"Don't envy the man of violence. Choose none of his ways." Proverbs 3:31 (WEB) ... [read more.](#)

WISE Crack

Do not envy a tyrant,
and choose none of his ways!

Jeff Martin - Proverbs 3:31



I have heard of
green with envy,
but this is a jungle!



Proverbs 04:05

"Get wisdom. Get understanding. Don't forget, and don't deviate from the words of my mouth." Proverbs 4:5 (WEB) ... [read more](#).

WISE Crack

Get wisdom! Get understanding!
Do not forget my words or
swerve from them.

Jeff Martin - Proverbs 4:5



Hey Got Milk!
who needs wisdom?



"Drink water out of your own cistern, running water out of your own well." Proverbs 5:15 (WEB) [... read more.](#)

WISE Crack

Drink water out of your own tank and
running water out of your own well.

Jeff Martin - Proverbs 5:15



Water pistol...
Water tank?
Water war!



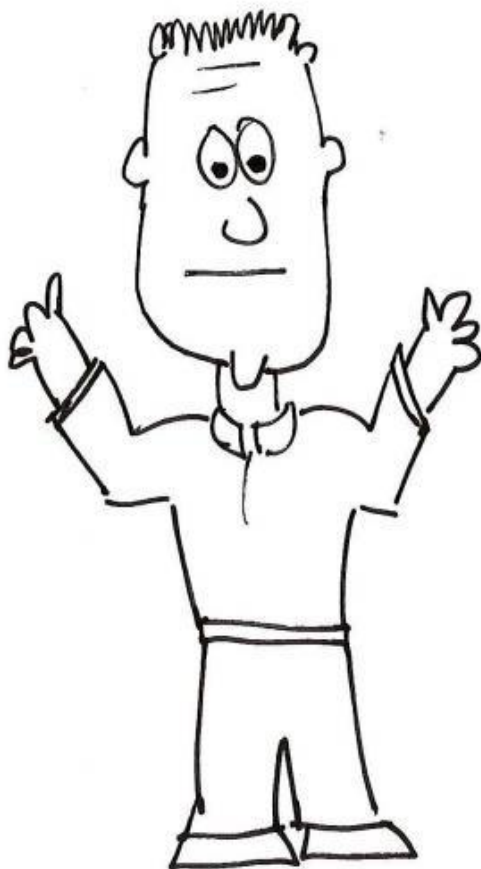
"Like a gold ring in a pig's snout, is a beautiful woman who lacks discretion." Proverbs 11:22 (WEB) ...
[read more.](#)

WISE Crack

Like a gold ring in a pig's snout
is a beautiful woman who
shows no discretion.

Show discretion?
I'm trying to
show some skin!

Jeff Martin - Proverbs 11:22

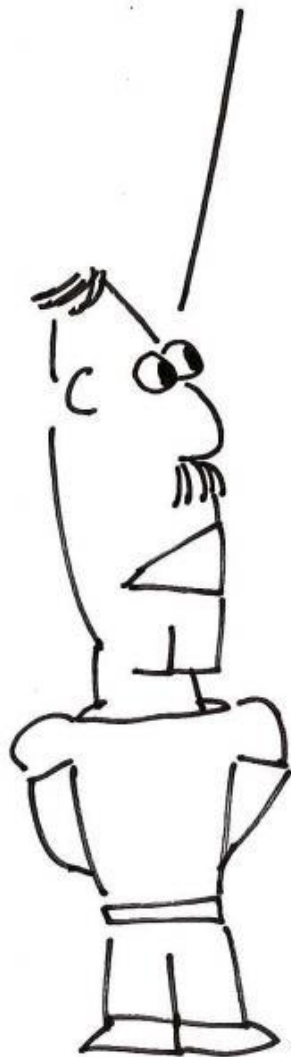


"Better is a dinner of herbs, where love is, than a fattened calf with hatred." Proverbs 15:17 (WEB) ...
[read more.](#)

WISE Crack

Better a meal of vegetables
with love than a tender steak
with hatred.

Jeff Martin - Proverbs 15:17



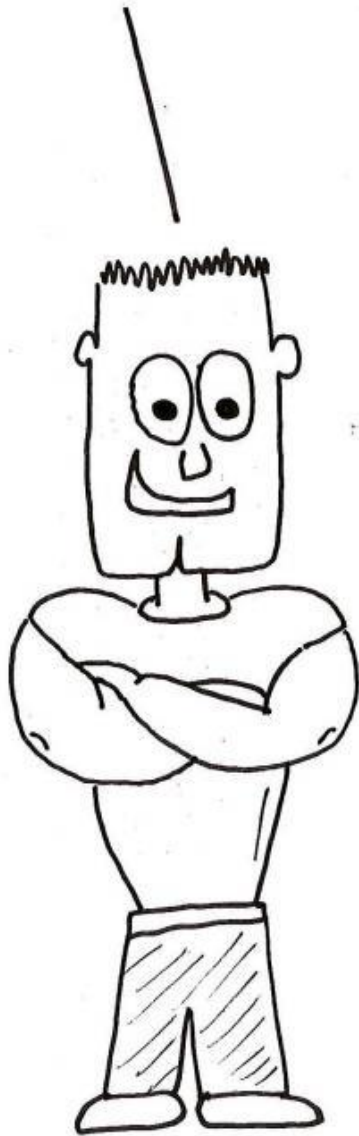
So what about the
poor and hungry?
Let them eat steak!



"The beginning of strife is like breaching a dam, therefore stop contention before quarreling breaks out."
Proverbs 17:14 (WEB) ... [read more](#).

WISE Crack

The beginning of an argument is like a dam burst, so stop before you start!



I guess a flood is a water table with serious legs...



Jeff Martin - Prov. 17:14

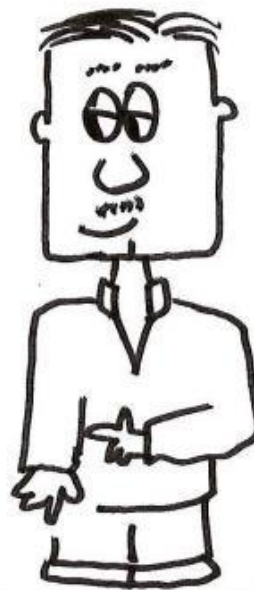
"Many men claim to be men of unfailing love, but who can find a faithful man?" Proverbs 20:6 (WEB) ...
[read more.](#)

WISE Crack

Many a man claims to have unfailing love,
but a faithful man who can find?

Hey baby, I'm a faithful
man! Just ask Suzy,
Donna, Tina, Lynn...

Jeff Martin - Proverbs 20:6



"Plans are established by advice; by wise guidance you wage war!" Proverbs 20:18 (WEB)... [read more.](#)

WISE Crack

Make plans by seeking advice

Jeff Martin + Jacob, Proverbs 20:18



who needs more vice?
I've got a truckload



Proverbs 21:02

"Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but Yahweh weighs the hearts." Proverbs 21:2 (WEB) ... [read more](#).

WISE Crack

All a man's ways seem right to him, but the Lord weighs the heart.

Jeff Martin - Proverbs 21:2



Hey if I'm right why ask the Lord?



"It is better to dwell in the corner of the housetop, than to share a house with a contentious woman."
Proverbs 21:9 (WEB) ... [read more](#).

WISE Crack

Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife.

Jeff Martin - Proverbs 21:9



Now you tell me!



"There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against Yahweh." Proverbs 21:30 (WEB) ... [read more.](#)

WISE Crack

There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the Lord.

Listen chief, I've got a bachelor's from ole state, a masters from new state, and a phd from gaseous state

Jeff Martin - Proverbs 21:30



Proverbs 25:21

"If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat. If he is thirsty, give him water to drink." Proverbs 25:21 (WEB)... [read more](#).

WISE Crack

If your enemy is hungry give him food, and if thirsty give him drink.

What does drinking water drink? Does non-drinking water get thirsty?

Jeff Martin - Proverbs 25:21



"Two things I have asked of you; don't deny me before I die: Remove far from me falsehood and lies. Give me neither poverty nor riches. Feed me with the food that is needful for me; lest I be full, deny you, and say, 'Who is Yahweh?' or lest I be poor, and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God."
Proverbs 30:7-9 (WEB) ... [read more](#).

WISE Crack

Hmmm
Check your math

GET RICH
give rich o!

Jeff Martin - Proverbs 30:7-9



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Home Bible Optimism Articles

Top Tens

Good Books

The Imitation of Christ Thomas A Kempis, Dover Publications Also available here for free...
www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1653 www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/26222 - audio
www.leaderu.com/cyber/books/imitation/imitation.html Knowing God J.I. Packer,
InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois. The Pilgrim's Progress John Bunyan, Whitaker
House, Springdale, Pennsylvania. Heresies - The Image Of Christ In The Mirror Of Heresy And
Orthodoxy From The Apostles To The Present Harold Brown, Doubleday and Company. The
Bondage of the Will Martin Luther, Fleming H. Revell, Grand Rapids, Michigan Disciples...
[read more.](#)

Good Movies

Jesus A faithful video account of the life of Jesus Christ based on the New Testament
Scriptures. Produced by Genesis Project. www.jesusvideo.org . Beyond the Next Mountain
The true story of God's calling of the youth Rochunga Pudaite to faith and Christian service
and how he completed an amazing mission to serve his family, the Hmar people of India,
through his youth to adulthood. An excellent film to inspire your children and yourself to
abandon... [read more.](#)

Good Websites

www.hopebeyondhell.net - Awesome news! concordant.org - A very cool Bible translation!
www.biblegateway.com - Online Bible www.worlddebible.com - English Bible translation free
from copyright www.wowhits.com - Great Christian music www.zradio.org - Great Christian
music on live radio www.klove.com - More great Christian internet radio www.gcfl.net - Good
Clean Funnies List www.visionvideo.com - Christian videos www.e-sword.net - Free
downloadable Bible software www.christiananswers.net - Christian answers to questions
www.answersingenesis.org - Biblical defense of Creation www.csama.org - Creation
Science... [read more.](#)

Disciplined by the Grace of Jesus Christ

Home Bible Optimism Articles

Musings

All You Zombies, by The Hooters: For the living dead in the nation

Holy Moses met the Pharaoh Yeah, he tried to set him straight Looked him in the eye, "let my people go" Holy Moses on the mountain High above the golden calf Went to get the Ten Commandments He's just gonna break them in half All you zombies hide your faces All you people in the street All you sittin' in high places The pieces gonna fall on you No one ever spoke to Noah They... [read more](#).

Are You Ready to Campaign?

Ready to campaign for Christ? Printable stickers, Avery 5164 stock Word and PDF format!... [read more](#).

Carry On My Wayward Son, by Kerry Livgren: For the Rock hearted among us

Once I rose above the noise and confusion Just to get a glimpse beyond the illusion I was soaring ever higher, but I flew too high Though my eyes could see I still was a blind man Though my mind could thnk I still was a mad man I hear the voices when I'm dreamin', I can hear them say Carry on my wayward son, For there'll be peace when you are done Lay your... [read more](#).

Desperado, by Kenny Rogers: For those lost in the Country among us

Desperado, why don't you come to your senses, You've been out ridin fences for so long now, Oh and you're a hard one, but I know that you've got your reasons, The things that are pleasin you can hurt you somehow. Don't you draw the queen of diamonds boy, she'll beat you if she's able. You know the queen of hearts is always your best bet. Now it seems to me some fine things have... [read more](#).

Examine Yourself

"Examine your own selves, whether you are in the faith. Test your own selves . Or don't you know about your own selves, that Jesus Christ is in you? —unless indeed you are disqualified." 2 Corinthians 13:5 (WEB) "But let a man examine himself , and so let him eat of the bread, and drink of the cup." 1 Corinthians 11:28 (WEB) " Be diligent in these things. Give yourself wholly to them, that your... [read more](#).

I am Catholic, Protestant, or Christian?

Am I Catholic, Protestant, or Christian?... [read more](#).

I Pledge Allegiance To The Cross

Brother or sister in Christ will you join me? I pledge allegiance to the cross of Jesus Christ the Lord and to the grace He gave to me His sinless death for my sinful life to purchase eternal freedom for all His family.... [read more.](#)

PAX I GIVE YOU (in honor of my dad)

Read PAX I GIVE YOU in honor of my dad.... [read more.](#)

The Chocolate Soldier by C.T. Studd

Read The Chocolate Soldier by C.T. Studd.... [read more.](#)

Unlikely Preachers


Read unlikely preaching from a few unlikely preachers.... [read more.](#)

Wallpaper

Baby Lamb



Backroad Biking

A photograph of two cyclists riding on a dirt trail. The cyclist in the foreground is wearing a white shirt, dark shorts, and a backpack. The cyclist in the background is wearing a grey shirt and dark shorts. They are riding on a dirt trail that winds through a lush green landscape. In the background, there is a large body of water, possibly a bay or a lake, surrounded by green hills and mountains. The sky is blue with some clouds. The text "I am Discipled by the Grace of Jesus Christ" is overlaid on the right side of the image in a large, bold, black font with a white outline.

**I am Discipled
by the Grace
of Jesus
Christ**

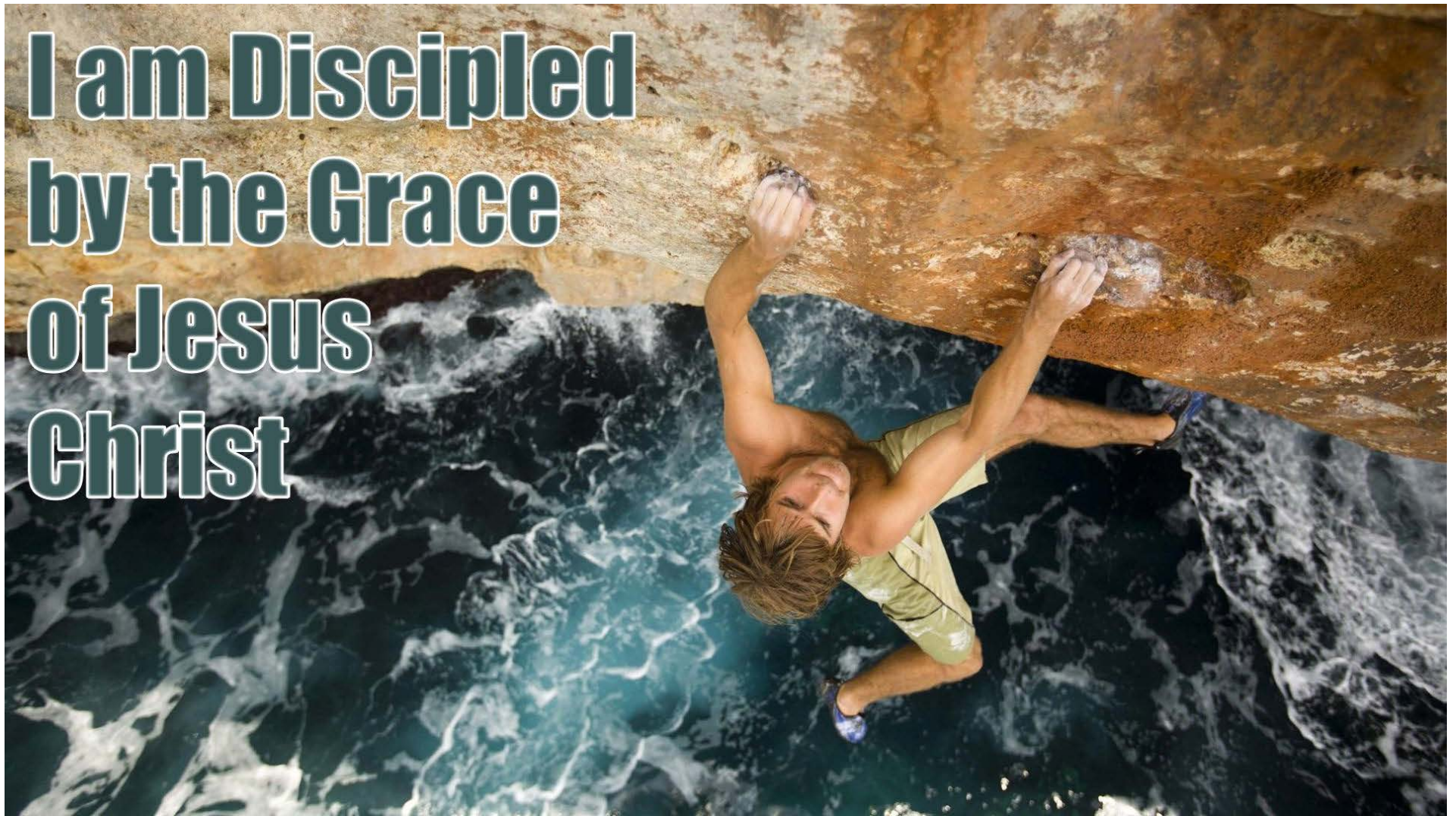
Blue Sky



Breakaway Basketball



Cliffhanger



Empty Stocks



**I am Discipled
by the Grace of Jesus Christ**

Lions Roar

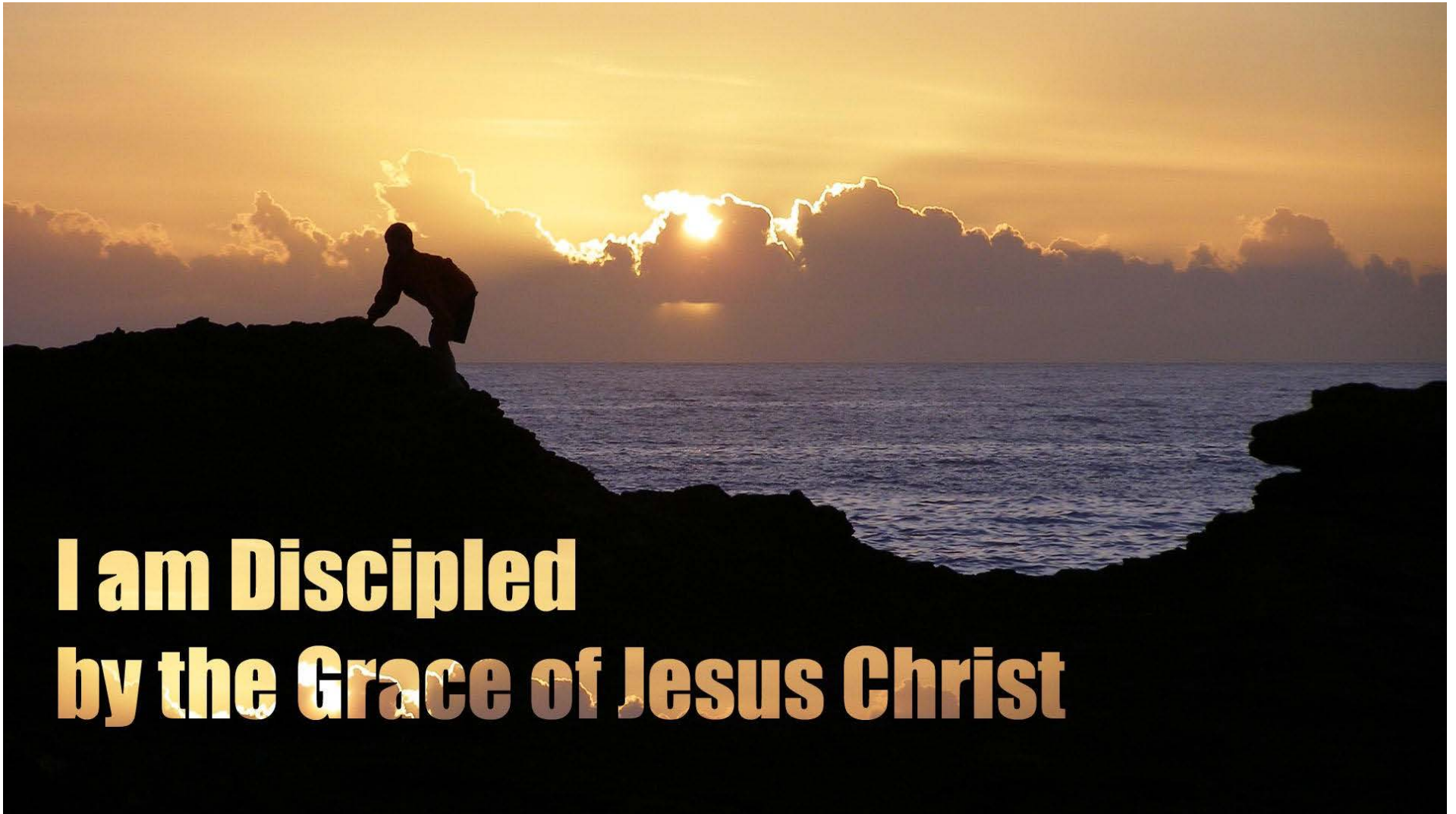


**I am Discipled
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Mountain Hike



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Vision

Through faith in Jesus Christ, God has given his people a vision and purpose:

1. To honor, obey, and teach the Bible, the only inspired, useful, and flawless word of God. *"Every Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness."* (2 Timothy 3:16, WEB). *"Every word of God is flawless. He is a shield to those who take refuge in him."* (Proverbs 30:5, WEB).
2. To make ourselves, our family, our friends, our neighbors, and all people disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. *"18) Jesus came to them and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. 19) Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20) teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you. Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'* Amen." (Matthew 28:18-20, WEB).
3. To obey Christ and call others to obey His two great commandments. *"36) 'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?' 37) Jesus said to him, ' "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." 38) This is the first and great commandment. 39) A second likewise is this, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 40) The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.'* " (Matthew 22:36-40, WEB).
4. To boldly teach the gospel which proclaims a righteousness from God given to all mankind that is received by faith from beginning to end. *"16) For I am not ashamed of the Good News of Christ, because it is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first, and also for the Greek. 17) For in it is revealed God's righteousness from faith to faith. As it is written, 'But the righteous shall live by faith.'* " (Romans 1:16-17, WEB). *"18) So then as through one trespass, all men were condemned; even so through one act of righteousness, all men were justified to life. 19) For as through the one man's disobedience many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one, many will be made righteous."* (Romans 5:18-19, WEB).
5. To be a part of building up the body of Christ, the congregation of believers, the church, for fellowship, service, and worship as we wait for the Lord's return, *"8) But since we belong to the day, let's be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet, the hope of salvation. 9) For God didn't appoint us to wrath, but to the obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10) who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him. 11) Therefore exhort one another, and build each other up, even as you also do. 12) But we beg you, brothers, to know those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you, 13) and to respect and honor them in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves. 14) We exhort you, brothers: Admonish the disorderly; encourage the faint-hearted; support the weak; be patient toward all. 15) See that no one returns evil for evil to anyone, but always follow after that which is good for one another and for all. 16) Always rejoice. 17) Pray without ceasing. 18) In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus toward you. 19) Don't quench the Spirit. 20) Don't despise prophesies. 21) Test all things, and hold firmly that which is good. 22) Abstain*

from every form of evil. 23) May the God of peace himself sanctify you completely. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24) He who calls you is faithful, who will also do it." (I Thessalonians 5:8-24, WEB).

6. To promote the unity of the body of Christ. *"1) I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to walk worthily of the calling with which you were called, 2) with all lowliness and humility, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3) being eager to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4) There is one body and one Spirit, even as you also were called in one hope of your calling, 5) one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6) one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all, and in us all."* (Ephesians 4:1-6, WEB).
7. To accept the Lord's discipline, encourage others to do the same, pursue holiness, and warn others that the unbelieving will be punished in Hades and the unredeemed will be separated from God for *The Ages of the Ages* in the Lake of Fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels. *"7) It is for discipline that you endure. God deals with you as with children, for what son is there whom his father doesn't discipline? 8) But if you are without discipline, of which all have been made partakers, then are you illegitimate, and not children. 9) Furthermore, we had the fathers of our flesh to chasten us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live? 10) For they indeed, for a few days, punished us as seemed good to them; but he for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness. 11) All chastening seems for the present to be not joyous but grievous; yet afterward it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. 12) Therefore lift up the hands that hang down and the feeble knees, 13) and make straight paths for your feet, so what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed. 14) Follow after peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no man will see the Lord, 15) looking carefully lest there be any man who falls short of the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and many be defiled by it."* (Hebrews 12:7-15, WEB).

Zingers

Acts 17:22-31, A Coherent Worldview Test

Today at lunch my kids rejoiced at the announcement that our weekly Philosophy discussion was cancelled. I can appreciate how even the most zealous academic teens might not be so thrilled about wading through the words of ancient pundits. I wondered to myself, "where are those who muse today?" The masses of today's prevailing culture have been hypnotized by the expert marketers of materialism, the fast pace of Facebook and social media exhibitionism, and popularity's... [read more.](#)

Acts 21:35-39, Search > Bible > Terrorist = Apostle Paul???

I love the Word of God. It is so perfect and has just the right word for every occasion. Recently I was reading more in the newspaper about the President's war on terrorism. At the same time I read another article titled " Christian Terrorist. " A columnist deftly pointed out that some things that people have done in the name of Christ, such as murdering abortionists, are actually terroristic. I wholeheartedly agree that murdering... [read more.](#)

Acts 4:28, They Did What God Willed!

The natural mind refuses to believe the Bible. This is understandable. The Bible makes plain statements that will send our socks screaming down the sidewalk while we are left standing barefoot on the pavement in a cold sweat. The only real choice we have is to stand still while our feet warm on the foundation of God's grace. Unbelievably, the Bible states that God is love. He chose to forgive, love, and bless us through... [read more.](#)

Acts 9:15-16, Suffering

I paged through a pastel colored Christian calendar one time many years ago. The calendar had one page per day with an encouraging verse on each page. As I read through the calendar I was encouraged. However, I noted that all the verses quoted, like the calendar, seemed to be "pastel." Moreover, some of the verses quoted were only quoted in half, while the other more disturbing half was unquoted. Unfortunately, it really is in... [read more.](#)

Christian Discipleship 365 Boot Camp like a Soldier, Athlete, and Farmer

Paul said to his man in 2 Timothy 2:1-7 (WEB), 1) You therefore, my child, be strengthened in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2) The things which you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit the same things to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. 3) You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4) No soldier on duty entangles himself in the affairs... [read more.](#)

Colossians 1:15-23, Out of Control Optimism Part 10, The

Parable of the Pew!

Jesus is the best. Check out Colossians 1:15-23 (WEB)... 15) He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. Jesus is the best for WHO HE IS, the image of God! 16) For by him all things were created in the heavens and on the earth, visible things and invisible things, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things have been created through him and for him. Jesus is... [read more](#).

Colossians 2:20-23 and 3:5-7, Interpreting and Sanctifying Style

We live in odd times. The other day while walking to work I passed a young man who was working on his car on the street. Though nothing odd about that, I noted that his pants were hanging so low over his rear end that he was walking on the pant legs which completely covered his shoes. What? I guess this is a teen hip hop thing, though the man was not a teen. Yet... [read more](#).

Corinthians(1) 10:1-11, The Baptism of Moses Compared and Contrasted with the Baptism of Jesus

There is both a comparison and contrast to be made when considering the baptisms of Moses and Jesus. Christian camps often remain divided on this point by emphasizing either the comparison or the contrast between Moses and Jesus. Yet the Holy Spirit himself notes a both comparison in I Corinthians 10:1-6 and a contrast in Hebrews 3:16-4:3a. So this is a useful study for all Christians to consider. 1) Now I would not have you... [read more](#).

Corinthians(1) 10:12 plus, Paul, John, Luke, and Jesus: Can Sin! Do Sin! May Sin! Hate Sin!

Remaining sin has got to be one of the most difficult realities facing the Christian and all humanity. Understanding God's wisdom in binding all humanity to disobedience is unfathomable (Romans 11:32) and facing the fact that sin still remains after the Lord Jesus personally made payment for our sin is equally mind boggling. We can only say that his infinite patience with our sin and mysterious purpose for our sin must demand all our worship.... [read more](#).

Corinthians(1) 13:12, Fully Known!

"Please understand me!" How many times have those words passed through our mind or lips? A child makes a plea to their parents and parents to their children. A brother argues with a sister and a sister with a brother. A wife entreats her husband and a husband his wife. A worker presents their request to the boss and the boss to the worker. A student asks a teacher for patience and a teacher asks... [read more](#).

Corinthians(1) 4:7, Butterfly Kisses Misses

Several months ago our family received a generous gift. While discussing the matter with a friend they casually commented, "That is great! You deserve it!" As I thought about this I was reminded that our casual conversation is often not very precise and unfortunately all too often not rooted in grace. I returned comment to my friend that actually we did not deserve

it, but we were very thankful for the gift even so. They... [read more](#).

Corinthians(1) 7:10-14, Marriage Part 5, Union with the Defiled?

God calls his people to holiness, that is separation from anything corrupted. He is holy and he has set us apart for his holy purposes. Most homes have special things that are set apart for special purposes. Growing up as a child in my parents home we had a set of fine crystal glassware to be used only for very special occasions. These glasses were set apart from the commonplace and you would hear it... [read more](#).

Corinthians(1) 7:20-21, Romans 11:36, Nation of Slaves Be Free!

No offense, but today I was silent while my church family celebrated the 4th of July with the rousing choruses of the Star Spangled Banner . Perhaps if our faith never gets further than Federer and America's God and Country we could sing along without question of conscience. However, for myself I could not stomach the smiling faces singing of the " land of the free and the home of the brave." We are... [read more](#).

Corinthians(1) 7:29, Marriage, Part 3: As Not Married

As a married man, Scriptures touching on marriage capture my interest. One such Scripture is 1 Corinthians 7:29 (WEB), "But I say this, brothers: the time is short, that from now on, both those who have wives may be as though they had none;" This is a striking command in view of the high value placed on marriage by the Christian faith. What does it mean for the married to live as though not married?... [read more](#).

Corinthians(2) 5:13, Insane Faith

When I share my faith and doctrine in the neighborhood, at the workplace, and with friends and family many feel that I am a strange bird, even Christians. However, my goal is simply to reverberate Presbyterian Calvin's doctrine of man's sinfulness, Catholic Augustine's doctrine of predestination, Methodist Wesley's doctrine of Christ's atonement, Anglican Tyndale's doctrine of irresistible grace, and Anabaptist Simon's doctrine of perseverance. So on these points if I am strange then I am... [read more](#).

Corinthians(2) 5:14-15, Out of Control Optimism Part 9, Jesus Loves All the Little Children of the World!

We sing the great majestic hymns of the faith in my church. Recently we sang one of the most majestic hymns of all time, Jesus Loves the Little Children. You might not think of this simple children's song as majestic, but the message is powerful. Clare Woolston wrote the words to the famous Christian song, Jesus Loves the Little Children . Woolston was a preacher in Chicago Illinois and lived from 1856 to 1927. This... [read more](#).

Corinthians(2) 5:16, The Matrix

Second Corinthians 5 has always been a favorite chapter, especially verse 16 (NIV), "So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in

this way, we do so no longer." My wife and I often remind and correct each other when we are regarding someone from a "worldly" point of view. By "worldly" Paul means from mankind's natural viewpoint apart from... [read more](#).

Corinthians(2) 5:21, Jesus Took My Wheel

My friend D. was explaining to me the challenges of teaching prison inmates his Life Skills class and said many of them could care less because they 'got the wheel.' I asked him what that means. It is prison slang for 'the wheel of life' or in other words a 'life sentence' in prison. You can imagine that would remove your motivation for a life skills class. There is no need... [read more](#).

Daniel 12:1-4, Further Reflection

Bill Saxton wrote Daniel's Prophecies of Covenant Change. Saxton does not address the scope of mankind's salvation. However, he does give thorough treatment to Daniel's prophecies that relate to my proposed understanding of Daniel 12:1-4, Matthew 24-25, and Revelation. Eschatology is not my strength and so I would be glad to take a wide path around these debated and divisive subjects in order to simply enjoy brotherhood trusting God with unanswered questions. Yet the grace... [read more](#).

Ephesians 1:11-14, Archie Bunker and The Praise of God's Glory

I misunderstood Ephesians 1:11-14. I originally understood the passage to teach that we have the privilege of praising God. This is true, however, a closer examination reveals that God is praised for saving us whether we have a heart of praise or not. Read for yourself, "11) We were also assigned an inheritance in him, having been foreordained according to the purpose of him who does all things after the counsel of his will, 12)... [read more](#).

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Optimistic Outline



I am not the first to leap for joy over this awesome news!

The Apostle Paul said, *"Therefore God also highly exalted him, and gave to him the name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, those on earth, and those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father,"* (Philippians 2:-11 WEB).

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_the_Apostle

The Pastor Watchman Nee said, *"God...held council with His Son even before the foundation of the world so as to have His Son come down and go to the cross in order to reconcile all things back to himself, rescue fallen mankind, and resolve the rebellion of Satan,"* (God's Plan and the Overcomers, Nee).

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Watchman_Nee

The poet George MacDonald said, *"Every atonement that God cares for; and the work of Jesus Christ on earth was the creative atonement, because it works atonement in every heart. He brings and is bringing God and man, and man and man, into perfect unity: 'I in*

them and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one... Justice then requires that sin should be put an end to; and not that only, but that it should be atoned for... but there is no refuge from the love of God; that love will, for very love, insist upon the uttermost farthing," (Justice, MacDonald).

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_MacDonald

The statesman Abraham Lincoln said, *"It is everybody or nobody,"* (Unity, Volumes 13-14, Lincoln when questioned who would ultimately be in Heaven). *"I believe the will of God prevails. Without Him all human reliance is vain. Without the assistance of His divine Being, I cannot succeed. With that assistance I cannot fail. Being a humble instrument in the hands of our Heavenly Father, I desire that all my works and acts may be according to His will; and that it may be so, I give thanks to the Almighty, and seek His aid,"* (The Creed of Abraham Lincoln in His Own Words, Wood). *"[All that was lost by the transgression of Adam was made good by the atonement: all that was lost by the fall was made good by the sacrifice - Cogdal],"* (The Almost Chosen People, Wolf)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious_views_of_Abraham_Lincoln

The writer Madeleine L'Engle said, *"All will be redeemed in God's fullness of time, all, not just the small portion of the population who have been given the grace to know and accept Christ. All the strayed and stolen sheep. All the little lost ones,"* (A Stone for a Pillow, L'Engle).

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madeleine_L'Engle

And even the entertainer P.T. Barnum said, *"I believe that finally every created soul will be drawn, not forced, to choose to seek, and when he chooses to seek will be helped to find eternal life. I have no knowledge of place or time. I have the great hope ... I base my hope on ... the attributes of God, ... the office and character of Jesus Christ, ... the trend of Scripture,"* (*Why I am a Universalist*, Barnum).

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/P._T._Barnum

The Apostle, the pastor, the poet, the statesman, the writer, and the entertainer above have all agreed that **Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind.**

Following is my defense of the same. The publication is available for free here at DGJC.ORG/OPTIMISM and various locations online. If possible, read the supporting articles referenced throughout the book also found here at DGJC.ORG. The next and previous page links are at the page bottom. The book outline is below and on the right sidebar. You can use the book outline links to jump directly to particular pages, but I recommend reading the pages in sequence. Also, if possible, read the supporting articles referenced throughout the book.

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Optimistic Abstract



After decades of defeat in a wrestling match with grace I am now thankful to offer a helping hand to those seeking escape from confusion and even self-righteous deception. Read on to discover the awesome Biblical news that God loves you... because he loves all mankind! I thank God for the patience and prayers of many Christians and especially a few Christians who showed me grace while I thrashed through life searching for the answers that were right in front of me, to God be the glory.

I also thank my editors for their review of the *Optimism Out of Control* manuscript. Their suggestions and corrections were invaluable. However, any remaining faults in grammar, tone, logic, and use of Scripture are my sole

responsibility. Also the book developed over a period of years as collections of articles and concepts were assembled. Thank you for your patience if you discover unnecessary repetition. Further time and effort certainly could have improved the work, but the urgency of clarifying the gospel of grace pressed for publication. I kindly ask you to contact me at DGJC.ORG/CONTACT with your own suggestions and corrections.

The *Optimism Out of Control* book has grown to be longer than anticipated. It can be read in several hours. I recommend reading the chapters through in sequence for the best understanding of my arguments. Also if you find the book confusing please persevere through the appendix where many more questions are answered. If you just cannot find the time you are invited to read the...

Optimism Abstract

Salvation Inception



Again, my simple thesis is that *Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind*. A related thesis is that *salvation is without condition and a free act of God's grace, given by him to chosen mankind*. This salvation is not conditioned on any work, action, thought, or choice of man. God has given grace to all mankind without our invitation or pre-condition. This salvation cannot be missed, ruined, or lost, since God himself secures the beginning, middle, and end. The inception and finale of salvation is God. The result is guaranteed.

This is incredibly optimistic. Christ's salvation is the only source of confidence and peace. He is the foundation to build your life upon. Unfortunately, the message is often clouded by hasty conclusions, poor interpretations, divided opinions, incomplete understandings, and inaccurate Bible translations. Sin itself obscures the message of salvation at times, though God's

Word is not obscure. God has spoken truth and love to reach both our minds and our hearts.

Perhaps that is one reason for the apparent obscurity. God could have given the Bible in the form of an encyclopedia or a step-by-step guide to salvation. That may have been clearer to our minds. We could easily memorize the outline and the steps. The knowledge would be locked in our minds, but the heart of salvation would be missed. God does want to explain the gospel to our minds, but he also is determined to share his love with our hearts. He is more than a teacher to us. He is our lover. If we read the Bible as notes from our teacher, we will miss God's heart. The Bible is not just a textbook for salvation, but also history, prose, poetry, and song. The Bible is God's love letters to our hearts.

Love is a common desire worldwide. Why would anyone ever refuse God's love? Why is there even one non-Christian in the world? If Jesus is so good, why isn't everyone cheering for the Son of God? Why argue with the idea that God has chosen to love you, me, and all mankind, in Jesus Christ? Can we name one valid objection to Jesus Christ? Did Jesus ever wrong one person? Can we see one imperfection in his words or actions?

Consider this dialogue between Peter and Jesus in Luke 5:1-11 (WEB).

1) Now while the multitude pressed on him and heard the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret. 2) He saw two boats standing by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them, and were washing their nets. 3) He entered into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the land. He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat. 4) When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into the deep, and let down your nets for a catch.'

5) Simon answered him, 'Master, we worked all night, and took nothing; but at your word I will let down the net.' 6) When they had done this, they caught

a great multitude of fish, and their net was breaking. 7) They beckoned to their partners in the other boat, that they should come and help them. They came, and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. 8) But Simon Peter, when he saw it, fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord.' 9) For he was amazed, and all who were with him, at the catch of fish which they had caught; 10) and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon.

Jesus said to Simon, 'Don't be afraid. From now on you will be catching people alive.' 11) When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything, and followed him.

This story shows that we really do not want God to get close to our hearts. We are afraid, and hide our sin from his eyes. Peter asked Jesus to leave because Jesus' holiness convicted him and made him uncomfortable. I suggest that atheism and false religion share a similar motivation to Peter's. We build defenses that keep us at a "safe" distance from God. Atheists choose the lie that God does not exist to keep him away. The religious choose a veneer of self-righteousness to shield themselves from God's gaze, while clinging to their fire insurance policies. If we dare to take a step closer to him, we dress ourselves up, hoping to hide our sin. We know we have done bad things and so we are uncomfortable around Jesus because he is good. We are just like our fallen parents, Adam and Eve, who tried to hide from God in the Garden of Eden.

Since we hide from God, special tactics beyond education are needed to defeat unbelief and reach the heart of sinners hiding from God's love.

However, there is no hiding from God, even if we pretend that he does not exist. One day we each will stand before him. I pray that God will use this book to conquer our opposition to Jesus, our fear of exposure, and our doubt about his love and forgiveness. The climax of God's love for mankind is seen in perfect measure at the cross. The cross fully exposed our hatred of God when we crucified Christ. However, the cross also displayed God's flood of forgiveness through Jesus' willing death for our sins. Jesus prayed from the cross in Luke 23:34b (WEB): *"Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing."* That is the proclamation of forgiveness and salvation for you, me, and all mankind.

The initial pages of this book lay the groundwork for a thorough explanation of my thesis by introducing important concepts, reviewing my previous articles, and beginning at the end with the grand conclusion of Christian salvation found in Romans 11:32.

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Christendom Confusion



As a new Christian, I learned that not all Christians agree. Sadly we are divided over many things. New Christians need to be nurtured just like newborn infants, but when there are family dysfunctions, newborns can suffer. For example, I read an account of a church family which divided over the shade of green for the new carpet in the sanctuary. Yikes! The tragedy is that when families divide, the children suffer most. Thankfully, God is our Father and not the church! Though the church is a haven for believers young and old, God alone is our perfect Heavenly Father. Nonetheless, it is tragic to think how self-centered, weak, and poor in judgment we Christians and our churches often are.

Christians have also divided over more significant matters. The Protestant Reformation in the 16th century is an example. In that case, there was a sharp disagreement about the gospel message itself. Martin Luther believed one thing while Catholic orthodoxy believed another. Moreover, the protesters could not even come to an agreement among themselves. Further splintering continued. Some followed Martin Luther (Lutherans), some followed John Calvin (Presbyterians), and still others followed Michael Sattler (Anabaptists). Also note that the Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church had already divided centuries earlier. Today the Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Anabaptists are not just three groups, but have each divided again, too many times to count. This is just a short account of the "organized" church. We ought to call ourselves the "disorganized" church! Other Christians prefer to follow Christ apart from this confusion, but they are not without their own sin and divisions as well.

My son once said as a young boy, "*It would be great if we could all live in one giant house!*" That was a special season of time for our family. We lived in a rented apartment. It had a large screen door that opened onto a grassy field surrounded by other apartments. Each neighbor had a screen door just like ours, and kids would pour out onto the field every evening and weekend to play kickball and other games. We had fun, but at day's end everyone needed to go home. My son thought it would be great if we could all go home to the same house so the fun would never end!

Sadly, because of the divisions, we Christians no longer live in the same house. This is nothing new. Divisions among Christians began in the first century as I Corinthians 1:10-17 (WEB) records Paul pleading,

10) Now I beg you, brothers, through the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

11) For it has been reported to me concerning you, my brothers, by those who are from Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. 12) Now I mean this, that each one of you says, 'I follow Paul,' 'I follow Apollos,' 'I follow Cephas,' and, 'I follow Christ.'

13) Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized into the name of Paul? 14) I thank God that I baptized none of you, except Crispus and Gaius, 15) so that no one should say that I had baptized you into my own name. 16) (I also baptized the household of Stephanas; besides them, I don't know whether I baptized any other.) 17) For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the Good News—not in wisdom of words, so that the cross of Christ wouldn't be made void.

If Christians began dividing in the 1st century and 2,000 years later the divisions have multiplied into the thousands, what hope is there?

Much.

There is hope because Jesus prayed in John 17:20-23 (WEB),

20) Not for these only do I pray, but for those also who will believe in me through their word, 21) that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that you sent me. 22) The glory which you have given me, I have given to them; that they may be one, even as we are one; 23) I in them, and you in me, that they may be perfected into one; that the world may know that you sent me and loved them, even as you loved me.

So we press forward with confidence, knowing that the prayer of Christ has been heard. Jesus' prayer is hot on our Heavenly Father's mind as he works his will in this world. Will you and I keep step with Christ and the oneness for which he prayed? Or will we be the cause of yet another division? Do we need to be confronted with the prophet's words yet again in Malachi 2:10 (WEB), as he asked, *"Don't we all have one father? Hasn't one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, profaning the covenant of our fathers?"*

So, looking past carpet color disputes, please join me in revisiting the gospel message.

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 - [PART for ALL](#)
 - [ALL for PART](#)
 - ['Love Wins' by Rob Bell](#)
 - [Three Rebuttals](#)
 - [Other Theologians](#)
 - [Streams of Thought](#)
 - [Certain Knowledge](#)

- Nit Picky?
- A House Divided
- Christ Dismembered

< [Grand Conclusion](#)

[up](#)

[Soteriologies](#) >

A Thought



Our *Salvation Evaluator* matrix has been useful to categorize different streams of thought concerning Christian salvation. When the factors of [*PART or ALL*] of mankind and [*PART or ALL*] of salvation are considered carefully, there is no fence riding. You might possibly ride the fence between *PART* and *ALL*. You could argue that this subject is similar to the mystery of the Trinity being three in one, or Jesus being both fully human and fully divine. However, the great philosopher C.S. Lewis and the great theologian James Boice both agreed that there is no fence riding, though each from different sides of the fence.

SALVATION EVALUATOR	PART OF MANKIND	ALL OF MANKIND
PART OF SALVATION	REJECTED BY ALL	ARMINIANISM C.S. LEWIS
ALL OF SALVATION	CALVINISM JAMES BOICE	?

We have also shown that the three cases considered thus far all have a dispute with Scripture, more or less. Here are the few Scriptures we considered.

I John 2:1-2 (WEB) explains that Jesus did die for *ALL* mankind. Verse 2 specifically highlights that Christ atoned for the sins of believers and unbelievers -- for the church and the whole world.

1) My little children, I write these things to you so that you may not sin. If anyone sins, we have a Counselor with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. 2) And he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.

Ephesians 2:8-9 (WEB) explains that we are saved by grace apart from any work and that even faith itself is a gift of God.

8) for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9) not of works, that no one would boast.

I have also said that all Christians agree that the *PART for PART* combination is bad math. I have shown that the *PART for ALL* model (Arminianism) and the *ALL for PART* model (Calvinism) both dispute Scripture and reason. First, they both claim that adherents can be certain of their salvation. Yet it is impossible that two systems could be so different and yet both be true. Either one OR both of these views is in grave error. Second, since Arminian theologians claim that "*faith*" is the condition that secures their salvation, then their security is ultimately dependent upon their act of "*faith*" instead of directly and fully on Christ. They trust in their trust. Thus they have no true security. Adherents can never be absolutely sure that God agrees that their act of "*faith*" is authentic and sufficient to guarantee salvation. Third, Calvinist theologians do claim to have faith fully on and directly in Christ, but they also claim he only saves a chosen subset of mankind. Thus their security requires confidence that they are part of that chosen subset. They can have no true security either, because faith must be based on facts and the critical fact we have is that Jesus Christ died on the cross for the sins of *ALL* mankind. They are trusting in their imagination. Fear of eternal damnation inspired their imagination to hope that God loves them and the minority, because they think that God hates and damns the majority. Again, how sad!

Curiously, when Jesus was physically present on this earth his ministry challenged both the Jew and the Gentile in different ways. The Jews believed that they were God's chosen people, while also believing that the Gentiles were not chosen. Jesus angered them by loving the Gentiles. The Gentiles, however, believed that good people could touch the divine with religious acts. Jesus angered them by saying, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me*" (John 14:6b WEB).

Two thousand years later, mankind continues to pass by to the left or to the right of the cross of Christ like unbelieving Jews and Gentiles from Jesus' day. But God continues to invite us all to come instead to the foot of the cross. Unfortunately, the hypocrisy typified by the Jew and the false religion typified by the Gentile still obscure our understanding of God's loving grace toward *ALL* mankind even today.

Hopefully, I have been fair and balanced in my analysis because I have personally served time as both an Arminian and a Calvinist. Yet now I am confident that the grace of God is a whole lot more comprehensive than either Camp Left or Right.

Join me now in considering the *ALL for ALL* combination next.

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- [ALL for ALL](#)
 - [Romans 11:32-36](#)
 - [Luke 16:19-31](#)
 - [Revelation 20:11-15](#)
 - [Matthew 25:31-46](#)
 - [Revelation 20:10](#)
 - [1 Corinthians 1:17-25](#)
 - [2 Corinthians 5:14-21](#)
 - [John 10:25-30](#)
 - [Hosea 2:23](#)
 - [Proverbs 26:4-5](#)
 - [Jonah 3](#)
 - [Acts 13:48](#)

Let's Celebrate!



These observations are a cause for great celebration... at least for believers and me.

As I explained, questions about the extent of God's grace in salvation grew like a dark cloud in my life, clouding my relationship with Christ. I was not sure I would be able to rejoice in Heaven. I needed to agree that Christ had done the right thing in saving some while eternally damning others. Yet I could not and so continued to search the Bible for answers.

In the end, my own hypocrisy and blindness were exposed, but the good news totally erased the pain of my error!

I guess we could feel badly about the sentencing of Satan, The Beast, and The False Prophet to the Lake of Fire. However, for me it was not quite the same concern to think about Satan going to the Lake of Fire as my family member or my neighbor. Furthermore, my own escape from eternal damnation is guaranteed by the same love God has for all mankind. Yet now I can agree that when God sentences an unbeliever to an eon in Hades that he has simply been assigned to a punishment that is fit for his unregenerate nature. Without

the new birth, we do truly hate God; Hades is a fitting punishment. Unbelievers would not even want to go to Heaven where God is praised openly all day long. Yet, I also have the hope that the "*gates of Hades*" will not prevail against the grace of God as I first explained in my article, [Matthew 16:15-21, Optimism Out of Control](#).

We may prefer to hold on to familiar theological systems. We may prefer the company of the majority view. Unfortunately these choices may neglect the truth. Beware. We miss great joy when salvation is tainted with even the smallest work of man. If we supply even the tiniest condition to our salvation then grace is no longer grace. The party is ruined. We also miss great assurance if we limit God's love to an imaginary subset of mankind. How then can we be confident that God loves us unconditionally if he does not love all? If we suggest any limitation to the atonement of Christ then we add hypocrisy to the invitation list. The party is over.

I invite you to a radical reconsideration of your Christian faith... if you have faith. I invite you to believe that Jesus Christ is the Savior of all mankind. In fact your own salvation is wholly dependent upon this truth! So I invite you to believe that the burning passionate love of God for all mankind places all mankind, from Mother Teresa to Hitler, on equal ground at the foot of the cross. Why join the majority of mankind who continue to cling to self-righteousness of some form or another? Why refuse to believe that **Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind?**

Yet we know that in order to demonstrate his patient grace, God allows the majority of mankind to continue in unbelief. God has ordained the existence of sin and allows mankind's ongoing rebellion against him for one reason only: to show off his grace.

Romans Chapter 11 gives an explanation of the dynamic of belief and unbelief among the elect and explains the future party that is planned when faith is finally awakened in all God's people -- even the hardest hearted. Join me and read the Chapter in full.

- [Romans 11:1-32](#)
- [Final Analysis](#)
- [Happy Hypocrites!](#)
- [Partying Pagans?](#)
- [RSVP Review](#)
- [Mystery in the Middle](#)

[< Acts 13:48](#)

[up](#)

[Romans 11:1-32 >](#)

Wait Another Minute!



So, is that it? Is that my incredibly awesome idea? Yes, that is it. For believing that Jesus Christ is the Savior of all mankind I was accused of having a case of "*optimism out of control.*" I hope I have written rationally enough to persuade you that my optimism is not out of control, but in fact in control and Biblically defensible. More than that, the message that Christ is Messiah and Savior of all mankind is The Message of the Bible. This is the Gospel -- the Good News!

I have suggested a model for evaluating salvation doctrines. I have weighed the pros and cons of the four possible scenarios. I have introduced you to the most common theories of Christian salvation. I have invited you to read the ideas of other respected theologians. I even took a closer look at the views of Bell, Dixon, Wittmer, Galli, Lewis, and Boice. I also explained my own theory.

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind. However, most do not believe the good news and pervert either the scope of salvation or the means of salvation due to hypocrisy, religiosity, or simple ignorance.

Now we turn to answer the many objections that we ourselves and others may have about the good news. We will also consider God's special tactics to confront unbelief. By the way, what is your

response to the good news?

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- [II Thessalonians 1:6-10](#)
 - [Daniel 12:1-4](#)
 - [John 3:16](#)
 - [Purgatory?](#)
 - [The Bottom Line](#)
 - [Playing Church](#)
 - [Gospel Foolishness](#)
 - [Curious Combo](#)
 - [Constructive Envy](#)

Eternal Destiny



Thank you for taking the time to read my thoughts concerning the gospel of Jesus Christ. I would be grateful to receive your thoughts and comments at DGJC.ORG/CONTACT. I can think of no other subject that has grabbed my attention as powerfully as the cross of Christ. Hopefully you feel the same way. The love of Jesus Christ and his tender caress in removing the thorns of sin from the hearts of his people is nothing less than pure ecstasy. The hymn writer said it best...

*It was grace that taught my heart to fear...
and grace my fears relieved.*

My incredible thought at the beginning of this treatise was this:

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind.

Hopefully I have taken enough time and reasoned soundly enough to persuade you that my optimism

is in control and Biblically defended, even if you still disagree with me. And at whatever points you or I are in error or disagreement, I am fully persuaded that the grace of God has covered and will overwhelmingly cover them all.

My view is certainly optimistic for the believer. However, the unbeliever, the one rejecting grace and refusing obedience to Christ's commands, has no confident optimism in his own worldview. The Arminians with their free will and the Calvinists with their limited atonement can offer no true assurance or guarantee before Holy God. So while God is constant is his love for all mankind, unbelievers do not know him as the God of grace. Grace is not at the foundation of their salvation recipe so their hearts can only contain fearful expectation of coming judgment, even though their fears are painted over with a thin veneer of religion. How sad!

The Scripture is clear that damnation to the Lake of Fire is the certain destiny of all the unredeemed. It is a matter of fact by definition that the unredeemed are not purchased back by God and thus are lost for all eternity. Yet sadly unbelieving mankind inwardly fears this destiny even though they were already redeemed at the cross and guaranteed a home in heaven.

Yes it is true that Jesus Christ is not the savior of the unredeemed. They are not chosen by him for grace. They are not graced with repentance. Conscious torment in the Lake of Fire is their destiny for The Ages of The Ages. There is no escape.

So if you reject that Christ paid for the sins of all mankind the only possible hope for any of us is that you are wrong. So why reject your election and wait in fearful expectation? Why deny that Jesus has paid for your sin, bought you back for his very own, redeemed you from condemnation by dying on the cross for you? If you do not consider yourself one of Jesus' chosen people then be warned that damnation is the only destiny of the unredeemed. Only those whose sins are paid for by the blood of Christ are redeemed and purchased back for eternity in Heaven. Friend, Jesus has fully paid for all your sin! You are redeemed! Why not

believe? Why live like a pauper when the King of the Universe is your Father?

Consider Hebrews 10:26-30 (WEB),

26) For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more a sacrifice for sins, 27) but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and a fierceness of fire which will devour the adversaries. 28) A man who disregards Moses' law dies without compassion on the word of two or three witnesses. 29) How much worse punishment do you think he will be judged worthy of who has trodden under foot the Son of God, and has counted the blood of the covenant with which he was sanctified an unholy thing, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? 30) For we know him who said, "Vengeance belongs to me;" says the Lord, "I will repay." Again, "The Lord will judge his people."

The Scripture is clear that *fearful expectation* is the only possibility for those who refuse to rest confidently in Christ. There is no bending of that Scripture. Furthermore, even the elect of God, those whom Jesus has redeemed, whose sins are fully paid, will be punished in the fires of Hades if they do not repent and receive the grace of Christ.

The warning from 2 Peter 2:1-9 (WEB) says,

1) But false prophets also arose among the people, as false teachers will also be among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, denying even the Master who bought them, bringing on themselves swift destruction. 2) Many will follow their immoral ways, and as a result, the way of the truth will be maligned. 3) In covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words: whose sentence now from of old doesn't linger, and their destruction will not slumber. 4) For if God didn't spare angels when they sinned, but cast them down to Tartarus, and committed them to pits of darkness to be reserved for judgment; 5) and didn't spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah with seven others, a preacher of righteousness, when he brought a flood on the world of the ungodly; 6) and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, having made them an example to those who would live in an ungodly way; 7) and delivered righteous Lot, who was very distressed by the lustful life of the wicked 8) (for that righteous man dwelling among them was tormented in his righteous soul from day to day with seeing and hearing lawless deeds): 9) the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment;"

Even the unbelieving redeemed will be punished in Hades after this life, unless they repent. Though the Lord has purchased all mankind with his blood, temporal punishment in Hades is certain for unbelieving mankind if they do not repent. I will now conclude briefly with a few quick thoughts about the redeemed and the reprobate while letting the Scripture itself be my conclusion with Revelation 22:7-21.

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- [The Redeemed](#)
 - [The Reprobate](#)
 - [Revelation 22:7-21](#)

Evangelism & Discipleship



Recently I was asked, *"What are the practical effects of believing that Jesus is the Savior of all mankind."* My friend does not believe that Jesus is the savior of all, but was simply trying to understand why this is such an important point. I then realized that my book was missing an important chapter on application. My friend's point is well taken. If there are no practical applications of a truth or even a theory yet to be proved as truth, then its value is quite limited.

However, in this case, the fact that Jesus is the Savior of all mankind is the most practical, useful, purposeful, glorious truth in the entire world. This truth has the grandest impacts on your personal well-being and your relationship to every other person on the planet as well as creation itself. Believing the truth about God's grace for mankind will pull your head out of the sand and turn your life right side up! You will be able to receive your proper title as God's child and be a true brother or sister to your neighbor.

Students of the Bible may well note that the book of Ephesians is divided into two parts. The first half teaches the reader truth about God's love for mankind and, in particular, the church. Careful observers have noted that there is not even one imperative statement in the entire first half of the book. There is not one instruction to action, but only teaching the truth about God's love for us.

The second half, however, focuses entirely on the actions and behaviors required of Jesus' followers. God's Word in Ephesians can be neatly divided into two chapters titled: Belief and Practice. However, my book is lopsided on theory and theology, so hopefully I learn a lesson from Ephesians and promote Christian action. My favorite verse on practical obedience is I John 3:18 (WEB), *"My little children, let's not love in word only, or with the tongue only, but in deed and truth."*

If you believe that Jesus loves and forgave you because he also loves and forgave all mankind, then we have important work to do! Love with actions and truth just like Jesus!

In the following pages of application I quote many Bible verses. No doubt you will be familiar with most of them. My goal in quoting them to you is not to simply serve the same meal again, but to invite you to chew on the Scripture with the seasoning that Jesus is truly the Savior of all mankind.

-
- [Follow Jesus](#)
 - [Believe Jesus](#)
 - [Trust Jesus](#)

- Hope in Jesus
- Read Jesus
- Talk to Jesus
- Love Jesus
- Obey Jesus
- Imitate Jesus
- Share Jesus
- Fellowship with Jesus
- Prove Jesus
- Revere Jesus
- Worship Jesus

[◀ Revelation 22:7-21](#)

[up](#)

[Follow Jesus ▶](#)

Optimistic Study Guide



The Biblical proofs cited in the body of my *Optimism Out of Control* book were sufficient evidence for me to know that my Optimism was in fact not out of control, but instead was founded on the truth of Scripture and the knowledge of the character of God.

Jesus Christ truly is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind.

However, what is sufficient proof for me may not be sufficient proof for you! So I have attached an abstract and study guide below that simply asks questions for you to answer from the Bible. I hope you find the guide helpful in your quest to know God and know his love for both you and others. I pray that these resources help you to be a disciple

and make disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Optimism Study Guide

Also, while pursuing my own optimistic study, numerous objectors asked hard questions about my hope in Christ. The following appendix contains some of the best objections and even better answers. I hope you continue reading through the [Appendix](#).

Appendix



Admittedly the ideas in this book are controversial... as was Jesus himself.

While many have been able to find fellowship in a tidy theological camp, I have both agreement and disagreement with available traditions. My goal in pursuing Christ has been to be pro-Christ, anti-denominational, thoroughly Biblical, and willing to consider the hard questions. Yet I do not want to be dogmatic and close the door to discussion. The truth does not change with discussion, yet God can use discussion to help both you and I grow in the truth. So, this last chapter is a place to air important feedback and discussion about this clarification of the gospel, as well as additional supporting arguments.

You were already invited to make comments and raise questions on each page of the book online. However, if you prefer to email me questions at DGJC.ORG/CONTACT I will answer them in the online *Appendix*. I will remove your name to protect your privacy.

-
- [Aion](#)
 - [Arminian & Calvin Only?](#)
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 - [But ya gotta accept it!](#)
 - [Can Such a Minority View Be True?](#)
 - [Compatibilism is the Answer? \(AKA Molinism\)](#)
 - [Did John Calvin Originate Calvinism?](#)
 - [Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News!](#)
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 - [God is Not a Retributivist!](#)
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 - [Is all mankind elect? NO!](#)
 - [Is "Free-Will" Faith Saving Faith?](#)
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 -

- Isaiah 65:25 says that even Satan will be restored
- Isaiah 66:22-24 Cannot Include Fallen Angels
 - John 3:36 Offers No Optimism!
 - John 5:28-30 Offers No Optimism!
 - Not Written in the Book of Life from Creation?
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Disciplined by the Grace of Jesus Christ

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'In' Doctrine!

To *indoctrinate* is "to teach (a person or group) to accept a set of beliefs uncritically." This is not good. When Jesus commands us to follow him he invites us to "**taste and see that the Lord is good.**" He also warns us to "**test the spirits to see whether they are from God.**" The Holy Spirit does not *indoctrinate* those that follow Jesus, but urges us to think critically the whole way. Why? God wants us to be fully persuaded ourselves that he is good so that he has won our total allegiance.

To that end I invite you to critically reconsider a long standing traditional understanding of the 'in' doctrine. 2 Corinthians 5:17 (WEB) says, "**Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new.**" Traditional interpretation concludes that only those who have made a volitional decision to trust Christ are in fact "**in Christ**" and released from the condemnation that would eventually eternally damn them. The verse could lend to this interpretation... perhaps. Yet is it possible that tradition has *indoctrinated* us? Is faith the condition to God's love or is faith instead the "eyes" to see his love? We need critical thinking.

I have argued in the past and now again that this traditional understanding is too simple and falls short of appreciating that the elect of God have always been safe from God's eternal wrath since the foundation of the world, EVEN while unbelieving! Of course the unbelieving elect are not safe from God's wrath against their wickedness and idolatry. But the elect of God will never be in jeopardy of eternal damnation, thanks to Jesus, "**the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world**" (Revelation 13:8b NIV). If the doctrine of predestination means *PRE*-destined in any sense whatsoever, then this must also be true. Think about it! Ephesians 1:3-4 (WEB) also agrees, "**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ; even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and without defect before him in love.**" The elect were chosen in him, that is in Christ, before the foundation of the world. Wow, consider that the elect were always in Christ!

I have also written elsewhere proposing that personal faith does not cause our personal justification. Rather, all the elect were justified at the cross, once for all, according to Romans 5:18, and personal faith is instead the RECEIVING of our justification already completed by Christ. Read more [here](#) if interested. I have also noted that the 'in' doctrine teaches us about Jesus' intimacy with this Father, our intimacy with Jesus, and the mysterious picture of all this is the intimacy between a husband and wife. Jesus said in John 14:20 (WEB), "**In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.**" Some of this stuff gets pretty steamy, but read my thoughts on that subject [here](#) and [here](#).

So now join me in re-visiting the 'in' doctrine. Take the time to read the article links above and you will see that the 'in' doctrine is quite deep. However, at the most basic level those who are 'in' Christ are simply 'hidden inside of Christ' and thus protected from God the Father's righteous justice against sin and the sinner. God cannot see our sin because it is 'hidden in Christ.' Those who are 'hidden in Christ' are safe and through the 'eyes' of faith can be free from fear of eternal damnation.

So the two big questions are...

- 1) who is 'in Christ' and
- 2) how did they get there?

Consider 2 Corinthians 5:16-21 (WEB).

16) Therefore we know no one after the flesh from now on. Even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know him so no more. 17) Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new. 18) But all things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ, and gave to us the ministry of reconciliation; 19) namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not reckoning to them their trespasses, and having committed to us the word of reconciliation.

20) We are therefore ambassadors on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21) For him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

This Scripture seems to say that only believers are 'in Christ', because only Christians are ever called a new creation. True. Yet the passage also seems to say that God himself is reconciling the world 'in Christ', apart from any human provided condition. Also true! How are we to add up these observations?

In a nutshell I propose that the 'in doctrine' has both an *actual* and an *acknowledged* aspect. Just like Christians commonly say we have both a *positional* and *practical* righteousness with God, so the elect have a *positional* and *practical* aspect to being 'in Christ'. Again, as a Christian I am still a sinner. The *practical* reality is that I sin every day in big or small ways. Yet I trust that my *position* with God is that he sees me perfectly without sin. He does not condemn me for my sin because through the blood of Christ my position with him is justified. *My faith did not make it so, but I trust that it is so!* Likewise I propose that the elect of God, even the unbelieving elect, are 'in Christ' though they do not *acknowledge* or even care to understand this happy truth. However, when one's eyes are open and faith begins we are able to *acknowledge* and enjoy the freedom from condemnation that all the elect *actually* have 'in Christ'. What happy yet sad news! This is Happy and we are forgiven because all mankind is *actually* forgiven. Yet this is Sad because very few *acknowledge* this forgiveness.

Let's consider a simple chart of sinful man's status 'in Adam' and 'in Christ' when considered from both God and man's view points.

Vantage Point	In Adam	In Christ
God	The elect IF no Christ... Bound to sin, Romans 11:32 Deserve condemnation, Romans 5:16 Deserve wrath, Romans 9:22 But not Adam, Christ is! Romans 5:18-19	The elect because of Christ... Chosen before creation, Ephesians 1:4 Reconciled before faith, Romans 5:10 Loved before faith, 1 John 4:10,19 In Christ before faith, 2 Corinthians 5:19
Man	With eyes closed... Adam's descendant, Romans 5:12 SELF-condemned, Titus 3:11 Object of wrath by NATURE, Eph 2:3 Dead, Ephesians 2:1	With eyes open... Christ's brother, Hebrews 2:11 Christ condemns none, John 3:17 New creation, 2 Corinthians 5:17 Alive, Romans 5:21

So you see faith does not change our *actual* position with God at all. He has chosen to love and forgive us, and that is grace. However, faith does enable us to see God's love for us, changes our heart towards God, practically impacts our struggle with sin, and spares us future judgments in Hades. This understanding is Biblical, agrees that God's love truly is unconditional, and properly defines 'faith' as trusting in God's love instead of as a condition to God's love. This understanding also reminds us just how pitiable the condition of

unbelievers are when they are surrounded by the truth of God's love for them and all mankind, but their eyes are not open to see Jesus, just like we were in unbelief. Without faith we are like desperate blind lame starving paupers stumbling and grumbling around in a banquet hall overflowing with luscious foods that we cannot see and refuse to acknowledge. Lord open the eyes of the blind!

Who is 'in' Christ? Everyone the Lamb died for from before the creation of the world is safely 'in Christ' from God's point of view, that is... all mankind. How did we get 'in Christ'? We certainly did not put ourselves there through faith! *Our faith did not make it so, but Christians trust that it is so!* Christian faith is simply trusting that Jesus has hidden us in himself, safe from God's wrath, along with the whole world, just as he said he did, 2 Corinthians 5:18-19.

Hopefully, this awesome news propels us to passionate prayer and compassionate evangelism for our fellowman who are deeply loved by God. In fact that is Paul own conclusion when he says, *"We are therefore ambassadors on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."*

Your sins are paid for! Believe! Know God! Rejoice!

A Brief Theology of Food and Clothing

Introduction

Christ and his Scriptures set an example for us of very practical teaching. Once one has entered the world of theology, Bible college, or seminary it can be too easy for ministry to become quite cerebral. Subjects such as atonement, prophecy, and eternal decrees may keep a Bible student entranced for years. Thankfully, the Lord remembers that we are but flesh and that as much as he wants us to know him, he reminds us that the goodness of his grace is too deep for us to even find the bottom, even after all our study. At times like this it can be a refreshing break to learn some simple human stuff from the Lord.

Jesus on Food and Clothing

For example Jesus loves us intimately enough to address such issues as food and clothing.

24) "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You can't serve both God and Mammon. 25) Therefore I tell you, don't be anxious for your life: what you will eat, or what you will drink; nor yet for your body, what you will wear. Isn't life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26) See the birds of the sky, that they don't sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns. Your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you of much more value than they?"

27) "Which of you, by being anxious, can add one moment to his lifespan? 28) Why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They don't toil, neither do they spin, 29) yet I tell you that even Solomon in all his glory was not dressed like one of these. 30) But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today exists, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, won't he much more clothe you, you of little faith?"

31) "Therefore don't be anxious, saying, 'What will we eat?', 'What will we drink?' or, 'With what will we be clothed?' 32) For the Gentiles seek after all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33) But seek first God's Kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things will be given to you as well. 34) Therefore don't be anxious for tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Each day's own evil is sufficient."

Matthew 6:24-34 (WEB)

Here Jesus exhorts us not to worry about food and clothing but to simply trust that he loves us and will provide for these needs.

Paul to Timothy on Food and Clothing

Paul picks up on the food and clothing theme in his exhortations to his key disciple Timothy. Paul's passed the spiritual baton to Timothy with words of warning about greed and of encouragement to be content with food and clothing in this life.

6) But godliness with contentment is great gain. 7) For we brought nothing into the world, and we certainly can't carry anything out. 8) But having food and clothing, we will be content with that. 9) But those who are determined to be rich fall into a temptation, a snare, and many foolish and harmful lusts, such as drown men in ruin and destruction. 10) For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some have been led astray from the faith in their greed, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

11) But you, man of God, flee these things, and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness. 12) Fight the good fight of faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you confessed the good confession in the sight of many witnesses. 13) I command you before God, who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate testified the good confession, 14) that you keep the commandment without spot, blameless, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15) which in its own times he will show, who is the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings, and Lord of lords. 16) He alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen, nor can see: to whom be honor and eternal power. Amen.

1 Timothy 6:6-16 (WEB)

We can see that Paul was a disciple of Christ's teaching and understood that fear of poverty or lust for more may propel us toward riches. Instead, however, we should put our faith in God and be content with what we have.

Paul to the Church on Prayer and Modesty

Paul also taught the church on prayer and modesty, concepts related to food and clothing.

1) I exhort therefore, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercessions, and givings of thanks be made for all men: 2) for kings and all who are in high places, that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and reverence. 3) For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4) who desires all people to be saved and come to full knowledge of the truth. 5) For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6) who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony in its own times, 7) to which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle—I am telling the truth in Christ, not lying—a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

8) I desire therefore that the men in every place pray, lifting up holy hands without anger and doubting. 9) In the same way, that women also adorn themselves in decent clothing, with modesty and propriety, not just with braided hair, gold, pearls, or expensive clothing, 10) but with good works, which is appropriate for women professing godliness. 11) Let a woman learn in quietness with full submission. 12) But I don't permit a woman to teach, nor to exercise authority over a man, but to be in quietness. 13) For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14) Adam wasn't deceived, but the woman, being deceived, has fallen into disobedience; 15) but she will be saved through her childbearing, if they continue in faith, love, and sanctification with sobriety.

1 Timothy 2:1-15 (WEB)

How are prayer and modesty related to food and clothing? Men are often the bread winner and feel pressure to provide for needs such as food. Paul commands men to pray rather than use aggression to achieve our goals. Women are made by God to be beautiful to men and often feel pressure to wear clothing enticing to men. Paul commands women to dress modestly rather than use immodesty to entice.

Standards and Cultural Influence

You will notice the absence of prayer schedules and hem lengths in the New Testament. Why? Under the Old Covenant God spelled out many specifics for the conduct of his people. However, the deceitfulness of the human heart caused man to follow the letter of the law while at the same time looking for loopholes. Under the New Covenant God provided a new higher law to end the search for loopholes. In 1 Thessalonians 5:17 we are commanded to pray without ceasing. Men, let me know when you attain that! In 1 Timothy 2:10 we are commanded to adorn ourselves with good works. Women, let me know when you are done with that!

The absence of an attainable standard for prayer and modesty is designed to offend those looking for loopholes and encourage those whose righteousness is in Christ to keep pursuing Christ-likeness. The absence of a specific standard also reminds us to think with the mind of Christ in the midst of our culture and sub-culture. Men, do godly men of your church family pray together once a month? Then pray with them once a month. Women, do godly women of your church avoid particular immodest fashions? Then avoid those fashions also. More could be said about this because culture is not our standard, but Christ. Yet cultural norms must be considered because Christ is building a common fellowship of Christians world-wide. Therefore we should be careful to adopt prayer schedules and fashions acceptable to Christians from all cultures and far from worldly norms.

Lust for Power / Fear of Weakness

In 1 Timothy 2:1-15 above it is interesting that Paul instructs men and women in parallel, men to pray and women to be modest. One reason for this parallel construct is that Paul is addressing the same vice in both sexes. This vice can manifest itself as prayerlessness in men and immodesty in women, that is the lust for power or fear of inadequacy and weakness. Men can be tempted to gain power and accomplish their will by force, anger, and arguing. Women can also be tempted to gain power or acceptance by enticing, sexual dress, and allure. Rarely does a woman use force or shows of power to gain power over men or other women. Think about it. This is not even accepted in the world of unbelievers. But what is accepted is a woman using her sexuality to gain power over men. Likewise a man typically does not use immodesty to gain power. Why this would be comical! Instead what is admired in the world is a man who knows how to use power and argument. Can you see the same vice is driving both the immodest woman and the aggressive man? The fear of weakness and desire for acceptance or the lust for power leaves prayer and modesty forgotten.

Why not join Paul in turning to grace to cure these vices?

9) He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Most gladly therefore I will rather glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest on me.

10) Therefore I take pleasure in weaknesses, in injuries, in necessities, in persecutions, and in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then am I strong.

The Marlboro Man and the Virginia Slims Woman

Imagine a movie from the culture of our time; the Marlboro Man meets and marries the Virginia Slims woman. This would be the saddest marital union in the history of the world. The Marlboro Man typifies the rugged individualist who has survived enemies and the elements thanks to his strength and cigarettes. The Virginia Slims woman likewise has risen above the mundane duties of washing floors to *"have come a long way baby!"* thanks to her sexuality and cigarettes. This would be no Christian marriage defined by self-sacrifice and humble service of one another, but a cool cold war as to who is controlling who from the workplace to the kitchen to the bedroom.

Little Johnny and Little Suzy

Perhaps you will agree with me that the Marlboro Man and the Virginia Slims woman have a deadly world view. Will you believe that little Johnny and little Suzy in your own household have the same lust for power and fear of weakness straight from the womb? The only way to see it is if we admit that we all have struggled with these vices from day one. The Bible teaches in Ephesians 2:3 that we all blindly followed these vices by our birth nature. Little Johnny and little Suzy are in dire need of the gospel lest their very nature blossoms into yet another Marlboro and Virginia.

A Time for Prayer Recess, Boasting, and Nakedness

Christian men, pray. Christian women, dress modestly. These counsels will result in a beautiful future. Yet is there any time to lay down the humility of prayer for boasting or nakedness?

23) Yahweh says, "Don't let the wise man glory in his wisdom. Don't let the mighty man glory in his might. Don't let the rich man glory in his riches. 24) But let him who glories glory in this, that he has understanding, and knows me, that I am Yahweh who exercises loving kindness, justice, and righteousness, in the earth; for I delight in these things," says Yahweh.

Jeremiah 9:23-24 (WEB)

Men, we are invited to lay down our wisdom, strength, and riches to glory and boast about our knowledge of God.

2) But, because of sexual immoralities, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. 3) Let the husband give his wife the affection owed her, and likewise also the wife her husband. 4) The wife doesn't have authority over her own body, but the husband. Likewise also the husband doesn't have authority over his own body, but the wife. 5) Don't deprive one another, unless it is by consent for a season, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer, and may be together again, that Satan doesn't tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

1 Corinthians 7:2-5 (WEB)

Women, you and your husbands need to know that sexual union is not immodest, but encouraged by the Lord. Now Paul...that is some good theology!

Conclusion

I hope this study has proved an encouragement to you. The Lord God knows all about our human fears, needs, and desires even down to the simple things such as food and clothing. God knows because he designed and created us and the world, we are made in his image, and most significantly he became a man and walked among us. God does truly know every inch of our existence and now wants us to know him. Specifically we of all his creations are invited to the distinct honor of knowing God's heart of grace, his infinite love for sinners, and that is what we are. Why it is enough to set your life on fire to believe that God loves us just exactly as much as he says he does.

Men, even if your only prayers to God have been curses and you have risen to the top by pure aggression running circles around the Marlboro Man himself, Christ died for such as you.

Women, even if you have played men on your string like Minnows and defeated all the competition with your displays causing even Virginia Slim to blush, Christ died for such as you. I know because Christ died for me despite my own lust for power and fear of weakness.

Come to Jesus Christ and know a mighty savior. Come to Jesus Christ and know a God who has forgiven blackened rebels, no longer good for anything but to be tossed into the fire. Come to Jesus Christ and join a fellowship of men and women saved from the pit, breathless that God would begin to call us his sons and daughters, that is if you receive him as Lord. Come to Jesus Christ and dine on truly rich food and wear truly lush clothing!

A Brief Theology of Houses

I was pretty mad at God.

I am sure there are many who have suffered more financial difficulties and just as many who never have. However, my own family's money problems were enough to leave a bitter taste in my mouth toward God. My mom and dad always wanted to have a nice house and financial freedom to compare with their friends and family. They bought an old farm house with the accompanying barn and 3 acres of grassy fields surrounding the property. My dad worked his tail off as a young husband and father to pay off the mortgage of his dream to provide for his new bride and their dream to provide for their two boys. But God was not pleased with some aspect of the dream and thwarted the success of my dad's work. After years of struggle in his business my dad eventually chose to file for bankruptcy and my mother was forced to enter the work force. The financial stress through these years would have torn many couples completely apart, but somehow God kept my parents together. My parent's dream was not to be... and I became pretty mad at God. Why couldn't God bless the efforts of my dad? I know few who have worked harder! God seemed to freely bless others, but not our family, at least not with the blessings I had hoped.

Later, in college, God led me to discipleship through a respected Christian and his family. God graced this family with peace, Christian calling, financial security, and ... a cool house. I am sure their motives in reaching out to me were to sincerely show me the love of Christ. However, my attraction to them was not so sincere. I wish I could say I only wanted to learn of Christ from them to aide my sojourn with the Lord. However, God has since exposed my idolatry to me... and to them as well. In a nutshell I also became attracted to the prospect of providing a house and peace in this lifetime for my future family. My own childhood experiences left me with little hope that this was even possible. However, here was a family that appeared to be enjoying these successes. Perhaps I could learn the secret to good decision making, peace in this lifetime, and home ownership from my new friends. Slowly respect for my dad and family shifted to my new idol. But as with any idol, sooner or later, the weaknesses will be exposed as it crumbles to the ground.

With God's grace I have been able to see that the problem was not my parents or my friend and his family. They are the Good Shepherd's sheep, the same as I, no more and no less. It was not my dad's fault that he was powerless to provide beyond the measure that God permitted. It was also not my friend's fault that I idolized the good things that God gave him. It was also not my friend's fault for the imagined inequity of God's grace to our families. Rather the problem was my idolatry of my friend's things and my anger toward God for withholding these good things from my own family.

I do not imagine that I am the first to hope for a family blessed with peace or idolize an earthly house as a place of security and comfort in this age of painful trials. However, I may be in the contest for those who have lost the most through such idolatry. That said, with God's help, I will take a moment to reflect briefly on a theology of houses hoping to guard future disciples from my errors.

The History of Houses

No doubt we are all familiar with the tragedy of man's fall into sin at the world's beginning. However, we may not have reflected deeply on the punishment that Adam and Eve received. *"So he drove out the man; and he placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the*

tree of life" (Genesis 3:24 WEB). They were evicted from their wonderful garden home and barred from the tree of life. We also may wince at the thought that God still evicts sinners from certain blessings even today.

The rebellion of Adam and Eve did not stop with them, but continued with Cain and Abel and all their descendants, even to you and me. In the case of the first generation Cain murdered Abel and God sentenced him to be a fugitive and a wanderer with no place to call home. ***"You will be a fugitive and a wanderer in the earth"*** (Genesis 4:12b WEB). Yet, we also see that though God does punish sinners severely he is also merciful. God still protected Cain, ***"Yahweh said to him, 'Therefore whoever slays Cain, vengeance will be taken on him sevenfold.' Yahweh appointed a sign for Cain, so that anyone finding him would not strike him"*** (Genesis 4:15 WEB). Later we read that Cain, ***"built a city"*** (Genesis 4:17 WEB). So even though Cain found no permanent home in this world he built a city for himself and others to live in while they waited for the Lord. Though Cain's grandson chose a nomadic life, ***"Jabal, who was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock"*** (Genesis 4:20b WEB).

Mankind continued to increase in population across the earth, but sin also increased and so God sadly determined to wipe mankind off the face of the earth through a global flood. God spared only Noah and his family and them only through grace. God instructed Noah to make a ship with rooms to live in while the remainder of mankind was drowned. ***"Make a ship of gopher wood. You shall make rooms in the ship, and shall seal it inside and outside with pitch"*** (Genesis 6:14 WEB). Imagine yourself in house boat of wood floating on the torrents of water that destroyed your wicked extended family and neighbors! One can safely say that neither Noah nor his wife enjoyed that wooden monstrosity as a permanent home. Would to God that it was never needed in the first place!

Noah's family then repopulated the earth. One would think that lessons from the flood would have worked some godliness in his descendants. However, even severe punishments can be forgotten by our hard hearts. In this case we see the descendants of Noah saying, ***"They said, 'Come, let's build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top reaches to the sky, and let's make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad on the surface of the whole earth' "*** (Genesis 11:4 WEB). Mankind began the good work of building a giant city as a home for protection. Yet because their purpose was to bring glory to man's name God stopped the effort and confused their language scattering them across the earth.

The stage was now set for God's work in his chosen nation, Israel, begun through the calling of Abraham. God said to Abraham, ***"Now Yahweh said to Abram, 'Leave your country, and your relatives, and your father's house, and go to the land that I will show you' "*** (Genesis 12:1 WEB). Abraham becomes a prototype of Christian missionaries, willing to leave his home to follow God's calling. In fact Abraham gave up the wealth of his homeland to live in a ***"tent"*** (Genesis 12:8 WEB). Abraham's nephew, Lot, also traveled with him, but over time quarrels developed between their households. Abraham then said to Lot, ***"Isn't the whole land before you? Please separate yourself from me. If you go to the left hand, then I will go to the right. Or if you go to the right hand, then I will go to the left"*** (Genesis 13:9 WEB). Abraham felt no attachment to an earthly home. We then read that, ***"Abram lived in the land of Canaan, and Lot lived in the cities of the plain, and moved his tent as far as Sodom. Now the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinners against Yahweh"*** (Genesis 13:12-13 WEB). Later, Lot moved from his tent in the suburbs of Sodom into a ***"house"*** in the city of Sodom, (Genesis 19:3 WEB). Lot moved his tent toward the city of wickedness and in short time had a house in the city of wickedness. Where is your tent now and where will your house be tomorrow? Lot suffered greatly for his unwise choices. The good news in Abraham's story, however, is the faith he passed on to his son Isaac and grandson Jacob. ***"Jacob lived in the land of his father's travels, in the land of Canaan"*** (Genesis 37:1 WEB). We read that Jacob received promises and visions from the Lord and set up a pillar for ***"God's house"*** (Genesis 28:22 WEB). Abraham's obedience to

God prepared his grandson Jacob to think not of his own house, but God's house. What legacy of faith are you building for your children and grandchildren, fine houses or tents of waiting on the Lord?

And Jacob's conviction was again passed to his son Joseph. Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt by his own brothers and he eventually found himself head servant in the house of Potiphar. Yet even an Egyptian house offered no safety for Joseph. ***"About this time, he went into the house to do his work, and there were none of the men of the house inside. She caught him by his garment, saying, 'Lie with me!' "*** (Genesis 39:11-12 WEB). Joseph escaped the seductress and thus challenges us all to find safety within the house of God for there is no safety in the houses of Egypt. Consider Joseph's final message to his family, ***"Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, 'God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here' "*** (Genesis 50:25 WEB). Joseph's home was not Egypt and he prophesied that his bones would find rest with the bones of his fathers.

Yet Joseph's bones did not move for 400 more years while Egypt enslaved the son's of Israel. God then raised up Moses to redeem Israel from the wicked Egyptians. God assured Moses thus, ***"I have also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their travels, in which they lived as aliens"*** (Exodus 6:4 WEB). Consider the incredible patience of God in waiting 400 years while his people suffered in slavery as he works his will to return them to the land he promised. How much more should we Christians wait patiently as God brings us to the new heavens and earth! What is a few thousand years compared to the eternal glory that awaits us? Finally God did use Moses to deliver Israel from Egypt and further to unite them as the people of God at Mount Sinai. God then spoke the Ten Commandments and I note that the tenth command reads, ***"You shall not covet your neighbor's house"*** (Exodus 20:17 WEB).

You no doubt noted my confession of idolizing my friend's house and household. We should all note that the command to not covet is explicitly applied to our neighbor's house among other things. The Lord sure does know my heart, how about yours? Thankfully he is a good God with designs to protect us from the foolishness of the American Dream. Moses also taught, ***"Therefore you shall lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul. You shall bind them for a sign on your hand, and they shall be for frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, talking of them, when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall write them on the door posts of your house, and on your gates"*** (Deuteronomy 11:18-20 WEB). The Bible says little about houses as a place of security, but instead they are a place to teach our children about God and a place with walls and gates to advertise his word.

As Israel moved toward Canaan God also promised to give the houses of the wicked Canaanites to Israel, ***"When Yahweh your God shall cut off the nations, whose land Yahweh your God gives you, and you succeed them, and dwell in their cities, and in their houses"*** (Deuteronomy 19:1 WEB). Yet despite these promises and God's previous display of power, the Israelites whined that they wanted to go back to their homes of slavery in Egypt. The Lord anger burned against Israel saying, ***"Yahweh said, I have pardoned according to your word: but in very deed, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of Yahweh; because all those men who have seen my glory, and my signs, which I worked in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have tempted me these ten times, and have not listened to my voice; surely they shall not see the land which I swore to their fathers, neither shall any of those who despised me see it"*** (Numbers 14:20-23 WEB). And so while on the threshold of finally receiving the Promised Land as a home, Israel broke the last straw with God and was sentenced to wait one more generation before entering the land.

Moses himself was a wonderful leader over the household of Israel through these years, yet

he also sinned openly against the Lord and was not permitted to enter the promised land of Canaan with the next generation, *"Yahweh said to him, This is the land which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, I will give it to your seed: I have caused you to see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there"* (Deuteronomy 34:4 WEB). Perhaps this reminded the children of Israel and could also serve to remind us that there is a small regret that Moses missed the promised temporal land of Canaan, but there will be no regrets in fellowship with Christ and his servant Moses in eternal glory. Since we all are punished by the Lord from time to time better to keep our hopes on eternal glory rather than the temporal!

Israel then entered the land. We read, *"Joshua the son of Nun secretly sent two men out of Shittim as spies, saying, 'Go, view the land, and Jericho.' They went and came into the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab, and slept there"* (Joshua 2:1 WEB). Even the prostitute Rahab is commended for opening her house in hospitality. Though her house was destroyed, she and her family were spared. Use your house today to serve Christ, because you may not have it tomorrow! And Joshua led Israel to victory over the land of Canaan with the same faith as Moses, Joseph, Jacob, and Abraham. And he challenged his relatives thus, *"If it seems evil to you to serve Yahweh, choose this day whom you will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve Yahweh"* (Joshua 24:15 WEB). Who is God in your house?

Israel now made a home in the land of Canaan, but sadly after the death of Joshua they turned away from the Lord to serve foreign gods. Israel continually strayed while God sent judges to save them from the Philistines and turn them back to righteousness. One shining moment near the end of these bleak years is the faithfulness of Ruth the Moabitess to her Jewish mother-in-law. *"Ruth said, 'Don't entreat me to leave you, and to return from following after you, for where you go, I will go; and where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God; where you die, will I die, and there will I be buried: Yahweh do so to me, and more also, if anything but death part you and me'"* (Ruth 1:16-17 WEB). Consider Ruth's unforgettable faithfulness. Her home was not a particular land, but the land of God's people.

Also before the kings of Israel we read about Hannah whose prayers for a child were answered. And Hannah returned honor back to God by dedicating her son Samuel to the Lord's service in God's house, *"When she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bulls, and one ephah of meal, and a bottle of wine, and brought him to the house of Yahweh in Shiloh: and the child was young"* (I Samuel 1:24 WEB). Hannah willingly sent her first born son from her own home to serve in the house of the Lord.

Israel then called on Samuel for a King and God reluctantly called Saul to be King of Israel. God's heart toward King Saul, and subsequent Kings David and Solomon, Israel's first three kings is communicated through the prophet Nathan in II Samuel 7 (WEB), *"David...are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? ...the Lord himself will establish a house for you ... I will raise up your offspring ... who will build a house for me ... But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul."* Praise God for hearts like that of King David who thought nothing of building a house for himself, but only of building the Lord's house and so received a blessed promise that the Lord himself would build a godly household for David.

Lord, give us David's heart and if it is possible his legacy! David also sang *"He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters"* (Psalm 23:2 WEB). Will you trust that God's choice of pastures for us is better than the pastures we choose for ourselves?

Solomon also challenges us, *"The house of the wicked will be overthrown, but the tent of the upright will flourish"* (Proverbs 14:11 WEB). So even if you live in a strong house it will be over thrown if you are wicked. However, the floppy tent of the righteous will stand

firm.

Sadly the strong house of David's grandson, Rehoboam, was overthrown because of his wickedness for he had neither David's nor Solomon's heart. In fact, his tyrannical rule divided the kingdom of Israel, ***"So Israel rebelled against the house of David to this day"*** (I Kings 12:19 WEB). Israel's home in the Promised Land had matured to a kingdom, but now was broken in two through Rehoboam. Through the division of the house of Israel, God has taught us a painful lesson about our sin, his grace, and our temporal homes so that our eyes would be lifted to him and his eternal home.

We also read that Israel's prophets suffered rejection for their ministry to God's people. Where could they safely live? Elisha lived on ***"Mount Carmel"*** (II Kings 4:25 WEB). Yet God led a Shunammite woman and her husband to bless Elisha with a ***"small room"*** of his own when he traveled that way, (II Kings 4:10 WEB). Elisha was then moved with compassion to pray for the blessing of this woman and she received her greatest desire, a son. Later her son died and she pled for help from Elisha who raised her son to life again. Much can be learned from the Shunammite woman's hospitality with her house.

Yet the prophet Isaiah also said, ***"Woe to those who join house to house, who lay field to field, until there is no room, and you are made to dwell alone in the midst of the land!"*** (Isaiah 5:8 WEB). God's people made every effort to expand their own houses, but neglected to expand the house of God. Though Isaiah hammered stubborn Israel with the word of the Lord for a lifetime he also concluded with hope saying, ***"They shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them"*** (Isaiah 65:21 WEB).

Jeremiah likewise spoke rebuke to Israel for a lifetime, yet encourages Israel in the midst of their banishment to Babylon, ***"Build you houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them"*** (Jeremiah 29:5 WEB). Yet Jeremiah also praises the descendants of Recab for obeying their father's command to never ***"build a house"*** (Jeremiah 35:7 WEB) so that they may live many days in the land of their sojourn. There is a lesson to learn from these people to remember our sojourn and our true homeland.

Haggai also asks us a hard question, ***"Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies waste?"*** (Haggai 1:4 WEB). The point is that we are often tempted to build our own houses at the neglect of God's house.

The prophet Malachi, however, challenges us with a wonderful promise, ***"'Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house, and test me now in this,' says Yahweh of Armies, 'if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough for' "*** (Malachi 3:10 WEB).

Yet the prophets could not restrain Israel's sin and so God sent the nations of Assyria and Babylon to punish his people. We read that Babylon, ***"burnt the house of Yahweh, and the king's house; and all the houses of Jerusalem, even every great house, burnt he with fire"*** (II Kings 25:9 WEB). So millennia after eviction from the garden, God's people are once again evicted, this time from the Promised Land. Yet even so seventy years later God raised up godly men such as Daniel, Ezra, Zerubbabel, and Nehemiah who thought not of their own house, but of rebuilding ***"the house of the Lord"*** (Ezra 1:5 WEB). Daniel cried out in prayer, Ezra purified the people, Zerubbabel rebuilt the temple, and Nehemiah rebuilt Jerusalem's wall. What part are you playing in building God's house?

If we interlude to reflect on our observations thus far it would seem that mankind has made absolutely no progress in the fight against sin. As we consider our theme of houses we see our ancestors suffering the punishment of eviction from the houses of this earth again and again. Sure there are victories, but where are the victories sustained through the

generations? Consider the wisdom of Job through his sufferings, *"Shall mortal man be more just than God? Shall a man be more pure than his Maker? Behold, he puts no trust in his servants. He charges his angels with error. How much more, those who dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, who are crushed before the moth!"* (Job 4:17-19 WEB). Can we conclude more than Job, that God is righteous while we who dwell in houses of clay are not? Though Job despaired even to say that the only *"home"* (Job 17:13 WEB) he hoped for was the grave, he also said *"I know that my Redeemer lives. In the end, he will stand upon the earth"* (Job 19:25 WEB). And in that hope we will continue our study.

The ministry of Jesus and the establishment of his new covenant with the people of God is fulfillment of that hope. Job knew that his redeemer lived and would stand upon the earth, and now we see Jesus. Regarding houses Jesus said, *"Everyone therefore who hears these words of mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man, who built his house on a rock"* (Matthew 7:24 WEB). Do you want to have your house on a solid foundation? Well then build upon Jesus Christ. Jesus also taught, *"Therefore don't be anxious, saying, 'What will we eat?', 'What will we drink?' or, 'With what will we be clothed?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first God's Kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore don't be anxious for tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Each day's own evil is sufficient"* (Matthew 6:31-34 WEB).

If you need a house God will provide it if you seek God first! However, do not boast about your plans to serve Christ. *"A scribe came, and said to him, 'Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.' Jesus said to him, 'The foxes have holes, and the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head' "* (Matthew 8:19-20 WEB). The cost of following Christ is high. If you follow him you will never find complete rest in an earthly house again, but you will find true rest in Christ and in the hope of permanent rest in eternity.

Jesus said again, *"If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand"* (Mark 3:25 WEB). When accused of serving Beelzebub, Jesus pointed out that he could not be of Satan's house because he opposes Satan. Satan's house is not divided between good and evil, but is fully evil. Yet today we would be better to ask, *'how is the house of Christ divided by denominations?'* Is Satan in our house? Jesus got pretty mad at the prospect of corruption in his house as demonstrated by his cleansing of the temple. *"He taught, saying to them, 'Isn't it written, 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all the nations?' But you have made it a den of robbers!' "* (Mark 11:17 WEB).

Consider a few additional observations about the ministry of Jesus. Some people were so eager to see Jesus for healing they ripped a hole in a house roof to get to him. *"Not finding a way to bring him in because of the multitude, they went up to the housetop, and let him down through the tiles with his cot into the midst before Jesus"* (Luke 5:19 WEB). On another occasion Jesus feet were washed by the tears and hair of a woman that he forgave. *"Turning to the woman, he said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I entered into your house, and you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head' "* (Luke 7:44 WEB). Acceptable hospitality is more than having someone into your house, but instead sincere desire to serve others from a heart of gratitude for Jesus mercy.

We also note that Peter and his family lived in a *"house"* (Matthew 8:14 WEB). Matthew lived in a *"house"* (Matthew 9:10 WEB). Capernaum was Jesus earthly home, (Mark 2:1 WEB). Jesus commanded his disciples to stay in the homes of others when traveling for ministry. *"Into whatever city or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy; and stay there until you go on"* (Matthew 10:11 WEB). Jesus ministered in the houses of others, (Matthew 13:36 WEB).

Jesus also equates his final return with breaking into our house. *“But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what watch of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched, and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore also be ready, for in an hour that you don't expect, the Son of Man will come”* (Matthew 24:43-44 WEB). We may keep good and bad treasures hidden in our life, but Jesus will break down our facades of self-righteousness.

After Jesus ascended to Heaven his disciples began to build the fellowship that Christ started. The book of Acts mentions homes and houses a number of times. First we see that a significant part of this ministry took place in the homes of the disciples. *“Day by day, continuing steadfastly with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread at home, they took their food with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. The Lord added to the assembly day by day those who were being saved”* (Acts 2:46-47 WEB).

But houses were not central to their ministry, Jesus was. In fact some disciples even sold their houses to further God's kingdom. *“For neither was there among them any who lacked, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet, and distribution was made to each, according as anyone had need”* (Acts 4:34-35 WEB). Stephen, in his rebuke to the Sanhedrin, concludes by pointing out that houses are not needed for God. *“But Solomon built him a house. However, the Most High doesn't dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says, 'heaven is my throne, and the earth a footstool for my feet. What kind of house will you build me?' says the Lord; 'or what is the place of my rest? Didn't my hand make all these things?' 'You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit! As your fathers did, so you do”* (Acts 7:47-51 WEB). Perhaps Stephen's final words offended their temple building campaign for at that point they picked up stones to stone Stephen.

Later even the Christian hater, Saul, is converted to Christ. Ananias met Saul in Judah's house, laid hands on him and baptized him right there in the house. *“Ananias departed, and entered into the house. Laying his hands on him, he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord, who appeared to you on the road by which you came, has sent me, that you may receive your sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' Immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he received his sight. He arose and was baptized”* (Acts 9:17-18 WEB). So the first disciples not only taught and fellowshiped in people's houses, but they also baptized new converts in houses. Peter even stretched the bar further by entering the houses of gentiles and eating with them. Peter, a Jew, was accused of wrong doing by associating with gentiles, *“You went in to uncircumcised men, and ate with them!”* (Acts 11:3 WEB). This was something a good Jew would never do, but Peter explained to his accusers that he was a now a follower of Jesus who is the God of gentiles also.

Again the early disciples found some utility in houses for serving Christ. We read, *“They went out of the prison, and entered into Lydia's house. When they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them, and departed”* (Acts 16:40 WEB). The door of Lydia's house was open! Paul, however, owned no house, but humbly served Christ as a guest in the houses of others. He says, *“I didn't shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, teaching you publicly and from house to house”* (Acts 20:20 WEB). Yet other prominent disciples did own houses. We read of Philip, *“On the next day, we, who were Paul's companions, departed, and came to Caesarea. We entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him”* (Acts 21:8 WEB). We see that Philip is not known as *“The Home Owner,”* but as *“The Evangelist!”* And we read in the last verses of Acts, *“Paul stayed two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who were coming to him, preaching the Kingdom of God, and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, without hindrance”* (Acts 28:30-31 WEB). God felt it important to note that Paul rented his

house. The point being that if you intend to follow the example of Paul in any literal sense home ownership is unlikely.

We can also learn more about houses from the New Testament epistles. We read, *"Greet the assembly that is in their house"* (Romans 16:5 WEB). Christian meetings were held in some homes. Other Christian meetings were not at home and so women were instructed to be silent in public meetings, but discuss questions with their husband in their own homes. *"Let your wives keep silent in the assemblies, for it has not been permitted for them to speak; but let them be in subjection, as the law also says. If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home, for it is shameful for a woman to chatter in the assembly"* (I Corinthians 14:34-35 WEB).

We also read, *"For we know that if the earthly house of our tent is dissolved, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens. For most certainly in this we groan, longing to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven; if so be that being clothed we will not be found naked. For indeed we who are in this tent do groan, being burdened; not that we desire to be unclothed, but that we desire to be clothed, that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now he who made us for this very thing is God, who also gave to us the down payment of the Spirit. Therefore, we are always confident and know that while we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord; for we walk by faith, not by sight"* (II Corinthians 5:1-7 WEB). Our earthly body is called a tent or a temporary house for our spirit and so we long for the permanent residence of our soul, our new body in heaven.

Another Christian meeting was also held in the home of *"Nymphas"* (Colossians 4:15 WEB). Paul also compared our ministry repertoire to a large house encouraging us to fill it with good things and to remove the bad things. *"Now in a large house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of clay. Some are for honor, and some for dishonor"* (II Timothy 2:20 WEB). Paul also says that women are to be *"workers at home"* (Titus 2:5 WEB). Another Christian meeting was held in the house of *"Archippus"* (Philemon 1:2 WEB). The Hebrew writer also reminds us, *"For every house is built by someone; but he who built all things is God"* (Hebrews 3:4 WEB).

Maybe we have built a house for our family or even served in building the household of God, but God is the builder of all and we have merely served him. In fact we ourselves are the very stones that God is setting into place to build his masterpiece, *"You also, as living stones, are built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ"* (I Peter 2:5 WEB). And Peter further reminds us of the dwelling that should be foremost on our minds, *"But, according to his promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells"* (II Peter 3:13 WEB). That is the hope of believers. Yet we are warned that our world is filled with vicious unbelievers. Apostle John says, *"Watch yourselves, that we don't lose the things which we have accomplished, but that we receive a full reward. Whoever transgresses and doesn't remain in the teaching of Christ, doesn't have God. He who remains in the teaching, the same has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you, and doesn't bring this teaching, don't receive him into your house, and don't welcome him, for he who welcomes him participates in his evil works"* (II John 1:8-11 WEB). Do not allow false teachers in your home.

In grand conclusion we read,

I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth have passed away, and the sea is no more. I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready like a bride adorned for her husband. I heard a loud voice out of heaven saying, 'Behold,

God's dwelling is with people, and he will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away from them every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; neither will there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more. The first things have passed away'....He showed me a river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On this side of the river and on that was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruits, yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

Revelation 21:1-22:2 (WEB)

What a wonderful day is planned when God makes his dwelling with man. Though mankind was evicted from the garden, the work of Christ has won for us a permanent dwelling in the coming city of God for all eternity. So we see the history of mankind beginning with two people in a perfect but humble garden and consummating with a great multitude in a glorious city of gold! Oh glad day! What a God we have!

God's Dream

Friend, which dream would you rather give your life to, the American Dream or God's Dream?

You can give into the temptation of coveting the temporal houses of this world and in the end waste your entire life over a couple of 2x4s and a few asphalt shingles. Or you can believe that the promise of Christ is trustworthy when he says, *"But seek first God's Kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things will be given to you as well"* (Matthew 6:33 WEB). And again, *"In my Father's house are many homes. If it weren't so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and will receive you to myself; that where I am, you may be there also"* (John 14:2-3 WEB).

In the end it is difficult to remain mad at God, who intends to bless us quite beyond the American Dream.

A Brief Theology of Name Calling

Last summer while struggling to connect with a group of cool and quiet 21st Century teens I relished in a fleeting moment of fraternity with one young man in the high school Sunday school class that I taught. You see I recently turned 42 years old and it is no minor task to appear hip (or groovy or stylin' or cool or chill or whatever) to such an audience.

This particular Sunday we studied 2 Timothy 2:20-21 (WEB), *"Now in a large house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of clay. Some are for honor, and some for dishonor. If anyone therefore purges himself from these, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, and suitable for the master's use, prepared for every good work."* The context immediately before and after suggests that the "vessels" in our house are the words and stories in our conversation. The passage is Paul's exhortation to Timothy and any reader desiring to live a godly life to clean up our speech by removing unprofitable words and stories from our speech and filling our speech with profitable words.

To emphasize the import of godly speech I relayed the story of my own Christian mother's willingness to scrub my mouth with soap whenever bad words were found in my mouth. Several students looked aghast as if I truly was in fact an anachronism from the dark ages as they suspected all along. In the effort to salvage my reputation I asked the class if any of their mothers performed similar procedures on their vile tongues. One young man sheepishly raised his hand with mild laughter coming from his squeaky clean smile. Though I do not necessarily endorse soap on the tongue as more effective than grace in the heart, I am still thankful that there is at least someone who shares a kinship with both me and Ivory soap.

The point of this is that most of us raised in Christian homes have been taught to stay clear of bad words and especially the name calling of others. And whether taught by a bar of soap or some other means our upbringing has left a significant impression that name calling in particular is offensive and wrong. Yet is name calling always bad? I know in the past we have considered loftier subjects such as justification, the image of God in man, and salvation. However, let's take a moment to briefly consider the earthy and perhaps more practical subject of the *Theology of Name Calling*.

MAKIN' MOMMA PROUD

I am a tad surprised at times about the speech that too many Christians allow into their homes in our day. Though I do not frequently hang with teens, yet as often as I do, expressions such as "Oh My God" and other Valley Girl irreverencies, though quite common today, would have had my mom heading for the soap or my dad for the belt. In fact I was also taught that even milder language such as "Gosh" and "Jeez" were simply unacceptable euphemisms for God and Jesus. So what does have the greater influence in our speech; movies, music, and questionable company, or Ephesians 4:29?

The Bible is an excellent resource to bring into our Christian homes. In fact we can hardly have a Christian home without it. The Bible is filled with practical and challenging story and instruction to guide our tongues to godly purposes.

We read in Genesis 4:26b (WEB), *"Then men began to call on Yahweh's name."* This is extremely helpful. Though we were severely punished for our disobedience in the garden, instead of lashing back at God with curses, some men called on the name of the Lord for help. Instead of calling God or their enemies names, some men began to respectfully call on

the Lord for help by his name.

Another name calling story our mommas may or may not like is II Kings 2:23-24, *"He [Elisha] went up from there to Bethel; and as he was going up by the way, some youths came out of the city and mocked him, and said to him, Go up, you baldy; go up, you baldhead. He looked behind him and saw them, and cursed them in the name of Yahweh. Two female bears came out of the woods, and mauled forty-two of those youths."* The youth in my class thought my mom was tough with the soap, and I often thought my dad was tough with the belt, but here Elisha cursed these rebellious youth in God's name and then God sent bears to punish the youth for saying less than is commonly on our tongues today. Maybe moms ought to again pull out the soap, dads the belts, and pastors some preaching, lest God send in the bears.

Youth are not the only ones tempted to a foul tongue. Job, on the absolute lowest day of his life, was brought even lower with the vile counsel of his wife in Job 2:9-10 (WEB), *"Then his wife said to him, 'Do you still maintain your integrity? Renounce God, and die.' But he said to her, 'You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?'"* While the OMG Valley Girls are ignorant of God's grace in restraining his wrath as he waits for their repentance before hell fire, Job's eyes were wide open to the temptation and consequence of irreverence. No thanks to his wife, but by the grace of God Job held his tongue and turned his face to Heaven waiting for an explanation of the suffering he faced on Earth.

The high calling we have for our speech is summarized in Ephesians 4:29 (WEB), *"Let no corrupt speech proceed out of your mouth, but such as is good for building up as the need may be, that it may give grace to those who hear."* Though our mommas did their best, we need God's grace to follow this instruction. Soap, belts, and bears may be some governor on the mouth. However, Jesus reminds us in Luke 6:45 (WEB), *"The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings out that which is good, and the evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings out that which is evil, for out of the abundance of the heart, his mouth speaks."* To be truly good we need to have a good heart and only God can change hearts. So God's instruction in the Bible is clear that vile speech and name calling is a sin and will be punished whether by godly earthly authorities or by God himself.

YO, WHERE'S THE SOAP?

Yet is all form of name calling wrong? This seems an odd question to ask in light of our momma's zeal for cleanness in the mouth, yet to those familiar with the Bible, there are some problematic passages worthy of discussion.

How did Elijah's momma respond after reading, I Kings 18:26-27 (WEB), *"They took the bull which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any who answered. They leaped about the altar which was made. It happened at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud; for he is a god: either he is musing, or he is gone aside, or he is on a journey, or peradventure he sleeps and must be awakened."* No doubt Elijah's mom taught him as my mom taught me not to mock others or to make fun of the losers. Yet here Elijah openly mocks the followers of Baal and mocks their false God. I have heard that *'gone aside'* was a euphemism of the day meaning, 'to step off the path to urinate or defecate.' Imagine the outrage if someone in our day would say, *"Where is Allah? Is he too busy 'taking a leak' to answer your prayers?"* Elijah's momma may have been looking for a bar of soap, but the followers of Baal were reaching for swords of steel.

What did Isaiah's momma do after hearing, Isaiah 44:13-20 (WEB),

The carpenter stretches out a line. He marks it out with a pencil. He shapes it with planes. He marks it out with compasses, and shapes it like the figure of a man, with the beauty of a man, to reside in a house. He cuts down cedars for himself, and takes the cypress and the oak, and strengthens for himself one among the trees of the forest. He plants a fir tree, and the rain nourishes it. Then it will be for a man to burn; and he takes some of it, and warms himself. Yes, he burns it, and bakes bread. Yes, he makes a god, and worships it; he makes it an engraved image, and falls down to it. He burns part of it in the fire. With part of it, he eats meat. He roasts a roast, and is satisfied. Yes, he warms himself, and says, 'Aha! I am warm. I have seen the fire.' The rest of it he makes into a god, even his engraved image. He bows down to it and worships, and prays to it, and says, 'Deliver me; for you are my god!' They don't know, neither do they consider: for he has shut their eyes, that they can't see; and their hearts, that they can't understand. No one thinks, neither is there knowledge nor understanding to say, 'I have burned part of it in the fire. Yes, I have also baked bread on its coals. I have roasted meat and eaten it. Shall I make the rest of it into an abomination? Shall I bow down to a tree trunk?' He feeds on ashes. A deceived heart has turned him aside; and he can't deliver his soul, nor say, 'Isn't there a lie in my right hand?'

We can rightly ask if Isaiah laughed as he penned this irony. To be sure he laughed... or cried. Yet today we live in the era when truth and error are both true and to point out the error of another is '*mean*,' even if intended to protect them from harm. Imagine the scorn if someone in our day laughed that proponents of *free will* make exactly the same mistake as the foolish idol maker above. Rather than worship Christ for his gracious choice to save us, they worship their *free will* on one hand and yet on the other they cannot do the simplest thing of willing to quit hating our good God and his commands. Belts have been applied to those pressing this point, yet God delivers his faithful ones.

Did Ezekiel's momma throw him out after seeing Ezekiel 23:1-20 (WEB),

The word of the LORD came to me: 'Son of man, there were two women, daughters of the same mother. They became prostitutes in Egypt, engaging in prostitution from their youth. In that land their breasts were fondled and their virgin bosoms caressed. The older was named Oholah, and her sister was Oholibah. They were mine and gave birth to sons and daughters. Oholah is Samaria, and Oholibah is Jerusalem, '...There she lusted after her lovers, whose genitals were like those of donkeys and whose emission was like that of horses.

Imagine the emptied pews if someone would remind Christ's followers that our fleshly righteousness is at least as corrupt as the Old Testament people of God as we caress our bodies with the hands of the world. Our only righteousness is Christ. Imagine a preacher preaching this rebuke to God's people today! Why I tell you if his mom was present she would be leading the charge to drag her son from the pulpit and feed him to the bears.

God himself also personally and compassionately joins the name calling. Now the Scriptures above are also his inspired words indirectly through men. However, in Jonah 4:11 (WEB), God himself directly makes a remark that would offend any but the most humble. He rebukes Jonah's selfishness and prejudice toward Nineveh saying, "*Shouldn't I be concerned for*

Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred twenty thousand persons who can't discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much livestock?
"

So where is the offense in this Scripture? Though forgotten by our sophisticated culture, we greet one another with the right hand because in time past the left hand is the 'wiping hand' for cultures without toilet paper. God is saying that Jonah should be deeply concerned about the Ninevites because they do not know the difference between the hand they eat with and the hand they wipe with. God is deeply concerned that the Ninevites be helped, while Jonah seems just as glad to let them suffer in their sin and ignorance. How would Christians respond today if a man of God urged us to show compassion for unbelievers because without Jesus we do not know the difference between a fork and toilet paper? We are that hopeless without Jesus.

Perhaps as New Testament disciples, acknowledging the sinfulness of every man, we no longer have the right to point out sin in another, much less name-call. Though, Jesus certainly has the authority to call us on the carpet with names to match our dark souls. In Matthew 23 (WEB) Jesus says to the Jewish Scribes and Pharisees and to every sinful man, *"Woe to you...hypocrites! ...hypocrites! ...hypocrites! ...sons of Hell! ...blind guides! ... blind fools! ...blind fools! ...hypocrites! ...blind guides! ...hypocrites! ...blind Pharisee! ... hypocrites! ...whitened tombs! ...hypocrites! ...serpents! ...offspring of vipers!"*

Imagine Jesus' mother, sister, and brothers as the fiery eyes of Christ blasted the leaders of their synagogue. Jesus' family no doubt thought him insane. We too easily redefine Christ into a person of our liking and reinterpret his words or simply put them on the shelf. Jesus said the inflammatory words above face to face to real people. Have you also heard these words from Jesus heart to heart? Are you better than a Pharisee?

We might think that we should leave the name calling to Jesus, yet Paul sets an example of name calling. Philippians 3:1-3 (WEB) says, *"Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not tiresome, but for you it is safe. Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision. For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."* The Jews commonly called gentiles 'dogs,' but Paul turned the tables and called the unbelieving Jews 'dogs.' We also read in Galatians 5:11-12 (WEB), *"But I, brothers, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been removed. I wish that those who disturb you would cut themselves off."* Paul uses offensive language and says he wishes the Jews who refused to let go of the Old Covenant would emasculate themselves.

Paul is dead serious about the gospel of grace. Why? Paul, the worst of sinners, knew his only salvation was the undeserved grace of God and counted it great privilege and solemn duty to fellowship with any other repentant worst of sinners at the altar of thankfulness for God's grace.

Paul also was willing to point his finger in the eye of unrepentant worst of sinners, II Timothy 3:1-8 (WEB),

But know this, that in the last days, grievous times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, fierce, no lovers of good, traitors, headstrong, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; holding a form of godliness, but having denied the power thereof. Turn away from these, also. For of these are those who creep into houses, and take captive

gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Even as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so do these also oppose the truth; men corrupted in mind, reprobate concerning the faith.

Apparently political correctness has no place in matters of Christian faith and practice.

Paul also name called over more common vices. We read in Titus 1:10-13a (WEB), *“For there are also many unruly men, vain talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped; men who overthrow whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for dishonest gain's sake. One of them, a prophet of their own, said, ‘Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, and idle gluttons.’ This testimony is true.”* Curiously in this case the Holy Spirit incorporates man’s condemnation of men in his own rebuke to men.

A last curiosity is the Holy Spirit’s use of derogatory stereotyping to emphasize an important point. I Timothy 4:4-7 (WEB) says, *“For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with thanksgiving. For it is sanctified through the word of God and prayer. If you instruct the brothers of these things, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, nourished in the words of the faith, and of the good doctrine which you have followed. But refuse profane and old wives' fables. Exercise yourself toward godliness.”* If these were our own words from the pulpit some ‘old wives’ might take offense, though a few might confess fabling is a common problem.

WASHIN’ MOMMA’S MOUTH

Though our mothers may have suffered the stereotype of an ‘old wife,’ they no doubt did their best to keep us on the narrow path. Proverbs 1:8 warns us not to forsake our mother’s teaching. Yet we also must compare the convictions of our mothers with the candor of Scripture. With God’s help we will learn to avoid the fables and speak God’s truth in love with the character of Jesus Christ.

What remains to be said?

I was tempted to use my newly found proof texts to lambaste the terrible denominationalism and worldliness in American churches. Thankfully I am out of paper. So I briefly ask is it possible that we Christians could simply call ourselves and each other Christians and live like Christians? Do we see that the names of our ‘distinctions’ are an offense to Christ and to what we really are?

In Christ we are HOLY. In Christ we are ONE.

The Father will answer Jesus’ prayer in John 17:21 one way or another.

A Brief Theology of Rest

Growing up as a kid I hated to go to bed. My brother and I would argue, complain, and whine to our parents hoping to stay up a few more minutes or watch one more TV program. I am not sure we were even consciously aware of why we did this, until later in our youth when one of us had to go to bed before the other. At this point the complaining and whining tripled. We simply did not want to miss fun that someone else in the family might be having. We had an insatiable desire to be at the center of fun. Good thing no one told us that people are awake somewhere on the globe 24 hours a day. We would have never slept! God, however, created and modeled rest and so let's turn to a brief study of this important subject.

God's Rest in the Beginning

First we see that God worked, but he also created and modeled rest for mankind. *"The heavens, the earth, and all their vast array were finished. On the seventh day God finished his work which he had done; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done"* (Genesis 2:1-2 WEB). It is interesting that the pattern set by God is a seven day week with one day of rest. A few times in history men have attempted to change society to a longer work week such as ten days with one day of rest. However, the seven day week has proved to be the most effective and enduring for the human constitution. I guess the Heavenly Father know best!

Man's Rest in the Beginning

While searching the Scriptures for commandments to rest I could find none before the commands given through Moses at Mount Sinai. God himself set an example of resting on the seventh day for Adam and Eve. However, there is no explicit command recorded in Scripture for Adam to do likewise. I have read that some believe that the Ten Commandments were also given to Adam and Eve. For example Joseph knew that it would be a sin against God to sleep with Potiphar's wife, Genesis 39:9. However, the more plain teaching is from Romans 5:12-14, which explains that no command was given after the fall until Moses. Perhaps one element of the curse given to Adam and Eve after the fall was no guidance to mankind about the need and value of rest. Jacob said to his son, Joseph, at the end of the book of Genesis, *"The time came near that Israel must die, and he called his son Joseph, and said to him, 'If now I have found favor in your sight, please put your hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me. Please don't bury me in Egypt, but when I sleep with my fathers, you shall carry me out of Egypt, and bury me in their burying place.' Joseph said, 'I will do as you have said' "* (Genesis 47:29-30 WEB). Life under the curse offers little rest and Jacob looked forward to the rest that death would give him.

Satan's Restlessness for Destruction

The Scriptures portray Satan and his demons as restless and agitated creatures. In the very beginning in the garden we read of Satan, *"Now the serpent was more subtle than any animal of the field which Yahweh God had made"* (Genesis 3:1a WEB). Satan is not a creature secure and at rest, but filled with striving toward malignant objectives. Quite quickly in the garden he possessed a snake with the evil goal of leading mankind into rebellion against God. Satan is driven by selfish ambition with no way to put it in neutral or reverse.

Jesus explains that the only rest demons experience is when they can be indwelling man to

work evil. *"When an unclean spirit has gone out of a man, he passes through waterless places, seeking rest, and doesn't find it. Then he says, 'I will return into my house from which I came out,' and when he has come back, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes, and takes with himself seven other spirits more evil than he is, and they enter in and dwell there. The last state of that man becomes worse than the first. Even so will it be also to this evil generation"* (Matthew 12:43-45 WEB). Demons are only at rest while working evil.

"Be sober and self-controlled. Be watchful. Your adversary, the devil, walks around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8 WEB). Again Satan is pictured as an insatiable, sleepless lion hunting down his prey. I have been told that sharks never sleep and always need to swim to keep water flowing through their gills. Such would also be a good picture of Satan with his rows and rows of teeth constantly bared for his prey.

Man's Rest Frustrated

Unfortunately our decision to follow Satan into rebellion has resulted in the frustration of our rest as well. After the disobedience in the garden, God not only punished Satan but us as well. The curse of restlessness had immediate effects in the first family. God said to Cain after he killed his brother Abel, *"Now you are cursed because of the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. From now on, when you till the ground, it won't yield its strength to you. You will be a fugitive and a wanderer in the earth"* (Genesis 4:11-12 WEB). Instead of peace, Cain was sentenced to be a fugitive with no place of rest.

Some friends of mine enjoy a little word game greeting. One will say, *"God is good!"* And the other will say, *"All the time!"* Yet is God good all the time? How can the sentence received by Cain be good? Later in the same chapter we read that after mankind was evicted from the restful garden, *"At that time men began to call on Yahweh's name"* (Genesis 4:26 WEB). God's punishment had a purpose that men would learn to call on him for deliverance in the midst of even the deepest trial. So my friends' greeting still stands. *"God is good all the time!"*

Though God is good all the time, we are not exempt from despairing at times. Job said, *"Why didn't I die from the womb? Why didn't I give up the spirit when my mother bore me? Why did the knees receive me? Or why the breast, that I should nurse? For now should I have lain down and been quiet. I should have slept, then I would have been at rest"* (Job 3:11-13 WEB). Job's life was so difficult at points he wished he had never been born. David also said, *"I said, 'Oh that I had wings like a dove! Then I would fly away, and be at rest' "* (Psalm 55:6 WEB). David's life was so difficult at points he wished he could fly away for rest.

Isaiah reminds us, however, that we have no one to blame but ourselves. *"For thus said the Lord Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel, 'You will be saved in returning and rest. Your strength will be in quietness and in confidence.' You refused, but you said, 'No, for we will flee on horses;' therefore you will flee; and, 'We will ride on the swift;' therefore those who pursue you will be swift"* (Isaiah 30:15-16 WEB). God offered us rest, but we have chosen to flee.

John teaches us in Revelation that the problem of man's restlessness will continue to the world's end. *"The smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever. They have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name"* (Revelation 14:11 WEB).

Moses' Rest Not Adequate

God graciously provided the Old Covenant through Moses to mankind which provided instructions about rest. *"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. You shall labor six days, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to Yahweh your God. You shall not do any work in it, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your livestock, nor your stranger who is within your gates; for in six days Yahweh made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore Yahweh blessed the Sabbath day, and made it holy"* (Exodus 20:8-11 WEB).

The Old Covenant also demanded the death penalty for those that did not rest on the Sabbath. *"Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to Yahweh. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall surely be put to death,"* (Exodus 31:15 WEB). So we see that God is serious that men would rest. However, there is something not restful about the death penalty looming for those that break the command to rest. This is not restful because we know that we sin from time to time. Thankfully the New Testament gospel of John catches our eye immediately because the ministry of Christ proposes an improvement upon Moses. *"For the law was given through Moses. Grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ"* (John 1:17 WEB).

Christ's Rest is Glorious

Isaiah knew that the ministry of the Messiah would be resplendent in contrast to the Old Covenant. He says, *"It will happen in that day that the nations will seek the root of Jesse, who stands as a banner of the peoples; and his resting place will be glorious"* (Isaiah 11:10 WEB). The Messiah will bring a glorious resting place for mankind. And where is this resting place? The writer of Hebrews says, *"His Son is the radiance of his glory, the very image of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, who, when he had by himself purified us of our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high"* (Hebrews 1:3 WEB). So we see that Jesus' himself has sat down after his work on the cross and is resting in Heaven. Jesus also promises, *"Don't let your heart be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me. In my Father's house are many homes. If it weren't so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and will receive you to myself; that where I am, you may be there also"* (John 14:1-3 WEB).

Man's Rest Restored

Though man has been cursed with restlessness, Christ has purchased eternal rest for us, and invites us to rest in him. David says, *"It is vain for you to rise up early, to stay up late, eating the bread of toil; for he gives sleep to his loved ones"* (Psalm 127:2 WEB). Solomon reminds us that resting in the Lord does not mean slothfulness, *"A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: so your poverty will come as a robber, and your scarcity as an armed man"* (Proverbs 6:10-11 WEB). Jesus invites us to the greatest rest, *"Come to me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light"* (Matthew 11:28-30 WEB).

The writer of Hebrews also explains, *"There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For he who has entered into his rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from his. Let's therefore give diligence to enter into that rest, lest anyone fall after the same example of disobedience"* (Hebrews 4:9-11 WEB). In this important passage we learn that the Old Testament Sabbath is simply a shadow of the real Sabbath rest we have by faith in Christ. The passage is commonly misinterpreted to mean that Christians are still obligated to obey the Old Testament Sabbath commands. Many Christians will often refer to Sunday as the Sabbath to be treated with special care. This is a

main plot of the movie *Chariots of Fire* where Eric Liddel refuses to compete in the Olympics on Sunday. It is fine for Eric to make Sunday a special day for himself, but this is not a Christian standard. Please find a Bible and read all of Hebrews chapter 4 for yourself. If you have more time search the whole of the New Testament and you not find Sunday referred to as the Sabbath even once. Instead you will find great encouragement to learn that the Sabbath rest offered by Christ is eternal rest in Heaven, given to all his chosen ones. Friends, do not miss this good news! Receive Christ today!

Because the New Covenant offers the real Sabbath rest of Heaven it therefore no longer maintains the Old Covenant Sabbath commands which existed only as a shadow to point to Christ. Paul teaches, *"One man esteems one day as more important. Another esteems every day alike. Let each man be fully assured in his own mind"* (Romans 14:5 WEB).

But how are we to rest until our Sabbath rest in Heaven is realized. In heaven we will truly be at rest, because the fight with sin will be over. How can we find rest now while still in the fight with sin? Apostle John teaches, *"My little children, let's not love in word only, or with the tongue only, but in deed and truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and persuade [rest] our hearts before him, because if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things"* (1 John 3:18-20 WEB).

God's Rest - Plan "A" Accomplished

One may be inclined to think that God modeled rest for mankind after creation, but needed to resort to plan "B" to redeem man from restlessness after the fall. David encourages us that since the fall God has been intently watching over our pitiful condition, *"Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep"* (Psalm 121:4 WEB). However, God never needed to resort to plan "B". Man's fall into sin and the frustration from restlessness have always been Plan "A". *"Haven't you known? Haven't you heard? The everlasting God, Yahweh, The Creator of the ends of the earth, doesn't faint. He isn't weary. His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the weak. He increases the strength of him who has no might. Even the youths faint and get weary, and the young men utterly fall; but those who wait for Yahweh will renew their strength. They will mount up with wings like eagles. They will run, and not be weary. They will walk, and not faint"* (Isaiah 40:28-31 WEB).

God's purpose is that we would learn to wait and depend upon him in the deepest way possible. That is God intends that we would trust him to make good in spite of the worst possible circumstance, our rebellion against even him. Can you restfully believe that Christ has completely forgiven even that? How can this have been plan "A" all along?

Well how else could our praise for the riches of his grace be amplified to the highest as explained in Ephesians 2:6-7 and 1 Peter 1:6-7?

Praise God for the promise of eternal rest!

A Brief Theology of Wine

Do you really know Jesus?

1) The third day, there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee. Jesus' mother was there. 2) Jesus also was invited, with his disciples, to the marriage. 3) When the wine ran out, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no wine."

4) Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does that have to do with you and me? My hour has not yet come."

5) His mother said to the servants, "Whatever he says to you, do it." 6) Now there were six water pots of stone set there after the Jews' way of purifying, containing two or three metretes apiece. 7) Jesus said to them, "Fill the water pots with water." So they filled them up to the brim. 8) He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the ruler of the feast." So they took it. 9) When the ruler of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and didn't know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the ruler of the feast called the bridegroom 10) and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when the guests have drunk freely, then that which is worse. You have kept the good wine until now!" 11) This beginning of his signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

John 2:1-11 (WEB)

Some teach that Jesus did not create wine, but grape juice. I believe this is an error because 1) the feast ruler thought Jesus' wine was better and should have been served first, most likely because inferior wine was typically served after the taste buds were numbed by the alcohol and 2) Jesus himself drank wine. What therefore should be a Christian view of fermented beverages?

Drinkers

After the flood *"Noah began to be a farmer, and planted a vineyard. He drank of the wine and got drunk. He was uncovered within his tent"* (Genesis 9:20-21 WEB). Noah, though spared from the flood, was a sinner saved by grace like us and here we see Noah's sin of drunkenness.

"Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High. He blessed him, and said, 'Blessed be Abram of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth' " (Genesis 14:18-19 WEB). Melchizedek, a gentile priest of God, served wine to Abraham.

"30) Lot went up out of Zoar, and lived in the mountain, and his two daughters with him; for he was afraid to live in Zoar. He lived in a cave with his two daughters. 31) The firstborn said to the younger, 'Our father is old, and there is not a man in the earth to come in to us in the way of all the earth. 32) Come, let's make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve our father's family line.' 33) They made their father drink wine that night: and the firstborn went in, and lay with

her father. He didn't know when she lay down, nor when she arose" (Genesis 19:30-33 WEB). Alcohol enabled a grievous sin.

"21) Isaac said to Jacob, 'Please come near, that I may feel you, my son, whether you are really my son Esau or not.' 22) Jacob went near to Isaac his father. He felt him, and said, 'The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.' 23) He didn't recognize him, because his hands were hairy, like his brother, Esau's hands. So he blessed him. 24) He said, 'Are you really my son Esau?' He said, 'I am.' 25) He said, 'Bring it near to me, and I will eat of my son's venison, that my soul may bless you.' He brought it near to him, and he ate. He brought him wine, and he drank" (Genesis 27:21-25 WEB). Jacob served Isaac, his father, wine.

"You shall trade the money for whatever your soul desires, for cattle, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatever your soul asks of you; and you shall eat there before Yahweh your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household" (Deuteronomy 14:26 WEB). God encouraged Israel to buy their hearts desire, including wine and strong drink.

"1) So the king and Haman came to banquet with Esther the queen. 2) The king said again to Esther on the second day at the banquet of wine, 'What is your petition, queen Esther? It shall be granted you. What is your request? Even to the half of the kingdom it shall be performed.' 3) Then Esther the queen answered, 'If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request' " (Esther 7:1-3 WEB). Queen Esther served wine to King Xerxes and Haman.

"I searched in my heart how to cheer my flesh with wine...." (Ecclesiastes 2:3a WEB). Solomon drank wine.

"The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Behold, a gluttonous man, and a drunkard; a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' " (Luke 7:34 WEB). Jesus drank wine with sinners and was accused of being a drunkard.

"Be no longer a drinker of water only, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities" (1 Timothy 5:23 WEB). Apostle Paul instructed Timothy to drink a little wine because it is good for the body and his illnesses.

Tea Totalers

"Yahweh spoke to Aaron, saying, 'Drink no wine nor strong drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the Tent of Meeting, that you don't die: it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations:' " (Leviticus 10:8-9 WEB). Israelite priests could not drink wine.

"Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the children of Israel, and tell them: When either man or woman shall make a special vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to separate himself to Yahweh, he shall separate himself from wine and strong drink. He shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of fermented drink, neither shall he drink any juice of grapes, nor eat fresh grapes or dried. All the days of his separation he shall eat nothing that is made of the grapevine, from the seeds even to the skins.....This is the law of the Nazirite: when the days of his separation are fulfilled, he shall be brought to the door of the Tent of Meeting.....after that the Nazirite may drink wine" (Numbers 6:1-20 WEB). A Nazirite vow could be taken which included abstaining from alcohol, but only for the duration of the vow.

"There was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was

Manoah; and his wife was barren, and didn't bear. The angel of Yahweh appeared to the woman, and said to her, See now, you are barren, and don't bear; but you shall conceive, and bear a son. Now therefore please beware and drink no wine nor strong drink, and don't eat any unclean thing: for, behold, you shall conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head; for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb: and he shall begin to save Israel out of the hand of the Philistines" (Judges 13:2-4 WEB). Samson had a special calling from God to be a Nazirite and abstain from alcohol.

"An angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. Zacharias was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, 'Don't be afraid, Zacharias, because your request has been heard, and your wife, Elizabeth, will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. You will have joy and gladness; and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and he will drink no wine nor strong drink. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb" (Luke 1:11-15 WEB). John the Baptist also abstained from alcohol.

Encouragement

"He causes the grass to grow for the livestock, and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food out of the earth: wine that makes glad the heart of man, oil to make his face to shine, and bread that strengthens man's heart" (Psalm 104:14-15 WEB). David sings that God makes wine for man's happiness.

"In this mountain, Yahweh of Armies will make all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of choice wines, of fat things full of marrow, of well refined choice wines. He will destroy in this mountain the surface of the covering that covers all peoples, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He has swallowed up death forever! The Lord Yahweh will wipe away tears from off all faces. He will take the reproach of his people away from off all the earth, for Yahweh has spoken it" (Isaiah 25:6-8 WEB). Isaiah speaks of the day when God's blessing on all peoples will be celebrated with choice wines.

Warnings

"Wine is a mocker, and beer is a brawler. Whoever is led astray by them is not wise" (Proverbs 20:1 WEB).

"He who loves pleasure shall be a poor man. He who loves wine and oil shall not be rich" (Proverbs 21:17).

"Don't be among ones drinking too much wine, or those who gorge themselves on meat: for the drunkard and the glutton shall become poor; and drowsiness clothes them in rags" (Proverbs 23:20-21 WEB).

"Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaints? Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes? Those who stay long at the wine; those who go to seek out mixed wine. Don't look at the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly. In the end, it bites like a snake, and poisons like a viper" (Proverbs 23:29-32 WEB)

"It is not for kings, Lemuel; it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes to say, 'Where is strong drink?' lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the justice due to anyone who is afflicted. Give strong drink to him who is ready to perish; and wine to the bitter in soul: Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more." (Proverbs 31:4-7 WEB).

Proverbs has absolutely nothing good to say about alcohol.

“Woe to those who rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; who stay late into the night, until wine inflames them! The harp, lyre, tambourine, and flute, with wine, are at their feasts; but they don't regard the work of Yahweh, neither have they considered the operation of his hands” (Isaiah 5:11-12 WEB). Isaiah warns those who love wine, but do not regard God.

“If a man walking in a spirit of falsehood lies: ‘I will prophesy to you of wine and of strong drink;’ he would be the prophet of this people” (Micah 2:11 WEB) Micah speaks hard words to a rebellious people.

“So then each one of us will give account of himself to God. Therefore let's not judge one another any more, but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block in his brother's way, or an occasion for falling. I know, and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean of itself; except that to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. Yet if because of food your brother is grieved, you walk no longer in love. Don't destroy with your food him for whom Christ died. Then don't let your good be slandered, for the Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then, let us follow after things which make for peace, and things by which we may build one another up. Don't overthrow God's work for food's sake. All things indeed are clean, however it is evil for that man who creates a stumbling block by eating. It is good to not eat meat, drink wine, nor do anything by which your brother stumbles, is offended, or is made weak. Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who doesn't judge himself in that which he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because it isn't of faith; and whatever is not of faith is sin” (Romans 14:12-23 WEB). Paul reminds us that our brother's conscience is more important than flaunting our liberty.

“But as it is, I wrote to you not to associate with anyone who is called a brother who is a sexual sinner, or covetous, or an idolater, or a slanderer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner. Don't even eat with such a person.” (1 Corinthians 5:11 WEB). Do not associate with drunkards.

“Therefore don't be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Don't be drunken with wine, in which is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, ...” (Ephesians 5:17-18 WEB). Drunkenness is a sin.

“Deacons, in the same way, must be reverent, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for money” (1 Timothy 3:8 WEB). *“And that older women likewise be reverent in behavior, not slanderers nor enslaved to much wine, teachers of that which is good”* (Titus 2:3 WEB). Deacons and women may drink, therefore anyone, but not much.

To Drink Or Not To Drink Is....

These Scriptures show 1) wine is good a gift from God, 2) abuse of wine and drunkenness is a sin and will destroy your life, 3) saints have sinned in the use of alcohol, 4) saints have properly used alcohol, and 5) saints have abstained from alcohol.

So in summary, 1) Christians may follow the example of Jesus and drink fermented beverages or John the Baptist and not drink, 2) drunkenness is a sin, 3) do not associate with anyone naming Christ who gets drunk, and 4) do not offend a weaker brother's conscience by drinking in their presence.

But much more importantly, however, *to drink or not to drink is... NOT the question.* Jesus' said *"To what then will I liken the people of this generation? What are they like? They are like children who sit in the marketplace, and call one to another, saying, 'We piped to you, and you didn't dance. We mourned, and you didn't weep.' For John the Baptizer came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Behold, a gluttonous man, and a drunkard; a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'" Wisdom is justified by all her children"* (Luke 7:31-35 WEB).

Tea Totalers, perhaps you side with John the Baptist? Drinkers, perhaps you side with Jesus? However, alcohol policies aside, John and Jesus were united in preaching *"repent and believe the good news!"* and both of them were rejected for their message, John decapitated, Jesus crucified. In plain words, your alcohol policy reveals nothing about your reception of the truth. Have you repented and believed the good news? That is the question!

Friend, without repentance and belief in the good news you are already drinking a terrible wine, *"One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, 'Come here. I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed sexual immorality, and those who dwell in the earth were made drunken with the wine of her sexual immorality' "* (Revelation 17:1-2 WEB). Your idolatry is equal to the drunken intoxication of adultery against God.

And apart from repentance and belief in the good news you are about to drink an even more terrible wine, *"Another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a great voice, 'If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead, or on his hand, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is prepared unmixed in the cup of his anger. He will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb. The smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever. They have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name. Here is the patience of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus'"* (Revelation 14:9-12 WEB).

Worship of anything but Christ will inflame God's wrath against you.

A Brief Theology of Work

Growing up in the heart of Pennsylvania Dutch Country, Lancaster County, the general philosophy of life was often, "Work is never wrong." A friend of mine once joked about the insanity of the German work ethic, "I caught my grandparents sweeping the forest floor one weekend, for Pete's sake!" More recently, a friend from church commented, "Young men need work. It keeps them out of trouble." I also agree that work is good, in fact modeled by God himself. However, the equation is not that simple as our study will expose. In fact work itself may be the number one idol through the whole of Scripture and in one sense is the number one sin, rejecting salvation by God's grace.

God's Work in the Beginning

Work is good, created by God and modeled by God. Consider that the whole existence of the universe itself is the result of God's work. The book of Genesis reads, *"On the seventh day God finished his work which he had done"* (Genesis 2:2 WEB) and again, *"He made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the surface of the earth, having determined appointed seasons, and the boundaries of their dwellings"* (Acts 17:26 WEB). So we see God finished his work of creation, he made every nation of men from one man, and he determined the entire course of history.

The New Testament Scriptures also make it plain that the God who did this is Jesus. *"For by him all things were created in the heavens and on the earth, visible things and invisible things, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things are held together"* (Colossians 1:16-17 WEB). And not only did Jesus create everything he is also actively holding all things together.

Man's Work in the Beginning

We often tend to extremes. In our introduction we explained that work itself can become an idol. On the other extreme we may believe that work itself is God's punishment to mankind for Adam's sin in the garden. However, this also is not the case. We read, *"God blessed them. God said to them, 'Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth' "* (Genesis 1:28 WEB). So we see before the fall into sin, God assigned work for man to do. This work, however, was always perfectly enjoyable because it was not frustrated by sin.

Satan's Work of Destruction

The ugly side of sin is the work of Satan. Satan himself led man into rebellion against God. The Scriptures say, *"Then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will kill with the breath of his mouth, and destroy by the manifestation of his coming; even he whose coming is according to the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders"* (2 Thessalonians 2:8-9 WEB). We also read the hope that Jesus came to destroy Satan's works. *"He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. To this end the Son of God was revealed: that he might destroy the works of the devil"* (1 John 3:8 WEB).

Man's Work Frustrated

Though Satan led us into sin, God still punished us as well. God said to Adam and Eve, "16) *To the woman he said, 'I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth. You will bear children in pain. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.'* 17) *To Adam he said, 'Because you have listened to your wife's voice, and ate from the tree, about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it,' the ground is cursed for your sake. You will eat from it with much labor all the days of your life.* 18) *It will yield thorns and thistles to you; and you will eat the herb of the field.* 19) *You will eat bread by the sweat of your face until you return to the ground, for you were taken out of it. For you are dust, and you shall return to dust.'* " (Genesis 3:16-19 WEB).

And not only did God initiate the curse with Adam and Eve, but he maintains the curse with each sinful man, that is all of us. God said to Cain after he killed his brother Abel, "*Now you are cursed because of the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. From now on, when you till the ground, it won't yield its strength to you. You will be a fugitive and a wanderer in the earth*" (Genesis 4:11-12 WEB).

God is so resolved that we would call to him as a father that he will destroy even the good efforts of men when he is excluded from involvement. For example we all remember the famous Tower of Babel. But do you remember why God halted the work? "4) *They said, 'Come, let's build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top reaches to the sky, and let's make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad on the surface of the whole earth.'* 5) *Yahweh came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men built.* 6) *Yahweh said, 'Behold, they are one people, and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do. Now nothing will be withheld from them, which they intend to do.* 7) *Come, let's go down, and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.'* 8) *So Yahweh scattered them abroad from there on the surface of all the earth. They stopped building the city.* 9) *Therefore its name was called Babel, because there Yahweh confused the language of all the earth. From there, Yahweh scattered them abroad on the surface of all the earth'* " (Genesis 11:4-9 WEB). God halted the work to prevent man from "making a name for themselves" and losing dependency on him.

Isaiah's confession is a solemn reminder that God's works surpass our works of the flesh. "*We have been with child. We have been in pain. We gave birth, it seems, only to wind. We have not worked any deliverance in the earth; neither have the inhabitants of the world fallen. Your dead shall live...*" (Isaiah 26:18-19a WEB). Man's efforts have produced nothing whereas God will bring the dead to life!

And most painfully when we turn from our Father God to make any kind of works an idol he will hand us over to work until our idol is broken. "*For it is: Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule; a little here, a little there. Very well then, with foreign lips and strange tongues God will speak to this people, to whom he said, 'This is the resting place, let the weary rest'; and, 'This is the place of repose' - but they would not listen. So then, the word of the LORD to them will become: Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule; a little here, a little there - so that they will go and fall backward, be injured and snared and captured*" (Isaiah 28:10-13 NIV).

Moses' Work Not Adequate

One thing is clear since the Garden of Eden. Mankind needs salvation. So God graciously worked through Moses to bring the Ten Commandments and the Old Covenant. This covenant was beautiful in glory and provided instruction for righteousness as well as instruction for forgiveness and atonement. Was this covenant adequate for salvation? Though misunderstood by many people, Jesus drew a sharp contrast between his New Covenant and the works of Moses. Consider, "*For the law was given through Moses. Grace and truth were realized*

through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17 WEB) and again “But now he has obtained a more excellent ministry, by so much as he is also the mediator of a better covenant, which on better promises has been given as law. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second” (Hebrews 8:6-7 WEB).

The greatest contrast is found in the heart of the gospel explained in Romans. *“For Moses writes about the righteousness of the law, ‘The one who does them will live by them.’ But the righteousness which is of faith says this, ‘Don’t say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’ (that is, to bring Christ down); or, ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead.)’ But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth, and in your heart;’ that is, the word of faith which we preach: that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:5-9 WEB).* So we see that even though the covenant given through Moses made provision for forgiveness, man still needed to bring the atoning sacrifice to the altar himself. The New Covenant of Christ, however, invites us to believe that Jesus has done it all, from top to bottom!

Christ’s Work of Restoration

The work of Jesus Christ himself is the work that will receive glory throughout all of eternity. *“Jesus said to them, ‘My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work. Don’t you say, ‘There are yet four months until the harvest?’ Behold, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and look at the fields, that they are white for harvest already. He who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit to eternal life; that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. For in this the saying is true, ‘One sows, and another reaps.’ I sent you to reap that for which you haven’t labored. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor” (John 4:34-38 WEB).* He labored to harvest the souls of mankind. Moreover, he effectively completed his work. *“I glorified you on the earth. I have accomplished the work which you have given me to do” (John 17:4 WEB).* And he effectively continues his work in mankind. *“Being confident of this very thing, that he who began a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6 WEB).*

Man’s Work Restored

Jesus not only worked to give us his righteousness apart from our works, but also to restore our corruption of work so that we could join him in his good work. And the first work of all that he gives us to do before anything else can or will matter is that we would trust him. Jesus said, *“ ‘Don’t work for the food which perishes, but for the food which remains to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For God the Father has sealed him.’ They said therefore to him, ‘What must we do, that we may work the works of God?’ Jesus answered them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent’ ” (John 6:27-29 WEB).* Paul says the same, *“Now to him who works, the reward is not counted as grace, but as something owed. But to him who doesn’t work, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness” (Romans 4:4-5 WEB).*

Jesus’ work of restoration is so thorough that he even overturns his confusion of men’s languages at the Tower of Babel with the gift of languages at Pentecost. *“Now when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all with one accord in one place. Suddenly there came from the sky a sound like the rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. Tongues like fire appeared and were distributed to them, and one sat on each of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other languages, as the Spirit gave them the ability to speak” (Acts 2:1-4 WEB).*

Jesus makes it more than clear that work is good and that he created us to do his good

works. *"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before that we would walk in them"* (Ephesians 2:10 WEB). However, he insists that we partner with him by faith for a guaranteed good result. *"He therefore who supplies the Spirit to you, and works miracles among you, does he do it by the works of the law, or by hearing of faith?"* (Galatians 3:5).

But how are we to have the courage to even lift a finger to partner with God's good work, while we still struggle with sin? *"My little children, let's not love in word only, neither with the tongue only, but in deed and truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and persuade [rest] our hearts before him, because if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things"* (1 John 3:18-20 WEB). But most significantly if we have received Christ we can have great confidence as well as holy reverence that God is working his will in and through us. *"So then, my beloved, even as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who works in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure"* (Philippians 2:12-13 WEB).

God's Work - Plan "A" Accomplished

One may be inclined to think that God created good work for mankind in the Garden of Eden, but needed to resort to plan "B" to restore this lost work after the fall. Paul teaches us that, yes, someone has subjected the entire creation to frustration. *"18) For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which will be revealed toward us. 19) For the creation waits with eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. 20) For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 21) that the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of decay into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. 22) For we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now. 23) Not only so, but ourselves also, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for adoption, the redemption of our body. 24) For we were saved in hope, but hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for that which he sees? 25) But if we hope for that which we don't see, we wait for it with patience."*
(Romans 8:18-25 WEB)

But who is this one who has frustrated creation? The account in Genesis 3 referenced above is clear, but to remove all doubt Paul himself invites us to know and worship the God of frustration. *"For God has shut up all to disobedience, that he might have mercy on all"* (Romans 11:32 WEB). Paul confidently invites us to know that God himself has frustrated his creation, even each of us, because Paul also believed that God would sooner or later mercifully set us free. Praise to the God of temporary frustration who is also the God of eternal freedom!

Now that is a plan "A."

A Brief Theology of...Something Better Than Wine

Better Than Wine!

Many unbelievers mock Christians as ignorant of the pleasures of sex simply because we strive to avoid their sexual jokes and their sexual immorality. We Christians, however, have the fullest tap into the goodness of God and his gift of sex to mankind. In fact one whole book of the Bible is dedicated to the physical love between a husband and his bride. *"The Song of songs, which is Solomon's. Beloved: Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth; for your love is better than wine. Your oils have a pleasing fragrance. Your name is oil poured forth, therefore the virgins love you. Take me away with you. Let us hurry. The king has brought me into his rooms"* (Song of Solomon 1:1-4 WEB). Read the whole book of *Song of Solomon* and discover for yourself that God and believers know that sex is better than wine.

Before The Curse - A Beautiful Flower

God created marriage between one man and one woman from the very beginning to bless mankind with companionship and pleasurable physical union, and this without shame. *"Yahweh God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.' Out of the ground Yahweh God formed every animal of the field, and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. Whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock, and to the birds of the sky, and to every animal of the field; but for man there was not found a helper suitable for him. Yahweh God caused a deep sleep to fall on the man, and he slept; and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. He made the rib, which Yahweh God had taken from the man, into a woman, and brought her to the man. The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh. She will be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.' Therefore a man will leave his father and his mother, and will join with his wife, and they will be one flesh. They were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed"* (Genesis 2:18-25 WEB). Wowzer! Sounds good to me!

Under The Curse - A Trampled Rose

However, Adam and Eve sinned and so sin entered the world and every individual person. Consider the terrible account of King David's sexual sin. *"It happened at evening, that David arose from off his bed, and walked on the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful to look on. David sent and inquired after the woman. One said, Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite? David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in to him, and he lay with her (for she was purified from her uncleanness); and she returned to her house. The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, and said, I am with child..... David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. He wrote in the letter, saying, Set Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire you from him, that he may be struck, and die..... The shooters shot at your servants from off the wall; and some of the king's servants are dead, and your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also..... When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she made lamentation for her husband. When the mourning was past, David sent and took her home to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son. But the thing that*

David had done displeased Yahweh. Yahweh sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, 'There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds, but the poor man had nothing, except one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and raised. It grew up together with him, and with his children. It ate of his own food, drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was to him like a daughter. A traveler came to the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man who had come to him, but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man who had come to him.' David's anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, 'As Yahweh lives, the man who has done this is worthy to die! He shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity!' Nathan said to David, 'You are the man. This is what Yahweh, the God of Israel, says: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul. I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that would have been too little, I would have added to you many more such things. Why have you despised the word of Yahweh, to do that which is evil in his sight? You have struck Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now therefore the sword will never depart from your house, because you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' This is what Yahweh says: 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbor, and he will lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.' David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against Yahweh.' Nathan said to David, 'Yahweh also has put away your sin. You will not die. However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to Yahweh's enemies to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die.' Nathan departed to his house." (2 Samuel 11:2-12:15 WEB). Even true believers sin greatly and are punished by the Lord. David committed adultery, murdered to cover it up, and was severely punished by God even to the loss of his child.

Inside Christ - A Precious Gift for the Christian Family to Protect

"Pharisees came to him, testing him, and saying, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason?' He answered, 'Haven't you read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall join to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh?' So that they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, don't let man tear apart.' They asked him, 'Why then did Moses command us to give her a bill of divorce, and divorce her?' He said to them, 'Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it has not been so. I tell you that whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and he who marries her when she is divorced commits adultery.' His disciples said to him, 'If this is the case of the man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry.' But he said to them, 'Not all men can receive this saying, but those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake. He who is able to receive it, let him receive it'" (Matthew 19:3-12 WEB). Jesus restores his standard of excellence for marital commitment and also reminds us that some have forsaken marriage for the sake of Christ's kingdom.

Paul's letter to Corinth reminds us again that true believers can sin in grievous ways and that grace demands a firm response, even disassociation if no repentance. *"It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles, that one has his father's wife. You are puffed up, and didn't rather mourn, that he who had done this deed might be removed from among*

you. For I most certainly, as being absent in body but present in spirit, have already, as though I were present, judged him who has done this thing. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, you being gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, are to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast leavens the whole lump? Purge out the old yeast, that you may be a new lump, even as you are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed in our place. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old yeast, neither with the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. I wrote to you in my letter to have no company with sexual sinners; yet not at all meaning with the sexual sinners of this world, or with the covetous and extortioners, or with idolaters; for then you would have to leave the world. But as it is, I wrote to you not to associate with anyone who is called a brother who is a sexual sinner, or covetous, or an idolater, or a slanderer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner. Don't even eat with such a person. For what have I to do with also judging those who are outside? Don't you judge those who are within? But those who are outside, God judges. 'Put away the wicked man from among yourselves' " (1 Corinthians 5:1-13 WEB)

God's people are called to holiness. "Flee sexual immorality! 'Every sin that a man does is outside the body,' but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:18-20 WEB).

The New Testament teaches that sexual union is blessed within the bonds of marriage for his people. "Now concerning the things about which you wrote to me: it is good for a man not to touch a woman. But, because of sexual immoralities, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife the affection owed her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife doesn't have authority over her own body, but the husband. Likewise also the husband doesn't have authority over his own body, but the wife. Don't deprive one another, unless it is by consent for a season, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer, and may be together again, that Satan doesn't tempt you because of your lack of self-control" (1 Corinthians 7:1-5 WEB).

"Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the bed be undefiled: but God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers" (Hebrews 13:4 WEB). Sex within marriage is blessed, but sexual immorality will be judged.

Outside Christ - Sexual Sinners Judged

"Now the works of the flesh are obvious, which are: adultery, sexual immorality, uncleanness, lustfulness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, strife, jealousies, outbursts of anger, rivalries, divisions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these; of which I forewarn you, even as I also forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19-21 WEB). The sexually immoral will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

"But for the cowardly, unbelieving, sinners, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their part is in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death" (Revelation 21:8 WEB). The sexually immoral are sentenced to eternal fire... if their sins are not paid for.

Adultery and Homosexuality as Judgment?

“The mouth of an adulteress is a deep pit: he who is under Yahweh's wrath will fall into it” (Proverbs 22:14 WEB). This Scripture says something extremely difficult to fathom. People fall into adultery following the wrath of God. Men fall into adultery because they are under God's wrath for other provoking sins.

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known of God is revealed in them, for God revealed it to them. For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity; that they may be without excuse. Because, knowing God, they didn't glorify him as God, neither gave thanks, but became vain in their reasoning, and their senseless heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and traded the glory of the incorruptible God for the likeness of an image of corruptible man, and of birds, and four-footed animals, and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to uncleanness, that their bodies should be dishonored among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason, God gave them up to vile passions. For their women changed the natural function into that which is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural function of the woman, burned in their lust toward one another, men doing what is inappropriate with men, and receiving in themselves the due penalty of their error. Even as they refused to have God in their knowledge, God gave them up to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil habits, secret slanderers, backbiters, hateful to God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but also approve of those who practice them” (Romans 1:18-32 WEB). This Scripture is also extremely difficult to understand. People are handed over to homosexuality because of God's wrath. He does this because they 1) didn't glorify God or give thanks and 2) traded the worship of God for the worship of corruptible man, birds, animals, and creeping things.

How could our good God do something this terrible?!?! Consider a father who loved his child and gave that child a beautiful Christmas present. The child rather than being thankful to his dad for the present instead played with that toy and worshipped it. The father attempted repeatedly to reach out with tender affection to that child intent that thankfulness and affection would be returned. But the child no longer responded to his father's voice nor would even look him in the eyes, but only toward his precious Christmas present. I tell you that because of that father's intense, jealous, fiery love for his child he found a crude mallet, placed it into his child's hand, wrapped his own hand around his beloved child's, and smashed that precious Christmas present to smithereens with great passion! Then... then that child looked into the eyes of his father with astonishment and they finally began to have a conversation, though difficult at first. Such is God's purpose should he hand his chosen ones over to their idols, as understood by one who had his own toys smashed.

Lord God, in wrath remember mercy!

My Teacher Eats Food, Temptation is Common, and Escape is Available!

The story was told of a child who saw his teacher shopping for groceries. The child exclaimed, *“Mom, I can't believe it! My teacher eats food!”* That child's egocentric world was pretty small. He had only ever seen his teacher sitting behind his desk and never once in the lunch room. Such was my case when I first began to face temptation as a youth. Self-

centeredness kept me from seeing that other good Christians also struggle with sin. Paul teaches us, *"No temptation has taken you except what is common to man. God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted above what you are able, but will with the temptation also make the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it"* (1 Corinthians 10:13 WEB).

Yes, everyone is tempted, but do you want to find that way of escape. Let's move from silence, fear, and ignorance in Christ's family so that we can encourage one another to receive forgiveness for sexual sin, strive for purity, and, yes, enjoy sexual pleasure within Christian marriage as God blesses.

A Look at the Body in Ephesians

Through high school I was basically a weakling. I barely tipped the scales at 140 pounds when I entered college and so I determined to do something about what I considered to be a problem. I began to lift weights and eat masses of carbs and protein with a goal to gain a muscular physical body. Though I continue to advocate exercise, I regret my excesses and wish I had instead applied this same energy to serving a body other than my own, the body of Christ. This temptation is apparently common to many youth because Paul also admonishes Timothy, *"For bodily exercise has some value, but godliness has value in all things, having the promise of the life which is now, and of that which is to come"* (1 Timothy 4:8 WEB). This considered, let's pursue a study of what the book of Ephesians has to say about building the body of Christ.

Everything for the Church, Which is His Body

We read in Ephesians chapter one,

18) having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of his calling, and what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, 19) and what is the exceeding greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to that working of the strength of his might 20) which he worked in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21) far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come. 22) He put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things for the assembly, 23) which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Ephesians 1:18-23 (WEB)

The power of God has been exerted in Christ to raise Him from death to the right hand of God our Father in Heavenly glory. Christ has been exalted from death to the supreme ruler of the universe. All things including governments, business, medicine, law, science, transportation, agriculture, education, and philosophy are under the authority of His rule. But most amazing is that He rules all things to serve His purpose for the church. In others words the church is Christ's front burner project, the main course, and every other thing in the world is only designed to serve Christ's purposes in the church. Though the world, and we, are often tempted to magnify our own endeavor, this Scripture reminds us that the church is the focal point of Christ's work and everything else is subservient to this work.

We also read that the church is the fullness of Christ who fills everything. Yet how can the church, who is fully dependent on Christ, be the fullness of Christ, who is already full and complete in Himself? Christ himself is totally self-sufficient in His person and work without any contribution from the church and yet He calls us His *"fullness"* or completion. Christ, under no compulsion or deficiency, has freely chosen to work the completion of His perfect will on the Earth through the church. Christ does this to further demonstrate His amazing power and grace by accomplishing His will through redeemed God-haters.

Paul repeats this same theme in Colossians 1:24 (WEB) when he says, *"Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions*

of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the assembly." Certainly Christ's afflictions in atoning for the sins of mankind are not lacking! Can Paul die for us? No! Christ died once for all. Instead consider, Christ personally showed His love for mankind in the heart of Jerusalem, but your community may not yet have experienced Christ's love in the flesh. Lord God fill us with your Spirit so that we can take your love to the outer most parts of the world!

One New Man Out of the Two

We read in Ephesians chapter two,

11) Therefore remember that once you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "uncircumcision" by that which is called "circumcision," (in the flesh, made by hands); 12) that you were at that time separate from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13) But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off are made near in the blood of Christ. 14) For he is our peace, who made both one, and broke down the middle wall of partition, 15) having abolished in the flesh the hostility, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man of the two, making peace; 16) and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, having killed the hostility thereby. 17) He came and preached peace to you who were far off and to those who were near. 18) For through him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. 19) So then you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, 20) being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone; 21) in whom the whole building, fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord; 22) in whom you also are built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit.

Ephesians 2:11-22 (WEB)

But what is Christ's body, the church? Here we read that Christ has made a new man, a Christian man, that is neither Jew nor Gentile. How did he do this? The Jews were near to God because he had given them the covenants, the promises, the law, and the prophets. However, as near as they were they still stood condemned by God's perfect law. Though the law is perfect, salvation could not come to sinners by this means. Now we read here that Christ has done the most radical thing. He has abolished the law covenant previously made with the Jews at Mount Sinai. The Jews no longer stand as a people under the terms of Mount Sinai. The Ten Commands and all their accompanying regulations have been forever removed. No longer do the Jews need to live in spiritual darkness pretending that all their efforts to keep the law are actually amounting to something. They can admit, with the help of God's grace, that they are guilty sinners in need of forgiveness just as a Gentile sinner. Likewise the hardened heart of the Gentile sinner can be melted to admit that he needs deliverance from the terrible sin he still loves. Both the self-righteous Jew and the self-condemned Gentile can become a new man, a Christian man, with a broken heart, confessing his sin as well as hating his sin.

Mystery Revealed - Members Together of The Body

We read in Ephesians chapter three,

1) *For this cause I, Paul, am the prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles,* 2) *if it is so that you have heard of the administration of that grace of God which was given me toward you;* 3) *how that by revelation the mystery was made known to me, as I wrote before in few words,* 4) *by which, when you read, you can perceive my understanding in the mystery of Christ;* 5) *which in other generations was not made known to the children of men, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit;* 6) *that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of his promise in Christ Jesus through the Good News,* 7) *of which I was made a servant, according to the gift of that grace of God which was given me according to the working of his power.* 8) *To me, the very least of all saints, was this grace given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,* 9) *and to make all men see what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things through Jesus Christ;* 10) *to the intent that now through the assembly the manifold wisdom of God might be made known to the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places,* 11) *according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord;* 12) *in whom we have boldness and access in confidence through our faith in him.* 13) *Therefore I ask that you may not lose heart at my troubles for you, which are your glory.*

Ephesians 3:1-13 (WEB)

The plan of Christ in the New Testament and under the New Covenant is truly new and unforeseen from prior times. Old Testament Saints knew and we know from reading the Old Testament that deliverance and a Messiah was promised from God. But just what would the nature of this deliverance and Messiah be like? No human being nor Old Testament prophet anticipated the mystery that has been revealed in the New Covenant given through Christ. Even John the Baptist, the greatest prophet that ever lived, was exposed to be an unbeliever by the ministry of Christ. See Matthew 11:3-11.

Absolutely no one was prepared for Christ. The best that any Old Testament saint could imagine was that the Messiah would come and fill them with a new Spirit to keep the terms of the covenant made at Mount Sinai and somehow bring salvation to the ends of the world through obedient Jews and Jewish proselytes. Instead we see a great mystery revealed that Christ has abolished the Old Covenant, initiated a New Covenant, and made both believing Jew and believing Gentile fellow heirs in a new body, the church. Wow! Paul suffered great abuse and persecution from his fellow Jews by insisting that they also needed to repent and receive Christ in order to be saved and join this new body, the church. Paul was no longer building a Jewish body, but a Christian body and so unrepentant Jews loathed him.

One Body and One Spirit

We read in Ephesians 4:4-5 (WEB), *"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as you also were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism."*

Moreover this new body, the church, is one body. At times we may be discouraged when we see so many factions within the Christian family. However, when we see with spiritual eyes we can accept anyone as a brother who simply trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

It Was He Who Gave ... so that the Body of Christ may be Built Up

We also read in Ephesians chapter four,

7) But to each one of us was the grace given according to the measure of the gift of Christ. 8) Therefore he says, "When he ascended on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men." 9) Now this, "He ascended," what is it but that he also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10) He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things. 11) He gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, shepherds and teachers; 12) for the perfecting of the saints, to the work of serving, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13) until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a full grown man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14) that we may no longer be children, tossed back and forth and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in craftiness, after the wiles of error; 15) but speaking truth in love, we may grow up in all things into him, who is the head, Christ; 16) from whom all the body, being fitted and knit together through that which every joint supplies, according to the working in measure of each individual part, makes the body increase to the building up of itself in love.

Ephesians 4:7-16 (WEB)

We also see that the body of Christ needs to grow from infancy to maturity. But how is this to happen? Christ himself gives spiritual gifts to individuals within the church so that we can serve and prepare the church for further works of service. Those within the body are to serve the body. Christ is very concerned about the growth of the church, His body, into maturity. We need to exercise and build the body of Christ. Are you serving your own body or the body of Christ?

Christ is the Head of the Church, His Body, of which He is the Savior

Finally we read in Ephesians chapter five,

21) subjecting yourselves one to another in the fear of Christ. 22) Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23) For the husband is the head of the wife, and Christ also is the head of the assembly, being himself the savior of the body. 24) But as the assembly is subject to Christ, so let the wives also be to their own husbands in everything. 25) Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the assembly, and gave himself up for it; 26) that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word, 27) that he might present the assembly to himself gloriously, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. 28) Even so husbands also ought to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself. 29) For no man ever hated his own flesh; but nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord also does the assembly; 30) because we are members of his body, of his flesh and bones. 31) "For this cause a man will leave his father and mother, and will be joined to his wife. The two will become one flesh." 32) This mystery is great, but I speak concerning Christ and of the assembly. 33) Nevertheless each of you must also love his own wife even as himself; and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Ephesians 5:21-33 (WEB)

In this passage we see that the church is Christ's own body and that he is the savior of this

body. Though elsewhere we read that Christ is Lord, in this tender passage the emphasis is that Christ is a nurturing Savior. We read that Christ 1) loved the church, 2) gave Himself up for her, 3) made her holy, 4) cleansed her by the washing of water through the word, and 5) presented her to Himself as a radiant church with no blemish, holy and blameless. It is simply electrifying to read about the love that Christ has demonstrated toward us believers. Oh that He would fill us further and give us opportunity to bring His love to those who do not yet know Christ!

How should we describe the love that Christ has shown to the church? The holy Scriptures in this passage exhort a husband to love his wife as Christ loved the church and a wife to serve her husband as to the Lord. Lord we pray again that you would fill us with your Spirit so that Christian marriages could demonstrate the perfection of your love to the world.

A Look at the Book of Colossians

The Christian Scripture is filled with beautiful literature. For example Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is classed by believers and unbelievers alike as one of the most glorious speeches of all time. The letter to the Romans stands as the foremost example of elegant argument while revealing grace! The gospel of John handsomely tells the story of Christ's life from the heart of the disciple whom Jesus loved to our hearts. The book of Hebrews exquisitely explains that Jesus is better than Moses. And we have yet to mention I John as a lovely tutor for young Christians, the knockout epistle of Philippians, the beautiful Acts of the Holy Spirit, and more. With super models of Scripture like these on the runway captivating everyone's eye it is no wonder that Paul's modest letter to the Colossians is often overlooked, pushed off the stage, and even lost in the shadows. In this article I hope to remind us that the book of Colossians is a Cinderella beauty worthy of our attention.

Recently I had the privilege of teaching through Colossians and I was thrilled by the captivating truths and winsome conversation found in this unassuming little book. This book highlights Paul's ability to be all things to all people as he shares the same gospel, but in the velvet glove of persuasive speech to people he never met in person. I have much to learn from Paul.

Paul's Purposeful Prayer

Paul begins this letter just as most of his letters, with a prayer for his audience. He prays,

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints— the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth. You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Colossians 1:3-14 (NIV)

And like Paul's prayers in his other letters, this prayer also appears to introduce the major themes of his letter as underlined above. Though Paul had not met them, the themes above

highlight that he was cheering for their spiritual growth. Colossians 4:7-9 indicates that Tychicus likely carried the letter to Colossi while traveling with Onesimus. This reference links the church of Colossi with Philemon verse 2 which indicates that this church met in Philemon's home. Paul was very thankful for this church, concerned for each individual there, and rooting for their spiritual success. In this article I hope to highlight Paul's progression through his: 1) points, 2) protective choice of phrases, 3) poignant and practical purposes, and 4) persuasion of Philemon. My 'pologies for the poetry!

Spiritual growth is the emphasis of Paul's prayer and this letter. Paul reminds us that the gospel is bearing fruit and growing all over the world just as the gospel is bearing fruit and growing at the Colossian church. And Paul prays that they could be filled with knowledge, live worthy lives, bear fruit, grow in the knowledge of God, and be strengthened with God's power. Paul serves as both coach and cheerleader for the Colossians as he calls the plays for their spiritual defense and offense and he leads the cheers for their spiritual win.

Paul's Point Progression

1. We thank God for you and pray for your spiritual growth, 1:1-14
2. Christ is foremost, 1:15-20
3. Christ is the beginning of your spiritual growth, 1:21-23
4. Christ is the mystery of God that I am commissioned to explain to you, 1:24-2:5
5. Christ is not only the beginning, but the continuance of your spiritual growth, 2:6-7
6. Christ is better than hollow and deceptive philosophy, 2:8-23
 - a. Christ has fullness of Deity and we have Christ, 2:9-13
 - b. Christ has cancelled and triumphed over the basic principles, 2:14-17
 - c. Christ has more wisdom than human tradition, 2:18-23
7. You set your heart on things above where Christ is seated, 3:1-4:1
 - a. You put to death your earthly nature, 3:5-11
 - b. You clothe yourself with Christ-likeness, 3:12-17
 - c. You submit to Christ's pattern for relationships, 3:18-4:1
8. You be thankful and pray for open doors for our message and clear speech, 4:2-6
9. You listen to my final instructions and remember my chains, 4:7-18

The progression begins with Paul praying for the Colossians and ends with Paul asking the Colossians to pray for him with a detailed recipe for spiritual growth in between.

Paul's Protective Phrases

Many commentators explain that Paul wrote Colossians to address a particular heresy that combined elements of Judaism, asceticism, and Gnostic teachings. This heresy is often labeled the Colossian heresy. While this may be true we should also note that Paul uses some words and phrases less familiar to us that may make his meaning more difficult to understand.

For example the word *cheirophon* is used only 1 time in the Bible and is translated in the NIV as 'written code'. *Philosophia* is used 1 time and is translated as 'philosophy'. *Acheiropoiētos* is used 3 times and is translated as 'not done by hands of men'. *Exaleiphō* is used 5 times and is translated as 'cancelled'. *Stoicheion* is used 7 times and is translated as 'basic principles'. *Paradosis* is used 13 times and is translated as 'tradition'. We might assume that since these word choices may be less common that the issues addressed are unique to the Colossians and are appropriately named the Colossians heresy. Yet is this really the case?

Colossians 2:8 warns that human tradition and basic principles are deceptive and will take us captive rather than help us like Christ. But what are human tradition and basic principles? The word *paradosis* or 'tradition' was also used by Christ to describe the Pharisaical additions

to the law. Colossians 2:18-23 expands on the very same idea. The word *stoicheion* or 'basic principles' is also used in Galatians 4:3 to mean the Mosaic Law. Colossians 2:14-17 also expands on this very same idea. Likewise Ephesians 2:11-22 is a parallel passage with a more clear reference to the Mosaic Law.

The meaning of *cheirographon* in Colossians 2:14 is debated but the context and the parallel passage of Ephesians 2 make it clear that Christ forgave us by canceling the obligation that stood opposed to us, the Mosaic Law. Christ performed a good old fashioned mortgage burning! So turning to human traditions or to the Law of Moses is opposed to the gospel of grace, however these problems were not distinct to the Colossians, but commonly addressed in New Testament letters.

Colossians 2:11 also speaks about circumcision. This was one of the most common debates Christians had with unrepentant Jews in nearly every city. So the book of Colossians joins the same debate saying that physical circumcision is nothing while spiritual circumcision is everything.

So the errors plaguing the Colossian church were nothing more than the common substitutes for Christ found in most places then and now. But why did the Spirit choose the less common expressions of *cheirographon*, *philosophia*, *acheiropoiētos*, and *exaleiphō*? Perhaps these words were commonly used in Colossi to better explain the gospel truths to their sub-culture. Perhaps the *exaleiphō cheirographon* communicates a nuance of Christ's work not highlighted elsewhere, that Christ not only forgave us by being our substitute, but also by satisfying and canceling the Law of Moses and mankind's obligation to keep it. Perhaps Paul used the word *cheirographon* with the Colossians rather than 'Law of Moses' to shield the Colossians from persecution. Jews were on the warpath over Christians teaching that the Law of Moses is abolished. Maybe Paul didn't want to throw the Colossians into the heat, but instead chose careful words, understood by Christians, but not by the Jews, giving the Colossians time to develop a passion and conviction to face the heat by choice. Or perhaps, the Spirit simply enjoys variety of expression as the spice of eternal life.

Paul's Poignant Purpose

Though we may not know for certain the reasons for Paul's word choices we do know this, he had a poignant purpose. Just as Christ did not avoid issues with the Pharisees but accused them of laying aside the command of God for the *paradosis* of men, so Paul teaches the Colossians that man-made regulations lack any value is restraining sensual indulgence and merely lead to false humility and harsh treatment of the body. Jesus and Paul point their finger right in the eye of our hypocrisy as we build human standards to reform or justify ourselves rather than trusting Christ.

So just as Christ boldly inaugurated a New Covenant even contrasting the Law of Moses with himself, so Paul teaches the Colossians that the Old Covenant signed at Sinai is now cancelled and superceded by Christ. The people of God no longer stand under, nor are identified by, the Law of Moses, but instead by the Law of Christ. Though the word *cheirographon* is often misunderstood in our day, it is clear that Paul refused to compromise or parley with the Jews. The Jews no longer had shelter in Moses' burned up tent, but must repent and enter Jesus' house or remain out in the cold.

Paul's Practical Purpose

The theology above may leave us reeling, but Paul does not merely tell us that human traditions and the Law of Moses are useless. He tells us very practically what will work in Colossians 3:1-2 (WEB) saying, "*If then you were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are on the earth.*" Now that is

practical counsel! 'That is it?' you say. Yes that is it! Set your mind on the person of Jesus Christ who is right now in heaven interceding for you before God the Father. This is the first step to spiritual growth. How would you feel if your friends held a special meeting to pray for you and your life's direction? Would you be thankful? Would you feel weird? Would you tell them to stop? Well Jesus is leading this meeting right now in Heaven and you would be wise to turn your mind and your concern to Christ right now! He will change your life.

Colossians 3:5 (WEB) warns, ***"Put to death therefore your members which are on the earth: sexual immorality, uncleanness, depraved passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry."*** Notice that Paul does not give even one direction about how to put these terrible sins to death, just to do it! Likewise, if you called the police for direction about how to put a rattle snake to death in your house they would not have a guideline for you. You would not need a guideline. You would immediately use any and every means available to kill that rattle snake. You would throw rocks without concern for windows. You would fire bullets without concern for walls. In the end you would burn your house down before living with a rattle snake. Likewise Paul very practically tells us 'put the snakes to death.' Notice that Paul urges us to put to death root causes and not merely deal with symptoms. We would not leave a snake in our house and build partitions for our protection. Nor can manmade barriers keep us from sin. We need grace to deal with sin at the heart level.

Colossians 3:12 (WEB) exhorts, ***"Put on therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, lowliness, humility, and perseverance."*** We may be tempted to think that being a Christian should make godliness easy, but Paul knew better. We may wonder why we still struggle with the same sins now as before we knew Christ, but Paul had no confusion. We are still sinners and though Christ has hamstrung our sinful nature, it is still alive (or dead, whichever metaphor you prefer). So Paul reminds us that we need to ***"put on"*** or ***"clothe"*** ourselves with Christian virtue. The metaphor highlights that just like we need to put on clothing every day, we also need to make conscious decisions each day to imitate Christ. Beware if we let go and just do what comes naturally! Instead we need to decide to do what is supernatural and with God's help love others as he loved us.

Colossians 3:18-4:1 outlines a simple list of commands from Christ for our relationships. Roles for authority and submission are clearly prescribed. However, our problem is usually not in the understanding, but in the application!

Paul's Philemon Persuasion

Paul wrote to Philemon saying, ***"Therefore though I have all boldness in Christ to command you that which is appropriate, yet for love's sake I rather beg, being such a one as Paul, the aged, but also a prisoner of Jesus Christ. I beg you for my child, whom I have become the father of in my chains, Onesimus."*** (Philemon 8-10 WEB). Paul appealed to Philemon to warmly receive Onesimus, his run away slave, back because he had become a Christian brother. Paul also told the whole Colossian church, ***"All my affairs will be made known to you by Tychicus, the beloved brother, faithful servant, and fellow bondservant in the Lord. I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that he may know your circumstances and comfort your hearts, together with Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will make known to you everything that is going on here"*** (Colossians 4:7-9 WEB). Paul's letters pointed Philemon firmly in the right direction. In fact so firmly that Philemon would have created a stink in the whole church to do anything less than what Paul asked. Perhaps Philemon would have no other thought in mind but to warmly receive Onesimus back. However, it is possible to imagine other less charitable responses. So we see that though Paul spoke the best of Philemon, he wrote persuasively to insure the right response.

Conclusion

Paul's final admonition is gripping, "*remember my bonds*" (Colossians 4:18 WEB). Today we live in virtual reality where many experience the world watching TV, simulate great contests with video games, and network on Facebook. Things are not wrong in themselves, but they are contrasted with Paul's life. He experienced the world on the front line of missions, endured the great contest for the gospel, and networked through Asia and Eastern Europe... face to face.

The chains on his wrists were cold hard steel and the Holy Spirit asks us to remember them.

A Look at the Book of Ephesians

Today we apply high school learning. In the ninth grade Mrs. M was my English teacher. She was the most frightening teacher a student could imagine. We have all met perfectionist types who demand absolute attention as well as unquestioning obedience. In a man this is militant. In a woman this was Mrs. M. I just looked at her picture again in my yearbook and chills still hit my bones. My fright was compounded because I too was a perfectionist type who lived to please my teachers. However, I was terrible at English and saw zero hope for my future in this woman's class. Much time has passed since this fearful experience and I no longer fault her. Were I to teach today I could invoke the same fears in my pupils and enjoy it too. I am a parent now, you know! Furthermore, I thank her because some things she taught us remain with me and are relevant to our study of the book of Ephesians.

She explained that good writing is not simply a bucket of words thrown onto the page. Rather there is order and organization. There is composition that first outlines themes and arranges these themes into paragraphs. She insisted that every thought in a paragraph needed to be relevant to the main idea in the paragraph as well as to the whole of the composition. As we learned more about the artistry of the written composition she began to give us writing assignments. Every paper we wrote that year needed to fit the specific pattern of a five paragraph composition. The first paragraph was the introduction. This first paragraph was also required to contain one thesis sentence that listed three main points that supported the main idea. These points were then to be expanded upon in paragraphs two, three, and four. These three points were affectionately referred to as "Bing," "Bang," and "Bongo." The fifth paragraph was the conclusion. We had poetic license, but only within this rigorous framework.

For example, suppose I were to write a paper using this pattern exhorting you to visit my church family some Sunday morning. In my first paragraph I would introduce the subject by explaining that my church family is great. My thesis would be, *"My church family is great because of the Bible facts taught, the wonderful fellowship, and the tasty food."* In my second paragraph I would expand on the Bible facts taught. In my third paragraph I would describe the wonderful fellowship. In my fourth paragraph I would illustrate the fellowship meals we have once a month. Finally in my fifth paragraph I would say again that our church family is truly great and that you should therefore come to visit. Do you understand me so far?

All of this is relevant to the book of Ephesians because this book contains all the elements of an excellent composition. These elements of composition include an introduction, thesis statements, body, conclusion, themes, and style. Most people do not read the Scriptures as a composition, but instead as a mass of verses thrown onto the page. This is a shame. Unfortunately it results in the neglect of major points, the over-emphasis of minor points, and missing the majesty and beauty of the Holy Spirit's compositional artistry. If Mrs. M can teach a bunch of 13 year old students to write a good composition, don't you think the Holy Spirit can write an excellent composition? In the remainder of this paper we will show how the Holy Spirit framed the composition of Ephesians with a variation of the five paragraph pattern I first learned from Mrs. M, discuss the introduction, show the thesis statements in Ephesians with their main points, and highlight the power of God as a major theme.

Ephesians Framework

Again, the book of Ephesians is a variation of the five paragraph composition I learned about in high school English. It goes without saying that Mrs. M taught us a simple pattern.

However, a pattern is only a tool to help us along the way. A beautiful composition need not follow this pattern, but may choose another pattern. The pattern observed in Ephesians is that two five paragraph compositions have been glued together. An extra paragraph has also been added at the beginning to explain the relationship of the two major sections of the book. The first major section of the book leads the reader to a knowledge of God as our savior with three supporting points. The second major section of the book leads the reader to Christian growth as a result of this knowledge with three supporting points.

Thus Ephesians is an eleven paragraph composition. The first paragraph is simply the welcome and introduction of the author and audience. The second paragraph introduces the two halves of the book, namely our blessing of salvation and our blessing of praising the Lord. The third paragraph introduces more completely our blessing of salvation with a thesis statement listing three component points of salvation. The fourth, fifth, and sixth paragraphs expand on the three component points of salvation. The seventh paragraph introduces more completely our blessing of praising the Lord with a thesis statement listing three points of our praise to the Lord. The eighth, ninth, and tenth paragraphs expand on the three component points of our praise. And finally the eleventh paragraph is simply a farewell from the author to the audience.

You are Blessed

After the welcome in paragraph one we come to the introduction of the two major halves of the book in paragraph two included here for you reference.

First you are blessed because God has chosen to save you.

3) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4) even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and without defect before him in love, 5) having predestined us for adoption as children through Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his desire, 6) to the praise of the glory of his grace, by which he freely gave us favor in the Beloved, 7) in whom we have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8) which he made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, 9) making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he purposed in him 10) to an administration of the fullness of the times, to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth, in him. 11) We were also assigned an inheritance in him, having been foreordained according to the purpose of him who does all things after the counsel of his will, 12) to the end that we should be to the praise of his glory, we who had before hoped in Christ. 13) In him you also, having heard the word of the truth, the Good News of your salvation—in whom, having also believed, you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14) who is a pledge of our inheritance, to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of his glory.

Ephesians 1:3-14 (WEB)

This paragraph can be neatly divided into two halves by the word "also." The first point in the paragraph explains our blessing of salvation which is discussed in the first half of the book of Ephesians. The second point in the paragraph explains our blessing of praising the Lord which is discussed in the second half of the book of Ephesians, in particular, praising God by the way we live. Typically we think of praise or worship as singing praise or worship

to the Lord. However, most would agree that the Scriptural meaning of praise and worship goes well beyond singing. Romans 12:1 make it clear that the offer of our lives to God is our act of worship. The book of Ephesians makes it clear that our pursuit of a godly life is acceptable praise.

Prayer One and Three Points

Following the introduction of our two blessings Paul singles out the first blessing, that of our salvation. In paragraph three, Ephesians 1:15-23, Paul prays a lofty prayer for us. This prayer, in effect, is the introductory paragraph for the next three paragraphs about salvation. This prayer also contains a thesis statement which introduces the next three paragraphs. The thesis is included here for your reference.

15) For this cause I also, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which is among you, and the love which you have toward all the saints, 16) don't cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers, 17) that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, 18) having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of his calling, and what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, 19) and what is the exceeding greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to that working of the strength of his might.

Ephesians 1:15-19 (WEB)

You will notice that I have underlined three words in this Scripture which highlight three main points. This sentence is the thesis statement itemizing three points about the knowledge of God as our savior. These three points are hope, riches, and power. These three points are then highlighted in the following three paragraphs in Ephesians. NOTE: Paul and other Scripture authors follow this same pattern of using a prayer or introduction as a thesis statement to introduce the main points of their books. This is a very helpful study to properly preach the main points of the book because the author tells you himself what they are!

Ephesians 2:1-10 is the paragraph which explains the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, point number 2 above. This can be seen most clearly in Ephesians 2:7 (WEB), *"that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."*

Ephesians 2:11-22 is the paragraph which explains the hope of His calling, point number 1 above. This can be seen most clearly in Ephesians 2:12 (WEB), *"that you were at that time separate from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world."*

Ephesians 3:1-13 is the paragraph which explains the greatness of His power toward believers, point number 3 above. This can be seen most clearly in Ephesians 3:7 (WEB), *"of which I was made a servant according to the gift of that grace of God which was given me according to the working of his power."*

Prayer Two and Three Points

Now concluded with the first half of the book, Paul begins a second lofty prayer in which he highlights the second blessing introduced earlier, namely that we are chosen for the praise of His glory. This is observed because every theme in this second prayer concerns our growth in

becoming a holy people in order to please Christ and represent His glory in this world. This is our praise to Him. This second prayer is also a prayer of introduction for the last half of the book. Again the prayer contains a thesis statement which introduces the next three paragraphs. The thesis is included here for your reference.

14) For this cause, I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15) from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16) that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, that you may be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner person, 17) that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, to the end that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18) may be strengthened to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and height and depth, 19) and to know Christ's love which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Ephesians 3:14-19 (WEB)

Again you will notice that I have enumerated the clauses of this Scripture which lists three points. This sentence is the thesis statement itemizing three points about our growth in the knowledge of God as our savior. These three points are power, love, and fullness. These three points are then highlighted in the following three paragraphs in Ephesians.

Ephesians 4:1-13 is the paragraph which explains being filled up to all the fullness of Christ, point number 3 above. This can be seen most clearly in Ephesians 4:13 (WEB), *"until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a full grown man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."*

Ephesians 4:14-6:9 is the paragraph which explains being rooted and grounded in love, point number 2 above. This can be seen most clearly in Ephesians 4:16 (WEB), *"from whom all the body, being fitted and knit together through that which every joint supplies, according to the working in measure of each individual part, makes the body increase to the building up of itself in love."*

Finally, Ephesians 6:10-20 is the paragraph which explains being strengthened in His power, point number 1 above. This can be seen most clearly in Ephesians 6:10 (WEB), *"Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might."*

Power

We may have made Mrs. M proud! But more importantly I pray that this explanation of Ephesians will help impress upon you the main points of the book. To conclude let us return to the theme of God's power which is threaded through the whole book and is also the final point. In Ephesians 1:19-23 we read that God's power raised Jesus from the dead and seated him at the highest point of authority in the universe. God's power lifted Jesus from death to the highest height. In Ephesians 3:7-9 we read that this same power of God transformed Paul, a hardened religious Jew, to bring the good news of Christ to the ungodly Gentiles, those that he formerly despised. God's power removed all his self-righteousness and gave him the desire to tell others about the righteousness of Christ. And finally in Ephesians 6:10-20 we are exhorted to be strong in the Lord's mighty power. Brother, sister, friend if God's power can raise the dead, if God's power can propel a self-righteous Jew to tell ungodly Gentiles about the love of Christ, then what can His power do for you? Answer: absolutely anything is possible. You could be sharing the Christian faith in Iraq to a people in dire need!

Be strong in His power!

A Look at the Book of Hebrews

A Theory

The author of the book of Hebrews is unknown. Some speculate Paul, Apollos, Barnabas, Luke, or others. One might deduce from the text that the author was not an eye witness of Christ or at least not an apostle. Hebrews 2:3 (WEB) says, *"How will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation—which at the first having been spoken through the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard."* So we see that the author includes himself with the "us" of his readers and not the "those" who heard Christ personally. Yet perhaps this is the editorial "we" or rather the editorial "us" as the case may be. After all there is a precedent for this as seen in Hebrews 4:11. In this case the author says, *"Let's therefore give diligence to enter into that rest, lest anyone fall after the same example of disobedience."* At first glance it would appear the author includes himself in the "us" of those whose final salvation is in question. Yet a few verses earlier in Hebrews 4:3 the author also says, *"For we who have believed do enter into that rest."* So how can the author be so certain of his salvation in verse 4:3, and then leave room for the possibility of not being saved in verse 4:11? Arminian theologians seize upon this to prove that salvation can be lost. But this is in error because instead the author uses "us" in an editorial sense, that is a gracious willingness to associate with his unbelieving audience. Yet for himself he has no question about his ultimate salvation because he is a believer. However, he urges the unbelievers in his audience to *"give diligence"* to obtain salvation. This is all to say that because there are other examples of the use of the editorial "we" that Hebrews 2:3 cannot necessarily be used to rule out that an apostle wrote the book.

But why didn't the author identify himself? The value of speculating may be questionable, but non-the-less I theorize. The Middle East, Asia Minor, and Eastern Europe were on fire due to the gospel. Just as Jesus provoked a show down with the Jews leading to his crucifixion, his followers continued the work resulting in further conflict with the Jews. Specifically the gospel truth that Jesus is the Christ and that he superseded Moses with the New Covenant was a lightning rod. Jews went livid as demonstrated by Paul who went house to house dragging Christians to prison and to death before he became a Christian. Stephen became the first martyr of the church specifically for preaching that Jesus is the *"prophet to come"* with the authority to supersede the Law of Moses. No New Testament book highlights these truths better than Hebrews. It's the main point of the book!

So perhaps the author omitted his name intentionally because of the incredible persecution at the time. Now I am NOT suggesting that he hoped to avoid persecution himself. Why that would be more cowardly than lobbing anonymous email arguments at your opponent. We ought to face our opponents like men! Instead perhaps the author is not identified so each Christian can uphold the letter to their neighbors with even greater personal endorsement. Then unbelievers could not undermine the letter by saying, *"so you believe what So-and-So wrote"* because there is no *"So-and-So"* in the picture. Christians also demonstrate greater corporate strength as each individual stands behind the beautiful but controversial message on his own two feet. Moreover the anonymity of the author puts the full brilliance of the spot light on Jesus Christ, the main subject of the letter.

These reasons seem plausible and may be the whole, part, or none of the reason for the author's anonymity. Since the Bible gives not one clue even if we happened to guess the true reason it would still remain only a theory on this side of glory. I simply took the time to propose this theory to remind us of the intense persecution upon Christians for the message contained in this book.

Three Structures

The message of Hebrews can be better understood by observing three structures, or frameworks, throughout the book. These structures highlight the author's strategy and purpose for the book, to proclaim that...

Jesus is better!

First, this book is filled with the word "therefore." When we see the word "therefore" we should ask what is the "therefore" there for! The word "therefore" links the points before it as the reason for the points after it. The word "therefore" is used to lead the reader somewhere. The NIV uses the word 16 times while the NASB, quoted below, uses it 24. Unfortunately limited time and knowledge of Greek prohibit me from noting all the primary logical Greek connectives in the book, but that is not essential to my point. The point is that this progression of points leads to a climax.

- 1:9 *"**THEREFORE** GOD, YOUR GOD, HAS ANOINTED..."*
- 2:14 *"Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood..."*
- 2:17 *"Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things..."*
- 3:1 *"Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling..."*
- 3:7 *"Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, 'TODAY IF YOU HEAR..."*
- 3:10 *"**THEREFORE** I WAS ANGRY WITH THIS GENERATION..."*
- 4:1 *"Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering..."*
- 4:6 *"Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it..."*
- 4:11 *"Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that..."*
- 4:14 *"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has..."*
- 4:16 *"Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace..."*
- 6:1 *"Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ..."*
- 7:25 *"Therefore He is able also to save forever those who..."*
- 9:18 *"Therefore even the first covenant was not inaugurated..."*
- 9:23 *"Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in..."*
- 10:5 *"Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says..."*
- 10:19 *"Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter..."*
- 10:35 *"Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has..."*
- 11:12 *"Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as..."*
- 11:16 *"Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for..."*
- 12:1 *"Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses..."*
- 12:12 *"Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the..."*
- 12:28 *"Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be..."*
- 13:12 *"Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through..."*

Second, since Jesus and his New Covenant are the main point of the book the author introduces Jesus and all his roles and titles in the first four verses of the book. Each of these titles is then elaborated on again in the first chapter and again throughout the remainder of the book. Read the first four verses and consider the preeminence of Christ.

1) God, having in the past spoken to the fathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2) has at the end of these days spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds. 3) His Son is the radiance of his glory, the very image of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, who, when he had by himself purified us of our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4) having become as much better than the angels as the more excellent name he has inherited is better than theirs.

Hebrews 1:1-4 (WEB)

The titles of Christ are then easily outlined through the book of Hebrews.

1. Chapter 1:1-4
 - a. Son
 - b. Prophet
 - c. Heir
 - d. Creator
 - e. God
 - f. Upholder
 - g. Priest
 - h. King
2. Chapter 1:5-14
 - a. Son - 1:5
 - b. Prophet - 1:7-8
 - c. Heir - 1:9
 - d. Creator - 1:10
 - e. God - 1:6-8
 - f. Upholder - 1:11-13
 - g. Priest - 1:13-14
 - h. King - 1:8, 1:13
3. Chapter 2-13
 - a. Son - 3:6, 5:5, 5:8, 7:28, 10:29
 - b. Prophet - 2:2-3, 3:2-5
 - c. Heir
 - d. Creator - 3:4, 4:3
 - e. God - 3:12, 6:10, 10:22, 10:31
 - f. Upholder - 10:13-14
 - g. Priest - 2:17, 3:1, 4:14-15, 5:6, 5:9-10, 6:20, 7:11, 7:17, 7:21, 7:24, 8:1, 9:11, 10:21
 - h. King - 2:5-8, 4:13, 4:16, 12:2

Third, the book of Hebrews compares Jesus with the lead spiritual figure on every playing field from angels to Abel with the conclusion that Christ is better than everything and therefore the best. This last structured look at Hebrews is perhaps the most striking. Some may be confused, but it is clear that Moses, the Law of Moses, and the Old Covenant had been superseded, cancelled, abolished by the advent of Jesus, the Law of Christ, and his New Covenant.

Jesus is better!

1. Better than Angels 1:1-2:18
2. Better than Moses 3:1-4:13
3. Better than Aaron 4:14-7:21
4. Better Ministry and Covenant 7:22-12:29
5. Better than Abel 12:24
6. Therefore do his will 13:1-25

The Insecurity of the Unbeliever

I grew up in a church family that rejected guaranteed salvation and warned that security is not promised to the believer. Several verses in Hebrews seemed to agree with this. Yet Philippians 1:6 (WEB) promises, *“being confident of this very thing, that he who began a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.”* Even Hebrews 13:5

(WEB) guarantees, *"I will in no way leave you, neither will I in any way forsake you."* So, is a believer allowed to believe these promises?

Hebrews 4:11 (WEB) warns, *"Let's therefore give diligence to enter into that rest, lest anyone fall after the same example of disobedience."* But how do we understand this verse? Certainly the author of Hebrews is a Christian, yet he seems to put himself in the same uncertain shoes as his audience of being able to fall short of heaven in the end. As already explained above, a better way to reconcile this with Scriptural promises is to observe the author's use of the editorial "we." The author says "us" to an audience mixed with believers and unbelievers, but his warning is to his unbelieving audience who has not yet entered the rest of salvation through faith.

Hebrews 12:25 (WEB) also warns, *"See that you don't refuse him who speaks. For if they didn't escape when they refused him who warned on the earth, how much more will we not escape who turn away from him who warns from heaven."* This verse is also used to teach that believers can lose the gift of eternal life. But this view does not maintain hope in God's promises. Rather those who refuse him who speaks are those who reject Christ and remain unbelieving! He is not talking to Christians in the struggle with sin, like all of us, or even to terrible Christians, like Ananias and Sapphira, who were punished by death. Yes Chapter 12 begins exhorting believers to persist in the struggle against sin, but in verse 16 while reminding us of Esau he expands his audience. He begins warning those who never received grace in the first place. The unbelievers listening to his sermon came as far as the foot of Mount Zion in hearing the gospel and he now presses them to look to Christ and believe.

The Heart of the Matter

Various issues divide God's people today, even our understanding of grace in salvation. Though all would say we are saved by grace, doctrinal statements show differences great and small. Curiously the definition of grace itself was not the debate in the 1st century. Instead the debate was whether Jesus was or was not the Christ, and whether circumcision and the Laws of Moses were still in force or were superseded by the New Covenant. Hebrews answers these questions. Yet today while many debate grace versus *free will*, the significance of the change of covenants is overlooked. And it seems that some have slipped back to Moses as we lobby for our secular government to post the Ten Commandments in the public square. What is happening? Have we re-joined the Jews?

However, I must be careful. Though I am fascinated that Christ has superseded Moses with the Law of Christ it is still not the most important issue. Paul put the importance of this as secondary the truth of Christ himself saying,

19) For though I was free from all, I brought myself under bondage to all, that I might gain the more. 20) To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain those who are under the law; 21) to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law.

I Corinthians 9:19-21 (WEB)

Consuming Fire!

Hebrews concludes, *"Therefore, receiving a Kingdom that can't be shaken, let's have grace, through which we serve God acceptably, with reverence and awe, for our God is*

a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:28-29 WEB). Does fire scare you? The picture here is not the fire of wrath, but the fire of God's passion for his people. God loves us so much he will burn up every thing that competes for our devotion to him. Moses told Israel in Deuteronomy 4 that God was a "*consuming fire*" not because he would burn them up but because he would forgive them and burn their idols! David sang in Psalm 130 that the Lord is feared not for his wrath, but his forgiveness! God says in Malachi 3 that he is a "*refiner's fire... but do not fear me!*"

So do not fear that God is a consuming fire that will harm you, but do warn your idols to look out!

A Look at the Book of James

Great benefit is to be had by personal study of God's Word. Recently I learned of a Christian who claimed that he no longer needed to read or turn to the Bible on a regular basis. He claimed that because of his maturity as a Christian and previous Bible knowledge that all his thoughts and actions were now automatically based on the truth every moment. God protect our brother and ourselves from this thinking! We all know from our foolish inclinations that to depend upon our own judgment is dangerous. Instead every Christian needs regular correction from the Word of God.

Let's take a look at the book of James. The study of an entire book of the Bible is recommended for several reasons. First God inspired Scripture writers to give us His Word in the form of whole books and letters. The first audience read Bible books and letters in the same way we read books and letters today, from beginning to end. In this way one is sure to capture the entire view of the book. Many Christians are faithful readers of the Bible but only ever read sections of verses here and there. It can be quite helpful to learn that gaining a view of an entire book of the Bible gives us further insight into the author's introduction, main points, and conclusion. With this better understanding of the author's original emphases we can also heed God's word better. Our study of the book of James will demonstrate this benefit.

James is identified by Eusebius, a Christian historian of the 4th century, as the first New Testament book written. The book of James is most likely authored by James the Lord's half-brother, not the disciple James. Find a good Bible dictionary or resource to confirm this background information for yourself. Several nicknames have been given to the book of James over the years. It has been called "*The epistle of holy living*," "*The epistle of practical Christianity*," "*The epistle of Christian ethics*," and "*Christianity in coveralls*." Yet another nickname is "*The Proverbs of the New Testament*." The letter of James appears to be simply a collection of paragraphs of various themes without structure, much like the book of Proverbs. Our study will reveal whether this is really the case.

In my study I read the book of James several times from beginning to end making notes of key verses and themes, repeated words and phrases, and groupings of paragraphs. Again my goal was not to become a Bible grammar expert, but to fully appreciate the author's original emphases. As I continued writing notes I noticed that several themes appeared 2 and 3 times in the letter. This seemed strange at first. Why would the author repeat his themes rather than fully expand upon them the first place they were introduced? After more study I came to the conclusion that James, as inspired by God, has written his book just like my professor taught me to give a good speech. My professor said, "*First tell them what you are going to tell them, second tell them, and third tell them what you told them*." James did exactly that. First he introduces his six major themes. Second he tells us his six themes again. Finally, he concludes with a third mention of his six major themes. My study revealed that James introduces six major themes in chapter 1. In chapters 2:1-4:12 he addresses all six themes again. Finally, he concludes in chapters 4:13-5:20 by reviewing all six themes one last time.

Your own study of the book may expose flaws in my observations or bolster the concept. For example there are certainly more than six themes in the book of James and our short study does not even touch on the complete list. However, I did feel my proposed outline for the book enabled me to zero in on six main themes in the book for application in our Christian lives. Now let's look at the six themes that seem to be the focus of the book of James. We will examine each theme in turn and show how each theme is addressed three times, once in

the introduction, once in the body, and once in the conclusion.

Theme One - Persevere Toward God Given Wisdom

2) Count it all joy, my brothers, when you fall into various temptations, 3) knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4) Let endurance have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. 5) But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

James 1:2-5 (WEB)

13) Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by his good conduct that his deeds are done in gentleness of wisdom. 14) But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, don't boast and don't lie against the truth. 15) This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, sensual, and demonic. 16) For where jealousy and selfish ambition are, there is confusion and every evil deed. 17) But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceful, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. 18) Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

James 3:13-18 (WEB)

10) Take, brothers, for an example of suffering and of perseverance, the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. 11) Behold, we call them blessed who endured. You have heard of the perseverance of Job, and have seen the Lord in the outcome, and how the Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

James 5:10-11 (WEB)

Theme Two - Poor Take Pride and Rich Weep and Wail

9) But let the brother in humble circumstances glory in his high position; 10) and the rich, in that he is made humble, because like the flower in the grass, he will pass away. 11) For the sun arises with the scorching wind and withers the grass, and the flower in it falls, and the beauty of its appearance perishes. So the rich man will also fade away in his pursuits.

James 1:9-11 (WEB)

1) My brothers, don't hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ of glory with partiality. 2) For if a man with a gold ring, in fine clothing, comes into your synagogue, and a poor man in filthy clothing also comes in, 3) and you pay special attention to him who wears the fine clothing and say, "Sit here in a good place;" and you tell the poor man, "Stand there," or "Sit by my footstool" 4) haven't you shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? 5) Listen, my beloved brothers. Didn't God choose those who are poor in this world to be rich in faith, and heirs of the Kingdom which he promised to those who love him?

James 2:1-5 (WEB)

1) Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming on you. 2) Your riches are corrupted and your garments are moth-eaten.

James 5:1-2 (WEB)

Theme Three - Resist Temptation

13) Let no man say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God," for God can't be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one. 14) But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lust and enticed.

James 1:13-14 (WEB)

1) Where do wars and fightings among you come from? Don't they come from your pleasures that war in your members? 2) You lust, and don't have. You murder and covet, and can't obtain. You fight and make war. You don't have, because you don't ask. 3) You ask, and don't receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. 4) You adulterers and adulteresses, don't you know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5) Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who lives in us yearns jealously"? 6) But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." 7) Be subject therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

James 4:1-7 (WEB)

16) Confess your offenses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The insistent prayer of a righteous person is powerfully effective. 17) Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it didn't rain on the earth for three years and six months. 18) He prayed again, and the sky gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit. 19) Brothers, if any among you wanders from the truth and someone turns him back, 20) let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

James 5:16-20 (WEB)

Theme Four - Rid Yourself of Anger

19) So, then, my beloved brothers, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger; 20) for the anger of man doesn't produce the righteousness of God. 21) Therefore, putting away all filthiness and overflowing of wickedness, receive with humility the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

James 1:19-21 (WEB)

11) Don't speak against one another, brothers. He who speaks against a brother and judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge. 12) Only one

is the lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge another?

James 4:11-12 (WEB)

7) Be patient therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it, until it receives the early and late rain. 8) You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. 9) Don't grumble, brothers, against one another, so that you won't be judged. Behold, the judge stands at the door.

James 5:7-9 (WEB)

Theme Five - Do Not Only Listen, Obey!

22) But be doers of the word, and not only hearers, deluding your own selves. 23) For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man looking at his natural face in a mirror; 24) for he sees himself, and goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. 25) But he who looks into the perfect law of freedom and continues, not being a hearer who forgets, but a doer of the work, this man will be blessed in what he does.

James 1:22-25 (WEB)

14) What good is it, my brothers, if a man says he has faith, but has no works? Can faith save him? 15) And if a brother or sister is naked and in lack of daily food, 16) and one of you tells them, "Go in peace. Be warmed and filled;" yet you didn't give them the things the body needs, what good is it? 17) Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead in itself. 18) Yes, a man will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

James 2:14-18 (WEB)

13) Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow let's go into this city, and spend a year there, trade, and make a profit." 14) Whereas you don't know what your life will be like tomorrow. For what is your life? For you are a vapor that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away. 15) For you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will both live, and do this or that." 16) But now you glory in your boasting. All such boasting is evil. 17) To him therefore who knows to do good, and doesn't do it, to him it is sin.

James 4:13-17 (WEB)

Theme Six - Rein The Tongue

26) If anyone among you thinks himself to be religious while he doesn't bridle his tongue, but deceives his heart, this man's religion is worthless. 27) Pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

James 1:26-27 (WEB)

1) Let not many of you be teachers, my brothers, knowing that we will receive heavier judgment. 2) For we all stumble in many things. Anyone who doesn't stumble in word is a perfect person, able to bridle the whole body also. 3) Indeed, we put bits into the horses' mouths so that they may obey us, and we guide their whole body. 4) Behold, the ships also, though they are so big and are driven by fierce winds, are yet guided by a very small rudder, wherever the pilot desires. 5) So the tongue is also a little member, and boasts great things. See how a small fire can spread to a large forest! 6) And the tongue is a fire. The world of iniquity among our members is the tongue, which defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature, and is set on fire by Gehenna. 7) For every kind of animal, bird, creeping thing, and sea creature, is tamed, and has been tamed by mankind; 8) but nobody can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 9) With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men who are made in the image of God. 10) Out of the same mouth comes blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.

James 3:1-12 (WEB)

12) But above all things, my brothers, don't swear— not by heaven, or by the earth, or by any other oath; but let your "yes" be "yes", and your "no", "no", so that you don't fall into hypocrisy.

James 5:12 (WEB)

The first benefit we reap by our effort in studying God's word is a certain knowledge of what God has to say to us. The second benefit is that since there is no confusion about what God has communicated we can now trust and obey Him wholeheartedly. We have no doubt 1) that God wants us to persevere toward God given wisdom, 2) that the poor should take pride and the rich weep and wail, 3) that we are to resist temptation, 4) that we are to rid ourselves of anger, 5) that we are to listen and obey, and 6) that we are to rein our tongue.

God give us the grace to obey God's message for us from the book of James.

A Look at the Book of Philippians

The Pocket

I have always enjoyed most of Jack London's literature. I was fascinated by the *Call of the Wild* as a youth. I read it over and over. However, most of his world view went sailing right over my head. I have since regretted that the life of such a great writer ended in destruction due to his existential foundation. Yet, today I write about the foundation of Jesus Christ and the fruit promised to those who trust in him as explained in the Book of Philippians.

But before we take a look at the book of Philippians let's consider one work of London titled simply, *The Pocket*. This short story tells the tale of an old weathered gold prospector in search of the big one. The prospector enters a beautiful valley with a lazy stream cutting through the bottom and he begins his work. He pans at one end of the stream and discovers a bit of gold dust. He moves down a bit and finds even more. Oddly he marks the spot and moves several hundred yards down the stream and pans back toward the spot he marked. Along the way he again finds gold dust in increasing amounts as he moves toward where he first began. He then wipes his brow and smiles as he surveys the grassy slope adjacent to the stream. Oddly again he leaves the stream and digs several small holes on the slope and again further up the slope, now beginning to whistle and nod his head. If you had been on the crest of the opposite slope you would have seen that the prospector was calculating a triangle with the base at the stream and the apex at the source of the gold, *The Pocket*.

Similarly, knowledge and wisdom must be applied to mine the gold from God's Word. We need a strategy to get to the apex, to *The Pocket*. We need prayer, discussion with other believers, and lots and lots of time reading his Word. We need to look at the whole of Scripture, upstream and downstream to be blessed with the whole picture of God's promises. We would also benefit from an understanding of grammar, the elements of composition, and literary style. We ought to notice details like repeated words, usage of figures of speech, and the historical setting of the book. In this article I hope to expose a few nuggets of gold for you and also one of the biggest pockets of gold, Christ's promise of guaranteed salvation.

The Word of Christ says, "***being confident of this very thing, that he who began a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ***" (Philippians 1:6 WEB). Discover that pocket of gold today!

In *The Pocket*, like many of London's stories, the man's life ends in meaninglessness. The prospector eventually unearths a huge pocket of gold on the slope. The old man digs and sweats finding the big one at the bottom of ten foot hole at the point of his calculations. As he prepares to carry his treasure out of the hole a shadow grows over his head. A thief watched all day while the prospector did the hard work and after the gold was found, he killed him and stole the gold. Such are the treasures of this world, but not the gold of God's promises. They cannot be stolen or lost. They are eternally guaranteed and safely recorded in the Book of Life. So let's apply the wisdom we have to look at the book of Philippians with great confidence and anticipation.

Major on the Majors

Paul begins this letter the same as most of his letters, with a greeting and an introductory prayer. You will note as you read the prayer that Paul builds a list of very specific praises

and prayer requests for the Philippian Christians. Read through the prayer carefully and you will see the mention of various spiritual themes. Perhaps Paul is introducing the major themes of the remainder of the book in his prayer! Though the chapter and verse numbers and the extra subheadings added by the editors of our Bibles may be a help they are not nearly as helpful as the thought that the Holy Spirit himself might specifically list the main points of the book in the introductory prayer. We might be tempted to think of the Bible as a massive encyclopedia of verses, and many people use it that way. However, consider that the Holy Spirit is a writer par excellence and no doubt uses and even defines all the tools of the most excellent writers. In this case I propose that Philippians is a composition with Paul's opening prayer serving as the introduction of the main points of the book to be followed by an expansion of each of these themes in the body of the book. The usefulness of this observation is that we have more definite guidance as to what the major points are so that we can major on them as we apply them to our lives and teach them to others. Of course there are also minor points in book that are equally true that we should be careful not to disregard.

Paul's Introductory Prayer

I have underlined five major points in Paul's prayer below that appear to be the outline for the remainder of the book. This seems clear because the very words and themes under discussion are expanded upon later in the body of the book. For example Paul prays in thankfulness for the partnership of the Philippians in verse 1:5. Then as we read the body of the letter Paul urges them to stand as "*one man*" for the gospel in 1:27 and commends them for going through the "*same struggle*" in 1:30. In fact it would appear that 1:12-30 is one paragraph that explains Paul's struggle and the partnership evident with the Philippians because they shared the same struggle. The Greek word for partnership, *koinōnia*, is used again in 2:1 and 3:1 for partnership with the Spirit and with Christ.

Read the prayer yourself and see for yourself what words and themes are introduced there and expanded upon in the body of the letter.

1) Paul and Timothy, servants of Jesus Christ; To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and servants: 2) Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3) I thank my God whenever I remember you, 4) always in every request of mine on behalf of you all, making my requests with joy, 5) for your partnership in furtherance of the Good News from the first day until now; 6) being confident of this very thing, that he who began a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ. 7) It is even right for me to think this way on behalf of all of you, because I have you in my heart, because both in my bonds and in the defense and confirmation of the Good News, you all are partakers with me of grace. 8) For God is my witness, how I long after all of you in the tender mercies of Christ Jesus. 9) This I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and all discernment, 10) so that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense to the day of Christ, 11) being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Philippians 1:1-11 (WEB)

With these observations we can then propose an outline for the contents of the book of Philippians. I am probably just weird that this stuff gets me excited because I really didn't like English in high school. In fact my 9th grade teacher Mrs. M. rebuked me for my distastes of literary study and failure to appreciate the elements of composition. If she could only see

me now! Of course the value of these observations is not to be mere literary students of the Scripture but to learn from the Holy Spirit's literary genius, to more fully understand his message, and to apply it to our lives. It sure would be a shame to be a student of the Word who never graduated to obedience or as Paul warned Timothy of men who are always learning, but never acknowledging the truth.

Jeff's Proposed Outline

1. Introduction, 1:1-11
 - a. Greeting, 1:1-2
 - b. Thesis - I thank God every time I remember you, 1:3-11
 1. Partners, 1:3-6
 2. Longing, 1:7-8
 3. Love, 1:9
 4. Sincere and without offense, 1:10
 5. Fruits of righteousness through Christ, 1:11
2. Body of the letter, 1:12-4:20
 - a. Partners in suffering, 1:12-30
 - b. Have the same love, 2:1-11
 - c. Become blameless and pure, 2:12-30
 1. Blameless and pure, 2:12-18
 2. Timothy's example, 2:19-24
 3. Epaphroditus' example, 2:25-30
 - d. Righteousness from God, 3:1-21
 - e. You whom I love and long for, 4:1-20
3. Conclusion, 4:21-23

Partners in Suffering

Paul prayed, *"4) always in every request of mine on behalf of you all, making my requests with joy, 5) for your partnership in furtherance of the Good News from the first day until now; 6) being confident of this very thing, that he who began a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ."* (Philippians 1:4-6 WEB).

Paul was called by Christ to a challenge beyond his own ability. He was appointed an apostle by Christ and charged to abandon every previous goal he had to herald the gospel. The Lord warned him, *"For I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name's sake"* (Acts 9:16 WEB). No doubt even the great Apostle Paul felt lonely at times, though never alone from Christ. So we understand Paul's thankfulness that the Philippians were partners with him in the work. He had few partners. Paul highlights in Chapter 4 that the Philippians gladly associated with him and helped him financially. Paul says, *"However you did well that you shared in my affliction"* (Philippians 4:14 WEB).

In Philippians 1:12-30 Paul discusses his own suffering, the suffering that Christ called him to endure. Paul concludes urging the Philippians to stand firm with him and each other through opposition. *"27) Only let your way of life be worthy of the Good News of Christ, that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your state, that you stand firm in one spirit, with one soul striving for the faith of the Good News; 28) and in nothing frightened by the adversaries, which is for them a proof of destruction, but to you of salvation, and that from God. 29) Because it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in him, but also to suffer on his behalf, 30) having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me."* (Philippians 1:27-30 WEB).

While the Galatian and Corinthian churches were the cause of suffering for Paul because of their waywardness, just as you and I have also caused others pain, the Philippians were a great encouragement because they suffered by Paul's side in the battle. While we Americans

shop and hop churches Paul found *koinōnia* with those willing to suffer with him for Christ. The Lord himself said not one word about reward for finding the best church, but instead the promise of reward to those simply willing to suffer for his name, Matthew 10:32-33.

Have the Same Love

Paul prayed, *"This I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and all discernment"* (Philippians 1:9 WEB).

We are not surprised to see love on the list of major themes of any New Testament book and love is found here in the book of Philippians. Love is highlighted in Philippians 2:1-11, the second major paragraph of the body of the book in my suggested outline. Paul says, *"1) If therefore there is any exhortation in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any tender mercies and compassion, 2) make my joy full by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind"* (Philippians 2:1-2 WEB). In this passage Paul points to the love we have received from Christ and urges us to have the same love for others. The paragraph is sometimes called the *kenosis* passage. *Kenosis* is the Greek word used in verse 2:7 and it means "emptied" or "made himself nothing." Christ emptied himself to lovingly serve us. Are we emptying ourselves, that is pouring ourselves out, to lovingly serve others?

Become Blameless and Pure

Paul prayed, *"so that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense to the day of Christ"* (Philippians 1:10 WEB).

Good theology leads to holiness. It is great if an engineer theorizes a better way, but is the theory actually applied to put something in motion? Good theology moves Christians to holiness. Paul says, *"12) So then, my beloved, even as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. 13) For it is God who works in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure. 14) Do all things without complaining and arguing, 15) that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without defect in the middle of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you are seen as lights in the world"* (Philippians 2:12-15 WEB). Very practically, as a result of Christ's love we are urged to obey, work out our salvation, do not complain, do not argue, and become blameless and pure. And the reward promised for pursuing these things is not Hollywood stardom, but to shine like a star in the universe!

Righteousness from God

Paul prayed, *"being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God"* (Philippians 1:11 WEB).

Good theology leads to Christ. The Lord appointed Paul to be the champion of grace theology. Paul's prayer highlights that righteousness, or right standing before God, comes through the work of Jesus Christ. A sinner cannot ever merit right standing before God. Instead Jesus Christ has freely given his merits to the account of mankind. Paul emphasizes, *"8) Yes most certainly, and I count all things to be a loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and count them nothing but refuse, that I may gain Christ 9) and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, that which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith"* (Philippians 3:8-9 WEB).

And good theology leads to fruit. The beginning point of the Christian life is realizing we are

empty of any fruit to merit heaven, and thus we turn to the free gift of Christ's righteousness applied to our account. The life of one believing will then become filled with fruit because of our gratitude also from God's grace. Paul shared, "14) *I press on toward the goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. 15) Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, think this way. If in anything you think otherwise, God will also reveal that to you. 16) Nevertheless, to the extent that we have already attained, let's walk by the same rule. Let's be of the same mind. 17) Brothers, be imitators together of me, and note those who walk this way, even as you have us for an example*" (Philippians 3:14-17 WEB).

Philippians 3:11 also is a challenging verse to translate and understand. The sentence in begins with Philippians 3:8-10 (WEB), "8) *Yes most certainly, and I count all things to be a loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and count them nothing but refuse, that I may gain Christ 9) and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, that which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith, 10) that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming conformed to his death,*" Followed by verse 11...

KJV "If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead."

NIV "And so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead."

NASB "In order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead."

NAB "Thus do I hope that I may arrive at resurrection from the dead."

Some translations could be wrongly interpreted to mean that Paul strove to merit the privilege of his resurrection by dying like Christ. Yet we know that neither salvation nor resurrection can be earned, even by a martyrs' death. So what is meant? Greek study reveals that the condition to attain or arrive at the resurrection in verse 11 is the same condition used in verse 8 to gain Christ. We know that Paul's gaining Christ as Savior in verse 8 is not conditioned upon considering everything else rubbish. That would be works! Rather Paul IS found righteous through faith in Christ without condition, yet to fully experience this reality the condition is to consider everything else rubbish. Likewise Paul's resurrection IS also certain without condition. Yet to fully experience that reality the condition is to die a Christ-like death.

Now this is *not necessarily* a call to martyrdom, though the godly are promised persecution, nor does one need to be crucified to die like Christ, but instead to face the suffering and death appointed for us with Christ-like confidence. My mother died of cancer holding on to Christian hope. She had Christ-like courage in death and so her resurrection will be that of a champion! The NAB suggests that Paul hoped to arrive at the resurrection with the condition of being like Christ in his death. The NASB suggests that Paul strove to meet the condition of a Christ-like death to fully experience the reality of resurrection power. In either case our resurrection is not merited, but a gracious gift. Paul knew his weakness and so humbly states that he "*hopes*" to arrive at the resurrection having died like Christ.

Sadly even Christians leave this world in fear or shame. And Paul's hope was not the vain boast of Peter who said "*even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you,*" while picking up a sword of steel. Paul knew his strength was insufficient for the challenges laid before him, but he hoped for God's strength to wield the sword of the Spirit and face whatever suffering and death Christ called him to with Christ-likeness.

You Whom I Love and Long For

Paul prayed, "*It is even right for me to think this way on behalf of all of you, because I have you in my heart, because both in my bonds and in the defense and confirmation of the Good News, you all are partakers with me of grace. For God is my witness, how I*

long after all of you in the tender mercies of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:7-8 WEB).

Paul had many enemies, few Christian friends, and even fewer partners in suffering. Paul threatened the stubborn Corinthians with the whip of rebuke, but he pours out his heart in longing for the Philippians. God’s grace empowered Paul to serve all the churches, but no doubt the Philippians were a joy. Paul concludes saying, ***“Therefore, my brothers, beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved”*** (Philippians 4:1 WEB).

Conclusion

May God help each of us to count the cost of living and dying in Christ-likeness and may God help our church families to be a blessing to others like the church of Philippi was to Paul.

A Look at the Books of I and II Timothy

Paul's letters to Timothy demonstrate the height of passion and purpose in Christian discipleship. Unfortunately we often pit things like love and truth, people and project, form and function, mercy and discipline, or worship and work against each other in our thoughts. This is unfortunate because God has designed beauty and strength to be both intimate and hard-working companions. Paul demonstrates both these ideals in his relationship to his young protege, Timothy.

Paul reveals the passionate heart cry of a father to a son saying, *"To Timothy my true son in the faith," "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young," "To Timothy, my dear son," "Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy," "I have been reminded of your sincere faith," "You, then, my son, be strong," "Do you best to come to me quickly," and "The Lord be with your spirit."*

Yet Paul also reveals the purposeful gravity of a military commander to a soldier saying, *"Command certain men not to teach false doctrines," "I urge, then, first of all," "Have nothing to do with godless myths," "Command and teach these things," "Be diligent," "I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels," "But you, man of God, flee from all this," "Warn them before God," "Flee the evil desires of youth," "But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days," and "I give you this charge: Preach the word."*

The work of Christ left an indelible stamp of grace of truth on the heart of Paul and now Paul seeks to pass the baton of the passions and purposes of Christ to Timothy. This was no hasty or last minute effort by Paul to make disciples as Christ commanded. Paul invested decades of prayer and effort into loving and training Timothy to continue the work of the gospel. The letters of I and II Timothy are the inspired message that Paul left to counsel, encourage, and exhort Timothy, his spiritual son, after his departure from this world. Much can be learned from them.

The letters are also chock full of wisdom and counsel. On one plain of dissection Paul counsels on how a godly man should relate to false teachers, rebels, kings and leaders, men, women, elders, deacons, deserters, older men, younger men, older women, younger women, older widows, younger widows, slaves, masters, the rich, reliable men, and terrible people of the last days. On another plain of dissection Paul teaches on themes such as love, a pure heart, a good conscience, sincere faith, the gospel of Jesus Christ, fighting the good fight, prayer, modesty, godliness, doctrines of demons, godly speech, reading Scripture, laying on hands, honoring leaders, contentment, power, self-discipline, guarding the gospel, enduring hardship as a soldier, competing fairly as an athlete, working hard as a farmer, avoiding arguments, imitating Paul's example, and preaching the Word. Every Christian leader who desires to be effective must study and come into conformity with these letters whether the pastor of a huge congregation or the parent of one child.

Since this article will only take a brief look at the books of I and II Timothy we will focus the balance of our time highlighting the thesis statements observed in these books. For those that have followed my writings you are already aware that I have taken a fancy to locating introductory thesis statements in books of the Bible. My high school English teacher Mrs. M. taught us that good prose literary compositions contain an introductory paragraph with a thesis statement followed by supporting paragraphs and then a conclusion. Imagine my surprise when I learned that the Holy Spirit had taken Mrs. M's class as well (or was that vice a versa). I explain the value of these observations at length in my article, [A Look at the](#)

Book of Ephesians. Briefly stated, however, observation of the main points in the thesis statements in I and II Timothy will help us major on the main points and minor on the minor points as we study these books.

I TIMOTHY

Not every book of Scripture has a classic thesis statement that introduces the main points of the book. The book of Titus, for example, does not appear to have one, but I and II Timothy each appear to have two, just like the book of Ephesians. Thesis statements can be recognized as a sentence or sentences in the introduction or transitions of the book that list important themes. I Timothy 1:5 (WEB) is just such a verse, *“but the goal of this command is love, out of a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith.”* Here Paul highlights the goal of love, which grows out of three factors. Our study will consider if these three factors are in fact major themes expanded upon in the verses that follow. Another likely verse is I Timothy 1:18-19, *“I commit this instruction to you, my child Timothy, according to the prophecies which were given to you before, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience... .”* Again we see Paul listing major themes, perhaps an outline for the remainder of his book. To see if this is truly the case we will now examine the verses following these thesis statements, looking for repetition of the key words highlighted in the thesis statements or continuation of the same thoughts.

Part I

The first thesis of I Timothy highlights the themes of a pure heart, a good conscience, and unfeigned faith. In this case I do not observe a repetition of these exact words in the following verses, excepting *“faith”* in 1:12, but there certainly is a continuation of all three themes. One possible outline could be as follows:

Thesis on a pure heart, a good conscience, and unfeigned faith, I Timothy 1:5

1. The law is for impure hearts, I Timothy 1:7:11
2. God considered Paul faithful, I Timothy 1:12-14
3. God cleansed Paul’s conscience, I Timothy 1:15-17

Part II

The second thesis of I Timothy highlights the themes of the good warfare, holding faith, and holding a good conscience. These words and themes are specifically repeated in following verses. The conscience is again mentioned in verse 3:9 and others, holding faith in verse 4:1 and others, and the good warfare in 6:12. In light of these and other observations one possible outline could be:

Thesis on waging the good warfare, holding onto faith, and a good conscience, I Timothy 1:18-19

1. Hold onto a good conscience, I Timothy 2:1-3:16
2. Hold onto faith, I Timothy 4:1-6:10
3. Wage the good warfare, 6:11-21

II TIMOTHY

Before considering a literary dissection of II Timothy, do not miss the crucial message of this book. Paul concludes saying, *“For I am already being offered, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight. I have finished the course. I have kept the faith. From now on, the crown of righteousness is stored up for me, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that day; and not to me only, but also to all those who have loved his appearing”* (II Timothy 4:6-8 WEB). Church tradition holds

that Paul was beheaded in Rome for his faith in Christ. This letter is his Magnum Opus to Timothy. Our hearts beat the fastest as we watch one Olympic runner end his sprint and hand the baton to the next runner. Will the baton be dropped? II Timothy is the Holy Spirit's perfect baton pass to any that would be a disciple or make disciples.

Just as in the book of I Timothy I also observe two thesis statements in the book of II Timothy. The first is II Timothy 1:7 (WEB), "*For God didn't give us a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and self-control.*" Paul highlights three components of the spirit that God has given us. These are likely themes for the verses following. The second thesis statement I observe is II Timothy 2:1-7, "*1) You therefore, my child, be strengthened in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2) The things which you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit the same things to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. 3) You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4) No soldier on duty entangles himself in the affairs of life, that he may please him who enrolled him as a soldier. 5) Also, if anyone competes in athletics, he isn't crowned unless he has competed by the rules. 6) The farmer who labors must be the first to get a share of the crops. 7) Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things.*" Paul tells Timothy to entrust the gospel to reliable men citing the enduring soldier, rule abiding athlete, and hardworking farmer as examples. These three examples seem to be likely themes for expansion in the remainder of the book.

Part I

The first thesis of II Timothy highlights the themes of power, love, and self-control. If this is a thesis statement we would expect these words or themes to be expanded upon in the verses that follow, and this is just the case. "*Power*" is mentioned in 1:8, "*love*" in 1:13, and the theme of no "*self-control*" in 1:15. In light of these and other observations one possible outline could be as follows:

Thesis on power, love, and self-control, II Timothy 1:7

1. Suffer for the gospel by the power of God, II Timothy 1:8-12
2. Keep my teaching with faith and love, II Timothy 1:13-14
3. Many have lost self-control and deserted me, but not all, II Timothy 1:15-18

Part II

The second thesis of II Timothy highlights the themes of enduring hardship like a good soldier, competing according to the rules like an athlete, and working hard like a farmer. These themes, likewise, finish the book. In light of these and other observations one outline could be as follows:

Thesis on the enduring soldier, rule abiding athlete, and hard working farmer, II Timothy 2:1-7

1. Avoid the godless chatter of civilians, II Timothy 2:14-26
2. Compete by the rules of Paul teaching, II Timothy 3:1-17
3. Work hard in season and out of season, II Timothy 4:1-8

CONCLUSION

If these observations are correct a summary of I and II Timothy can easily be constructed which majors on the majors. The thesis statements of I Timothy 1:5, I Timothy 1:18-19, II Timothy 1:7, and II Timothy 2:1-7 highlight a total of 12 major themes. Consider this summary:

Paul wrote Timothy

1. First exhorting him to

- a. Aim for love through a
 1. Pure heart,
 2. Good conscience, and
 3. Unfeigned faith
 - b. Receive instruction so that he might
 1. Fight the good fight,
 2. Hold onto faith, and
 3. Hold onto a good conscience
2. Second exhorting him to
 - a. Fan the flame of God's gift to him through God's spirit of
 1. Power,
 2. Love, and
 3. Self-Control
 - b. Entrust Paul's teaching to reliable men remembering to
 1. Endure hardship like a soldier,
 2. Compete according to the rules like an athlete, and
 3. Work hard like a farmer

It is on this framework that Paul instructs Timothy with details like: urge men to lift up holy hands in prayer, teach women to dress modestly, do not be ashamed of the gospel, and preach the Word. Lord willing, this outline will help you and I master the wisdom and counsel found in the books of I and II Timothy. The goal of course being that we each would receive the baton of grace and truth successfully as reliable men and also pass on the baton of grace and truth successfully to reliable men.

Has your rebel heart bowed to salvation by grace received by faith? Does your rebel heart love the truth of Scripture? Are you investing your life to train reliable men who will faithfully carry the message of grace and truth after you leave this world? Men, the terrible times in the last days began in Paul's day and continue through today. And when Lord's winnowing fork separates the wheat from the chaff will you be found to be a son in His kingdom and a soldier in his army fighting against the present tide of evil?

Lord God, help us to be the faithful men needed in this hour.

A Quintessential Defense of FREE WILL

My Position Clarified

Recently while discussing the amazing grace of Christ with a number of Christian friends I have learned that many still hold the belief that God has given man a *free will* to either receive or reject Jesus. The belief in *free will* has become a palatable answer to the question of '*how could the grace of God choose some and not others?*' Many have come to peace of mind over this difficult question by attributing a man's fate to the choice of his *free will*. Yet Romans 9:11-13 seems to attribute a man's destiny to the choice of God, "*For being not yet born, neither having done anything good or bad, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him who calls, it was said to her, 'The elder will serve the younger.'* Even as it is written, '*Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.*' " I know I have debated a number of my friends arguing for the sovereignty of God over the *free will* of man. Hopefully I have lost no friends, but at this point I must take a moment to clarify my position.

Please accept my apologies, for I too believe in free will.

Free Will Defined

Before I elaborate my view it is important that we define the phrase *free will*. Too often people have argued or parted over views without taking time to define terms. Sadly this can result in unnecessary separations because the two parties were actually much closer to agreement than they realized. Unfortunately, undefined terms and the bandying of theological jargon often confuse debate.

Let's first define *free will* from the dictionary. [Dictionary.com](#) defines '*free*' to mean '*not affected or restricted by a given condition or circumstance.*' '*Will*' is defined to mean to '*chose or decide upon a course of action*' and '*the act of exercising the will.*' If we add these definitions together *free will* could be understood to mean '*to chose or decide upon a course of action and / or exercise one's will without being affected or restricted by any given condition or circumstance.*' The *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* by Elwell states that one with *free will* is '*the first cause of his acts.*' Thus one acting with a *free will* is not affected or restricted by any prior causes. To discuss this subject sensibly we must all understand and agree with this statement.

We could also consider a common philosophical definition of *free will* from [wikipedia.com](#). They say, '*free will is the belief or the philosophical doctrine that holds that humans have the power [within themselves] to choose their own deeds.*'

These definitions ought to be sufficient to continue our discussion... as long as we play fair. We cannot adjust our definition of '*free*' later if we are losing the argument. For example, suppose I work my kids hard all morning and give them the rest of the day '*free*' to do as they please. Later, if I tell them they must mow the yard, they will tell me I am not being fair. Likewise, if our '*free will*' is in any way affected or restricted, then it is no longer a '*free*' will.

Thank you for your patience with me.

If we are to engage in important theological and philosophical discussion we must be precise. You may also say that we do not need theology and philosophy, but we need Jesus. I

agree. I hope to use a number of Scriptures beginning with I Corinthians 1:20-31 (WEB),

20) Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the lawyer of this world? Hasn't God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 21) For seeing that in the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom didn't know God, it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save those who believe. 22) For Jews ask for signs, Greeks seek after wisdom, 23) but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews, and foolishness to Greeks, 24) but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God; 25) because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. 26) For you see your calling, brothers, that not many are wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, and not many noble; 27) but God chose the foolish things of the world that he might put to shame those who are wise. God chose the weak things of the world that he might put to shame the things that are strong. 28) God chose the lowly things of the world, and the things that are despised, and the things that don't exist, that he might bring to nothing the things that exist, 29) that no flesh should boast before God. 30) Because of him, you are in Christ Jesus, who was made to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption: 31) that, as it is written, "He who boasts, let him boast in the Lord."

Since the salvation of God's people is the root concern in the *free will* debate consider a question. Which position better reflects boasting in the Lord? One claims, '*I am saved because I made a good choice of Christ with my free will.*' But another says, '*I am saved because Christ made a gracious choice of me, a rebellious sinner.*' I hope if we are not agreed at the beginning of this article that our testimonies will be harmonious by the end and so we will share a happy brotherhood in Christ.

Common Sense Considerations

Common sense suggests that no mortal man can truly satisfy our definition of *free will*. Do we realize that every decision we make is affected or restricted by something? We do not even have the *free will* to cross the street at the moment of our choosing, but are affected by this or that and are restricted by the speeding traffic. Hopefully we eventually cross the street, yet sadly there are some who have willed to cross, but were killed in the traffic. We should all think of that the next time we stand on the curb ready to pass to the other side. Is your will '*free*' to accomplish your objective... guaranteed? According to our definition one with '*free will*' will cross the street when and where they choose... guaranteed. Anything less is not a '*free*' will. This thought could bring humility to us all as we stand poised on the curb.

Thus common sense teaches me that mortal man does not have '*free will.*' So is our quest to find '*free will*' then lost? Not at all! I believe in free will, as I already said. There is one who's will is free. There is one who's will is unbounded, unfettered, unlimited. There is one who can cross the street or do anything at anytime of his choosing. There is such a man. Friends, he is real and he alone stands as the possessor of FREE WILL! Just the thought might be enough to cause us to tremble in fear that there is one who is unstoppable in his every objective. Thankfully, however, this one is our loving Heavenly Father.

You might say to me, '*Don't be ridiculous!*' Well I say, '*don't be ridiculous yourself with your foolish proclamations of your own free will!*' Why Jesus demonstrated in living color to his disciples that he has free will while we do not. Jesus freely willed to walk on water before his disciples. Marvel at this mild and controlled demonstration of his free will. Why he

could have blasted galaxies to pieces and rebuilt them in an instant with his unthwartable will, yet to bring his awesome power down to Earth he merely walks on water. 'Ah hah,' you say, 'didn't Peter also walk on water?' Yes, he did. Yet remember that Peter also fell in when his eyes parted from Jesus. I hope we all agree that, though Peter walked on water, his will, courage, and ability to do so was all a miraculous gift from the Lord. Thus, Jesus powerfully, but humbly, demonstrated God's free will, while Peter demonstrated for all of us, man's utter weakness without God.

Even Icarus willed to fly and started well, yet he flew too near the sun and the heat melted the feathers from the wax and he fell to the Earth. Perhaps we are unwise to learn anything from Greek mythology, yet if it helps our understanding consider that even the will of mythological Icarus was not free to fly. However, one day believers in Jesus will fly to meet our Lord and each other in the sky, not by the power of our infirm will, but by the power of his mighty will, and that is no myth.

Scripture

The subjection of our wills to God's majestic will is a major theme in the Scriptures. I could tell the story of mankind willing to build the tower of Babel while God willed to smash the effort. Do you remember whose will freely prevailed? I could tell the story of Haman who willed to destroy the Jews while God willed to save them through Esther. Do you remember whose will freely prevailed? I could tell the story of Jonah who willed not to preach to Nineveh while God willed that he would. Do you remember whose will freely prevailed? I could go on with story after story after story demonstrating God's freedom of will with man's subjection of will, but we do not need a flood to quench a thirst, merely one cup of cold water. Yet I will give you not one, but three key passages that compare God's and man's will in the mundane, in destiny, and in salvation.

The New Testament writer James preached,

13) Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow let's go into this city, and spend a year there, trade, and make a profit." 14) Whereas you don't know what your life will be like tomorrow. For what is your life? For you are a vapor that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away. 15) For you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will both live, and do this or that." 16) But now you glory in your boasting. All such boasting is evil. 17) To him therefore who knows to do good, and doesn't do it, to him it is sin.

James 4:13-17 (WEB)

So we see that man cannot freely plan even mundane things to do this or that without humble dependency on the Lord's will. James, urges us to humbly say, "*If the Lord wills,*" for our own good. What will become of us if we forget that God is the one who carried us safely to this very day, through every success and failure? And what if we say I built all that you see here by my *free will*? Nebuchadnezzar was such a man and he did not fair too well. Better to give glory to God than to man's *free will*!

While teaching one friend about the grace of God he rebuked me saying that the Sovereignty of God and the *free will* of man are the two great pillars of the church! Yikes! If this is the case we had better quickly come to shelter under the pillar of God's sovereignty because the pillar of man's *free will* is crumbled with no life possible there. Friends, the companion doctrine to the sovereignty of God is not the *free will* of man, but the responsibility of the man. These are the two iron rails on which run the locomotive of God's grace. Cross or reject these two rails and you will have a train wreck.

We should instead rejoice that we have a God who truly is a God and who is sovereign over everything, including our sin. And at the same time we should humbly confess responsibility for our sin. Do you say that these two things cannot be? Why then you must take issue with the book of Romans. Here at least you will find comfort that you are not alone with your complaint. Paul said,

14) What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? May it never be! 15) For he said to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." 16) So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who has mercy. 17) For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I caused you to be raised up, that I might show in you my power, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." 18) So then, he has mercy on whom he desires, and he hardens whom he desires.

19) You will say then to me, "Why does he still find fault? For who withstands his will?" 20) But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed ask him who formed it, "Why did you make me like this?" 21) Or hasn't the potter a right over the clay, from the same lump to make one part a vessel for honor, and another for dishonor? 22) What if God, willing to show his wrath and to make his power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23) and that he might make known the riches of his glory on vessels of mercy, which he prepared beforehand for glory, 24) us, whom he also called, not from the Jews only, but also from the Gentiles?

Romans 9:14-24 (WEB)

Nothing withstands the will of God. God's will has ordained every moment of history past, present, and future including our destinies from before we were even born. Here is cause for great hope, because our loving Heavenly Father rules all... and loves all mankind. Praise his name!

Let's turn again to the salvation question. Many concede that God is Sovereign over all, except our *free will* to choose Christ. One argues that God is a perfect gentleman that would not force himself upon a lady. Better to view God as a gentleman willing to soil his hands as he pulled us kicking and screaming out of the filthy gutter of sin that we loved. The *gentlemen* of this world take a wide course around trash like us, but God does not. Another argues that God has freely chosen to give us *free will* in the matter of our salvation. Yet friends this directly violates the very heart of grace! We are not saved by any work of man whatsoever, but by the grace of God, received in faith. Jesus said it best, "*You didn't choose me, but I chose you and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain; that whatever you will ask of the Father in my name, he may give it to you*" (John 15:16 WEB). Try as you might, but you cannot twist these words to say any other thing. Man's will is not free to pick up the gavel as judge of his own destiny. God alone exercises his free will to save everyone whom he chooses and he will not be stopped. Hopefully you now see the urgency in proclaiming the good news that Jesus chose to die for ALL mankind!

God's Powerful Freedom of Will

God alone has *free will*. He is not enabled or restricted by anything. He alone is the first cause with no prior cause anywhere in sight. He says, "*Remember the former things of*

old: for I am God, and there is no other. I am God, and there is none like me. I declare the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done. I say: My counsel will stand, and I will do all that I please” (Isaiah 46:9-10 WEB).

Can we boast saying ‘I will do all that I please?’ That is what we are saying if we claim to have free will. Are you now ready to quit this silly boast and instead join me in thanks that our God’s mighty free will is our very salvation?

He says, *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give eternal life to them. They will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and the Father are one” (John 10:27-30 WEB).*

Praise God he uses his powerful will to save us. And thankfully even the sin that entangles us is ordained by our God for his great purpose. *“Behold, Yahweh’s name comes from far away, burning with his anger, and in thick rising smoke. His lips are full of indignation, and his tongue is as a devouring fire. His breath is as an overflowing stream that reaches even to the neck, to sift the nations with the sieve of destruction; and a bridle that leads to ruin will be in the jaws of the peoples” (Isaiah 30:27-28 WEB).* He does all his pleasure. He saves his people without question. He has all the evil in this world under his sovereign control. Praise his mighty name!

Thus we worship a God who is unbounded in the expression of his free will. There is nothing he cannot do and nothing that can stop what he wants to do. Consider a brief chart that illustrates exactly how free and boundless God’s will is.

God’s freedom	to the good.	to the evil.
to do good...	Jesus Christ exalted Philippians 2:9-11	Mankind saved by grace John 4:42
to do evil...	Jesus Christ made to be sin II Corinthians 5:21	Fallen angels condemned Matthew 25:41

God truly does all his pleasure. His will is free.

Man’s Puny Limited Restricted Will

Frankly, by contrast, man’s will is quite puny, limited, and restricted. The Scriptures referenced above show that we cannot will even the mundane in our lives much less our destiny, or salvation. God’s will alone prevails. In fact to call our will puny is even too much credit. Jesus said, *“I am the vine. You are the branches. He who remains in me and I in him bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5 WEB).* Really we have no freedom of will AT ALL but are utterly subject to the will of God. Again thankfully our God is a loving Heavenly Father.

Learning to trust in God through Jesus Christ is the heart of the matter. We are invited to rest completely in the will of God, with no faith in our own will whatsoever. God insists that we know him to be trustworthy in the mundane, as well as with our destiny and our salvation. In light of our fallen state we actually would have reason to fear if man had *free will*. What a horror if sinful man could achieve whatever we willed! Though we do see horror from time to time, the grace of God lovingly restrains the will of man from full expression of our depravity. Again we have no reason to fear God’s *free will* over our lives, but reason for great thankfulness for his loving grace. We would self-destruct without him! Consider another table illustrating the destitute nature of man’s will.

Man's bondage	to the good.	to the evil.
to do good...	We are unfaithful here...rarely will someone die for a righteous man Romans 5:7	Unbelievers serve Satan John 8:44, Ephesians 2:2
to do evil...	Christ crucified by mankind I Corinthians 2:2	Men destroy one another James 4:2

Our wills are the opposite of our good God's. We are in desperate bondage. Our will is not free, but held captive by our sinful nature.

Question and Answer

Are we then robots, automatons? Absolutely not! We are beings that think and act according to our wills doing as seems best to us. We are not lifeless puppets driven along by the will of God. Yet I did say above that God's will always prevails in our lives. How can this be? Millard Erickson offers a thoughtful explanation in *Christian Theology* on page 359. He says, "*God works in such a suasive way with the will of the individual that he freely makes the choice that God intends.*" Thus we freely choose what God ultimately wills. God is sovereign. We are responsible for our choices. Note, however, that God's purposes are only ever for the ultimate good, while our purposes are mixed with both good and evil.

Did we then NOT freely receive Jesus? Certainly we received him freely! Here is the biggest misunderstanding in this discussion. Jesus said, "*freely you have received!*" However, "*freely*" describes *how* we received him, not *why* we received him! Everyone who has received Christ has done so freely. We were not compelled to receive Christ against our wills. It has been said, "*A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still.*" Instead God opened the door to his grace irresistibly to each Christian convincing and empowering our will to receive him.

If you have been pressured to confess Christ, but in your heart of hearts remain unbelieving, then you do not know the irresistibly good God. Please do yourself a favor and be honest. Tell yourself and the world that you are not a Christian! Then there may still be hope that you could know the true God and be saved. Otherwise you are living a lie and will perish in spite of your charade. Again every true believer has freely received Christ by faith. The more important question is why have we received Christ? Certainly not because of *free will*. Paul describes unbelievers as spiritually DEAD. A dead man has no power to will himself to be made alive. We must be made alive by the Holy Spirit!

Also note that though every true Christian has been made willing to receive Christ that does not imply it is a pleasant experience. Terrible sin of every sort still affects Christians, even hatred of God at times, though not the blaspheming of the Spirit. Salvation is quite a violent ripping of man's soul from the sin nature. Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus is an excellent Biblical example. Elizabeth Taylor's marriage in the movie *Taming of the Shrew* also portrays this fairly well.

What is the difference between *free will* and *free moral agency*? The *free will* debate is a hot button for many. Tell them you do not believe in the *free will* of man and suddenly you are labeled as un-democratic! So to clarify our position we also speak of *free moral agency*. In this case *free* means men make choices freely without compulsion, although as explained above, each choice we make is affected by the will of God. Further, *moral agency* means we are responsible and accountable for our choices. We are *free moral agents* but our wills are

not *free*, but both limited and subject to boundaries determined by God.

Is God then culpable for our sin? Absolutely not! The beautiful doctrine of the free will of God has been used by unbelievers to slander the great name of our God. This is a great offense. Here is an illustration that may help us honor God and humble ourselves. Consider that fallen man is like a vat of putrid sewer sludge. If God opens a valve we will freely flow in the direction of any sin. Paul warns, "***No temptation has seized you, but what is common to man.***" God is not guilty for allowing the sludge to flow, but we are guilty for each step we take. Instead God is to be praised that he restrains us at all. He is not obligated to soil his hands by graciously restraining us. In fact it would be justice for him to simply let us eat the fruit of our lusts, excepting that the death of Christ on our behalf has provided a new justice for mankind. A Biblical understanding of these things should instead result in hands lifted in prayer, "*Lord save me from my love of sin!*"

OK we are guilty for our sin, but who is guilty for giving us a sin nature in the first place, that is for original sin? No one is guilty, but someone is to be praised for his amazing purpose!

***32) For God has bound all to disobedience, that he might have mercy on all.
33) Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out! 34) "For
who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" 35)
"Or who has first given to him, and it will be repaid to him again?" 36) For of
him, and through him, and to him are all things. To him be the glory for ever!
Amen.***

Romans 11:32-36 (WEB)

Should we motivate ourselves by saying "*where there is a will, there is a way?*" Belief in the *free will* of man is a terrible tragedy. Sadly teachers of this view imagine that they are bringing freedom by proclaiming freedom. But belief in the *free will* of man does not bring freedom but blindness, hopelessness, and oppression. Consider the curse of a leader urging his followers to dig deep within themselves to accomplish the mission. Here is a wooden general making wooden soldiers of his troops. Jesus called these people, "*the blind leading the blind.*" Why not rather say, "*where God wills there is a way!*" Here there is hope for the pastor and his flock. Here there is hope for the counselor and his counseled. Here there is hope for parents and their children. Here there is hope for a husband and his wife. Here there is hope because God's will IS free and prayer to him is powerful.

Hasn't the gospel age made all men free to choose Christ? One explained that all men have been given a *free will* to believe during the gospel age. But then how do we explain why everyone does not believe? The answer is that unbelievers have not yet been made free to believe by the Holy Spirit. Their wills are still dead in sin and not free. Everyone is invited now, but each one will believe only at the hour Christ chooses. Any other gospel allows the work of man to enter into the salvation equation.

Hasn't Jesus set his disciples free? True. Jesus said, "***if the Son sets you free you will be free indeed.***" Jesus has set believers free...but not completely free. An insightful pastor once pointed out the three Ps of spiritual freedom. The work of Christ has set us free from the POWER of sin. Sin no longer dominates the life of the Christian. The work of Christ has also set us free from the PENALTY of sin. Christians will never be condemned for our sin. Finally the work of Christ will eventually set us free from the PRESENCE of sin whether by our death or his return. Christians are two-thirds free. Praise the Lord, one day we will also be free from the presence of sin. Consider the faith of David who cries to the Lord, "***set me***

free from my prison, that I may praise your name." David realized that he was still in prison. Do we realize that our will is still bound to sin? David realized that God had the power to free him. Do we believe that God alone has free will to change our love of sin?

David held on to hope in the Lord's purposes despite the prison God allowed in his life. Do we still have hope in the Lord in spite of our remaining sin?

Isn't one small part of salvation due to man's *free will*? Even if we consider four simple corners of salvation it is God's will that has won the victory, not our own. On first base we see that God predestined his people to salvation from before the creation of the world. Human will was not involved at all in that decision, but only God's will. On second base we see that God chose to die on the cross, even though Peter and all our self-righteous pride refused the idea. Human will was not involved at all in that decision either, but only God's will. On third base we see that Jesus asked the Father to forgive us, even though no one was asking for forgiveness. Again human will was not involved at all in that decision, but only God's will. Finally, arriving at home-base we see that the Holy Spirit raised us from spiritual death to spiritual life. No one was willing or able to receive grace, but God makes each one willing at the time of his choosing. God hits the home run and freely wills to free our wills!

Don't we at least have a free will to do the things God commands? God commands us to trust and obey him, but that is not proof that our will is *free* to do so. Even earthly fathers command their sons to tasks that they cannot achieve without help. I command my son to mow the yard. However, I provided the equipment, demonstrated how to do it with word and example, and corrected him as needed. I commanded him to do it, but he couldn't have done it without my help. I also noticed a beautiful effect in the process. My son and I grew closer to one another while the yard was mowed. This also is God's purpose as he commands us. He desires that we would grow closer to him as he helps us obey his commands to love and trust him and love our neighbor as ourselves.

Some chide that God cannot have absolute free will. Can he make a rock that he cannot move? Though we boast about our own *free will*, we gladly question God whether his will is truly free. So with one simple question we seemingly have dethroned God. If God answers 'no' that he cannot make a rock that he cannot move, then his will is not free. And if God answers 'yes' that he can make a rock that he cannot move, then likewise his will is not free again, for he cannot move the rock. Either way God has lost the contest.

Yet on one hand he must answer 'no' that he cannot make such a rock, because he himself is the rock that cannot be moved, Numbers 23:19. He cannot make a rock greater than himself because he is the greatest. To be greater than God is impossible and so such a rock cannot be made. Unbelievers can now attempt to rejoice because they have found the fatal flaw of our Lord Jehovah. His fatal weakness is that he has no weakness!

Yet on the other hand he must answer 'yes' that he can make such a rock because he promised to make Jerusalem, the home of his people, a rock that cannot be moved, Zechariah 12:3. Unbelievers can rejoice again because the rock he cannot move has been found. His second fatal weakness is the grace he has given to his people! He became weak and died for them and they now cannot be moved from testifying to his unmatched grace. Ha! In daring display of logic God escapes from the full nelson of man's unbelief answering both 'no' and 'yes' to the infamous riddle leaving unbelievers gaping and believers rolling in laughter!

Does Jesus have free will? Good question. Strictly defined even Jesus does not have free will, but only God the Father. Jesus' will is subject to the Father. He is not free to assign those who will sit at his right and left. He is also not free to know the time of his return. Our wills are also not free, but subject to the will of Jesus, whether in believe or unbelief. Further our wills are not free because we are temporarily in bondage to sin. Jesus, however, is free from

bondage to sin. I concede that more discussion is needed to express whether one who by nature is perfectly, gladly, and willingly subject to authority can be said to have a free will. In our common understanding freedom and subjection are antonyms. But Jesus redefined freedom to be joyful obedience to one's authorities. Yet even in glory the scope of God's freedom will be unbounded while ours will be bounded. Of course then we will be perfectly happy and content children playing within his boundaries by our very nature!

Conclusion

The goal of my paper is 1) that we could together defend the free will of our God and share a happy brotherhood, 2) that we would share the common testimony that we are saved because Christ made a gracious choice of rebellious sinners like us, and 3) that I could do my part to refute the *free will* of man or any doctrine that assaults the precious grace of Christ.

Have I succeeded?

How should we now view those who maintain they possess *free will*? Is it laughable, pitiable, or abominable? As a young boy at family gatherings my uncles would egg me on to arm wrestle my dad. I would tackle the challenge fully persuaded that I could defeat the man. There I was, 60 pounds of little boy, stacked up against adult muscle. I gave my best while they all laughed at the prospect. Even though I lost they would somehow get me to try again. My will was not *free* to beat my father, nor does anyone have freedom of will like our Heavenly Father.

Later in my teens we set up a high jump contest while on vacation. The competition grew between me and a close friend. He made the last jump. I missed. The family laughed and cheered. However, I became angry and ran away. I wanted to be the winner and based my fragile self-esteem on a silly high jump. Pity the one who is happy only when they win! My will was not *free* to win, nor is anyone's will free to take glory from our Heavenly Father.

Even later as a young Christian in college I learned that God had chosen to save me from before the foundation of the world. I raised my blackened fist to heaven shouting that I did not want to be saved that way! But my will is not *free* to save or even unsave myself by the method of my choosing, nor can anyone else will to justify sinners, but only Jesus Christ the savior of mankind.

In the years since then I have not been able to find one palatable answer as to why God would save a scoundrel like me. But I have found peace in the fact that I do not need to have an answer for you. Jesus Christ alone can make answer as to why he graced us with his love. You and I are left simply to praise his amazing grace. So if you do take the time to question the Lord about my salvation or his gospel, please also let me know what he says to you about your salvation.

I guess if you live in the United States you are welcome to continue to believe in the *free will* of man. It is a *free* country. However, if you do maintain this position you must at least admit that a new translation of the Holy Scriptures is needed. At a minimum you must rewrite the three key Scriptures above. James must be edited to say, "*Whether the Lord wills or not, we will both live, and do this or that. We now glory in boasting. All such boasting is good.*" Paul must instead read as, "*So then, we will give ourselves mercy or harden ourselves according to the choice of our free will. God will say then to us, 'Why do you even need me? For who withstands man's will?' But indeed, O God, who are you to reply against man?'*" Will Christ mind if we adjust his story a tad? Really it is we who taught Jesus saying, "*You didn't choose us, but we chose you.*" This is the *free will* translation of the word of man.

However, if you choose to believe in the free will of God as I do, what then is a proper

posture for the Christian with eyes wide open to God's sovereignty in our lives? Paul challenged us thus, *"So then, my beloved, even as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who works in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure"* (Philippians 2:12-13 WEB). Also consider Paul's humble boast, *"But by the grace of God I am what I am. His grace which was given to me was not futile, but I worked more than all of them; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me"* (1 Corinthians 15:10 WEB). After the working, the fearing, and the trembling make sure above all to conclude with worship of our amazing God. *"For of him, and through him, and to him are all things. To him be the glory for ever! Amen"* (Romans 11:36 WEB).

P.S. Belief in man's *free will* is a pesky dandelion. It is everywhere, mowing the head does nothing, and the root is nearly impossible to kill. I thought Luther's rebuke of Erasmus in *The Bondage of the Will* would have ended the matter finally. But I am long after him and I too believed in man's *free will* before I read his book, studied Scripture on the matter, and had my pride humbled.

Absolutely True, However...

I was raised in a dear Mennonite fellowship and the women wore a cloth covering over their hair. The church understood 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 to teach that a woman's head must be covered with a cloth to symbolize her submission to man. Tragically this teaching and other issues became a source of division, sweet fellowship was divided, and each believed as they individually chose. Why bother to raise this subject again?

God has introduced me to many new fellowships since my youth. As a result I have learned more about the word of God from a number of godly teachers. Regarding 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 I had only ever heard two explanations. The first is that the passage teaches that a woman's hair should be covered with a cloth covering. This is one popular interpretation of the KJV, NASB, and NIV translations. A second is that the passage does teach that a woman's hair should be covered with a cloth covering, but this is only a cultural mandate that no longer applies today. I never could accept this second interpretation because if we can dismiss this Biblical teaching as cultural then why not any Biblical teaching. Moreover no reason given for the head covering is cultural: 1) woman originated from man, 2) man is head over woman, 3) woman was created for man, and 4) to respect angels. None of these reasons is cultural and therefore the second interpretation is inferior to the first.

Yet I did not ask my wife to cover her head because the KJV, NASB, and NIV translations seemed to be confusing. Verse 3-10 seemed clear that a woman should cover her head. However, verse 15 says that her hair is given to her as a covering. So does her hair need to be covered or is her hair a covering? I was confused. Paul also concludes strongly in verse 16 saying "*we have no other practice.*" No other practice than what? Is he saying no other practice than woman wearing a cloth covering or using hair as a covering? The KJV translation even adds more confusion by saying "*we have no such practice*" in verse 16. This is a completely opposite meaning than the NIV and NASB! I remained confused and undecided. If I was going to ask my wife to wear a head covering, I also wanted to confidently teach the same to all Christian women. Furthermore, we have dear Christian friends with strong convictions on either side. What were we to believe? So we waited for better understanding.

Following is a third interpretation learned from several sources that answers my questions. To agree with this interpretation you need to agree to five points. If you can agree with each of the following points in succession you will eliminate the confusion of the passage and hopefully be thankful for the outcome.

Point 1: The KJV, NASB, and NIV Translations of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 are Confusing and Conflicting

I have already explained that the KJV, NASB, and NIV translations of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 are confusing and conflicting. Verses 3-10 clearly teach that a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head to demonstrate her submission to man and to respect angels. The confusion in the passage arises, however, at verse 15. Why does Paul say "*For her hair is given to her for a covering?*" The statement is out of place if Paul has been arguing that a woman's hair ought to be covered with cloth. Why would Paul state that a woman's head needs to be covered with cloth and then say later that her hair is a covering? Are there two coverings? If you agree that there is some confusion in the KJV, NASB, and NIV translations you are ready to move on to the next point. If, however, you see no confusion in the translation there is no point in going further.

Point 2: Original Autographs Are Perfect, Translations Are Imperfect

When I began to make new Christian friends from a variety of backgrounds I was stretched. One such way was that I learned that the Old Testament was originally written in the Hebrew language and the New Testament in Greek. I had never been taught this and became afraid that the KJV Bible I had was not truly God's word. What Bible could I trust if they were all translations? I have since learned that most translations are the work of faithful Christians. Thus, the KJV, NASB, NIV, and others are good translations. However, they are still human translations and thus may contain errors.

The only copy of God's word completely without error is the original autographs of Scripture inspired by the Holy Spirit. To see a well known translation error for your self read 1 John 5:7 in the KJV, NASB, and NIV. This verse has been wrongfully translated in the KJV because the KJV translators modified one verse to defend the Trinity doctrine. The Trinity doctrine is true, but it cannot be proved from 1 John 5:7. See the Greek for proof. Likewise I propose that the translation of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 could be improved to more accurately reflect the meaning of the original Greek. Since we already agreed in point 1, that there is some confusion in existing translations we have good reason to ask if there is a problem with the translation itself. If you also agree that translations may have errors, Point 2, then you are ready to move on to the next point. If, however, you believe that the KJV, NASB, or NIV are without error there is no point in going further.

Point 3 - A Look at Greek Words

Bible translators first obtain the earliest and best Greek translations available and then translate the Greek words into the new language. The challenge is that one Greek word could be translated into numerous English words. Thus the translator must also give attention to the context of the passage in order to choose the best word. Below is a table that identifies several Greek words from 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 that we need to reconsider. You are welcome to double-check my study yourself. I used *The NASB-NIV Parallel New Testament in Greek and English* by Marshall published by Regency/Zondervan and the *NASB Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible with Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Dictionaries* published by Foundation Publications.

Verse	NIV-Word	Greek	Meaning	My Word
2	teachings	paradosis	a handing down or over, a tradition	traditions
15	as	anti	over against, opposite, instead of, substitution, contrast	instead of
16	other	toioutos	such, such like, such as this	such
16	covering	peribolaion	that which is thrown around, a covering or mantle	cloth veil
16	practice	sunetheia	habit, habitual use, custom	custom

I propose to improve the translation of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 by more accurately translating these five words, indicated in bold below. If you agree that we need to translate Greek words carefully according to the best meaning to fit the context, then you are ready to move on to the next point. However, if you are uncomfortable with these Bible translation concepts there is no need for you to go further.

Point 4: Translations May Paraphrase Incorrectly

Also difficult is the interpretation of verses 5 and 6. When faced with difficult verses

translators do their best to communicate the same meaning as the Greek often rephrasing entire sentences. However, for our study I want to show you the Greek word for word translation of verses 5 and 6, also from Marshall, underlined below.

Point 5: Historical Context

The early church leaders were Jews and Greeks from the 1st Century Eastern Europe and Middle East. A custom in the Middle East is that pious and religious people cover their heads to respect or fear God. It would be natural to ask Paul the question, "*Should our men or women wear a head covering?*" The book of 1 Corinthians by Paul answers many questions about Christian belief and practice. Though we may not be 100% certain about possible questions the Corinthians had for Paul, we are certain that Paul gives instruction about the head covering in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. Following is a simple improvement to the NIV translation.

Improved Translation

2) I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the traditions, just as I passed them on to you. 3) Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. 4) Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. 5) But every woman praying or prophesying with the head unveiled shames the head of her; for it is one and the same thing with the woman having been shaved. 6) For if a woman is not veiled also let her be shorn; but if shameful for a woman to be shorn or to be shaved, let her be veiled. 7) A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. 8) For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; 9) neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. 10) For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head. 11) In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. 12) For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God. 13) Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? 14) Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, 15) but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her instead of a cloth veil. 16) If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no such custom--nor do the churches of God.

1 Corinthians 11:2-16 (NIV modified)

Commentary

Notice that Paul frames his paragraph by first thanking the reader for "*holding to the traditions*" and concludes by saying "*we have no such custom.*" Winsome Paul intends to find agreement with his reader over a sensitive tradition, but make it clear that the church does not follow this custom. Comment on each verse is more easily understood in reverse order because of Paul's use of humorous irony in the passage.

Verse 16: Paul is discussing a custom that he did not pass on and the church does not practice and he rebukes anyone being contentious with his teaching about this custom. What is the custom?

Verse 15: The custom discussed is the "*peribolaion*" or cloth veil for women of that time

and culture. Paul teaches that a woman's long hair is given instead of the "*peribolaion*." Yes, a woman's long hair is her glory.

Verse 14: Yes, it is a disgrace for a man to have long hair.

Verse 13: No, it is not proper for a woman to pray with her head uncovered.

Verse 12: Man and woman are interdependent and all comes from God.

Verse 11: Paul begins a contrast from his earlier point to teach the interdependence of men and women.

Verse 10: Women must have a sign of authority on their head, but Paul's teaching is not revealed until verse 15.

Verse 9: Women are under man's authority because woman was created for man.

Verse 8: Women are under man's authority because woman came from man.

Verse 7: Man should not cover his head, but women must cover their head.

Verse 6: This verse is difficult because the English word "also" implies that if not covered a woman should additionally cut her hair, thus making hair and coverings two separate things. Perhaps the word "also" translated from the Greek word "kai" misses Paul's sense. As a rule the more difficult verses must be interpreted in light of the easier and verse 15 does plainly teach that a woman's long hair is given instead of the "*peribolaion*." Paul is best understood in verse 6 as finding common ground with those holding to the head covering tradition or more likely setting up a more poignant irony to expose the error of his opponents. See my "tarped" tree illustration below.

Verse 5: This verse is absolutely hilarious. If a woman's long hair is her covering she would be disgraced to be uncovered because if uncovered she would be bald. But until receiving verse 15 the humor is not obvious.

Verse 4: It is disgraceful for a man to pray with his head covered.

Verse 3: God is the authority of Christ, Christ of man, and man of woman.

Verse 2: Thank you for paying close attention to the traditions I passed on to you.

In summary Paul answers "*Absolutely true!*" to those saying a woman's head should be covered, but continues with "*However,*" because a woman's long hair is her covering. Though Christianity was born in the Middle East, Christians will not by any means continue the Middle East practice of the cloth veil. It is ironic and sad that the last sentence could also be translated, "*We have no such habit.*" Ironic because one church has named the clothing and head covering used for their nuns a "*habit*." Sad because many churches misunderstand this passage and unnecessarily burden their women with a custom that never was required in the Scripture.

Tarped Tree Illustration

Suppose you had a good brother who ridiculously insisted without any Biblical teaching (because it was the custom of his sect) that beautiful trees must be covered with a tarp to take their place before God. You might say to him, "*You are absolutely right brother! Every tree standing uncovered is shamed; for it is one and the same thing with the tree having no leaves. For if a tree is not covered also remove her leaves, but if shameful to have no*

leaves let her be covered. The tree ought to have a sign of her place before God on her branches. However....Does not the very nature of things teach you that a tree's leaves are for her glory? For leaves have been given to her instead of a tarp." The parallel is not perfect, but Paul's irony toward those who insist upon the "*peribolaion*" is obvious.

This plain meaning is often missed because we do not expect irony in the Scriptures.

Good News To Those Mised by Middle East Custom

The above corrections to the NIV translation now repair the confusion that I first noted in this discussion. The relationship of verses 3-10 and 15 now make excellent sense as a comparison contrast. However, our improved translation has come to a completely opposite interpretation concerning the cloth head veil. Instead the passage properly translated and interpreted insists that Christian women do not need to follow the Middle Eastern custom of covering their head with cloth, but instead to wear uncovered long hair as a sign of submission to authority.

Good News To Those Dismissing Scriptural Command As Cultural

This new translation offers good news to those who dismiss the passage as cultural and therefore irrelevant. Some deny that the Scripture teaches that men and women are equal before the Lord but with different roles in marriage and the church as described in Ephesians 5:22-33 and 1 Timothy 2. However, they also ignore the point of this passage. This passage teaches that women are under the authority of their husbands and need to have a sign of authority on their head, and their long hair is this sign of authority.

It is my prayer that this paper could be used of God to continue to unify the church and build all Christian believers together into the likeness of Jesus Christ. If any believers are persuaded to discard the custom of the cloth covering or to accept the roles for men and women in marriage and the church I pray that it could be done with grace. And if it were possible I pray that even the believers of my home congregation could be reunited in sweet fellowship.

Many thanks to those who pointed out errors as I labored over revisions of this study.

Acts 17:22-31, A Coherent Worldview Test

Today at lunch my kids rejoiced at the announcement that our weekly Philosophy discussion was cancelled. I can appreciate how even the most zealous academic teens might not be so thrilled about wading through the words of ancient pundits. I wondered to myself, "where are those who muse today?" The masses of today's prevailing culture have been hypnotized by the expert marketers of materialism, the fast pace of Facebook and social media exhibitionism, and popularity's power over truth. The sentiment of the day is that the meaning of life or of anything doesn't really matter, what matters is what sells! By way of contrast a friend, with whom I enjoy a \$1 sausage burrito once a month, shared this concise and coherent worldview test with me, which I now share with you. How would you answer these four simple questions?

How did you get here?

Why are you here?

How do you determine right or wrong?

What is your destiny?

These questions may provide a useful break from your life a-musement to instead muse upon a bigger picture, the purpose of your life. Your efforts to find answers to these questions may serve to give your life real meaning. Millenia ago Paul likewise challenged the pundits of Mars Hill in Athens Greece with answers to these questions.

22) Paul stood in the middle of the Areopagus, and said, 'You men of Athens, I perceive that you are very religious in all things. 23) For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription: "TO AN UNKNOWN GOD." What therefore you worship in ignorance, I announce to you. 24) The God who made the world and all things in it, he, being Lord of heaven and earth, doesn't dwell in temples made with hands. 25) He isn't served by men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he himself gives to all life and breath, and all things. 26) He made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the surface of the earth, having determined appointed seasons, and the boundaries of their dwellings, 27) that they should seek the Lord, if perhaps they might reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 28) "For in him we live, move, and have our being." As some of your own poets have said, "For we are also his offspring." 29) Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold, or silver, or stone, engraved by art and design of man. 30) The times of ignorance therefore God overlooked. But now he commands that all people everywhere should repent, 31) because he has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he has ordained; of which he has given assurance to all men, in that he has raised him from the dead.'

Acts 17:22-31 (WEB)

Acts 21:35-39, Search > Bible > Terrorist = Apostle Paul???

I love the Word of God. It is so perfect and has just the right word for every occasion. Recently I was reading more in the newspaper about the President's war on terrorism. At the same time I read another article titled "*Christian Terrorist*." A columnist deftly pointed out that some things that people have done in the name of Christ, such as murdering abortionists, are actually terroristic. I wholeheartedly agree that murdering abortionists is terroristic, though I also wholeheartedly preach against abortion. Yet I was disturbed that the evil of terrorism could so easily be associated with Christianity, namely because of the stupidity of a few people. True Christianity, however, only ever stands for truth, love, mercy, and righteousness.

"What a strange wind is blowing in our world these days," I thought to myself. As I pondered these things I got the crazy idea to search the Bible for the word "*terrorist*" and found Acts 21:35-39 (NIV).

When Paul reached the steps, the violence of the mob was so great he had to be carried by the soldiers. The crowd that followed kept shouting, 'Away with him!' As the soldiers were about to take Paul into the barracks, he asked the commander, 'May I say something to you?' 'Do you speak Greek?' he replied. 'Aren't you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led four thousand terrorists out into the desert some time ago?' Paul answered, 'I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city. Please let me speak to the people.'

Amazing! Once again the Holy Scripture sheds light on the current events of the day. First, I notice that the wrongful association of Christianity with terrorism is not a new phenomenon, but as ancient as Apostle Paul and the First Century. Second, I notice that the Roman soldiers mistakenly assumed that Paul was a terrorist, most likely because the law abiding citizens of Jerusalem were so outraged against him. Third, I notice that Paul had zero concern about this false accusation of association with terrorists nor did he show concern to rebuff it. Paul knew who he was, who the Jews were, who the Romans were, and that the Lord himself with faithful brothers were the only protectors of his commission. Paul's primary concern was preaching the gospel to Jews and gentiles. Fourth, I notice that the Christian ministry of Paul did produce incredible outrage among the law abiding citizens of Jerusalem. Why? Because by the power of the Holy Spirit Paul provoked the hypocrisy of their fattened consciences and they did not like it.

Friends, leave your slavery to idols! Give your all to Jesus Christ!

Acts 4:28, They Did What God Willed!

The natural mind refuses to believe the Bible. This is understandable. The Bible makes plain statements that will send our socks screaming down the sidewalk while we are left standing barefoot on the pavement in a cold sweat. The only real choice we have is to stand still while our feet warm on the foundation of God's grace.

Unbelievably, the Bible states that God is love. He chose to forgive, love, and bless us through Jesus Christ completely apart from our good deeds, Ephesians 1:3-2:10. Someone once defined G.R.A.C.E. as God's Riches At Christ's Expense. We cannot do one good thing to make God love us any more. We cannot do one bad thing to make God love us any less. Moreover the most amazing news is that Jesus became a man and so died for all mankind without exception and so has won the title of Savior of all Mankind. His love for his people is constant whether we are believing or unbelieving, though believing is much better for us, I Timothy 4:10. Our birth nature simply cannot believe that God loves us unconditionally, but God gives new birth.

Also unbelievably, the Bible states that God is God. He is sovereign over both creation and providence, including sin. While it is true that we are amazing creations, free moral agents who make volitional choices and are responsible for our actions, it is also true that the power and wisdom of God has willed everything that has ever happened or will happen. Our natural minds revolt at the thought that the will of God has decreed atrocities such as rape, abortion, murder, world war, or simply our latest embarrassing blunder. How can this be when God's own loving command urges us not to sin? Even so God is God, and his sovereign will has ordained every sinful act. One explanation is that God, though not double minded has two wills, his prescriptive will which defines right and wrong for us, and his perfect will which is his sovereign action throughout history. Whatever you do with these facts don't sin and blame God expecting to get his praise!

Regardless, rapes and wars are nothing compared to the greatest crime in the history of the world, mankind's crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Regarding that crime the Scriptures are clear, God willed that man crucify Christ and man is guilty of the crime. Acts 4:27-28 (WEB), says,

27) For truly, in this city against your holy servant, Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together 28) to do whatever your hand and your council foreordained to happen.

Likewise Acts 2:22-23 (WEB), says,

22) Men of Israel, hear these words! Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved by God to you by mighty works and wonders and signs which God did by him among you, even as you yourselves know, 23) him, being delivered up by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by the hand of lawless men, crucified and killed.

It is impossible enough to accept responsibility for our hatred of God, but impossibly impossible to read that God willed it. What possible purpose could God have in ordaining sin?

Do we really know him at all? The rock bottom objection from any clear thinking unbeliever is that either God is not love or God is not God. But the Bible teaches and we believe that God is love and God is God.

Some believe that God gave free will to Adam, thus creating the possibility for him to choose to sin. Yet this view is short sighted, for God called Adam good and his good nature was incapable of even desiring sin. Adam was created good, but he was not good when he gave way to temptation. Adam sinned because his good nature had become bound to disobedience, along with every one of his descendants, including us. In fact Romans 11:32-36 (WEB) tells us exactly who bound Adam and us to sin and why.

*32) For God has bound all to disobedience, that he might have mercy on all.
33) Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out! 34) 'For
who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?' 35) 'Or
who has first given to him, and it will be repaid to him again?' 36) For of
him, and through him, and to him are all things. To him be the glory for ever!
Amen.*

God willed that all men sin so that he could demonstrate his loving grace to all men, Ephesians 2:7. So God is love and God is God. So Praise God and how warm are your feet?

Acts 9:15-16, Suffering

I paged through a pastel colored Christian calendar one time many years ago. The calendar had one page per day with an encouraging verse on each page. As I read through the calendar I was encouraged. However, I noted that all the verses quoted, like the calendar, seemed to be "pastel." Moreover, some of the verses quoted were only quoted in half, while the other more disturbing half was unquoted. Unfortunately, it really is in our nature to wish to see the Scriptures and the world in this way, simply as "nice." But it is essential that we Christians, of all people, face and teach the whole truth with courage.

For example we may slip from our calling at times and think it is merely good to be a Christian. Brothers and sisters in the Lord, it is good, but it is also difficult, challenging, rewarding, and sometimes terrible, but always right. In a word it is to be like Christ in this world. Consider God's word to Ananias about Paul, *"But the Lord said to him, "Go your way, for he is my chosen vessel to bear my name before the nations and kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name's sake" (Acts 9:15-16 WEB).*

In my reading of Scripture and experience with life I have identified five categories of human suffering. First there are "pot shots" from Satan under God's sovereign guidance and purpose. Such is the suffering of Job or Paul's thorn. Second there is suffering the natural consequence of sinful choices. Such is the warning of Galatians 6:7. Third there is suffering the Lord's corrective hand of discipline for our sin. Such is received only by believers as discussed in Hebrews 12:7-13. Fourth there is the personal anguish of soul suffered simply by being a sinner and being separated from Christ and his home of righteousness. Such is David's cry in Psalm 6:3. And fifth there is suffering persecution for righteousness from an unbelieving world. Christ chose Paul for this. And Paul reminds Timothy and us in 2 Timothy 3:12 that everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

Three questions remain. Do you want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus? If God does count you worthy of persecution for righteousness will you respond with the grace of Christ? Will we call upon Christ for grace through our suffering? Keep looking to Him!

All You Zombies, by The Hooters: For the living dead in the nation

*Holy Moses met the Pharaoh
Yeah, he tried to set him straight
Looked him in the eye, "let my people go"*

*Holy Moses on the mountain
High above the golden calf
Went to get the Ten Commandments
He's just gonna break them in half*

*All you zombies hide your faces
All you people in the street
All you sittin' in high places
The pieces gonna fall on you*

*No one ever spoke to Noah
They all laughed at him instead
Working on his ark, working all by himself*

*Only Noah saw it coming
Forty days and forty nights
Took his sons and daughters with him
Yeah, they were the Israelites*

*All you zombies hide your faces
All you people in the street
All you sittin' in high places
The rain's gonna fall on you*

*Holy Father, what's the matter
Where have all your children gone
Sitting in the dark, living all by themselves
You don't have to hide anymore*

All you zombies show your faces...

Dear Heavenly Father, I pray that you would open the eyes of the living dead that they could see and believe that the consuming wrathful justice of God toward sinful mankind has been met at the bloody cross of Jesus Christ.

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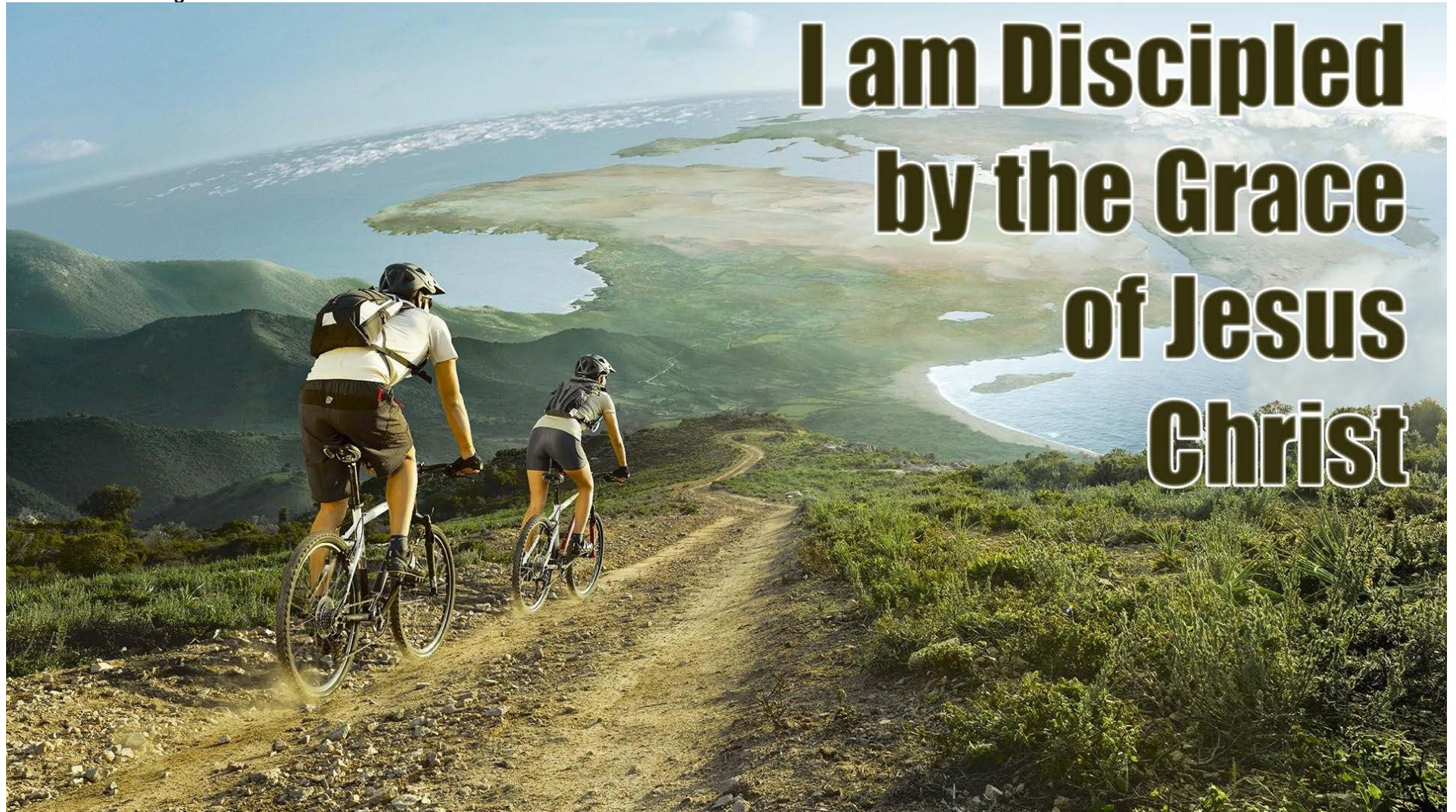
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Be Strong in Grace

Impossible Commands?

God has at times through history commanded His chosen ones to do impossible things. In the book of Genesis we read that Abraham was commanded to leave his homeland and go to a place that God would show him later. In other words, *"Abraham begin your trip now and I will let you know where you are going when I choose!"* In the book of Exodus we read that Moses was commanded to march single handed against the entire nation of Egypt. What would you think of a modern day parallel where God commanded you to preach against the rampant wickedness of an entire nation? In the book of Joshua we read that Joshua was commanded to attack the city of Jericho simply by marching around the city seven days blowing trumpets and shouting. What would happen today if the church laid aside money, methods, manpower, and materials in the building of Christ's body and relied on God's Word, prayer, and the work of the Spirit? In the book of Jonah we read that God brought Jonah to the bottom of the sea in the belly of a fish to bring about Jonah's cry for help, repentance, and preaching in the city of Nineveh. This story defies every comfortable notion of what it means to serve the living God! Who is this God who takes His chosen servants leagues beyond their feeble strength? What is God's purpose in crushing the strength of man over His impossible plans?

Strangest of all to me is a short little command from Paul to Timothy in Paul's last epistle. Paul commands Timothy and God commands us as well, *"You therefore, my child, be strengthened in the grace that is in Christ Jesus"* (2 Timothy 2:1 WEB). We all know what it means to "be strong." In fact almost everything in the human heart is working towards this objective all day every day. We want to be healthy, to be financially secure, to be right, to win,.....and to hide our weaknesses and failures. Or is it just me?

However, just what does it mean to *"be strengthened in grace?"* Discipleship by the grace of Jesus Christ teaches us that we cannot even do the most important thing for ourselves. We cannot save ourselves from the destructive nature of our own sin nor from the wrath of God against sin. Grace teaches us that we are sinners who are totally and completely subject to the judgment of God Almighty. So if grace teaches us that we are weak, even powerless, before God almighty, just how are we to *"be strong in grace?"* Let's consider this question in the remainder of our article.

Old Testament Commands To Be Strong

First we notice that the command to *"be strong"* is a major theme in the Scriptures. Paul was not the first person to command his pupil to *"be strong"*. The Scriptures have numerous examples of God commanding man to *"be strong,"* and man commanding man to *"be strong."*

Moses commanded Israel to *"Be strong and courageous"* (Deuteronomy 31:6 WEB) as they prepared to enter the promised land without his leadership. Moses also commanded Joshua in the presence of all Israel to *"Be strong and courageous"* (Deuteronomy 31:7 WEB) as he prepared to become Israel's new leader.

The Lord also commanded Joshua, *"Be strong and courageous"* no less than five times in the books of Deuteronomy and Joshua. Joshua himself commanded the entire Israelite nation to *"Be strong and courageous"* (Joshua 10:25 WEB).

The judges Deborah and Barak sang to Israel after God defeated Jabin, king of Canaan. They

sang, *"My soul, march on with strength!"* (Judges 5:21 WEB).

God's people were not the only ones familiar with this exhortation. Even the wicked Philistines, Israel's enemy, exhorted one another, *"Be strong, and behave like men, O you Philistines, that you not be servants to the Hebrews, as they have been to you. Strengthen yourselves like men, and fight!"* (1 Samuel 4:9 WEB).

David also encouraged Israel after the death of King Saul, *"Now therefore let your hands be strong, and be valiant; for Saul your lord is dead, and also the house of Judah have anointed me king over them"* (2 Samuel 2:7 WEB). Joab, David's captain, also told his brother while fighting the Ammonites, *"Be courageous, and let's be strong for our people, and for the cities of our God; and may Yahweh do what seems good to him"* (2 Samuel 10:12 WEB). Even Absalom, David's son, when treacherously taking revenge upon his own brother said, *"Absalom commanded his servants, saying, 'Mark now, when Amnon's heart is merry with wine; and when I tell you, 'Strike Amnon,' then kill him. Don't be afraid. Haven't I commanded you? Be courageous, and be valiant!"* (2 Samuel 13:28 WEB). David also sang to God's people, *"Wait for Yahweh. Be strong, and let your heart take courage. Yes, wait for Yahweh"* (Psalm 27:14 WEB). And again, *"Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who hope in Yahweh"* (Psalm 31:24 WEB). David also bolstered his son Solomon for the task of building the temple by saying, *"Then you will prosper, if you observe to do the statutes and the ordinances which Yahweh gave Moses concerning Israel. Be strong and courageous. Don't be afraid, and don't be dismayed"* (1 Chronicles 22:13 WEB). And again, *"Take heed now; for Yahweh has chosen you to build a house for the sanctuary. Be strong, and do it"* (1 Chronicles 28:10 WEB). And yet again, *"David said to Solomon his son, 'Be strong and courageous, and do it. Don't be afraid, nor be dismayed; for Yahweh God, even my God, is with you. He will not fail you, nor forsake you, until all the work for the service of Yahweh's house is finished' "* (1 Chronicles 28:20 WEB). Moreover, David's dying words to Solomon were *"I am going the way of all the earth. You be strong therefore, and show yourself a man"* (1 Kings 2:2 WEB).

Later in Israel's history we also hear the same words from Israel's prophet Azariah. He said to Judah's king Asa, *"But you be strong, and don't let your hands be slack; for your work will be rewarded"* (2 Chronicles 15:7 WEB).

Judah's king Hezekiah also encouraged Israel while surrounded by Assyria with certain destruction looming, *"Be strong and courageous. Don't be afraid or dismayed because of the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude who is with him; for there is a greater one with us than with him"* (2 Chronicles 32:7 WEB).

Ezra the priest was the first to return after 70 years of exile from the promised land. He began the work of restoring people to their walk with the Lord by saying, *"Now therefore don't give your daughters to their sons. Don't take their daughters to your sons, nor seek their peace or their prosperity forever; that you may be strong, and eat the good of the land, and leave it for an inheritance to your children forever"* (Ezra 9:12 WEB).

Isaiah the great prophet spoke, *"Tell those who have a fearful heart, 'Be strong. Don't be afraid. Behold, your God will come with vengeance, God's retribution. He will come and save you' "* (Isaiah 35:4 WEB). Yet Isaiah also warns that God mocks men as they encourage one another with useless words to build idols soon to be destroyed, *"Everyone helps his neighbor. They say to their brothers, 'Be strong!' "* (Isaiah 41:6 WEB).

Ezekiel gravely warns the proud of men that no strength will be able to endure the judgments and discipline of the Lord, *"Can your heart endure, or can your hands be strong, in the days that I will deal with you? I, Yahweh, have spoken it, and will do it"* (Ezekiel 22:14 WEB).

Daniel, a prophet of visions, was encouraged directly by an angel, *"He said, 'Greatly beloved man, don't be afraid. Peace be to you. Be strong. Yes, be strong.' When he spoke to me, I was strengthened, and said, 'Let my lord speak; for you have strengthened me' "* (Daniel 10:19 WEB).

God spoke to Zerubbabel through the prophet Haggai to prepare him for the work of rebuilding the temple, *"Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel," says Yahweh. 'Be strong, Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land,' says Yahweh, 'and work, for I am with you,' says Yahweh of Armies"* (Haggai 2:4 WEB). Zechariah also spoke to those rebuilding the temple, *"Yahweh of Armies says: 'Let your hands be strong, you who hear in these days these words from the mouth of the prophets who were in the day that the foundation of the house of Yahweh of Armies was laid, even the temple, that it might be built' "* (Zechariah 8:9 WEB). And again, *"It shall come to pass that, as you were a curse among the nations, house of Judah and house of Israel, so I will save you, and you shall be a blessing. Don't be afraid. Let your hands be strong"* (Zechariah 8:13 WEB).

New Testament Commands To Be Strong

God exhorted the Corinthian church through Paul, *"Watch! Stand firm in the faith! Be courageous! Be strong!"* (1 Corinthians 16:13 WEB).

Paul also wrote to the Ephesian church, *"Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might"* (Ephesians 6:10 WEB).

And the final occurrence of God's command to be strong is Paul's exhortation to Timothy, *"You therefore, my child, be strengthened in the grace that is in Christ Jesus"* (2 Timothy 2:1 WEB).

The New Testament Advantage - Strength In Grace

With a superficial glance it would appear that we simply have a list of mighty men and women victorious for God who are passing their key to success on to future generations. Moses, Joshua, David and many more exhort their sons and followings with all their strength to *"be strong."* Without a New Testament faith that may be all that we would have, a hopeless hope in the strength of ourselves. But instead Ephesians 6:10 clarifies how we are to be strong, *"in the Lord, and in the strength of his might"* And 2 Timothy 2:1 clarifies where we get strength, *"in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."* The one who has been tamed by the grace of Jesus Christ need no longer look for deliverance by his own strength, but by Jesus Christ.

Most exhortations to *"be strong"* in the Old Testament concern God's command to His people to fight against their enemies. Israel has always been surrounded by enemies such as Egypt, Assyria, Philistia, Canaan, and Babylon. God's purpose was that Israel would remain separate from these wicked nations and at times fight against them. The advent of Jesus Christ has, however, revealed a whole new battlefield with more dangerous enemies. The grace of Christ has shown to mankind that our own nature is sinful and opposed to God. The enemy is within our own heart. Furthermore, the true enemy that is without is much too great a foe for us to battle without the Lord. Though we may have human enemies from time to time, the true foe behind these contests is the father of lies himself, the devil, who pits man against man in competition, war, and destruction.

The command to *"be strong in grace"* is essential for the believer to continue to abide in Christ. Drawing near to Christ is sure to reveal to us more and more of our own sinfulness. But how are we to continue on this path of confrontation with the ugliness of our own sin? It may be so painful that it would be easier to deny the truth. But can one run from one's self?

Surely the command to *"be strong in the grace that is in Jesus Christ"* is to encourage the follower of Jesus Christ to continue to draw near to God, painful as it may be when God shows us our sin. What ever the sin, it is not too big for Christ! However scarred from past mistakes, God has a purpose for you!

God's Pleasure - Strength in Weakness

Contrary to man's wisdom, God is pleased to demonstrate his power through our weakness. Paul writes of his weakness, *"Concerning this thing, I begged the Lord three times that it might depart from me. He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Most gladly therefore I will rather glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest on me"* (2 Corinthians 12:8-9 WEB). Even in the gospel message itself God pits His foolishness against man's wisdom, *"For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are dying, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise. I will bring the discernment of the discerning to nothing' "* (1 Corinthians 1:18-19 WEB). And most strongly stated by Christ, *"He said to them, 'He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts. For that which is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God" ' "* (Luke 16:15 WEB). It is certainly not a plan of our choosing, but God demonstrates his power in weakness. So be strong in grace!

Strength Without Grace?

But how can so many appear to be strong without a knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ? Only by seeing the crucified Christ can a lost humanity come to know their true weakness and need. Only by seeing Christ's willing sacrifice on their behalf can they rejoice in His salvation.

Beautiful Savior / Trustworthy Lord

Jesus Christ's relationship with us has been identified by many titles within Scripture. Jesus calls himself a *prophet* in Mark 6:4. The writer of Hebrews identifies Jesus as our permanent *priest*, who offered His own blood for us, in Hebrews 7:18-28. Jesus was also revealed to be our *king* in John 18:33-37. In Luke 17:5-10 Jesus compares himself to a *master* while we are his slaves. In John 15:13-15, in Jesus' final hours with his disciples, He specifically raises them from the status of servants to *friends*. What a warm-hearted term for sinners to be called friends of the Lord Jesus Christ, the king of the universe! In Romans 8 we read how those led by the Holy Spirit are designated as sons of God which causes us to cry out to God with our whole hearts, "*Daddy Father!*" And further on in Romans 8 we read that God's purpose is to conform us into the very image of Christ so that we will be *brothers* of Jesus Christ. Sinners like ourselves cannot hope to earn these relationships with Christ by our efforts of the flesh. Rather it is God that brings us through the furnace as a brother of Christ and brother in the family of Christ by grace through faith.

Paul and Peter were the primary New Testament writers that frequently referred to Jesus by yet another title, *Lord and Savior*. Paul opens his letter, "*to Titus, my true child according to a common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior*" (Titus 1:4 WEB). Peter closes his general letter to all Christians, "*But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and forever. Amen*" (2 Peter 3:18 WEB).

In this article we plan to examine more closely the beauty of Jesus Christ as our Savior and His trustworthiness as our Lord. It is essential that we know Christ to be both a beautiful Savior and a trustworthy Lord in order to continue to be His disciple. The commitment required by Christ does not lessen but increases as we draw near to Him. Jesus said, "*So therefore whoever of you who doesn't renounce all that he has, he can't be my disciple*" (Luke 14:33 WEB). We often draw the line far short of everything, reserving certain idols for ourselves. We reason in our hearts that we can give Christ all of one thing hoping to retain the other thing for ourselves. However, Jesus is not speaking with exaggeration or hyperbole here. To be his disciple we must give him everything. Of course even if we do not give everything to him, it is all his anyway! Thus, there is no possible way to give to Christ what is demanded unless one knows Christ as He truly is....

a beautiful Savior and a trustworthy Lord.

Jesus Christ Our Beautiful Savior

As Jesus carried the cross to Golgotha,

28) But Jesus, turning to them, said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, don't weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. 29) For behold, the days are coming in which they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.' 30) Then they will begin to tell the mountains, 'Fall on us!' and tell the hills, 'Cover us.' 31) For if they do these things in the green tree, what will be done in the dry?"

32) There were also others, two criminals, led with him to be put to death. 33) When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified him there with the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left.

34) Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing."

Dividing his garments among them, they cast lots. 35) The people stood watching. The rulers with them also scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others. Let him save himself, if this is the Christ of God, his chosen one!"

Luke 23:28-35 (WEB)

The beauty of Christ's salvation is measured by the extent of the forgiveness he has given. Christ did not merely forgive ignorant or misguided offenses of mankind. He forgave those who crucified him without reason. The forgiveness of Christ from the cross can only be described as beautiful, powerful, overwhelming, flooding, and consuming! His forgiveness is truly beautiful because it comes with the assurance of the guarantee of eternal life. This assurance of forgiveness applies directly to us as well should we ever find ourselves directly in opposition to the God of the universe. May God give us the grace to bring more lost sheep into the fold through the beauty of Christ's forgiveness given personally to us.

Moreover we see that Christ's forgiveness is without condemnation. Christ does not call attention to the wickedness of His executors, though it is obvious. Instead Christ's plea to the Father is *"they don't know what they are doing."* We see further support for this when Paul points out in 1 Corinthians 2:8 (WEB), *"which none of the rulers of this world has known. For had they known it, they wouldn't have crucified the Lord of glory."* Thus the crucifixion of Christ does expose to us our sin, but Christ was never truly in the hands of men. Jesus came to die to demonstrate his grace and mercy to us and to accomplish His mission to atone for mankind's sin. May God give us the grace to bring more lost sheep into the fold through forgiveness without condemnation and extending understanding that we sheep are often deaf, dumb, and blind to how terrible sin really is.

Jesus Christ Our Trustworthy Lord

At one point in Jesus' ministry John the Baptist confessed his unbelief and Jesus likewise rebuked the people's unbelief. Jesus then followed by saying,

Come to me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Matthew 11:28-30 (WEB)

We have all had yokes placed upon us by others who enslaved us in the pursuit of their own idols. Towers of Babel abound and remain to testify to man's insatiable desire to make a name for themselves. Consider a short list of such slavery...the pyramids of Egypt, the cotton fields of the South, Peter the Great, Hitler's Germany, and the Roman Empire to name a few. The sin in our hearts is so inclined to these activities and the worship of the work of our hands that we need a God invasion to bring down our idolatrous towers. Of course, the easiest thing to do is to point at others and talk for hours about how they have taken advantage of us in these ways. The Holy Spirit's work, however, is to show us how we ourselves have placed yokes on others.

Compare the yokes of men with the yoke of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ did not build a tower,

pyramid, or boat. Jesus Christ did not even sit down and instruct his disciples in a 12 point systematic theology. I admittedly feel more comfortable with these types of yokes because the product is concrete, visible, and measurable with boasting in a job well done. The Lord's yoke, however, is so different than the yokes of men. His yoke is easy and his burden light. One of my favorite verses is John 6:28-29 (WEB), *"They said therefore to him, 'What must we do, that we may work the works of God?' Jesus answered them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.' "* My heart is often restless for the next assignment, but Jesus says that the work he wants us to focus on is trusting in him as he works his will in our lives. Jesus Christ is resolutely working toward His certain goal of building the church. Our role, however, is trusting in Christ, and Paul reminds us in Romans 3:27 that there is absolutely no boasting in that. May God help us to wear the yoke of Christ ourselves and free others from yokes of slavery for the yoke of Jesus Christ.

Repentance and Rest or Flight on Swift Horses

God spoke the same tender call to repentance and rest through the great prophet Isaiah.

15) For thus said the Lord Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel, "You will be saved in returning and rest. Your strength will be in quietness and in confidence." You refused, 16) but you said, "No, for we will flee on horses;" therefore you will flee; and, "We will ride on the swift;" therefore those who pursue you will be swift. 17) One thousand will flee at the threat of one. At the threat of five, you will flee until you are left like a beacon on the top of a mountain, and like a banner on a hill.

18) Therefore Yahweh will wait, that he may be gracious to you; and therefore he will be exalted, that he may have mercy on you, for Yahweh is a God of justice. Blessed are all those who wait for him. 19) For the people will dwell in Zion at Jerusalem. You will weep no more. He will surely be gracious to you at the voice of your cry. When he hears you, he will answer you. 20) Though the Lord may give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your teachers won't be hidden any more, but your eyes will see your teachers; 21) and when you turn to the right hand, and when you turn to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way. Walk in it." 22) You shall defile the overlaying of your engraved images of silver, and the plating of your molten images of gold. You shall cast them away as an unclean thing. You shall tell it, "Go away!"

23) He will give the rain for your seed, with which you will sow the ground; and bread of the increase of the ground will be rich and plentiful. In that day, your livestock will feed in large pastures.

Isaiah 30:15-23 (WEB)

This passage in Isaiah now directs us to the real enemy that we need to confront. While it may be true that others have shown us unforgiveness or others have placed yokes on our backs while in the pursuit of their own idols, Isaiah, like an expert archer, directs the Word of God to our own conscience. Repentance and rest has been offered to each of us but we have chosen idols instead of fellowship with the Lord. The beauty of Christ's salvation and the trustworthiness of His Lordship are often rejected for the pursuit of idols. The picture above of flight on horses from the Lord would be enough to make one cry, except for the Lord's compassion even in the midst of our flight. Moreover, a glad day is promised that no longer will idols be in competition with the Lord in our lives. With our own hands we will destroy the idols that plague us in favor of fellowship with the Lord and His people. May God

bring about this heart change both compassionately and quickly!

Conclusion

Our sin problem is so great and woven with the schemes of Satan that we truly are in a helpless plight. We are ensnared in the fowling net in need of the Lord himself to free us. Consider four facts leading to freedom.

First, Jesus is a beautiful savior having already forgiven all the sin of mankind without one word of condemnation. He has completely condemned sin within sinful man, Romans 8:3. He has given grace upon grace to us His people, the sheep of His pasture. Do you believe that Christ has forgiven all your sin past, present and future as well as the sin of your fellow man?

Second, Jesus is a trustworthy Lord. He has no desire to build an earthly kingdom like we often do on the backs of the people. Rather He is building a kingdom of truth and righteousness in the hearts of His people, Luke 17:20-21. Thus we have nothing to fear in giving God our entire heart and committing our lives to His Lordship. Jesus is not a harsh task master!

Third, Isaiah puts his finger directly on the issue at hand, our idols. We may have legitimate grievances against others, but the heart of the matter for our own spiritual condition is our own idols. God wants repentance and rest for us His people, but we have turned from it in pursuit of idols. Skip the common idols of cars, houses, lands, and wealth. Let's dive deeper into idols such as reputation, comfort, security, power, and influence. For each of us to become brothers in Christ these idols must certainly die.

Fourth, God has a great promise for us in Isaiah 30:22. We each know what idols we struggle with. We may even admit to ourselves that we love them, and therefore hate them all the more because of our addiction to them and because of their position between ourselves and the Lord and His family. God's great promise is that He will change our heart so that we will willingly cast these idols aside so that there will be nothing obscuring the fellowship between ourselves and our beautiful savior and trustworthy Lord and His family.

Lord Jesus come quickly and remove our remaining idols so that we can see you face to face!

Blue Sky



**I am disciplined by
the grace of Jesus Christ**

BODY BUILDING

Build the Body

Years ago anxiety attacks and irrational sinful choices nearly took me out of the race. Yet our unchanging Christ and his unfailing grace enabled me to run again in his service, though not without difficult hurdles to overcome, also with his help. On the physical side the anxiety attacks removed sweet sleep and the anxiety medication added 50 pounds to my body. On the spiritual side God used these years to remove a spirit of independence and add understanding from his Word. This article compares some principles I learned in exercising for physical fitness with the even more important principles essential to train for spiritual fitness. These principles will help our body building goals.

Paul reminded Timothy, *“Exercise yourself toward godliness. For bodily exercise has some value, but godliness has value in all things, having the promise of the life which is now, and of that which is to come”* (I Timothy 4:7b-8 WEB). So there is value to physical exercise and even greater value in spiritual exercise toward godliness.

Physical exercise strengthens the physical body. Spiritual exercise serves to strengthen God’s family.

11) He gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, shepherds, and teachers; 12) for the perfecting of the saints, to the work of serving, to the building up of the body of Christ, 13) until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a full grown man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14) that we may no longer be children, tossed back and forth and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in craftiness, after the wiles of error; 15) but speaking truth in love, we may grow up in all things into him who is the head, Christ, 16) from whom all the body, being fitted and knit together through that which every joint supplies, according to the working in measure of each individual part, makes the body increase to the building up of itself in love.

Ephesians 4:11-16 (WEB)

The goal is to increase in love! Paul exhorts Timothy,

1) You therefore, my child, be strengthened in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2) The things which you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit the same things to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. 3) You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4) No soldier on duty entangles himself in the affairs of life, that he may please him who enrolled him as a soldier. 5) Also, if anyone competes in athletics, he isn't crowned unless he has competed by the rules. 6) The farmer who labors must be the first to get a share of the crops. 7) Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things.

II Timothy 2:1-7 (WEB)

Leadership requires enduring hardship, following to rules, and hard work. Leadership requires sweat!

Set Goals

The first step in getting anywhere is to determine the goal and list the steps to get there. If you plan to go nowhere, you are sure to get there! For example, if you want to lose fat and gain muscle you must establish a goal and the steps to follow. Likewise, Peter instructs us with a very specific list of steps to get to the ever greater goal of being a fruitful Christian.

5) Yes, and for this very cause adding on your part all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence; and in moral excellence, knowledge; 6) and in knowledge, self-control; and in self-control perseverance; and in perseverance godliness; 7) and in godliness brotherly affection; and in brotherly affection, love. 8) For if these things are yours and abound, they make you to not be idle or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

II Peter 1:5-8 (WEB)

Paul also teaches that the lesser Christian goals of teaching truth and working miracles only serve the greater goal of growing to love one another like Christ loved us.

12:27) Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. 28) God has set some in the assembly: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracle workers, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, and various kinds of languages. 29) Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all miracle workers? 30) Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with various languages? Do all interpret? 31) But earnestly desire the best gifts. Moreover, I show a most excellent way to you.

13:1) If I speak with the languages of men and of angels, but don't have love, I have become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal. 2) If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but don't have love, I am nothing. 3) If I give away all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, but don't have love, it profits me nothing.

4) Love is patient and is kind. Love doesn't envy. Love doesn't brag, is not proud, 5) doesn't behave itself inappropriately, doesn't seek its own way, is not provoked, takes no account of evil; 6) doesn't rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; 7) bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. 8) Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will be done away with. Where there are various languages, they will cease. Where there is knowledge, it will be done away with. 9) For we know in part and we prophesy in part; 10) but when that which is complete has come, then that which is partial will be done away with. 11) When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child. Now that I have become a man, I have put away childish things. 12) For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know fully, even as I was also fully known. 13) But now faith, hope, and love remain—these three. The greatest of these is love.

I Corinthians 12:27-13:13 (WEB)

We may have set a New Year's resolution to lose a few pounds. How many of us have set a goal to gain more love? What scale would we use to weigh our losses or gains?

Drink Water

Many fitness articles suggest that the single most important thing everyone needs to do to improve their physical health is to drink enough water. And drinking more of Christ's living water is needed for our spiritual health.

10) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

11) The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. So where do you get that living water? 12) Are you greater than our father, Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his children and his livestock?"

13) Jesus answered her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, 14) but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never thirst again; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."

15) The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I don't get thirsty, neither come all the way here to draw."

John 4:10-15 (WEB)

Sinners like us need to drink more forgiveness daily to have no doubt that Christ is an infinite supply of the waters of forgiveness already forgiving all our sins in the past, present, and future.

Eat Right

While joining my wife to the grocery store I marveled at the number of isles of junk food. To grow in physical fitness one must eat right. We need to eat *Super Foods* like yams, turkey, and broccoli. We need to avoid *junk foods* like soda, potato chips, and ice cream. We need to eat unprocessed foods like apples and peanuts and avoid processed foods like apple pie and peanut butter. We need to eat more meals per day with smaller portions. You cannot reach a goal of gaining weight or losing weight without counting calories. You cannot eat right without including proteins, carbohydrates, and healthy fats. Neither can you eat right spiritually without applying similar wisdom and discipline.

Peter offers a simply admonition to avoid the bad and long for the good.

Putting away therefore all wickedness, all deceit, hypocrisies, envies, and all evil speaking, as newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the Word, that with it you may grow, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious

I Peter 2:1-3 (WEB)

Are you eating spiritual junk food? This recipe will bring spiritual health.

Isaiah asks us why we waste our money on junk food and invites us to eat that which is good.

*1) Hey! Come, everyone who thirsts, to the waters!
Come, he who has no money, buy, and eat!
Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.*

*2 Why do you spend money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which doesn't satisfy?
Listen diligently to me, and eat that which is good,
and let your soul delight itself in richness.*

*3) Turn your ear, and come to me.
Hear, and your soul will live:
and I will make an everlasting covenant with you,
even the sure mercies of David.*

Isaiah 55:1-3 (WEB)

This diet will bring spiritual growth.

Exercise

Every plan to improve physical health includes not only eating right, but exercise. The best books on exercise recommend a mix of aerobic exercise for a healthy heart and strength training to improve muscle tone. With a full-time job, family, and church commitments my schedule is packed. However, you would be surprised what a half hour a day can do! If you are too busy to care for your body or too busy to care for your car they will each spend more time with the mechanic and hit the junk yard sooner than you may wish. So care for your car and exercise your body so they can serve your spiritual life.

Physical exercise is hard work and spiritual exercise is even harder. Paul coaches us thus,

24) Don't you know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run like that, that you may win. 25) Every man who strives in the games exercises self-control in all things. Now they do it to receive a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible. 26) I therefore run like that, not aimlessly. I fight like that, not beating the air, 27) but I beat my body and bring it into submission, lest by any means, after I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected.

I Corinthians 9:24-27 (WEB)

And Paul cheers from his finish line,

7) I have fought the good fight. I have finished the course. I have kept the faith. 8) From now on, the crown of righteousness is stored up for me, which

the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that day; and not to me only, but also to all those who have loved his appearing.

II Timothy 4:7-8 (WEB)

Beware

Many obstacles can hinder a plan to improve physical fitness. We can be too busy, discouraged, sick, disabled, lazy, undisciplined, etc. Some of these same problems and others can also hinder spiritual growth and fitness. Many enemies are fighting against our spiritual growth.

Maturing spiritually does not happen automatically. Though physical maturation cannot be stopped, spiritual maturation is easily stopped. Stop searching the Bible, stop seeking the Lord in prayer, and stop openhearted fellowship and you will stop growing spiritually. Stop eating good spiritual food and you will be spiritually stunted.

12) For although by this time you should be teachers, you again need to have someone teach you the rudiments of the first principles of the revelations of God. You have come to need milk, and not solid food. 13) For everyone who lives on milk is not experienced in the word of righteousness, for he is a baby. 14) But solid food is for those who are full grown, who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern good and evil.

Hebrews 5:12-14 (WEB)

Most foot races are usually free from enemies seeking to trip us. Our spiritual race, however, has many enemies eager to trip us, including Satan, unbelievers, and our own sinful hearts. Paul warned the Galatians,

6) For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision amounts to anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith working through love. 7) You were running well! Who interfered with you that you should not obey the truth? 8) This persuasion is not from him who calls you. 9) A little yeast grows through the whole lump. 10) I have confidence toward you in the Lord that you will think no other way. But he who troubles you will bear his judgment, whoever he is.

Galatians 5:6-10 (WEB)

And who is interfering with your spiritual growth; Satan, unbelievers, or yourself?

Those who excel know a vital principle of growth. Choose your best friends carefully. Choose excellent role models for your goals. You want to be a star athlete? Hang out with the best athletes! You want to eat healthy? Avoid McDonalds! Friends and role models bring a small pain of reminder when we fall short, but this is a blessing compared to the greater pain of not finishing the race. Paul said, *"Don't be deceived! "Evil companionships corrupt good morals"* (I Corinthians 15:33 WEB). Solomon said, *"Faithful are the wounds of a friend; although the kisses of an enemy are profuse"* (Proverbs 27:6 WEB).

Measure Progress

Good goals and good friends will also help us measure our progress. The only way to know you are making progress in losing fat or gaining muscle in physical training is to pinch your waistline and chart your increases in strength. Measuring our progress against objective goals tells us facts. Lying to ourselves or fudging our measurements may provide temporary happiness, but no long term pleasure for the hard work of reaching meaningful goals. Security in God's love enables us to fail yet begin each day with renewed motivation to give our all to the goal before us. If this reminder is needed for physical failures, how much more for spiritual failures!

Likewise only authentic spiritual growth is worthwhile.

These people draw near to me with their mouth, and honor me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. And in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrine rules made by men.

Matthew 15:8-9 (WEB)

Honesty with ourselves and friends can help us recover from a fall.

1) Brothers, even if a man is caught in some fault, you who are spiritual must restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; looking to yourself so that you also aren't tempted. 2) Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. 3) For if a man thinks himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. 4) But let each man examine his own work, and then he will have reason to boast in himself, and not in someone else.

Galatians 6:1-4 (WEB)

Sickness, Disease, and Weakness

We may wish we had the strength of athletes or the beauty of super models, but physical excellence is rare in our fallen world. However, most of us have some malady that challenges our physical fitness. How much more is spiritual fitness hampered by our weaknesses! The Scriptures say physical sickness may even be God's punishment for our spiritual sickness. Paul cautioned,

29) For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy way eats and drinks judgment to himself if he doesn't discern the Lord's body. 30) For this cause many among you are weak and sickly, and not a few sleep.

I Corinthians 11:29-30 (WEB)

1) In other cases our physical weakness is designed to display God's strength. Jesus said, As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. 2) His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" 3) Jesus answered, "This man didn't sin, nor did his parents; but, that the works of God might be revealed in him."

John 9:1-3 (WEB)

Whatever the case we need grace.

Self or Service

Physical fitness has some value but not for serving self. Physical fitness can help us labor physically to serve others, endure the hardship of missionary labor, be alert with our minds, encourage us with our usefulness, and reflect God's image in us. Physical fitness may also ward off sickness and increase length of life, but curiously the Bible says that honoring Christ and honoring your parents are even more significant requirements for physical fitness than eating right and exercise, I Corinthians 11:29-30 and Ephesians 6:1-3.

And if we are motivated to be physically fit there is even greater value to spiritual fitness. The spiritually fit are able to build up the body of Christ with the goal of maximizing our love for one another. Paul pressed himself and us like an athletic coach toward the goal. Christ set an example of eating the healthiest food.

31) In the meanwhile, the disciples urged him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." 32) But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you don't know about." 33) The disciples therefore said to one another, "Has anyone brought him something to eat?" 34) Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work."

John 4:31-34 (WEB)

Are you sweating as you train for spiritual fitness? Are you eating Jesus spiritual food? Are we disciples of Narcissus in our love of our physical bodies? Or are we disciples of Jesus in our love for the body of Christ?

Measuring Your Handle on Love (that is your Love Handles)

1. You must be a Christian to love with God's love, I John 4:7-21.
2. You must strive to be an effective Christian lover, II Peter 1:3-11.
 - Christian love begins with trust and obedience in Jesus Christ.
 - Moral excellence must be added to faith.
 - Knowledge must be added to moral excellence.
 - Self-control must be added to knowledge.
 - Patience must be added to self-control.
 - Godliness must be added to patience.
 - Brotherly affection must be added to patience.
 - Effective Christian love is the goal.
3. You must have the attitude of Christ to know sacrificial love, I Peter 4.
4. You must do good for the family of believers, Galatians 6:10.
5. Are you willing to do good for unbelievers with the gospel? Romans 5:6-8.
6. You must help those in need to prove God's love is in you, I John 3:16-24.
7. Are you honest about you sin with Christian friends? Hebrews 3:12-15.

Breakaway Basketball



Carry On My Wayward Son, by Kerry Livgren: For the Rock hearted among us

*Once I rose above the noise and confusion
Just to get a glimpse beyond the illusion
I was soaring ever higher, but I flew too high
Though my eyes could see I still was a blind man
Though my mind could think I still was a mad man
I hear the voices when I'm dreamin', I can hear them say*

*Carry on my wayward son,
For there'll be peace when you are done
Lay your weary head to rest
Now don't you cry no more*

*Masquerading as a man with a reason
My charade is the event of the season
And if I claim to be a wise man, it surely means that I don't know
On a stormy sea of moving emotion
Tossed about I'm like a ship on the ocean
I set a course for winds of fortune, but I hear the voices say*

*Carry on my wayward son,
For there'll be peace when you are done
Lay your weary head to rest
Now don't you cry no more*

*Carry on, you will always remember
Carry on, nothing equals the splendor
Now your life's no longer empty
Surely heaven waits for you*

*Carry on my wayward son,
For there'll be peace when you are done
Lay your weary head to rest
Now don't you cry no more*

Dear Heavenly Father, I pray that you would continue to protect us your son's from our own waywardness and bring us safely home to your promised rest.

Christian Discipleship 365 Boot Camp like a Soldier, Athlete, and Farmer

Paul said to his man in 2 Timothy 2:1-7 (WEB),

1) You therefore, my child, be strengthened in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2) The things which you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit the same things to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. 3) You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4) No soldier on duty entangles himself in the affairs of life, that he may please him who enrolled him as a soldier. 5) Also, if anyone competes in athletics, he isn't crowned unless he has competed by the rules. 6) The farmer who labors must be the first to get a share of the crops. 7) Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things.

Do we Christians live our lives for Christ with the same duty of a soldier? With the same sportsmanship of an athlete? With the same hard labors of a farmer? Enlist in this boot camp program to challenge your faith and grow.

Christian Discipleship 365 Boot Camp

Christian Perspectives on Strength and Beauty

Today I chatted with Jane, an elderly Catholic believer who often sits on a doorstep near my office. Jane volunteered the story of a young woman from her church who offends by showing cleavage, too much leg, and too little discretion with her beauty. Jane went on to say that girls shouldn't dress that way in God's house. I commented that the whole world is God's house and asked Jane if she could talk to the girl about modesty. Jane said she would never do that. Unfortunately Jane was willing to tell me about this girl, but hadn't the courage to persuade the girl to save the display of her valuables for her husband. If only we would have courage to apply Jesus' instructions in Matthew 18:15-20 to this area of life as well.

After work, the neighbor kids dropped by to show me their puppy. The brother showed me how the puppy can growl, while I asked the sister (7th grade) what she thought of a recent Bible club we hosted. I explained again that we are all sinners, but the good news is that Jesus has forgiven our sin. She turned the subject to her previous pastor, saying he had judged her for wearing immodest clothing. I reflected how to answer her as she stood before me with skin tight shorts, sassy T-shirt, her hands on cocked hips, and her navel suggestively revealed. I asked her if she judges herself.

Following is a challenge that we would judge our own display of strength and beauty, saving us the embarrassment of correction by others or the pain of God's discipline. And that we would have the courage to exhort those in our care to be humble with strength and modest with beauty.

Strength and Beauty Fallen

Strength and beauty in man and woman is an incredible reflection of the engineering and artistry of God our creator. All creation proves God to be the master of function and form. Consider God's brilliant engineering in a simple tree or flower, as well as the beautiful artistry. Likewise, consider God's creation of man and woman, the reflection of his own image!

Yet since our eviction from the Garden of Eden, the strength and beauty we see today is defaced by the corruption of sin. There is absolutely nothing existing in this world today close to the perfection of strength and beauty found in Adam and Eve before they ate the forbidden fruit. Since then we see strength and beauty marred by weakness, ugliness, brokenness, sickness, disease, obesity, and genetic weakness. Yet, perhaps through the fortune of youth, a good pedigree, hours in the gym, pounds of makeup, hours in front of the mirror, and the help of Photoshop experts we can imagine a glimpse of the strength and beauty in that perfect garden so long ago. Yet even so, the strength and beauty we lust after today is a thin veneer of cosmetic painted over corrupt and blackened hearts, some of whom would sell their souls to Wal-Mart magazine racks for a buck or worse, parade their sexuality like a runway model in my friend Jane's church and churches all across the land from liberal Catholic to conservative Baptist.

In truth a veneer of strength and beauty painted over a sinful heart is even more revolting and sinister than outright weakness and ugliness. Suppose I handed you a piece of tempting cake from the *Death by Chocolate* recipe book and just as you raised a huge fork-full to your lips I say, "*The cake is more than meets the eye. I also added a cup of Botulinum.*" You then

ask, *"What is Botulinum?"* I then answer, *"Botulinum is the deadliest poison known to mankind."* You then freak out and scream, *"What, are you a mad man?!"* I try to calm you down saying, *"Ok, ok, just relax. We don't have to eat the cake, but let's just leave it on the counter so the rest of the family can enjoy its beauty."* You then push me out of the way with a singular determined goal to strip the icing from the cake and expose the poison so all can avoid the danger. Strength and beauty, like everything, is fallen and a veneer of strength and beauty over a rebellious heart is still poison. We lust after the strength and beauty we see in the men and women around us, but it is icing over a cake filled with Botulinum. If we take a bite we will suffer and die.

Strength and Beauty Idolized

Americans spend millions if not billions on cosmetics, diets, gyms, fashion, plastic surgery, and more. The lust for strength and beauty and the praise they get from this world grips America's heart. Man and woman is the pinnacle of God's creation, so the worship of strength and beauty in man and woman is certainly not an unexpected idolatry. However, to replace worship of God with worship of even the best of his creation saddens and angers him. For example, Romans Chapter 1 explains that God punishes idolaters by handing us over to homosexuality. When we praise men and women for their strong and beautiful bodies instead of praising God for his wonderful design, God throws a wrench of perversion into our lives. God is not vindictive in doing this, but his love demands that our eyes be captivated by him. Thus he may hold our rebellious heads under the filth of sin until we repent and gasp for forgiveness.

We should be gripped in fear by these concepts. However, too often we do not read the Bible, or if we do, we blind our eyes to the blazing passion God has for our hearts. He is white hot with burning love for our full devotion, and will burn every idol that stands in the way to ashes. Inconceivably he wills us to pervert his own good creation should we idolize it.

Furthermore, if we happen to be graced with strength and beauty in this fallen world shouldn't we be humbled if not embarrassed by such a gift when so many do not have strength or beauty? What if a father gave one twin son a brand new Mustang convertible for Christmas and gave the other a bike from the junk yard? If hearts were right the Mustang boy would immediately negotiate with his father about this and have compassion on his brother, while the bike boy, though disappointed, would also trust that his father knew best and be content with the bike. However, if hearts were not right the Mustang boy would cruise down the street showing off his gift with no thought that his brother had less and little thanks to his father. Likewise the bike boy would throw his bike in the trash in anger at his father and envy towards his brother. But we know that our Heavenly Father is not this cruel. He is not cruel at all, but he is crafty! In this world he is not Santa Claus, but the tester of our hearts and he does this very thing all the time to test our hearts. Are you passing the test? Are you modest with the strength, beauty, and other good things God has given you? Are you asking God for compassion on the weak, ugly, and those that have less or nothing? Or are you angry at God over the broken things in your life? God is planning an eternity with every tear wiped away and all his children will be graced with perfect strength and beauty with no one lacking one desire. However, until then he tests our hearts with inequity and suffering. He does this to build charity in his disciples. He commands us to bow to him in dependent prayer without anger and to dress ourselves with good deeds instead of immodesty, II Timothy 2:8-10. He commands us to deny man's praise for superficial strength and beauty and instead to boast in our weakness to receive praise from him. Paul shows us how in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.

Strength and Beauty Graced

Do not lose hope or give way to pursue the idols of strength and beauty in the human body. We have his promise that our bodies will be perfected in strength and beauty in

eternity! Paul writes,

42) So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown perishable; it is raised imperishable. 43) It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. 44) It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body and there is also a spiritual body.

I Corinthians 15:42-44 (WEB)

Consider another father who promised his sons brand new race cars when they reached maturity. One doubted his father's promise, and so gave his life to earning money to buy his own race car. Sadly in the effort he ignored his family, sacrificed his friendships, and had no time to visit his dad. However, the other believed the promise and so drove a beat up car, saving his time and money to serve his family, be with friends, and visit his dad. But we are not discussing auto bodies, but instead desire for strength and beauty in our physical bodies. A wise person will care for their used car investing just enough oil changes, wax jobs, and inspections to maximize its useful life. However, he also knows that one day the car will hit the junk heap and cars are not as important as people. The same is true of our fallen bodies, for they too will hit the junk heap one day and bodies are not as important as souls. A foolish person, however, idolizes their car as a status symbol for man's praise, or hopes for status from a strong beautiful body rather than from Christ.

Two Extra-Biblical Parables

A good father raised three sons and wanted each to be a trophy winner. In fact this is the very father who invented trophies. He also loved to see his sons excel in sport. But the father grew concerned about a subtle competitive spirit between his sons. The sons never quarreled openly, but just below the surface anger and envy undermined true brotherhood. So the father designed a crafty plan, a foot race between his three sons with three trophies to be awarded. The race was finished and the first son received a large trophy. The second son also received a large, but slightly smaller trophy. The third son received a tiny trophy. The two sons' joy over their big trophies ended the competition between them initially, but a different competition began. The sons with big trophies took their trophies out of the display case more and more, craving the attention that the beautiful trophies created among their friends. The second son with the large but slightly smaller trophy also figured out how to carry his trophy so that his friends couldn't tell that his was smaller. The new competition created a worse situation as the boys became more self-centered, thinking only about showing off their trophies at school, work, and church. Now the third place son was utterly humiliated with his tiny trophy. He kept his trophy locked in the display case at all times telling everyone that he was more modest than his brothers. He pouted saying that he did not want a big trophy, though no one believed him. A friend then said to the father that the foot race seemed a terrible idea in the end. The father smiled saying that his crafty plan to expose the hearts of his sons was only just beginning. You see this wise father cared more for the hearts of his sons than his reputation and so he dared to expose their selfishness and envy so it could be cured. Years later the three sons' eyes were opened to their selfish pride because they became vile even to their friends who first admired their trophies. So the three sons asked forgiveness of each other and their dad. Their father then rewarded all of them with grand trophies, the foremost being the heart of gold he gave them through his crafty plan.

An incredibly rich father died and left an inheritance to his two sons. The father not only was the wealthiest man that ever lived, but he also was the wisest and wanted his sons to be wealthy and wise as well. And so he left \$999,999 to his youngest son and \$1 to his eldest son. Both sons were men of character with hardly a flaw perceptible. However, their father,

who knew them best, noted that the elder was at times self-righteous toward the younger. When he received \$1 for his inheritance he was more than disappointed. Yet he fashioned a bold smile of gratitude for his \$1 and buried his anger toward his father and brother down so deep that he forgot he was angry himself. The father also noted that the younger was at times irresponsible, leaving the work for the older. When he received the \$999,999 his joy over the inheritance left little room for concern over his brother. He imagined that his father arbitrarily chose him for the greater gift and he gladly received it. However, over time the younger brother's irresponsibility became manifest. He became indiscreet with his wealth. He allowed his big bucks to bulge out of his wallet and shirt and pants pockets. It seems stupid that he would flaunt his wealth rather than keep it safely, but his unscrupulous friends actually encouraged the behavior because they enjoyed looking at his money. The older brother, however, became indignant; saying that money was evil and he wanted nothing to do with it. Yet their father had carefully explained that not money, but the lust for money is evil. Eventually the irresponsible sons' wealth shrank and his insensible friends left. He had learned how to display his big bucks to get the attention of others, but now with the bucks gone he confessed his error and turned to a sensible friendship with his older brother. The older brother took pity on him and brought him into his home. The meager inheritance of the older brother taught him to serve, and he became wealthy with cheer and hospitality. Imagine their surprise when a relative visited with the remainder of their inheritance handing \$1,000,000 to each son with a note from their father. "My sons do not fret the past inequity for that was not really your inheritance, but my investment in your character. My older son, I hope you have learned that money is not as important as wisdom and good friends. My younger son, I hope you have learned that wisdom and good friends are more important than money. Now take your true inheritance and serve others with wisdom." Prayerful humility and modesty is virtuous with all kinds of wealth, from the possession of big bucks to the possession of strength and beauty.

A Biblical Strategy for Protecting Valuables

Paul counsels, *"Every Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction [training] in righteousness"* (II Timothy 3:16 WEB). The Bible is useful to teach ourselves what to believe and how to behave. If someone believes or behaves wrongly they must be reproved. When they repent they should be shown the correct way. Christian character is trained by repeating this process as often as needed. Why does God want us to bow our strength in prayer and reserve our beauty through modesty? What valuables is God protecting? We save our strength and beauty to serve God's purpose. We protect our bodies from abuse or misuse by ourselves or evil men. We save our consciences from defilement by disobedience. We respect others who have less or nothing.

Conclusion

Strength bowed in prayer and beauty reserved by modesty is not to hide what is weak or ugly, but to protect and preserve what is good, the strength and beauty that he has given us. A Christian perspective on strength and beauty should cause us to fear the Lord's discipline if we idolize his creation, to humbly and modestly serve God and others with the good things we have as God directs, to compassionately consider others who have less or nothing, to boast in our weakness and ugliness rather than our strengths and beauty, and finally to wait prayerfully for the day when all God's people will be perfected in strength and beauty for all eternity. We should behave thus, but sadly we still remain sinners. We often do not gain his strength in prayer, but raise our strength in anger. We often do not gain his beauty with good deeds and modesty, but display our beauty immodestly. God help us to obey the Lord and receive his fatherly protection in our lives.

A summary handout follows.

Charted

Perspectives	Strength	Beauty
Generally	Admired in men	Admired in women
Their Movies	Action adventure	Chick flick
Their Goal	Be a powerful stud	Be a beautiful babe
His Command	I Timothy 2:8 Prayer, not anger or force	I Timothy 2:9-10 Good deeds, not immodesty
His Warning!	Isaiah 22:16-18 Mighty man may be hurled	Proverbs 11:22 Beautiful woman may lack
Our Pitfalls...	Judges 16:18-21 Trust in his own strength Hide insecurity with strength Strength w/o wisdom is lame No true satisfaction	Ezekiel 16:15 Trust in her own beauty Hide insecurity with beauty Beauty w/o discretion is ugly No true satisfaction
Value Now?	I Timothy 4:8 Some value	Proverbs 31:22 Finely clothed
His Wisdom	Jeremiah 9:23-24 Boast that you know God	I Peter 3:3-5 Inner beauty of great worth
Our Goal	A man who prays	A woman who serves
Our Prize	I Corinthians 15:42-44 Raised powerful, glorious	I Corinthians 15:42-44 Raised powerful, glorious

Christian Teaching

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1. BEFORE STUDYING GOD, (prolegomena)

What is Theology?

Theology is the study or science of God, his works, and his ongoing relationship with his works. More specifically stated it is the discipline which gives a systematic statement of Christian truth based on the Christian Scriptures. This statement is placed in the context of the current world situation using contemporary language with a goal to relate it to practical life issues. A good Christian theology is then Biblical, systematic, relevant, contemporary, and practical.

This paper is a systematic study of Christian doctrine. We have examined the Scriptures in order to declare facts about each of the eleven topics listed in the table of contents. Systematic Theology is dependent upon Biblical Theology which insists that all Bible passages be interpreted accurately. Systematic Theology is also dependent upon Historical Theology which insists that we must consider the observations and interpretations of Christian Theologians throughout history. And finally Systematic Theology is dependent upon Christian Philosophical Theology which insists that all Theology must coincide with reality.

Any religion or philosophy begins with presuppositions. These presuppositions are the beginning point or the foundation of the system of belief that follows. This paper explicitly begins with the presupposition that *"There exists one all knowing, all powerful, loving, just, and holy God, whom created everything and whom all men have consciously rejected in favor of idols, who has revealed himself in nature, history, and human design, and in the 66 original inerrant autographs of the Old and New Testament Christian Scriptures, the source for all Christian belief and practice."* This systematic Theology will be founded on this presupposition.

Theology and Philosophy

Understanding the possible relationships between Theology and human philosophy is important because it will have a radical effect upon our belief and practice of the truth. There are six main ways to intersect Theology and human philosophy. 1) Theology and human philosophy are opposed. Truth for the Christian's belief and practice is revealed only through the Scriptures and philosophy is useless. 2) Theology is the source of truth while human philosophy may contain truth, it can never bring truth greater than the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. 3) Theological truth is revealed only through the Scripture, but human philosophy can be useful to elucidate this truth. 3) Theology can be established by human philosophy. 4) Theology must be proved by human philosophy. 5) Pragmatism, existentialism,

analytical philosophy, process philosophy, or others provide the content for Theology. Our presupposition requires us to adopt number 2 as the relationship between Theology and human philosophy.

The Method of Theology

Various systematic Theologies have been developed through history by individuals and Christian groups. We contend that according to our presupposition there is only one truth because there is only one God and only one Scripture message from Him. Therefore differences among Christian theologies must be reduced to 1) both are right and there is miscommunication, 2) one is right and one is wrong, or 3) both are wrong. One's method of pursuing God, the knowledge of God, truth, and Bible fact needs to reflect our presupposition that there is one God and one Bible message. Thus our method in developing a good Christian Theology is 1) to insure our conclusions are in agreement with good Bible interpretation and that the Bible is the source of all our conclusions, 2) to insure that our conclusions have given consideration to Bible interpretations from other Christians throughout history since this paper or our conclusions are not infallible but only God and his word are infallible, and 3) to insure our conclusions are not in contradiction with the created world around us.

Theology and Critical Study of the Bible

Since our presupposition causes us to depend upon the Christian Scriptures we also need to speak about the various types of examination scholars have given to validate or invalidate the Scriptures. Form criticism for example attempts to answer the question as to how any given Bible text evolved from the original revelation to its current textual form. Redaction criticism as another example attempts to answer the question as to how the author or authors of the text in question acted to produce the current textual form. These are excellent sciences and can be useful for the defense of Christianity.

However, to guard against those attempting to undermine our presupposition and resultant Christian beliefs we also need to establish guidelines to evaluate Form, Redaction, and other types of critical studies of the Scriptural text. 1) Biblical criticisms which are against the miraculous are in error. 2) Biblical criticisms which use circular reasoning are in error. 3) Biblical criticisms which depend upon inferences are in error. 4) Biblical criticisms which are arbitrary or subjective are in error. 5) Biblical criticisms which presuppose that faith and reason are opposed are in error. 6) Biblical criticisms which multiply probabilities in order to make conclusions need to be exposed for what they are, less probable.

Contemporizing the Christian Message

Since we are declaring a systematic Christian Theology in this paper we also need to answer the question of what is the abiding essence of Christianity through history and how is this made contemporary in each culture. Various things have been suggested as the abiding essence of the Christian religion. These include 1) the presence of a visible Christian church, 2) acts of God throughout history, 3) the experiences of believers, 4) doctrines, and 5) the Christian way of life. We can trace any one of these things through the history of Christianity. In keeping with our presupposition, however, we believe the abiding essence of Christianity through the ages to be the presence of God the Holy Spirit and his word, the Bible, and this abiding essence is made contemporary when believers in the midst of their own culture and time period begin to believe and practice the Bible.

Theology and Its Language

Some have jeopardized the importance of truth in the Christian faith by suggesting that Christianity is something beyond propositional truth. We reject this idea and rather believe that the truths contained in the Christian Bible are essential to even bring love and change of heart into the Christian's life. Others have rejected the possibility of extracting truth from the Bible expressed in contemporary language in favor of locating seeming paradoxes and unexplainable mysteries from the Bible. We also reject this idea and assert that the Bible does express very clear and certain truth which we must believe and apply. Whatever

continues to remain unclear should be prayerfully examined and discussed. And still others have chosen to adopt the language of particular theological systems without admitting its faults or acknowledging the truth contained in other Christian theologies. We believe the solution to this disunity is to encourage all Christians toward simplicity in expression of Biblical truth as well as favoring the use of Biblical terminology rather than the terminology from a particular Christian sect.

2. A STUDY OF KNOWING GOD, (revelation)

How can man know God? If man is to know God, God must reveal something of himself to man. And God has done this universally to all men and particularly to those men who have the Christian Scriptures.

God's Universal Revelation

Has God revealed something of himself universally to all people? Yes. God has revealed something of himself to each individual person that has ever lived through His creation. (Psalm 19:1-6, Romans 1:18-20, Romans, Acts 14:17).

What has God revealed of himself universally to all people? The heavens and the skies declare the glory of God. God's invisible qualities, his eternal power, and divine nature have been clearly seen and understood from what has been made in creation. God does these things universally to all mankind. And God has also revealed himself in providence to each individual by determining every moment and the exact places each should live so that people would perhaps seek him. (Psalm 19:1-6, Romans 1:18-20, Acts 14:17, Acts 17:26).

Can people be saved through God's universal revelation of himself? No. The knowledge of God given universally to all people is only enough for condemnation. The default status of all people under God's universal revelation of himself is condemnation. The salvation of individual men is received only through faith in Jesus Christ, as revealed in God's particular revelation, the Christian Scriptures. (John 3:17-18, Romans 2:12-16, Acts 4:8-12).

God's Particular Revelation The Christian Scriptures

Has God revealed himself particularly to some people? Yes. God has revealed himself universally to all people to some degree, but particularly to some people to a much greater degree. (Matthew 13:10-17).

What has God revealed of himself particularly to some people? God has revealed himself particularly to some men through miracles, prophets speaking on behalf of God, Jesus Christ, the testimonies of Christ's Apostles, and Scripture. (John 10:37-38, 2 Timothy 3:16, Hebrews 1:1-4, Hebrews 2:1-4, Ephesians 2:19-22).

Does any person know God completely or perfectly? The Christian has the mind of Christ and so is able to make judgments about all things. And yet in another sense no one has known or even now knows the mind of the Lord. (Romans 11:33-36, 1 Corinthians 2:15-16).

Can people be saved through God's particular revelation of himself? Yes. Moreover God's particular revelation of Jesus Christ is the only way to be saved. Faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to receive salvation. Those who receive Jesus Christ by faith will know they have eternal life. Those who reject Jesus Christ remain self-condemned. (Acts 4:8-12, John 14:6, Revelation 21:6-8).

Is God's particular revelation propositional or personal? God's particular revelation concerns propositional truth about the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ the Son of God, lived, died for our sins, was raised to life on the third day, appeared to the Apostles, and ascended to heaven where he intercedes for us to this day. Christian truth needs to point to the person of Jesus Christ. All efforts to demonstrate the love of Christ to others needs to point people to the person of Jesus Christ and not ourselves. Any ministry that does not point people to faith in the person of Jesus Christ is not Christian ministry. (1 Corinthians 15:1-11, 2

Corinthians 4:5, 1 John 2:6, 1 John 4:1-6)

The Preservation of Revelation: Inspiration

What is the inspired Word of God? The inspired Word of God is the 39 books of the Old Testament Scripture and the 27 books of the New Testament Scripture.

How has God inspired the Christian Scriptures? All Christian Scripture is God-breathed through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. God effectively used human personality through the use of different men to write the Scriptures and yet all is equally inspired. The Spirit of Christ in men pointed to the suffering and glory of Christ. Men were carried along by the Holy Spirit, not their own will, as they prophesied the Word of God. (2 Timothy 3:16-17, 1 Peter 1:10-12, 2 Peter 1:20-21).

To what extent are the Christian Scriptures inspired? The Christian Scriptures in the original autograph are fully and completely inspired. There is no Christian Scripture that is not inspired. (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

How intensively are the Christian Scriptures inspired? The Christian Scriptures *in the original autograph* are fully and completely inspired in content, meaning, grammar, and word choice. There is no aspect of Christian Scripture that is not inspired. (Proverbs 30:5, 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The Dependability of God's Word: Inerrancy

Are the Christian Scriptures inerrant? Yes. The inspired Word of God in the original autographs contains absolutely no error. (Psalm 18:30, Proverbs 30:5).

To what degree are the Christian Scriptures without error? There are absolutely no errors in the inspired Word of God *in the original autograph* in content, word choice, grammar, or meaning. (Psalm 18:30, Proverbs 30:5).

What about apparent errors in the Christian Scriptures? There do remain some unexplained inconsistencies in the Christian Scriptures. Since we do not have the original autographs, understanding the remaining inconsistencies awaits further archaeological and philological research as permitted by the Holy Spirit. (Acts 17:11).

The Power of God's Word: Authority

What is the authority of the Christian Scriptures? The Christian Scriptures possess authority to teach truth and to rebuke, correct, and train people in righteousness. The Christian Scriptures possess authority by virtue of their truthfulness and because they are from God himself. (1 Timothy 3:14-17, Hebrews 4:12-13, John 5:31-47).

How is the authority and truthfulness of the Christian Scriptures applied and illumined in the lives of believers? The authority and truthfulness of the Christian Scriptures are applied and illumined in the lives of believers through reading or hearing the Word of God and the illuminating word of the Holy Spirit. (John 5:24, Romans 10:17, Ephesians 1:13, 1 John 2:26-27).

Who can authoritatively interpret, teach, preach, and call others to submit to the authority of the Christian Scriptures? The Holy Spirit is the authoritative interpreter of Scripture. Every believer in Jesus Christ also receives the privilege and duty of knowing and teaching the truth. Every believer also has the obligation to accurately handle the Word of God. God also gives the special gift of pastoral and teaching ministry to some believers for the benefit of all believers. Pastors and teachers deserve double honor for their work, (Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Timothy 5:17, 2 Timothy 4:2, 1 John 2:27).

3. A STUDY OF WHAT GOD IS LIKE AND WHAT GOD DOES, (Theology)

Why study what God is like and what he does? Our presupposition is that there is a God who has created and cares for all things including ourselves. Since this is the case it is a very reasonable quest to know something about the God who has created us and cares for us.

WHAT GOD IS LIKE

The Greatness of God

What is the greatness of God? God is a spirit and thus absolutely spiritual, unique, and one in essence (Deuteronomy 6:4, 1 Timothy 6:13-16). God is personal and relates personally with his creation and we his people (Genesis 3, Exodus 3:14). God is alive and unlike mankind lives independently from any need for support (Exodus 3:14, Jeremiah 10:10, John 5:26). God is infinite and unlimitable in all his qualities including his eternality, omnipresence, omniscience, omnipotence, sovereignty, and freedom (Psalm 145:3, Psalm 90:2, Psalm 139:7-12, Psalm 147:4-5, Ephesians 1:18-22, Psalm 115:3). God is constant with no quantitative or qualitative change in his nature or work ever (Psalm 102:27).

What is the extent of God's sovereignty? God is absolutely sovereign. There is absolutely nothing that is not under his rule. Absolutely everything is under his rule. Absolutely nothing resists his will. Everything he wills comes to pass and everything that comes to pass God has willed. God's sovereignty in Christian salvation is a major theme of the Christian Scriptures in that he saves whomever and whenever he chooses, (Romans 9:18-19).

The Goodness of God

What is the goodness of God? God is pure. God is pure in his holiness, (1 Peter 1:16). God is pure in his righteousness, (Jeremiah 9:24). God is pure in his justice, (Acts 10:34-35). God is also true. God is true because he is genuine, (Jeremiah 10:5-10). God is true because of his veracity, (Titus 1:2). God is true because of his faithfulness, (1 Thessalonians 5:24). And finally God is love. God's love is demonstrated by his benevolence, (John 3:16). God's love is demonstrated by his grace, (Ephesians 1:5-8). God's love is demonstrated by his mercy, (Matthew 9:36). And God's love is demonstrated by his persistence, (2 Peter 3:9).

God's Nearness and Distance: Immanence and Transcendence

Is God present, immanent, within nature, human nature, and history? Yes. God is personally present through his own character and will in every detail of nature, human nature, and history. There is no aspect of nature, human nature, and history in which God is not expressing his own character and will, (Jeremiah 23:24, Acts 17:24-28, Colossians 1:15-17).

Is God separate and independent from his creation, transcendent? Yes. God is separate from his creation. He is the creator of his creation. The creation is not God and God is not the creation. God is also independent from his creation. God does not need his creation. His creation is dependent upon Him absolutely while he is independent from His creation. Thus God himself is to be worshiped and praised for his interest in the creation, (Psalm 113:5-6, Isaiah 55:8-9, John 8:23, Romans 1:21-23).

God's Three-in-Oneness: The Trinity

Is God one? Yes. God is one and there is only one God and he alone is the object of our worship, (Exodus 20:2-3, Deuteronomy 6:4).

Is God three persons? Yes. There is one God existing in three persons. God the father, one person in the trinity, is very God, (1 Corinthians 8:4-6). God the son, another person in the trinity, is very God, (Philippians 2:5-11). God the Holy Spirit, the third person in the trinity, is very God, (Acts 5:3-4). All three persons of the one God share equally the attributes of God, though with different functions in creation, providence, and redemption.

WHAT GOD DOES

God's Plan

What is at the center of God's plan? The person and work of Jesus Christ are at the center of God's plan. In His person Jesus Christ is the revelation of the character of God to mankind. In His work Jesus Christ is the head of the church, (Ephesians 3:1-13).

What are the characteristics of God's plan? God's plan for Christ and all else has been planned entirely in eternity past. God acted freely and was not constrained by anything or

anyone in his plan. The purpose of God's plan is his own glory. There is not one material object or event that is not part of God's plan. His plan is all-inclusive. God's plan is also efficacious and guaranteed to come to pass. God's plan speaks of his actions resulting from his nature. The components of God's plan include creating, preserving, directing, and redeeming. Man's existence, thoughts, and actions are also all part of God's providential plan. God's plan is unchangeable, (Numbers 11:23, Psalm 148:1-6, Isaiah 14:24, Isaiah 25:1, Isaiah 46:11).

What is logically prior God's plan or men's decisions? Each individual person has a will with which they are able to think, act, will and make decisions. And at the same time no one exists, thinks, acts, wills, or makes a decision without God's prior willing. The great and good God has willed everything that has ever happened in the world's history and each individual's personal history for the greater good and His own glory. God's plan and will are logically prior to man's will and decisions. Everything that man does has been brought to pass because of God's will, (John 15:16, Romans 9:18-19).

What are the decrees of God? The eternal purpose and decrees of God are the set of events and purposes which God has determined in eternity past according to the counsel of His own will. Much is hidden regarding a logical priority in the eternal decrees of God. However, we know that there is an temporal priority essential in the gospel, namely that God has decreed the effectual salvation of the elect before he even created the world. (Romans 11:33-34, Ephesians 1:3-10).

What is God's eternal purpose for this age? God's eternal purpose is that the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms through the church, the body of believers in Jesus Christ, (Ephesians 3:10-11).

God's Originating Work: Creation

What did God create? God created everything that ever has existed, exists, or will exist. God also sustains the existence of everything. (Nehemiah 9:6, John 1:3, Acts 17:24, Colossians 1:16).

How did God create everything? God created everything that exists from nothing. God created everything that exists in six days as recorded in Genesis chapter one, (Genesis 1:1-2:3, John 1:3).

What is the capstone and hierarchy of creation? First, God is sovereign over all creation. Second, mankind is the capstone of God's creation. God created man in his own image and instructed him to rule over the entire creation. God created woman from man as a suitable helper for man. Mankind is subject only to God and the creation is subject to man. Within the domain of Mankind woman is helper to man. Third, the creation is for mankind's enjoyment and God's glory. (Genesis 1:26).

What is God's purpose in creation? God's purpose is the promotion of His own glory in the salvation of man, the demonstration of His grace. (Romans 11:32-36, Ephesians 2:6-7).

God's Continuing Work: Providence

What is providence? Providence is God actively willing all that comes to pass. (Acts 17:24-31).

How does God work in providence? God holds all things together, from atomic particles to governments and nations to solar systems and galaxies. God cares for mankind to bring them to His intended purpose. God wills all events and the decisions of men to glorify himself through the obedience of His chosen servants in every situation. God has determined even every moment and the places that each person lives so that they would recognize their need and seek God. (Esther 4:14-16, Acts 17:24-31, Colossians 1:17).

What is the capstone of God's providential work? The death of Jesus Christ for our sin and the resurrection of Jesus Christ for our justification, (Acts 2:22-23, Acts 4:27-31).

What is the future goal of God's providential work? Jesus Christ is building his church on the

foundation of the Apostles and prophets who testify to nature and work of Jesus Christ. God plans to increase his church in number and perfect the church's representation of himself in the world. God's purpose is to prepare believers for battle with Satan, his demons, and his evil influence upon the world. The church is a first fruit of Christ's work with elect mankind being the remaining fruit. Christ himself will return from heaven to earth and in an instant believers in Christ will be changed to reflect his image and glory to rule with Christ. All mankind will then be finally saved at the Great White Throne Judgment while Satan and his demons will be sentenced to the Lake of Fire, (Ephesians 3:1-13, Matthew 11:12, Romans 11:16, 1 Corinthians 15:20-52, Revelation 20:7-10, Revelation 21:6-8).

What is God's purpose in providence? God's purpose is the promotion of His own glory in the salvation of mankind, the demonstration of His grace. (Acts 17:24-31, Ephesians 2:6-7).

Evil and God's World: A Special Problem

Are Satan and his evil demons subject to the will of God? Yes. Satan and his evil demons only ever do what God has already determined that they do. They willingly purpose evil, but God's purpose is only ever the greater good through permitting their evil actions. God's sovereignty and wisdom are demonstrated in no more amazing way to us in that God can use evil for the greater good, (Job 1:6-12).

Again has God ordained both all the good and evil events in history and the good and evil actions of individual men? Yes. (Romans 9:18-19, Romans 11:32-36).

What is an example of God using an evil scheme of Satan for greater good? The crucifixion of Jesus Christ, (Acts 4:27-31).

Is God guilty of sin in ordaining all the evil events in history? No. God is perfect and without sin. He does not tempt man to sin nor is He tempted to sin. (Matthew 5:48, Romans 11:32-36, James 1:13).

Is God the cause of evil? God is sovereign over the universe and the whole of history, both good and evil, yet the evil acts of fallen angels and fallen men proceed directly from their own evil nature, (James 1:13).

Is God culpable in the decree of Satan's and subsequently man's fall into sin and bondage to the sinful nature? No, (Romans 9:19-24).

Can man will evil and remain innocent or blame God? No. Wisdom of this nature is only possessed by God. Though God wills all that comes to pass, even the sin of men, each man has exercised his own will in sinning and is accountable to God for his sin. The sovereignty of God in good and evil events and the responsibility of man for his own sin are both always true. (Romans 9:18-24, Romans 11:32-36, James 1:13-18).

Are further evil schemes of Satan prophesied in the Christian Scriptures and what is God's good purpose in ordaining this evil? Yes. Satan himself is bound and then loosed again upon the earth in order to deceive the nations and gather them for battle against the camp of God. God's good purpose is to sanctify believers, perfect the faith of believers, and demonstrate His own grace and nature in believers to the objects of His wrath, (John 17:17-19, James 1:2-4, Revelation 20:7-10).

What should be mankind's response to this truth? Mankind should fear of God because of His willingness to forgive every sin, even hatred towards Himself. Mankind should pray that God would keep us from temptation and deliver us from Satan. Mankind should be amazed at the unsearchability of God's judgments and worship God, (Psalm 130:4, Matthew 6:13, Romans 11:32-36).

4. A STUDY OF GOD'S SPECIAL GOOD AGENTS, (angelology)

What are God's special good agents, angels? The Christian Scriptures explain that we are not the only living beings created by God. God has also created good angels for his glory and our care and protection. Thus it is good for us to know something about these beings.

Origin, Nature, and Status

Are angels created? Angels were created by God. They are subject to Him and owe Him worship the same as mankind. (Psalm 148:1-6).

What is the nature of angels? Angels are created beings, purely spiritual, invisible, without marriage, eternal. They may assume bodies for the benefit of presenting themselves and their message to mankind. They are people, but not human. All manifestations of angels in the Bible appear to be male, (Matthew 22:30, Luke 1:11-12, Luke 20:36, Colossians 1:16, Hebrews 1:14).

What is the status of angels? Angels are subject to God. During Jesus Christ's life he could have asked God the Father for angels to do his bidding, but did not. Angels did, however, minister to Christ. Angels are not subject to mankind, but they are ministering spirits to mankind. Mankind is also not subject to angels, but angels are messengers of God's bidding to mankind. Angels are not to be worshiped, (Psalm 148:1-6, Matthew 4:11, Matthew 26:53, Colossians 1:18, Hebrews 1:14, Hebrews 2:2).

Their Appearance

What is the appearance of angels? Angels are usually invisible to us though they are in reality all around us. Angels can assume a physical body to appear to man. Sometimes the glory of the Lord shines from them. (Genesis 18:2, Genesis 16, Genesis 22, Numbers 22:31, 2 Kings 6:17, Luke 2:9).

Their Capabilities And Powers

What capabilities and powers do angels have? They have intelligence and will. They are moral creatures with some described as holy. They are people. Fallen angels have lied and sinned. They may have super-human knowledge, but their knowledge is finite. They also have great power over God's creation, men and material. But angels like ourselves have nothing apart from what God himself works in and through them, (2 Samuel 14:20, 2 Chronicles 32:21, Matthew 24:36, Mark 8:38, Luke 1:26, Luke 12:8, Galatians 3:19, 1 Peter 1:12, 2 Peter 2:11, Revelation 22:9).

Their Organization

How are angels organized? Angels have been given the titles of Principalities, Powers, Authorities, Dominions, and Thrones. There are archangels with authority or position over other angels. There are Cherubim and Seraphim, (Ephesians 6:12, Colossians 2:15, 1 Thessalonians 4:16, Jude 9).

Their Activities

What are the activities of angels? Angels praise and glorify God. Angels serve as messengers from God to man, particularly in mediating the law. Angels minister to believers. Angels execute judgment upon the enemies of God. Angels are participants in the rapture and coming of Christ. Apparently people are assigned "guardian" angels, (2 Kings 19:35, Psalm 103:20, Matthew 18:10, Matthew 25:31, Acts 5:19, Acts 7:53, Galatians 3:19, Hebrews 2:2).

5. A STUDY OF GOD'S SPECIAL EVIL AGENTS, (demonology)

What are God's special evil agents, Satan and demons? The Christian Scriptures explain that of the angels God created some have fallen into evil with evil intents toward God and humanity. Thus it is good for us to know something about these evil angels as well.

The Origin Of Demons

What is the origin of Satan and demons, the evil angels? The evil angels were created by God, but have fallen into sin and the judgment of God. They are people, but not human. God does not spare even angels when they sin. Instead they lose their position with God and are cast away from God's presence, (2 Peter 2:4, Jude 6).

The Chiefs Of The Demons

Who is the chief of demons, Satan, and what purpose does he serve for God? The chief of all the demons is known by the name of devil, adversary, accuser, Beelzebub, evil one, great dragon, father of lies, murderer, and sinner. Satan is a demon, the chief of fallen angels. Satan's primary role is to oppose God and the work of Christ especially by tempting man. Satan's primary tool in this work is deception. Satan cannot do one thing that God does not expressly permit. Christians can also resist him and he will flee, but only by the power of the Holy Spirit, (Matthew 4:3, Matthew 12:24, Matthew 13:39, Mark 3:22, Luke 11:15, 1 Corinthians 3:16, 2 Corinthians 11:14-15, 1 Thessalonians 3:5, James 4:7, 1 John 2:13, Revelation 12:9, Revelation 12:10).

The Beast and The False Prophet of Revelation are partners with Satan in leadership of the fallen angels. They likewise are fallen angels exercising leadership with Satan as their head over all the fallen angels. Only Satan, The Beast, and The False Prophet are explicitly named as destined to the Lake of Fire, which is prepared for the Devil and his angels, (Matthew 25:41, Revelation 16:13, Revelation 19:20, Revelation 20:10).

Activities Of Demons

What are the activities of demons? Demons are the subjects of Satan the chief demon and have joined him in his rebellion against God. Demons carry out Satan's mischief in the world. Demons inflict disease, dumbness, deafness, blindness, convulsions, paralysis, and lameness. Most significantly they oppose the spiritual progress of Christ's family, (Matthew 12:22, Mark 1:26, Mark 9:17, Mark 9:25, Ephesians 6:12).

Demon Possession

What is demon possession? This is when a demon takes special control over a human being intending harm, though still under God's superintending sovereignty. A demon possessed person may have unusual strength. They may act in bizarre ways such as wearing no clothes or living among tombs. They may engage in destructive behavior. There appear to even be degrees of affliction. Demons can inhabit animals. Jesus both healed and cast out demons. Not all healings were demon possession. Epilepsy was not mistaken for demon possession. Jesus cast out demons with no elaborate formula and attributed the exorcism to the Spirit of God, (Matthew 4:24, Matthew 8, Matthew 12:28, Matthew 12:45, Matthew 17:15, Mark 5:2-4, Luke 8:27, Luke 13:32).

Can Christians be demon possessed? The Christian cannot be demon possessed. Though Christ may permit Satan to work limited evil for a time in a Christian, the Christian's heart is ruled by Christ and not demons, (Luke 22:24-34, Romans 8:38-39, 1 Corinthians 10:19-21, 1 Timothy 4:1).

What is spiritual warfare and should Christians engage in battle against Satan or demons? Spiritual warfare is the activity described in Ephesians 6:10-20. Christians are also encouraged to resist the devil and he will flee from us. But we are also reminded that Satan is the Lord's enemy and even Michael the archangel did not rebuke the devil directly but only in the name of the Lord, (Ephesians 6:10-20, James 4:7, Jude 8-9).

The Destiny Of Satan And The Demons

What is the destiny of Satan and demons, the evil angels? The Beast and The False Prophet are cast into the Lake of Fire at the beginning of Christ's Kingdom. Satan is bound and then released for a time to gather the nations against the camp of God. After this final battle between Satan and Christ's family, Satan and his demons are cast into the Lake of Fire for *The Ages of The Ages*. The Lake of Fire is prepared for the Devil and his Angels and not prepared for mankind, (Matthew 25:41, Revelation 19:20, Revelation 20:10).

6. A STUDY OF HUMANITY, (anthropology)

What is the form, substance, quality, and essence of a person? Christianity is a very thorough religion in that we also require a study of the nature of mankind.

Introduction to the Doctrine of Humanity

Why is the study of humanity important? The study of humanity is important because man is the highest of God's creatures thus humanity reveals the most about God's work and of God himself. The Bible reveals that only man has been made in God's own image and likeness. The study of humanity also reveals more about the person of Christ, because Christ took on human nature. And finally the study of humanity of course is our personal vantage point for the study of all the other aspects of theology, because we ourselves are human, (Genesis 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 13:12, Philippians 2:5-11).

What is the Christian view of man? Man is a creature, made in the image of God, created by a purposeful conscious act of God for the purpose of bringing glory to God, (Genesis 1:26-27, Romans 11:33-36).

The Origin of Humanity

What is the origin of humanity? All of humanity is descended from the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, whose lives are recorded in Genesis 1-4. God created all that exists in six days and created man on the sixth day. God created everything that exists out of nothing. God created everything that exists for the promotion of his own glory, (Genesis 1-4).

How did God create the first man and the first woman? God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. God formed a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, (Genesis 2:7, Genesis 2:22).

How did God create the large populations of mankind? All humanity in existence today is physically descended from the first man, Adam, and the first woman, Eve, created by God in the garden of Eden on the sixth day of creation, (Acts 17:26).

What can we conclude from man's creation? Man has no independent existence. Rather man is dependent completely upon God. Man is part of the creation itself. Man also has a unique place in creation because man is instructed to have dominion over creation. All mankind share a physical brotherhood, though only those in Christ share spiritual brotherhood. Man is not the highest object in the universe. God is the highest being. Man has limitations physically and temporally. And finally man is a wonderful creation of God, (Genesis 1:27-30, Psalm 100:3-5, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

The Image of God in the Human

Is the image of God universal to all humanity? Yes all men and women regardless of race and faith possess the image of God, (Genesis 9:6, James 3:9-10).

Was the image of God in humanity lost due to sin? No. The image of God is still present universally in all humanity, though it is obscured because of sin, (Genesis 9:6, James 3:9-10).

What is the image of God in the human? I feel the primary image of God in mankind is God's character reflected in man, man's dominion over creation, and man's ability to develop relationship, be in union, with God and one another, (Genesis 1:27-30, Psalm 37:1-9).

How is sinful man able to reflect the image of God? It is only in Christ that sinful man is able to reflect the image of God. All Christians are commanded to pattern their lives after Jesus Christ who is the perfect human representation of the image of God, (2 Corinthians 5:17, 1 John 2:6).

The Constitutional Nature of the Human

Is man constituted of one or many elements? The Scriptures speak of the human spirit, soul, and body. Hebrews also testifies that God's word is so precise as to be able to distinguish between the soul and the spirit of man. And yet man is one being created by God as very good. No element of man's constitution was originally evil, (1 Thessalonians 5:23, Hebrews 4:12).

What is the future for each individual human being's constitution? Man's constitution while living on this earth is body, soul, and spirit in one being. Upon death the body dies and

returns to the earth while the soul and spirit, disembodied, return to God. At the resurrection the soul and spirit of the redeemed will be joined again to a new body. The new body will be imperishable, glorious, powerful, and spiritual, (Acts 24:15, 2 Corinthians 5:1-10, 1 Corinthians 15:35-58, Revelation 20:11-15).

The Universality of Humanity

Who is included in humanity? Every individual human. All of humanity is human and thus is under God's protection as a creature of God made in his image. This includes all human races, both sexes, humans of all economic status, young and old, the unborn from conception, married and unmarried, and Christian and non-Christian, (Genesis 9:6, Isaiah 1:17).

How is all humanity to be treated by Christians? We are to demonstrate the compassion of Christ to all mankind as God gives us the grace and opportunity, (Matthew 9:36).

How is believing humanity to be treated by Christians? We are to do good to all men, but especially to the family of believers, (Galatians 6:10).

How is unbelieving humanity to be treated by Christians? We are to be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear - hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh. We are also to treat all humans without favoritism just as God relates to humanity, (James 2:1-13, Jude 22-23).

7. A STUDY OF SIN, (harmartiology)

What is sin? The Bible declares that every individual man has sinned. We need to learn what sin is and how it effects man's relationship with God and with other men.

The Nature of Sin

Why is the study of sin important? Sin is mankind's main, only, and constant dilemma in his relationship with God his creator. It is because of our sin that we are unable to stand by ourselves before a holy, righteous, and just God, (Ezra 9:15).

What are Biblical terms for sin? Innocent ignorance. Culpable ignorance. Error. Inattention. Determining to miss the mark. Irreligion. Transgression. Iniquity. Rebellion. Treachery. Perversion. Abomination. (Leviticus 19:15, Numbers 14:41-42, Deuteronomy 7:25-26, Joshua 7:1, 1 Samuel 26:21, Isaiah 1:2, Isaiah 21:3, Isaiah 53:12, Acts 17:30, 1 Corinthians 6:9, Ephesians 4:18, Hebrews 2:2-3).

What is sin? The failure to fulfill both God's law in love, worship, and obedience and the spirit of his law primarily because of refusal to trust God, (Hebrews 10:38).

The Source of Sin

What is the source of sin in mankind? Each individual human is tempted, lured, and enticed into sinful thoughts and actions by his own evil nature and is personally responsible for his own sin. Sin is the choice of the person who commits it, (James 1:14-15).

What is original sin? The first and original sin occurred when Adam and Eve chose to disobey the command of God and eat from the forbidden tree. And in this way sin entered the world and the punishment of death came to Adam and Eve and to all mankind, because all have sinned, (Genesis 3, Romans 5:12-21).

How did Adam and Eve sin for God created them very good? God himself has bound all mankind, including the first man and woman, over to disobedience and yet is free from sin, resulting in each individual being a sinner by their very nature, (Genesis 1, Romans 11:32, James 1:13-15).

What is the cure for sin? Natural man will never love, worship, or obey God, but will only ever worship idols and self, and act according to their own sinful nature. A supernatural work of God is required in the nature of the individual in order to change the sinful nature through the gospel message, the Scriptures, the prayers of Christ's family, and the Holy

Spirit, (Romans 8:5-11, 1 John 3:9).

The Results of Sin

What is the result of sin with respect to God? The sinner is in disfavor and alienation from God. The sinner is guilty under the judgment of God. The sinner receives punishment from God. The sinner dies physically at the hand of God, (Genesis 3:3, Hosea 9:15, John 9:41, Hebrews 2:2-3).

What is the result of sin with respect to the sinner? Restlessness. Evil times. Guilt. Trouble. Enslavement, habit, and addiction. Flight from reality, for example avoiding thoughts of death and judgment. Denial of sin. Self-deceit. Insensitivity. Self-centeredness. (Genesis 3:11, Job 3:17, Proverbs 22:8, Jeremiah 17:9, Amos 6:3, Romans 6:17, 1 Corinthians 11:27, 1 Timothy 4:2, Hebrews 9:27).

What is the result of sin in human relationships? The proliferation of competition. Inability to empathize. Rejection of authority. Inability to love, (Romans 13:2, Philippians 2:3-5, James 4:1-2, 1 John 3:17).

The Magnitude of Sin

What is the extent of sin within mankind? The sinfulness of mankind is universal. Every individual has sinned against God, (1 Kings 8:46, Psalm 143:2, Ecclesiastes 7:20, Romans 3:23).

What is the intensiveness of sin within the individual? The sinfulness of every individual person is to such an extent that man cannot even understand his own heart. Each person has not sinned completely in every way, but certainly every aspect of a person's nature is sinful and sinful to the degree that apart from a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, sin and evil will dominate the individual. Man is totally depraved in sinfulness, (Jeremiah 17:9, Romans 3:10-18).

The Social Dimension of Sin

What is social sin? We have primarily addressed the sinful thoughts and actions of individuals. However, there are also sinful groups, policies, ideologies, and governments, (Ephesians 6:12).

Why is social sin difficult to recognize? We overlook deeds for which we are not directly responsible for or involved with. Our membership within a particular group affects our perception of the group. Group misdirection may not be correctly observed because of admirable loyalty and zeal within the group, (1 Corinthians 15:33).

What are the social areas of sin? The World, that part of mankind that is not part of the body of Christ on this earth, is a tremendous source of social sin. There are also unseen powers at work in the world such as the powers of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms that result in social sin in the world. And finally there are organizations of men that promote social sin even of a religious nature such as the circumcision group of Apostle Paul's day, (Galatians 4:17, Ephesians 6:10-12, 1 John 2:15-17).

How should the Christian fight social sin? The Christian should be in the world as salt and light but not of the world or its sinful social systems. The Christian should put on the armor of God to fight these battles using truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, the Christian scriptures, and prayer, (Ephesians 6:10-20, 1 Corinthians 5:9-13, 2 Corinthians 6:17-18).

How should the Christian not fight social sin? A Christian should not use the world's means such as litigation or the roles given by God to this world's governments such as warfare and capital punishment, (Matthew 26:52, 1 Corinthians 6:1-11, Romans 13:1-5).

8. A STUDY OF THE PERSON OF CHRIST, (Christology)

Who is Jesus Christ? In a previous study we have learned that God is revealed to us in three persons. We need to closely examine Jesus Christ as he is the focal point of the Christian

faith.

Contemporary Issues in the methods of studying Christ

How can one know who Jesus Christ was historically? The historical life, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ can be known through study of the Christian Scriptures, (John 20:31).

How can one know Jesus Christ personally and place faith in Him today? Anyone who has come to know Jesus Christ historically is also free to believe that Jesus Christ is truly the savior of mankind and that He died for our sins and that Jesus Christ is truly the Lord of all creation and mankind and thus receive salvation, (John 9:35-37, Romans 10:5-13).

What is the essence of Christ's message to mankind? The teachings of Jesus Christ assert that the grace of Christ is the only way to be saved from sin and condemnation, which is received through faith. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave proves his power and authority to save His people and proves that He is Lord of all. Jesus Christ's crucifixion demonstrates that mankind's sin is indeed a terrible rebellion against God. Jesus Christ's words of forgiveness from the cross and subsequent resurrection proves that He has forgiven all mankind's rebellion, (Romans 4:25, 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, 1 Corinthians 15:3-7).

The Deity of Christ

Is Jesus Christ fully God? Yes. Jesus confessed to be the Christ, (Mark 2:27-28, John 1:1, Romans 9:5, Philippians 2:6-11, Colossians 1:15-20).

Is embracing Jesus Christ as God essential to salvation? Yes. If Jesus Christ is not God His death and resurrection are nothing more than a martyr's death and a miraculous resurrection. However, since Jesus Christ is God Christians are able to know the truth that the crucifixion demonstrates, that sin itself is opposition to the nature of God expressed in Jesus Christ. Christians also have the hope that since Jesus Christ is God that His proclamation of forgiveness is trustworthy and His atoning death for sin effective, (John 8:42-47, Romans 10:5-13, 1 Timothy 1:15, 1 Timothy 4:9-10).

What are the implications for believers that Jesus Christ is God? First we have real knowledge of the nature and person of God. Second redemption is not merely hypothetical, but reality because the sin of all mankind has been truly atoned. Third the rift between God and man has been truly amended as God closed the rift himself. Fourth Christ deserves all our worship, (John 14:9, Philippians 3:3, Hebrews 10:19-22).

The Humanity of Christ

Was Jesus Christ fully human? Yes. Paul explains that Jesus took on the nature of a servant and was made into human likeness, (Philippians 2:5-11).

Is embracing Jesus Christ as human relevant to salvation? Yes. Jesus Christ's humanity is a true example and hope for us because his example was true God in true humanity. Jesus' intercession for us is credible because he was faced with every temptation and remained sinless. The Scriptures also declare that acknowledging that Jesus came in the flesh is part of true Christianity, (Philippians 2:5-11, Hebrews 4:14-16, 1 John 4:2).

What are the implications of the humanity of Jesus Christ? Jesus' atoning death is applied to humanity because He became human to save us. Jesus can truly sympathize and intercede for us because he knows our trials. Jesus has demonstrated for us what sinless humanity is and what Christians have to look forward to. Jesus can be our example because he was a human example. God's willingness to limit himself to human existence demonstrates that human nature is good, though limited. And finally God is not completely transcendent and above creation, but he acts within creation, (Acts 17:27-28, Philippians 2:5-11, Colossians 1:27, 2 Timothy 2:8-10, Hebrews 4:14-16).

The Unity of the Person of Christ

How is Jesus Christ both fully God and fully human? The eternally pre-existent Jesus Christ

temporarily removed only those divine qualities needed so that he could become a man to fulfill His work on this earth. Upon completion of this work the incarnate Christ returned to heaven, (Philippians 2:5-11).

The Virgin Birth

Was Jesus Christ supernaturally born of a virgin woman? Yes, (Matthew 1:18-25, Luke 1:26-38).

Why is the virgin birth significant? The virgin birth insists to us that Jesus Christ and salvation are supernatural. The virgin birth insists that God's salvation is fully a gift of grace because Mary wasn't more deserving of this blessing than any other woman. The virgin birth sets Jesus apart as unique among humanity. And the virgin birth stands as another miracle to lead us to belief in Jesus Christ, (Luke 1:46-56, John 1:13, John 3:5-6, John 14:11).

Introduction to the Work of Christ

How did Jesus Christ serve in his role as a prophet revealing truth from God? Jesus taught truth from God, (Mark 6:4, John 7:17).

How did Jesus Christ serve in his role as a priest reconciling men to God? Jesus serves in a permanent priesthood because offered himself for our sins and because he lives eternally, (Hebrews 7:18-28).

How did Jesus Christ serve in his role as a king ruling over mankind and creation for God? Jesus serves as a servant king and does not lord it over those entrusted to himself. In fact His kingdom is not of this world, but of the future new heavens and new earth. (John 6:15, John 18:33-37).

What was the work of Jesus Christ's humiliation? The work of Christ's humiliation was willingly to humble himself by becoming man, to be rejected by all mankind, to suffer at the hand of mankind, and to die upon a cross, (Matthew 16:21, John 1:11, Philippians 2:5-11).

What was the work of Jesus Christ's exaltation? The work of Christ's exaltation was to teach the truth in love, to raise himself from the dead, to ascend to God the father's right hand, and to win the title of Lord and Christ, (Luke 2:46-52, John 10:17-18, Acts 1:11, Acts 2:22-36).

The Atonement of Christ

What is the atonement of Christ? Jesus Christ's death as a righteous sacrifice for the sins of His people is His work of atonement, (Romans 3:25, Hebrews 2:17, 1 John 2:2, 1 John 4:10).

Why is the atonement of Christ significant? Jesus Christ's willingness to atone for the sins of enemies is a demonstration of His character of gracious love and mercy. Jesus Christ's laying down His own life serves as an example for His disciples. Jesus Christ's death as a perfect sacrifice meets God's demands for divine justice for sin. Jesus Christ's victory of forgiveness prevailing over hate is a victory over the forces of sin and evil. And finally Jesus Christ's death satisfies God's requirements for justice so that mercy can be given to those for whom Christ died, (Luke 10:18, John 15:13-14, Romans 3:21-26, 1 Corinthians 15:54-58, Philippians 2:5-11).

The Central Theme of Atonement

What is the central theme of the Christian Scriptures? The central theme of the Christian Scriptures is that God will make atonement for the sins of His people and destroy the work of Satan, (Genesis 3:15, Psalm 130:7-8, Romans 3:25).

Why does the nature of God require atonement for sin? God's perfect holiness and justice requires recompense for every sin, (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Why does the nature of man and his sin require atonement? Man's nature and sin is not simply ignorance or misguidance, rather man's nature and sin is truly in opposition to God and so if man is to be reconciled to God this sin cannot be overlooked, (John 9:41).

What is meant by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ? Jesus Christ willingly offered himself as a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of His people. The sacrifice of His life was an acceptable offering to God, (Romans 3:25).

What is meant by the propitiation of Jesus Christ? Jesus Christ willingly died for the sins of His people in order to appease the wrath of God toward sinners and win the favor of God toward sinners, (Romans 5:9).

What is meant by the substitution of Jesus Christ? Jesus Christ in His death willingly accepted the wrath of God upon himself that was deserved by all sinful men, (2 Corinthians 5:21).

What is the purpose of the atonement? The purpose of the atonement was to truly make sinful men holy so that Jesus Christ could truly call us brothers and invite us into fellowship in glory with himself, (Hebrews 2:10-18).

What are the implications of the atonement? Sinful man is totally depraved otherwise Jesus Christ would not have needed to go the whole way to death to atone for our sin. God's nature maintains integrity with respect to his justice and mercy. That is, God is able to offer mercy because justice has been met. Grace is the only means of salvation. The design of God's salvation covers the sins of all mankind for all time because the design of Christ's atonement is infinitely perfect. Thus the believer is guaranteed salvation in spite of future sin. The price God paid for our salvation demands worship and obedience from His people, (Romans 3:9-31, Romans 8:28-39, Romans 11:32-36, Romans 12:1-2).

The Extent of the Atonement

Did Jesus Christ die universally for all the sins of all mankind without exception? Yes Jesus Christ died for the sins of those God the father has given Him also known as the elect or the people known as His people or His sheep, that is all mankind, (John 6:39, John 10:11, Romans 11:7, 2 Timothy 2:10, 1 John 2:2, 1 John 4:10)

Did Jesus Christ atone for the sins of those who are finally condemned to the Lake of Fire? Jesus Christ did not atone for the sins of Satan, The Beast, The False Prophet, or the fallen angels, that is those whose names are not found in the book of life, (Matthew 25:31-46, Luke 16:19-31, Romans 8:28-30, Hebrews 2:16, Revelation 19:20-20:10, Revelation 21:6-8).

Does the 'apokatastasis' of Acts 3:21 include the restoration of Satan and the fallen angels? Possibly, but not probably. On one hand since the redemption of mankind includes the redemption of all creation, perhaps then even fallen angels are in view. Yet on the other hand the substitutionary death of Christ only substitutes for people of like kind, that is humans and not angels. Fallen angels are also not named in the Book of Life which is why they are cast into the Lake of Fire, which is prepared specifically for them. The definitive Greek word for eternal 'aidios' is only used twice the Bible, once in Romans 1:20 concerning God and once in Jude 6 concerning the bonds on fallen angels, (Matthew 25:41, Acts 3:21, Romans 1:20, Romans 8:21, Colossians 1:20, Hebrews 2:16, Jude 6, Revelation 20:10).

For whom did Jesus Christ's death atone for sin? Jesus Christ atoned for all the sins of the elect, that is all mankind, (Romans 3:21-31, 2 Timothy 2:10, 1 John 2:2, 1 John 4:10).

Are those for whom Jesus Christ died guaranteed eternal life? Yes, (John 10:28, Romans 8:28-30).

When are those for whom Jesus Christ died recognized as part of Christ's elect family? The elect are only recognized as spiritual brothers when they have received Jesus Christ by faith. Faith does not cause election, rather election precedes and produces faith in Jesus Christ. Personal faith in Jesus Christ is the requirement for all the blessings of the Christian life, (Romans 3:26).

For what did Jesus Christ's death atone? Jesus Christ's death atoned for all the sinful thoughts and actions of the elect, His people, for all time, (Matthew 12:31).

9. A STUDY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, (Pneumatology)

Who is the Holy Spirit? Our study has also revealed to us that the Holy Spirit is the remaining person of the God-head. We need to consider his person and work.

The Person of the Holy Spirit

Is the Holy Spirit God? Yes. Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit who is identified as God, (Acts 5:3-4, 1 Corinthians 2:10-11, 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

What is the nature of the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit as the third person of the trinity shares equally all the attributes of God discussed earlier. Furthermore the Holy Spirit is truly a person with personality and not an impersonal force, (John 16:5-11, John 16:13-14, Ephesians 4:30).

What are implications for us from the doctrine of the Holy Spirit? Again the Holy Spirit is a person and not simply a force exuding from God the Father. The Holy Spirit being fully divine shares in all the attributes of God shared earlier. The Holy Spirit is one with the Father and the Son in nature, purpose, and work. God, the Holy Spirit, is actually so close to us as to actually enter into the believer in Jesus Christ, (Acts 2:4, Acts 5:3-4).

The Work of the Holy Spirit

Was the Holy Spirit at work in the Old Testament? Yes. (Genesis 1:2, 1 Samuel 10:6, Job 26:13, Ezekiel 2:2).

Was the Holy Spirit at work during Jesus' ministry? Yes. (Matthew 3:16, Matthew 12:25-27, Mark 1:8, Luke 1:15, Luke 1:35, Luke 4:14, Luke 10:21).

Was the Holy Spirit poured out to all people at Pentecost, the beginning of the church age? Yes. (John 14:15-21, John 16:5-11, Acts 2:1-41).

What is the work of the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit convicts the world of guilt in regard to sin because men do not believe in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit convicts the world of guilt in regard to righteousness because Jesus Christ is going to the Father in heaven. The Holy Spirit convicts the world of guilt in regard to judgment because the prince of this world now stands condemned, (John 16:5-11).

What is the work of the Holy Spirit in beginning the Christian life? The Holy Spirit effectively calls individuals to the point of hearing the gospel. The Holy Spirit regenerates individuals using the means of the gospel, Scripture, Christian testimony, and the prayers of Christians, producing the visible evidence of conversion, turning from unbelief to belief in God's promises. The Holy spirit lives within the Christian from the point of regeneration and never leaves. Regeneration is an invisible work of the Holy Spirit. Conversion is the visible fruit, (John 14:17, Acts 2:36-39, Acts 15:3, Titus 3:5-6).

Can that portion of mankind who has never heard the gospel, such as the unborn, infants, or pagan peoples, be regenerate? No. There is no regeneration, conversion, or beginning the Christian life apart from understanding the gospel. Regeneration is a work of the Holy Spirit in those who understand and believe the gospel, (Matthew 13:15-16, Romans 10:5-13, Acts 20:32).

What is the fate of that portion of mankind who has never heard the gospel and thus have never been regenerated by the Holy Spirit? These people die in a lost state and are placed immediately before the judgment seat of Christ. Christian salvation is defined by personally placing faith in Jesus Christ who has died for sinners. The entire emphasis and thrust of the New Testament message is to bring the good news to those who have not heard so they can believe. Little attention is given to explaining the fate of the unborn, infants, and that portion of mankind who are ignorant of the good news. Rather the Christian is commanded in Scripture to bring the good news to everyone who has not heard. Jesus Christ has won the title of judge of mankind and every individual will appear before his judgment seat and his judgments are trusted by believers. Wicked unbelieving mankind is punished in Hades after death, (Luke 16:19-31, Romans 2:16, 2 Timothy 4:1-2, Revelation 20:11-15).

What is the work of the Holy Spirit in continuing the Christian life? The Holy Spirit continues

the work that He began through continuing conviction of sin, righteousness, and judgment. This work results in the renewal and spiritual development of the Christian. No Christian conquers sin in this lifetime, but instead he will be instantly perfected and glorified only upon Jesus Christ's return. The Christian is able, however, to put to death the misdeeds of the body, but only by the Spirit, (John 16:5-11, Romans 8:13, Philippians 1:3-6, Titus 3:5-6).

What are the gifts given by the Holy Spirit to believers for their service to the body of Christ? The gifts of the Holy Spirit are prophecy, service, teaching, encouraging, giving aid, leadership, showing mercy, wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miraculous powers, discernment of spirits, speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, apostles, evangelists, pastor/teachers, and speaking, (Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, Ephesians 4:11, 1 Peter 4:11).

What are the purposes of the gifts from the Holy Spirit? The gifts of the Holy spirit are to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ, (Ephesians 4:12-13).

Are all the gifts of the Holy Spirit manifest today? No. Apostles are those men specifically appointed by the risen Christ Jesus to testify to the life, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. There have been no Apostles other than those recorded in Scripture. 1 Corinthians 13 makes it clear that speaking in tongues will cease and prophecy will be abolished at some point. The present day imitations of speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, words from the Lord, and false miracles are not works of the Lord, (Mark 3:14, Acts 1:26, Acts 2:1-13, Acts 14:14, Acts 15:2, Romans 1:1, 1 Corinthians 1:22-23, 1 Corinthians 12:1-31, 1 Corinthians 14:1-40, 1 Corinthians 15:8-9. Galatians 3:5).

10. A STUDY OF SALVATION, (soteriology)

What is Christian salvation? Thus far we have learned about God, man, and sin. At this juncture it is appropriate to introduce our study of the salvation of men. How can a holy and just God permit the salvation of even one sinful man?

Conceptions of Salvation

How does salvation occur in time? Salvation within the individual begins at a point and is followed by a process. The beginning point is predestination even before the creation of the world, followed by regeneration and conversion in time, to be born of the Spirit. The process which follows is renewal, also by the Spirit, (John 3:1-21, Ephesians 1, Titus 3:5-7).

In the salvation of man what is saved? The primary work of salvation is to restore each individual man's broken relationship with God so that man can approach God even as a sinner. Subsequent effects also include restoration of man's relationship with himself because condemnation and guilt have been removed, man's relationship with other men because all believers are brothers in Christ, and man's relationship with the creation, (Romans 8:1, Romans 8:18-25, Romans 8:29).

What is the medium of salvation? The sole medium of salvation is the initiation of grace from God resulting in the expression of faith in Jesus Christ in individual men, (Ephesians 2:8-9).

What is the extent or scope of salvation? Salvation is completely effective for the elect of God, (2 Timothy 2:8-10).

What are the objects of salvation? The primary object of salvation is the salvation of God's people through faith in Jesus Christ. And thus men are called upon to repent and believe this good news. Scriptures also indicate that the creation itself, plants, animals, and minerals are also subjected to frustration and waiting for liberation upon Jesus Christ's return, (Romans 8:18-25).

What is the summary expression of salvation by grace? All mankind is totally depraved. God the father has unconditionally elected His people to salvation. God the Son has provided complete atonement for all mankind. God the Holy Spirit draws chosen ones to faith in Jesus

Christ through His irresistible grace. God's people are secure once saved and are preserved by the power of Jesus Christ, (Ephesians 2:1-3, Ephesians 1:3-8, John 10:11-19,24-29, John 16:5-15, Philippians 1:3-6).

The Antecedent to Salvation: Predestination

What is predestination? Before the creation of the world God chose and predestined His people in Christ to be holy and blameless in his sight even though they were sinners in order to demonstrate His grace, (Ephesians 1:5-6).

Who has God predestined? God predestined to salvation those that he foreknew or fore-loved, those chosen by grace, (Romans 8:29, Romans 11:1-5).

When has God predestined the elect in time? God predestined the objects of His grace before the creation of the world, (Ephesians 1:5-6).

When has God predestined with respect to individual salvation? God first foreknew His people. He then predestined them to salvation. He then calls them to himself. He then justifies them in His sight. And finally He will glorify them in His presence, (Romans 8:29-30).

What are the implications of predestination? We can have great confidence that the sins of the elect are atoned for. We can rest when we have done our best to proclaim the gospel knowing that salvation belongs to the Lord. We can be confident in our evangelistic zeal knowing that God's grace will be victorious even for the unbelieving elect. Salvation by grace alone begins with the doctrine of predestination, (Romans 8:29-30, Romans 11:1-6, 2 Timothy 2:8-10).

The Beginning of Salvation: Subjective Aspects

What is the logical order of the subjective aspects of salvation? First God places a special call on the individual's life with a guaranteed goal of salvation. This calling is an invisible work of the Holy Spirit who uses the Scriptures, the gospel, and the prayers of the saints. This calling will then result in regeneration and conversion at some point after physical birth when the individual hears the gospel and believes. God's calling in the individual is only evident through regeneration and conversion. An individual can have no confidence of God's calling in their life without regeneration and conversion. Calling is completely a work of the Holy Spirit and man is a passive receptacle. Regeneration and conversion occur at the same moment in time, though regeneration is logically prior and the cause of conversion. Regeneration is completely a work of the Holy Spirit. Conversion is the response of man. (Acts 2:38, Acts 16:31, Romans 8:29-30, Galatians 1:15, 1 John 3:9, 1 John 5:1).

What are the elements of conversion? Repentance from sin and faith in the promises of the Lord Jesus Christ, (John 6:29, Acts 2:38, Acts 3:19, Acts 26:20, Revelation 3:19).

What is regeneration? Regeneration is a work of the Holy Spirit by which a natural man is changed into a spiritual man. Regeneration is a one time event marking the beginning of the Christian life, (John 3:1-21, John 5:24, Titus 3:5-6).

What are the implications? Human nature cannot be changed by social reforms or education. We cannot predict or control or cause regeneration, this is a work of the Holy Spirit. Regeneration and conversion are the beginning of the Christian life, not calling. Thus no one is born Christian. Christian conversion requires both repentance from sin and trust in the promises of Jesus Christ. Conversion experiences may differ in other ways, but repentance from sin and faith in Jesus Christ are the essential elements. Regeneration is not felt or observed. It is a silent invisible work of the Holy Spirit. However, each individual once regenerated by the Holy Spirit is acutely aware of changes in his mind, will and emotions during his conversion to Christ, (John 5:39-40, Acts 2:38, Galatians 1:15, Titus 3:5-6).

The Beginning of Salvation: Objective Aspects

What is union with Jesus Christ? Through the work of the Holy Spirit Christians are once and

forever united with Christ and share blessings with Him. The Christian is so close to Christ he is said to be "in Christ." And Christ is so close to the Christian He is said to be "in us." Union with Christ results in righteous standing before God and thus no condemnation forever. Union with Christ results in living for Christ and death to sin. Union with Christ results in suffering for righteousness. Union with Christ will result in reigning with Christ, (Matthew 10:24-25, Romans 5:17, Romans 6:1-14, Romans 8:1, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Colossians 1:27).

What is justification? Justification is the legal proclamation from God that the guilty sinner is declared righteous in His sight. Justification is completely by the grace of God received through faith and not of any work on the part of the sinner. Justification both absolves the sinner of his sin and imputes the righteousness of Jesus Christ to his account. Justification was a one time act of God at the cross of Jesus Christ for all mankind, the elect, which is received by faith at the beginning of the Christian life, (Romans 3:21-31, Romans 5:1-11, Romans 10:1-13).

What is adoption? The Christian believer now has the right to be called a son of God and share in all the privileges that a son of God has. He has the full right of an adult son in God's household and is an heir with Christ of all things. These blessings include Christian liberty and freedom, the heavenly Father's care, and the privilege of being Christ's ambassador. The Christian has all things now, by faith. At Jesus Christ's return he will have all things, in reality, (John 1:12, Romans 8:22-25, Romans 8:32, 2 Corinthians 5:20, Galatians 4:1-7).

The Continuation of Salvation

What is sanctification? Sanctification is the continuing work of God in the life of the believer making the person holy and Christ-like. Sanctification like justification is completely by the grace of God and not of any work on the part of the sinner, (John 17:15-20, 1 Corinthians 1:2, Titus 3:5-6).

Is the believer completely positionally sanctified before God? The Christian is completely positionally sanctified in God's sight from the beginning of their Christian life onward despite all their past and future sin by God's grace, (1 Corinthians 1:2).

Is the believer ever completely practically sanctified in this life? The Christian believer will continue to fight and struggle against sin until Jesus Christ returns and he is glorified in God's presence after which he will never sin again, (1 John 1:8, 1 John 3:1-3).

How does union with Christ affect the Christian life? The Christian's union with Christ guarantees that no matter what circumstance the believer finds themselves in that Christ is always with them to minister to them in their time of need, (Matthew 28:20, 1 Corinthians 10:13, Hebrews 13:5-6).

How does a friendship and brother relationship with Christ effect the Christian life? This expresses the type of relationship that Christ desires and will have with us and is a great comfort to the believer in the midst of ungodly relationships, because Christ's relationship with us is always perfect, (John 15:15, John 20:17, Romans 8:29).

What is the role of law in the life of the believer? The Old Testament law no longer stands in the life of the believer. Rather the believer's life is governed by the law of Jesus Christ. The believer has the mind of Christ and so is able to make judgments about all things, (1 Corinthians 2:15-16, Galatians 5:18, Galatians 6:2, Colossians 2:13-15, 1 Timothy 1:8-11).

What is the role of grace in the life of the believer? Grace is the beginning and continuance of the Christian life. Christians continue living by receiving and giving grace, (Romans 6:14-15, Romans 12:1-2, Galatians 5:16-18).

How is the believer to be separate from the world? The Christian believer is to be separate from fellowship with the unbelieving world meaning those who reject Christ and those within apostate Christianity, (Acts 8:9-25, 1 Corinthians 5:9-13, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

How is the believer to fellowship with other believers? The believer is to open their heart wide in the fellowship of God's people, use their spiritual gifts to build up the body of Christ,

do everything in their power to promote the unity of the body of Christ, and proclaim the good news in order to expand the fellowship of believers, (2 Corinthians 6:12-13, Ephesians 4:2-6, Ephesians 4:11-13, 1 John 1:1-4).

The Completion of Salvation

What does it mean to persevere in faith in Jesus Christ? The true believer will continue in faith in Jesus Christ and Christ's purpose for him in this world whether Christian service or Christian growth by the grace of God alone, (Philippians 1:3-6).

Will the believer persevere in faith in Jesus Christ? Yes, by the grace of God alone. (Philippians 1:3-6).

Can the believer ever lose God's gift of salvation? No. The Christian believer has come to accept a salvation that is totally of God's grace and by God's promise. And if it is of God's work, will God change His promise? No again. The Christian's hope is in the unchanging promises of God alone, (Romans 8:31-39, Hebrews 6:13-20).

Can the believer shipwreck their faith and remain saved? Yes. (1 Corinthians 3:10-15, 1 Corinthians 10:1-13, 1 Timothy 1:18-20).

What is the glorification of the believer? Upon the return of Jesus Christ in glory he will bring all believers into His presence and glorify them. The souls of those dead in Christ and those still living will be gathered before the judgment seat of Christ and be joined with an imperishable body, glorious, powerful, and spiritual. They will then enjoy the presence of the Lord in a sinless state forever, (John 14:2-3, Romans 8:18-27, 1 Corinthians 15:12-58, 1 John 3:1-3, Revelation 21:1-5).

When will the believer be glorified? Every Christian believer will be glorified immediately upon the return of Jesus Christ for His bride, (1 Corinthians 15:51-52, Colossians 3:4, 1 John 3:1-3).

The Means and Extent of Salvation

What are the means of salvation? The means of God's work of salvation in the life of the believer is grace alone. All that God does in the believer is by grace for the praise of His grace. The agents of grace primary to God's work are the Christian Scriptures, the gifts of the Spirit distributed within the body of Christ for building the body of Christ, and the prayers of the saints. The sole work of the believer is to trust in Jesus Christ, (John 6:29, Acts 20:32, Ephesians 2:6-7, Ephesians 4:11-13, James 5:13-20, 1 John 5:14-17).

What is the extent of salvation? The offer of salvation by faith in the grace of Jesus Christ is guaranteed to be effective in the elect, God's chosen people, (Romans 11:1-36, 2 Corinthians 5:11-21, 2 Timothy 2:8-10).

11. A STUDY OF THE CHURCH, (ecclesiology)

What is the church, the organization of saved people? God has saved men and the Bible also speaks about what saved men are to believe, what they are to practice, and how they are to organize themselves.

The Nature of the Church

What is the church? The church is the assembly of repentant sinners who place faith in the promises of Jesus Christ, who demonstrate regeneration through their conversion, who profess that Jesus Christ is Lord, who have followed Jesus Christ's example and command to be baptized in water, and who have willingly joined themselves in fellowship with Jesus Christ, the head of the church, and His family on this earth, (Matthew 16:13-20, 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, Ephesians 2:14-22, Ephesians 5:23, 1 Peter 2:4-5).

What is the minimum requirement to be a local church? The minimum spiritual requirement for participation in a church of Christ is described above. Regarding attendance Jesus said, *"where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."* Doctrinally every church of Christ must be committed to Jesus Christ as the head of the church, committed to

inerrancy of the Christian Scriptures and its authority over individual believers and the church in both belief and practice, and committed to Christian discipleship, (Matthew 18:20, Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 17:10-12, 1 Corinthians 11:3, Ephesians 4:15, 2 Timothy 3:16-4:5).

Must a believer be in fellowship with a church family? Yes. If a believer is not in fellowship with an assembly of believers he is sinning, (Hebrews 10:25).

Is there one church or many churches? There is one true church of Christ visible to God and invisible to men comprised of all true believers in Jesus Christ. There are also local churches of Christ with the commission to represent the one true church in belief and practice, (Matthew 16:13-20, Acts 8:1, Acts 9:31, 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 1 Corinthians 16:19, Colossians 4:15, 2 Timothy 2:19).

Must a local church be in fellowship with other local churches? Yes. If a local church is not in fellowship with other local churches they are sinning, (3 John).

How is the church described in the Scripture? The church is called the people of God. The church is the visible body of Christ in this world. The church is the temple of the Holy Spirit, (1 Corinthians 12:13, 2 Corinthians 6:16, Ephesians 1:22-23).

Is the church the kingdom of God? The church is only part of the kingdom of God and is the result of God's kingly reign and serves to testify concerning all of God's kingdom, (Acts 8:12, Acts 28:31, Romans 14:17, 1 Corinthians 15:24, Colossians 1:13, Hebrews 12:28).

Are the church and Israel distinct? Yes, God continues to maintain a distinct promise to turn Israel to faith in Jesus Christ in history future. Believing Israel will, however, not regain God's favor in a body separate from the church, nor the church separate from them, but all will rejoice together in fellowship under Christ, (Romans 11, Ephesians 2:14-22, Ephesians 3:1-13).

The Role of the Church

What is the role of the church in evangelism and discipleship? The church has been given the commission by Christ to make disciples of all nations by going, baptizing, and teaching them to obey everything Jesus has commanded. (Matthew 28:19-20, Mark 16:15-16, John 21:15-19, Acts 1:8).

What is the role of the church in building up believers and the body of Christ? The primary work of the church is to build up the body of believers into Christ's likeness. Evangelism and social service become most effective as the body of Christ itself is built up. Jesus himself did not pray for the world, but for those that God gave him out of the world, so that the world could come to belief. Edification takes place through fellowship, discipline, instruction, and teaching. (Matthew 18: 15-20, John 17, 1 Corinthians 14:26, Ephesians 4:1-16, 1 John 1:1-4).

What is the role of the church in the discipline of believers? The foremost goal is the restoration of the offending believer. Jesus first prescribes that the offending party be corrected by one brother. If he does not listen take one or two others along. If he still does not listen take it before the church. If he does not listen at this point remove him from fellowship, (Matthew 18:15-20, 1 Corinthians 5:1-13, 2 Corinthians 2:5-11).

What is the role of the church in worship of Jesus Christ? The assembly of believers is the community where believers worship the Lord in renewal, conversation, praise, thanksgiving, the Lord's supper, giving, and song, (Romans 12:1-2, 1 Corinthians 11:1-34, 1 Corinthians 14:1-40, 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, Ephesians 5:19-20, 1 Timothy 2:1-15).

What is the role of the church in social concern? The church is to minister to the physical and spiritual needs of both Christians and non-Christians. The primary ministry to the non-Christian world is the ministry of the gospel. However, Christians should also represent Christ to the world by feeding the poor, ministering to medical and other needs, and speaking and praying against the corrupt powers of this world, (Galatians 2:10, James 2:1-13, James 5:1-6, 1 John 3:17).

What is the role of the church in proclaiming the gospel? The church of Jesus Christ serves to

demonstrate the good news of the gospel within their fellowship, proclaim the good news to the lost, and pass the good news to the next generation of humanity protected from heresy, (1 John 1:1-4, 2 Timothy 2:2, 2 Timothy 4:1-5).

What is the posture and attitude of the church in the world? The church of Christ is to be serving with a Christ-like attitude and adapting ministry to believers and non-believers in a culturally relevant fashion, (Matthew 20:28, Philippians 2:5-11).

The Government of the Church

What are the qualifications for servants of the church? Servants of the church must be blameless, not overbearing, not drunkards, not violent, hospitable, lovers of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. They must hold firmly to the sound doctrine of the Christian Scriptures so they can teach believers and refute those opposing it, (1 Timothy 3:1-13, Titus 1:5-9).

How are servants of the church commanded to serve? Servants of the church are to be shepherd's of God's flock serving because they are willing, not greedy for money, eager to serve, and not lording it over those entrusted to their care, (1 Peter 5:1-4).

How are servants of the church to be honored by believers? They are to be remembered, their way of life considered, and imitated. They are also receive double honor and compensation for their work, (1 Timothy 5:17-18, Hebrews 13:7).

How are servants of the church to be corrected? No accusation is to be brought against an elder except by the testimony of two or three witnesses. Elders who sin are to be rebuked publicly so that others can take warning, (1 Timothy 5:19-20).

What are the roles of men and women in the church? Men may serve in every capacity in the church. Women may serve in every capacity except to teach men or have authority over men, (1 Timothy 2:11-15).

The Initiatory Rite of the Church: Baptism

What is Christian baptism? Christian baptism is the immersion / washing of a regenerate convert to Christianity into water upon their profession of faith in Jesus Christ. Christian baptism does not produce regeneration, conversion, or faith. These must all be evident before Christian baptism, (Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 2:14-41).

What is the meaning of Christian baptism? Baptism symbolizes the believer's union with Christ in His death and resurrection. Baptism also symbolizes the pledge of a good conscience toward God, (Romans 6:1-14, 1 Peter 3:21).

Who is baptism properly applied to? Baptism is properly applied only to those who evidence regeneration by the Holy Spirit through conversion and repentance from sin, trust in Jesus Christ, and desire baptism. There is no precedent for infant baptism in the Scriptures or for the forced baptism of adults, (Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 2:14-41).

Are other modes of baptism acceptable? The primary meaning of the word baptism is "*to dip*" and thus it is the Biblical method. However, it is possible that other modes, such as washing, pouring, or sprinkling, have been used in the Scriptures when immersion was not possible such as in a house, (Acts 9:18-19, Acts 10:47-48).

What is dangerous about emphasizing baptism? Paul explains that in his own ministry he did not want to rob the cross of its power by baptizing (1 Corinthians 1:11-18). Paul is certainly not opposed to baptism, rather his commission was to preach the gospel so that men could be saved. Water baptism should naturally follow. Paul also explains that if anyone communicates that there is any way to be saved other than by faith in Jesus Christ, such as by water baptism, let him be eternally condemned. The proper posture for the church is to simply call sinners to repentance and faith in Christ and baptize those trusting in Christ. Baptism does not save, but Jesus does, (Galatians 1:6-10, Acts 2:38).

Should a baptized infant be re-baptized if they are saved by personally placing faith in Jesus

Christ? Yes. The Scriptures demonstrate only the baptism of those professing faith in Jesus Christ personally, (Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 2:14-41).

Should a baptized adult be re-baptized if they has not trusted Christ earlier, but now have been saved by receiving Christ's forgiveness? Yes. The Scriptures demonstrate only the baptism of those professing faith in Jesus Christ personally, (Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 2:14-41).

Is a baptized infant who does not personally receive Jesus Christ or any other person who rejects Jesus Christ saved? No. Personal faith in Jesus Christ is the only way of receiving salvation, (John 3:16, Ephesians 2:8-9).

If someone were baptized under a ministry that does not teach that salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ alone, then should they be re-baptized in a Christian church? Yes. Baptism is both a symbol of personal faith as well as union with the body of true believers through agreement with their teaching, (Acts 19:1-7).

What meanings does the word baptism have in the Scriptures? The use of the word baptism in the Scriptures requires careful examination because it may refer to water baptism or it may refer to the baptism of the spirit, the Holy Spirit's saving work in the individual's life, (Matthew 3:11).

Can someone be saved without water baptism? Yes. The thief on the cross was saved, but not baptized. However, this rite should not be taken lightly and is strongly associated with salvation itself, (Luke 23:43, Acts 2:38)

The Continuing Rite of the Church: The Lord's Supper

What is the Lord's Supper? The Lord's Supper is a memorial meal of unleaven bread and wine, patterned after the Old Testament Passover, established by Jesus Christ before his crucifixion, (Matthew 26:17-30, Mark 14:12-26, Luke 22:7-38).

What is the meaning of the Lord's Supper? Jesus explained that the bread is His body which was broken for us. He also explained that the wine was the new covenant in His blood. The purpose of Christians sharing in this supper of bread and wine is to proclaim the Lord's crucifixion until He returns, (1 Corinthians 11:17-26).

Who should partake of the Lord's Supper? The Lord's Supper is properly served only to those professing faith in Jesus Christ, (1 Corinthians 11:23-34).

How should one prepare to take the Lord's Supper? The Lord's Supper is cause for self-examination for the believer and must be eaten reverently, (1 Corinthians 11:23-34).

What are the elements of the Lord's Supper? The elements of the Lord's Supper are unleaven bread and wine. The Scriptures do not forbid substituting the elements for practical purposes providing the substitutes maintain proper reverence for the memorial meal, (1 Corinthians 11:23-34).

The Unity of the Church

Is the church of Jesus Christ one church universally in the world? Yes, (1 Corinthians 12:12-13, Ephesians 4:1-6).

How should Christians of different local church bodies fellowship and work together? Christians should make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. Christians should prepare their hearts for the day when there will be one people of God in reality in heaven. Christians should also pursue and work toward the high calling of uncompromised Scriptural truth, loving Christian fellowship, and partnership with all believers, (Ephesians 4:1-15).

What are the essential factors to consider in Christian fellowship and partnership? Truth and love, belief and practice. Truth and beliefs about Jesus Christ and the Christian Scriptures need to be examined and compared to confirm unity in the Christian mission. Love and practice also need to be examined to insure all are living lives worthy of Christ's calling, (1

Corinthians 5:1-12, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, Titus 1:10-16).

Why is the visible church of Jesus Christ factious? The visible church of Jesus Christ is factious because of sin, Satan, and Christian immaturity. And yet God himself is sovereign even over these problems, (2 Corinthians 2:10-11, Ephesians 4:1-16, James 4:1-12, Revelation 2-3).

The Role of the Church in Marriage

Is marriage an institution of the church or state? Marriage is an institution of the church and thus the church need not acknowledge state marriage or perversions thereof, (Matthew 19:4-6.)

Is a believer permitted to marry an unbeliever? No, (2 Corinthians 6:14).

Does the Bible prescribe additional regulations concerning marriage, divorce, and remarriage?

Yes. A simple summary of marriage regulations would be that first divorce is permitted but only in the case of unrepentant sexual infidelity. (Matthew 1:18-20, Matthew 5:31-32, Matthew 19:3-12, 1 Corinthians 7:10-17, 1 Timothy 5:11-15, Colossians 1:21-22, Matthew 6:14-15, Deuteronomy 22:13-27, Deuteronomy 22:28-29, Deuteronomy 24:1-4, Isaiah 50:1).

Does the Lord hate divorce? Yes, very definitely, (Malachi 2:13-16).

12. A STUDY OF LAST THINGS, (eschatology)

Finally what remains to be accomplished in God's plan? The Christian Scriptures speak about things yet future and the destinies of all things in this world from people to the physical creation. God has revealed some of these things to us for our strengthening and encouragement.

Introduction to Eschatology

Why is the study of future things important for the Christian? God has spoken to us of future things in the Scriptures for our benefit and so it would be wise to pay attention. The Christian Scriptures also proclaim that Christ is victorious and all who hope in Him will be brought into His presence with great joy. It is also important because God is truly completing His plan in the world exactly as prescribed in the Scriptures and Christians should take heed that God continues to work in the world. Jesus commanded us to "watch!", (Matthew 24:36-51, Mark 13:32-37).

What are the essential doctrines of last things for Christian orthodoxy? There are numerous differing views of future things and they cannot all be correct! The Scriptures themselves speak directly against those who teach that Jesus has already returned and that there is no future coming of Jesus Christ. We assert with the Christian Scriptures that Jesus Christ will return in power and great glory for His people and there will be no mistaking His return, (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3, 2 Timothy 2:17-18, Revelation 20:11).

Individual Eschatology

Why does God continue to give the believer life? God gives the believer life, but only as he walks by the Spirit in order to live for Christ and complete the works that God has created in advance for him to do, (Romans 8:1-17, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 2:10, Philippians 1:21).

Why does God continue to give the unbelieving elect life? God gives the unbelieving elect life, that is unbelieving mankind, because of his patience in waiting for them to come to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. And God will faithfully bring them to himself, (2 Peter 3:9).

Why does God continue to give the unbelieving non-elect life? God gives the unbelieving non-elect life, that is fallen angels, because of his patience in storing up his wrath for the day of judgment upon them as well as to truly demonstrate the riches of his glory to the objects of his mercy, mankind, whom he prepared for glory, (Romans 9:22-23).

What is death and why does every individual die? Death is the separation of the human soul and spirit which returns to God from the physical human body which returns to the earth. Every individual is sentenced to die because of their own sin against God. There are two recorded exceptions of men who did not die, Elijah and Enoch. However, even Jesus Christ died. Death is the final enemy to be conquered by Jesus Christ, (Genesis 3, Romans 5:12, 1 Corinthians 15:26, 1 Corinthians 15:51-57).

What occurs during the intermediate state between death and the resurrection? Believers in Jesus Christ are immediately taken to a place of enjoyment in Hades called Abraham's Bosom in the Lord's presence apart from the body. Unbelievers are taken immediately to a place of torment in Hades. Hades is the temporary holding place for deceased humanity, righteous and wicked, (Matthew 10:28, Matthew 16:18-19, Mark 9:43-48, Luke 16:19-31, Luke 23:43, Acts 2:31, 2 Corinthians 5:1-10, Philippians 1:19-26).

The Second Coming and its Consequences

Will Jesus Christ return to earth again physically? Yes, (Matthew 25:1-13, Acts 1:11, Hebrews 9:27-28).

Does anyone know the date or time of this return? No, (Matthew 24:26-44, Mark 13:32-37).

What are the characteristics of Jesus Christ's return? Jesus Christ's return will be personal, physical, visible, unexpected, impending, and with power and great glory, (Matthew 24:30, Matthew 24:36-44, Matthew 25:31, Colossians 3:4, 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10, 1 John 3:1-3).

Will the righteous and wicked dead be resurrected from the grave? Yes. Hades will be emptied of all humans held there and Thalaasa will be emptied of all fallen angels held there. These subjects will then stand before Christ at the Great White Throne for final judgment, (Isaiah 26:19, Daniel 12:2, Ezekiel 37:12-14, Matthew 22:29-32, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Revelation 20:5).

Will the resurrection be bodily? Yes. The believer's soul and spirit will be joined with a new body, imperishable, powerful, spiritual, and glorious. Those outside of Christ who have done evil, however, will rise to condemnation, (Daniel 12:2, John 5:24-30, 1 Corinthians 15:35-58).

What is the final judgment? At the Great White Throne Judgment of Jesus Christ all mankind and angel-kind will appear before Him for His final judgment. Every secret will be revealed. Those in the Lamb's Book of Life will be welcomed into eternal enjoyment in the presence of the Lord. Those not in the Lamb's Book of Life, will be sentenced to eternal damnation separated from the Lord's presence for the ages of the ages, that is the Devil and his angels for whom the Lake of Fire is prepared, (Matthew 25:41, Romans 2:16, Revelation 20:11-15).

Millennial and Tribulational Views

What is the 1,000 year period of Satan's bondage? This is a greatly debated question, but I favor the view that this is the time of Christ's reign on earth through Christians during the Church Age. Thus there is a very real Kingdom of Christ at work now, but the specific length of 1,000 years is figurative. In favor of this view I observe that Revelation 20:1-6 can easily refer to the Church Age now because it makes no mention of peace, while Isaiah 65:17-25 appears to be speaking about the New Heavens and the New Earth. During the Church Age Satan is bound, restricting his evil work on the earth. At the end of the Church Age Satan will be released again to deceive the nations and rally them against the camp of the saints and the beloved Holy City. History will then be consummated at the Great White Throne Judgment of Christ, (Revelation 19:11-20:15).

What is the timing of Jesus Christ's return? I favor the view that Christ's return will occur at the end of the Church Age just before the Great White Throne Judgment, (Revelation 19:11-20:15).

Do the Scriptures speak in the future tense about tribulation and judgments upon Jerusalem that occurred in history past at 70AD? Yes, (Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21, Revelation).

Do the Scriptures speak in the future tense about tribulation and judgments upon the world that are still in history future? Yes, (Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21, Revelation 20-22).

What is the timing of Jesus Christ's return with respect to future tribulation and judgments upon the world? Though a foreign concept to my upbringing Scripture may indicate multiple future events with Christ. Christ came upon Jerusalem in judgment for their rejection of Christ in 70 A.D., (Luke 21:20). Christ will reign on earth through believers during the Church Age, (Revelation 20:4). Christ will appear for the rapture of the church, (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). Christ will judge the sheep and the goats and execute the Great White Throne judgment, (Matthew 25 and Revelation 20:11-15). I am certain that each Christian and the world will face trials in this life with some of them being very great as Christian history has demonstrated. God willing we will study this further. The primary passages of Scripture in question are Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21, Romans 11, 1 Corinthians 15, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11, 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10, 2 Thessalonians 2, 2 Timothy 2:17-18, Hebrews 9:23-28, 2 Peter 3:1-13, and Revelation.

Will the elect, the people of God, those written in the Lamb's book of life, be welcomed into the joyful presence of God for all eternity in glory? Yes, (Revelations 20:11-22:21).

Final States

What is the new heaven and new earth? The new heaven and new earth is the location of God's presence in glory and the final home of all those transformed to love the Lord Jesus Christ, elect mankind, (John 14:1-7, Revelation 20:11-22:21).

What is the activity of heaven? The saints will enjoy the presence of God, worship God, rest from the work of their earthly life, eat and drink at Christ's table, fellowship with Christ and each other, and serve Christ and each other, (Isaiah 6:3, Matthew 19:28, Luke 22:28-30, John 14:1-7, Hebrews 3:11, Hebrews 4:9-11, Hebrews 12:22-24, Revelation 19:1-4, Revelation 20:22-21).

Is there marriage in heaven? No. Marriage was a great gift from God to mankind from even before the fall. The fellowship of Christians is a great gift to mankind during the church age. And in eternity the Scriptures promise that the blessings of heaven for the redeemed are wildly beyond our imagination, (Matthew 22:23-30, Romans 8:18-39, 1 John 1:1-4).

Will there be sorrow in heaven over past sins and separation from the unredeemed? Certainly not. How could anyone be sad about being separated from Satan and his demons? God has promised that in heaven He will wipe away every tear, (Revelation 21:4).

Will there be varying rewards in heaven? God will reward all those He has called according to His grace such that no person in heaven will know regret, loss, or shame, (Matthew 20:1-16).

What crowns will the believer receive from Christ in heaven? The eternal crown. The crown of brotherhood. The crown of those ministered to. The victor's crown. The crown of righteousness. The crown of life. The crown of glory, (1 Corinthians 9:25, Philippians 4:1, 1 Thessalonians 2:19, 2 Timothy 2:5, 2 Timothy 4:8, James 1:12, 1 Peter 5:4, Revelation 2:10).

Is Hades a temporary place of torment for souls awaiting the Great White Throne Judgment? Yes. The dead in Hades and the dead in Thalassa (the Sea) will be extracted to stand before the Great White Throne Judgment of Christ for final judgment and then death and Hades itself will be thrown into the lake of fire along with the unredeemed. Hades is the temporary prison for unbelieving mankind, while Thalassa is possibly the retreat or temporary prison for fallen angels, (Revelation 20:11-21:1).

Is damnation and conscience torment away from the presence of God for *The Ages of The Ages* certain for those not in the Lamb's Book of Life, that is the Devil and his angels? Yes, (Matthew 25:31-46, Revelation 21:6-8).

Does the Great White Throne Judgment of Jesus Christ determine the fate of each individual

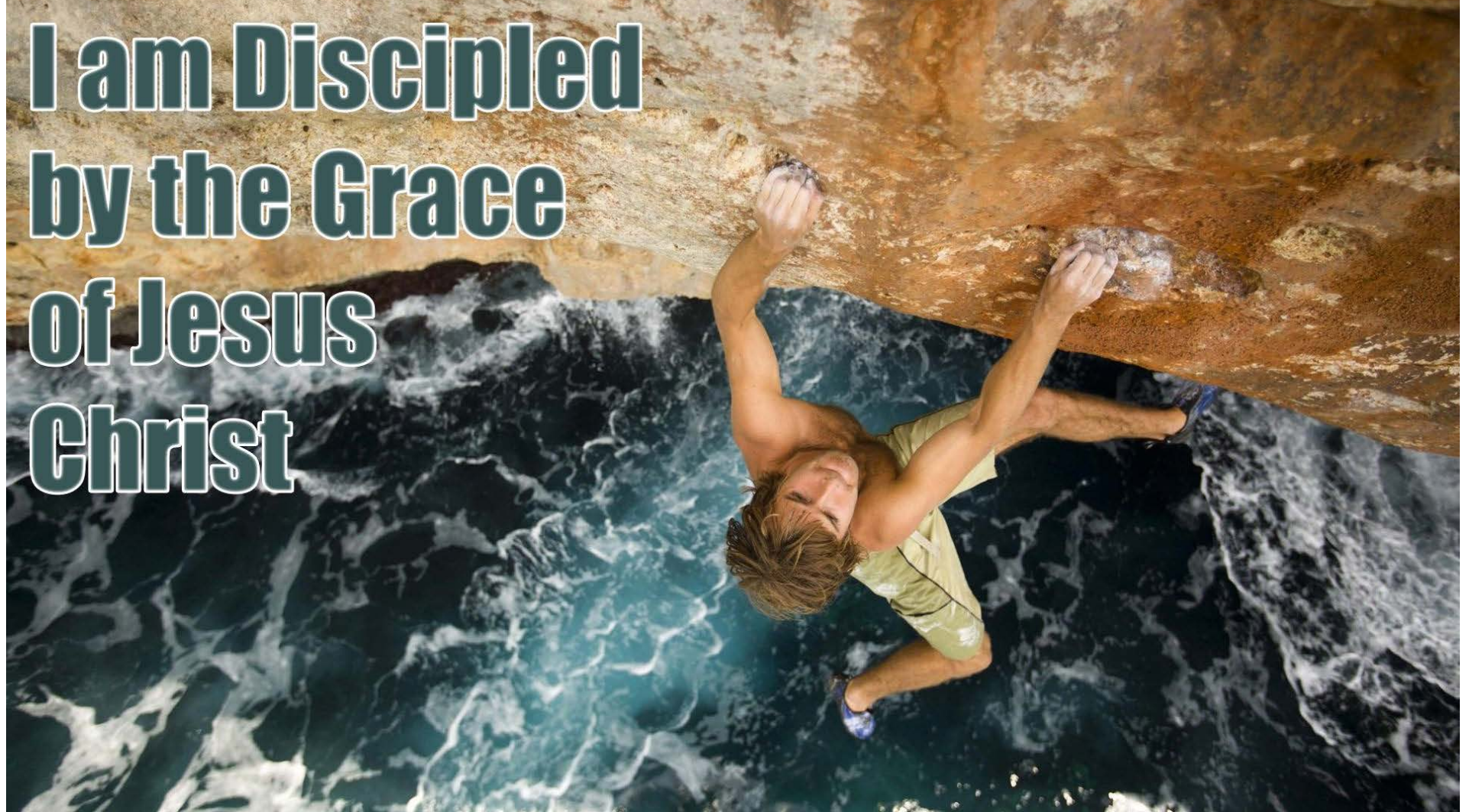
finally? Yes, Jesus Christ's White Throne Judgment is final, (Hebrews 9:27, Revelation 20:11-15).

What will be the basis for the final judgments at the consummation of this world's history? The Book of Life will be opened and everyone who's name is not found in the Book of Life will be cast into the lake of fire. No individual has ever written their own name into the Book of Life, rather Jesus Christ has written these names. Is your name in the Book of Life? If you are a son or daughter of Adam you can know for certain that your name is in the Book of Life through faith in Jesus Christ.

Finally the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters, and all liars will be placed into the fiery Lake of Burning Sulfur. Brother, sister, friend, come to Jesus Christ and find your name in the book of life! (Revelation 20:15-21:4).

Come quickly Lord Jesus and deliver us forever from the evil effects of Satan in our lives and the fellowship of your people!

Cliffhanger



**I am Disciplined
by the Grace
of Jesus
Christ**

Colossians 1:15-23, Out of Control Optimism Part 10, The Parable of the Pew!

Jesus is the best. Check out Colossians 1:15-23 (WEB)...

15) He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

Jesus is the best for WHO HE IS, the image of God!

16) For by him all things were created in the heavens and on the earth, visible things and invisible things, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things have been created through him and for him.

Jesus is the best for WHAT HE DID, creating everything!

17) He is before all things, and in him all things are held together.

Jesus is the best for WHAT HE IS DOING, holding it all together!

18) He is the head of the body, the assembly, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things he might have the preeminence.

Jesus is the best, LEADING THE WAY THROUGH DEATH TO RESURRECTION!

19) For all the fullness was pleased to dwell in him,

Jesus is the best, PACKED TO THE MAX WITH GOD!

20) and through him to reconcile all things to himself by him, whether things on the earth or things in the heavens, having made peace through the blood of his cross.

Jesus is the best, SINGLE HANDEDLY RECONCILING ALL THINGS TO GOD!

21) You, being in past times alienated and enemies in your mind in your evil deeds,

We were the worst, hating God IN OUR MINDS (though he always loves us!).

22) yet now he has reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and without defect and blameless before him,

Jesus is the best, HAVING RECONCILED US TO God even while we hated him!

23) if it is so that you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the Good News which you heard, which is being proclaimed in all creation under heaven, of which I, Paul, was made a servant.

We must continue trusting that Christ has forgiven us, or we will hate God in our minds again, even though we are still reconciled to God through the death of Christ and loved by him.

Friends, false religion is always just one thought away even for the true believer in Jesus Christ. We can continue to trust that God loves us and live confidently as his friend knowing that nothing will ever separate us from his love. Or we can forget, fail to trust, and turn to man-made religion to solve our stinky sin problem.

An extra-Biblical parable:

There was a stinky place. It reeked. Take the worst of yourself, fashion into a foul goop, heat it to boil, sit in the middle, and draw in a deep long breathe. Then invite all your 'friends' who you secretly envy to do the same and begin to throw your goop at each other. Such was this stinky place.

A gracious carpenter came and provided a pew for you and all your 'friends' to sit on while he washed out the stink. He invited everyone to sit on the pew, but no one would take the seat. So he lifted one out of the stink and sat him on the pew himself. Curiously one 'friend' built an imitation pew... with his goop, and attempted to sit on it. Another 'friend' declared that the pew was not for everyone as he pretended to sit next to it. Most curious of all, the one on the pew nearly left his clean seat to sit on the imitation goop pew. He even considered joining the pretender next to the real pew doubting whether the pew was truly for everyone. Meanwhile the carpenter faithfully continued to flush out the goop as he lifted each one out of the goop at the time of his choosing.

Colossians 2:20-23 and 3:5-7, Interpreting and Sanctifying Style

We live in odd times. The other day while walking to work I passed a young man who was working on his car on the street. Though nothing odd about that, I noted that his pants were hanging so low over his rear end that he was walking on the pant legs which completely covered his shoes. What? I guess this is a teen hip hop thing, though the man was not a teen. Yet on another occasion, while helping a friend build a deck, a neighbor the age of my dad stopped by to say hi. He too wore some low riders in the effort to be hip. So while we showed him our carpentry, he showed us... yikes!

Even more accepted in our culture is the open display of feminine sexuality. Recently while evangelizing at the university we saw more skin, silk, and layers over lingerie in the street, than 100 married men see in their bedroom in a year. Though we might chuckle at the indiscreet men above, funny is not the word for indiscretion in women. Though many may not see it or admit it, there is a brutal competition among women. One wonders where the contest will end.

Why even note these things? Things like this have been going on since the beginning of time. Each generation of Christians faces the same sin in their culture as the prior generation, though manifest differently. We note this because Christians are commanded to purify ourselves and our own house, the church. So when the sins of the present culture encroach on the sacred ground of Christian fellowship, when Christians bring these displays into the church family, we must take action. But how?

We might attempt to control these suggestive styles with a policy, campaign, or measuring ruler. We could attempt to craft a church ordinance that lists what pants are acceptable, how high to wear them, and how to stand in them. We could also mandate that silk and lace is for bed room use only, and women can only display a certain percentage of skin in public with no sass in their stance or coy in their countenance. But, would these man-made regulations accomplish the goal?

Colossians 2:20-23 (WEB) says 'no' to more ordinances.

20) If you died with Christ from the elements of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to ordinances, 21) "Don't handle, nor taste, nor touch" 22) (all of which perish with use), according to the precepts and doctrines of men? 23) These things indeed appear like wisdom in self-imposed worship, humility, and severity to the body; but aren't of any value against the indulgence of the flesh.

Hmmm, so do we live and let live?

No to that also. Rather we preach Colossians 3:5-7 (WEB).

5) Put to death therefore your members which are on the earth: sexual immorality, uncleanness, depraved passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 6) For these things' sake the wrath of God comes on the children of disobedience. 7) You also once walked in those, when you lived in them;

Rather than attempt to restrain our wayward hearts with more rules, we break our hearts calling the spade a spade with gospel truth.

Genius is not needed to interpret the styles of men and women who strut their sexuality in the street... and in church. Sexual sins are the top three on Paul's list so we should not be surprised to find it abundant in our culture... and among Christians. Our present generation thinks they have found sexual liberation, but instead they have been enslaved and have locked themselves away from God's blessing intended for the marital bedroom. So will we attempt to curb indulgence with an impotent policy? Or will we interpret our culture's style, preach the truth in love, put lust to death at the heart level, and sanctify style in Christ's household?

Corinthians(1) 10:1-11, The Baptism of Moses Compared and Contrasted with the Baptism of Jesus

There is both a comparison and contrast to be made when considering the baptisms of Moses and Jesus. Christian camps often remain divided on this point by emphasizing either the comparison or the contrast between Moses and Jesus. Yet the Holy Spirit himself notes a both comparison in I Corinthians 10:1-6 and a contrast in Hebrews 3:16-4:3a. So this is a useful study for all Christians to consider.

1) Now I would not have you ignorant, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; 2) and were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; 3) and all ate the same spiritual food; 4) and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of a spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. 5) However with most of them, God was not well pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. 6) Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. 7) Don't be idolaters, as some of them were. As it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play." 8) Let's not commit sexual immorality, as some of them committed, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell. 9) Let's not test Christ, as some of them tested, and perished by the serpents. 10) Don't grumble, as some of them also grumbled, and perished by the destroyer. 11) Now all these things happened to them by way of example, and they were written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come.

1 Corinthians 10:1-11 (WEB)

16) For who, when they heard, rebelled? Wasn't it all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses? 17) With whom was he displeased forty years? Wasn't it with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? 18) To whom did he swear that they wouldn't enter into his rest, but to those who were disobedient? 19) We see that they weren't able to enter in because of unbelief. 1)Let's fear therefore, lest perhaps anyone of you should seem to have come short of a promise of entering into his rest. 2) For indeed we have had good news preached to us, even as they also did, but the word they heard didn't profit them, because it wasn't mixed with faith by those who heard. 3) For we who have believed do enter into that rest, even as he has said, "As I swore in my wrath, they will not enter into my rest;"

Hebrews 3:16-4:3a (WEB)

Consider	I Corinthians 10:1-11 Comparison	Hebrews 3:16-4:3a Contrast
Old Covenant People of God	Blessed but sinned	Heard but didn't believe good news
New Covenant People of God	Saved but also sin	Heard and believed good news

Two troublesome thoughts are highlighted above. First it is possible to be among the people of God and share in great blessing by being near his protection, yet not believe, and miss salvation and protection from God's wrath. Second, it is also possible to be a member of the people of God through sincere faith in the Messiah receiving salvation, yet fall into the same grievous sins as unbelievers and destroy one's usefulness in this life. Examine yourself for true faith and exhort yourself to godly obedience, else you will not escape judgment and your life will be wasted by the effects of sin.

Corinthians(1) 10:12 plus, Paul, John, Luke, and Jesus: Can Sin! Do Sin! May Sin! Hate Sin!

Remaining sin has got to be one of the most difficult realities facing the Christian and all humanity. Understanding God's wisdom in binding all humanity to disobedience is unfathomable (Romans 11:32) and facing the fact that sin still remains after the Lord Jesus personally made payment for our sin is equally mind boggling. We can only say that his infinite patience with our sin and mysterious purpose for our sin must demand all our worship.

Yet will we worship Christ even as Christian sinners? Why the unbelieving laugh at even the concept of one claiming to be Christian who also sins. Yet that is what we are, Christian sinners! The painful reality of our remaining sin may just as easily turn us to denial, brazenness, or hopelessness. Rather than believe that Jesus loves sinners like us, we may simply deny that we do sin or deny that our sin is sin. Rather than believe that Jesus loves sinners like us, we may harden our conscience and simply give ourselves over to sin. Rather than believe that Jesus loves sinners like us, we may despair... even to the depths of suicide.

There is a better solution than a final vindictive strike against God by killing ourselves. Why not find ourselves already crucified with Christ? It is better to believe we are already dead so that Christ can live in us! If God has made you willing to live in this way Paul, John, Luke, and Jesus have some excellent counsel about the sin that remains in us.

Paul says that Christians can sin.

You of course know the difference between 'can' and 'may.' 'Can' means that we have the 'ability to,' while 'may' means that we have 'permission to.' And so Paul teaches that Christians have the 'ability to' sin. ***"Therefore let him who thinks he stands be careful that he doesn't fall"*** (I Corinthians 10:12 WEB). When we became Christians God did not take away our ability to sin. Christians are capable of every sin, except the blasphemy of the Spirit. Christians can murder, lie, steal, commit adultery, and even speak words against Christ. So if you have done or are tempted to do these things do not lose hope or think that Christians can't sin. True Christians can sin and Jesus loves sinners like us!

John says that Christians do sin.

You of course know the difference between theory and practice. While we may discuss the sinfulness of man in theory, John says that our hands are stained with the practice of sin. ***"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us"*** (I John 1:8 WEB). When we became Christians Jesus paid for all our sin, but he did not take away our every practice of sin. Christians sin in thought or action every day. And with the help of the Holy Spirit we do not need to look further than our own hands to see our crimes. So even though we do sin we should not lose hope or think that we need to become a Christian again if we sin. True Christians do sin and Jesus loves sinners like us!

Luke says that Christians may sin.

You of course know the difference between 'can' and 'may' already explained above. Luke

records the conclusion of the Jerusalem Counsel in the books of Acts which gives Christians permission to sin. ***"Therefore my judgment is that we don't trouble those from among the Gentiles who turn to God"*** (Acts 15:19 WEB). Under the New Covenant God wants absolutely no veil of hypocrisy standing between us and him as under the Old Covenant. And so since we are sinners he gives us permission to sin and still be part of the Christian family. This is why the believing members of the Jerusalem Counsel cried out that the Law of Moses was a yoke that neither they nor their fathers were able to bear. Hypocrisy is Christianity's biggest threat. We secretly and not so secretly give ourselves permission to sin, yet hypocritically do not afford this grace to others! But the bold truth of Jesus Christ is that we need only repent of one sin to become a Christian. We need to cease justifying ourselves and instead be justified by Christ. So even though we willingly sin, do not lose hope or think that Christians are better than that. True Christians may sin and Jesus loves sinners like us!

Finally, Jesus says that Christians must hate sin.

"He who loves his life will lose it. He who hates his life in this world will keep it to eternal life" (John 12:25 WEB). Jesus is not talking about hating the good things in mankind, such as his very image designed in us. Rather we must hate the corruption of his image in us and our sin. The thing that we should hate the most about sin is our love of it! And though we have been confronted with the ugliness of our love of sin, we are filled with the wonderful hope of the final and permanent removal of sin for God's people in eternity.

Frankly, Christians would not even be able to pass a sanity test by the psychologists of this world. We are living contradictions hating our own lives, yet filled with unconquerable hope for future glory! So even though we can, do, and may sin we must also hate sin. These four ingredients are the rocket fuel to propel a sinner to love God and love others. And The love of Jesus will hold us on course because of his infinite patience with our sin, his grand purpose for our sin, and his certain promise of eternity with him and his people in a place without sin.

Hold us Jesus!

Corinthians(1) 13:12, Fully Known!

"Please understand me!" How many times have those words passed through our mind or lips? A child makes a plea to their parents and parents to their children. A brother argues with a sister and a sister with a brother. A wife entreats her husband and a husband his wife. A worker presents their request to the boss and the boss to the worker. A student asks a teacher for patience and a teacher asks a student for diligence. A friend seeks understanding with a friend.

Yet who would dare to approach Jesus Christ in order to be understood by him? To many times our efforts to be understood by others are merely efforts to gain approval from men. But can approval from men provide protection from the penetrating gaze of Jesus Christ into our lives? To be known by Christ is to be known to be a desperate sinner in need of a mighty savior. To know Christ is to come to a safe haven where every sin can be laid naked at the foot of the cross covered fully by his blood. To know Christ is to say "Please understand me!" and to gain full assurance that God himself knows every millimeter of our tangle of sin and still hear his urging, "trust in me!"

Others may or may not ever understand our plight in the fowlers net, but Christ, our gentle lamb of sacrifice, knows all. *"For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know fully, even as I was also fully known"* (1 Corinthians 13:12 WEB).

Lord God help us to press on to know and to be known in joyful anticipation of that great day when every secret is laid bare and hypocrisy no longer obscures the fellowship between you and your people. Oh to see and be seen face to face!

Corinthians(1) 4:7, Butterfly Kisses Misses

Several months ago our family received a generous gift. While discussing the matter with a friend they casually commented, "That is great! You deserve it!" As I thought about this I was reminded that our casual conversation is often not very precise and unfortunately all too often not rooted in grace. I returned comment to my friend that actually we did not deserve it, but we were very thankful for the gift even so. They looked at me like I was from outer space!

Time did not permit to exegete Scripture on the matter during my water cooler exchange, however I will take a moment now. The Scripture teaches us that mankind is the undeserving beneficiary of a gracious God. Every good thing we possess is the result of God's gracious blessing. Sinners like our selves could not begin to earn these blessings. Furthermore, if any one of us appears to have more good or less evil than another, that too is from the wise hand of God's grace.

Paul challenged the egocentric Corinthians thus, *"For who makes you different? And what do you have that you didn't receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?"* (I Corinthians 4:7 WEB). Not one stitch of the good things we have are deserved. Rather God has freely chosen to bless his people because of his gracious choice.

On this same note, Bob Carlisle sings a heart moving tear jerking song titled *Butterfly Kisses* about the special relationship between a father and a daughter. I have three daughters myself and I am moved by the song. Yet as incredibly moving as the lyrics are, I will point out that one particular line falls short of grace. Carlisle sings, *"With all that I've done wrong I must have done something right to deserve her love every morning and butterfly kisses at night."* Grace, however, teaches us that we do not deserve even one good thing, but in fact damnation. But God because of his grace does not give his people damnation, but instead good things, such as special butterfly kisses from our daughters.

Now I have absolutely no intent to undermine or devalue the wonderful song of Bob Carlisle. I still enjoy this song myself and look forward to hearing it on the radio. However, I do hope to do my part to testify to the amazing grace of God in this world. If we are moved to tears by *Butterfly Kisses*, how much more will we be moved to follow Christ by the knowledge of his grace in our lives? We didn't do a lot of wrong that can be made up by doing something right! Friends, we have wronged beyond repair and no doing of right can even the score. Only the work of a perfect Christ can reverse the effects of our sins. And this he has done at the cross of Calvary. And what is more he also calls redeemed sinners such as us to great works such as Christian parenting and the like.

As we lean over to kiss our children good night how much more should we be moved to tears that God entrusts us with the awesome task of raising his little ones, not because we deserve it, but because of his grace. And how much more should we be moved to ask God to make us equal to the task!

Corinthians(1) 7:10-14, Marriage Part 5, Union with the Defiled?

God calls his people to holiness, that is separation from anything corrupted. He is holy and he has set us apart for his holy purposes. Most homes have special things that are set apart for special purposes. Growing up as a child in my parents home we had a set of fine crystal glassware to be used only for very special occasions. These glasses were set apart from the commonplace and you would hear it from my mom if they even came close to harms way. Now as an adult in my own home we have a model train set that only comes out of the closet at Christmas time. We have set it apart from regular use in order to keep it special and my kids hear it from me if it is not kept safe. God is also set apart, holy, by the very nature of who he is. And He has also set apart his redeemed people in his eyes. And now he calls us to live as set apart, just as he sees us. For example in the Old Testament God commanded Israel to remain holy and set apart through various marriage regulations and now in the New Testament era He commands Christians to only marry Christians, 2 Corinthians 6:14.

Nowhere is the call to holiness and separation from the world as painfully illustrated as in Ezra 10:1-4 (WEB). We read,

1) Now while Ezra prayed and made confession, weeping and casting himself down before God's house, there was gathered together to him out of Israel a very great assembly of men and women and children; for the people wept very bitterly. 2) Shecaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered Ezra, "We have trespassed against our God, and have married foreign women of the peoples of the land. Yet now there is hope for Israel concerning this thing. 3) Now therefore let's make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and those who are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God. Let it be done according to the law. 4) Arise; for the matter belongs to you, and we are with you. Be courageous, and do it."

The thought of sending one's wife and children away is almost inconceivable, but such was the radical resolve and commitment of the Jews returning from the exile who learned their lesson to do things God's way at all cost. So it could be expected that the new Christians of the first century returning to God through Jesus Christ would have the same question about what to do with their unbelieving spouses and children. Would God call Christian men to send their unbelieving wives and children away in order to obey the even more glorious revelation of the holiness of God evident in Jesus Christ? The standard of Christ under the New Covenant is even higher than the demands of Moses! The truth of Christ no doubt introduced painful circumstance to many marriages as believers worshipped a crucified Christ. Their unbelieving spouses must have thought and still do think this is utter foolishness. Ending the painful union of belief and unbelief may have been inviting for many.

So Paul answers this question in I Corinthians 7:10-14 (WEB),

10) But to the married I command—not I, but the Lord—that the wife not leave her husband 11) (but if she departs, let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband not leave his wife. 12) But to the rest I—not the Lord—say, if any brother has an unbelieving wife,

and she is content to live with him, let him not leave her. 13) The woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he is content to live with her, let her not leave her husband. 14) For the unbelieving husband is sanctified in the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified in the husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy.

So unlike the Jews returning to God under the Old Covenant, the New Covenant people of God are not permitted to divorce their husbands or wives because of their unbelief. We might think that since the call to holiness is even more radical as followers of Christ that our separation from unbelieving spouses should even be swifter. One thought is that even though the Christian call to holiness is even more radical, the grace of God under the terms of the New Covenant is likewise more radical. The powerful grace of God in Christ reveals to us just how Holy God can be intimately united in fellowship with sinful man. And so that same grace protects a believer who finds themselves united in marriage to an unbeliever. The Scripture is clear that a Christian should never begin a marriage with a non-Christian. However, if we find ourselves married to an unbeliever, whether by becoming a Christian after marriage or a by wrong choice in the past, we can trust that God is in control and continue to love our spouse as long as they are willing. For the sake of the believer God has sanctified the unbelieving spouse and children, not that they are saved and Christian, but that the believer is free to fellowship with their family without fearing corruption even though they remain in unbelief.

Two final reflections: The radical commitment to God and holiness observed by Jews and Christians in days past placing God's command above their spouse and children is striking. Our present generation has made idols of everything including marriage and family. We are experts at getting our our way in God's name.

However, the Lord's command to remain united in married, even to unbelievers, is a vivid parallel of Holy God's gracious choice to unite himself permanently to sinful man through the cross. What a wonderful husband we have in Christ! He is committed to our holiness and will never leave us despite our sin.

Corinthians(1) 7:20-21, Romans 11:36, Nation of Slaves Be Free!

No offense, but today I was silent while my church family celebrated the 4th of July with the rousing choruses of the *Star Spangled Banner*. Perhaps if our faith never gets further than Federer and *America's God and Country* we could sing along without question of conscience. However, for myself I could not stomach the smiling faces singing of the "*land of the free and the home of the brave.*"

We are a nation of slaves.

To be sure good men have righted injustices of prejudice and oppression. Lincoln was a man who led our nation like a David defeating the Goliath of black slavery. His Gettysburg Address still resounds with hope, "*Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.*" Just the first sentence of his speech ignites fervor in any sensible man. Yet oddly the Scriptures cast a different tone on the value of freedom. Paul says, "*20) Let each man stay in that calling in which he was called. 21) Were you called being a bondservant? Don't let that bother you, but if you get an opportunity to become free, use it*" (1 Corinthians 7:20-21 WEB). The Bible is strangely dispassionate about the liberty praised by Americans. The gospel affronts suggesting that an obedient Christian is effective even as a slave, while a 'free' unbeliever is useless due to their slavery to sin. There may be no oratory of greater eloquence defending liberty than Lincoln's address... except the gospel of Jesus Christ promising true liberty. Lincoln's conclusion is known by all, '*that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.*' But do we know Scripture's conclusion is a perfect contrast? "*For of him, and through him, and to him are all things. To him be the glory for ever! Amen*" (Romans 11:36 WEB). Democracy will one day perish from the earth, but the benevolent rule of Christ the king will endure forever.

It is the gospel that offends. Why Christ boldly teaches that citizens ought to pay their taxes, even to evil governments! Christ teaches that we must obey our government whether good or evil. Yet this command is in contrast to the very seed of thought that gave birth to the United States, that governments should be obeyed... except for tyrants. Am I the only Christian, aside from my wife and children, that must submit to sinful leadership? We reviewed Romans 13 today in church and concluded that Pastor Bonhoeffer, though praised as a martyr by Americans, is not praised by Christ for attempting to assassinate his maniacal governor. First century Christians, however, submitted to the brutal rule of Rome in every way that Christian conscience permitted, and were martyred by their maniacal governor.

Christians are called to obey their government, pray for their leaders, to speak against wrongs, and... to suffer as lambs if evil men do not repent. How would the story read if Bonhoeffer and the Founding Fathers had done that? While American democracy appears to have tuned up some injustice, sadly the greater reverberation is with the chords of fallen human nature suggesting that God makes exceptions to his commands to preserve our happiness. This small misalignment has ever so slowly driven us off the high road into swine filth. I am baffled that American Christians cannot tell the difference between a mere United States citizen and a citizen of Christ's kingdom, or worse that earthly liberty is worthy of corporate praise while our nation remains chained in slavery to sin!

How can we be submerged in excrement and yet come up smiling and licking our lips with

millions of our babies sacrificed for our convenience, billions in our wallets from prostituting the beauty of our women, and trillions gambled to bring this 'freedom' to other lands with our democracy? Nineveh did not know right from left, but we have even homogenized it so that we do not know up from down. Any sane nation in the world ought to cry, 'Yankee, go home!'

Someone must follow Jonah to tell us 'Yanks' of true home and liberty. And the 'Star Spangled Banner' must be amended to make it fit for Christian worship and proclaim Christian mission.

*O! Say now I see by the gospel's true light
That liberty is found only in freedom from sin
And my villainy is exposed at His cross in dark night
Yet through his blood I am guiltless in Him!
How woefully enticed by temporal freedoms
Blindly used to serve self and this world's kingdoms!
Yet the star-spangled banner will surrender her slaves free,
When His brave free in the land tell of true home and liberty!*

Corinthians(1) 7:29, Marriage, Part 3: As Not Married

As a married man, Scriptures touching on marriage capture my interest. One such Scripture is 1 Corinthians 7:29 (WEB), *"But I say this, brothers: the time is short, that from now on, both those who have wives may be as though they had none;"* This is a striking command in view of the high value placed on marriage by the Christian faith.

What does it mean for the married to live as though not married? Other Scripture confirms that it CANNOT mean to be unfaithful, to not love and respect your spouse, to not provide for your family, or to despise marriage. The command must mean to strive to be free from the typical worldly encumbrances of married households as much as possible in order to be free to serve the Lord.

What does it mean that the time is short? Verse 31 explains, *"For the mode of this world passes away."* Thus the verse does not point only to the trials of the 1st century church, but of the church until this present world passes away at Christ's return. In light of eternity the time is short so do not make a home here, but in heaven.

Are we then to deny ourselves the pleasure of marital bliss? Again other Scriptures make it plain that marriage is approved, encouraged, and blessed, but not mandatory. The verse, however, reminds us that we must not make marriage and family our primary focus as long as we remain in a fallen world. Spiritual warfare and a focus on Christ are of first importance. Some have even denied themselves marriage for the sake of the Kingdom, Matthew 19:12.

How can Paul expect us to live by this standard? In Romans 8:18 Paul encourages us that our sufferings are not even comparable to the glory to be revealed in us. In 2 Corinthians 12:4 Paul describes a man, himself, who was caught into the third heaven and heard things of which it is not even permitted to speak. I believe God showed Paul something of heavenly glory, and though he could not speak to us about it directly, we can still listen to a man just like ourselves who has been to heaven. The tone of Paul's life reads in bold print saying something like, *"Believe me! Jesus paid our way. He is building a mansion for us. And if you saw and heard what I saw and heard nothing would stand in your way of giving EVERYTHING to Jesus...even your marriage."*

Corinthians(2) 5:13, Insane Faith

When I share my faith and doctrine in the neighborhood, at the workplace, and with friends and family many feel that I am a strange bird, even Christians. However, my goal is simply to reverberate Presbyterian Calvin's doctrine of man's sinfulness, Catholic Augustine's doctrine of predestination, Methodist Wesley's doctrine of Christ's atonement, Anglican Tyndale's doctrine of irresistible grace, and Anabaptist Simon's doctrine of perseverance. So on these points if I am strange then I am strange along with great men in the church.

None-the-less it is quite unsatisfying to be considered strange without reason. Therefore, I wish to offer you my interpretation of 2 Corinthians 5:13 and prove beyond all doubt that Christians should have insane faith in an insanely good God. *"For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God. Or if we are of sober mind, it is for you"* (2 Corinthians 5:13 WEB). Here Paul reminds us that rock solid faith in THE GOD WHO IS will cause us to appear beside ourselves, that is out of our minds, to the unbelieving and the ignorant.

For example, I believe that Elijah and Enoch did not die, but were transported directly to Christ in heaven. I believe that Jesus literally raised Lazarus and many others to life from stone cold death. I believe that though the body dies that all people that ever lived are still alive today in Paradise or Hades. I believe that Jesus turned water into wine with no smoke and no mirrors. I believe that though a man may hate and defy God in ignorance, that the grace of God will win this wretch to pure wholehearted devotion. I believe that though my current life is difficult because of the effects of my sin, the sin of others, and Satan's sin, that at my death or the beginning of eternity I will be made forever perfect, along with all God's chosen ones. I believe that God knows all and sees all and that nothing can be hidden from him, including our thoughts. I believe that we are surrounded by myriads of righteous angels, usually invisible to us. I believe we are also plagued by demons, angels fallen into rebellion against Christ.

How will YOUR neighbors react when you teach them these things? It is not surprising that communist China has dealt with some Christians by confining them to asylums. What can we learn from this? How long before proud democratic USA follows China? To muse about what Jesus Christ has done and may do is nothing short of ecstasy for believers, but painful pills for unbelievers no matter what nationality. Yet, because of unbelievers and the ignorant we need to spend time in our right mind for the sake of the gospel and their salvation. That is to say, it is a blast to remember what God has done and imagine what he may do. However, before blowing people away with all the amazing abilities of our God, it is of first importance to point the world to his amazing cross of sacrifice and set good practical examples of loving others.

How about beginning by washing the dishes and taking out the trash?

Corinthians(2) 5:14-15, Out of Control Optimism Part 9, Jesus Loves All the Little Children of the World!

We sing the great majestic hymns of the faith in my church. Recently we sang one of the most majestic hymns of all time, *Jesus Loves the Little Children*. You might not think of this simple children's song as majestic, but the message is powerful.

Clare Woolston wrote the words to the famous Christian song, *Jesus Loves the Little Children*. Woolston was a preacher in Chicago Illinois and lived from 1856 to 1927. This song is a favorite even today, especially among children.

*Jesus loves the little children,
All the children of the world.
Red and yellow, black and white,
All are precious in His sight,
Jesus loves the little children of the world.*

I sang the song with joy, but sadness as well. I couldn't help but focus on the words, "*Jesus LOVES the little children, ALL the children of the world.*" That is the good news. Jesus does love all the children of the world! Yet I was sad.

Some have redefined Jesus' *love* to be an offer of *love* half way to the heart of children. They believe that if children repent, Jesus' love continues. However, if children do not repent, Jesus' love turns to eternal wrath and eternal damnation. This seems odd for God to love and then rescind the offer! If that is true, then what is grace really? However, Jesus' love is not conditional like our love. His love goes the whole way through to pay for our sin and guarantee a seat in Heaven, reaching our sinful hearts... sooner or later. His love for his chosen ones is unconditional, unrelenting, unthwartable, unchanging. "*Jesus LOVES the little children....*"

Others have redefined *all* to mean *all* nationalities and *all* types, but not each individual child. Jesus MIGHT LOVE a particular child OR he MIGHT NOT. They are not sure. However, anyone who has read anything about the life of Jesus realizes that he was kind and loving to each individual. He was even kind to the Pharisees who hated him and invented foolish ideas such as, God does not love all. Yet Jesus does love, "...*ALL the children of the world.*"

With good news like that how can I stay sad? Time to share the Good News and LIVE for Christ!

For the love of Christ constrains us; because we judge thus, that one died for all, therefore all died. He died for all, that those who live should no longer live to themselves, but to him who for their sakes died and rose again.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15 (WEB)

Corinthians(2) 5:16, The Matrix

Second Corinthians 5 has always been a favorite chapter, especially verse 16 (NIV), *"So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer."* My wife and I often remind and correct each other when we are regarding someone from a "worldly" point of view. By "worldly" Paul means from mankind's natural viewpoint apart from enlightenment from the Lord and a heart of grace.

I am often tempted to place people into the categories of "the good" to be loved and trusted and "the bad" to be avoided. Furthermore once these categories are established I overlook the good in the bad people and the bad in the good people. These categories, however, are totally opposed to the view point of Christ who loves and died for sinners.

A better way is a Christian regard for our fellowman that absolutely does not result in trust in or worship of each other, but instead a commitment to brotherhood. That is we must follow Christ and love and forgive even those who do not deserve it, for we ourselves do not deserve the love and forgiveness we have received from God. The Scriptures teach that any one of us is capable of any sin, therefore we are all in great need of friends that will bring the love of Christ into our lives rather than abandon us to our wretchedness or blindly pretend that we all are the nice people that we show ourselves to be from day to day. Moreover, a Christian regard for Christ must result in sinful man's trust in, obedience to, and worship of a perfect Christ. Consider a matrix of worldly and Christian views below:

Four views of Christ	as bad	as good
worldly	The Pharisees thought Christ could not be trusted for he associated with sinners Luke 15:2	The crowds thought Christ was wonderful and so crowned him earthly king John 6:15
Christian	Christians know Christ has done nothing wrong even though he was crucified Luke 23:41	Christians must trust, obey, and worship Christ as king of our hearts John 20:28

Four views of man	as bad	as good
worldly	A Pharisee hated bad men because they are bad Luke 18:11	Even Tax-collectors love good men because they are good Matthew 5:46
Christian	Christians should love bad men because Christ graciously loved us Matthew 5:43-46	Christians know even the best man is still corrupted by sin Romans 3:23

You will note there is a great contrast between the worldly and Christian views and the views of Christ and man in the tables above. Are your views of your fellowman and Christ Christian or worldly? Are you regarding others from a worldly point of view or from the view of Christ? Only with God's help can we be agents of grace in a world devastated by the corruption of sin.

Corinthians(2) 5:21, Jesus Took My Wheel

My friend D. was explaining to me the challenges of teaching prison inmates his Life Skills class and said many of them could care less because they '*got the wheel.*' I asked him what that means. It is prison slang for '*the wheel of life*' or in other words a '*life sentence*' in prison. You can imagine that would remove your motivation for a life skills class. There is no need to learn how to interview, get a job, or balance the checkbook because you will never need those skills again. At the time D. was telling me this, American Idol, Carrie Underwood, was becoming a star with the song, '*Jesus take the wheel.*' It gave me cause for reflection.

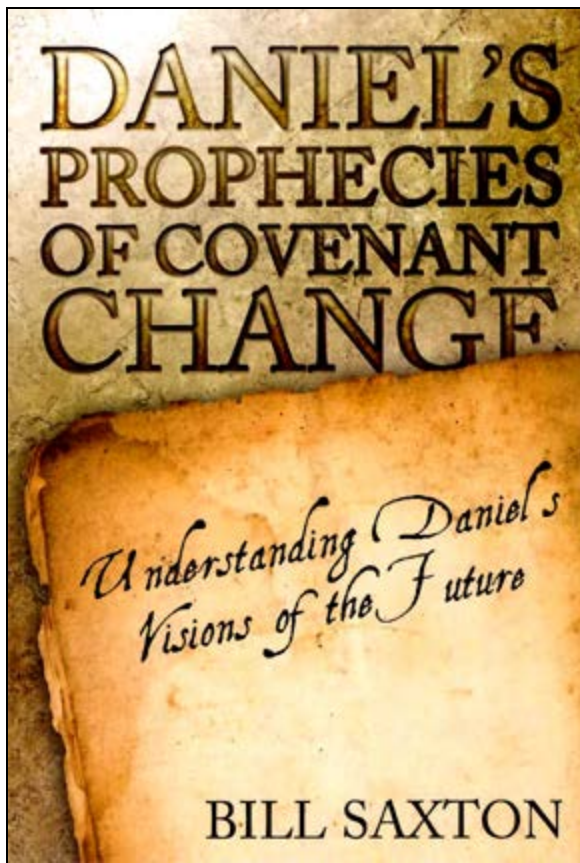
Underwood's song is about a young mother who cries out for Jesus to save her from a near death car accident by '*taking control of the steering wheel*' and then after she is safely on the side of the road she asks Jesus to '*take control of the steering wheel*' of her misguided life. No doubt you are encouraged by the message that Jesus is a savior who can save us from harms... such as car accidents, and also save us from the tragedy of a wasted life... if we obey him. However, as Carry sings of salvation from an auto fatality with glossed lips and a veneer of tight jeans, we were not saved from her *femme fatale*. Something seems amiss.

To be sure Jesus can save us from harms and also from wasting our lives if we pursue Christ-likeness. However, Jesus' greatest work is to save us from eternal condemnation as a consequence of our rebellion against holy God. Scripture says, "***For him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; so that in him we might become the righteousness of God***" (2 Corinthians 5:21 WEB). Jesus Christ took our punishment upon himself to save us from God's wrath against sin. To be saved from a car crash and a misguided life is worth singing about, but to be saved from eternal damnation is an altogether different category of praise.

One can easily understand why Carrie Underwood is an American Idol, but suppose a prison inmate from my friend D.'s class stood before us. His face is scarred from a life of violence, his body racked from drug abuse, and his usefulness to society wasted. He can no longer be saved from the repeated crashes that destroyed his life. He can no longer be saved from a misguided life for '*the wheel of life*' in prison is all that remains for him. Though Carry Underwood's performance has captivated the eyes of America, this prisoner is a captive we do not care to understand and so our eyes turn away. Though well beyond our aid, imagine that he hears that '*Jesus took his wheel*', paying his sin debt on the cross and he begins to believe that Jesus saved him from eternal damnation. A contrast is to be noted. He is not pleading for Jesus to 'take' his wheel, but boldly believes that Christ already 'took' his wheel. Would we be willing to praise God for giving this criminal eternal salvation for free the same as we are willing to praise Carrie Underwood, America's Idol?

Truth be told, with our gloss of goodness removed, and our veneers of hypocrisy stripped away we have more in common with the heart of this prison inmate than with the cosmetic image of Carry Underwood. We are guilty sinners before a holy God, yet saved by grace. Though we may lust for the praise given to American Idols, it is Jesus Christ that will be praised.

Daniel 12:1-4, Further Reflection



Bill Saxton wrote *Daniel's Prophecies of Covenant Change*. Saxton does not address the scope of mankind's salvation. However, he does give thorough treatment to Daniel's prophecies that relate to my proposed understanding of Daniel 12:1-4, Matthew 24-25, and Revelation. Eschatology is not my strength and so I would be glad take a wide path around these debated and divisive subjects in order to simply enjoy brotherhood trusting God with unanswered questions. Yet the grace of Christ draws me, and hopefully you as well, to search deeply into the prophesied future of mankind's redemption. Saxton does not propose a definite answer to the timing of the resurrection and judgment forecast in Daniel 12:2, but instead a possible dual meaning. Daniel 12 follows closely after Chapter 11 which he understands to detail the life of 1st century King Herod. Yet Daniel 12:1-4 also appears to speak about resurrection and final judgment. Thus Saxton has not answered all my remaining questions, but he does inspire me to strive to perfect my understanding of mankind's redemption with Biblical proofs.

Further study and reflection to continue at [Daniel 12:1-4](#) and [Your Thought is that Daniel 12:1-4 is the Final Judgment!](#)

Desperado, by Kenny Rogers: For those lost in the Country among us

*Desperado, why don't you come to your senses,
You've been out ridin fences for so long now,
Oh and you're a hard one, but I know that you've got your reasons,
The things that are pleasin you can hurt you somehow.*

*Don't you draw the queen of diamonds boy, she'll beat you if she's able.
You know the queen of hearts is always your best bet.
Now it seems to me some fine things have been laid upon your table,
But you only want the ones you can't get.*

*Desperado, you ain't gettin no younger,
Your pain and your hunger, they're drivin you home,
And freedom, oh freedom, well that's just some people talkin.
Your prison is walking through this world all alone.*

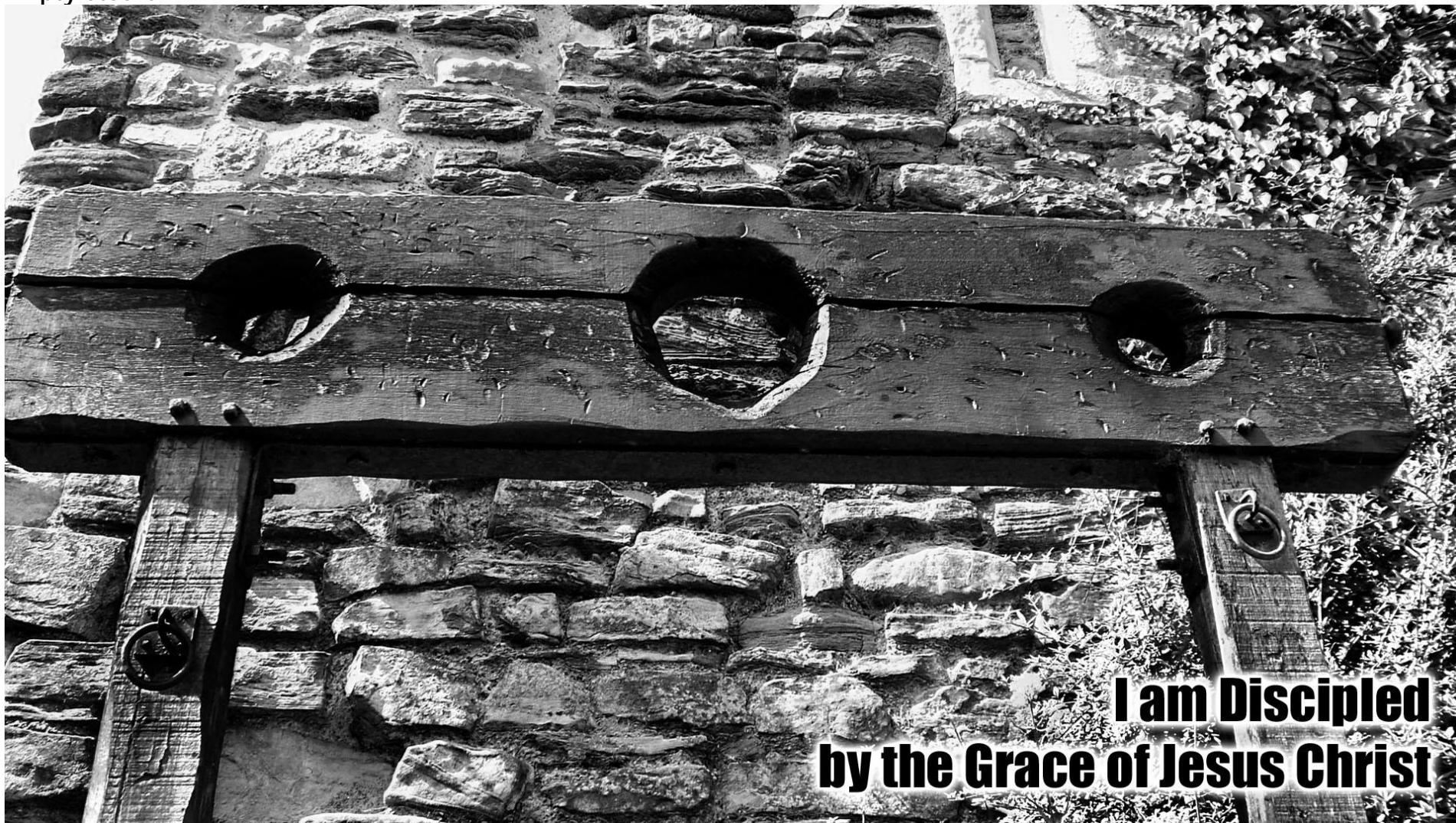
*Don't your feet get cold in the wintertime,
The sky won't snow and the sun won't shine,
It's hard to tell the nighttime from the day.
And you're losin all your highs and lows,
Ain't it funny how the feelin goes away?*

*Desperado, why don't you come to your senses,
Come down from your fences- open the gates.
It may be rainin, but there's a rainbow above you.
You'd better let somebody love you,*

*LET SOMEBODY LOVE YOU.
You'd better let somebody love you,
before it's too late.*

Dear Heavenly Father, I pray that you would round up the remaining lost cowboys and bring them safely back to your loving ranch.

Empty Stocks



**I am Disciplined
by the Grace of Jesus Christ**

Ephesians 1:11-14, Archie Bunker and The Praise of God's Glory

I misunderstood Ephesians 1:11-14.

I originally understood the passage to teach that we have the privilege of praising God. This is true, however, a closer examination reveals that God is praised for saving us whether we have a heart of praise or not. Read for yourself, *"11) We were also assigned an inheritance in him, having been foreordained according to the purpose of him who does all things after the counsel of his will, 12) to the end that we should be to the praise of his glory, we who had before hoped in Christ. 13) In him you also, having heard the word of the truth, the Good News of your salvation—in whom, having also believed, you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14) who is a pledge of our inheritance, to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of his glory"* (Ephesians 1:11-14 WEB).

This is great news for two reasons resulting in an important conclusion. First, our salvation does not hinge on having a constant positive attitude of praise toward God. Truth be told you can be angry as a hornet at God, have an attitude to match Archie Bunker himself, and have absolutely no praise for God and God is still praised for saving your wretched soul. I am not saying we should magnify the glory of God's grace by increasing our sin. But I am saying that even if our attitude is that God himself and the people in our lives are "meatheads," God is still praised for saving us.

Second, even when our attitudes are excellent, our praise is still tainted with the poison of sin. Though I have no plans to rid the shelves of my favorite Christian music CDs or cease my own efforts to serve the Lord, again truth be told even our best efforts, including our praise, are striped with the poisons of pride, ignorance, selfish ambition, greed, and the like. The verses above teach that God is praised for showing mercy to wretched sinners who did not deserve it and still do not deserve it.

God help us to welcome the lost to join a fellowship with Christ himself as our only hope! Praise be to God's glorious grace!

Ephesians 1:3-4, Chosen!

Tonight I just finished reading a theological magazine that I receive every other month. I enjoy reading the magazine to learn as well as understand more about the views of other Christians. As I read the magazine I noted how easy it was for the various contributors to make many profound points as well as promote the theological jargon from a particular camp without explaining or teaching the Christian Scripture. I found myself intellectually roused and ready to debate these authors with my own hard won opinions. But here is a trap that I have fallen into before. Will I (or you) as a minister of the gospel use the privilege to speak to others to advance a personal or club distinction or instead to make clear to others the encouragement and exhortations from God's Word? God help us to do the latter. Thus postured, I begin a new monthly Zingers column in which we will, in a short paragraph or three, highlight one verse or sentence from the Christian Scripture.

Please consider a grammatical dissecting of Ephesians 1:3-4 (NIV) in order to learn some down right neat facts. Please follow along. What is the noun or verb? "**Blessed be.**" OK, blessed be who? "**The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.**" Wow...so God is the God and Father of Jesus? Yes. And more wow...Jesus is also our Lord? Yes, it says "**our Lord.**" Read on grammar man. What can you tell me about this God and Father of Jesus? It says "**Who has blessed us.**" Cool! God be blessed caused he has blessed us. How has he blessed us? "**With every spiritual blessing.**" Now you are talking dude. By breaking apart these grammar clause-a-ma-thingies a picture is starting to take shape. BLESSED be God who has BLESSED us with every spiritual BLESSING. Wowzer...(or blessing)...which ever exclamation fits your generation gap.

Now back to it. Tell me about these blessings. Not only do you have EVERY spiritual blessing, these blessings are "**in the heavenly places in Christ.**" Now that one is getting a little too tough to believe. Sometimes life and the future prospects seem dim or even black, hardly heavenly. Well?? OK I know we have very serious battles to face, but God's word says what it says. You are radically blessed. How radical? "**Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.**" Whoa boy?! Just how could God choose us before he even made us? Well the verse doesn't explain that, but the verse does say he did.

So you may want to consider looking at your life from the view point that God knew about you from before day one. So if you think that there is something you are hiding from God...ah, well...it may be tough for you to swallow...but...ah....he knows. Well he is God after all then. So God chose us. What did he choose us for? God chose us "**that we would be holy and without blemish before him.**" Whoa..Wowzer..and Shazam. You mean that we are forever sinless to Holy God from BEFORE day one in spite of all the sin we have committed SINCE day one. You got it. How could he even do that?

Well we are just looking at one verse here. Be sure to read the remaining context to learn how God did this "**in Christ**" and through the "**blood of Christ.**" God's love for us came at the highest price of the death of his only Son. Though you may want to take a break before reading about it ...if you get more excited your exclamations may simply turn to shouting praise!

Ephesians 5:19, Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs

I thoroughly enjoy music. In fact, in my house my kids tell me to turn down the volume. Agreed we should not use music as an escape from problems or a veneer over depression, but instead to tell the tale of our victories and defeats, and express our emotions. Agreed also we shouldn't prefer music to hearing truth, but why not tell truth in our music? David did. For myself I rank a number of Christian songs over many sermons I have heard and even given. Paul exhorts us in Ephesians 5:19 (WEB), *"speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs; singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;"*

Now this is a cool verse. Here we are exhorted to sing three types of music: psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. I once heard someone say that the only music we are to sing are the Psalms from Scripture. They further explained that the Book of Psalms can be divided into three styles: psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. This assertion is more than I know and unfortunately I only know a teeny bit of Greek with little time to study more. However, if I had more expertise in Greek I would study this verse further in the hopes of enhancing the praises of God's people.

Yet perhaps the translators already did adequate research and 'psalms' are simply to be understood as the inspired songs of Scripture in the Book of Psalms. I went to a church once and their conviction and policy was to only sing songs from the Book of Psalms. I thought that was cool to sing Psalm chapter one put to music. More churches ought to sing the Psalms.

Likewise the translator's reference to 'hymns' may simply be a reference to the common congregational music of God's people, not inspired, but written by thoughtful Christians throughout the ages. My current church family can belt out hymns like I have never heard before. It is actually fun to sing them at full tilt. Likewise our policy, hoping to protect the weaker brother, is to sing hymns only.

Finally, if we take the translation at face value 'spiritual songs' could simply mean any song whatsoever that is spiritual. Wow! Think of the implications! We could be free to make music in any way whatsoever that best expresses our tastes and emotions, while keeping step with the Spirit. Break out my Petra and Larry Norman collection! I think back to my college years and involvement with Campus Crusade, Navigators, and DiscipleMakers, I am reminded that we sang modern praise choruses. These songs were often simpler than hymns and not inspired like the Psalms, but they did a great job of helping me to express my new faith and they were also a blast to sing. Ironically, many of these groups sing praise choruses only.

Now I am sure that when Paul wrote the verse above he did not intend to mean that those with convictions to sing Psalms or hymns or spiritual songs should each meet SEPARATELY to worship! Yet sadly it would seem that this is the case. Of course we each have different tastes whether in the same generation or different generations, yet Christian charity demands that we each think of others more highly than ourselves. Thus we should be willing to be enriched by experiencing the tastes of others and they ours, thus growing together, all while maintaining a more commonly accepted staple so that all get fed.

When my wife and I go out to eat we generally stick to the things we are familiar with, but we also like to test our pallet on new things, as she tries something from my plate and I from hers. Variety is the spice of life! A picky eater is often the result of weak parents who never

required that their child try new things. What is the cause of picky worshipers? Hopefully our taste for the joyful worship of Christ with all believers overpowers our particular taste preference in music!

What do I propose? Could someone with expertise in Greek please write a concise article explaining that Paul taught that we should TOGETHER worship God with Psalm, hymn, and spiritual song (unless of course my translation and understanding above is wrong)? Could someone else then put that article in the front of a Christian song book that contains Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (maybe one already exists)? One last favor. Make sure the Ephesians 5:19 song book includes Psalm 1 put to music, How Great Thou Art (Swedish version), and Days of Elijah by Twila Paris. And could someone with money pay for this project?

Thanks for helping with this.

Ephesians 5:25-33, Marriage Part 4 - A Cross of Self-Sacrifice

Like most of you I grew up with the fanciful notions about marriage and family described in romantic books, songs, and movies. Cinderella found her Prince Charming "*And they lived happily ever after.*" Song lyrics echo with the promise "*I will always love you.*" These books, songs, and movies often get the main point right, that marriage is a wonderful design. However, they often forget to mention, that in addition to the wonder of wedded bliss, marriage and family is filled with incredible challenges and heartaches. They also miss the key ingredient for a successful marriage, self-sacrifice. Consider that Scripture compares a husband's relationship with his wife to Christ and the church in Ephesians 5:25-33 (WEB).

25) Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the assembly, and gave himself up for it; 26) that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word, 27) that he might present the assembly to himself gloriously, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without defect. 28) Even so husbands also ought to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself. 29) For no man ever hated his own flesh; but nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord also does the assembly; 30) because we are members of his body, of his flesh and bones. 31) "For this cause a man will leave his father and mother, and will be joined to his wife. The two will become one flesh." 32) This mystery is great, but I speak concerning Christ and of the assembly. 33) Nevertheless each of you must also love his own wife even as himself; and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

I don't know about you but this is an extremely uncomfortable comparison. Christ had an extremely tumultuous relationship with his disciples. He patiently led. They complained. He humbly served. They sought glory. They rebuked him for going to the cross. He pressed on. And most difficult, many that Christ died for still remain separated from him. Yet Christ still loves them deeply. The Christian recipe for serving your spouse is to first take all your self-serving desires and nail them to the cross of Christ.

I don't like to think about these unromantic elements to the marriage and family relationship, but at least the Scriptures offer real hope instead of pie-in-the-sky. So don't be surprised if your marriage has challenges. You are not alone. But do hold on to Christian principles and the victory Christ will win in the end. We may not like it but marriage is one of God's key instruments to grind smooth the rough edges in our lives to shape us into Christ's image.

Perhaps instead of saying, "*And they lived happily ever after,*" we should say, "*And they challenged one another's selfishness for a lifetime cultivating a deep longing for true Christ-likeness.*"

Ephesians 6:4 and Hebrews 12:10, The Strong Willed Parent

Much has been written about how to handle the strong willed child. Parenting has got to be one of the toughest jobs there is in the world. And parenting can be especially tough when the child you are parenting possesses a strong will. God himself knows this because he is a parent himself and we are his children. This is why he commands Christians to discipline disobedient children with the rod of correction in the book of Proverbs.

I teach elsewhere that God has replaced the Old Covenant commands given through Moses by the New Covenant commands given through Christ. However, it is important to note that the commands in Proverbs given through Solomon, though in the Old Testament, are not part of the Old Covenant, the contract given through Moses to the Jews. Thus the command to spank disobedient children with a rod of correction still stands. So parents spank your children!

However, also be reminded that though parenting is a tough job, there is another tough job, that of being a kid! The Holy Spirit brings a balance of grace to parent and child relations by also speaking about the strong willed parent. God says in Ephesians, *"You fathers, don't provoke your children to wrath, but nurture them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord"* (Ephesians 6:4 WEB). And again in Hebrews, *"For they [fathers] indeed, for a few days, punished us as seemed good to them; but he [God] for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness"* (Hebrews 12:10).

Two hard facts come to the surface here. First, God warns fathers not to exasperate our children. Why? Because we often do! Second, God does not even give fathers the credit for disciplining children for their good. Instead, he warns that only God our Father has motives of benefit in discipline. Unfortunately we fathers are often inclined to discipline our children simply when their disobedience inconveniences us. Sadly we fathers also are corrupted with stubborn and strong wills.

The command to spank our children still stands. However, the Holy Spirit's words ought to bring a measure of sober judgment as we discipline our children. Let's keep in step with God's goal that Christian parents and children would grow to be brothers and sisters in the Lord under his fatherhood.

Examine Yourself

*"Examine your own selves, whether you are in the faith.
Test your own selves. Or don't you know
about your own selves, that Jesus Christ is in you?
—unless indeed you are disqualified."
2 Corinthians 13:5 (WEB)*

*"But let a man examine himself, and
so let him eat of the bread, and drink of the cup."
1 Corinthians 11:28 (WEB)*

*"Be diligent in these things. Give yourself wholly to them,
that your progress may be revealed to all.
Pay attention to yourself and to your teaching.
Continue in these things, for in doing this you will
save both yourself and those who hear you,"
1 Timothy 4:15-16 (WEB)*

1. Spirit - your relationship to God

Do you confess that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised him from the dead?
Do you have love for God and gratefulness for his grace toward you?
Are you reading God's word regularly? What have you read?
Are you talking to God regularly? What have you said?
Are you fellowshiping with other Christians regularly? Open fellowship?
Are you confessing your sins to a close friend in the Lord? Do you have secret sin?
Are you looking toward heaven or lusting for this world's things? What things?
Are you an ambassador for Christ? Do your friends know you are a Christian?
Are you making disciples? Who are you helping to trust and obey?
Are you evangelizing? Who have you explained the gospel to?
Are impure movies, books, or music in your life? Would godly friends agree?
We are all tempted...how are you being tempted now? Who is praying for you?

2. Soul - your relationship to your fellowman

Do you have love for your fellowman and thankfulness for God's grace to them?
Do you have un-reconciled conflict with others? With who specifically?
Have you lied, cheated, or stolen from your fellowman? What specifically?
Are you working to provide for yourself and your family? Working hard?
Are you submitted to your authorities? Parent? Husband? Employer? Government?
Are you avoiding any people in your life? Why?
Are you growing in your mind through good books? Are you reading junk?
Are you growing through good hobbies and endeavors? Are you being lazy?
Do you have friends that know you well? Do they have any concerns about you?
Are you godly with money? Do you owe others? Do you give? Are you hoarding?

3. Body - your care of your physical body

Do you see a doctor for checkups? When was the last time?
Do you see a dentist for checkups? When was the last time?
Do you see an optometrist for checkups? When was the last time?
Are you avoiding the help or prescriptions of medical professionals? Why?
Are you eating good foods and the right amount? Would a nutritionist agree?
Are you exercising regularly? Enough or too much?

Do you have any physical pains or problems that you are avoiding? Why?
Are you getting enough sleep? How much?
Do you feel encouraged, thankful, and positive? Why or why not?
Are you properly groomed and clothed to mirror Christ? Would godly friends agree?

[Printable PDF Version Here](#)

Ezekiel 23:20, Donkeys and Horses

Men, we need more frank conversation about sexual temptation.

The prophets frequently compare Israel's idolatry to sexual adultery in quite graphic terms. Ezekiel chapter 23 is one such comparison. God was quite enraged at his people for turning to Egypt for help rather than calling on him. How would you feel if your son or daughter went to those that hated you for counsel rather than coming to you?

Ezekiel tells us how God felt,

1) Yahweh's word came again to me, saying, 2) "Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother. 3) They played the prostitute in Egypt. They played the prostitute in their youth. Their breasts were fondled there, and their youthful nipples were caressed there. 4) Their names were Oholah the elder, and Oholibah her sister. They became mine, and they bore sons and daughters. As for their names, Samaria is Oholah, and Jerusalem Oholibah."

Ezekiel 23:1-4 (WEB).

God tells us that Samaria and Jerusalem are nothing less than harlots because they left him to engage in prostitution with Egypt. We could all nod our heads in somber agreement, acknowledging that we have chosen idols in favor of God at some point in our lives. Yet God is not content with a simple nodding of the head and so escalates his symbolism in order to revolt our minds, wrench our stomachs, and break our hearts.

God says through Ezekiel,

There she lusted after her lovers, whose genitals were like those of donkeys and whose emission was like that of horses.

Ezekiel 23:20 (NIV)

One does not know whether to weep or close the book in disgust over this imagery. We should close the book in disgust. I would say that on a good day, but friends we do not live in good days.

Instead we live in the days when the unscrupulous send unsolicited emails to us with graphic pictures hawking the means for a man to get a penis like that of a donkey and emissions like that of a horse. God used this symbolism in Ezekiel 23 specifically in order to cause us to disgust our idolatry. Yet now mankind has evolved to the superior place of mass marketing the disgusting symbolism from the 5th century BC as reality in the 21st century AD! My email box is inundated with this trash. What kind of mongers have we become?

We are approaching the depths of Sodom and Gomorrah who craved homosexual relations with the very angels that escorted Lot from the city before it was destroyed. Friends, when we divorce physical pleasure from relational intimacy and marriage commitment we become nothing more than animals with animal genitalia and animal emissions. The beautiful

partnership of pleasure and commitment found in marriage is nearly destroyed in our present generation. I expand on this theme at length in my article, [The Image of God in Man, Part 2](#).

I saw a bumper sticker on a car years ago that brazenly stated, "*Porn is Better than Marriage*." Men, there is no safe haven from the depths to which our culture has plummeted. Emails and bumper stickers of this depravity are invading our lives and families. The only consolation is that little effort is needed to expose evil as evil and good as good. The distance between good and evil has become so vast it reads in bold print. The peril is that we are all tempted in many ways and a foot slipped off the edge in today's world leads to a chasm deeper than ever before.

The Scriptures warn that this world will go from "*bad to worse*." Yet Jesus can also help us to avoid sexual sin and protect the sanctity of human sexuality. And if we ourselves fall to the depths of our own generation's crimes Jesus still remains the same gracious savior to all mankind. Lord, save us.

PS. Please don't misunderstand and think that I lobby for another powerless law from Washington DC. This matter needs the conviction of a law written on our hearts with ink flowing from the veins of Christ. This matter needs a sermon rooted in the gospel of grace that proclaims his love will never quit for his chosen ones, even if we prostitute ourselves.

Five Prayers from Scripture

The Prayer of Jabez

Recently I was introduced to a small book titled "The Prayer Of Jabez." The book discusses a small passage of Scripture which tells us about Jabez, his mother, and a prayer that Jabez prayed. In fact the whole story of Jabez and his prayer only encompasses two verses included here for your reference,

9) Jabez was more honorable than his brothers. His mother named him Jabez, saying, "Because I bore him with sorrow." 10) Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, "Oh that you would bless me indeed, and enlarge my border! May your hand be with me, and may you keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain!" God granted him that which he requested.

1 Chronicles 4:9-10 (WEB)

I was first intrigued by the book and the attention given to Jabez's prayer. The prayer of Jabez could easily be missed even by a serious Bible student. It was a reminder to us that God's word is filled with so many excellent truths and accounts of God's dealings with mankind in history. Keep reading God's word! Consider that Jabez prayed this prayer to be free from harm and pain and God was willing to grant him this request. If we think about it, we have probably prayed similar prayers and God has spared us as well. We may not have been spared from every harm, but no doubt we all have stories of how God has protected us in some situation where injury seemed inevitable. The encouraging fact here is that God did in fact grant His request. And that is the God we serve, the God who has our best interest and protection in mind.

Yet, perhaps there are those that may have been discouraged by the prayer of Jabez! Certainly God has never given us his word to discourage us, but if we consider the prayer of Jabez without due consideration to other prayers in Scripture we may in fact find ourselves discouraged. Discouraged? What about those who have wished and prayed something similar, but God has had a different answer? Does that mean that the good God is not their God also? Of course no one likes pain. And we imagine that we are not alone in wishing our lives to be free from pain. What good American wouldn't love to pray the prayer of Jabez and have God grant his request? It is the American dream to have a pain-free life! But our good God's dream for us is quite beyond the American dream. God's desire is that we would be shaped into the image of Christ in preparation for the best after-life.

There are numerous other prayers from Scripture that are interesting to compare along side the prayer of Jabez. I have selected four other prayers from Scripture to consider. Our goal is to join the saints of the Bible in setting our hope fully on serving God's purpose for this life and anticipating eternal fellowship with Him in the after-life.

A Prayer of Elijah

We read of Elijah,

1) *Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the*

prophets with the sword. 2) Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I don't make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time!"

3) When he saw that, he arose, and ran for his life, and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. 4) But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree. Then he requested for himself that he might die, and said, "It is enough. Now, O Yahweh, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers."

1 Kings 19:1-4 (WEB)

Elijah was one of the first great prophets in the nation of Israel. He never wrote a book, but he did serve the Lord without reservation. God's commitment to Elijah is measured by God's willingness to answer Elijah's prayer for fire from Heaven in a competition against the false God Baal and his prophets, and his prayer to stop the rain for three years and then start it again. Elijah's commitment to God is measured by His willingness to put hundreds of prophets of Baal to death for their false teaching. Of course God's mandate through Christ is no longer to slay false prophets, but to preach against all error with the gospel of Jesus Christ. But we can still learn from Elijah. Consider the extent of His zeal for the Lord. He laid everything on the line for God to find himself praying, *"take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers."* God did not answer Elijah's prayer and take his life, but He did give him a new ministry at this lowest moment. God told him to get up and disciple Elisha. Likewise there is hope today for those who have given everything to God to discover it is not enough. God is the one you need to look to for your next step.

A Prayer/Psalm of David

We read of David,

1) Have mercy on me, God, according to your loving kindness. According to the multitude of your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions.

2) Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity. Cleanse me from my sin.

3) For I know my transgressions. My sin is constantly before me.

4) Against you, and you only, I have sinned, and done that which is evil in your sight; that you may be proved right when you speak, and justified when you judge.

5) Behold, I was born in iniquity. In sin my mother conceived me.

6) Behold, you desire truth in the inward parts. You teach me wisdom in the inmost place.

7) Purify me with hyssop, and I will be clean. Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

8) Let me hear joy and gladness, That the bones which you have broken may rejoice.

9) Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all of my iniquities.

10) Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a right spirit within me.

11) Don't throw me from your presence,

*and don't take your holy Spirit from me.
12) Restore to me the joy of your salvation.
Uphold me with a willing spirit.
13) Then I will teach transgressors your ways.
Sinners shall be converted to you.*

Psalm 51:1-13 (WEB)

David sinned. God's punishment was the death of Bathsheba's son, the sword would never leave his house, and his own son would lie with his wives. Who could remain standing after confessing this sin and receiving this punishment from God? David could not. We read his heart poured out to God in this Psalm. David's concern could no longer be about peace and security in this lifetime. Nathan had just told him he would never have it. These difficult things lead David to understand that his sin was truly against God and that God desires that David's heart be cleansed in the deepest parts. David needed to accept his punishment like a man and place his trust fully on God for the future. And there is hope for believers today who though forgiven carry the scars of sin in their past that still cause great pain in their life today.

A Prayer of Jesus

We read of Jesus Christ,

36) Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go there and pray." 37) He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and severely troubled. 38) Then he said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here, and watch with me."

39) He went forward a little, fell on his face, and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass away from me; nevertheless, not what I desire, but what you desire."

Matthew 26:36-39 (WEB)

Jabez prayed that his life would be free from pain. Jesus prayed that as well, but added, *"nevertheless, not what I desire, but what you desire."* Brother and sister in Christ, are you not glad that Jesus prayed that. God himself was willing to suffer and die so that we could be with Him forever. And should believers ever need to pray difficult prayers today, we have Christ himself who understands all our suffering interceding for us from Heaven.

A Prayer of the Disciples

We read of the disciples,

23) Being let go, they came to their own company and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 24) When they heard it, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, "O Lord, you are God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all that is in them; 25) who by the mouth of your servant, David, said,

'Why do the nations rage,

*and the peoples plot a vain thing?
26) The kings of the earth take a stand,
and the rulers take council together,
against the Lord, and against his Christ.'*

*27) "For truly, in this city against your holy servant, Jesus, whom you
anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of
Israel, were gathered together 28) to do whatever your hand and your council
foreordained to happen. 29) Now, Lord, look at their threats, and grant to
your servants to speak your word with all boldness, 30) while you stretch out
your hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done through the name
of your holy Servant Jesus."*

*31) When they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were gathered
together. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word
of God with boldness.*

Acts 4:23-31 (WEB)

After Jesus ascended persecution broke out upon the disciples from those unwilling to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Messiah, nor believe that He was raised from the dead. Peter and John were jailed, as were many other Christians. The points of their prayer recorded here may be an encouragement to you. They acknowledged that God made the world and everything in it. They point out that the raging and plotting of the nations is in vain against God. They point out that Jesus Christ was only crucified because God himself decided it should happen. Therefore they ask for boldness to preach the gospel. And they ask that God would perform miracles in Jesus name. God give his people the grace to pray like disciples.

We have only briefly looked at four prayers to lend balance to the prayer of Jabez first considered in our study. There are many many more prayers recorded in the Scripture. I hope that you will be encouraged from these in your pursuit of Christ and in your fellowship with other Christians.

Galatians 1:1-2, With and Not With

Galatians 1:1-2 (WEB), "*Paul, an apostle—not from men, nor through man, but through Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead— and all the brothers who are with me, to the assemblies of Galatia:*"

Philippians 1:1 and 4:21 (WEB), "*Paul and Timothy, servants of Jesus Christ; To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and servants." "Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you."*

Colossians 1:1 (WEB), "*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God, and Timothy our brother."*

I & II Thessalonians 1:1 (WEB), "*Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the assembly of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." "Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the assembly of the Thessalonians in God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ:"*

II Timothy 4:9-18 (WEB), "*Be diligent to come to me soon, for Demas left me, having loved this present world, and went to Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service. But I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. Bring the cloak that I left at Troas with Carpus when you come, and the books, especially the parchments. Alexander, the coppersmith, did much evil to me. The Lord will repay him according to his works, of whom you also must beware; for he greatly opposed our words. At my first defense, no one came to help me, but all left me. May it not be held against them. But the Lord stood by me, and strengthened me, that through me the message might be fully proclaimed, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me for his heavenly Kingdom; to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen."*

Philemon 1 (WEB), "*Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon, our beloved fellow worker."*

Consider Paul's character and companions. Paul died to himself, his pride, and past sin such that he was able to partner with and enjoy warmhearted fellowship with the very people he previously hated. He won the affection of his Christian brothers and they were *WITH HIM* in the Lord's work. Paul also strove to preach the gospel of grace in spite of severe opposition and extended grace to his Christian brothers who stumbled in the race due to the heat. And he pursued the goal *EVEN WHEN NO ONE WAS WITH HIM*, yet *THE LORD STOOD WITH HIM*. Lord, we need your character to die to self interest and live for you. Lord, we need your companionship to be faithful. Lord, empower us with bold love to be with you and with your people!

Genesis 3:15 plus, Doveman Promised, Begins, Returns, Rules

While Gotham City attracts vicarious tourists of brutality and a world without rules, we with tickets to the Golden City ought to remind ourselves of an ancient promised coming and redemption from our rule breaking, *"I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will bruise your head, and you will bruise his heel"* (Genesis 3:15 WEB). Doveman Promised!

While bat men amuse about a Batman and the 'safe' haven of fictional savagery, dove men muse about the Doveman and heaven through factual salvation, *"16) 'Behold, I send you out as sheep among wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. 17) But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to councils, and in their synagogues they will scourge you. 18) Yes, and you will be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony to them and to the nations. 19) But when they deliver you up, don't be anxious how or what you will say, for it will be given you in that hour what you will say. 20) For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you' "* (Matthew 10:16-20 WEB). While critics acclaim and accuse Christopher Nolan, the Creator appoints and applauds Christ Jesus as the Doveman, *"13) Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. 14) But John would have hindered him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and you come to me?' 15) But Jesus, answering, said to him, 'Allow it now, for this is the fitting way for us to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he allowed him. 16) Jesus, when he was baptized, went up directly from the water: and behold, the heavens were opened to him. He saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming on him. 17) Behold, a voice out of the heavens said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased' "* (Matthew 3:13-17 WEB). Doveman Begins!

While many in an unreal world rejoice over Batman Returns, few in the real world are aware that Doveman is poised for his return with eyes like a flame of fire, *"12) I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. Having turned, I saw seven golden lamp stands. 13) And among the lamp stands was one like a son of man, clothed with a robe reaching down to his feet, and with a golden sash around his chest. 14) His head and his hair were white as white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire. 15) His feet were like burnished brass, as if it had been refined in a furnace. His voice was like the voice of many waters. 16) He had seven stars in his right hand. Out of his mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining at its brightest. 17) When I saw him, I fell at his feet like a dead man. He laid his right hand on me, saying, 'Don't be afraid. I am the first and the last, 18) and the Living one. I was dead, and behold, I am alive forever and ever. Amen. I have the keys of Death and of Hades' "* (Revelation 1:12-18 WEB). While Christian Bale portrays Bruce Wayne's best effort to fight evil with the word and wit of fallen man, Jesus Christ is himself, a harmless dove, effectively conquering evil with the word and wisdom of perfect God, *"11) I saw the heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it is called Faithful and True. In righteousness he judges and makes war. 12) His eyes are a flame of fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has names written and a name written which no one knows but he himself. 13) He is clothed in a garment sprinkled with blood. His name is called 'The Word of God.' 14) The armies which are in heaven followed him on white horses, clothed in white, pure, fine linen. 15) Out of his mouth proceeds a sharp, double-edged sword, that with it he should strike the nations. He will rule them with an iron rod. He treads the wine press of the fierceness of the wrath of God, the Almighty. 16) He has on his*

garment and on his thigh a name written, 'KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS' "
(Revelation 19:11-16 WEB). Doveman Returns!

While dark batman men search their souls for a ray of light, glorious Doveman searches our dark souls to shine His light in his chosen ones, *"For Yahweh's eyes run back and forth throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him"* (2 Chronicles 16:9a WEB). While mankind tries to hide for safety in the muddied morass of melodrama, Jesus Christ makes clear and final judgment on men according to his grace, *"11) I saw a great white throne, and him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. There was found no place for them. 12) I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and they opened books. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works. 13) The sea gave up the dead who were in it. Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them. They were judged, each one according to his works. 14) Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15) If anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire"* (Revelation 20:11-15 WEB). Doveman Rules!

Have you a-mused yourself with Batman this summer? Why not muse yourself with Doveman?

Genesis 3:15, John 1:36, Acts 1:11, A Series of Fortunate Events

Is your glass half empty or half full? My family has enjoyed a popular best selling book series titled, [A Series of Unfortunate Events](#). The title resonates with most because we are often faced with many trials and unfortunate events. In fact we face so many trials that we might think that the good God has checked out of our lives. For example a friend of mine in high school concluded from her experience that every other year was destined to be a bad year. So has the good God checked out of our lives? Is the verdict on the failure, success, and purpose of our lives in the hands of fate? Is life merely a series of unfortunate events?

Now it is true that the history of mankind past, present and future is a *series of events*. These major events of history are simply summarized 1) someone is coming, 2) someone is here, and 3) someone is coming again. But is this series of events unfortunate or fortunate?

After Adam and Eve sinned God predicted that someone was coming. ***"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel"*** (Genesis 3:15 NIV). How fortunate! Satan might harm us, but he will be crushed when Jesus comes!

John the Baptist proclaimed that someone was here. ***"Again, the next day, John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked, and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God!'"*** (John 1:35-36 WEB). Again fortunate! Jesus came to Earth as promised!

Two angels promised that someone is coming again. ***"When he had said these things, as they were looking, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight. While they were looking steadfastly into the sky as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white clothing, who also said, 'You men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who was received up from you into the sky, will come back in the same way as you saw him going into the sky'"*** (Acts 1:9-11 WEB). Finally fortunate! Jesus is coming again!

The history of mankind is a *series of fortunate events*. In fact the tragedy of human sin, our trials, and unfortunate events are really not without purpose in view of eternity, but in fact very fortunate and actively designed by God to demonstrate his grace. Though sometimes hard to understand and hard to believe, God has not checked out of our lives. He is always very checked in and he is about to check in again, personally. What great fortune for every one of his chosen ones! Do you long for his return? The glass of God's grace is completely full and overflowing.

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Good Books

The Imitation of Christ

Thomas A Kempis, Dover Publications

Also available here for free...

www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1653

www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/26222 - audio

www.leaderu.com/cyber/books/imitation/imitation.html

Knowing God

J.I. Packer, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois.

The Pilgrim's Progress

John Bunyan, Whitaker House, Springdale, Pennsylvania.

Heresies - The Image Of Christ In The Mirror Of Heresy And Orthodoxy From The Apostles To The Present

Harold Brown, Doubleday and Company.

The Bondage of the Will

Martin Luther, Fleming H. Revell, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Disciples are Made, Not Born

Walter Henrichsen, Victor Books

Fight

Preston Sprinkle, David C. Cook

Methodical Bible Study

Robert Traina, Francis Asbury Press, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

The Reformers And Their Step Children

Leonard Verduin, Eerdman's Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Abraham's Four Seeds

John Reisinger, New Covenant Media, Allentown, Pennsylvania.

A Basic Guide to Eschatology

Millard Erickson, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Christian Theology

Millard Erickson, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Peace Child

Don Richardson, Regal Books, Ventura, California.

All Of Grace

Charles Spurgeon, Whitaker House, Springdale, Pennsylvania.

The Master Plan Of Evangelism

Robert Coleman, Baker Book, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Why Government Can't Save You

John MacArthur, Word Publishing, Nashville, Tennessee

The Greatest Salesman in the World

Og Mandino, Bantam Books, New York, New York

A Tale of Three Kings

Gene Edwards, Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, Illinois

Hinds Feet on High Places

Hannah Hurnard, Barbour Books

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Good Movies

Jesus

A faithful video account of the life of Jesus Christ based on the New Testament Scriptures.

Produced by Genesis Project. www.jesusvideo.org.

Beyond the Next Mountain

The true story of God's calling of the youth Rochunga Pudaite to faith and Christian service and how he completed an amazing mission to serve his family, the Hmar people of India, through his youth to adulthood. An excellent film to inspire your children and yourself to abandon everything to service of Christ. Produced by Global Films.

Martin Luther

The true story of Martin Luther and his awakening to salvation by grace alone received through faith in Christ alone while serving as a Catholic monk. Martin Luther's awakening sparked the famed Reformation of church history that impacts Christian thought to this day. Check out the Classic Louis De Rochemont production by Lutheran Film Associates.

The Hiding Place

The true story of Corrie ten Boom and her family who defied the corrupt and evil Nazi government to shelter Jews during the Holocaust. This moving account will inspire any who possess spiritual life with courage to do right even when nations and governments become corrupt or evil. The film is produced by World Wide Pictures.

God's Outlaw

The true story of William Tyndale and his passion to serve Christ in 16th century Europe during a time when preaching the gospel of Christ was made illegal. The film should challenge every believer to note that unbelievers still want to silence the gospel of grace and God still commands us to preach it, whether we live in a country that defends freedom of speech or not. Produced by Grenville Film Productions.

The Radicals

The true story of Michael and Margaretha Sattler and the suffering they endured standing against infant baptism in favor of volitional repentance from sin, faith in Christ, and baptism as a sign of one's commitment to Christ and his people. This is an essential movie to gain an understanding of the roots of the Anabaptist church movement. It is not entertainment. Produced by Sisters and Brothers.

The Cross and the Switchblade

The true story of David Wilkerson, a country pastor from Philipsburg, Pennsylvania played by Pat Boone, and Nicky Cruz, a New York City gang leader played by Eric Estrada. God led Wilkerson to New York City and the heart of gang drugs, sex, and violence with the good news of Jesus Christ. This movie portrays God's answer to Wilkerson's prayers, the conversion of Cruz to Christ. Produced by Gateway Films.

Amazing Grace

A new movie released in 2007 about the life of antislavery pioneer William Wilberforce. Wilberforce is inspired and exhorted by John Newton, a repentant slave trader turned Christian, to fight against slavery while serving in the British Parliament. The movie is named after the famed hymn, Amazing Grace, written by Newton after his conversion to Christ. Though the movie played in main stream theaters the script gladly included Newton's famous words "I am a great sinner, and Christ is a great savior." Watch this film and find

encouragement and example of how one man served Christ as a statesman par excellence. And where are the Wilberforces of today to fight against the degrading of women in pornography, the slaughter of children in abortion, the greed of man in gambling, and the dehumanizing of man in violence as entertainment? If Wilberforces are not found we will self-destruct before God even has time to lay his rod of correction across the back of this nation! Fortunately God has promised to raise up Wilberforces for each hour's need.

Barabbas

A fictional expansion of the life of Barabbas noted briefly in the Christian Scriptures. Historically Barabbas was the man literally released from the death sentence in favor of mankind sentencing Jesus Christ to die on a cross. The film does an excellent job of portraying the impact that such a release from certain death would have on an individual. This film is great cause for reflection because the Scriptures also teach that each of us are also criminals like Barabbas and Christ also died in our place. The discerning viewer will note that though Barabbas is portrayed as converting to Christ, he is often very misguided, also like many of us. He is strongly rebuked by Peter for his greatest error of civil disobedience against Rome. Anthony Quinn stars as Barabbas with Richard Fleischer directing. Some scenes and themes are not appropriate for young children and may also be revolting to unbelieving and complacent adults.

The Robe

A fictional expansion of the life of the Centurion who nailed Jesus hands and feet to the cross. The film magnificently portrays the anguish of conscience that anyone would have who literally laid hands of harm on our innocent Christ. The fulcrum point of the movie is when the Centurion comes to understand that his anguish of conscience is not caused by insanity, but his inability to forgive himself for his sins against Christ. Peter and the apostles step in and press him with the good news that Christ loves and forgives him even though he sinned greatly against Christ, as we all have. The movie continues with the Centurion giving his life to Christ against all odds. The discerning viewer will note that Christians are improperly cast in acts of civil disobedience such as subversive efforts to free imprisoned Christians. To be sure Christians were freed from prison in the Book of Acts, but by the hand of angels and earthquakes, not men. Though I recommend the movie for the value that is there, it is unfortunate that immature Christians have been led to rebel against governmental authority. Instead governmental authority is sanctioned and blessed by God and Christians are commanded to obey both good and evil governments. The Scriptures permit Christians to disobey the government only when at odds with the command of Christ. Richard Button stars as the Centurion with Henry Koster directing.

Chronicles of Narnia - The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe

The first of the seven volume fictional tale by C.S. Lewis. The movie is faithful to the story line and themes of Lewis' original work with excellent acting and special effects to add the thrill of big screen movie action to Lewis' allegory. P.S. Unfortunately the second movie, Prince Caspian, was darker with numerous deviations from the original story line.

Les Miserables

The fictional story of Jean Valjean, a heartless convict, who is transformed by a single act of mercy. The story is woven with themes of grace received by Jean Valjean and grace rejected by the lawman who makes a life goal of capturing Valjean. The story is set in France during the French Revolution. Produced by Columbia Pictures. The film is rated PG-13 for brief nudity that is not inappropriate to realistically portray the villainous nature of man apart from grace.

Cyrano de Bergerac

The fictional story of Cyrano de Bergerac and his romance of Roxanne through the dimwit named 'Christian.' I comment on Christian allegories in this movie in my article [The Image of God in Man, Part 2](#). Cyrano de Bergerac dies on a cross shaped intersection of a sidewalk

while making his final oratory against pride and selfishness. Jose Ferrer stars as Cyrano de Bergerac with Michael Gordon directing. This movie is a classic and my all time favorite!

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Good Websites

www.hopebeyondhell.net - Awesome news!

concordant.org - A very cool Bible translation!

www.biblegateway.com - Online Bible

www.worldbible.com - English Bible translation free from copyright

www.wowhits.com - Great Christian music

www.zradio.org - Great Christian music on live radio

www.klove.com - More great Christian internet radio

www.gcfl.net - Good Clean Funnies List

www.visionvideo.com - Christian videos

www.e-sword.net - Free downloadable Bible software

www.christiananswers.net - Christian answers to questions

www.answersingenesis.org - Biblical defense of Creation

www.csama.org - Creation Science Association for Mid-America

www.creationresearch.org - The Creation Research Society

www.creationontheweb.com - Creation Ministries International

www.icr.org - Institute for Creation Research

www.audiotreasure.com - Free MP3s Bible, Christian Books, and Music

He Went To Jerusalem

Jesus, in his work of atonement for the sins of mankind, did the most important thing for us...

he went to Jerusalem.

In this article I discuss, first, the resolute and orderly plan that Christ followed as revealed in the book of Matthew, second, how this plan demonstrates that Christ died for the sins of all mankind, and third, applications for following Christ to Jerusalem.

Christ's Resolute and Orderly Plan

The book of Matthew begins with a detailed account of the genealogy of Christ from Abraham through Joseph, the custodial father of Christ. The genealogy of Christ recorded in Matthew can be contrasted with a second genealogy recorded in Luke which spans from Adam to Christ. Luke's genealogy begins with Adam and so could be said to prove that Christ is the savior of mankind promised in Genesis 3:15. In this way Luke's account is the gospel to all mankind. Matthew's genealogy, however, begins with Abraham and so could be said to prove that Christ is the promised seed of Abraham promised in Genesis 12:7 and explained in Galatians 3:16. Thus in this way Matthew's account is understood to be the gospel to the Jews.

The genealogy in the book of Matthew could also be described as peculiar. The genealogy is laid out in a neat progression from Abraham to King David, from King David to Israel's exile to Babylon, and from Israel's exile to Babylon until the day of Christ. Matthew 1:17 (WEB) even explains this pattern by saying, *"So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; from David to the exile to Babylon fourteen generations; and from the carrying away to Babylon to the Christ, fourteen generations."*

Why did God arrange Christ's genealogy this way? And why did the Holy Spirit, through Matthew, record Christ's genealogy in such an organized and systematic way? I am not proposing some sort of numerology here. Numerology is a way of studying the Bible where numbers and patterns of numbers take precedence over basic Christian truth. However, I am noticing that the Holy Spirit himself called attention to this numerical pattern in Matthew 1:17. After some study and prayer I have come to the conclusion that the Holy Spirit has used the pattern in Matthew's genealogy to organize or outline the rest of the book of Matthew.

Most people have noticed that the gospel of Matthew quotes the Old Testament more than any other gospel. This is especially fitting since Matthew is the gospel directed toward the Jews. Matthew wants to appeal to the Jews and so quotes the Old Testament which they already accept as the Word of God. Taking the time to count the number of Old Testament quotes provides at least one possible answer as to Matthew's genealogy. Counting the number of Old Testament quotes will reveal that the Old Testament is quoted exactly 42 times from beginning to end. This is the same as the number of generations recorded in the genealogy. Again I am not proposing some sort of numerology here, but instead that the Holy Spirit freely used an interesting literary device to order Matthew's account of the life of Christ.

Further study of the use of Old Testament quotes in the book of Matthew reveals that the life of Christ could be divided into three segments just as Matthew's genealogy divides Israel's history into three segments. That is there are 14 quotes of the Old Testament in the

beginning, middle, and end of Matthew's account of Jesus life. The first 14 quotes occur in chapters 1-10 from Jesus' birth until the initial sending of the twelve. The next 14 quotes occur in chapters 10-21 from the initial sending of the twelve until Jesus enters Jerusalem. The final 14 quotes occur in chapters 21-28 from Jesus entering Jerusalem until his death, resurrection, and final commission. This progression or outline of the life of Christ could be compared with the outline of Israel's history given in Matthew's genealogy of Christ from Matthew chapter 1. Consider the chart below:

Period	Israel's history	Christ's life
Inception	Abraham -to- King David. One man -to- a physical nation. Genesis - 2 Samuel.	Birth -to- sending the twelve. One man -to- a spiritual nation. Matthew 1-10.
Organization	King David -to- Israel's exile. Nation -to- exile for sin. 2 Samuel - 2 Kings.	Sending the twelve -to- Jerusalem. Spiritual nation -to- exile for righteousness. Matthew 10-21.
Mission	Israel's exile -to- Christ. Exile -to- new covenant in Christ Post-exile prophets - Malachi.	Jerusalem -to- Resurrection. Exile -to- new covenant in Christ. Matthew 21-28.

So we see that these observations in the book of Matthew can be very helpful in understanding more about Christ and his relationship to Israel. We should not go beyond good Bible study principles in our conclusions from these observations. However, we do want to learn as much as we can from the things we have seen.

So let's make a few conclusions at this point in our study. First I see the sovereignty of God at work in history and the Bible record. When I say "sovereignty" I mean that God not only knows what will happen from beginning to end, but also brings it to pass himself. Thus the parallels observed between Israel's history and Christ's life are not to be admired because they are coincidence, but instead they are admired because God himself brought both Israel's history and Christ's life to pass according to his own good will. Thus we can take great confidence that God is in control of our lives as well.

Second I see that all three persons of the godhead brought these things together in an orderly and resolute way. God ordained Israel's history as well as the life of Christ. The Holy Spirit made use of Israel's generations from Abraham to Christ to order the account of Christ's life in the book of Matthew. Christ himself walked a course from birth to Jerusalem in obedience to the Father. God also did not act hastily in Israel's history or the advent of Christ. Rather he brought it to pass according to his own plan, wisdom, and timing. Thus we can also take great confidence that not only is God in control, but he is faithful and purposeful in his own timing.

Third, I can see that the New Covenant begun by Christ does not leave the Israelite people or anyone behind. Rather Christ continues to have a great heart for his people Israel as evidenced by his final trip to Jerusalem. Christ did not begin the New Covenant in order to abandon Israel his people, but instead to save them. Thus these observations in the book of Matthew should serve to bolster our efforts to share the good news, not only with all mankind, but especially with Israel, God's chosen people.

To Jerusalem for All Mankind

We observed that in the last third or phase of Jesus ministry recorded in the book of Matthew, chapters 21-28, Jesus made his final entrance into Jerusalem. Properly understood Jesus' determination to face the cross in Jerusalem proves that his work of atonement is

applied to all mankind with himself as head alone of the church, his purchased bride.

Jesus had many reasons not to face Jerusalem according to the flesh. If all he was concerned about was having a faithful following of a few men, Jesus already had that before his entrance to Jerusalem. Jesus had twelve disciples and more with many of them promising to follow Him even unto death. Perhaps God could simply destroy all the unfaithful and build his new nation with the disciples that had followed him so far and promised such great faithfulness? This is reminiscent of God's dialogue with Moses in Exodus 32:9-14 when God threatened to destroy Israel for their rebellion and make a great nation of Moses alone.

Christ did not do this.

First, the vain promises of his disciples could not be trusted, for they were sinful men just as much as the Pharisees. Second, Christ did not come to die for the visible disciples alone, but also to die for the Pharisees and all mankind so that they could become disciples too. We can all thank God that Christ turned to face Jerusalem to die for the sins of mankind rather than to create one more schismatic sect of religious people. Christ's purpose is most elegantly explained in Ephesians 2:11-22. He planned to make one new fellowship, a fellowship of the cross, with himself as the head. Praise God that through Christ we are now brothers with all believers and are freed from the bondage and impossible task of somehow proving to God and "good men" that we are better than other "sinful men."

Jesus had another reason to avoid Jerusalem, his opposition. For much of his ministry Jesus avoided and at times confronted his opposition. He was first opposed by King Herod who tried to kill him at his birth, Matthew 2:13. As an adult Jesus healed people and commanded them to tell no one so that he could continue his work without confrontation, Matthew 9:30. Later the Pharisees set out to kill him because he performed his healing works on the Sabbath, Matthew 12:14. When John the Baptist was beheaded Jesus retreated to pray, perhaps anticipating his inevitable confrontation with sinful men, Matthew 14:13. After explaining fully to his disciples that he needed to suffer and die in Jerusalem at the hands of sinful men, Peter, his own disciple, opposed him directly. "*Never, Lord.*" Peter said in Matthew 16:21-23. Jesus responded with his sternest rebuke because not even his best disciple could stand in the way of his mission to die for the sins of mankind in Jerusalem. Later he was even transfigured into his glorious body before three disciples and told them not to tell a soul, Matthew 17:9.

With two-thirds of his ministry completed Jesus had many great successes in teaching, healing, and building a following. Perhaps Jesus could somehow complete his mission without the final confrontation with sinful man scheduled for Jerusalem? But whom would be his faithful followers since Christ was opposed by every category of men? He was opposed by the state, by the Pharisees, and by his own disciples. Instead Christ's purpose was to endure the cross to redeem all His people, the people who opposed him. Furthermore, the sinful rebellion of these people was not merely ignorance or a mistake easily mended. The sinful rebellion of mankind required blood atonement if any were to be redeemed at all. God knows that we ourselves deserve to die cruel deaths on a cross for our sin, but Christ himself took our place on the cross. Christ resolutely set himself to Jerusalem to pay the price for mankind's sin that we could not pay for ourselves.

Applications For Following Christ to Jerusalem

Peter planned, as did all the disciples, to follow Christ to Jerusalem. However, the disciples intended to follow Christ with a sword. They all vowed that they were prepared to die with Christ in Jerusalem. Peter himself, at the arrest of Christ, pulled out a sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant. The disciples were zealous and faithful to Christ even at the very end, and yet they had no clue as to Christ's purpose in Jerusalem. They had zeal without knowledge. Jesus said he needed to die in Jerusalem and they imagined that they

would die by His side. Peter and the disciples wanted to die for Christ, but Christ had to die for them in the heart of Jerusalem. Perhaps most simply stated, even the most zealous disciple is just like every man, a sinner in need of grace. Paul reminds us in Galatians 5:11 that the message of the cross is an offense to mankind. It says we are sinners. It says our righteousness is like a filthy rag. It says we can do nothing to amend for our sin. It says we need the blood of Jesus shed in our place or else we are eternally damned. Brother or sister in Christ, praise God that Jesus Christ has paid a debt for our sin that we could not pay. Praise God also for the fellowship we share at the cross of Jesus Christ.

One thing is clear. We cannot follow Christ to Jerusalem wearing our own righteousness, for we have none to offer. Peter and the disciples tried, but received repentance and grace instead. May God give us the grace to be true disciples and enter the new Jerusalem wearing the righteousness of Christ alone freely given to us by His grace. Now that is a place of joy unthinkable. Sinners that were doomed to damnation, but now are saved by grace and are freely given eternal peace and rest. That is a place of perfect fellowship. It is filled with sinners rejoicing together over how Jesus Christ spared their lives despite their sin and gave them every good gift.

Lord Jesus we pray that your kingdom of peace, joy, and love would come quickly to this earth and come forever.

Hebrews 11:34, Weakness Turned To Strength

The Holy Spirit says in Hebrews 11:34 (WEB) that in the past people trusted God and their *"from weakness were made strong."*

Can you honestly confess your weaknesses to friends? To the face in the mirror? To God? Will you be honest with God or will you hide your weaknesses from him who sees all? Can you trust that God has the power to use even our weaknesses to demonstrate his grace? Will you trust God with your weaknesses or will you trust your own strength? Can you wait patiently for God, who has delivered others in the past, to deliver you today? Will you wait patiently for God's deliverance or will you try to deliver yourself? Can you put your weakness to work in God's hands by testifying that Christ is your savior? Will you testify that Christ is your savior or pretend that you do not need a savior?

Confess. Trust. Wait. Testify.

Hebrews 12:14-17, SEE TO IT!

"Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears."

Hebrews 12:14-17 (NIV)

I've been enjoying Christmas break spending time with my family, eating Christmas dinners, catching up on my writing, doing fun home improvement projects for my wife, and watching movies with the kids. Last night we plopped on couches eating buttered pop corn eager to watch the movie version of Jules Vern's Voyage to the Center of the Earth. My kids have read the book for home-school and persuaded me to read it also. We were looking forward to watching the movie version. The movie followed the book closely for the first hour to a large lake in the center of the earth.

In the effort to obey verses like the one above we are careful about the movies we watch. I was enjoying this one so far and was beginning to think to myself it was a keeper... until the movie plot quickly diverged from the book and moved from the center of the earth to the center of sexual immorality.

I made the mistake of thinking that this was an older film and free from trash. I should have sought out a Christian movie review first.

Warnings against sexual immorality and wonder over the gift of sexuality to mankind are major themes in Scripture. God has destroyed whole cities for their sexual immorality in the past. Isaiah and his prophets preached against it. Jesus accused the Pharisees of being sinners equal with adulterers. The first church counsel agreed that new Christians must repent of sexual immorality before they could even participate in church fellowship. Paul urged Timothy to be pure. The sexually immoral are listed among those sentenced to the Lake of Fire. And on the positive side the Holy Spirit dedicated a whole Bible book to romantic marital love. God is serious that we would protect sexual expression for the marriage of a man and a woman as he intended. And in the Scripture above we are commanded above to... SEE TO IT!

And how are we to see to it? First, God's 100% grace must be preached that even the worst sexual sins of God's people are already forgiven at the cross, Ephesians 2:1-5. Furthermore, sexual immorality is not to be tolerated among God's people so new Christians must cease immoral behavior before participating in church fellowship, Acts 15:20. We are also commanded to confess our sins to one another and pray for one another holding one another accountable, James 5:16. Godly counselors are to gently instruct others in the hope that God will grant repentance to those fallen into sin, II Timothy 2:25-26. Godly leaders are to preach the truth in love opposing Satan's lies with great patience and careful instruction, II Timothy 4:2. And Christians who remain unrepentant are to be expelled from fellowship in order to bring them to their senses, I Corinthians 5:13. No doubt all hearts would be broken to be in such a terrible situation yet we would be in the good company of the broken heart of

Christ. We also ought to remind each other that all sin is already forgiven, but there is still sin that leads to death, I John 5:16-17.

This is only a sampling of Scripture that will help us SEE TO IT that we do not fall into sin while surrounded by the sexual immorality of those with a defiant finger in God's eye.

Hebrews 13:7-17, The Outer Circle

Recently while researching on the Internet I received an invitation to join the 'Inner Circle' of a particular group. The secrecy appealed to my curiosity. The exclusivity tempted my pride. The chance of '*esprit de corps* wooed' my loneliness. Who wouldn't want to be part of an inner circle? Yet Jesus summons us to join him in his outer circle.

"Remember your leaders, men who spoke to you the word of God, and considering the results of their conduct, imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Don't be carried away by various and strange teachings, for it is good that the heart be established by grace, not by food, through which those who were so occupied were not benefited. We have an altar from which those who serve the holy tabernacle have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest as an offering for sin, are burned outside of the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people through his own blood, suffered outside of the gate. Let's therefore go out to him outside of the camp, bearing his reproach. For we don't have here an enduring city, but we seek that which is to come. Through him, then, let's offer up a sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of lips which proclaim allegiance to his name. But don't forget to be doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they watch on behalf of your souls, as those who will give account, that they may do this with joy, and not with groaning, for that would be unprofitable for you."

Hebrews 13:7-17 (WEB)

This is no rebel clique, but a fellowship of those obedient to God's word and to godly leaders. This is nothing new, but old fashioned Biblical Christianity. Instead of secrecy, the gospel of Christ is to be proclaimed openly. The openness will challenge your courage. This is not a man-made altar, but the altar of humble faith in God's common salvation. Instead of exclusivity, the grace of Christ is for all mankind. The inclusiveness will kill your pride. This is not mere earthly '*esprit de corps*', but true fellowship with God's spirit. Instead of a chance, we have the guarantee of eternal joy with God and his people. The certainty will eclipse your greatest desire.

Have you joined Christ's outer circle through faith in his grace?

Hebrews 4:11-13, Two Double Edged Swords!!

Knives are dangerous.

Several years ago I purchased new pocket knives for myself and my son. Though knives are dangerous we need to learn to use them safely. So while demonstrating to my family how to use the knife safely... I nearly cut my finger off! Though quite humbling to be raced to the emergency room, perhaps it was an even better lesson for both me and my family. Knives are dangerous, so be careful. The Christian Scripture picks up on the theme using a double-edged sword as a metaphor for ONLY TWO things.

Hebrews 4:11-13 (WEB) says,

Let's therefore give diligence to enter into that rest, lest anyone fall after the same example of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and is able to discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart. There is no creature that is hidden from his sight, but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him to whom we must give an account.

So this is not surprising and seems fitting to compare the power and sharpness of God's word to a double-edged sword.

However, we also read in Proverbs 5:3-5 (WEB),

For the lips of an adulteress drip honey. Her mouth is smoother than oil, but in the end she is as bitter as wormwood, and as sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death. Her steps lead straight to Sheol.

This seems curious that God's Holy Word would share the same metaphor as an adulterous!

So we are reminded of the awesome cutting power of God's word and the adulterous. One cuts for our good, the other cuts to destroy.

Hosea 11:3-4, The Scripture That Ripped My Proud Heart To Shreds

The summer of 1998 I had just completed my fund raising efforts to participate in a Christian ministry outreach to college students. I had been a Christian for many years serving the Lord through the counsel of my Christian leaders in Bible study, evangelism, and disciple-making. By every outward indication I was a model Christian. During my fund raising campaign I had also been working on completing a Bible Certificate Program through a well known Bible College.

While working through the curriculum we had to read significant portions of the Old Testament. During one of these readings at a desk in my bedroom I read Hosea 11:3-4 (WEB),

Yet I taught Ephraim to walk. I took them by his arms; but they didn't know that I healed them. I drew them with cords of a man, with ties of love; and I was to them like those who lift up the yoke on their necks; and I bent down to him and I fed him.

I was stunned.

I had read through the Bible many times before, but now this verse was speaking to me directly. It was the Lord who had taught me to walk and carried me safely to this very point using the cords of a man, the people in my life! I had been striving to attain a radical discipleship relationship with Christ while at the same time carrying a spirit of pride and independence into relationships with the very people God himself was using to help me! Oh proud foolish man, I thought to myself. God is demonstrating his amazing grace in the most amazing way possible in that He Himself has been at work through sinners in order to bring grace to me, a sinner. GLORY TO GOD!!

So please understand the Discipled by the Grace of Jesus Christ ministry. Do not imagine that I boast of discipleship directly by the grace of Jesus Christ. No. Instead, God has crushed the pride of this proud sinner by showing me his grace through the human kindness of Mennonites, Evangelicals, Presbyterians, Baptists, Catholics, Independents, Bible believers, parents, special doctors, and believe it or not, even the unbelieving. Though all these people are sinners, nor can they be Christ in my life, Christ has none-the-less used human kindness to minister His grace to me, and... to you as well.

I responded by confessing my pride, thanking the Lord for showing me His grace through the people in my life, and asking the Lord to get me back onto the foundation of Christ. That was the beginning of Christ bringing down my idolatrous house of cards in order to re-establish my fellowship with Him and His people. Praise the Lord for His matchless wisdom.

Hosea 1:10, Optimism Out of Control, Part 2: In the Same Place!

Some Scriptures have depressed me. Consider one.

Jesus answered them, 'I told you, and you don't believe. The works that I do in my Father's name, these testify about me. But you don't believe, because you are not of my sheep, as I told you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.'

John 10:25-27 (WEB)

You may say I should not be depressed because I am a sheep that hears God's voice. I am not depressed that I hear God's voice. I am very thankful that he has called me to follow him. I was depressed because Jesus told the Jews, his chosen people, that they were not his sheep. How can they be his chosen people and yet not his sheep? And if the Jews are his chosen people and yet are rejected what hope can there be for a wayward sinner like me? It can only be a matter of time before I am rejected as well. What ignorance or hypocrisy in me veils the wisdom and beauty of Jesus' words from my understanding?

The words of Hosea provide a curious hope.

Yet the number of the children of Israel will be as the sand of the sea, which can't be measured or counted; and it will come to pass that, in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' they will be called 'sons of the living God.'

Hosea 1:10 (WEB)

A close study of this verse offers more out of control optimism for mankind through God's grace. God says, '*you are not my people,*' and later in the same place they will be called, '*sons of the living God.*' God is not saying he removes those who are not his to replace them with those who are his. Rather God transforms those who are not his into those who are his. And the transformation is so radical that those who are not his people must be called not his people until they are transformed into his people.

Paul also understood the radical transformation required by the gospel and so quoted Hosea 1:10 in Romans 9:26. Paul also quotes Hosea 2:23 in Romans 9:25 at the heart of the gospel of grace. "*I will sow her to me in the earth; and I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy; and I will tell those who were not my people, 'You are my people;' and they will say, 'My God!'"* (Hosea 2:23 WEB).

Wait a minute! If God calls unbelievers '*not his people*' doesn't that mean they never were and never will be his people? Yes they never were and never will be his people... apart from the miraculous transformation possible only through the Spirit of God. Here is great reason for out of control optimism because this is God's very specialty, the transformation of sinful men through his amazing grace.

Thus when Jesus tells the Jews that they do not believe because they are not his sheep this does not rule out their becoming sheep through God's grace as Romans 11 promises. Jesus' and Hosea's harsh words to the unbelieving Jews, that they are *'not God's people,'* are best understood as the only sane answer to the insanity of their unbelief. Solomon said, *"Don't answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes"* (Proverbs 26:4-5 WEB). And so in John 10:25-27 Jesus answers the foolishness of the unbelieving Jews according to their folly.

Yet these observations beg a question. If answering unbelievers according to their folly is an essential component of the gospel ministry do ratiocinative systems like Calvinism or Arminianism capture this dynamic? Now I am NOT saying that the truth is dynamic or irrational, but instead that Jesus dynamically answers belief according to wisdom and unbelief according to folly. Jesus encourages believers with unchanging rational truth, *"All we like sheep have gone astray. Everyone has turned to his own way; and Yahweh has laid on him the iniquity of us all"* (Isaiah 53:6 WEB). Yet Jesus also answers the folly of the unbeliever's insanity thus, *"you are not of my sheep"* (John 10:26 WEB).

Unfortunately ratiocinative systems miss the need to answer a fool according to his folly like Jesus does. Because these systems speak the same wisdom to the wise and the foolish, many wise have become foolish in God's eyes and many foolish have become wise in their own eyes. Better instead to ask God for wisdom in speaking to believers with encouragement and to unbelievers according to their folly. Though of course, if we ourselves listened to the folly spoken to the foolish we would no longer be wise!

In summary, if we, like Jesus, speak to unbelievers according to their folly, we would be wise. But if we speak to unbelievers according to their wisdom, we would be foolish. And further if I have unbelievably spoken to unbelievers according to their folly, God remains wise, but I have spoken foolishly. And if I have unbelievably spoken to believers according to their wisdom, God again remains wise, but I still have spoken foolishly. But now I speak to believers according to your wisdom and confess that God is the all wise savior of all humanity while I have been foolish. And I also speak to unbelievers according to your folly and say that Christ is not your savior because of your inhumanity without Christ.

If anyone understands what I am talking about lets grab lunch sometime!

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I Pledge Allegiance To The Cross

Brother or sister in Christ will you join me?

I pledge allegiance to the cross
of Jesus Christ the Lord
and to the grace He gave to me
His sinless death for my sinful life
to purchase eternal freedom for all His family.

Isaiah 19:22-25, Life aint a highway,,, at least not yet!

Last night we grabbed some family time and watched the kid movie Cars by Disney / Pixar. It is a fun full length animation about the value of humility and friendship over pride and independence. Moreover, there is little overt objectionable content that I perceived.

Some have objected to the opening theme song by Rascal Flatts, Life is a Highway. The hard driving beat of this tune could rev the engine and spin the tires of even the oldest family sedan. The lyrics paint a picture comparing enjoyment of life's pleasures with the thrill of driving on a highway all night long. Everyone who is into racing understands the thrill of driving their hot rod down a straight, smooth, and sanctioned drag strip or hugging the curves on the top or bottom of the NASCAR track.

Yet, as I reflected further I was reminded that our lives are not yet on a smooth highway, but on dirty and dangerous trails. And worse it is too easy for our self-centered hearts to rejoice in the trail we have blazed for ourselves while closing our eyes to the needs of those who are still lost in the wilderness.

The prophet Isaiah also speaks about God's highway saying, *"Yahweh will strike Egypt, striking and healing. They will return to Yahweh, and he will be entreated by them, and will heal them. In that day there will be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria; and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. In that day, Israel will be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth; because Yahweh of Armies has blessed them, saying, 'Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance,'" (Isaiah 19:22-25).*

Though we may be pleased with the highway we have cobbled for ourselves, God will not stop till he has paved a highway for all nations. Ladies and gentlemen start your engines... Jesus is the on ramp to the eternal highway!

Isaiah speaks radical encouragement to believers in Jesus Christ. First it is clear that the Lord struck Egypt to punish them, but his ultimate purpose is to finally heal them. Second we see that a future highway is promised, so we do not have to pretend that we are on a highway now while suffering in the wilderness of this life. We do not have to hide our longing for God's highway because we have confidence it will be built *"in that day."*

And until then, with God's help, we will reach out to help others who are struggling along the path or lost altogether. Finally, believers can take great joy, excitement, and anticipation in God's coming highway. He is faithful!

Dare we compare the messages of Rascal Flatts and Jesus Christ side by side? Race with Rascal Flatts, worshipping the creation instead of the creator, and prepare to fix more than a flat tire after your joy ride ends with a crash and burn. Race with the Christian race team, worshipping Christ for his undefeated grace and incredible creation, and fasten your seatbelts for the wild road trip of eternity!

RASCAL FLATTS	versus	JESUS CHRIST
Life is a highway		Eternal life is a highway
I wanna ride it all night long		We're gonna ride it all eternity long

If you're going my way	If you're going CHRIST'S way
I wanna drive it all night long	We're gonna drive it all eternity long

Disciplined by the Grace of Jesus Christ

Home Bible Optimism Articles

Isaiah 26:17-19, You Cannot Tell It, But,,,

At the beginning of the year I made a slight adjustment in my priorities. As a young Christian I did very little to serve in a local church family, but prided my self in being on the front lines in evangelism. And worse yet my pride blinded me to just how poor an evangelist I was anyway. But the Lord is a good father and brought correction in order to teach me to fellowship from the heart, even within an imperfect church family. Actually an imperfect church family is a perfect fit with my own imperfections!

Yet committees and Sunday School teaching pushed evangelism to the back burner. So I have been asking the Lord for help to move evangelism up in priority while still involving my Christian friends from church.

One useful resource my own church is learning from is titled, *You Can Tell It!*, by EvanTell. The resource highlights just how simple the gospel is to explain. Perhaps our fear in evangelism isn't the complexity of the message, but the uncertain response of our audience. Yet our duty in evangelism isn't following our feelings or producing results, but obeying the Lord's command. Fear over our audience's response should be minor compared to fear over the consequence of not obeying the Lord's command. We should not fear because we do not have the power to change hearts anyway, but God does.

So perhaps a series on evangelism could be better named *You Can Tell It...with God's Help!* or *You Cannot Tell It...without God's Help!* or *You Will Not Tell It...without Obedience!* or *They Will Not Believe It Without God...but Tell It Anyway!* or *Why Tell It...Because God Said So!* or *Tell Your Self...It is God Who Saves!*

The great prophet Isaiah has powerful words of motivation for the evangelist. Consider his short course in evangelism.

Just as a woman with child, who draws near the time of her delivery, is in pain and cries out in her pangs; so we have been before you, Yahweh. We have been with child. We have been in pain. We gave birth, it seems, only to wind. We have not worked any deliverance in the earth; neither have the inhabitants of the world fallen. Your dead shall live. My dead bodies shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in the dust; for your dew is like the dew of herbs, and the earth will cast out the departed spirits.

Isaiah 26:17-19 (WEB)

Isaiah's words about our total inability in evangelism give us boldness to be confident and persistent evangelists... because God is able!

Isaiah 30:1-18, Fifty Ways We Left Our Lover

There is a popular song from my youth still on the radio today titled, *Fifty ways to leave your lover*, by Paul Simon. The chorus encourages, "Just slip out the back, Jack. Make a new plan, Stan. You don't need to be coy, Roy. Just get yourself free. Hop on the bus, Gus. You don't need to discuss much. Just drop off the key, Lee and get yourself free." This is the theme song for our generation.

We have not been a faithful people, but faithless. "*Semper Fidelis*" has become a motto for the back of jackets, pickup truck windows, and movie heroes of yesteryear, but not for our hearts! Friends I am not talking about our infidelity to our marriage partners, though we have been grossly unfaithful there as well. I am talking about our unfaithfulness to God our maker, our true lover. Consider the prophet Isaiah's words to those who, "...slip out the back, Jack!"

1) "*Woe to the rebellious children*", says Yahweh, "*who take counsel, but not from me; and who make an alliance, but not with my Spirit, that they may add sin to sin, 2) who set out to go down into Egypt, and have not asked my advice; to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to take refuge in the shadow of Egypt! 3) Therefore the strength of Pharaoh will be your shame, and the refuge in the shadow of Egypt your confusion. 4) For their princes are at Zoan, and their ambassadors have come to Hanes. 5) They shall all be ashamed because of a people that can't profit them, that are not a help nor profit, but a shame, and also a reproach.*"

6) *The burden of the animals of the South. Through the land of trouble and anguish, of the lioness and the lion, the viper and fiery flying serpent, they carry their riches on the shoulders of young donkeys, and their treasures on the humps of camels, to an unprofitable people. 7) For Egypt helps in vain, and to no purpose; therefore I have called her Rahab who sits still. 8) Now go, write it before them on a tablet, and inscribe it in a book, that it may be for the time to come forever and ever. 9) For it is a rebellious people, lying children, children who will not hear Yahweh's law; 10) who tell the seers, "Don't see!" and to the prophets, "Don't prophesy to us right things. Tell us pleasant things. Prophecy deceits. 11) Get out of the way. Turn away from the path. Cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us." 12) Therefore thus says the Holy One of Israel, "Because you despise this word, and trust in oppression and perverseness, and rely on it; 13) therefore this iniquity shall be to you like a breach ready to fall, swelling out in a high wall, whose breaking comes suddenly in an instant. 14) He will break it as a potter's vessel is broken, breaking it in pieces without sparing, so that there won't be found among the broken pieces a piece good enough to take fire from the hearth, or to dip up water out of the cistern."*

15) *For thus said the Lord Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel, "You will be saved in returning and rest. Your strength will be in quietness and in confidence." You refused, 16) but you said, "No, for we will flee on horses;" therefore you will flee; and, "We will ride on the swift;" therefore those who pursue you will be swift. 17) One thousand will flee at the threat of one. At the threat of five, you will flee until you are left like a beacon on the top of a mountain, and like a banner on a hill.*

18) Therefore Yahweh will wait, that he may be gracious to you; and therefore he will be exalted, that he may have mercy on you, for Yahweh is a God of justice. Blessed are all those who wait for him.

Isaiah 30:1-18 (WEB)

Let's make a list for ourselves of the "*fifty ways*" we have left the Lord our lover and fled from him. He has tenderly called us to repentance and rest, but we would not have it. For myself I have fled to praise from man, pleasure, college degrees, money, work, and even ministry and marriage. Some of these things are good things that God has created to be enjoyed, but none of them can replace God.

Friend, what can you add to the list? God help us to lay down our idols for repentance and rest. And even if we ourselves happen to be hopelessly surrounded by the sin of our past, alone, like banner on a hill with only God to deliver, then let us finally give up hope in our idols and begin to hope in Jesus Christ.

Fly his banner and show the world a mighty victory!

Isaiah 30:1-2, An Alliance, But Not With My Spirit

The most frightening teaching to me when I first came to Christ was found in Romans Chapter 8 verse 13. But how can that be? Romans Chapter 8 is the climax of Christian encouragement! If we are afraid of any Chapter in the Scripture it is Romans Chapter 9. What is so frightening about Romans Chapter 8?

It is here that we learn that if we live according to the sinful nature we will die, but if by the Spirit we will live. These are certain words with the outcome of life or death. In my case I have lived and lived and lived according to the sinful nature. How will my life or any sinner's life be spared with this propensity to sin? Brothers and sisters, we cannot hope to live and walk before the Lord in our own strength. When we received Christ we confessed our need of the Lord and he took up residence in our lives. But to continue to live we must live by that same Spirit.

Consider also Isaiah's warning to move only with the Spirit of the Lord.

"Woe to the rebellious children", says Yahweh, "who take counsel, but not from me; and who make an alliance, but not with my Spirit, that they may add sin to sin, who set out to go down into Egypt, and have not asked my advice; to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to take refuge in the shadow of Egypt!"

Isaiah 30:1-2 (WEB)

Lord, it is only you that can bar the way and keep us from selling out to Pharaoh. Apart from you can we stave off our love of sin? Apart from you we have already signed partnerships of sin with others! Apart from you can we preach the requirement of the new birth for salvation? Apart from you we are promising parents that their children were born Christian or that the church can save children with no gospel needed at all! Apart from you can we live as Christian men at Mount Calvary? Apart from you we are joining the Jews at Mount Sinai or the Gentiles at Mount Lust! Apart from you can our lives flame with a knowledge of your grace? Apart from you we will say "grace" at every meal, but forget what it even means to be saved by grace.

Lord God we cannot live as you want apart from you. Help us to put off the deeds of the sinful nature in order to be filled to over-flowing with your Spirit and then we will live! Help us Lord I pray.

Isaiah 30:31-32, Break Out the Punishing Rod AND... the Tambourines? Say What?

We are all familiar with the picture of a father disciplining his son while soberly saying, "son, *this is going to hurt me more than it hurts you.*" So our heart goes out to the son and the pain he will experience. Our heart goes out to the situation wishing it had never been. And our heart goes out to the father who experiences hurt as well, perhaps being reminded of his own disobedience in years past.

We might assume that these hurts experienced by earthly fathers are also shared by our Heavenly Father. Yet consider His words in Isaiah 30:31-32 (WEB),

For through Yahweh's voice the Assyrian will be dismayed. He will strike him with his rod. Every stroke of the rod of punishment, which Yahweh will lay on him, will be with the sound of tambourines and harps. He will fight with them in battles, brandishing weapons.

Say what?!?! God's discipline, in this case, is not delivered with any personal agonizing in the least, but instead with great confidence and joyful celebration! Break out the punishing rod and the tambourines! How should we understand God's joy over the punishment of the disobedient?

Hebrews 12:9-11 (WEB) explains that God only ever and always does what is for our best with the wisdom and power of a Heavenly Father. Scripture explains,

Furthermore, we had the fathers of our flesh to chasten us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live? For they indeed, for a few days, punished us as seemed good to them; but he for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness. All chastening seems for the present to be not joyous but grievous; yet afterward it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Earthly fathers are only acknowledged for doing what seems good to us, BUT God always disciplines for our benefit and so he can take great joy in disciplining us.

Proverbs 19:18 (WEB) also commands us, "***Discipline your son, for there is hope; don't be a willing party to his death.***" Perhaps a godly earthly father ought to rejoice also with every opportunity taken to properly discipline his son, knowing that he is participating in God's plan to deter him from sinful choices leading to death. If we don't discipline our children we ought to begin mourning now for the suffering and death their unrestrained sin will cause.

You might argue that Christ did suffer on the cross, so my point is wrong. Yes, Jesus did suffer. However, he suffered death on the cross for our atonement and was raised to life for our justification, NOT to discipline us. His work on the cross saved all His people from damnation and was the greatest suffering a human being ever experienced. Through his love at the cross he proved that he ALSO has the authority, power, and tenderness to discipline us with great joy knowing his hand of chastisement will achieve it's intended outcome. The justification given to us by God's grace concerns our final destiny and is our ticket to eternal glory.

However, God's discipline in our life is quite a different matter. His day to day involvement in our lives warning and disciplining us is to keep us on a safe path far from destructive sinful choices. Yes, Jesus suffered for our justification, but He finds pleasure in our discipline because he is a father effectively disciplining his children!

Hebrews 2:9 explains, *"But we see him who has been made a little lower than the angels, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God he should taste of death for everyone."* Praise to Jesus Christ who suffered separation from the Father so that we will never ever be separated from Him. Praise to God who now takes great pleasure in teaching, leading, fellowshiping with, and... disciplining us.

Has our Heavenly Father disciplined you lately?

Isaiah 48: 1-6, Would you give God an Oscar Award?

Popular thought and theology, if they acknowledge God at all, would reduce him to be a mere fore-teller of the future, a psychic in the sky, if you will. So whether it is the weather tomorrow or the giving and receiving of grace most believe that God anticipates these wonders, but he either cannot or will not interfere with nature and man's 'free will.' So if that is your own view, please take a moment to reflect on Isaiah 48:1-6 (WEB).

1) "Hear this, house of Jacob, you who are called by the name of Israel, and have come out of the waters of Judah. You swear by Yahweh's name, and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth, nor in righteousness 2) (for they call themselves citizens of the holy city, and rely on the God of Israel; Yahweh of Armies is his name): 3) I have declared the former things from of old; yes, they went out of my mouth, and I revealed them. I did them suddenly, and they happened. 4) Because I knew that you are obstinate, and your neck is an iron sinew, and your brow bronze; 5) therefore I have declared it to you from of old; before it came to pass I showed it to you; lest you should say, 'My idol has done them, and my engraved image, and my molten image, has commanded them.' 6) You have heard it; see all this. And you, won't you declare it? I have shown you new things from this time, even hidden things, which you have not known."

Recently I have been reflecting on God's words in Isaiah chapter 48 as it relates to my own life. There is no doubt that God has acted in my prayers, both conceiving my prayers through the Holy Spirit and bringing his answer to fulfillment through his sovereign hand. Though it is painful to consider how stubborn I have been and can be, it is welcome relief to have my sin an open subject between me and God. After all he is also a merciful and gracious God. Read the rest of Chapter 48 to see just how gracious he is.

So what about you? Will you not admit that God has acted in your life? Has God's guarantee of grace emboldened you to admit your stubbornness? Where we stand today is not the result of 'mother nature' or our supposed 'free will' acting! No instead our lives are the result of the supreme Actor, the God of the universe.

Would you give him an Oscar for his performance? If we have any doubts, we must patiently wait till the end of his show.

Isaiah 63:17, Whoa! Whoa! Whoa! Whoa! Whoa! Whoa! Whoa!

Isaiah is my favorite Old Testament prophet. Through the Holy Spirit he saw more of the glories of Christ than many see today even after Christ has already come. Why he even saw past our present world to the inauguration of the New Heavens and the New Earth! It is a wonder that Isaiah didn't simply explode from the high octane glory that was revealed to him.

Yet Isaiah didn't explode, but shared in the sufferings of Christ at the hand of the Jews for preaching the New Covenant. It is no wonder that the theology of Apostle Paul borrows extensively from Isaiah with references to Isaiah 1:9, 8:4, 10:22-23, 11:10, 28:16, 29:10, 29:16, 45:9, 45:23, 52:5, 52:7, 52:15, 53:1, 59:7-8, 59:20-21, 63:17, 64:8, 65:1, and 65:2. The book of Romans quotes Isaiah so much in explanation of the gospel that Isaiah is sometimes called the Romans of the Old Testament.

One major theme of comparison between the two books is God's sovereign grace. Our unbelieving hearts are often reluctant to believe Romans 9:19 (WEB), "*You will say then to me, 'Why does he still find fault? For who withstands his will?'*" Though the answer to the Holy Spirit's rhetorical question is that NO ONE resists God's will, we are reluctant to believe it because this would make the will of God sovereign over sin as well.

Yet perhaps we misunderstand the context and the meaning of Paul's words. For confirmation Isaiah also touches on these themes in Isaiah 63:17-64:1 (WEB),

17) O Yahweh, why do you make us wander from your ways, and harden our heart from your fear? Return for your servants' sake, the tribes of your inheritance. 18) Your holy people possessed it but a little while. Our adversaries have trodden down your sanctuary. 19) We have become like those over whom you never ruled, like those who were not called by your name. 1) Oh that you would tear the heavens, that you would come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence.

Like whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa! What kind of God would "*make us wander*" from his ways? If we have any confusion about Paul's meaning in Romans 9:19 there certainly is no confusion about what Isaiah means in Isaiah 63:17. Though Romans 9:19 is God asking man a question that we know the answer to, but hate to admit, Isaiah 63:17 is man asking God a question that we do not know the answer to, but would certainly like to hear.

Thankfully, God also had a plan to fulfill Isaiah's longing and rend the heavens and come down. The Lord Jesus did rend the heavens and came down and through his life and death on the cross he has given answer to the prophets. The work of Christ answers Job's question in Job 25:4 (WEB), "*How then can man be just with God? Or how can he who is born of a woman be clean?*" Check out the answer in Romans 3:20-26.

And the word of Christ answers Isaiah's question in Isaiah 63:17 (WEB), "*O Yahweh, why do you make us wander from your ways, and harden our heart from your fear?*" directly in the Bible. So great as Isaiah was, even a child with simple faith in Christ and his word has

the greater understanding.

Where is the answer? Read the answer for yourself in Romans 11:32-36.

Isaiah 64:5, Acts 2:36, and Ephesians 2:1-22, A Study in Pronouns

Recently I read an interesting article that compared President Ronald Reagan and President Barak Obama's use of the word 'we'. The article noted that Reagan's use of the word 'we' was the populist usage, 'we' meaning everyone in the United States who is rooting for the good of United States. Reagan felt a brotherhood with his fellow Americans. Obama's use of the word 'we', however, is not populist, but instead 'we' meaning those that agree with Obama's agenda for the nation and are helping him to achieve it. Obama's brotherhood is by contrast... elite. This is a noteworthy observation. Pay attention to see if you notice the distinction yourself.

The article above reminded me of a similar observation about the use of pronouns in the Bible for God's family.

Isaiah said, *"You meet him who rejoices and does righteousness, those who remember you in your ways. Behold, you were angry, and we sinned. We have been in sin for a long time. Shall we be saved?"* (Isaiah 64:5 WEB). The great prophet Isaiah includes himself in the list of those having sinned and speaks to God as a voice for all sinners calling out to God. Isaiah shared a brotherhood with fellow sinners.

Peter said, *"Let all the house of Israel therefore know certainly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified"* (Acts 2:36 WEB). Passionate Peter preaches a sermon that brings 3,000 people to their knees in repentance after the crucifixion of Christ. Peter is not somehow less noble or more hypocritical than Isaiah above, but instead shows us that it is more than appropriate to bring hardened sinners to account by preaching, 'YOU have sinned!' Peter is well aware that he also had sinned, denying Jesus with vile curses and swearing. So his sermon is not in the spirit of condemnation, but correction. But his sermon is not, 'I'm bad, you're bad, God's good, and we're OK.' No. Peter's audience is not welcomed into the 'we' with him until they also join him with hearts bowed in repentance. Peter was just the man for this sermon.

Paul also said,

1) You were made alive when you were dead in transgressions and sins, 2) in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the children of disobedience. 3) We also all once lived among them in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. 4) But God, being rich in mercy, for his great love with which he loved us, 5) even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6) and raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7) that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus; 8) for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9) not of works, that no one would boast. 10) For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before that we would walk in them.

11) Therefore remember that once you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "uncircumcision" by that which is called "circumcision" (in the flesh, made by hands), 12) that you were at that time separate from Christ,

alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13) But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off are made near in the blood of Christ. 14) For he is our peace, who made both one, and broke down the middle wall of separation, 15) having abolished in his flesh the hostility, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man of the two, making peace, 16) and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, having killed the hostility through it. 17) He came and preached peace to you who were far off and to those who were near. 18) For through him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. 19) So then you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God, 20) being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone; 21) in whom the whole building, fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord; 22) in whom you also are built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit.

Ephesians 2:1-22 (WEB)

Paul's gracious use of the pronouns 'you', 'us', and 'we' in this passage of Scripture is perhaps the most heart-warming display of Christian charity and unity found in the whole of Scripture. Paul was the Pharisee of Pharisees and had a Pharisee's attitude toward Gentile 'dogs'. If Gentiles wanted to join the Jewish family of faith, Paul and the Pharisees demanded that the only way was through legal compliance with the Law of Moses. This was God's standard before the advent of Christ. Yet even the Jews did not comply with the Law of Moses themselves! Paul and the Jews hypocritically excluded the Gentiles and labeled them 'dogs' for failing to standards that they did not even keep themselves.

Yet in Ephesians 2:1-22 we see that Paul has fully repented of his hypocrisy, abandoned the Old Covenant, and received Christ and his New Covenant. Paul is now a Christian! Moreover, Paul warmly welcomes and enjoys fellowship with those he formerly called 'dogs', confessing that he is saved by the exact same terms as they, that of the unmerited grace of Jesus Christ. Paul 'lost all things' including his Jewishness in order to stand side by side with Gentile believers on the same level ground at the foot of the cross of Christ.

And what about you? Is your use of 'we' populist or elite, dividing or unifying Christ's family? Is your use of 'you' condemning or corrective, hurting or helping?

Isaiah 66:22-24, Optimism Out of Control, Part 3: All Mankind

Isaiah was a man before his time and he suffered because of it.

His books can be divided into two distinct pieces: part one, judgment; and part two, mercy. The parts of his book are so distinct and so chock full of prophecy years and years beyond the end of his life, that some suggest that Isaiah did not write his entire book. Yet Jesus attributes both halves of the book to Isaiah in John 12:37-41. And though the first half of his book focuses on judgment, mercy is also found there, and judgment in the mercy half of the book as well.

Today, however, I would like to highlight to you that his book concludes with radical mercy for mankind and is a fitting verse for part 3 of Optimism Out of Control. Consider Isaiah's final prophecy,

"For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me," says Yahweh, "so your offspring and your name shall remain. It shall happen that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh will come to worship before me," says Yahweh. "They will go out, and look at the dead bodies of the men who have transgressed against me; for their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind."

Isaiah 66:22-24 (WEB)

First, we see that the permanence of God's people is compared to the permanence of the new heavens and new earth. God permitted Isaiah, though only an Old Testament prophet, to see all the way to the new heavens and new earth fully explained in Revelation 21-22. Furthermore, a wonderful promise is found in this verse, God's people will live eternally.

Second, we see that God promises that all mankind will worship the Lord. Currently we see that the men of earth are dragged so low into the depths of filth by bondage to sin that they cannot even see that God is good. Though the current view is pitiful, God promises that the day is coming when all mankind will worship God for his goodness.

Third, we see that those who rebelled against the Lord will suffer wrath for their offenses. Yet who are these rebels? All mankind has rebelled for sure, but we have already shown that they will all be rejoicing before the Lord. So who remains? Isaiah teaches us that Satan and the angels that followed his rebellion will be embodied and sentenced to eternal fire, the 'men' who rebelled against God. Currently Satan and his demons exist as purely spiritual beings, but at some point God will give each of them a body suitable to represent their character and with which to inflict torment upon them.

Fourth, we see that all mankind has repented to see that Satan and his ways are loathsome. Mankind will no longer be double minded. God's goodness will be praised and Satan and the rebellion he led will be hated. Finally, Isaiah makes a point of mentioning "all flesh" and "all mankind" twice so that we have no doubt that all mankind will worship God and all mankind will loath Satan and his ways.

Certainly Isaiah was not sawn in two by his fellowman because of preaching the limited atonement! Jewish hearts are glad enough to believe that God's blessings are limited to them. Rather, Isaiah enraged the self-righteous and risked his life by preaching against the sin of ALL mankind AND comforting ALL mankind with God's forgiveness.

If this is good news to you, feel free to join me in stoking the fires of our optimism out of control... but don't forget the hard gospel fact that unbelieving mankind must be punished in Hades.

Isaiah 6:8, World Record Excuses

I heard an awesome sermon today about a not so awesome fact. I am an expert at making excuses (and you too). Of course we may need to correct a wrong accusation from time to time, but that is not what we are talking about here. We are talking about our ability to shift the blame to something or someone else, to dodge the bullet, to sidestep our responsibility, to attempt to ease our conscience with a little massaging of the truth, simply stated, to lie. We are experts at excuses, typically with the single goal of protecting our precious reputation or to avoid punishment. And we have been experts since day one. Consider a short Biblical history of excuses...

Genesis 3:12 (WEB), *"The man said, 'The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate it.' "* Adam gets our history of excuses started by blaming both God and his wife and sadly I have done the same.

Genesis 3:13 (WEB), *"Yahweh God said to the woman, 'What have you done?' The woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate.' "* Eve gets the same idea and blames Satan, and we also have followed her bad example only to learn that we cannot escape our mistake by blaming Satan.

Genesis 4:9 (WEB), *"Yahweh said to Cain, 'Where is Abel, your brother?' He said, 'I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper?' "* Cain, Adam and Eve's son, also dodges the bullet for murdering his brother.

Genesis 18:14-15 (WEB), *" 'Is anything too hard for Yahweh? At the set time I will return to you, when the season comes round, and Sarah will have a son.' Then Sarah denied it, saying, 'I didn't laugh,' for she was afraid. He said, 'No, but you did laugh.' "* And perhaps humorously Sarah outright lies to the angels that delivered the good news that she would have a son. She didn't believe them but neither would she admit that she didn't believe them and covered it all up with an excusing lie! Ha! Sounds to much like my own wrestling with doubt and faith.

Exodus 32:22-24 (WEB), *"Aaron said, 'Don't let the anger of my lord grow hot. You know the people, that they are set on evil. For they said to me, 'Make us gods, which shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we don't know what has become of him.' I said to them, 'Whoever has any gold, let them take it off.' So they gave it to me; and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf.' "* And perhaps with the all time record excuse Aaron explains his cowardice to Moses saying that the golden calf idol simply leaped out of the fire all by itself! But before we laugh too much, what if our own whoppers were recorded in the Bible?

I Samuel 13:8-14 (WEB), *"He stayed seven days, according to the time set by Samuel; but Samuel didn't come to Gilgal, and the people were scattering from him. Saul said, 'Bring the burnt offering to me here, and the peace offerings.' He offered the burnt offering. It came to pass that as soon as he had finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might greet him. Samuel said, 'What have you done?' Saul said, 'Because I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that you didn't come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines assembled themselves together at Michmash; therefore I said, 'Now the Philistines will come down on me to Gilgal, and I haven't entreated the favor of Yahweh.' I forced myself therefore, and offered the burnt offering.' Samuel said to Saul, 'You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of Yahweh your God, which he*

commanded you; for now Yahweh would have established your kingdom on Israel forever. But now your kingdom will not continue. Yahweh has sought for himself a man after his own heart, and Yahweh has appointed him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept that which Yahweh commanded you.' " Here King Saul moves ahead with his own plan, disregarding the Lord's command, explaining to Samuel that he was COMPELLED to move ahead without Samuel and without the Lord. Ya know we always have a reason for the things we do, but we would be wise to remember who is God and who is not God.

Jonah 4:1-3 (WEB), *"But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. He prayed to Yahweh, and said, 'Please, Yahweh, wasn't this what I said when I was still in my own country? Therefore I hurried to flee to Tarshish, for I knew that you are a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness, and you relent of doing harm. Therefore now, Yahweh, take, I beg you, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.'* " Jonah refused to obey initially and excused himself because he knew that God was compassionate. Man, we are a lot worse than we think we are, even withholding God's grace and compassion from others!

Matthew 25:24 (WEB), *"He also who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you that you are a hard man, reaping where you didn't sow, and gathering where you didn't scatter.'* " And we are messed up on both sides. Jonah's excuse was that God was too forgiving and this man's excuse was that God is too hard. Again we blame God.

Matthew 8:18-22 (WEB), *"Now when Jesus saw great multitudes around him, he gave the order to depart to the other side. A scribe came, and said to him, 'Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.' Jesus said to him, 'The foxes have holes, and the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.' Another of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, allow me first to go and bury my father.' But Jesus said to him, 'Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.'* " Waiting to follow God in order to bury your father seems like an acceptable excuse, but not according to Jesus.

John 10:19-20 (WEB), *"Therefore a division arose again among the Jews because of these words. Many of them said, 'He has a demon, and is insane! Why do you listen to him?'* " Again the blaming shifting to God gets even more serious. Whenever we don't understand God, we might even call him insane. Or if we are too 'good' to say what we really think about Jesus we simply redefine him to be more comfortable to our own way of thinking. The U.S. has marketed a personal salvation and a personal Jesus that we each define for ourselves. But there is only ONE Jesus and all His people share a COMMON salvation.

John 20:24-29 (WEB), *"But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, wasn't with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, 'We have seen the Lord!' But he said to them, 'Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.' After eight days again his disciples were inside and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, the doors being locked, and stood in the middle, and said, 'Peace be to you.' Then he said to Thomas, 'Reach here your finger, and see my hands. Reach here your hand, and put it into my side. Don't be unbelieving, but believing.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen, and have believed.'* " Thomas along with all of us from time to time have a very good excuse, we will not believe until we have tangible proof. But in the end we are surrounded by tangible proof! The problem is not God and his proofs, it is our willingness or unwillingness to walk with God by faith and see the vast proofs he has already given.

John 21:19-22 (WEB), *"Now he said this, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. When he had said this, he said to him, 'Follow me.' Then Peter, turning around,*

saw a disciple following. This was the disciple whom Jesus loved, the one who had also leaned on Jesus' breast at the supper and asked, 'Lord, who is going to betray you?' 21 Peter seeing him, said to Jesus, 'Lord, what about this man?' Jesus said to him, 'If I desire that he stay until I come, what is that to you? You follow me.' " And here is an excuse that is still used daily 2,000 years later, 'what about him?' we complain as we point over the fence to those standing in apparent greener grass. Americans demand equality and fairness, but Jesus demands faith and obedience. Really our minds are too small and God too big to truly compare ourselves honestly with another person. Only God sees the whole picture as well as into each of our hearts.

The preacher asked us a question for reflection at the end of his sermon. Most of us may accomplish at least a few things in life without excuse: trusting God occasionally, perhaps going to church on Sunday, or giving some money to the needy. Praise God, that is good! But occasional trust or worship one day a week without excuse is not the ideal we pursue. What if instead we **lived our entire life without excuses** and not just on occasion, or Sundays, or when someone else was looking? Just what would that look like?

Maybe our lives would look more like Isaiah than Jonah. *"I heard the Lord's voice, saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then I said, 'Here I am. Send me!' "* (Isaiah 6:8 WEB).

Isaiah 8:19-9:7, Nevertheless

nev er the less [nev-er-thuh-les], adverb

Meaning: *in spite of what preceded*

Synonyms: *nonetheless, notwithstanding, however, in spite of that, yet, at least, but, still*

When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn. Distressed and hungry, they will roam through the land; when they are famished, they will become enraged and, looking upward, will curse their king and their God. Then they will look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, and they will be thrust into utter darkness.

Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan- The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder.

For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

Isaiah 8:19-9:7 (NIV)

Notice the word '*nevertheless*' in the passage above. The word '*nevertheless*' is an adverb along with the word '*there*' that modifies the meaning of the verb '*will be*.' Isaiah chapter 9:1-7 is a common Scripture used at Christmas time to remind us of the good news that '*there will be no more gloom*.' That is good news. However, also consider that the word '*nevertheless*' modifies the meaning of the verb '*will be*' to say in spite of what preceded '*there will be no more gloom*.' And what preceded the promise of no more gloom? Isaiah 8:19-22 explains that if God's people do not speak according to God's word they have no light of dawn, they will walk through the land distressed and hungry, they will curse God for their hunger, and God will thrust them into utter darkness. Nevertheless the SAME PEOPLE thrust into the gloom of utter darkness for punishment will have no more gloom. Now that is great news!

The grace of Christ reaches to the utter darkness of our sorrow and despair (2 Corinthians 6),

our hardship and punishment (Hebrews 12:7-13), our weakness and difficulties (2 Corinthians 12:9-10), our loneliness and persecutions (2 Timothy 4:9-18), and if you can believe it even the depths of Hell itself (Revelation 20:13). God's love will not fail for even one of his chosen ones!

Disciplined by the Grace of Jesus Christ

Home Bible Optimism Articles

James 3:1-2, The Perfect Person

I was reminded this past week that I am far from perfect even in the exercising of my spiritual gifts. We ought to be thankful that when Christ saves us he also calls us to useful service and equips us with at least one spiritual gift to serve Christ's family. However, we should also remember that even the exercising of our spiritual gifts is tainted with sin and so love itself still remains the greatest command covering over a multitude of sins.

James 3:1-2 (WEB) says, *"Let not many of you be teachers, my brothers, knowing that we will receive heavier judgment. For we all stumble in many things. Anyone who doesn't stumble in word is a perfect person, able to bridle the whole body also."*

In the whole of human history approximately 36 people did something perfectly, but only by God's grace. Adam and Eve were entirely perfect for a brief time before falling into sin and infecting the entire human race with sin. The Holy Spirit breathed the Christian Scriptures perfectly through roughly 33 men, though the rest of their lives were completely tainted with sin. Only 1 man lived an entirely perfect life because he was God himself, the man Jesus Christ.

Thus we could ask should anyone even dare to be a teacher of God's word since no one is a perfect man or able to bridle their tongue? The Scriptures do say that God has given the gift of pastor / teacher (Ephesians 4:11) and that elders are to be appointed (Titus 1:5). So how is an imperfect man who cannot perfectly bridle his tongue supposed to teach? We must do our best to correctly handle the word of God, II Timothy 2:15. We must also humble ourselves to teach through the Spirit's power, I Corinthians 2:1-5. And if we stumble, even in the exercise of our gifts, Jesus Christ still remains the same gracious savior urging us to continue receiving forgiveness and giving our lives in service to him. Only our pride can take us out of his service.

The 33 men who wrote the Bible, listed from www.gotquestions.org.

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy = Moses - 1400 B.C.

Joshua = Joshua - 1350 B.C.

Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel = Samuel / Nathan / Gad - 1000 - 900 B.C.

1 Kings, 2 Kings = Jeremiah - 600 B.C.

1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah = Ezra - 450 B.C.

Esther = Mordecai - 400 B.C.

Job = Moses? - 1400 B.C.

Psalms = several different authors, mostly David - 1000 - 400 B.C.

Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon = Solomon - 900 B.C.

Isaiah = Isaiah - 700 B.C.

Jeremiah, Lamentations = Jeremiah - 600 B.C.

Ezekiel = Ezekiel - 550 B.C.

Daniel = Daniel - 550 B.C.

Hosea = Hosea - 750 B.C.

Joel = Joel - 850 B.C.

Amos = Amos - 750 B.C.

Obadiah = Obadiah - 600 B.C.

Jonah = Jonah - 700 B.C.

Micah = Micah - 700 B.C.

Nahum = Nahum - 650 B.C.

Habakkuk = Habakkuk - 600 B.C.

Zephaniah = Zephaniah - 650 B.C.

Haggai = Haggai - 520 B.C.

Zechariah = Zechariah - 500 B.C.

Malachi = Malachi - 430 B.C.

Matthew = Matthew - 55 A.D.

Mark = John Mark - 50 A.D.

Luke = Luke - 60 A.D.

John = John - 90 A.D.

Acts = Luke - 65 A.D.

Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon = Paul - 50-70 A.D.

Hebrews = unknown, best guesses are Paul, Luke, Barnabas, or Apollos - 65 A.D.

James = James - 45 A.D.

1 Peter, 2 Peter = Peter - 60 A.D.

1 John, 2 John, 3 John = John - 90 A.D.

Jude = Jude - 60 A.D.

Revelation = John - 90 A.D.

Of course the Holy Spirit gets the credit for the perfection :-)

James 4:1-10, I am Grumpy Because I Cannot Be God!

Wow, way too long since I've had a chance to write. Check this thought copied from my Facebook status. The Holy Spirit says in James 4:1-10 (WEB),

1) Where do wars and fightings among you come from? Don't they come from your pleasures that war in your members? 2) You lust, and don't have. You murder and covet, and can't obtain. You fight and make war. You don't have, because you don't ask. 3) You ask, and don't receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. 4) You adulterers and adulteresses, don't you know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5) Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who lives in us yearns jealously"? 6) But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." 7) Be subject therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8) Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners. Purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9) Lament, mourn, and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to gloom. 10) Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he will exalt you.

So our grumpiness is easily explained. We want something, but we cannot get it. Do you want a risky solution to our problem?

Ask God to help you admit to yourself what it is you really want and then dare to let Him determine whether you will EVER get it. Sound risky? Perhaps, except for two things...

1) God knows better than us, what is good for us.

2) God will get His way anyway, so our grumpiness is wasted effort :-)

For myself I am often grumpy because I want to control things, my circumstances, my life... and other people's lives... honesty put, I want to be God!... Ha! But he will not let me be God... nor you either.

So the next time you are grumpy and someone dares to get close enough to you to ask why. Just tell them the truth, that you want to be God for the moment, but He will not let you. The thought might just add a smile to your face.

James 4:1-4, Mad in the USA

The people of the United States ought to be thankful for the riches God has poured down upon our nation. We have been blessed in home life, education, business, research, and government like few nations in the history of the world. These blessings have served to provide a superior quality of life and comfort when compared with most people.

Yet despite these superior provisions the vices tearing at the fiber of our nation are common to all people. Despite our TVs, DVDs, cell phones, modern cars, comfortable homes, and computers we continue to battle against murder, murder in the womb, adultery, lies, greed, lust, selfishness, hate, hypocrisy, and fear. Our nation, though wonderful in many ways, is still dead from thirst.

Don't be fooled into thinking that Democracy, Capitalism, or modern innovation will satisfy this thirst. Most Americans have all of these and yet many are simply "*Mad in the USA*." You don't believe me? Visit a courtroom sometime and watch your countrymen fight for their rights. All these goodies have served absolutely no purpose in satisfying our true thirst. They haven't cured our thirst any more than would a tall cool drink of sand.

The New Testament writer James, however, offers this refreshing water to drink,

1) Where do wars and fightings among you come from? Don't they come from your pleasures that war in your members? 2) You lust, and don't have. You murder and covet, and can't obtain. You fight and make war. You don't have, because you don't ask. 3) You ask, and don't receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. 4) You adulterers and adulteresses, don't you know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

James 4:1-4 (WEB)

James does not cover up our problem with yet one more American idol. Instead he tells us that each person has a cancerous battle of sin waging within. We are all sinners with a desperate need for the Lord. The problem or solution is not our form of government, education, or business. But rather will you remain friends with the world or become friends with the Lord Jesus Christ?

Jeremiah 1:4-10, Ripped from the Word and Womb

Today I ripped the entire book of Jeremiah from my Bible.

I read these words in Jeremiah 1:4-10 (WEB),

Now Yahweh's word came to me, saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you. Before you were born, I sanctified you. I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.' Then I said, 'Ah, Lord Yahweh! Behold, I don't know how to speak; for I am a child.' But Yahweh said to me, 'Don't say, 'I am a child;' for you must go to whomever I send you, and you must say whatever I command you. Don't be afraid because of them, for I am with you to rescue you,' says Yahweh. Then Yahweh stretched out his hand, and touched my mouth. Then Yahweh said to me, 'Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. Behold, I have today set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to uproot and to tear down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.'

We ought to remind ourselves that the Bible says that life is conceived in the mind of God even before conception in the womb. So the destruction of life is more than an offense against the unborn, but also against God who ordains life.

I may have raised your eyebrow by ripping pages from the very Word of Life, but are your eyes open wide to the 40 million plus lives ripped from the womb in the 'so called' land of the free? We are not free! This is no democracy! Our government does not serve God's purpose of protecting its people! We are a nation ruled by spin doctors, the self-serving rich, and strong cowards who murder with no demur, hire hit men to deal with 'inconveniences,' and crush life from the defenseless. How can such a government endure?

History tells us it will not.

It will not because our righteous Governor, the Magistrate of wicked nations, is already serving the warrant for our arrest. Our Heavenly Father himself conceived of each one of these 40 million plus lives, each one to be our son or daughter, and many to be a brother or sister, husband or wife, pastor or missionary, doctor or teacher, business owner or employee, counselor or friend. His tears of compassion fall for these children and also for a country so deceived by Satan as to kill unborn younglings. We are both deceived and diabolic as we unwittingly join Satan in his plot to destroy humanity while we serve the God of self.

It is impossible that the Lord could ignore this. The King of Kings will make retribution. Kings of Earth, you will answer to the King of Heaven.

God told Jeremiah to *'go to whomever I send you, and you must say whatever I command you. Don't be afraid because of them, for I am with you to rescue you'* and commissioned him to *'uproot and to tear down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant,'* nations and kingdoms.

Christians today have the same commission as we seek to build and plant for the kingdom of Christ as well as to uproot, tear down, destroy, and overthrow unbelief and evil such as

abortion through preaching and the power of prayer. We should not be afraid to speak the truth for God will protect his people.

The terrible good news is that even if we are God's chosen people, his grace covers all our sin even to the killing of our own family. The news that God's people are capable of these crimes is more than terrible, but God's constant love for sinful mankind is the wonderfully good news. He will never condemn us...

but he will chastise.

I tore the pages of Jeremiah from my Bible and mailed them to President Obama with three questions.

If God knew Jeremiah before he was conceived, does he not know each of the 40+ million aborted babies?

If Jeremiah preached against the sins of his countrymen, should Christians not preach against abortion?

If God used the wicked Babylonians to punish chosen Israel, would God not be even more willing to use Babylon to punish the United States today?

I am not a prophet, but my knowledge of the character of God warns that he will act.

Jesus will act.

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Home Bible Optimism Articles

Job 31:1, I Did Look At You

Men, we need more frank conversation about sexual temptation.

Job said, *"I made a covenant with my eyes, how then should I look lustfully at a young woman?"* (Job 31:1 WEB). Christian men, this is our ideal. But Jesus also challenges us in the Sermon on the Mount with the words, *"but I tell you that everyone who gazes at a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart."* (Matthew 5:28 WEB).

Any honest man past puberty will have to confess that we have broken Job's covenant with our eyes. The hair trigger on our lustful thoughts plainly exposes us to be sinners. Though women may never fully understand the mind of a man in this department, experience the powerful effects of testosterone, or face the challenges of being a Christian male in our fallen world, Jesus Christ understands, and also any man filled with his Spirit.

I do not intend to belittle the great challenges that our sisters in the Lord also face, but I do not implicitly understand those struggles and in this piece I write to men.

Unfortunately because women do not understand our battles implicitly, many never really understand. Among unbelieving women physical beauty may be their biggest asset and seduction their most powerful weapon to reach their goals. Yet sadly just as believing men are still sinners, so believing women are also quite capable of seducing with physical beauty whether wittingly or unwittingly.

There are various reasons that even Christian women can fall to indiscretion. Christian women may be ignorant of the facts because they have never been taught by their dad, mother, brother, pastor, or friend. It is a difficult subject to address with young girls becoming young women or with women newly converted to Christ. It is difficult because men feel quite uncomfortable explaining the problem. For example, who will speak to a young woman with her skirt is too short or her neckline too low? If something is said she will be embarrassed to tears. If nothing is said she may enjoy the bees swarming to pollinate, but will she be stung (or sting) instead? God help us speak with grace.

Women may have been taught, but by a rebel who views immodesty as a stand against hypocrisy. Some husbands and dads actually encourage their wives and daughters to show some more skin in the effort to put a wide gap between themselves and unreasonable dress codes. Or by contrast women may have been taught, but by a hypocrite who views dress codes as a guard against his lust. Women may be just as glad to throw off yokes such as this, but will they leave modest clothing on afterward? Or women may have been taught, but prefer to risk the standard of the world or a standard just a bit closer to the world. Or women may have been taught, but are in rebellion against wisdom to their own hurt. Unfortunately, we have ALL chosen that course more than once.

For this reason we men need to remind ourselves that a woman is not automatically prudent just because she is a Christian. I once observed my daughter watching a music video with Christian musician Stacy Orrico and a gang of attractive women aerobic dancing to her latest hit. Maybe I am alone on this one, but I did have the thought that watching Stacy dance was not helpful in cultivating singular attraction to my wife. I know Stacy sings, *"Don't look at me,"* but frankly I have looked at her, and I imagine that others have as well. I recommended to my daughter that we skip that music video in the future.

This is a challenging subject for Christian men and women to understand and respect one another in this department. The Scriptures purposefully avoid any mention of hem lengths or neck lines because modesty at the foundation is a heart issue, a personal and public issue, and a very complicated cultural issue. As soon as we would define a hem length, we would still find away to strut our stuff while meeting the letter of the law. We should remind ourselves that modesty is about calling attention to Jesus Christ and others instead of ourselves by our words, actions, and yes, also our clothing choices.

Finally, even if a few more men and women are persuaded to modesty we can be sure that indiscretion, temptresses, and sexual temptation will always be with us. And so men, with God's gracious help we will accept our responsibility to be gentlemen, keep the ideal of Job, and admit our shortcomings. And perhaps God will then help us to be ladies and gentlemen once again.

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Home Bible Optimism Articles

John 12:25, Relient K, Chapter 2

I enjoy hearing the salvation stories of those who come to Christ. It is nothing less than wonderful to hear how lives are changed through the power of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is truly a wonderful savior who desires to pluck us from the filth of things such as fornication, drunkenness, greed, and the like. I myself was ecstatic after coming to Christ that I had left things such as this behind. The freedom I felt was intoxicating.

The Christian band Relient K captures the heart of this feeling in their song, *Who I am Hates Who I've been*. This is true for all Christians. Yet thankfully when I came to Christ I was challenged by a Christian friend to consider a difficult fact, that I am a sinner still. I was on cloud nine a bit prematurely. Fornication, drunkenness, greed, and the like still tempt me with their fleeting pleasures, even with Christ resident in my heart. Why it is as if coming to Christ has revealed me to be an even greater wretch than I imagined in the first place, though also with greater hope. This is why it is said that Jesus Christ is our peace, for there is no peace to be found within our selves. To be sure in eternal glory our sin will be finally removed, but until then it is not yet time for the dancing on the cloud nine that will dance on then.

Jesus soberly teaches us, *"He who loves his life will lose it. He who hates his life in this world will keep it to eternal life"* (John 12:25 WEB). The point of this is that Jesus challenges me, even as a Christian, to hate my life in this world. In fact, if I can find no other reason to even live at all except for the purposes of Jesus Christ, then and only then will my life have meaning. We are the more pitiable if we actually think that we have 'arrived' or found hope in something outside of Christ.

What I am trying to say is that I am encouraged by the lyrics of Relient K's song, but would I offend us if I suggested that there should be a Chapter 2? Does our disgust with our present sin and hope in future glory ever cause us to sing, *'Who I will be hates who I am?'*

RELIENT K LYRICS, *"Who I Am Hates Who I've Been"*

*I watched the proverbial sunrise
Coming up over the Pacific and
You might think I'm losing my mind,
But I will shy away from the specifics...*

*cause I don't want you to know where I am
cause then you'll see my heart
In the saddest state it's ever been.*

This is no place to try and live my life.

*(Pre-Chorus)
Stop right there. That's exactly where I lost it.
See that line. Well I never should have crossed it.
Stop right there. Well I never should have said
That it's the very moment that
I wish that I could take back.*

*(Chorus)
I'm sorry for the person I became.*

*I'm sorry that it took so long for me to change.
I'm ready to be sure I never become that way again
cause who I am hates who I've been.
Who I am hates who I've been.*

*I talk to absolutely no one.
Couldn't keep to myself enough.
And the things bottled inside have finally begun
To create so much pressure that I'll soon blow up.*

*I heard the reverberating footsteps
Synching up to the beating of my heart,
And I was positive that unless I got myself together,
I would watch me fall apart.*

*And I can't let that happen again
cause then you'll see my heart
In the saddest state it's ever been.*

This is no place to try and live my life.

*(Pre-Chorus x2)
(Chorus)*

*Who I am hates who I've been
And who I am will take the second chance you gave me.
Who I am hates who I've been
cause who I've been only ever made me...*

*So sorry for the person I became.
So sorry that it took so long for me to change.
I'm ready to be sure I never become that way again
cause who I am hates who I've been.
Who I am hates who I've been.*

John 14:8-21, Marriage Part XOXO - Intimate Reflections of the Image of God

I read *Divine Romance* by Edwards. I heard *Divine Romance* by Wickham. But what is romantic about God, the cross, Scripture, repentance, faith, obedience, and eternity? Can true romance be known? I pondered.

I read *The Bible* by Jesus,

Philip said to him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us.'
Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you such a long time, and do you not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father. How do you say, 'Show us the Father?' Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I tell you, I speak not from myself; but the Father who lives in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me; or else believe me for the very works' sake. Most certainly I tell you, he who believes in me, the works that I do, he will do also; and he will do greater works than these, because I am going to my Father. Whatever you will ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you will ask anything in my name, I will do it. If you love me, keep my commandments. I will pray to the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, that he may be with you forever: the Spirit of truth, whom the world can't receive; for it doesn't see him and doesn't know him. You know him, for he lives with you, and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans. I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more; but you will see me. Because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. One who has my commandments and keeps them, that person is one who loves me. One who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him, and will reveal myself to him.'

John 14:8-21 (WEB)

I write that the world knows nothing of romance, but only the prostitution and purchase of themselves on *YouTube* and *YouMagazine*. I say that romance is defined by God, Scripture, redemption, faith, obedience, and eternity. The Father passionately commands the Son. The Son passionately obeys the Father. The cross testifies of their love for mankind. The Holy Spirit writes the love letters. Unrepentant man melts in the heat of God's affection. Love struck man trusts and obeys God in gratitude. Eternities of passionate love remain for God's people. It is not about YOU, but about selfless love toward ANOTHER, God toward us and us toward each other.

I write that romance is a dance with no side-by-side partners, but with passionate leading lovers and following beloveds. In fact the choreography of the "in" doctrine above is the quintessence of romance. The beloved is first "in" the leading lover, the lover last "in" the following beloved. Why? The Father leads the Son, so the Son is first "in" the Father, because the great Father glories over the obedient Son and the obedient Son glories "in" the great Father. The Son follows the Father, so the Father is last "in" the Son, because the humble Son glories over the commanding Father and the commanding Father glories "in" the humble

Son. Yet the dance begins with the Father for he sets all things in motion. Glory! What blasphemy to imagine the Father first "in" the Son, or the Son last "in" the Father, or the Father "in" himself not "in" the Son!

The Son leads the church, so mankind is first "in" the Son, because the great Son covers over shameful mankind and shameful mankind hides "in" the great Son and because the great Son glories over the obedient church and the obedient church glories "in" the great Son. The church follows the Son, so the Son is last "in" the church, because weak mankind reposes over the obedient Son and the obedient Son strength-"in"s weak mankind and because the humble church glories over the commanding Son and the commanding Son glories "in" the humble church. Yet this dance begins with the Son for he rouses the church. Glory! Glory!! What blasphemy to imagine the Son first "in" mankind, or the church last "in" the Son, or the Son "in" himself not "in" the church!

The intimate heart of God's image reflected "in" mankind is not an earthly father and son, or even a son and a brother, but a husband and wife, Genesis 1:27 and Ephesians 5:25. The same passionate union of the Father and Son also burns between the Son and the church and ignites the marriage of a husband and a wife. Does this romantic union reach from the spiritual to the physical? I wondered. Glory! Glory!! Glory!!! What selfishness to imagine a husband loving himself first or a wife obeying her husband last. What perversion, apostasy, and heresy to imagine Christ "in" man not "in" the church, or woman "in" the church not "in" Christ, or Christ "in" the church not "in" God!

God's wrath in sentencing idolaters to homosexuality and adultery is now understood! Romans 1:18-32 and Proverbs 22:14. If we remove the Creator to worship the created, he removes his image created "in" us until we worship the Creator. Lord, remove the veil so we can glory knowing ourselves "in" you, our shame covered with your greatness, and glory knowing you "in" us, our weakness filled with your strength.

Lord, restore your image "in" us, in Jesus name.

Further explanation of this Triple Entendre [available upon request](#). For more detail on the wonder of human sexuality read [The Image of God in Man](#), [The Image of God in Man Part 2](#), and [The Image of God in Man Part 3](#). Also the explanation of human sexuality as a metaphor of Christian salvation is further explained in ['In' Doctrine](#).

John 1:12-13, Give Kids the World

Eleven months ago the Lord was pleased to bring a difficult trial into the life of my family. My youngest daughter was diagnosed with Wilm's Tumor kidney cancer. I say the Lord was pleased, not because he is cruel, but because every thing he ordains, including difficulties, are to fulfill and complete his marvelous works in this world and our lives. And this includes my daughter's kidney cancer as well.

Through this trial my wife, my children, and I have fallen on the Lord's grace and re-learned that he is faithful. Through this trial we have been prayed for by dear Christian friends and Christian family members and received blessing upon blessing. Through this trial God has moved the hearts of too many people to count to help care for our daughter and shown us that his grace has been poured out upon this earth.

For example two neat organizations that blessed us are *Make-A-Wish* and *Give Kids the World*. *Make-A-Wish* is a charitable organization that grants wishes to children with life threatening illnesses. Our daughter received a wish and asked that our family could receive a week vacation in Florida to see Disney World. *Give Kids the World*, founded by Henri Landwirth, partnered with *Make-A-Wish* to provide us with comfortable accommodations, great food, and tickets to all the theme parks in Orlando. It was a wonderful family vacation and most importantly a special time with our daughter. We are so thankful for this generous gift and all the people that made it possible.

There are so many people who give of themselves to benefit suffering children because there is nothing quite as tragic as childhood suffering. Suffering does not make sense, but none-the-less we maintain that the Lord remains the good Lord. It is also fitting that these children would have the opportunity to be "*given the world*" in the midst of their trial. So again I cannot express how grateful I am for the generosity shown to my daughter and our family by all.

In fact as I think deeply about it there must be nothing in the whole world as tragic as childhood suffering and nothing as magnanimous as "*giving these kids the world*." There is nothing more noble that is, except one thing only, which is "*giving kids the kingdom*."

Jesus reminded us that there is more to life than this world. Jesus came to bring good news and hope because as wonderful as the things of this world are, Jesus is building an even more wonderful kingdom in heaven for his children. And for many children suffering through trials in this world is hardly wonderful. But if there were truly the hope of the final end of suffering and a heaven where there were no more sadness or tears, then it would be the most wonderful thing of all to give children this Kingdom.

Friends, there is just such a Kingdom and Jesus is its King. You can read about him in the Christian Scriptures. And though I cannot personally bestow the rights to his Kingdom upon you, Jesus can, and you can receive it from him. Jesus said, "***But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become God's children, to those who believe in his name: who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God***" (John 1:12-13 WEB).

This important verse makes it clear that you cannot become God's child because you were born from Christian or even godly parents. You also cannot become God's child because you merely decided you want to be his child and go to heaven. You cannot even become God's child because your husband, parents, pastor, friend, or I want you to.

The good news is that you must be born again to become God's child. The beauty of being God's child is that it is not something we can do to ourselves by trying to be good. Otherwise it would be a miserable failure. Instead, the very Spirit of God must reach inside each one of us and change us. God must make us willing to trust and obey Jesus with a new heart. You must be born of God. Thankfully that is exactly God's business... changing hearts.

Whatever your situation, whether you have been given this world's pleasures or not, I pray that you would receive the Lord Jesus Christ and look forward to his eternally wonderful Kingdom in Heaven, promised to all his children!

John 3:16, 10:10, and 20:31 ~ Hat Trick!!!

A *hat trick* is the achievement of a positive feat three times in a game, or another achievement based on the number three. The term first appeared in 1858 in cricket, to describe H. H. Stephenson's taking three wickets with three consecutive deliveries. Fans held a collection for Stephenson, and presented him with a hat bought with the proceeds. The term was used in print for the first time in 1865. Other sports also adopted the expression including hockey, football, baseball, water polo, handball, racing, and others. Quoted from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hat-trick>.

John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, had a fancy for threes as well. John wrote three letters to churches, the gospel of John, and Revelation. The structure of each of his three larger books appears to be outlined with an introductory thesis, each highlighting, you guessed it, three main points. John's first letter to the church begins, "*That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we saw, and our hands touched, concerning the Word of life,*" John 1:1 (WEB). The body of the letter then uses the three senses of hearing, sight, and touch to organize his points. Likewise, John's Revelation begins with Jesus introducing himself from three perspectives, "*I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty,'"* Revelation 1:8 (WEB). Jesus then tells John to write three things, "*Write therefore the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will happen hereafter,*" Revelation 1:19 (WEB). The body of Revelation then reveals three vantage points of time: past, present, and future (though there is much debate about the detail 😊). And finally John's Gospel begins, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,*" John 1:1 (WEB). This three-part thesis likewise outlines the progression of John's message that Jesus is the Word from the beginning, that Jesus has come from God, and that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, in fact very God.

Please understand that I am not suggesting that there is something magical about the number *three*. There is no intrinsic power in the number *three*. Numerology is the belief that numbers themselves have mystical power. That is not what I am saying. Instead, God the Holy Spirit is a master craftsman in everything he does, including his inspiration of Scripture. So apparently it was his fancy to make artistic use of the threes in some of the structuring of the Bible. Hey, so give God the *hat trick*!

Now, I said all that to introduce you to the most important *hat trick* in the gospel of John. There are three verses placed at the beginning, middle, and end of the book, each highlighting the same wonderful message. In fact there is a strong correlation between these three verses and the introductory thesis found in John 1:1. Way cool! So, yes, the Bible is more than an encyclopedia of verses, but in fact a composition with introduction, body, and conclusion. This is very useful to help us identify the main points of John's gospel.

Let's consider the verses in reverse order. The third verse is John 20:31 (WEB).

*but these are written,
that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,
and that believing you may have life in his name.*

This verse is the checkered flag for John's *hat trick* through the life of Christ. At the end of Chapter 20 John's slams home his main point for the entire gospel. The gospel of John falls into the literary category of historic biography and specifically a persuasive call to action. John 20:31 is our call to action. Read the simple verse again and there is the greatest

invitation in the entire world that we have ever or will ever receive. John's gospel tells the story of the most amazing man ever... the God-man! Will we trust him and have *life* in his name? That is our call to action.

Note that the call to action is curiously simple with a curiously simple result. We are called to trust in Jesus. That is it. And the result is *life* in his name. Actually the call to action seems too simple from the greatest man that ever lived.

Yet consider that the simple word *life* is free from adjectives to emphasize that we are invited to whole *life*, all of *life*, the best of *life*, the essence of *life*, to *life* itself! John began his gospel in John 1:4 saying that "*in Him was life*" and concludes with the invitation to receive *life*. *Life* is translated from the Greek ζωή transliterated as zōé and it simply means *life*. So we see that John's gospel conclusion is anything but a fire insurance policy to protect our own interests, to protect our own skin, or even to merely escape Hell. Instead John's call to action is an invitation to let go of self-protection, let go of self-interest, let go of small things, and instead through Christ to begin the essence of *life* itself, to truly *live* in the only way that is possible, to *live* the *life* that God our creator designed for us, to *live* in the love of our redeemer, Jesus Christ.

As we consider John's *hat trick* of verses, traditional ideas about salvation will be radically challenged. Jesus' invitation to *life* is so much more than the simple Western Evangelical gospel recipe of '*trust Jesus, go to Heaven.*' In fact such a watered-down gospel totally misses the true gospel and is no gospel at all! Why settle for a mere fire insurance policy that at best only offers a false sense of security, when Jesus invites us to a totally transformed life and relationship with the creator of the universe. Jesus is offering ALL of life to those who are ALL in. Are you ALL in to Jesus?

The second verse is John 10:10 (WEB).

*The thief only comes to steal, kill, and destroy.
I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly.*

Everyone understands that this verse is speaking about the abundant life of a restored relationship with God himself, our Father in Heaven. The word *abundantly* is translated from the Greek επισός with the root περί which is transliterated as perissós. This word means beyond, superabundant in quantity or superior in quality, excessive, preeminent, exceeding abundantly above, more abundantly, advantage, exceedingly, very highly, beyond measure, more, even superfluous. Superfluous? Yes! Unnecessarily extravagant! Jesus came to give us *life* pouring over the brim. Oh yeah! I'll take a flood of that!

The point is that this is the *life* that Christ calls us to *live* now, right now, this moment and every moment. He wants us to know and have confidence that we are entirely and unconditionally loved by God so much that even our trials on earth are abundantly blessed with his awesome purpose. Jesus came that you and I "*may have life, and may have it super-abundantly, exceedingly, highly, beyond measure.*" Again Jesus and his messenger John are not peddling tickets to Heaven or get-out-of-Hell cards! Western, capitalistic, and fearful thinking are naturally wired to 'close' the sale and settle the 'deal' so that we put our minds at rest and get back to our lives. Why would we ever reduce the gospel to the likeness of an eternal time-share vacation purchase? Instead, Jesus wants to give us *life* that we do not even have without him, *life* rooted in a loving relationship with God himself.

And now the first verse of John's hat trick... the most abused, the most mistreated, the most misunderstood verse in the history of Christianity.... yes our very own John 3:16 (WEB).

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son,
that whoever believes in him should not perish,
but have eternal (aionian) life.*

This is John's hat trick opener. However, contrary to Western Evangelical thinking this verse is terribly translated and instead makes the SAME point as the previous two verses above. Fire insurance salesman have twisted this verse into a cheap recipe to escape Hell. However, instead this verse stands as the grandest invitation to mankind. Just as with the other two hot shots, the first hot shot screams into the net to tell us that God loves us, gave the life of his own Son for us, and through trusting him our life will not be wasted, but instead be made whole, a life *completely restored* to God's awesome purposes.

'Wait!', you may say. 'The verse says *ETERNAL life*', you may point out. Please listen to me and consider carefully. God is raising up a small army of Davids to take on the Goliath of Western Evangelical tradition to right a great wrong and set the record straight. And I have joined David's army. The word translated as eternal is the Greek *αιώνιος* transliterated as *aiónios*, or commonly *aionian*. This Greek word means from start to finish, pertaining to the age, lifetime, entirety, and complete. You may ask, 'Are you saying the most well known Bible verse in the entire world is mistranslated?' Yes... I am. The absolute quickest explanation is that the Greek word *aionian* is the adjective of the noun *aion*. *Aion* is the Greek word for *age*, the ancestor of our English word *eon*. The connection between *aion* and *eon* should be easily seen, just as the connection between *aionian* and *eonian*. The Greeks used the word *aionian* to describe anything that filled the boundaries of its existence. Simple chronological, endless, or infinite time was never in view, but instead *entirety* and *completeness*. So God is not peddling tickets to eternal life for those seeking to protect their own skin. Instead he is giving super extravagant abundant wholly restored life to those longing for a relationship with their creator God, Jesus Christ. Read [Dr. Keizer](#) and [Ramelli and Konstan](#) for proofs. Begin with an [abstract of Dr. Keizer's conclusions](#).

Furthermore, context is always the king of meaning. In the case of John's *hat trick* the meaning is even more clear when we consider the context of John's entire book, the introduction in John 1:1, and the main point of all three verses in their context. All three verses progress toward the same point! John 3:16 teaches us that God gave us his own Son so that through trusting him our lives would not perish and be wasted, but instead be restored, made whole and complete. That is the beginning. Second we see in John 10:10 that Satan came to steal and destroy, but Jesus came that we might have life and have life super-abundantly. That is continuing. And thirdly, we see in John 20:31 that Jesus is the Christ, God himself, and that through faith in him we can *live* the very essence of *life*! That is the grand conclusion.

Friend, trade in your cheap fire insurance policy and instead know God as he is, your loving Heavenly Father and through faith in Jesus, God the son, and begin to truly *live*!

P.S. 'What about salvation from eternal Hell?' you ask. Friend, you are still missing the point. When your eyes are on the clock on the wall your unbelief is revealed. Sit down, get your eyes on Jesus, trust him, and enjoy fellowship with the man at the head of the table! Our Heavenly Father's loving eyes are on you and every one of his people. Not one will be lost. Truly? Truly! Not one will be lost. Everyone destined for glory will be there without question! Jesus even promised, proved, and prophesied the defeat and emptying of Hades itself! His grace will save even the wicked unbelieving elect at the last day just as he prophesied! There is no escape from the love of Jesus Christ.

That is the awesome news! Praise God!

John 3:5-8, The Reformers, Their Stepchildren, and.... Their Grandchildren

Read Leonard Verduin's *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren*. This book explains the Anabaptists of the 16th century also known as '*The Left-wing of the Reformation*' or the '*Radical Reformers*.' Martin Luther sparked the Reformation, dividing Catholic and Protestant over the gospel of justification by faith alone, Romans 1:17. This match lit a fire that divided not only Catholics and Protestants, but Protestants and Protestants to this very day.

Never did Jesus words ring more true when he says, "*Don't think that I came to send peace on the earth. I didn't come to send peace, but a sword*" (Matthew 10:34 WEB), and again "*From the days of John the Baptizer until now, the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force*" (Matthew 11:12 WEB). The fight for truth is no contest for arm-chair quarterbacks. And so we see divisions today from forceful men of the past as Catholics, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Anabaptists, and various Christian faiths warmly worship Christ every Sunday while coolly separated from each other, yet each with some kind of goal to follow Christ. Look at our church names! We are the grandchildren of the Reformation!

But how are we doing?

We are warm and cool. Why not hot and cold?

Yes, God continues his mighty work, unstoppable in his goal, to demonstrate his passionate grace in his chosen ones. This is hot. But we are a cool mess, even worse than before. Not only are Catholics, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Anabaptists divided, we are each divided among ourselves over the gospel, over homosexuality, over doctrine, over practice. These differences would be great things to divide over, but we also divide over food, clothing, music, and trivia!

In the midst of spiritual war and the quest for truth Luther, Calvin, Sattler, and others gave their lives for critical matters in belief and practice as they sought to follow Christ. We face the same critical matters today... but also cursory matters. Luther is commended for dividing a congregation over the gospel, for the unbelieving are not the church! But would Luther be commended for dividing a church over music? Would church history future look back to study the 21st century music reformation?

Grandchildren of the Reformation wake up! Fight about something worth fighting for! Fight for truth! Or are you merely a child of flesh?

Being a child or a grandchild of the Reformation or any heritage means nothing. Although it would have been a blessing to be a son of Eli, Samuel, David, or Solomon, and to witness their mighty deeds for the Lord. However, it is only a blessing for the believing. For their own sons, Hophni and Phinehas had no regard for the Lord, Joel and Abijah did not walk in God's ways, Amnon and Absalom raped and murdered, and Rehoboam divided God's people. They were merely children of flesh for even godly parents and a godly heritage cannot command the Spirit.

That is why,

Jesus answered, "Most certainly I tell you, unless one is born of water and spirit, he can't enter into God's Kingdom. That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Don't marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born anew.' The wind blows where it wants to, and you hear its sound, but don't know where it comes from and where it is going. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

(John 3:5-8 WEB)

And Paul said,

But it is not as though the word of God has come to nothing. For they are not all Israel that are of Israel. Neither, because they are Abraham's offspring, are they all children. But, "your offspring will be accounted as from Isaac." That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as heirs. For this is a word of promise, "At the appointed time I will come, and Sarah will have a son."

(Romans 9:6-9 WEB)

And what about you? Praise God if you are a child of Christian parents and go to a good church. Are you also a child of the Spirit? Have you received God's promises?

John 7:16-20, Why do you seek to kill me? A fair question.

Jesus had an amazing way with words. For myself, all too often I am in conversations of various sorts only to think of the choice words a day later. But Jesus always had the perfect words for his audience, seeing into our hearts with the wisdom that only God has. One noteworthy record of Jesus' words is in John Chapter 7. In this passage Jesus *'cuts to the quick'* like no one or nowhere else in the history of the world.

Jesus therefore answered them, "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me. If anyone desires to do his will, he will know about the teaching, whether it is from God, or if I am speaking from myself. He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory, but he who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and no unrighteousness is in him. Didn't Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keeps the law? Why do you seek to kill me?"

The multitude answered, "You have a demon! Who seeks to kill you?"

(John 7:16-20 WEB)

This is a most striking exchange and worth reflection.

Jesus has asked various hardball questions to us throughout his ministry, but this question, this question is the question of all questions. Jesus asks, *"Why do you seek to kill me?"* Let's first assume that Jesus is God as he says he is, and as I believe. If so, Jesus knows everything and so he does not ask the question to get an answer for HIS OWN edification. If you or I were being attacked by a madman, and there was a pause in his attack, we would no doubt be curious and ask *"Why do you seek to kill me?"* because we would not know why and would like to know why before our attacker killed us. At least we would have the satisfaction of knowing why someone hated us enough to kill us as we drew our last breath. However, in Jesus' case we can safely assume he knows why we seek to kill him, but he asks us the question for OUR OWN edification. His question is driving us to reflect on the reasons why we hate him. Jesus is the great physician, revealing a deadly cancer in our lives for cleansing, cure, and healing.

That said, there are several possibilities as to why we hate Jesus.

- 1) We hate Jesus and DO NOT know why.
- 2) We hate Jesus and DO know why, or
- 3) we hate Jesus and DO know why, but CANNOT admit the reasons to ourselves.

Perhaps there are other reasons, but one reason that cannot be on the list is a valid grievance against the Lord. Read the Biblical accounts of his life yourself, and you will see that he healed, loved, forgave, spoke against injustice, and finally returned good for evil when we crucified him on a cross, when he could have commanded the armies of heaven to destroy us. Jesus was and is a good man, a good God.

Has his grace given you the wisdom to understand and boldness to confess the reasons you seek to kill Jesus?

John 8:30-47, Free at Last! Free at Last! Thank God Almighty I am 2/3 Free at Last!

On August 28, 1963 Martin Luther King Jr. stood on the steps at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. and exclaimed, "*I have a Dream!*", the most powerful and resounding speech in our generation with the final words still echoing through our land, "*Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty we are free at last!*"

Jesus is also for freedom and has a dream. Consider the powerful words of Christ about freedom, perhaps forgotten in our land.

30) As he spoke these things, many believed in him. 31) Jesus therefore said to those Jews who had believed him, "If you remain in my word, then you are truly my disciples. 32) You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

33) They answered him, "We are Abraham's offspring, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How do you say, 'You will be made free'?"

34) Jesus answered them, "Most certainly I tell you, everyone who commits sin is the bondservant of sin. 35) A bondservant doesn't live in the house forever. A son remains forever. 36) If therefore the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. 37) I know that you are Abraham's offspring, yet you seek to kill me, because my word finds no place in you. 38) I say the things which I have seen with my Father; and you also do the things which you have seen with your father."

39) They answered him, "Our father is Abraham."

Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. 40) But now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham didn't do this. 41) You do the works of your father."

They said to him, "We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father, God."

42) Therefore Jesus said to them, "If God were your father, you would love me, for I came out and have come from God. For I haven't come of myself, but he sent me. 43) Why don't you understand my speech? Because you can't hear my word. 44) You are of your father, the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and doesn't stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks on his own; for he is a liar, and the father of lies. 45) But because I tell the truth, you don't believe me. 46) Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? 47) He who is of God hears the words of God. For this cause you don't hear, because you are not of God."

(John 8:30-47 WEB)

Unfortunately the rally cry for freedom has left Americans and the World in a most pitiful condition. While men labor, strive, and fight for freedom from tyrannical rulers they each themselves are locked in slavery to their own vile sins which they cannot nor will not cease. Or worse, the free democratic people of the world party and rejoice in their delusions of freedom hoping to bring the cure of democracy to the world while they also are no better off, but have hands, head, and heart likewise chained to abominable sins with the devil himself as their slave master.

A true pastor once preached that through Christ we can be free from the penalty of sin and the power of sin. And one day in eternity those for whom Christ died will finally be free from the presence of their own sin and the sin of others. Total freedom is coming, but the best one can claim at this moment is to be free from the penalty and power of sin ruling their life, but not the presence of sin in their own life or the lives of those around them. The best one can claim is to be 2/3 free. And apart from faith in Christ there is absolutely no freedom at all.

100% freedom is coming for the elect of Christ, but it is reserved for that great day. Governments cannot advance that day. Democracy cannot advance that day. Wealth cannot advance that day. Education cannot advance that day. Human striving cannot advance that day. However, the cause of Christ has won 2/3 freedom for his people right now as well as true hope that full freedom is certainly coming with His return.

Would you stand with the Jews of Jesus day and boast that you have never been a slave to anyone? Would you hear Christ quietly say to you, "***Most certainly I tell you, everyone who commits sin is the bondservant of sin***"? Or would you follow the example of Paul who instead preferred to call himself a slave of Christ and serve Him patiently while looking forward to that great day?

Look to Christ and dream of that day when we are truly free, free from sin forever!

John(1) 3:15 and John 14:6, Relatives and Absolutes

We should note when studying Scripture that God's word contains both *relative* and *absolute* statements. Some statements in the Bible are always true under every condition for all time. Other statements are relative or generalizations and not absolute. These statements are generally true, but not under every condition or situation.

For example, the apostle John wrote, *"Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life remaining in him"* (1 John 3:15 WEB). We can conclude that since King David of the Old Testament murdered Uriah that John's statement must be a generalization. This verse cannot be an absolute statement because with the discovery of one exception the statement is no longer true under every condition and situation for all time.

So on one hand this is good news, for even if we happened to have murdered someone, our salvation is not necessarily in question. On the other hand this is fearful news because we see that even true believers are capable of heinous crimes.

Yet the Scriptures also do speak in absolutes. Apostle John also recorded that Jesus said, *"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me' "* (John 14:6 WEB). How do we know that this statement is absolute? We know it is absolute because no exception is recorded in Scripture, nor has any exception ever been found in the history of mankind to date.

Someone may take up the challenge to find an alternative means by which sinful man can come to our Holy Father. Many false ideas and religions have been invented throughout history. But nothing can possibly satisfy the justice of God while providing mercy to sinners like God's invention of the cross. Though we may shy away from absolute statements, this is one with great hope, the promise of salvation! The wisest course is to receive Jesus as the only answer and begin telling the rest of the world about him.

Praise God for the wonderful cross of Jesus Christ.

Disciplined by the Grace of Jesus Christ

Home Bible Optimism Articles

Justified!

How can a sinful man be justified before a holy God? To justify someone is to declare them innocent or guiltless, to absolve or acquit. The dilemma for us is that God is our judge and he is both loving and just. He is perfect in love, but also perfect in justice so that he cannot wink at our sin or sweep it under the carpet. We must be judged and we are all convicted guilty of sin. What would we think of a human judge who bent the rules acquitting and convicting with no regard for the evidence or the law? The judge would be impeached.

Likewise God cannot be unjust and he must deal with sinners according to the evidence and the law. We are all sinners and he cannot set some sinners free and punish others without a just and lawful explanation. The good news is that though we all deserve damnation for our rebellion against God, Jesus, God the son, willingly took upon himself mankind's punishment, dying on the cross in our place. The gospel of Christ is the only possible way that Holy God is able to preserve the perfection of both his love and justice in the acquittal of sinful man. Our God is a pure genius of grace as seen in his character and actions. To this all Christians agree.

Unfortunately not all Christians agree as we go deeper in our study of Christ and his salvation of all mankind. In fact the Bible also seems to present a myriad of confusion on this most important point, our justification before holy God. Consider that the Bible says we are:

Justified by	Scripture	Explanation
His grace	Romans 3:24	?
His blood	Romans 5:9	?
Our faith	Romans 3:28	?
Our works	James 2:24	?
Our words	Matthew 12:37	?

So are we justified by his grace or blood, or our faith, works, or words? Worse yet one verse says we are justified by faith and not works of the law, Romans 3:28, while another verse says we are justified by works and not faith alone, James 2:24. What is the explanation?

Certainly God is not intentionally obscure, so our quest for rock solid proof of our acquittal drives us to his word.

REFORMATION

These questions have been asked more and less throughout the history of the Christian faith. The most well know debate was in the 16th century between Martin Luther and the Roman Catholic Church. Luther's quest for assurance of salvation could not be satisfied by the dogma of the 16th century Catholics. So Luther turned to Scripture and the good news summarized in Romans 1:16-17 (WEB),

16) For I am not ashamed of the Good News of Christ, because it is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first, and also for the Greek. 17) For in it is revealed God's righteousness from faith to faith. As it is written, "But the righteous shall live by faith."

Luther found great encouragement that salvation and assurance of salvation does not come through works of the law or even the works required by the Catholic Church but simply by faith in Christ. Luther's rediscovery of the gospel sparked a fire in the followers of Christ that still impacts the names of denominations and statements of faith to this day.

Two main veins of thought remain from the Reformation. Below is comparison of the classic Ordo Salutis, order of salvation events, as understood by each of these camps.

Reformed / Calvinist	Catholic / Arminian
1) Election / Predestination	1) Outward call
2) Gospel call	2) Faith / election
3) Inward call / Regeneration	3) Repentance
4) Conversion: faith and repentance	4) Regeneration
5) Justification	5) Justification
6) Sanctification	6) Perseverance
7) Glorification	7) Glorification

Note the different orderings of regeneration and faith. The Reformed camp believes that God regenerates sinners, which leads to their faith. The Arminian camp holds that fallen man retains the moral capacity to believe the gospel in his own power, which leads to regeneration. Yet one might ask why does one man believe and not another? The Reformed answer is because God regenerated or awakened one man's heart and not the other. The Arminian answer is because one man made the good choice of Christ and the other did not. The Arminian position defines election to mean that God foresaw who would believe the gospel, but was not the effecting cause of their belief. The Reformed position understands instead that God won some to believe the gospel and did not yet win others.

Conclusions from the Reformation are an excellent starting point to glorify God for his grace in of our salvation. However, the Reformation is not the best ending point. Specifically, I plan to show that justification is better ordered before regeneration in the Reformed Ordo Salutis.

ORDERING AN ETERNAL AND OMNIPOTENT GOD?

One might ask why even debate a sequence of events willed by an eternal and omnipotent God? If a madman determined to crash an unstoppable freight train through the house to our left, then our house, and then the house to our right we would not be concerned with the order that our houses were smashed, but instead that an unstoppable train was coming to destroy. But our joy is that an unstoppable God is coming to save. If we believe that God saves, our Ordo Salutis may not be that significant. Revelation 13:8b says, "...*the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.*" Jesus was slain in 33 AD in history, but since creation in God's determination. So we ask is it even significant to order the actions of an eternal and omnipotent God? For man the order of steps may help us reach an uncertain goal. For God the order and priority may be important, but even if our understanding falls short, God will still reach his goal. So to lose a friendship debating an Ordo Salutis would be pure silliness provided that we all agree God is glorified for effecting our certain salvation.

SCRIPTURE ON JUSTIFICATION

Can a guilty law breaker justify himself?

Jesus does not think so in Luke 16:15 (WEB),

He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts. For that which is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God."

The thief on the cross did not think so in Luke 23:40-41 (WEB),

40) But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Don't you even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? 41) And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong."

No, the law breaker cannot free himself from the judge.

God is the judge who justifies

Romans 8:33 (WEB), says,

Who could bring a charge against God's chosen ones? It is God who justifies.

Only God justifies so who then has the power or authority to condemn? Moreover, Jesus' judgment is trustworthy, John 5:30 (WEB),

I can of myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is righteous; because I don't seek my own will, but the will of my Father who sent me.

Furthermore, I Peter 3:18 (WEB), says,

Because Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring you to God, being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the Spirit.

So we see that God is able to *righteously judge the unrighteous as righteous* because of the great exchange of Christ's righteousness given to our account. So the justification of God's people is not in question, but Jesus does ask in Luke 18:8 (WEB),

I tell you that he will avenge them quickly. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?

OK, so how and when are law-breakers justified before God the holy judge?

God decided to *justify by grace* all mankind. Consider Romans 3:23-24 (WEB),

For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

and Titus 3:7 (WEB),

That being justified by his grace, we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Sinful man is justified by God's gracious choice. When did the judge's gavel of acquittal fall? Classic Reformed and Arminian camps say the gavel of justification falls for each individual after the new birth. Though, as explained above, the Reformed camp praises God's grace for new birth while the Arminian camp credits man's faith as the cause of regeneration.

Regardless, my understanding is that God justified all his people one time from the cross before either Reformed or Arminian regeneration. We read in Luke 23:34a (WEB),

Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing."

Forgiveness is proclaimed! Furthermore, Romans 5:10 (WEB) says,

For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we will be saved by his life.

God's people are fully reconciled to himself through Christ since 33 AD in history and since creation in God's determination, well before either our new birth or faith! Paul quotes Habakkuk saying, "*the righteous shall live by faith*" (Romans 1:17b WEB). God's people are already righteous before holy God through the work of Christ and so by faith we can live to God. *Thus we are right to tell the lost the good news that God loves us and loved us first, rather than saying that God will love us if we love him.*

God was able to *justify by Christ's blood* as payment. Romans 5:9 (WEB), says,

Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we will be saved from God's wrath through him.

God is able to justify us by his grace because Christ paid our debt of sin with his blood.

Men then RECEIVE *justification by faith* alone. Romans 3:28 (WEB), says,

We maintain therefore that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.

We are justified apart from works of the law. However, is our justification caused by faith or vice a versa? We are justified by God's gracious choice which is then RECEIVED by faith. God justifies! Paul quotes Habakkuk saying, "*the righteous shall live by faith*" (Romans 1:17b WEB). God's chosen, whether believing or unbelieving, are already righteous through the work of Christ and already justified! Now if we are to live, 'by faith' is the only way.

Men prove they have received *justification by works* of service. James 2:24 (WEB), says,

You see then that by works, a man is justified, and not only by faith.

Does this verse contradict Romans 3:28? Either God's word is contradictory or an explanation must be found. I understand that Paul and James use the word '*justified*' slightly differently. Paul answers the question, "*how is one saved from damnation?*" The answer is we are saved through the work of Christ received by faith alone. James answers the question, "*how is one saved from damnation plus how must we who received salvation behave?*" The answer is we are saved through the work Christ received by faith alone AND true faith will not be alone from gratitude expressed with good deeds. Paul also teaches that good deeds are a certain RESPONSE of the believing, BUT he takes pains to explain that God's salvation is received by faith apart from good deeds to guard against those attempting to save themselves BY their good deeds. God likely chose Paul to explain this at length because Paul knew better than most the tragedy of imagining one can save your self by being good enough and just how short these imaginations are from true salvation. Paul challenges the Galatians and any who imagine that they can save themselves with good deeds to face the fact that Christ was crucified!

Men prove they received *justification by words* of testimony. Jesus said in Matthew 12:37 (WEB),

For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.

Does this verse also contradiction Romans 3:28? Are we saved by the work of our testimony? Hardly. Jesus also teaches that receiving his work by faith is our only salvation AND proof that we have done this will be evident in our testimony. We testify with our lips the belief that is our heart. Romans 10:9 (WEB),

that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Summary

The Scriptures say that we are justified by grace, by his blood, by our faith, by our works, and by our words. So just how we are justified again? *God justifies by grace his chosen people by the blood of Christ as payment and we receive this justification by faith proving our faith that God justified us by our works and by our words.* God is not intentionally obscure, and our quest for rock solid proof of our acquittal gives believers great confidence because God's grace is trustworthy.

Justified by	Scripture	Explanation
His grace	Romans 3:24	God decided to <i>justify by grace</i> all mankind at the cross
His blood	Romans 5:9	God was able to <i>justify by Christ's blood</i> as payment
Our faith	Romans 3:28	Men receive <i>justification by faith</i> alone
Our works	James 2:24	Men prove they received <i>justification by works</i> of service
Our words	Matthew 12:37	Men prove they received <i>justification by words</i> of testimony

John Owen on the Formal Cause of Justification

I am only familiar with the book covers of the volumes written by John Owen in the church library, yet I know that somewhere he asserts that the formal cause of justification is the grace of God in the work of Jesus Christ and NOT our faith. Sinful man is justified by the gracious choice of God and this is received by faith. Only by God's grace is our will freed to believe that God loves us.

TWO COURTROOMS

Frankly it is impossible to believe that God loves us as much as he does because there is literally nothing lovable within us. God has simply chosen to love us to show off his grace. Consider two courtrooms to make it clear just what God has done in justifying his chosen people. Furthermore consider that a God who is God never needed a plan B, but only plan A.

Earthly	Spiritual
Judge, Banker, and Magistrate party	Father, Son, and Spirit fellowship
Judge plans to show parties beat trials	God plans to show mercy triumphs over judgment

Judge envisions wild Friends for a super party	God foreknows his people
Judge plans to acquit guilty Friends	God predestines to save his people
Banker pledges restitution for Friends' crimes	Son promises atonement for his people's sins
Judge builds courtroom beautifully	God creates angels and mankind very good
Judge hires nasty Lawyer and Newspaper	God decrees the fall of Satan and 1/3 of angels
Judge gives Friends temporary criminal tendency so that he can prove that acquittal of the guilty is more effective than prison	God binds mankind to disobedience temporarily so that he can show that mercy to sinners is more transforming and triumphs over judgment
Lawyer lures Judge's Friends into big crime	Satan tempts mankind to join his rebellion
Friends leave country in fear of Judge	Mankind turns to false religion in fear of true God
Magistrate predicts acquittal of Friends	Spirit records promise of mankind's salvation
Magistrate predicts demise of Lawyer	Spirit records promise of Satan's destruction
Lawyer claims acquittal of guilty is unjust	Satan accuses that forgiving sinners is unjust
Newspaper condemns Judge and Friends	Satan's angels hate God and his people
Judge subpoenas Friends for acquittal papers	God calls mankind to receive salvation
Friends believe Newspaper, ignore subpoena	Mankind believes lies, ignore God's call
Lawyer accuses Judge of rigging trial	Satan accuses God of compromising true justice
Banker restitutes for legal acquittal of Friends	Son fulfills promise to atone for mankind
Judge gives verdict of acquittal	God justifies his people
Magistrate announces acquittal	Spirit records that mercy triumphs over judgment
Magistrate seeks out Friends 1 by 1	Spirit regenerates his people 1 by 1
Magistrate confronts Friends	Spirit convicts his people
Judge slaps Friends on wrist for hiding	God punishes men for unbelief
Friends receive acquittal papers	Men repent and trust God
Friends thank judge	Believers praise God
Judge helps friends avoid criminal tendencies	God sanctifies believers
Lawyer claims Banker did not make restitution	Satan whispers that Jesus' atonement not sufficient
Judge sends Lawyer and Newspaper to slammer	God sends Satan and followers to the Lake of Fire

Judge removes criminal tendency from Friends	God glorifies his people in heaven
Judge hosts super party for his wild Friends	God fellowships for eternity future with his people

Perhaps the above comparison could be improved. But can we truly understand God's wisdom in ordaining the existence of sin in order to demonstrate that mercy triumphs over judgment?

Even if we do not understand we can still rejoice that God has freely justified us. Anticipation of God's super party with all his wild friends is enough to cause anyone to lose sleep!

QUESTION AND ANSWER

Why care if justification precedes regeneration?

If we agree God's grace is the effective cause of salvation then the order of salvation events may be of little consequence. However, the pride of man rails against grace. Some agree we are 'saved by grace,' but say man's 'faith' causes justification. I take time above to explain above from Scripture that justification precedes regeneration to silence those adding the work of man to God's salvation. The claim that any human condition effects salvation is a poisonous attack on grace. Furthermore, the claim that 'faith' itself is the condition and casual effect of justification likewise attacks grace and totally redefines faith! Faith is not a condition *to* God unconditional love, but faith is simple trust *in* God's unconditional love!

What is faith?

Hebrews 11:1 (WEB) says, "***Now faith is assurance of things hoped for, proof of things not seen.***" Faith is surety of the unseen. We naturally look inside ourselves to see a reason that God would love us, but find nothing. Even our faith cannot swing the gavel of acquittal at our own trial! We stand before God as guilty sinners and there is no good thing in us to merit our acquittal. Instead God commands us to supernaturally trust that he has slammed the gavel of acquittal by his grace through the blood of Christ.

What is salvation?

Jesus saves us from many things! Believers are saved from God's judgment in Hades, Luke 23:43. Obedient believers are saved from sin and sin's harmful effects, I Corinthians 10:13. Careful believers are saved from loss and receive reward for building with Jesus, I Corinthians 3:10-15. Prayerful believers are saved from harm, Matthew 8:25. Those predestined to the Lamb's Book of Life are saved from the Lake of Fire, Revelation 20:11-15.

When is salvation?

Jesus saved us in the past through predestination, saved when we believed, and saves in the future! This is clear in Romans 5:10 (WEB). Jesus saved us from the penalty of sin in the past, "***For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son.***" Jesus saved us from the power of sin when we believed, "***much more, being reconciled.***" And Jesus will finally save us from the presence of sin, "***we will be saved by his life.***"

Who does God save?

Jesus is the savior of the world, John 4:42. Jesus atoned for the sins of the whole world, I John 2:2. Jesus is the savior of believers and unbelievers, I Timothy 4:10. Jesus died for all mankind, 2 Corinthians 5:14. Jesus justified all mankind, Romans 3:23-24. Yet he has not saved all from Hades for their unbelief, or saved all from sin because of their disobedience, or saved all from loss for their carelessness, or saved all from harm for their prayerlessness.

Nevertheless, he will finally save everyone he loves, those he predestined in the Lamb's Book of Life, from the Lake of Fire, to live in glory with him forever! Are you a son of Adam or daughter of Eve? You can know your name is in the Book of Life through faith in Christ, your

Lamb of sacrifice. Read the Bible, pray to Jesus, and talk to Christians! Find your name in the Book of Life through faith in Jesus Christ.

WARNING

Understanding my view, your view, or the perfect view of Christian Ordo Salutis may not save you, me, or anyone. And if such studies are not useful for salvation are they of any value? Studies of real value carry knowledge from the head 18 inches further to faith in the heart. Studies of real value move our feet in service, open our mouths in testimony, and raise our arms worship of the person Jesus Christ.

Kings(1) 19:1-3, The Fear of Woman Proves to be a Snare

Consider another Zinger on the theology of women. Again I have written in my article [The Image of God in Man](#) that I am opposed to efforts to change God's Word to be gender neutral. Though again, upon further reflection, there may be another important doctrine for the politically correct to gain ground in the area of gender equality. Proverbs 29:25 (WEB) says, *"The fear of man proves to be a snare, but whoever puts his trust in Yahweh is kept safe."*

Here is a teaching that could deserve a whole chapter in our theology books today. The fear of man is truly a snare that can lead us to lie, cower, remain silent, or even deny Jesus our Lord. I myself could certainly use a regular exhortation to walk through this life as the person I really am...an ambassador of Heaven, a brother and friend of Christ, and a son of the living God!

But what of the fear of woman?

Again we know that God intended to say "man" in the verse above, but also means that fear of *man or woman* is a snare. It could be useful, however, to specifically consider the fear of woman. Let's look at the powerful prophet Elijah. *"Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, 'So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I don't make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time!' When he saw that, he arose, and ran for his life, and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there"* (1 Kings 19:1-3 WEB).

Here is a great irony. Elijah had single-handedly called 450 prophets of Baal to a show down on Mount Carmel and kicked their butts. Moreover, Elijah had the false prophets brought to the Kishon Valley and slaughtered them there. Strangely, however, Elijah then flees at the threat of one woman. The Bible offers no interpretation for this irony, but leaves that to our speculation.

So for the sake of godly men facing a female antagonist I will add my 6 pennies. In my article [A Brief Theology of Food and Clothing](#) I explain 1) men more naturally fight for power with aggression, 2) women more naturally fight for power with sexuality, 3) God calls Christian men to lay down aggression for prayer, and 4) God calls Christian women to lay down immodesty for modesty and good deeds.

In the same article I also suggest it is very rare to find a woman who fights for power with the tactics of men. It would be strange to see a woman flex her muscle to a man. Strange as it is, however, Jezebel, was just such a woman. When faced with this situation most men would be as stupefied as being faced off against a squad of women in the Super Bowl. Aggression is the natural language of men, but against women it just aint right!

5) Perhaps, even though Elijah defeated the prophets of Baal in the power of the Spirit, his carnal nature preferred the aggressive contest with men over the contest with Jezebel. So what is the solution? 6) The solution is that God calls Christian men to lay down all aggression toward men or women period, and instead to pray. Had Elijah learned this perhaps he could have fearlessly won a mightier victory bringing both prophets of Baal and Jezebel to God's grace.

What about me? What about you?

Kings(2) 6:8 - 7:20, Believe in the United States Marines or Believe in Yaweh?

This fall I have the distinct honor of teaching the youth Sunday School class at my church which also includes one of my daughters. I've enjoyed getting to know each of them better. I have also been serving coffee, tea, and hot chocolate as a 'coming of age' treat. We've been learning how to balance the Bible and a cup of coffee without spilling it, something every adult ought to know how to do!

The lesson for this fall is the life of Elijah and Elisha. Every week has been filled with exciting tales of God working miracles through these two men who are just like you and me. So are you prepared for God to work miracles through you? The first step is to become a Christian if you are not already. The next and last step is to put your life fully into his hands to do whatever HE CHOOSES whether the miraculous or the mundane.

Today we learned about how to fight the enemy... Elisha style. I've included the whole text of 2 Kings 6:8-7:20 (WEB) below for your convenience, followed by a few paragraphs of comment from me. It is a fantastic story and worth your time to read it.

6:8) Now the king of Syria was at war against Israel; and he took counsel with his servants, saying, "My camp will be in such and such a place."

9) The man of God sent to the king of Israel, saying, "Beware that you not pass this place; for the Syrians are coming down there." 10) The king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him and warned him of; and he saved himself there, not once or twice. 11) The king of Syria's heart was very troubled about this. He called his servants, and said to them, "Won't you show me which of us is for the king of Israel?"

12) One of his servants said, "No, my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom."

13) He said, "Go and see where he is, that I may send and get him." He was told, "Behold, he is in Dothan."

14) Therefore he sent horses, chariots, and a great army there. They came by night, and surrounded the city. 15) When the servant of the man of God had risen early, and gone out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was around the city. His servant said to him, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?"

16) He answered, "Don't be afraid; for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." 17) Elisha prayed, and said, "Yahweh, please open his eyes, that he may see." Yahweh opened the young man's eyes; and he saw: and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire around Elisha. 18) When they came down to him, Elisha prayed to Yahweh, and said, "Please strike this people with blindness."

He struck them with blindness according to Elishah's word. 19) Elisha said to them, "This is not the way, neither is this the city. Follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek." He led them to Samaria. 20) When they had come into Samaria, Elisha said, "Yahweh, open these men's eyes, that they may see."

Yahweh opened their eyes, and they saw; and behold, they were in the middle of Samaria. 21) The king of Israel said to Elisha, when he saw them, "My father, shall I strike them? Shall I strike them?"

22) He answered, "You shall not strike them. Would you strike those whom you have taken captive with your sword and with your bow? Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master."

23) He prepared a great feast for them. When they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master. So the bands of Syria stopped raiding the land of Israel.

24) After this, Benhadad king of Syria gathered all his army, and went up and besieged Samaria. 25) There was a great famine in Samaria. Behold, they besieged it, until a donkey's head was sold for eighty pieces of silver, and the fourth part of a kab of dove's dung for five pieces of silver. 26) As the king of Israel was passing by on the wall, a woman cried to him, saying, "Help, my lord, O king!"

27) He said, "If Yahweh doesn't help you, where could I get help for you? From of the threshing floor, or from the wine press?" 28) The king said to her, "What is your problem?"

She answered, "This woman said to me, 'Give your son, that we may eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow.' 29) So we boiled my son, and ate him: and I said to her on the next day, 'Give your son, that we may eat him;' and she has hidden her son."

30) When the king heard the words of the woman, he tore his clothes. Now he was passing by on the wall, and the people looked, and behold, he had sackcloth underneath on his body. 31) Then he said, "God do so to me, and more also, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat stays on him today."

32) But Elisha was sitting in his house, and the elders were sitting with him. Then the king sent a man from before him; but before the messenger came to him, he said to the elders, "Do you see how this son of a murderer has sent to take away my head? Behold, when the messenger comes, shut the door, and hold the door shut against him. Isn't the sound of his master's feet behind him?"

33) While he was still talking with them, behold, the messenger came down to him. Then he said, "Behold, this evil is from Yahweh. Why should I wait for Yahweh any longer?"

7:1) Elisha said, "Hear Yahweh's word. Yahweh says, 'Tomorrow about this time a seah of fine flour will be sold for a shekel, and two seahs of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria.' "

2) Then the captain on whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God, and said, "Behold, if Yahweh made windows in heaven, could this thing be?"

He said, "Behold, you will see it with your eyes, but will not eat of it."

3) Now there were four leprous men at the entrance of the gate. They said to one another, "Why do we sit here until we die? 4) If we say, 'We will enter into the city,' then the famine is in the city, and we will die there. If we sit still here, we also die. Now therefore come, and let's surrender to the army of the Syrians. If they save us alive, we will live; and if they kill us, we will only die."

5) They rose up in the twilight, to go to the camp of the Syrians. When they had come to the outermost part of the camp of the Syrians, behold, no man was there. 6) For the Lord had made the army of the Syrians to hear the

sound of chariots, and the sound of horses, even the noise of a great army; and they said to one another, "Behold, the king of Israel has hired against us the kings of the Hittites and the kings of the Egyptians to attack us." 7) Therefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses, and their donkeys, even the camp as it was, and fled for their life. 8) When these lepers came to the outermost part of the camp, they went into one tent, and ate and drank, and carried away silver, gold, and clothing, and went and hid it. Then they came back, and entered into another tent, and carried things from there also, and went and hid them. 9) Then they said to one another, "We aren't doing right. Today is a day of good news, and we keep silent. If we wait until the morning light, punishment will overtake us. Now therefore come, let's go and tell the king's household."

10) So they came and called to the city gatekeepers; and they told them, "We came to the camp of the Syrians, and, behold, there was no man there, not even a man's voice, but the horses tied, and the donkeys tied, and the tents as they were."

11) He called the gatekeepers; and they told it to the king's household within. 12) The king arose in the night, and said to his servants, "I will now show you what the Syrians have done to us. They know that we are hungry. Therefore are they gone out of the camp to hide themselves in the field, saying, 'When they come out of the city, we shall take them alive, and get into the city.' "

13) One of his servants answered, "Please let some people take five of the horses that remain, which are left in the city. Behold, they are like all the multitude of Israel who are left in it. Behold, they are like all the multitude of Israel who are consumed. Let's send and see."

14) Therefore they took two chariots with horses; and the king sent them out to the Syrian army, saying, "Go and see."

15) They went after them to the Jordan; and behold, all the path was full of garments and equipment which the Syrians had cast away in their haste. The messengers returned, and told the king. 16) The people went out and plundered the camp of the Syrians. So a seah of fine flour was sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, according to Yahweh's word. 17) The king appointed the captain on whose hand he leaned to be in charge of the gate; and the people trampled over him in the gate, and he died as the man of God had said, who spoke when the king came down to him. 18) It happened as the man of God had spoken to the king, saying, "Two seahs of barley for a shekel, and a seah of fine flour for a shekel, shall be tomorrow about this time in the gate of Samaria;" 19) and that captain answered the man of God, and said, "Now, behold, if Yahweh made windows in heaven, might such a thing be?" and he said, "Behold, you will see it with your eyes, but will not eat of it." 20) It happened like that to him; for the people trampled over him in the gate, and he died.

I have already explained in other articles that I believe Christians are enlisted solely to spiritual warfare under the New Covenant and are called to un-enlist from this world's armies. You can read my other articles on this website for more lengthy proof.

I mention the point again here because this story about Elisha is further evidence of the calling given to godly men to fight with spiritual weapons, even under the Old Covenant. Elisha used the much more powerful weapons of prayer, prophecy, miracles, mercy, grace, and trusting God to make war and defend God's people. Elisha single-handed (or God-handed) disabled the entire Syrian army with blindness and led them by the hand to the heart of Israel. He then persuaded the King of Israel to give them food, grace, mercy, and sent them home. Though later Syria attacked again and the Israelite king became angry at

Elisha for telling them not to kill the Syrians. However, God continued to work through Elisha and powerfully intervened again to protect God's people.

What if American Christians (not America, but American Christians) repented of their alliance with the armies of this world and the arm of flesh to join the Army of the Lord led by his Spirit? Consider the mighty victories that would be possible! But would we be willing to pursue a Christ-like Christianity that is committed to all mankind instead of our American brand of Christianity?

Recently a friend of mine praised a military man for 'believing' in the United States Marines. Yet, that is not the faith of the Bible, nor of most Christians around the world. What if instead we believed in and obeyed the Lord and became an army of Elisha's to minister grace to this world?

Pray that I would be willing. How can I pray for you?

Kings(2) 8:11-12, More Warfare, Elisha Style

Just another quick note on the awesome power of warfare with spiritual weapons. Previously we've discussed the arsenal listed in Ephesians 6. We've mentioned the armament of 'attitude' in 1 Peter 4. We've also considered the **supernatural weaponry** that God wielded through Elisha.

To review, God helped Israel by revealing to Elisha the locations of the Syrian army and Elisha informed the king of Israel so they could better defend themselves. God also empowered Elisha to blind the entire Syrian army and single-handedly lead them defenseless to the heart of Israel, feed them, and send them home. Syria dared to attack again and against all odds, Elisha relayed a message from God that Syria's siege would be routed. And Syria was routed by the sounds of an attacking army that didn't even exist. LOL.

So after these fantastic demonstrations of spiritual weaponry, what else could remain? Perhaps the most moving of all...

He settled his gaze steadfastly on him, until he was ashamed. Then the man of God wept. Hazael said, "Why do you weep, my lord?" He answered, "Because I know the evil that you will do to the children of Israel. You will set their strongholds on fire, and you will kill their young men with the sword, and will dash their little ones in pieces, and rip up their pregnant women"

II Kings 8:11-12 (WEB)

Though God defended Israel through Elisha in the past, God now intended to allow Syria to harm Israel. Yet, Elisha continued to fight for Israel with the steady gaze of his clear conscience upon the enemy and with tears for God's people. The armies of this world know only one objective, to defeat the enemy. However, Elisha, because he served the Lord, knew another painful objective in God's plan.

Elisha knew that God purposed to discipline Israel through defeat by the Syrian army. Israel had become THEIR OWN ENEMY by turning from God to worship idols. So for Israel's own good, God planned their defeat through Syria. Of course Syria was not righteous themselves as Elisha's penetrating gaze reveals. Elisha had defended Israel against Syria multiple times in the past, though without sword. Yet, even though Israel's defeat to Syria was certain, Elisha continued to fight for his countrymen with tears over the much greater enemy of their own sin and God's righteous judgment soon to fall upon them.

Elisha shows us how to fight a battle that cannot be fought with sword in hand.

Kings(2) 8:7-15, Water Boarding 101

We missed reading the newspaper today, but read II Kings 8:7-15 (WEB) in family devotions.

7) Elisha came to Damascus; and Benhadad the king of Syria was sick. He was told, "The man of God has come here."

8) The king said to Hazael, "Take a present in your hand, and go, meet the man of God, and inquire of Yahweh by him, saying, 'Will I recover from this sickness?' "

9) So Hazael went to meet him, and took a present with him, even of every good thing of Damascus, forty camels' burden, and came and stood before him, and said, "Your son Benhadad king of Syria has sent me to you, saying, 'Will I recover from this sickness?' "

10) Elisha said to him, "Go, tell him, 'You will surely recover;' however Yahweh has shown me that he will surely die." 11) He settled his gaze steadfastly on him, until he was ashamed. Then the man of God wept.

12) Hazael said, "Why do you weep, my lord?"

He answered, "Because I know the evil that you will do to the children of Israel. You will set their strongholds on fire, and you will kill their young men with the sword, and will dash their little ones in pieces, and rip up their pregnant women."

13) Hazael said, "But what is your servant, who is but a dog, that he could do this great thing?"

Elisha answered, "Yahweh has shown me that you will be king over Syria."

14) Then he departed from Elisha, and came to his master, who said to him, "What did Elisha say to you?"

He answered, "He told me that you would surely recover."

15) On the next day, he took a thick cloth, dipped it in water, and spread it on his face, so that he died. Then Hazael reigned in his place.

In this ancient account, Hazael treacherously murdered Benhadad King of Aram who was an enemy of Israel, using water boarding, apparently an old and new means to torture and kill. Hazael then assumed leadership of Aram using his power to successfully war against Judah and Israel.

Elisha wept for God's people.

Lions Roar



**I am Disciplined
by the Grace
of Jesus
Christ**

Disciplined by the Grace of Jesus Christ

Home Bible Optimism Articles

Luke 10:3, Braver Heart

Several years ago I saw the movie *Brave Heart* starring Mel Gibson cast as William Wallace who leads Scotland in revolution against the tyranny of British rule. The fervor of Wallace-Gibson is heated white hot when the British rape and murder his new bride and so he leads Scotland into bloody battle against the British. If there ever was a just war this would be it, as a husband rises to vengeance against his wife's murderers and Scotland's cruel oppressors. After many battles the revolutionary leader Wallace-Gibson, is eventually caught and grossly disemboweled while bound to a cross shaped platform. He dies a hero and a martyr.

The movie has an incredible appeal to the protective nature within men and husbands. As my own emotions boiled during the movie I myself was ready to follow Wallace-Gibson into battle, as were many of my Christian friends. However, over the years I have reflected further and have found a stark contrast between the "Brave Heart" of Wallace-Gibson and the "Braver Heart" of Elisabeth Eliot.

Consider that Elisabeth also lost her spouse, Jim, to cruel ignorant savages in South America. No doubt Elisabeth's love for Jim could have evoked similar passions for vengeance as that of Wallace-Gibson. She could have raised of a fervor of indignation in America to bring those wretches to a wretched end! However, those who know the story remember that Elisabeth, by the grace of God, sought out her husband's killers in order to do battle with their fear and ignorance... not with guns, but with grace and the good news of Jesus Christ. With God's help she conquered her passions for vengeance, forgave the unforgivable, and led her enemies to faith in Christ.

Elisabeth Eliot deserves the title of "Braver Heart" in my book. And not only does Elisabeth Eliot deserve this title, but the other women in her group that lost their husbands or any Christian throughout history that has suffered evil without returning evil, but good. Christian beware that you are not sucked into believing that American pop culture is Christian in anyway or that you are tempted to believe that movies like *Brave Heart* are a place to learn Christian ideals.

Jesus said in Luke 10:3 (WEB), "***Go your ways. Behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves.***" Everyone agrees that there are wolves in the world! But are there any lambs in American churches ready to follow the example of Elisabeth Eliot into Christian battle?

Discipled by the Grace of Jesus Christ

Home Bible Optimism Articles

Luke 10:36-37, The Good Iraqi

One self-righteous philosopher said to another self-condemned partier, "*We fool ourselves thinking that we love our neighbor.*"

The sel-condemned replied, "*I love my neighbor, I do not bother him, but who is my neighbor?*"

Yet a third in the future replied to the past,

A Christian was going from Philadelphia to Baghdad to testify, and he fell among terrorists, who both stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. By chance a certain Democratic politician was going down that way. When he saw him, he passed by on the other side hastening to win the election. In the same way a Republican soldier also, when he came to the place, and saw him, passed by on the other side hastening to win the war. But a certain Iraqi, a descendant of Keidar and believer in the God of Abraham, as he traveled, came to where the beaten man was. When he saw him, he was moved with compassion, came to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring on salve and ointment. He put him in his own transport, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out his own Dinar, and gave payment to the host, and said to him, 'Take care of him. Whatever you spend beyond that, I will repay you when I return.'

Jesus still asks today, " *'Now which of these three do you think seemed to be a neighbor to him who fell among the robbers?' He said, 'He who showed mercy on him'* " (Luke 10:36-37 (WEB)).

Luke 13:31-32, Go Tell That Fox

Jesus knows the heart of every man.

Read the Christian Scriptures and you will see that absolutely no man gets the leg up on God. Jesus sees us coming from miles away with our evil motives, sin, selfishness, and whatever ugly baggage we may be hiding. You name it and Jesus already knows all about it, whether we are hedonistic pagans, hypocritical Pharisees, or stumbling disciples.

In Luke we see a particularly spicy comment from Christ as his eyes penetrate into the life of King Herod. *"On that same day, some Pharisees came, saying to him, 'Get out of here, and go away, for Herod wants to kill you.' He said to them, 'Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I complete my mission' ' "* (Luke 13:31-32 WEB).

In a rare exchange we see that the Pharisees appear to try to help Jesus escape from trouble. Or perhaps they thought they found a way to encourage Jesus to leave town. It is a strange exchange, regardless, because later the Pharisees dragged Jesus to Pilot and Herod themselves to be crucified. Jesus, however, instructs the Pharisees to tell Herod that nothing will stop his mission. No doubt he calls him a "fox" meaning that King Herod is nothing more than a crafty old sinner. Perhaps Herod could be described as a thief in the chicken coop after yet another chicken dinner. Such would truly describe the heart of man, which is insatiably looking after his own interests and frequently dining on easy prey.

The point of all this is that Christ is not fooled by the masks we use to cover up our sin. He knows our wretchedness and loves us still. Read the Gospels and you will discover that Jesus Christ also knows you, yet loves you dearly.

Disciplined by the Grace of Jesus Christ

Home Bible Optimism Articles

Luke 14:26, You Can't Love If You Don't...

The volume control has broken on our car radio. Fortunately the Lord chose a new permanent volume setting that works for both me and the kids. If we max the bass and treble controls we can hear when driving with highway wind whistling past the windows and if we lower the bass and treble the volume is perfect when sitting still. Thank you God!

We do enjoy listening to Christian music and one recent hit by Natalie Grant in particular, titled *In Better Hands* from her *Relentless* album. The main message of the song is that we are in better hands if we are a Christian, the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ. The song ministers to me. I seriously like it. Yet, there are a few phrases that could be tuned up to be more Biblical. But how we should revise the lyrics?

In the first verse of the song Natalie sings...

*It's hard to stand
On shifting sand
It's hard to shine
In the shadows of the night
You can't be free
If you don't reach for help
And you can't love
If you don't love yourself
But there is hope when my faith runs out...
Cause I'm in better hands now*

Once while deep in counsel for a quagmire of sin I had fallen into, I noted a book on my counselor's shelf titled, *How to Love Yourself*. I suggested that perhaps this book could help me feel better about myself. He gently pointed out that he doesn't agree with all the messages of the books on his shelf. And this book in particular is a prime example of the world's philosophy. He suggested that we stick to the Bible. He also asked me a hard question, "*Can you love yourself after what you did?*" I confessed that I could not.

He then assured me that I was in good shape because Jesus still loved me and was looking for people that hated themselves. Say what? Yes, Jesus said, "***If anyone comes to me, and doesn't disregard his own father, mother, wife, children, brothers, and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he can't be my disciple***" (Luke 14:26 WEB). The only way to love God is to remove the idols from our lives, especially the love of ourselves.

Frankly if we look in the mirror and like what we see we are blind. Do you sing with sultry Joy Williams, "*I've got a secret to tell, a midnight confession, I love the life that I lead, but it's no obsession*"? Jesus demands that we have an obsession for him and eternity with his people and hate the lives we try to lead that are apart from his purpose. How should we blend that into Natalie's song?

The lyrics above say that we cannot be free unless we reach for help. Yet the gospel of Christ says that no one wants God's help apart from grace. Paul writes, "***Isaiah is very bold and says, 'I was found by those who didn't seek me. I was revealed to those who didn't ask for me.' But about Israel he says, 'All day long I stretched out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people'***" (Romans 10:20-21 WEB).

How should we add that into Natalie's song?

Perhaps we should sing...

*Jesus bought your freedom
But you won't reach for help
And you can't learn to love
If you don't first hate your life*

It seems more Biblical but I'm not sure it will win a Dove Award.

Luke 15:3-7, The Greatest Celebration on Earth

This past February my family had the exciting opportunity to enjoy a family vacation at Disney World in Orlando, Florida. This is the fifth time I have been to Florida. My parents took my brother and I when we were 4 and 5 and again when 13 and 14. Later my wife and I celebrated our honeymoon there in '91 and a pre-children vacation in '93. I enjoy Florida and this year enjoyed taking my family there as well. My wife and I and our kids had a blast in the warm weather at Cocoa Beach, Wet and Wild, Give Kids the World, and all four Disney theme parks.

On one day while racing to all the attractions at Magic Kingdom I noticed a sign that advertised, *"The Greatest Celebration on Earth."* As I thought about that sign I reflected that this was not just another trumped up advertisement, but in fact it was true. I was in fact standing in the midst of the greatest celebration on earth. We had fantastic rides everywhere, great food, amazing sights, fireworks, landscapes, movies, shows, warm sun, and crowds of people all cooperating with the program for fun. It was awesome.

Yet I was saddened that in the midst of the splash and excitement that my heart felt a deep splinter of pain. There are billions and billions of people across the earth whose life is no celebration, but instead is war and tragedy torn. My celebration at its best could only be bitter sweet. How can I share good things with all those people?

Moreover, the Lord will not let me forget that as wonderful as our celebration may be there is a day when each of us will step off this earth to meet the Lord Jesus Christ. Will that meeting be a cause for celebration? The crucifixion of Christ demonstrates that mankind was not pleased to see Jesus the first time. So it would seem that if there is to be any joy in the second encounter that some change is needed. Since God is too good to need to change, that would leave the ball in our court for change.

Jesus does offer us hope to that end.

He told them this parable. 'Which of you men, if you had one hundred sheep, and lost one of them, wouldn't leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one that was lost, until he found it? When he has found it, he carries it on his shoulders, rejoicing. When he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' I tell you that even so there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance.'

Luke 15:3-7 (WEB)

Jesus, the master proponent of hope, speaks hope again. Here we read about another celebration. In fact this is the *"greatest celebration in heaven!"* Jesus reminds us that even though we are lost and guilty of great sin he will seek us out. And when we finally come to repentance a great party erupts in heaven.

There are places in this world where it is a death sentence to admit you've done wrong, but

in the kingdom of Christ the wonderful thing is that with his grace we can admit we did wrong and ask for forgiveness and the angels throw a giant party in heaven because of it.

Friends, get your heart right and prepare for the greatest celebration in heaven!

Luke 16:15, On Ships and Supermodels

Today, I maintain the ship, I throw some Supermodels overboard, and I keep others. God's people have safely traveled since Christ in the vessel of the church, though she has been sorely attacked. World culture has at times torn gaping holes through the hull that have needed serious repair. When this happens we need to pull out a serious welder and rivets or sink.

One seriously riveting verse is Luke 16:15 (WEB),

He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts. For that which is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God."

It is frightening to think that our sin nature is so deceived that we praise the things that God detests and even detest the things that God praises. Consider a few things that man admires and praises: success, achievement, awards, profitable business, efficiency, getting it right the first time, faster and better, youth, intelligence, wealth, and near the top, physical beauty, typically with no acknowledgement of our need for grace. At the height (or depth) we see the Supermodel industry where mankind has exploited and prostituted the beauty of the female body in the name of wealth and glory. Worse, these ideals are flooding into the lives of Christians, even Supermodel fashion and immodesty. Don't we know that these things are detestable to the Lord?

Consider instead some difficult circumstances that the Lord has been pleased to weave into His sovereign plan. The funeral of a 16 year old youth brings a divided community together in prayer. A business is smashed to bankruptcy to lead a proud man to cry to the Lord. A man is driven to a psychiatrist to remove his spirit of independence. A woman in the prime of life is inflicted with terminal cancer, now crushed because she will never see grandchildren nor enjoy physical beauty again in this life. Bloated from steroids, hair lost from chemotherapy, no longer able to control her bladder, and ruined from the effects of the cancer she is over-taken by the ugliness of death, going to her grave as something many want to place out of mind as they return to their pursuits. Even during her last days some would neglect that she is a dear person needing comfort. But how does she respond in her final hour? She insists with hand motions, because she can no longer talk, that she be wheel-chaired to her last family gathering to be with her friends and family.....with a smile on her face. Oh, she has put the prima donnas to shame!

She is a Supermodel like few have seen, facing death and lost dreams with a smile on her face, submitted to the purposes of God. What amazing courage! Praise her in the gates! Praise her I tell you!! She has faced the final foe of death that we have yet to fight and she did it with grace. She is a true Supermodel with beauty on the inside who has modeled an example of Blue Ribbon courage. Who is she?

Elta, my mother, now in the arms of Jesus.

Brothers and sisters, prepare the ship for the battles ahead!

Luke 16:19-31, Charles Dickens versus The Gospel of Jesus Christ

I have on my shelf a video of Charles Dickens' famous tale, *A Christmas Carol*, acted out by the Muppets. You undoubtedly know Ebenezer Scrooge, the nasty old businessman visited by his deceased partner Jacob Marley who returned from the dead to warn him to repent of greed or he will suffer the judgment of death. My family and I have enjoyed the movie, but recently I was reminded that the thesis of the movie is at odds with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Consider the words of Christ,

19) "Now there was a certain rich man, and he was clothed in purple and fine linen, living in luxury every day. 20) A certain beggar, named Lazarus, was taken to his gate, full of sores, 21) and desiring to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. Yes, even the dogs came and licked his sores. 22) The beggar died, and he was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died, and was buried. 23) In Hades, he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far off, and Lazarus at his bosom. 24) He cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue! For I am in anguish in this flame.'

25) "But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that you, in your lifetime, received your good things, and Lazarus, in the same way, bad things. But here he is now comforted, and you are in anguish. 26) Besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, that those who want to pass from here to you are not able, and that no one may cross over from there to us.'

27) "He said, 'I ask you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house; 28) for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, so they won't also come into this place of torment.'

29) "But Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them.'

30) "He said, 'No, father Abraham, but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'

31) "He said to him, 'If they don't listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if one rises from the dead.' "

Luke 16:19-31 (WEB)

Jesus points out through Abraham that even if someone were to return from the dead urging for repentance that it would not be enough to turn a sinner from his sinful ways. This is great and good news for believers in Jesus Christ. I, for one, can easily imagine a host of sins that I could not eliminate from my life even if a band from heaven returned in force with a message of repent or die. The good news is that even though I am in a death struggle

with sin, that with the help of Jesus Christ I will conquer each and every sin he enables me to.

Furthermore, the glory of life without sin will never be attained by me or anyone by human effort, but instead is graced to all God's people in eternity. The unbeliever must be mightily discouraged by Charles Dickens' tale as they reform themselves for the New Year only to find themselves a sinner still, even in the seat of Scrooge, Christmas after Christmas.

Oh friends, come to Jesus Christ, who has died not for the righteous or reformed Scrooges, but for hopeless sinners.

Luke 16:19-31, The Beautiful Woman and Laverne

While preparing to teach the book of I Timothy, I noted that the Holy Spirit makes the generalization that greed and aggression are vices common to men, I Timothy 2:8, 3:3, and 3:8. The Holy Spirit also makes the generalization that immodesty and gossip are vices common to women, I Timothy 2:9, 3:11, and 5:13. Jesus already told the non-fictional story of a rich man who burns in Hades because of his greed, Luke 16:19-31. What if we consider the fictional story of a beautiful woman who burns in Hades because of her brazenness?

Now there was a certain beautiful woman, and she was clothed in purple and fine linen, loving the looks from men. A certain ugly woman, named Laverne, was laid at her gate, unsightly and desiring to be clothed with even an old cloth discarded from the beautiful woman's closet. Yes, even the dogs came and howled at her repelling form. It happened that the ugly woman died, and that she was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The beautiful woman also died, and was buried. In Hades, she lifted up her eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far off, and Laverne at his bosom. She cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Laverne, that she may bring a modest garment, and cover my burning flesh! For I am in anguish in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Daughter, remember that you, in your lifetime, received your good things, and Laverne, in like manner, bad things. But now here she is beautiful and you are in anguish. Besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, that those who want to pass from here to you are not able, and that none may cross over from there to us.' She said, 'I ask you therefore, father, that you would send her to my father's house; for I have five sisters, that she may testify to them, so they won't also come into this place of torment.' But Abraham said to her, 'They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them.' She said, 'No, father Abraham, but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' He said to her, 'If they don't listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if one rises from the dead.'

The story above is fiction inspired only by myself. My goal is to expose the offense of self-centeredness in women as Christ exposed it in men, though we see selfishness is manifest differently. Have I done so equitably? The parallel above is so offensive I question the wisdom of making the observation. Is Christ enraged by a brazen woman insensitive toward her homely sister as he is towards a greedy man heartless toward his needy brother?

The answer to this question has erased my fear of being unnecessarily offensive and instead to be bold with love and offensive as needed! The truth is that Christ punishes both men AND women in the fires of Hades for their unbelief, whether evidenced by their greed, their immodesty, or any other fruit of hatred of God. Though politically incorrect to accuse a man of greediness in our day, it is unthinkable to accuse a woman of immodesty.

Perhaps it is difficult to confront a brother with his greediness when our wallet is bulging, so we tell lies to our wallets. It is also difficult to confront a sister of her immodesty when our eyes are bulging, so we tell lies to our eyes.

Ok, so we are all crumbs, now what? Christ does wildly more than convict the rich man and

callously call attention to the beggar's poverty, he offers great hope. The beggar will be comforted. And I believe the ugly will be made beautiful. Yet, this optimism stands only for those who believe.

Application Questions:

Should the rich appease their conscience by helping the poor to become rich with money? Or should the rich admit their poverty and ask the poor for the riches of faith? James 2:5-7 and 5:1-6.

Should the beautiful appease their conscience by helping the ugly to become beautiful in appearance? Or should the beautiful see their ugliness and ask the ugly for the beauty of faith? Proverbs 11:22 and 31:30.

Luke 16:8-9, Jesus Commends the Shrewd / Bill Gates for Devotions?

Someone once said, "*Don't be so Heavenly minded that you are no earthly good!*" Highlighting this quote might seem a bit odd in the midst of a blog that is dedicated to writing reams of Christian truth, which I am sure has bored many to tears. Yet the quote is fascinating, at least prompting this question: is that really possible? That is, is it possible to be so Heavenly minded that you are no earthly good?

History does have tale of Christians performing feats of silliness in Jesus' name that leave unbelievers scratching their heads about who really knows the truth. I once read about a group of Christians in centuries past that was convinced that Jesus was returning on a certain date. So they all sold their houses and waited upon a hill top for his return. They swallowed a difficult pill and we still wait for the Lord's return. In the news today we read that Harold Camping again predicts a specific date for the return of Christ, this time on May 21, 2011. To add to the comics I heard that several people have asked him to put his money where his mouth is and sign over his house to them since he will not need it after May 21st.

Perhaps we Christians need to be reminded to keep our feet on the ground. Even Jesus said by way of parable in Luke 16:8-9 (WEB),

His lord commended the dishonest manager because he had done wisely, for the children of this world are, in their own generation, wiser than the children of the light. I tell you, make for yourselves friends by means of unrighteous mammon, so that when you fail, they may receive you into the eternal tents.

So perhaps it is possible for a Christian to lose some of their business savvy while staring at the light of glory and we need to be reminded that we can still learn from the people of this world.

For example in family devotions tonight we read the Bible... and we also read Bill Gates. Gates certainly is a business man of this world more shrewd and savvy than most. He provided 11 rules to live by in his book *Business and the Speed of Thought*, that I like to pull out for my teens every now and then as follows...

RULE 1 - Life is not fair; get used to it.

RULE 2 - The world won't care about your self-esteem. The world will expect you to accomplish something BEFORE you feel good about yourself.

RULE 3 - You will NOT make 40 thousand dollars a year right out of high school. You won't be a vice president with a car phone, until you earn both.

RULE 4 - If you think your teacher is tough, wait till you get a boss. He doesn't have tenure.

RULE 5 - Flipping burgers is not beneath your dignity. Your grandparents had a different word for burger flipping, they called it opportunity.

RULE 6 - If you mess up, it's not your parents' fault, So don't whine about your

mistakes, learn from them.

RULE 7 - Before you were born, your parents weren't as boring as they are now. They got that way from paying your bills, cleaning your clothes and listening to you talk about how cool you are. So before you save the rain forest from the parasites of your parents' generation, try "delousing" the clothes in your own room.

RULE 8 - Your school may have done away with winners and losers, but life has not. In some schools they have abolished failing grades; they will ask as many times as you want to get the right answer. This doesn't bear the slightest resemblance to ANYTHING in real life.

RULE 9 - Life is not divided into semesters. You don't get summers off and very few employers are interested in helping you find yourself. Do that on your own time.

RULE 10 - Television is NOT real life! In real life people actually have to leave the coffee shop and go to jobs.

RULE 11 - Be nice to nerds. Chances are you'll end up working for one.

So you see there may be useful things that we can learn even from the worldly wise that could be harnessed to serve the kingdom. I've noted that even the Holy Spirit borrowed from the wisdom of the worldly wise when he wrote Titus 1:12-13 (WEB), *"One of them, a prophet of their own, said, 'Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, and idle gluttons.' This testimony is true. For this cause, reprove them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith."* Of course the Holy Spirit didn't start or stop with quoting the Cretan prophets. Nor should we stop with the wisdom of Bill Gates. Perhaps one could follow the rules of Bill Gates and reap an earthly reward of millions or billions of dollars. But we Christians must return to the final and superior value of spiritual wisdom and add a final redeeming rule to Mr. Gates list.

RULE 12 - Keep one foot on the ground trusting and obeying Jesus Christ and another foot on the ground loving and giving to your fellowman and with both feet on the ground you will not fly sideways and miss Jesus when he does finally return, but instead have friends forever in Heaven.

Luke 20:18, Broken or Crushed. Your choice.

Growing up as a youth my mind was filled with imaginations of the great things I would be and the great things I would do in my life. I had numerous cousins, aunts, uncles, family, schoolmates, and friends who demonstrated the achievement of success. I lived to achieve the same.

I remember one who worked hard, saved money, and bought himself a beautiful sport car. The car was loaded with a high-powered engine, a four-barrel carburetor, loud glass-pack mufflers, wide racing wheels and tires, and an immaculate interior and paint job. I wanted one of those! I also remember another couple who worked hard, saved money, and bought themselves a large mansion. The home was wonderful and boasted of a modern kitchen, plush carpeting, a Jacuzzi, spacious rooms, and more. I wanted that as well! Yet another man had become a fabulously successful businessman. Oh that I could obtain his wealth, power, and reputation!

Thus ran the vain thoughts of youth. Worse yet I myself dragged these self-serving ideals into the family of Christ. In the vanity of youth I imagined that my life consisted of the things I owned. I imagined that I could be both a Christian and serve the American Dream. I imagined that I and others could really be made happy by service to these idols.

However, the truth is that all have sinned and absolutely no one escapes this life without very painful wounds. Jesus called himself the chief cornerstone and said of himself, ***"Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but it will crush whomever it falls on to dust,"*** Luke 20:18 (WEB).

Since the only two choices for sinful man are to be broken or to be crushed, God help us to call upon Him for brokenness and deliverance from our idols. The only alternative is for his wrath to be kindled to flame and we and our idols to be crushed under the weight of His glory.

Luke 20:26-38, Marriage, Part 2: The Divine Marriage Amendment

The purpose of Monthly Zingers is to remind myself and my audience of the flavorful teaching of Christ. Think of it as a spiritual spice rack. Recently, I liberally salted and peppered your plate with [Romans 3:20-24 & 5:20, The Federal 'Old Covenant Style' Marriage Amendment](#). Unsure if I served the perfect blend of spice, however, I decided to add several pounds of red hot chili peppers in order to bring the dish back into balance.

Much ado is being made in my nation about a proposed marriage amendment. As I reflected on this I noted that Christ has also made a marriage amendment. Read of Christ,

26) They weren't able to trap him in his words before the people. They marveled at his answer and were silent. 27) Some of the Sadducees came to him, those who deny that there is a resurrection. 28) They asked him, "Teacher, Moses wrote to us that if a man's brother dies having a wife, and he is childless, his brother should take the wife and raise up children for his brother. 29) There were therefore seven brothers. The first took a wife, and died childless. 30) The second took her as wife, and he died childless. 31) The third took her, and likewise the seven all left no children, and died. 32) Afterward the woman also died. 33) Therefore in the resurrection whose wife of them will she be? For the seven had her as a wife."

34) Jesus said to them, "The children of this age marry, and are given in marriage. 35) But those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. 36) For they can't die any more, for they are like the angels, and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. 37) But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed at the bush, when he called the Lord 'The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' 38) Now he is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for all are alive to him."

Luke 20:26-38 (WEB)

The Scriptures place incredible importance on the sanctity of marriage and on love, honor, respect, and submission in marriage. The Scriptures also warn of the shame of dishonoring marriage and punishment for adulterers, fornicators, and homosexuals. Ephesians Chapter 5 even teaches that the purpose of Christian marriage is to typify Christ's love for the church. Christ also taught,

6) But from the beginning of the creation, God made them male and female. 7) For this cause a man will leave his father and mother, and will join to his wife, 8) and the two will become one flesh, so that they are no longer two, but one flesh. 9) What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.

Mark 10:6-9 (WEB)

Yet the teaching of Christ is also plain,..... marriage is a temporary institution for this age. The prospect is both frightening and mind blowing! Frightening because as a husband I will one day give account of my husbanding to Christ, our true husband. My wife is not mine, but we are His. Mind blowing because in light of Christ's marriage amendment the glories of eternity must be wildly beyond our imagination with little Scriptural revelation to guide us. Apostle John reveals some information, *"Beloved, now we are children of God. It is not yet revealed what we will be; but we know that when he is revealed, we will be like him; for we will see him just as he is"* (1 John 3:2 WEB).

Based on Galatians 3:28 some believe that in eternity people will no longer be male or female. Yet Genesis 1:27 explains that male and female is a primary part of God's expression of his image in man. *"God created man in his own image. In God's image he created him; male and female he created them"* (Genesis 1:27 WEB). Thus anything less than male and female would be a demotion for mankind in eternity. I believe that men and women will continue as brothers and sisters in eternity with only their marriage to Christ enduring forever. But don't lose too much sleep over speculation about eternal glory. The Scriptures reveal little.

Yet the red hot chili pepper teachings of Christ do make one thing clear. Christ's plan to demonstrate His unrestrained goodness and passionate love to His chosen people shatters every comfortable idea about God that one may have while sitting in the typical church pew. My personal idolatry of marriage, of earthly family, and toward my wife, that she would be MY OWN are killed dead.

If you don't like Christ's teaching on this subject you can join the Mormons. They offer contracts for "eternal marriage," though I don't think Christ honors these contracts. You may also consider the Muslims; they propose a male-centric eternity with female servants. It is clear that both Mormon and Muslim teaching fall way short of the truth.

The simple notion that eternity will be like this world, but without sin, falls infinitely short of eternity's glories. It will be a NEW age. If you can hardly wait then I am sure you share my prayer, "Lord help me to be worthy to attain that age and to patiently wait."

Luke 22:26, Major George Buxton Persuades Sergeant Alvin York

"York quietly went through basic training and then in the spring of 1918 spoke to an officer about his continuing objection to war. York's sincerity was obvious and he was taken to see Major George Edward Buxton, the battalion commander. Buxton and York spent a long night discussing the Bible. Buxton pointed to Jesus' instruction that the apostles should carry swords (Luke 22:36); to Jesus' statement that earthly kingdoms, unlike Jesus' spiritual kingdom, do fight (John 18:36); and to the obligation for Christians to give governments the 'things that are Caesar's.' Finally, Buxton read York Ezekiel 33:1-6, in which God told the prophet to tell the people to listen for the watchman's trumpet, and to take warning when an armed invader comes"

Sergeant York - Great Hero of the Great War, by Kopel

York reflected on these arguments, changed his objections, and became a WWI hero, yet are Buxton's arguments sound?

Luke 22:35-38 (WEB),

35) He said to them, "When I sent you out without purse, wallet, and shoes, did you lack anything?"

They said, "Nothing."

36) Then he said to them, "But now, whoever has a purse, let him take it, and likewise a wallet. Whoever has none, let him sell his cloak, and buy a sword.

37) For I tell you that this which is written must still be fulfilled in me: 'He was counted with transgressors.' For that which concerns me has an end."

38) They said, "Lord, behold, here are two swords."

He said to them, "That is enough."

Buxton raises a hard question here. Why did Jesus tell them to buy swords? Were the swords to advance his kingdom? Jesus' rebuke in Matthew 26:52-54 and Paul's mandate in 2 Corinthians 10:3-4 say 'no'. Was Jesus encouraging them to join the Roman army? Hardly! We see immediately following the instruction to buy swords God purposed that Christ be numbered with transgressors. Simply, the swords were part of God's plan to help 'number Christ among transgressors' and thus facilitate his crucifixion. Furthermore, the disciples didn't even need to buy swords because they found two and Jesus said that was enough, but enough for what purpose? I answer this question in my Zinger titled, [Luke 22:38, That is Enough](#).

John 18:36 (WEB),

Jesus answered, "My Kingdom is not of this world. If my Kingdom were of this world, then my servants would fight, that I wouldn't be delivered to the Jews. But now my Kingdom is not from here."

This Scripture proves the point of those laying down the steel sword in order to fight with the sword of the Spirit, NOT Buxton's point. Yes the kingdoms of earth wage war, but

Biblical studies prove that Christians are citizens of a higher kingdom, Philippians 3:20. Sure we are still earthly citizens and subject to national laws, except at a few critical points: 1) our authority to preach the gospel (Acts 5:29), 2) the reason we pay taxes (Matthew 17:26-27), and 3) our conscription to spiritual warfare in lieu of earthly warfare (Ephesians 6:12).

Ezekiel 33:1-6 (WEB),

1) Yahweh's word came to me, saying, 2) "Son of man, speak to the children of your people, and tell them, 'When I bring the sword on a land, and the people of the land take a man from among them, and set him for their watchman; 3) if, when he sees the sword come on the land, he blows the trumpet, and warns the people; 4) then whoever hears the sound of the trumpet, and doesn't heed the warning, if the sword comes, and takes him away, his blood will be on his own head. 5) He heard the sound of the trumpet, and didn't take warning. His blood will be on him; whereas if he had heeded the warning, he would have delivered his soul. 6) But if the watchman sees the sword come, and doesn't blow the trumpet, and the people aren't warned, and the sword comes, and takes any person from among them; he is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand.'"

Buxton, no doubt, is unfamiliar with the change of covenant from the old to the new. If he were familiar he would see that the application of Ezekiel's Old Covenant words to the Christian today, if there is any application, has nothing to do with civil military service, but instead with the New Covenant commission to spiritual warfare and disciple-making. The Christian who does not preach the gospel and warn his fellow man of the judgment to come will himself be accountable for the unsaved and subject to judgment! How ironic that most Christians are easily misled by Buxton and York in pursuit of the accolades in earthly battle, while being pacifists in spiritual battle. Soldier, have you shared your faith this week? Have you rebuked a brother too close to enemy lines? Be warned that our military commander Jesus Christ is returning and you will face his court martial if you are found to be AWOL!

In Matthew 22:21 (WEB), Jesus teaches us to pay taxes in order to *"Give therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's."* Yet have you "given to God what is God's?" Have you given your life in obedience and served your countrymen with an understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ? Simply put Buxton uses proof texts from the Bible to defend his preconceived opinion.

Of course if you do not agree with me an alternative analysis is found [here](#).

Luke 22:38, That is Enough

While challenging myself and another brother to follow Christ the other day I was reminded of curious words from our Lord. While the disciples readied to travel with Jesus to the Olive Garden after the Last Supper the disciples said, ***"They said, 'Lord, behold, here are two swords.' He said to them, 'That is enough'"*** (Luke 22:38 WEB). This is just the type of verse we might easily glide right over without much meditation. Yet we should remind ourselves that the literary arts of the Holy Spirit are second to none and he has richly filled every inch of the Scriptures with wisdom for believers.

Consider the verse above. Jesus says, ***"That is enough"*** with absolutely no explanation. Yet we might ask, ***"enough for what?"*** The disciples were all anticipating a showdown between their leader, Jesus, and the Jews. Peter and all the disciples had earlier vowed that they were willing to die for Jesus. Now they gathered what little armament they had preparing to defend the cause of Christ with swords of steel in Gethsemane. Did they imagine that Jesus was testing their faith as they readied for the battle of their lives? Would Jesus miraculously multiply the two swords like he did with the fish and loaves earlier? Would God work miracles for the small army like he did for Gideon and Israel many times?

The disciples were resolved to stand by Jesus' side believing that he could do anything. Some may argue that Jesus did intend to advance his kingdom with the swords of his disciples, but changed his mind in his final hours. Though it is easily proven that Jesus did not change his mind, nor ever intend to stand behind the swords of his disciples.

Yet we still ask why would he say, ***"That is enough"***? We read in Matthew's gospel,

50) Jesus said to him, "Friend, why are you here?" Then they came and laid hands on Jesus, and took him. 51) Behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck the servant of the high priest, and struck off his ear. 52) Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place, for all those who take the sword will die by the sword. 53) Or do you think that I couldn't ask my Father, and he would even now send me more than twelve legions of angels? 54) How then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that it must be so?"

55) In that hour Jesus said to the multitudes, "Have you come out as against a robber with swords and clubs to seize me? I sat daily in the temple teaching, and you didn't arrest me. 56) But all this has happened that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled."

Matthew 26:50-56 (WEB)

So we see that Jesus used his final hours, despite his personal agony, to make two of his most important points to his zealous, but very ignorant disciples.

First the Scripture records that Jesus paused to miraculously heal the ear of the high priest's servant. This simple act of mercy reminds us that Christ was not starting one more hypocritical or schismatic religion to divide men. Jesus loves all of us, from the drunken adulterer who knows nothing and cares nothing about God to the hypocritical Pharisee who is ready to put Christ to death. Peter was determined to terminate evil men, but Jesus was

determined to love evil men from the cross, Peter included.

Second we see that Jesus says that "...*For all those who take the sword will die by the sword.*" God commanded Israel to punish sinners of various types with the death sentence under the Old Covenant. Perhaps bold Peter was ready for a blood bath as in days of old at the foot of Mount Sinai. But instead Christ was inaugurating a New Covenant making the old obsolete and Peter was still learning the new way of things.

To be sure God still authorizes the state to punish evildoers. However, all the death penalties of the Old Covenant people of God have been abrogated by the New Covenant, and only the death penalty mandate to Noah in Genesis 9:6 still stands and is restated in Romans 13 under the New Covenant. This is not in question.

What is in question is how are Christians called to advance the kingdom of Christ and fight against evil? Peter's adrenaline was flowing in anticipation of dying for Christ with a sword in his hand, but Christ assigned Peter and any that would follow him to anticipate dying with the sword of the Spirit in our mouths. Are we willing to lay down the steel sword to wield the sword of the Spirit? Are we willing to suffer for preaching the truth of God's love to an unbelieving world? Is our adrenaline flowing for this commission?

Two swords were enough to provide opportunity for Christ to further teach and correct his disciples then and now. I speak more on this subject in my article, [To Battle with the Sword of the Spirit and Prayer](#).

Matthew 15:7-9, Happy Holidays!

Today I hope to prepare our annual Christmas card for mailing. I am thankful for the occasion because it is one day of the year that we are able to wish our family, friends, neighbors, and colleagues a Merry Christmas without too much repercussion for actually vocalizing a Christian theme.

No doubt most are aware of the tension during this time of year, should we be brave and greet others *'Merry Christmas'* or should we kowtow to world culture and say *'Happy Holidays?'* The recent C.S. Lewis movie, *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, highlights unbelieving mankind's effort to crush out reference to Christ in this world. The Narnians oppressed by the White Witch summarize that her plan is to *'make it always winter, but never Christmas.'*

I read today that the Best Buy store plans to stick with the *'Happy Holiday'* greeting while Walmart, responding to complaints from last year, has authorized employees to greet customers with a hearty *'Merry Christmas.'*

Frankly we are all showing our ignorance in this discussion because the original meaning of *'Holiday'* was *'Holy Day.'* Godly people of centuries past took special *'Holy Days'* to rest and reflect on God their Creator and Savior. Bing Crosby likely did not have this in view as he sang *'Happy Holidays.'* *'Holidays'* have become popular but the meaning has long since been lost and most are glad for taking a rest from work, but have little time for reflection on God our Creator and Savior.

So it would seem that those wishing others *'Happy Holidays'* are actually being just as offensive as those wishing others *'Merry Christmas!'* and perhaps even more so, because the *'Happy Holiday'* greeting should remind everyone of the need to be Holy. *'Merry Christmas'* could be a more culturally acceptable greeting in this world because it is in fact a pleasant sort of celebration even for unbelievers.

However, the celebration of holiness is hardly welcomed by unbelievers and sadly even some believers. Perhaps the *'Merry Christmas'* wish really is the easy road. In wishing others *'Merry Christmas'* I am able to appease my guilty conscience by vocalizing Christ's name to others, yet avoid the often challenging commission to confront my family, friends, neighbors, and colleagues with the offensive cross of Jesus Christ on a daily basis. It is cute to look at a manger holding baby Jesus, but not so cute to see our sin on his bloody cross.

Jesus quoted Isaiah saying,

7) You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, 8) 'These people draw near to me with their mouth, and honor me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. 9) And in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrine rules made by men.'

Matthew 15:7-9 (WEB)

I wonder if we Christians do ourselves a favor by trivializing the name of Christ with petty arguments over *'Happy Holidays'* versus *'Merry Christmas.'* Do we even advance the gospel a micron by forcing unbelievers to say *'Merry Christmas?'*

This sends us 10 steps backward.

We have reduced understanding the precious mission of Christ and praising his name as Savior to persuading Walmart to say '*Merry Christmas*' to shoppers! For crying out loud, let everyone call December 25th whatever they want! The real argument to get into is whether Christ is merely on our lips or whether he is deeply rooted in our hearts. For on this point we will either be sentenced to Hell or enjoy paradise with Christ.

Matthew 16:15-21, Optimism Out of Control

Praise God, the Lord is making progress in the sanctification of even my sinful unbelieving heart. Last week I was accused of having out of control optimism. This is probably a first for me. In general I tend to be on the side of melancholy and pessimism. After growing up in a family strained by financial hardship, bankruptcy, the death of my brother to an automobile accident, and the death of my mother to cancer it has been too easy to get out of bed each day wondering what tragedy was on the menu next. But praise God at least once in my life I was accused of being too optimistic!

Forgive me while I savor the moment because I am sure that I will battle melancholy again. And Christian friends we should be optimistic, not because we have any righteousness in ourselves, but because mankind has been freely granted the complete righteousness of Christ. The grace of Christ has been and will be utterly super-abundantly victorious in heaven and on earth!

While searching for a verse to provide further reason for out of control optimism I found Matthew 16:15-21 (WEB).

15) He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

16) Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

17) Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. 18) I also tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my assembly, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. 19) I will give to you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven; and whatever you release on earth will have been released in heaven." 20) Then he commanded the disciples that they should tell no one that he was Jesus the Christ. 21) From that time, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised up.

When reading this passage in the past I have been challenged by Peter's courage, Peter's confession of Christ, the church's authority to bind and release, and the sufferings of Christ. Recently, however, God has called to mind another forgotten, but important teaching in this passage. ***"the gates of Hades will not prevail against"*** the church. Now here is something optimistic. The church wins through Christ. But here is something also curious. Jesus says, ***"the gates of Hades will not prevail."***

Typically we imagine that Christians wage war against the spiritual forces of evil only on the *plains* of this world. We think the battle ends with a line drawn in the sand in history future with Christ purchasing some for Heaven, Satan dragging the rest to Hell, and each enjoying their spoils. The curious thing, however, is that the gates of Hades are not on the plains of this world. Nor do gates fight. Gates are used for defense. The verses above explain that the grace of Christ through the church will press the enemy off the plains of this earth to the very gates of Hades. Wow! The gates of Hades themselves will be smashed by the church completely robbing Satan of all his spoils.

Whence comes the church's power to shatter the very gates of Hell? The army of souls receiving a salvation by grace alone must not, will not, nor can not rest until everyone whom Christ has died for is found safely in the arms of our Savior. Folks here is some news that could send your optimism out of control as well! The teaching of nearly every Christian sect rejoices that the grace of Christ alone has redeemed a people for himself. But what does Catholic, Baptist, Presbyterian, Anabaptist, Methodist, Anglican, Pentecostal or any other denomination teach about grace that will smash down the very gates of Hades looking for more sinners to save? Given time I may study their answer, but I will not let it spoil my optimism over the teaching of Christ.

Finally, Jesus speaks a solemn word that he himself was to be hated and crucified for loving all mankind, both Pharisee and pagan. Repentance for each of us, whether Pharisee or pagan, is the only way to join the redeemed at the level ground at the foot of his cross.

Rock on Jesus our rock.

Matthew 18:1-4 and more, Good to Great or to Grace?

Recently at my employ I was asked to read and report on the latest best seller titled *Good to Great*, by Jim Collins. The author of the book researched very successful businesses and distilled his findings into a number of axioms that have propelled good organizations to enduring greatness. I enjoyed the book and reported on the axioms that I felt to be most useful. However, in my report I also added that the book had missed the most important axiom of all. Jesus said, "*apart from me you can do nothing*" (John 15:5 WEB).

Unfortunately, world business and culture are in a drunken stagger from current successes and this book continues the trend of giving no glory to God. How long before God is angered by our failure to acknowledge that everything, both success and failure, is directly from his hand of grace? Instead, if we are after true greatness why not consider the words of Christ himself?

1) In that hour the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?" 2) Jesus called a little child to himself, and set him in the middle of them, 3) and said, "Most certainly I tell you, unless you turn, and become as little children, you will in no way enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. 4) Whoever therefore humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven."

Matthew 18:1-4 (WEB)

11) But he who is greatest among you will be your servant. 12) Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

Matthew 23:11-12 (WEB)

33) He came to Capernaum, and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing among yourselves on the way?" 34) But they were silent, for they had disputed with one another on the way about who was the greatest. 35) He sat down, and called the twelve; and he said to them, "If any man wants to be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all." 36) He took a little child, and set him in the middle of them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, 37) "Whoever receives one such little child in my name, receives me, and whoever receives me, doesn't receive me, but him who sent me."

Mark 9:33-37 (WEB)

46) An argument arose among them about which of them was the greatest. 47) Jesus, perceiving the reasoning of their hearts, took a little child, and set him by his side, 48) and said to them, "Whoever receives this little child in my name receives me. Whoever receives me receives him who sent me. For whoever is least among you all, this one will be great."

Luke 9:46-48 (WEB)

24) A dispute also arose among them, which of them was considered to be greatest. 25) He said to them, "The kings of the nations lord it over them, and those who have authority over them are called 'benefactors.' 26) But not so with you. But one who is the greater among you, let him become as the younger, and one who is governing, as one who serves. 27) For who is greater, one who sits at the table, or one who serves? Isn't it he who sits at the table? But I am among you as one who serves."

Luke 22:24-27 (WEB)

A quick study of Christ's teaching proposes that the way to greatness is to 1) become as little children, 2) humble yourself as a little child, 3) aim to be last of all, 4) be the servant of all, 5) be humble enough to be kind to little children, and 6) be as the younger. True greatness is found in being the servant of all. I wonder if this teaching of Christ would be a best seller? I also wonder if the ministry of Christ would be listed among the enduring great organizations of our time? His teaching is so offensive that he was crucified leaving behind a few stunned disciples. Even in our present age the church of Christ seems to be in death throws with division, apostasy, scandal, and rejection by the world. Thankfully the axioms of Christ demonstrate that God does not measure greatness by the same standards as Jim Collins or the wisdom of our world.

I know a man who set out to operate a business by the standards of Christ. Many times he was faced with difficult decisions whether to tell a small lie, fudge a small detail, play politics, scratch someone's back, deal unethically, or to reject these means and follow the example of Christ. Of course he is not perfect, but he has passed many of God's tests of character at the expense of having a successful business by this world's standards. Which would you rather have? The reward of hearing Christ say, *'Well done good and faithful servant,'* or praise from man for an organization which is an enduring financial success?

Jesus said you cannot serve both God and money. Yet great as my friend is, not one of us even comes close to the servant heart of Christ who humbled himself even to death on a cross, suffering the death we deserve, in our place so that our sins could be forgiven. No matter how good or great you happen to be you must receive the grace of Jesus Christ to be a winner. Now that is *"Good to Grace."*

Matthew 18:7, My BODACIOUS Father

Jesus said, "*Woe to the world because of occasions of stumbling! For it must be that the occasions come, but woe to that person through whom the occasion comes!*" (Matthew 18:7 WEB). When I read the verse above I am initially repulsed, especially when I think about the word "*must*." The word "*must*" communicates a definite necessity, an irrevocable purpose, an unchangeable course... toward sin. Every rational fiber in my body and belief in my intellect screams out "Such things MUST NOT come!"

Who is the foe of man that wills such things to come? Let him make himself known! What demented goal could he possibly achieve? Let him reveal one good end or be proved utterly blackened in evil! How could he methodically bind all mankind to the destructiveness of sin? Let him divulge his sinister plot! Why would he place us on his perverted target? Let him face us eye to eye and answer these charges! When could any good come of this? Let him record even one place in the whole of history!

Yet he does make himself known in Romans 11:32. He reveals his good end in Romans 8:18-25. He even divulges his method in Romans 5:12. He faces us with his sovereignty over evil in his anger toward sinful man in Isaiah 30:27-33. He also records at least two examples in history where evil miraculously resulted in his good (and ours), Genesis 45:8 and Acts 4:28.

Study these verses for yourself and you will be impressed with the greatness of His awesome power displayed in sovereignty... even over evil. Wow! Wow again! Wowzer! Like wild and crazy incredibility! Totally awesome dude! God our Father, Almighty God, is sovereign even over evil?

Yes.

God is so so so so good that he can even use evil for good and he is not our foe. Don't get me wrong. God does not bless evil, evil actions, or evil people, but instead punishes them. Though the *necessity* of sin proceeds from the sovereign will of God, God also pronounces woe on the one through whom sin comes. Yet amazingly, evil, evil people, and even the Devil himself are simply pawns, frightening tools (that is frightening to us, but not to God), in his toolbox as he builds history in preparation for the dazzling wedding party to celebrate the consummation of Christ's marriage to his bride, while the Devil and his angels will be banished to the Lake of Fire for *The Ages of The Ages*.

God's authority over evil and our sinful nature is a great comfort to believers, as we can have great confidence that none of our mistakes will ruin God's plan, but are even part of his plan to build the church and us into his image. Unbelievers, however, because they will not admit their sin, nor trust that God is greater than all their sin, have nothing but dread fear of God's absolute power over their lives.

Friends take a walk on the wild side and join a family with a dad who has already poured an ocean of forgiveness on all your sin, period! He is a father like no other. He is my BODACIOUS father! And through faith in Christ he is yours also. The "*free will*" of man could not invent a God this good!

bo·da·cious also bow·da·cious - Southern & South Midland U.S.
adjective
Remarkable; prodigious.
Audacious; gutsy.

Matthew 22:1-14, The Parable of the Wedding Banquet!

The Bible says scary things, but the believing, those who know the God of grace can stand confidently in his grace. Read Matthew 22:1-14 (WEB) and consider what the believing know and what the unbelieving do not know.

1) Jesus answered and spoke to them again in parables, saying, 2) "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a certain king, who made a marriage feast for his son, 3) and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the marriage feast, but they would not come. 4) Again he sent out other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "Behold, I have prepared my dinner. My cattle and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the marriage feast!" ' 5) But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his merchandise, 6) and the rest grabbed his servants, and treated them shamefully, and killed them. 7) When the king heard that, he was angry, and sent his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.

8) "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited weren't worthy. 9) Go therefore to the intersections of the highways, and as many as you may find, invite to the marriage feast.' 10) Those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together as many as they found, both bad and good. The wedding was filled with guests. 11) But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man who didn't have on wedding clothing, 12) and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here not wearing wedding clothing?' He was speechless. 13) Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and throw him into the outer darkness. That is where the weeping and grinding of teeth will be.' 14) For many are called, but few chosen."

Believers know and unbelievers do not know...

- EVERYONE is invited to fellowship with their King, John 3:16.
- Only a FEW are dressed properly for the wedding, Matthew 22:11.
- Proper dress IS NOT being good enough, Isaiah 64:6.
- Proper dress IS trusting God's grace, Galatians 3:27.
- God's grace has forgiven the BELIEVING, 1 John 2:1-2.
- God's grace has ALSO forgiven the unbelieving, 1 John 2:1-2.
- The self-righteous are thrown OUTSIDE to endure suffering, Matthew 22:13.
- No where does this passage speak about ETERNAL punishment.
- Unbelievers are punished in HADES, Luke 16:19-31.
- This verse does NOT say unbelievers are damned to the Lake of Fire.

Conventional protestant thinking too quickly concludes that unbelieving mankind is damned to the Lake of Fire. Yet a careful reading of this Scripture and an understanding of the difference between Hades and the Lake of Fire as well as the timing of Jesus' wedding banquet show that unbelievers will not escape punishment, yet grace will be finally victorious for all God's people.

Believers take heart and unbelievers take warning.

Matthew 23:34-36, The Christian Memorial Day Proposed

Am I the only one saddened by the prayers of American Christians thanking God for the peace and safety we have to worship in the United States... while Christians across the globe suffer persecution and unimaginable trials?

Consider an comparison. *"A marine stationed on routine duty at headquarters thanks his commanding officer that he can serve in safety at headquarters while his fellow marines are in harms way in the battle field."*

That soldier's face is smeared with the shame of cowardice. His heart is not Semper Fidelis, but craven. Christians likewise are called into spiritual battle as soldiers for Christ. Perhaps we need a Christian Memorial Day to renew our passion for the battle and honor those in harms way or who have lost their lives for Christ.

My proposal is not to undermine Memorial Day or dishonor those who have died in earthly warfare. God has commissioned the state to wage war and men have fought and died gallantly. Yet Christ calls his followers to lay down earthly warfare in order to fight and die gallantly in spiritual war. The Christian Memorial Day reminds us to count the cost of following Jesus and to honor those who have already paid the cost.

Jesus honored Abel and Zechariah in Matthew 23:34-36 (WEB)!

34) Therefore behold, I send to you prophets, wise men, and scribes. Some of them you will kill and crucify; and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city; 35) that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zachariah son of Barachiah, whom you killed between the sanctuary and the altar. 36) Most certainly I tell you, all these things will come upon this generation.

Matthew 24:4-14, Same as the Old Boss

The rock group, The Who, screamed a provocative lyric. In their song, *Won't Get Fooled Again*, they conclude with a despairing truth "*Meet the new boss... Same as the old boss.*" Their song rightly points out a sad irony of every revolution that has ever taken place on the planet. Mankind strives and struggles to take two steps forward, but ironically we close our eyes and slide back to be the same people we hated.

The annals of history pitifully expose us to be hypocrites and charlatans. The United States wins a mighty revolution to escape taxation without representation, only to strangle our selves through taxation with representation. Are we really any better than King George? We scorn Hitler and Hussein as murderous madmen while we quietly murder tens of millions of defenseless children ourselves. Friends according to the numbers we are not better than Hitler or Hussein, but worse. We condemn God for allowing poverty throughout the world while we feather our nests with winnings from the stock lottery. It is not the hand of God that ruins the party, but our own greedy little palms.

We boast that we *won't get fooled again*, but we are deaf, dumb, and blind to who we really are. Why even *The Who* understand something of our condition as their message concludes, "*Meet the new boss... Same as the old boss.*" But how can mankind permanently escape from the hopeless despair of our condition to get our feet on solid ground? View it from whatever level you choose, whether nations, governments, businesses, families, and even the church of Jesus Christ, we are a hot mess.

Perhaps we need further reformation? Perhaps we need yet another revolution?

4) Jesus answered them, "Be careful that no one leads you astray. 5) For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will lead many astray. 6) You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you aren't troubled, for all this must happen, but the end is not yet. 7) For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there will be famines, plagues, and earthquakes in various places. 8) But all these things are the beginning of birth pains. 9) Then they will deliver you up to oppression, and will kill you. You will be hated by all of the nations for my name's sake. 10) Then many will stumble, and will deliver up one another, and will hate one another. 11) Many false prophets will arise, and will lead many astray. 12) Because iniquity will be multiplied, the love of many will grow cold. 13) But he who endures to the end will be saved. 14) This Good News of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world for a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.

Matthew 24:4-14 (WEB)

Friends, men will always claim to be the Messiah, reform old establishments, or revolt to begin new establishments. Jesus exhorts his disciples to not be troubled by these transient movements or even to join them. It is hard to imagine that *The Who* and Jesus have anything in common. But on this point they agree, as long as men or the establishments of men are your boss, then they are the same as every other boss, a fallen sinner.

I myself have looked to mere men a number of times for deliverance only to find myself

enslaved by tyrants. And worst of all I still occasionally serve the greatest of tyrant of all time... self. But there is another to serve. There is an option distinct from all the rest, a new boss that is not the same as the old boss. Why not truly escape the hopelessness and despair of this fallen world and receive Jesus Christ as your boss, or better as your friend and savior?

He is unique above every other man. He is the God-man with wisdom, grace, and power to offer any that would call on him. With him on our side we can be fooled a thousand times and still rejoice in his forgiveness. With Jesus by our side we might even be able to honor a sinful earthly leader or even be one. Alternatively if you do not want to honor or lead, then why chose to be just a plain fallen sinner?

Won't Get Fooled Again by The Who

*We'll be fighting in the streets
With our children at our feet
And the morals that they worship will be gone
And the men who spurred us on
Sit in judgment of all wrong
They decide and the shotgun sings the song*

*I'll tip my hat to the new constitution
Take a bow for the new revolution
Smile and grin at the change all around
Pick up my guitar and play
Just like yesterday
Then I'll get on my knees and pray
We don't get fooled again*

*The change, it had to come
We knew it all along
We were liberated from the fold, that's all
And the world looks just the same
And history ain't changed
'Cause the banners, they are flown in the next war*

*I'll tip my hat to the new constitution
Take a bow for the new revolution
Smile and grin at the change all around
Pick up my guitar and play
Just like yesterday
Then I'll get on my knees and pray
We don't get fooled again
No, no!*

*I'll move myself and my family aside
If we happen to be left half alive
I'll get all my papers and smile at the sky
Though I know that the hypnotized never lie
Do ya?*

*There's nothing in the streets
Looks any different to me
And the slogans are replaced, by-the-bye
And the parting on the left
Are now parting on the right*

And the beards have all grown longer overnight

*I'll tip my hat to the new constitution
Take a bow for the new revolution
Smile and grin at the change all around
Pick up my guitar and play
Just like yesterday
Then I'll get on my knees and pray
We don't get fooled again
Don't get fooled again
No, no!*

Yeaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!

*Meet the new boss
Same as the old boss*

Matthew 6:13, Lead us not into temptation

Unbelievers see contradiction in the Scriptures and claim this as evidence of fallibility in God or his word. The unbelieving make a grave mistake in maligning God in this way. However, we believers often make the mistake of responding defensively or superficially when a seeming contradiction is pointed out. Instead we should not be surprised when a seeming paradox, contradiction, or anomaly is pointed out to us. After all the study of God is well above rocket science so we should not be surprised if something is not easily understood.

Yet we should not be content with confusion either. Instead we should aim for rock solid confidence that every seeming contradiction or paradox will be explained by Jesus Christ in due time.

Consider an example of difficult Scripture. The absolute purity of God from sin is defended in James 1:13-15 (WEB),

13) Let no man say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God," for God can't be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one. 14) But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lust and enticed. 15) Then the lust, when it has conceived, bears sin. The sin, when it is full grown, produces death.

This popular Scripture is rightly used to explain that though sin is in the world and in our lives God is completely innocent and not culpable in any way for man's sin. Each man is guilty for his own sin and God has no sin to be guilty of whatsoever. This is true and accepted by Christians of all shapes and sizes.

Yet has any one ever compared James 1:13-15 with Matthew 6:13 (WEB), *"Bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen."* At first glance there appears to be a contradiction here. The first verse explains that God does not tempt anyone while the second is a prayer that God would not lead us into temptation. If God does not tempt would not it follow that it would be impossible that God would lead us into temptation?

Yet the first Scripture explains that God does not tempt and the second instructs us to pray that God would not lead us into temptation! Perhaps we should join the ranks of unbelievers and discredit God through this observation. Perhaps we should raise our fist to heaven in complaint, and especially in this case for God claims he does not tempt, yet says we have to ask him to keep us from temptation. Is not God already doing that without the asking? Does not God always watch our backs?

A more careful explanation is needed here. The root of most if not all complaints from unbelievers is a rejection of our condemned position apart from grace. Yet grace teaches us that God has forgiven us even though he was not obligated in the least to do it. He graciously saved us through unmerited favor though he would be just as good a God had he sent all of us immediately to eternal damnation. From this vantage point the verses above are easily understood.

First God is perfectly good and certainly does not tempt us. It is we who are evil and are tempted and fall into sin through our own corrupt nature. Second Jesus graciously provides a means of escape from our own foul nature. He instructs us to call on him for help in escaping

temptation. Again this is a gracious offer from the Lord who is not obligated to help us in any way. Also consider that God is not even obligated to help us on the merit of our asking for help. God would be just as good a God if he were to release his restraint all together and hand us fully over to our own sinful desires. Sin is what mankind wants and God would be perfectly just in giving us over to all our lusts. But to demonstrate his grace he tells us to call on him for deliverance and by his grace he delivers.

The unbelieving likely have no clue what I am talking about. However, it does not take much of the Holy Spirit to imagine what each us would be if God were to hand us fully over to our depravity. I know we all sin, but suppose God were to truly set us free to live by our own nature and empower us to accomplish not his will, but our own wicked will. I am not asking what would happen if God would allow us to become evil, but what would happen if God would allow our already existing evil nature to be fully manifest? The darkest, blackest, most sinister picture begins to appear.

The thought alone brings us to marvel at Jesus' compassion in teaching us to humbly pray that our heavenly Father would, "...*Bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.*"

Matthew 7:21-23, 24:23-25, Prophets and Miracle Workers, Yet Reprobate

God has at times through history spoken his word and words of prophecy as well as performed miracles through men of faith. Strangely, however, the Scriptures teach that there are and will be false prophets and miracle workers. Strange, because their faith and testimony is false, yet the prophecies and miracles are real!

Why would God delegate super natural power to the unbelieving? Perhaps to test the faith of the saints. Perhaps to further delude the unbelieving in their false assurance in order to bring greater judgment upon them.

Read Christ's warning for yourself,

21) Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22) Many will tell me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name, in your name cast out demons, and in your name do many mighty works?' 23) Then I will tell them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you who work iniquity.'

Matthew 7:21-23 (WEB)

And again,

23) "Then if any man tells you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or, 'There,' don't believe it. 24) For there will arise false christs, and false prophets, and they will show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the chosen ones. 25) "Behold, I have told you beforehand.

Matthew 24:23-25 (WEB)

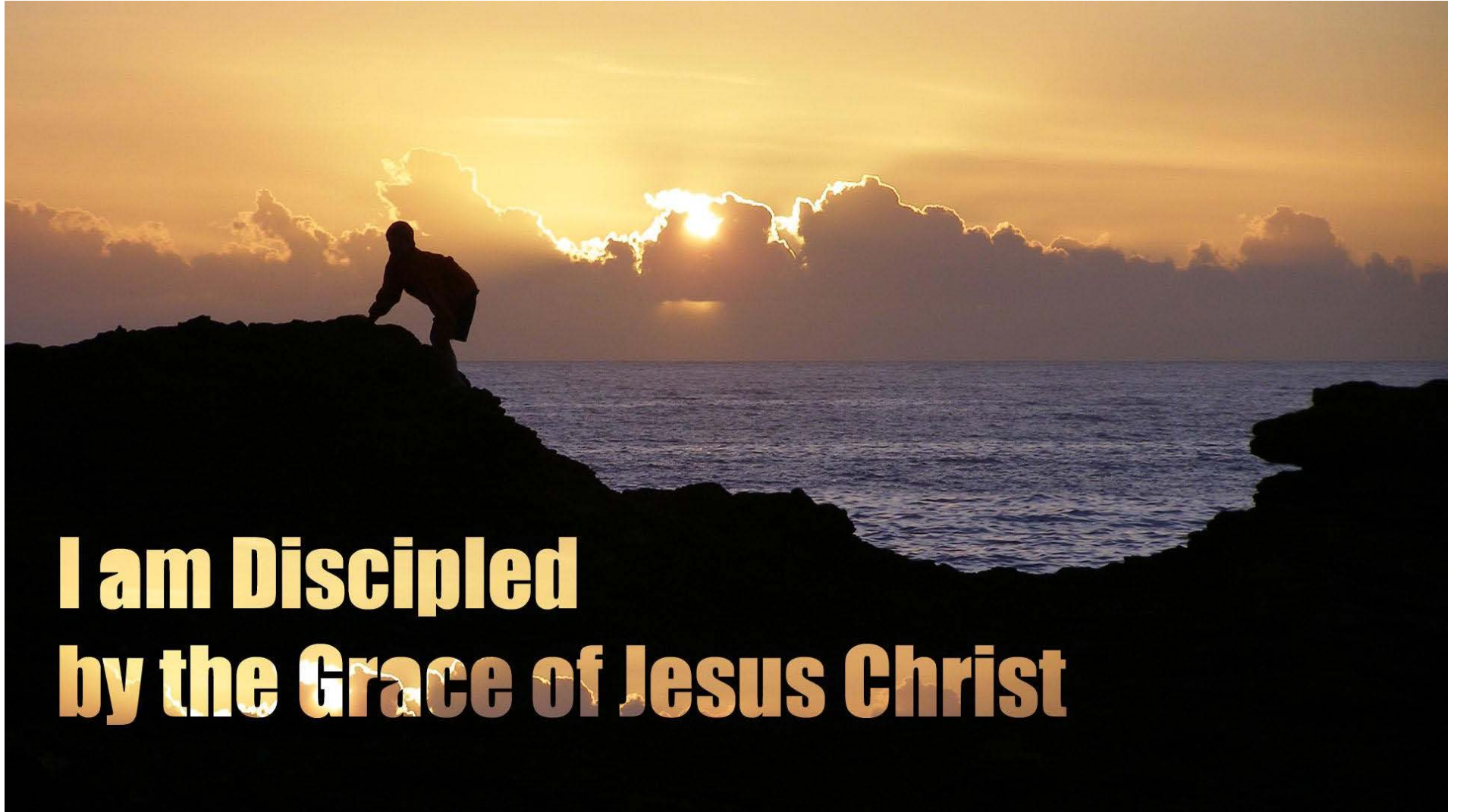
Do not be impressed in the least with prophecies and miracles even in they are real, for the prophet or miracle worker may still be reprobate, have a false testimony, and be cast into Hades. Instead let us keep our eyes and hope trained on God's Word and the cross of Christ, the Son of God's willing sacrifice for all our sin.

Mountain Hike



**I am Disciplined
by the Grace of Jesus Christ**

Mountain Sea Sun



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PAX I GIVE YOU (in honor of my dad)

Read [PAX I GIVE YOU](#)
in honor of my dad.

Peter(1) 2:9-12, My observations as an undercover catholic priest

I shocked a friend once by telling him that I was an undercover catholic priest. I explained that God had called me out of professional ministry to the humbler station of laity, though I maintained my catholic priesthood undercover. I could not get him to believe me, but Scripture suggests that any believer in Christ can make this claim.

Peter writes,

9) But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellence of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10) In the past, you were not a people, but now are God's people, who had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

11) Beloved, I beg you as foreigners and pilgrims, to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; 12) having good behavior among the nations, so in that of which they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they see, glorify God in the day of visitation.

13) Therefore subject yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether to the king, as supreme; 14) or to governors, as sent by him for vengeance on evildoers and for praise to those who do well. 15) For this is the will of God, that by well-doing you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: 16) as free, and not using your freedom for a cloak of wickedness, but as bondservants of God.

I Peter 2:9-16 (WEB)

Peter tells us that every believer is part of a royal priesthood. Under the Old Covenant only the descendants of Aaron were priests. However, under the New Covenant all Jesus' disciples are priests. Further, this priesthood is royal! This is no paltry office portrayed with special clothing and ceremony. Rather this office is high, undeserved, and bestowed upon us through the precious blood of Christ. Let us live up to it!

Peter also explains that believers have received the title of "*God's people*." We are not a divided congregation, but one people possessed by one God, Jesus Christ. The Roman Catholic Church attempted to enforce this unity on the family of Christ by the use of the word '*catholic*,' which means '*universal*' with a lower case '*c*.' This was a noble, but misdirected effort.

No man-made organization will ever be able to put their arms around all Christians universally. Rather, the true '*catholic*' or universal church is and will always be simply those people everywhere with true faith in Christ. Thus in a very Biblical sense I am a catholic priest, not serving as a professional minister, but as an undercover agent of grace.

That said I will share two observations I have made while in this station. First, Peter urges us in the verse above to have "*good behavior*." One painful lesson I have re-learned is that I

am a sinner the same as all my friends, family, and colleagues, but now with no ministry title to hide behind. I get angry. I get impatient. I am tempted to lie and steal. I lust. I am not making excuses or minimizing Peter's exhortation to pursue holiness. However, I am reminding us that doing right in the world is not going to be easy. We truly need Peter's exhortation to be good. For example, it is one thing to ask forgiveness from brothers in the Lord when I mess up, but quite another to ask forgiveness from those that may or may not love our Lord. Grace may not be extended. Understand also that I am not saying that those with a ministry title are hiding behind it, but the temptation to hide instead of fulfilling our calling will be there or anywhere.

Another painful lesson I have learned is that most people do not want Christianity preached at street level. Peter reminds us above that there are "*foolish men.*" There are men that would gladly sit in front of a pulpit Sunday after Sunday. Yet the rest of their week is filled with cursing, drunkenness, adultery, pornography, crude jokes, gambling, godlessness, greed, abortion, and lying. A pastor should not imagine that the happy, godly, and orthodox people he sees at church are happy, godly, or orthodox when away from church. Expose the false religion of these charlatans and you take your life in your hands! Undercover work may be needed to unearth this hypocrisy, but expect suffering in the process.

Remember that Jesus himself revealed his glory only to a few, but otherwise remained undercover in order to submit to crucifixion by Jew and gentile, and thus expose the hypocrisy of us all. So whether you remain a professional minister or laity I invite you to likewise follow Christ as an undercover catholic priest.

Peter(1) 2:9-17, Honor the King

The desire to be accepted and at ease is so great within our natures that we often may be tempted to make the kingdoms of this earth our home. But Christian friends, Peter explains that believers in Christ are a holy nation with a citizenship in heaven. Can the kingdoms of this earth offer a meaningful identity or a lasting rest to match this? True meaning and rest can only be found in Christ. Keep looking to him!

9) But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellence of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10) In the past, you were not a people, but now are God's people, who had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

11) Beloved, I beg you as foreigners and pilgrims, to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; 12) having good behavior among the nations, so in that of which they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they see, glorify God in the day of visitation.

13) Therefore subject yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether to the king, as supreme; 14) or to governors, as sent by him for vengeance on evildoers and for praise to those who do well. 15) For this is the will of God, that by well-doing you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: 16) as free, and not using your freedom for a cloak of wickedness, but as bondservants of God.

17) Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

1 Peter 2:9-17 (WEB)

Furthermore, until that wonderful day when we see Christ and each other face to face and enter that heavenly rest we are to live as strangers in this world, honor all men, and especially honor the king. Note that Peter adds no exceptions here regarding good and evil kings and governments. We are to honor the king and be subject to the government whether good or evil, respectfully disobeying government regulations that violate Christian conscience only.

Discipled by the Grace of Jesus Christ

Home Bible Optimism Articles

Peter(1) 4:1, Armed with Attitude

I once taught a Bible class to college students with a section titled, "*Spiritual Weapons.*" I used Ephesians 6 to explain how Scripture and prayer are key spiritual weapons in our fight against sin and Satan. Recently while reading 1 Peter, I realized that I have neglected another vital spiritual weapon. Peter writes, "*Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin*" (1 Peter 4:1 NIV).

Leave it to brash, impetuous Peter to teach us that ATTITUDE is one more key weapon we need in our armory. What was Christ's attitude? Hebrews 12:2 (WEB) says, "*looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*" Christ had an attitude of looking past the pain to future joy.

Peter also continues in 1 Peter Chapter 4 preaching attitudes to the troops to prepare us for battle. He highlights attitudes such as 1) live for the will of God, 2) do not live for evil human desires, 3) be prepared for unbelievers to think you are strange and to be abused by them, 4) be clear minded and self-controlled in order to pray and be prepared for the end of all things, 5) love each other deeply, 6) be hospitable without grumbling, 7) use your gifts faithfully to serve others, 8) speak as if speaking the very words of God, 9) serve with the strength God provides, 10) do not be surprised at suffering for Christ's sake, but praise God, 11) determine not to suffer for being any kind of criminal or meddler, and 12) commit yourself to your faithful creator and continue to do good.

Now there is a dozen attitudes for ya, but don't take it from me, read 1 Peter 4 for yourself and get ARMED WITH ATTITUDE!

Peter(1) 4:11, Take away my freedom of speech? Please!

In my country the golden calf of our ideology may very well be the freedom of speech or the right to speak freely. Perhaps the emphasis of this ideal was born out of the persecution of many Christians in Eastern and then Western Europe in times past as Christianity spread from its roots in the Middle East. This is no surprise because the gospel of the grace of Christ has always met resistance, more or less, since its inception. Men sought ways to control this conflict and all conflicts as world population and Christian belief grew into the Western Hemisphere. The people of the United States thus stamped freedom of speech into the very foundation of their government.

Though cardinal to many human governments you would be hard pressed to prove that this is an inalienable human right from the Scripture. Unfortunately the freedom of speech granted by governments has not necessarily advanced the cause of Christ. Consider that too often we may simply use our freedom of speech as both a license to preach our faith at one moment and to preach our fancy at another. I know I have not always been an honorable ambassador for Christ. Sadly, my freedom of speech has too often been used to put down or condemn others. I do not want freedom to do that.

Consider also that our freedom to speak is powerless to change an unbeliever's heart toward God at all. I spoke graciously to a colleague about Christ once and, though they thanked me, the next day the boss told me that they requested that I never speak to them about religion again. My freedom of speech could not change their heart. What value is powerless freedom? Oh, I could have hired a lawyer and pressed my right to speak freely! After all, many exercise their rights to speak freely about drinking and sex at the workplace. Certainly the United States court would defend my right to speak freely about Christ! I could have done this, but Christ would never. Instead, he weeps that men would know him to be a compassionate friend and savior. Relationships like this are not built on points of law in courtrooms, but in the blood, dirt, and tears at the foot of the cross.

Consider, finally, that it does not matter whether governments grant me freedom of speech or not. Rather, I am bound by Christ to proclaim the good news that he has paid the entire sin debt for mankind. I am enslaved to this mission whether permitted by free speech or not. No law of man can supersede it. No law of man can stop it. In fact, I wish instead that God would take away my freedom to engage in meaningless, harmful, and ineffective speech and bind my speech to the sole purpose of the gospel. Oh that my speech would be meaningful, helpful, and effective in pointing people to Jesus our truly compassionate savior and friend.

Apostle Peter exhorted I Peter 4:11a (WEB),

If anyone speaks, let it be as it were the very words of God...

Peter(1) 4:17, Daddy, what are Hooters?

We just returned from a New Year's meal with my wife's extended family. My wife and kids have enjoyed a humorous debate about which of our family reunions serves the best food. Opinions diverge, but for me I enjoy all the food and the fellowship at these gatherings. We are also blessed to have family who love Jesus and lead out with Christian prayer and song. Today I noticed that the event was even less well attended than the past. I do not know the reason for the sparse attendance, but I do know that our culture is far from family friendly.

Our countrymen have boldly stepped beyond neutral zones into purely destructive theaters for the family, and unfortunately we Christians are often dragged down to these base levels. For example as we traveled on 322 through Lewistown I winced as I passed the billboard ad for the Hooters restaurant with the body parts of a young co-ed waitress prominently displayed. Recently the caption has been changed to say, "All Ages Welcome." Say what? Also recently I heard of an elderly husband and wife who celebrated their wedding anniversary at Hooters with their family. Say what again? Last summer I took my son to a ball game and smiled as I saw another father taking his son, probably 10 years old, to the ball game. The son turned and I saw a Hooters waitress painted on the back of his shirt posing erotically with her guitar. My smile faded. I guess all ages are welcome, shamelessly.

A long view of history shows that manifestation of human depravity has waxed and waned, but there is no doubt that our present culture has plummeted to the gutter of no shame. Unscrupulous men lie to themselves and their women pretending that these displays pose no temptation. Rather than honestly admit and explain to their wives how God has wired men to be sexually aroused by sight of the female body and ask for prayer to fight temptation these men secretly fantasize the whole way to adultery on a daily basis. I heard a man say that watching women in bikinis does nothing to tempt him. Wow. He is made of different stuff than me.

All shame is lost and a Christian has no choice but to fight fire with fire. There is no point trying to extinguish the flame, but instead to teach ourselves and our children not to play with fire, but to let it burn in the fireplace of the marriage bedroom.

My daughter asked, "Daddy what are 'Hooters'?"

Dad says, "Well, daughter, 'hooters' is a crude term that sexed crazed men use to refer to a woman's breasts."

Daughter says, "You got to be kidding me!"

Dad says, "No, I am not kidding you. The Hooters restaurant chose an owl as mascot because the owl has eyes that are open super wide and God has designed men to be so attracted to the female body that if a man catches a glimpse of the female breast it is likely to open his eyes with sexual interest, even a godly Christian man."

Daughter says, "That makes me angry, there ought to be a law against the Hooters restaurant."

Dad says, "There is."

Daughter says, "Well then why don't the police stop them?"

Dad says, *"Well the law is God's law and our country is not a Christian nation. Moreover, God patiently allows his own laws to be freely broken because he does not want to coerce his people to obey. Instead he plans to change our hearts winning us to believe that he is good so that we eagerly want to obey him."*

Unfortunately, the new cultural standards made commonplace by Hooters and other exploiters of women have even worked their influence among God's people. I must admit that I do not understand the redefined modesty that permit some of the choices of even our Christian women. This can be very difficult for Christian men.

There is a battle in our inner man between what our lust wants to see and what Christ gives approval to see. I often do not know where to draw a line between pure and lustful thought and between modest and immodest clothing, but I do know that Christ's standard is perfection in purity and modesty. Thankfully Jesus Christ knows our hearts perfectly as he leads, guides, and ... judges.

Yes, Jesus will judge his people.

Peter says, *"For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God. If it begins first with us, what will happen to those who don't obey the Good News of God?"* (1 Peter 4:17 WEB). I am personally acquainted with the judgment and correction of the Lord because of my poor choices. So I know that the holiness God will not hold back judgments for the sins of our present generation. We are wise to ask one another, are we flirting with the world?

The good news is that our forgiveness is already guaranteed and if we are still alive after his hand of correction falls he may still permit us the useful purpose of testifying to his amazing grace and urging one another on toward holiness.

Peter(2) 3:1-13, Global Warming is No Joke

Global warming is no joke. Read below.

3:1) This is now, beloved, the second letter that I have written to you; and in both of them I stir up your sincere mind by reminding you, 2) that you should remember the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior: 3) knowing this first, that in the last days mockers will come, walking after their own lusts 4) and saying, "Where is the promise of his coming? For, from the day that the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." 5) For this they willfully forget that there were heavens from of old, and an earth formed out of water and amid water by the word of God, 6) by which means the world that existed then, being overflowed with water, perished. 7) But the heavens that exist now and the earth, by the same word have been stored up for fire, being reserved against the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

8) But don't forget this one thing, beloved, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9) The Lord is not slow concerning his promise, as some count slowness; but he is patient with us, not wishing that anyone should perish, but that all should come to repentance. 10) But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. 11) Therefore since all these things will be destroyed like this, what kind of people ought you to be in holy living and godliness, 12) looking for and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God, which will cause the burning heavens to be dissolved, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? 13) But, according to his promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

2 Peter 3:1-13 (WEB)

The subject of global warming is a curiosity in our day and age. Cynical mention of the subject can bring laughter in some settings, while in other settings sober conversation will raise millions of dollars towards a solution. For myself, one well done video I reviewed made an important point that we know very little about 100, 500, and 1,000 year weather and climate trends on planet earth. Sure, we each experience annual season and weather patterns. However, are there also climate and weather patterns that are on longer cycles? If so millions and billions of dollars may not be able to do anything to stop it.

Furthermore, if God decides to melt the polar ice caps, who is going to stop Him? Just praise God, get ready to bid for the extra real-estate down under, and hope you don't own property too close to the Jersey shore line as waters rise. For all I know, the Lord may be melting things down to uncover a few mammoths, dinosaurs, and cities at the poles to stupefy the unbelieving. Perhaps he is warming things up a bit to make things more comfortable for his return. I would like to know just what is under the ice where those penguins keep going back to! The grave of a master penguin trainer?

But I do not write this piece to enter the voluminous global warming debate. Rather, I want to call attention to another weather and climate pattern in the history of our world, or not pattern, but a predetermined course for the temperature of our planet. This present

temporary heavens and earth will one day end in fire, to be replaced by an eternal permanent heavens and earth to be inhabited by those redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ. Have you entered a discussion about this global warming problem? Have you made the preparations needed to step from the present heaven and earth to the new heaven and earth?

It is worth the investment of everything you have, and it is no joke.

Philippians 2:1-11, Others Magazine!

We live in an unabashedly self-centered period of world history. If there were a time past when selflessness and sacrifice was considered a virtue, it is truly gone. Just what do you say to someone who says to you, *'It is all about YOU!'* What? Shall I just kill all virtue and employ all my resources in the service of... MYSELF? It is true that my 'self' is self-'ish' and truly only concerned with my-'self'. But should I marinate in the fact? Instead, Jesus demonstrated and said that 'self' is the part that must die in order to be any use at all to serving God and his people.

We read in Philippians 2:1-11 (WEB)

1) If therefore there is any exhortation in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any tender mercies and compassion, 2 make my joy full by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind; 3 doing nothing through rivalry or through conceit, but in humility, each counting others better than himself; 4 each of you not just looking to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others.

5 Have this in your mind, which was also in Christ Jesus, 6) who, existing in the form of God, didn't consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7) but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men. 8) And being found in human form, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, yes, the death of the cross. 9) Therefore God also highly exalted him, and gave to him the name which is above every name, 10) that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, those on earth, and those under the earth, 11) and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus won the highest title by emptying himself, not feeding himself. Curiously he also said that if we want to be the greatest we must be willing to make ourselves the servant of all. The true path to greatness is upside down and inside out from all of our natural tendencies and desires. Instead, we need to sacrifice all aspiration of earthly title to eagerly serve God's purpose big or small, looking only for the Lord's commendation, *'Well done, my good and faithful servant.'*

Perhaps we American Christians have been bombarded with *'me, me, me, me, you, you, you, you'* so hard, so often, and so powerfully that our defenses have caved in and our sense of virtue is knocked unconscious in the boxing ring. Can the case against our depraved selfishness be any more clear and condemned by the fact that our generation publishes *Self Magazine*? We are a shame to ourselves. Of course *Self Magazine* simply has put the label on what the real problem is with our hearts. My insecurity vainly grasps for a *self-preserver* and insanely grabs the lead weight of *self* and my *accomplishments* hoping for buoyancy. However, lead weight sinks!

How can we fight against this? Anyone with publishing skills want to publish *Others Magazine*? But would it sell at the Walmart checkout? The heart of the matter is our heart and so we must start there with Jesus' command, *"in humility, each counting others better than himself."*

Philippians 3:10, Eureka! Likeness IS NOT Sameness!!

My wife and I home-school and we have learned that a good home-school program is not for the faint of heart. Imagine taking a job as a kindergarten teacher and being promoted to a new grade level each year through twelfth grade! You would have to learn as much or more than the kids each year just to keep your head above the water. So most any home-schooler can tell you about both the hard work and the rewards provided the attitude is properly aligned.

One of my pieces of the pie is to handle the higher level math corrections. Currently our oldest teens are wrestling through geometry and everyone's favorite, geometry proofs. Call me sick, but I do love geometry proofs! However, it must not be genetic, because my kids do not. Anyway, Jeff, get to the point. I was recently reminded from geometry that SIMILARITY IS NOT THE SAME AS CONGRUENCE! For example if two shapes share identical angles and dimensions in every respect, then they are congruent. However, if two shapes share identical angles, but only the similar proportion of dimensions, then they are only similar. For example the earth is a round ball, similar to the sun which is also a round ball, but they are far from congruent. This seems plain to all. So lets leap to the spiritual.

Christians speak of being Christ-like as a goal in life. This is typical speech among Christians and generally accepted as the sign of a mature Christian. However, we should point out that our catchy phrases may often gloss over the difficult heart of what this may mean. Do we really want the discernment to see sin in other disciples and gently but firmly rebuke it? Christ did that. Do we really want to expose the hornets nest of the hypocritical religious? Christ did that AND with love. Do we really want to lose sleep and pray all night because other believers are suffering? Christ did that. Do we really want to refuse the defense of armies of angels and instead suffer and die? Christ did that also. And do we really want to ask God to forgive our tormentors before they even ask? Christ forgave us all before we asked. Honestly we may not actually want to be like Christ, but our gracious God finds pleasure putting himself inside sinful man and stretching us to his likeness. So growing in Christ-likeness is a Biblical idea though a painful stretch. Consider a few Scriptures...

1 John 4:17 (NIV), *"In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him."* So Christians are like him now.

Philippians 3:10 (NIV), *"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death."* We also need to strive to be like him.

1 John 3:2 (NIV), *"Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."* Though we are not perfectly like him now, but we will be one day in glory.

But what if someone said instead of wanting to *be Christ-like* that they wanted to *be Christ*? That is instead of being similar to Christ, they wanted to be congruent to Christ. They were not content sharing similar angles but also wanted to share the same dimensions. This would be silly, wrong, offensive, it would be anything but accepted. It is one thing to take us, a

little lumps of clay, and shape us into something similar to Christ, but quite another and attempt to shape it into Christ himself. No amount of clay can make God! Again this seems plain to all. So finally lets leap to the image of Christ in man, the mystery of marital union.

As explained in other articles I have noted that Genesis 1:27 says male and female is a reflection of his image within mankind and also Ephesians 5:25-33 says that marriage itself is also a living metaphor with the husband representing Christ, though quite imperfectly, and a wife representing the glorious church. So what points remain to be made? Satan's schemes and our ignorance are a recipe to destroy the beauty of God's design in male, female, and marriage.

Simply stated two objects can be very similar but if they are not the same then they are not congruent. Likeness is not sameness! A man might possibly be Christ-like due to God's grace, but he is still not Christ. And a wo-man might also be like a man in more dimensions than can be discussed in this article. And that is all by God's design. Yet it is the not so subtle and also the very subtle differences that add the *WHOA* into woman that made God's gift of Eve to Adam so special. It is the similarity combined with the differences that light the fires of romance and attraction. Perhaps this is also plain to most yet only rediscovered theory to me. So what's the point?

I am reminded that Satan's schemes, in combination with our ignorance and rebellion, can be a powerful brew. Satan has used both the differences and the similarities between men and women to fuel destruction, but God intended the differences and similarities to fuel romance. Since I am reminded of this recently, I remind you and myself to not be to hasty and miss the way in our judgments. The power of God's grace is able to make a sinful lump of Clay more Christ-like than we might imagine, but the Christian is still not Christ. Likewise, the creative imagination of God has made male and female both more similar and more different than we might imagine. But Satan has used confusion and fear over this fact to instigate divorce, estrangement, flight, mutilations, murder, homosexuality, transgenderism and a host of brokenness to the beauty God created. So I say again LIKENESS IS NOT SAMENESS, whether it be a small shape and large shape, a Christian and Christ, or female and male sexuality. Do you think me silly to say don't be fooled? Well don't be! Seek the Lord and godly counsel...

Perhaps God has allowed me to write such an admonition to you because someone with little knowledge, such as myself, could not say too much and give an open door to the enemy nor ruin the mystery of romance. Though I pray that knowledge of God's beautiful designs would grow for both of us beyond mere theory and my lame words.

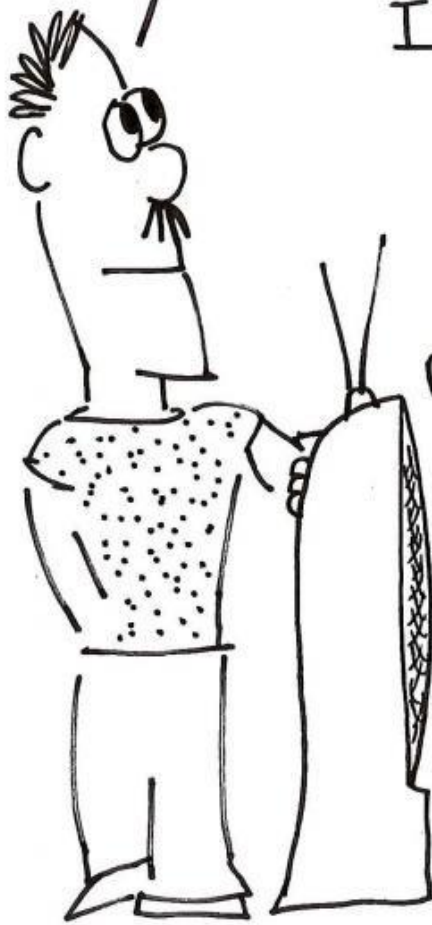
Proverbs 01:05

WISE Crack

The wise listen
and add to their learning

Hey! I'm listening, but
I keep losing brain cells

Jeff Martin - Proverbs 1:5



Marry a
Multi-Millionaire

Survivor
Temptation
Island
cheaters



*"That the wise man may hear, and increase in learning;
that the man of understanding may attain to sound counsel."*

Proverbs 1:5 (WEB)

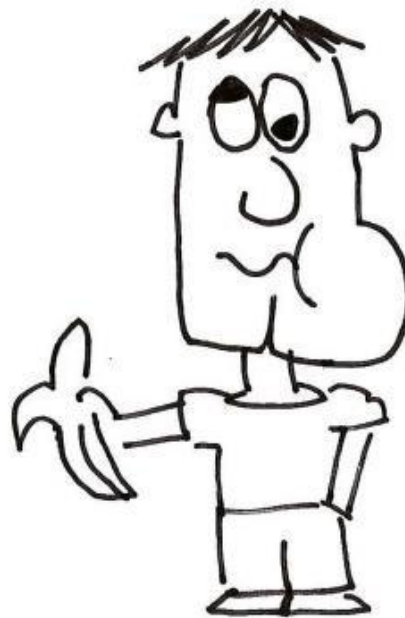
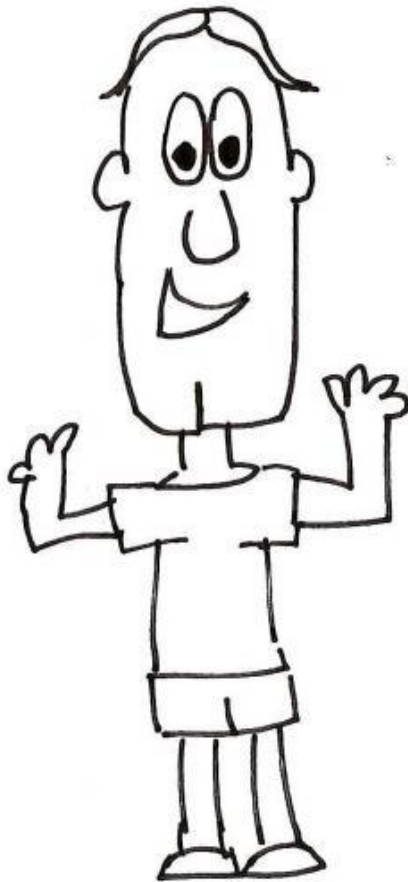
Proverbs 01:08

WISE Crack

Listen, my son, to your father's instruction!

Problem is my dad is an ape !!

Jeff Martin - Proverbs 1:8



Evolution 101

"My son, listen to your father's instruction, and don't forsake your mother's teaching."

Proverbs 1:8 (WEB)

Proverbs 03:31

WISE Crack

Do not envy a tyrant,
and choose none of his ways!

Jeff Martin - Proverbs 3:31



I have heard of
green with envy,
but this is a jungle!



*"Don't envy the man of violence.
Choose none of his ways."*

Proverbs 3:31 (WEB)

Proverbs 04:05

WISE Crack

Get wisdom! Get understanding!
Do not forget my words or
swerve from them.

Jeff Martin - Proverbs 4:5



Hey Got Milk!
who needs wisdom?



*"Get wisdom.
Get understanding.*

*Don't forget,
and don't deviate
from the words of my mouth."*
Proverbs 4:5 (WEB)

Proverbs 05:15

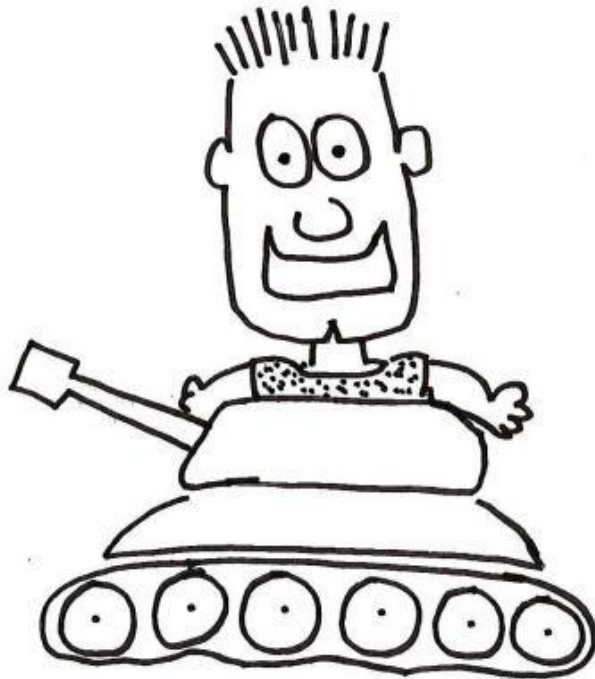
WISE Crack

Drink water out of your own tank and
running water out of your own well.

Jeff Martin - Proverbs 5:15



Water pistol...
Water tank?
Water war!



*"Drink water out of your own cistern,
running water out of your own well."*

Proverbs 5:15 (WEB)

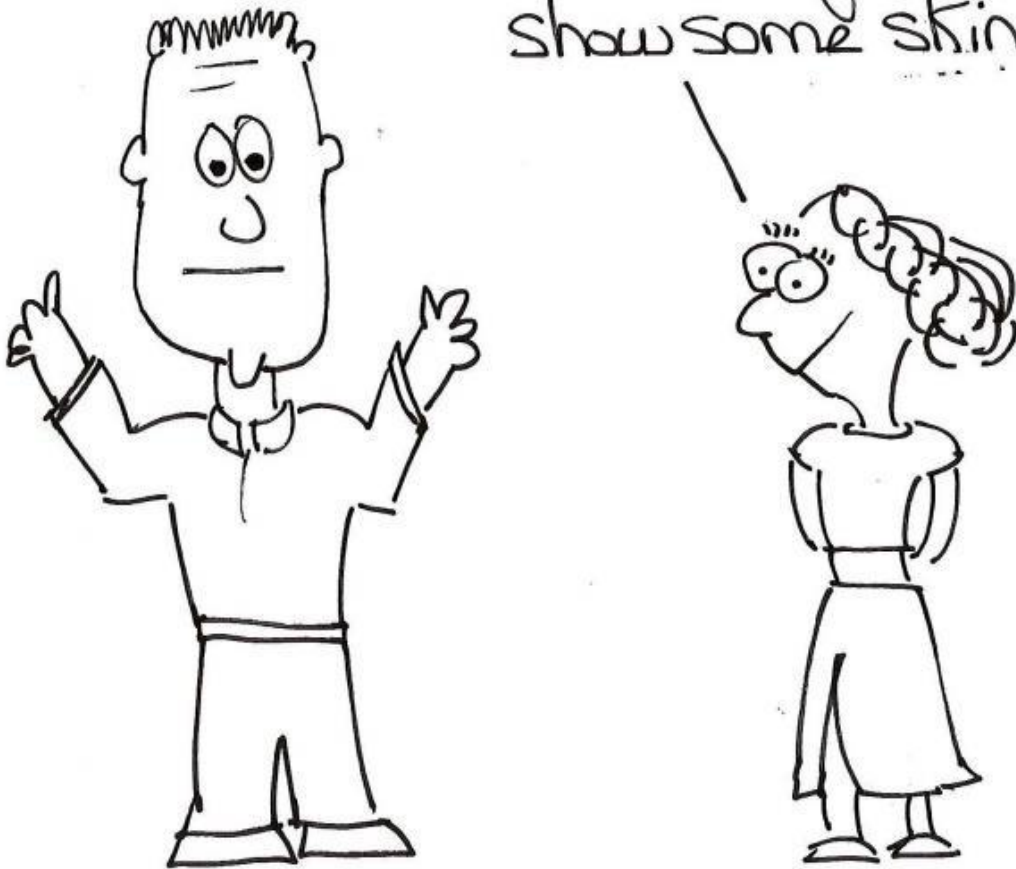
Proverbs 11:22

WISE Crack

Like a gold ring in a pig's snout
is a beautiful woman who
shows no discretion.

Show discretion?
I'm trying to
show some skin!

Jeff Martin - Proverbs 11:22



*"Like a gold ring in a pig's snout,
is a beautiful woman who lacks discretion."*

Proverbs 11:22 (WEB)

Proverbs 11:22, It Aint No Secret Victoria

Men, we need more frank conversation about sexual temptation.

Ever since our fall into sin men have been faced with the sin of lusting after the female body treating women as chattel and women have been faced with the sin of disrespecting men using their beauty as bait.

One evening while dining at the beach I saw a beautiful woman walk across the shore while a man followed her in tow a few feet behind. He caught up with her and they chatted a few moments at the surf, she flung her long black hair and gown revealing a sexy black bikini and strolled further down the shoreline, again with him panting behind her. He again caught up and she again flung her hair and gown and posed toward the boardwalk with the sand as her runway. He wanted what she had. She had what he wanted.

Volumes have been written about battles on the beaches of Normandy and Iwo Jima, but here was a great battle on the beach between two great sinners unobserved by most and likely recorded only in these few sentences. He wanted what she had, following after her with his tongue drooling, trading love for the lust of her body. She had what he wanted, leading him on like a dog with a bone, trading respect for the thrill of enticing a man. Sadly this battle of the sexes has been raging since the fall. Yet can we find reason for love to defeat lust and respect to defeat seduction?

Solomon said, *"Like a gold ring in a pig's snout, is a beautiful woman who lacks discretion"* (Proverbs 11:22 WEB). Frankly, we men often do not hate indiscretion in women. We men are glad enough to enjoy some eye-candy from time to time, not even realizing that the heart of immodesty is disrespect of men. Woman, likewise, are glad enough to enjoy the thrill of seducing the glances of men also not realizing that they are cultivating lust for themselves and not love. Perhaps a closer examination of this verse will help love and respect win the victory.

Proverbs 11:22	Commentary
Like a	Solomon is beginning a comparison
gold ring	A gold ring is beautiful
in a	A beautiful gold ring is to be put in something
pig's snout	Put a beautiful gold ring in a pig's snout?
is a	A gold ring in a pig's snout is to be compared with something
beautiful woman	A beautiful woman is beautiful
who lacks	A woman, though beautiful, could still be lacking something
Discretion.	To be discreet, show prudence, have good judgment, in context to show discretion with beauty A beautiful woman may lack discretion with her beauty, i.e. immodesty / seduction Indiscretion with female beauty is equal to putting a gold ring in a pig's snout

Consider, men, the next time we feast our eyes on an indiscreet female, it is equal to wearing the gold ring of female beauty in the pig's snout of our lust. It is one thing to admire God's design in female beauty, but quite another thing to feed our selfishness with it. Consider, women, the next time you are indiscreet with your beauty, it is equal to putting

the gold ring of man's attraction to the female body in the pig's snout of your seduction. It is one thing to marvel at God's design in male attraction to female beauty, but quite another to seduce with it.

Yet, there is a place for man to enjoy the beauty of the female body with no restriction to his passion. There is also a place for woman to enjoy the thrill of attracting a man, holding nothing back. This place is the safe and secret place of the marriage bedroom. It is not a place for lust, for seduction, for children, for the public, or for the marketing of sex. The marriage bedroom is a precious place requiring diligent stewardship and protection.

Protection is needed because what God has intended for intimate pleasure in the safe and secret place of the marriage bedroom is now exploited in the name of free speech and the bottom line of marketing departments. The ethic of today's business has become "*Whatever Works*" with the dollar bill as Almighty God.

Isn't it ironic that the largest sellers of lingerie would call themselves Victoria's Secret? I am all for lingerie sold discreetly and worn confidently in the marriage bedroom, the problem is that not only is Victoria's lingerie not a secret, neither is her body. If there ever were an example of a gold ring in a pig's snout this would be it. Some of the world's most beautiful women have placed their beauty in the pig's snout of American lust because of the pig's snout of their own seduction. Instead of reserving this precious gift for the marriage bedroom, women receive a paycheck to model their wares on TV and twice life size posters in the mall in full view of children and the public, reaping billions of dollars with their indiscretion.

And who is more guilty, the buyer or the seller? Though, we should also note that men do not always buy the indiscretions of women with money, but with all sorts of compromises such as giving admiration to the harlot and overlooking the chaste. Women, you also do not always sell your indiscretion for money, but also for the mere fleeting glances of the sex charged men that pass you on the street.

As for Victoria and her disciples why don't we be honest and change her name to comply with truthful advertising. How about "*Victoria's Advertisement*," "*Victoria's Announcement*," or "*Victoria's Proclamation*?" I got it. Let's get rid of the hint of the Victorian era because we are well past that and add a touch of US pride. How about "*Vicky's Declaration*?" We could even hang it next to the Constitution or the Declaration of Independence since it is becoming a pillar in the foundation of the American way of life. And what would it say? It would begin...

When in the intercourse of sexual events it becomes necessary for one sex to battle another for their selfish rights, a descent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to battle. We hold these truths to be self evident, that he wants what she gets and she gets what he wants and he trades love for lust to buy it and she trades respect for seduction to sell it, bringing great dishonor to the marriage bed through his selfishness and her indiscretion...

Alternatively men could call on the Lord for help to love women instead of lust for them and women could call on the Lord for help to respect men instead of seduce them.

Proverbs 12:9, A Sad Observation

A person of integrity is the same person in public and in private. Yet most know that it is very difficult to be this kind of person. In fact at times we may be the most rude and unkind to people we know the best and very kind and polite to people we do not even know at all. This is a sad observation, though perhaps we should not stop at the observation, but instead ask ourselves why this is. To just say *'that is the way it is'* misses an important opportunity to understand the engines of sin in our soul and perhaps ask God for grace to overhaul them.

The Scripture also notes the fact in Proverbs 12:9 (WEB), *"Better is he who is little known, and has a servant, than he who honors himself, and lacks bread."*

Also Proverbs 13:7 (WEB), *"There are some who pretend to be rich, yet have nothing. There are some who pretend to be poor, yet have great wealth."*

In the first verse the commended one doesn't seem to care about the esteem of the masses, but manages his own household well enough to have a servant. However, the one contrasted is very concerned to honor himself perhaps for popularity, but his own household has no food. Similarly in the second verse one man pretends to be rich, apparently to impress others, while another man doesn't care to be popular through his wealth, but instead keeps it a secret for himself and his family. Why is this?

We might use the expression to *'put on airs'* or *'give oneself airs'* when someone acts better than one really is and pretends to be good or to be superior. But again why would we put out the energy and effort to please the crowd, yet neglect our own household? For example when I write or speak in front of a group I put a lot of effort into preparing. I prepare in advance thinking about the things I want to say and how to say them. I do my best to calculate my humor and the responses because I want to *'look good'* for my audience. But do I put the same effort into conversation with my wife and family? I remember when courting my wife my mind raced to prepare for my time with her. However, now 25 years later, coming home from work is too often just... regular. Why is this? Or what about you? How do you prepare for your public, for your fan club? How do you converse, dress, operate? Does your public audience get the same treatment as your private audience? If you are like me, too often I treat the superficial public better than my close friends and family.

Here are a few reflections as to why this might be?

1. Intimacy requires openness about our weaknesses, but pleasing a crowd is easier.
2. The praise of crowds feed our ego, but good friends should shrink our ego.
3. Intimacy requires heart level effort, while the heart can be avoided in a crowd.
4. Bitterness erodes relationships, but the crowd promises friendship, albeit superficial.
5. Intimacy surrenders control, but it is easier to fool a crowd and stay in control.

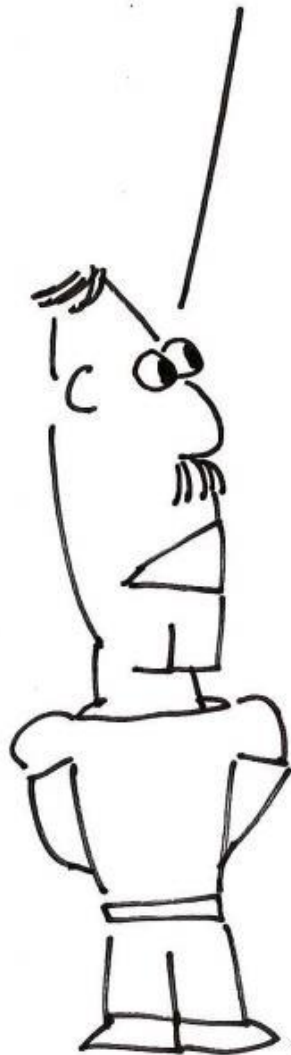
Wouldn't it be better to thrill our private audiences than to sell ourselves to the crowd for a cheap thrill?

Proverbs 15:17

WISE Crack

Better a meal of vegetables
with love than a tender steak
with hatred.

Jeff Martin - Proverbs 15:17



So what about the
poor and hungry?
Let them eat steak!



*"Better is a dinner of herbs, where love is,
than a fattened calf with hatred."*

Proverbs 15:17 (WEB)

Proverbs 16:1-7 and the Art of Motorcar Repair

I usually have my personal devotions with breakfast. I am an early riser, so my family is still asleep and it is nice quiet time to meet with God and His word while eating my oatmeal, banana, eggs with mustard, and glass of water.

On this particular morning I had taken a vacation day, and though healthy food was on my breakfast menu, vacation was NOT the menu for the day. A day of street side auto repair was staring me in the face. I had been struggling with a problem engine vibration on my van that I noticed after a recent repair job at my local mechanic. I had taken the van back several times for further diagnosis, but without satisfaction. I was on my own with this one, or so I complained to myself once, before the Lord corrected me. He reminded me that we are NEVER on our own.

Thankfully I began my day with these verses from Proverbs 16:1-7 (WEB).

1) The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from Yahweh. 2) All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but Yahweh weighs the motives. 3) Commit your deeds to Yahweh, and your plans shall succeed. 4) Yahweh has made everything for its own end— yes, even the wicked for the day of evil. 5) Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to Yahweh: they shall certainly not be unpunished. 6) By mercy and truth iniquity is atoned for. By the fear of Yahweh men depart from evil. 7) When a man's ways please Yahweh, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.

So the Lord reminded me that I may have plans for the day, but it is his plans alone that will come to pass. He also reminded me that though I may think my motives are pure, that he sees right through me to my hidden sin. So I committed the auto repair job to him, whether success or failure. I thought of my own sin and asked God to keep me far from the judgment to come on the wicked. And though not my enemy, I did ask the Lord if he could persuade my mechanic to give at least some of my money back.

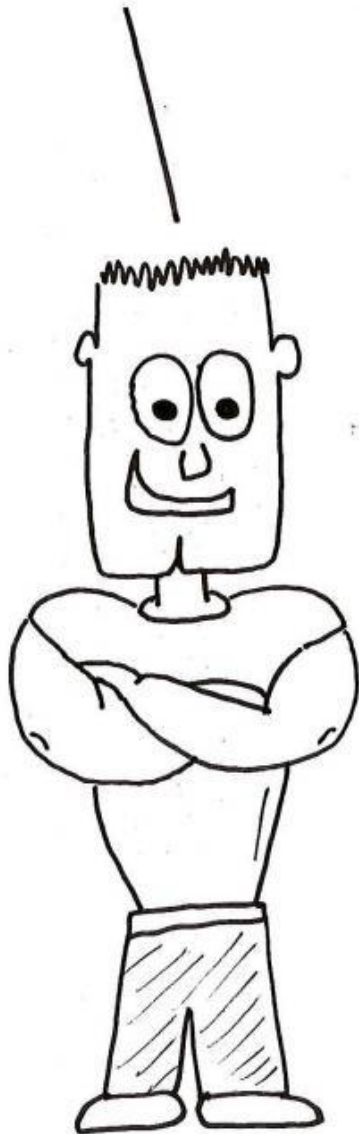
Well not to bore you with the details, but the Lord helped me repair the van, the vibration is gone, and my mechanic returned a fair amount of my money. And even though I began the day with a tad of self pity, my daughter encouraged me mid-day with these cheerful words, "Dad isn't it great to be able to work outside on this beautiful fall day?"

And ya know it was... thanks to the Lord!

Proverbs 17:14

WISE Crack

The beginning of an argument is like a dam burst, so stop before you start!



I guess a flood is a water table with serious legs...



Jeff Martin - Prov. 17:14

"The beginning of strife is like breaching a dam, therefore stop contention before quarreling breaks out."

Proverbs 17:14 (WEB)

Proverbs 20:06

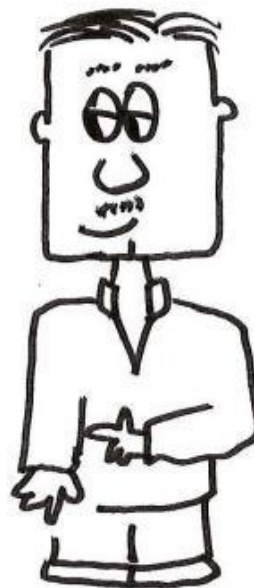
WISE Crack

Many a man claims to have unfailing love,
but a faithful man who can find?

Jeff Martin - Proverbs 20:6



Hey baby, I'm a faithful
man! Just ask Suzy,
Donna, Tina, Lynn...



*"Many men claim to be men of unfailing love,
but who can find a faithful man?"*

Proverbs 20:6 (WEB)

Proverbs 20:18

WISE Crack

Make plans by seeking advice

Jeff Martin + Jacobs, Proverbs 20:18



who needs more vice?
I've got a truckload



*"Plans are established by advice;
by wise guidance you wage war!"*

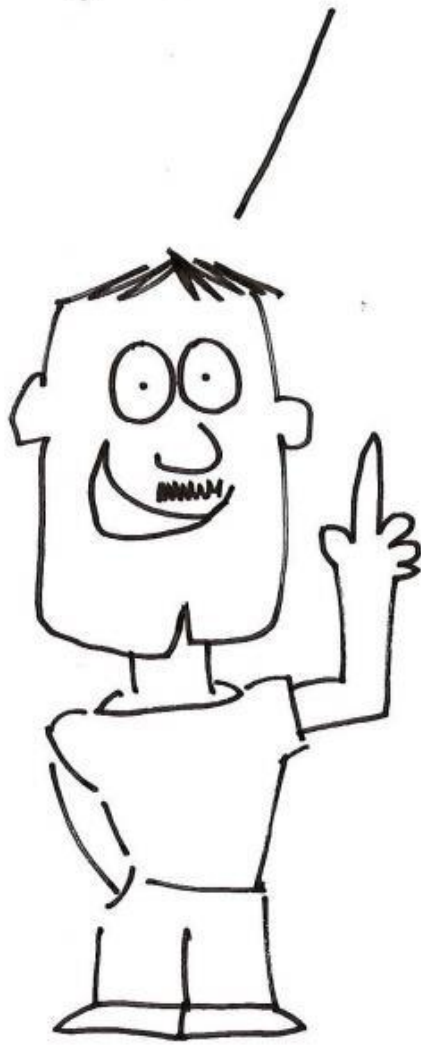
Proverbs 20:18 (WEB)

Proverbs 21:02

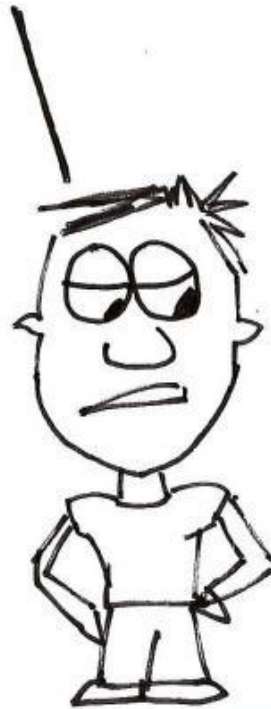
WISE Crack

All a man's ways seem right to him, but the Lord weighs the heart.

Jeff Martin - Proverbs 21:2



Hey if I'm right why ask the Lord?



*"Every way of a man is right in his own eyes,
but Yahweh weighs the hearts."*

Proverbs 21:2 (WEB)

Proverbs 21:09

WISE Crack

Better to live on a corner of the roof
than share a house with a quarrelsome wife.

Jeff Martin - Proverbs 21:9



Now you tell me!



*"It is better to dwell in the corner of the housetop,
than to share a house with a contentious woman."*

Proverbs 21:9 (WEB)

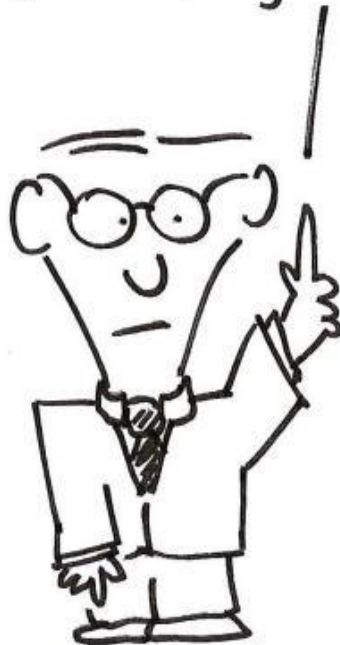
Proverbs 21:30

WISE Crack

There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the Lord.

Listen chief, I've got a bachelor's from ole state, a masters from new state, and a phd from gaseous state

Jeff Martin - Proverbs 21:30



"There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against Yahweh."

Proverbs 21:30 (WEB)

Proverbs 25:21

WISE Crack

If your enemy is hungry give him food, and if thirsty give him drink.

Jeff Martin - Proverbs 25:21



What does drinking water drink? Does non-drinking water get thirsty?



*"If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat.
If he is thirsty, give him water to drink."*

Proverbs 25:21 (WEB)

Disciplined by the Grace of Jesus Christ

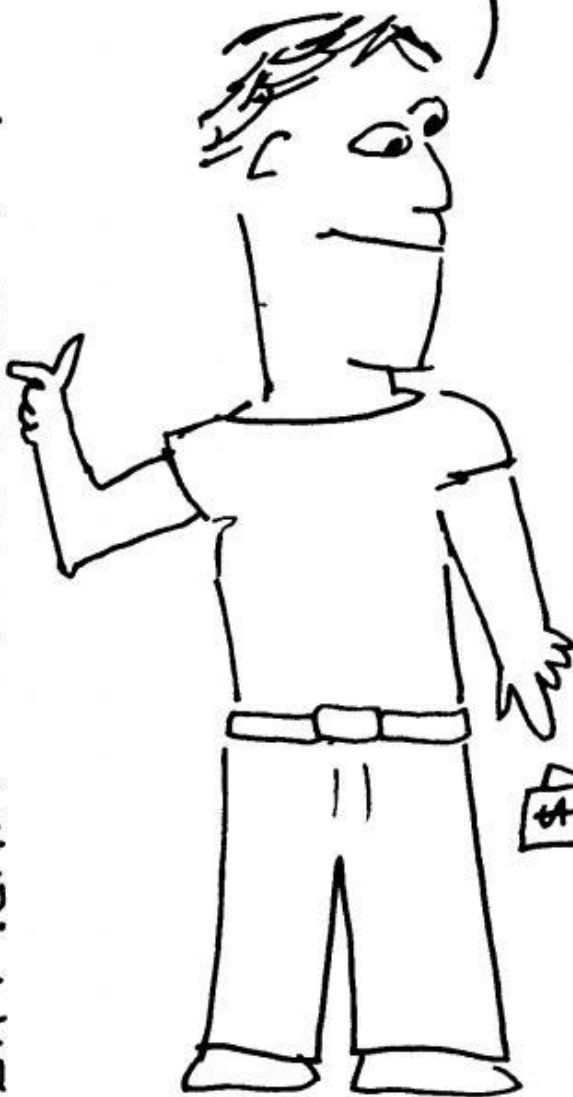
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Proverbs 30:07-09

WISE Crack

Hmmm
Check your math

GET RICH
give rich o!



Jeff Martin - Proverbs 30:7-9

*"Two things I have asked of you;
don't deny me before I die:
Remove far from me falsehood and lies.
Give me neither poverty nor riches.
Feed me with the food that is needful for me;
lest I be full, deny you, and say, 'Who is Yahweh?'
or lest I be poor, and steal,
and so dishonor the name of my God."*

Proverbs 30:7-9 (WEB)

Proverbs 4:23, Can You REALLY Trust Him? Can You REALLY Trust Yourself?

This received in my email recently. My comments below...

From: Background Check [noreply@fremymind.com]

Sent: Tuesday, January 05, 2010 7:06 AM

Subject: Check Anyone's Background



The advertisement features a woman in the foreground looking thoughtfully to the side, with a man in the background looking away. The text is overlaid on this image.

 **BeenVerified**

Can you REALLY trust him?

SEARCH NOW FREE!

Run an INSTANT boyfriend/girlfriend report and find out everything!

100% Completely Anonymous and Secure

AS SEEN ON **The New York Times**

CNNMoney.com
A Service of CNN, Forbes & Money

THE NEW YORK OBSERVER

This is about the saddest advertisement I have ever seen. It is sad enough that this young woman and this young man have given away their intimacy (or taken it away from the other) without the commitment of marital bonds, but now FREMYMIND.COM proposes to restore her security with a simple background check of the man she just slept with. Say what?! I guess when things are going great for me, I also am tempted to think that we are not really as needy as the Bible says. However, this ad highlights the desperate neediness and lost state of mankind with neon lights. Do you see how utterly sad this scene is? Do you see it?

FREMYMIND.COM is trying to sell her and us security by validating the integrity of the man that just stole her intimacy! Or did she sell it to him or give it away for free? And this is the bear trap we find ourselves in all too frequently because of our sin. Though I may condemn you or you condemn me because of our foolish, sinful choices, the Lord Jesus' heart bleeds because of his love for us. Matthew 9:36 (WEB) says, *"But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion for them, because they were harassed and scattered, like sheep without a shepherd."*

The woman above is so blind that her only question is can she trust the man she just slept with, even though they have no commitment whatsoever. Where did she meet the guy, at a bar? Was he drunk? Did she really give herself to a man she knows so little about that she needs to run a background check on the man? The real question she ought to be asking in light of these foolish decisions is can she trust herself! Can she trust herself after giving away her great value to someone she doesn't even know? Why, if she worked at a jewelry store and let a customer walk out the door with a handful of diamonds without the commitment of payment she would be fired. Yet the young woman above is worth more than all the diamonds in the world, yet the sleeping dude walked out the door with her diamonds with at most vain promises of marital commitment. Selfish cowardliness.

And what about him, can he trust her? Where did he meet her, at a sorority party? Is she clean or is he one more notch on her lipstick case? Did he really risk so much for a moment of pleasure with a woman that knows nothing about him, and presumably he knows nothing about her? Can he really trust himself? He lays there peacefully dozing thinking he scored free of charge, with no understanding whatsoever of the true cost of his actions.

All these words and we haven't even mentioned the possibility of pregnancy. The little ditty from our children is long forgotten... *'First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes baby in the baby carriage.'* Sadly, babies come without love or marriage and their most common destiny in the land of the free and the brave is the trash can behind medical facilities. We are not the free and the brave, but the enslaved and the cowardly, killing our own children.

So what is the answer? The answer is that NO she cannot trust him and NO he cannot trust her! In fact the Bible even says is foolish for us to EVER trust in ourselves and also that we should NEVER trust in another person. Even if we happen to think we are a good person, we are foolish to trust in ourselves. That is right, we are foolish to EVER trust in ourselves and should NEVER trust in another person. Surprised? Read for yourself...

One who trusts in himself is a fool; but one who walks in wisdom is kept safe.

Proverbs 28:26 (WEB)

Don't put your trust in princes, each a son of man in whom there is no help.

Psalms 146:3 (WEB)

So what should we do instead?

Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it is the wellspring of life.

Proverbs 4:23 (WEB)

The only hope for the couple above is to cease trusting one another and instead to trust to Lord God and obey his commands for marriage and follow his pattern for romance and chivalry. Only then will a woman be able respect her husband even though he is a sinner and a man love his wife even though she is also a sinner. FREMYMIND.COM is not selling security but a lie.

Proverbs 6:27, Playing with Fire

Men, we need more frank conversation about sexual temptation.

God's wonderful design in our attraction to the beauty of the female body has been prostituted like never before in the name of freedom of expression. The amazing gift of human sexuality designed for the intimacy and safety of marriage commitment is prostituted in full view on the bed of United States businesses marketing departments and teen age Brittany Spears wannabes. Billions of dollars are made there because of our weak wills. The video *Every Young Man's Battle* with Stephen Arterburn and Fred Stoeker states that the pornography industry in the United States alone rakes in tens of billions of dollars a year! And that does not even include the profits of Hooters, Baywatch, and Maxim.

When I walk to work I pass a photography studio whose specialty has been photographing female clients in teasing poses, often displayed in the store window. I confronted them about it suggesting it was offensive to pass by their store with my children, but they boldly proclaimed that they are on par with Victoria's Secrets advertising. Well said, well said. I don't think any of us have a problem with what Victoria's got. God designed this beauty. But do we agree that God also designed that her stuff be kept a secret for her husband in the bedroom rather than prostituting herself on posters in the mall and on TV? Why invite children and the public into our bedrooms?

Sadly this run away lust train is dragging many of the disciples of Christ through the mire as well. Even the godliest Christian man fights a battle daily to keep his eyes pure for his wife or future wife and for Christ. The daughters of United States culture display their goods for sale on TV, movies, newspapers, magazines, emails, posters, screen savers, and the street. They sell their beauty in every venue possible, yet are they willing to give their beauty to their husband as a gracious gift in the bedroom?

Even the sincerest Christian woman is challenged to set a godly standard for modest dress. On one occasion I saw a beautiful Christian girl dressed inappropriately and dared to speak to her about it. I was informed that it was my problem and she can dress as she chooses. Doesn't she have a Christian dad, mom, brother, sister, friend, or husband that loves her enough to explain the facts of life? Or maybe instead she refuses the counsel of her dad.

Though men, she is right, it is our problem. Even if we persuade a few Christian women to respect themselves, the prostitution of female beauty will always be with us. There will always be men eager to buy and women eager to sell, whether we trade with money or trade with lustful glances. In fact a pastor friend once said to me that we have yet to see how bad it will get.

Consider God's strategy in times past. He said to Israel, *"In the fourth generation they will come here again, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet full"* (Genesis 15:16 WEB). God allowed the sin of the Amorites to grow GREATER before he brought punishment. God is a wise gardener. He allows weeds to grow to maturity because then they are obvious to all and more easily pulled out. We often want to deal with weeds quickly and simply mow them off. The problem is the weeds keep coming back. God, however, insists on tending the fertile ground of the heart and so allows weeds to develop strong roots so that when he rips them out he gets the whole weed, root and all.

One possible reason is explained by Malachi, *"Then you shall return and discern between*

the righteous and the wicked, between him who serves God and him who doesn't serve him" (Malachi 3:18 WEB). God is quite fairly giving us time to trust and obey him from the heart or to find a better way if we think that is possible. If we do not think God's way is best from the heart he is quite willing to let us learn the hard way. As we see from the cross this breaks his heart, but it is the only way to fully persuade and convert a rebel to his cause. He has no desire to force unwilling obedience by constant lectures. That is the unfortunate fate of too many earthly fathers. Our heavenly father, however, wants no fakers on his team, but complete devotion. So he shows us his inescapable grip of love through his powerful open hand. No one can fall any lower than his nailed scarred hand.

I said all that to challenge us with the wisdom of Solomon who said, *"Can a man scoop fire into his lap, and his clothes not be burned?"* (Proverbs 6:27 WEB). Have you scooped fire into your lap? Are you flirting with sexual sin in any way whatsoever? Are you a true Christian brother to the daughters of eve?

Proverbs 7:10,22, Parable of the Cherry Pie

Men, we need more frank conversation about sexual temptation.

I have suggested in previous articles that the heart of immodest dress in women is the disrespectful control of men and the heart of lust in men is the insensitive lack of love for women. Perhaps the extreme example of this in our times is Pamela Anderson, formerly of the popular TV series Baywatch, who has lured millions of men to her website to gaze upon her body. If we are to take Jesus' words literally in Matthew 5:28, Pamela Anderson has had sex with tens of millions of men. I am not sure there is a word in any language the world around for a woman such as this or the men that would use her, save the words of Christ for us all, *"forgive them for they don't know what they do."* We honestly do not know what we do, for we have slaughtered love and respect in favor of lust and seduction. Friends, sex is a wonderful gift, but we must care for this wonderful gift by the instructions of the one who gave it.

Consider a story...

A good king ruled his kingdom and he loved cherry pie. In fact this was the very king who invented cherry pie. He especially loved to see beautiful young maidens serve tasty cherry pie to handsome (and hungry) young men. But because he loved this so much he also established a simple rule in order to insure that this blessed dessert would not be mistreated and that everyone would get served. The king required that the young men eat the meat and potatoes of COMMITMENT to one young woman first and then eat ONLY her cherry pie for dessert. The rule seemed fair enough, but sadly the king hater, who also hated faithfulness and waiting for dessert, began to whisper to the young men and women and they listened to him. One young man forsook self-control and ate a whole cherry pie before the meat and potatoes and that without permission. He totally abandoned love for the young maiden and thought only of her pie, selfishly eating it without permission leaving her violated and broken. Another young woman forsook respect and waved her cherry pie in front of the young men without offering any meat and potatoes leaving them all in a wretched state. Yet another young man and woman both spurned the king's command and conspired together and ate the cherry pie before the meat and potatoes. The good king was deeply saddened but also was a forgiving king and already had a plan to repair the damage done as well as remove the one who hated him and hated waiting for dessert. However, because the king was also a father he punished the young men and women severely to teach them to love and respect him and each other so they could learn to serve and eat cherry pie according to his rule with thankfulness.

The end.

Solomon, however, puts it more frankly. *"Then out came a woman to meet him, dressed like a prostitute and with crafty intent... all at once he followed her like an ox going to the slaughter, like a deer stepping into a noose,"* (Proverbs 7:10, 22 NIV).

American culture today honors the prostitute while we blindly send ourselves to the slaughter. We have reached new levels of insanity as women parade their sexuality before men, and men encourage women to set traps of lust leading us to death by

adultery. Christian woman how are you dressed and what is your intent? Christian man who are you following and where are you stepping? Sad as our nation is will Christians hold on to the good news that Christ has paid for all our sin as well as Pamela's? So whether we are Pamela, a Pamela user, or some other kind of sinner altogether the ground is level at the foot of the cross.

Psalm 108, The Help of Man is Worthless

*My heart is steadfast, God.
I will sing and I will make music with my soul.
Wake up, harp and lyre!
I will wake up the dawn.
I will give thanks to you, Yahweh, among the nations.
I will sing praises to you among the peoples.
For your loving kindness is great above the heavens.
Your faithfulness reaches to the skies.
Be exalted, God, above the heavens!
Let your glory be over all the earth.
That your beloved may be delivered,
save with your right hand, and answer us.
God has spoken from his sanctuary: "In triumph,
I will divide Shechem, and measure out the valley of Succoth.
Gilead is mine. Manasseh is mine.
Ephraim also is my helmet.
Judah is my scepter.
Moab is my wash pot.
I will toss my sandal on Edom.
I will shout over Philistia."
Who will bring me into the fortified city?
Who has led me to Edom?
Haven't you rejected us, God?
You don't go out, God, with our armies.
Give us help against the enemy,
for the help of man is vain.
Through God, we will do valiantly.
For it is he who will tread down our enemies.*

Psalm 108 (WEB)

Good people help each other every day. We help each other to work, to learn, to grow, and even to relax. Tonight as I put my daughter to bed she volunteered that she wanted to get up early to make the family pancakes for breakfast to surprise her mom and to be her good helper. What a blessing when we help each other with a joyful attitude! It makes life downright fun!

Even the Bible makes relative statements about us helping each other, but because the Bible is the Word of our Heavenly Father he also speaks in absolutes. And God also wisely reminds us through David that... the help of man is worthless. God reminds us of this absolute, not to discourage us, but instead to encourage us that he is the good God who helps us 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, absolutely. Even the best of our friends will let us down at times, but God never will, ever.

Furthermore, while it is true that on a good day we are a real help to each other, this apparent helpfulness is actually our good God himself at work through us by his gracious choice. The glory goes to God for every good thing. Sin has spoiled our helpfulness and we are in desperate need of God. All too frequently we do not help, but make more work, impede learning, stunt growth, and cause stress in one another's lives. We need help from

God!

The good news is with God's help we will be reminded to ask him to be at work through us in spite of the weaknesses that make us worthless. With God's help we will give him the glory even if he happens to use us in a small or big way to be a help to others. With God's help we will be victorious over the enemy. Help us, God!

Psalm 10:16-18, Davids War on Terror

Terrorism is nothing new.

Ever since sin has entered the world there have been oppressors and oppressed. Ever since the kingdoms of this earth have become the kingdoms of Satan, fathers and brothers have also beaten and abandoned their children and neighbors terrorized. The ancient Hebrew, King David, knew this as well and wrote Psalm 10 to point us to the only one who can deliver us from terror.

*16) Yahweh is King forever and ever! The nations will perish out of his land.
17) Yahweh, you have heard the desire of the humble. You will prepare their heart. You will cause your ear to hear, 18) to judge the fatherless and the oppressed, that man who is of the earth may terrify no more.*

Psalm 10:16-18 (WEB)

The real source of terror on the earth is sinful man. In fact we are hopelessly surrounded by terrorists. On one hand we have hypocrites clothed in self-righteousness, pleading 'trust me,' while inwardly they are raging animals ready to devour. False believers fill the pews with hearts too full of lust to have room for Jesus. On the other hand we have the licentious, reveling in their lust, enticing 'live free,' while inwardly they are corpses filled with death. Terrible unbelievers empty the earth of all good leaving a trail of mangled fetuses behind.

And to cut off all possible escape you and I are also members of sinful mankind terrifying others with our own hypocrisy and licentiousness from time to time. Who will deliver us from the terror that surrounds us and indwells us? The only hope for deliverance is God's war of grace in this world. Jesus is advancing to the battle ground of our very hearts to redeem that which was lost to Satan's power.

This is great hope.

David reminds us above that even nations will perish from the earth and fail to save, but our gracious Lord will remain king forever. Has the Lord our eternal king conquered your terrorist heart with grace?

Lord God, deliver us!

Psalm 16:11, The Position of Pleasure

Consider the incredible dignity of mankind, created in God's image, a reflection of his awesome character, worth, and glory, created to walk upright, think intelligently, care for creation, serve one another, and demonstrate loving kindness and compassion. Yet consider the depravity to which we have fallen. God created us for his good pleasure intending us to take pleasure in his goodness, but we have made pleasure our god and lost all goodness.

hedonism pronunciation: [heed-n-iz-uhm] part of speech: noun

Meanings:

1. The doctrine that pleasure or happiness is the highest good.
2. Devotion to pleasure as a way of life.

Example:

The later Roman emperors were notorious for their hedonism.

Unbelievers in our day know no shame. If there ever was a day that hedonism was scorned as base, it is no longer. The unscrupulous marketers of sin no longer hide their shame in dark of night, but revel in light of day with public websites and resorts brazenly named '*Hedonism.*' An associate of mine once boasted about spelunking in one of these lust lairs with no apparent qualm of conscience. The dignity of upright man intended to carry faithfulness and honor has been reduced to the equal of savage animals crawling on the ground. Typically we are safe from dangerous animals because they are fearful of civilization. But when wild animals roam the streets in open daylight flashing their teeth and advertising their loathsome squalor one thing is certain. Get your women and children off the streets and load your spiritual weapons for bear because rabid and ravenous beasts are on the prowl.

Yet this is nothing new. The ancient writings of the Christian Scriptures confronted the worst of wickedness in their day and in ours. Paul warned godly men that there will be, "... *lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding a form of godliness, but having denied its power. Turn away from these, also*" (II Timothy 3:4b-5 WEB). That is the counsel of Scripture.

All of this yucky stuff is only mentioned so that God's people can lay proper claim to the true position of pleasure. David, the man after God's own heart, sings in Psalm 16:11 (WEB), "*You will show me the path of life. In your presence is fullness of joy. In your right hand there are pleasures forever more.*"

Pleasure is created by God and is at the prominent position of God's almighty right hand. But hedonists shovel pleasure into their smeared faces with both right and left hands serving their god. Ascetics deny God's goodness forsaking pleasure, cutting off His right hand in the effort to get closer to Him. Yet the Westminster Shorter Catechism asks the simple question, "*What is the chief end of man?*" Do God's people still remember the answer? "*Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.*" We are created for God's pleasure to take pleasure in Him and His creation giving thanks to Him!

This hope moved Moses, Paul, and Timothy.

24) By faith, Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25) choosing rather to share ill treatment with God's people than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a time, 26) considering the

reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he looked to the reward.

Hebrews 11:24-26 (WEB)

3) You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4) No soldier on duty entangles himself in the affairs of life, that he may please him who enrolled him as a soldier.

2 Timothy 2:3-4 (WEB)

How does it move you?

Psalm 99:8, Forgiven Yet Not Unpunished

God is a perfect heavenly father and so he always forgives...and punishes as well. Consider God's fatherhood of Israel. *"O LORD our God, you answered them; you were to Israel a forgiving God, though you punished their misdeeds"* (Psalm 99:8 NIV).

God always forgave Israel, in fact he died for all of them as well as us. However, he also punished them and sometimes quite severely. Korah rebelled against Moses and so God swallowed Korah and his family alive into hole in the ground. Moses also rebelled against God's direction and struck the rock and therefore was not permitted into the promised land. David committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered Uriah to hide it and so God took the life of Bathsheba's child and told David that the sword and trouble would never leave his household. The nation of Israel forsook the Lord for idols and so God sent the wicked nations of Assyria and Babylon to punish them. Jesus even prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple because Israel rejected him, and in 70 AD Rome leveled Jerusalem to dust.

Some would blind their eyes in dread fear of this God and say, *"That was the Old Testament God. Jesus wouldn't do that!"* The problem for them is that Jesus is the Old Testament God. Even in the New Testament dispensation under the New Covenant we see Jesus forgiving... and punishing. For example, the Christians Ananias and Sapphira, a husband and wife, agreed to partner in lying to the Holy Spirit and God immediately took their lives. God is a perfect father and so all these people were forgiven, yet not unpunished.

You may be aghast to consider that God did these things. Your faith may still be bubbling with the good news that Christ has forever forgiven your sin, just as it should be! However, in the midst of our excitement we must not neglect that we have terribly important work to do. Because we have received forgiveness, Christ has joined us to his ministry of forgiveness and... his ministry of discipline toward yet others!

In Luke 6 we are commanded *"Do not judge...forgive."* We should not condemn one another because of sin, but seek opportunity to forgive one another. In 1 Corinthians 5 we are also commanded to *"judge those inside (the church)."* Though we are not to condemn each other, believers are commanded to identify sin, correct, and reprove one another. The world's ideal is *"live and let live,"* but such is not the true love between believers.

Sin is destructive and so true love demands that we lovingly invade one another's lives so that all may finish the race without shame. How are we to discipline one another when rebellion remains? God himself maintains the authority to punish with trial, sickness, and even death under the New Covenant just as he did the under the Old Covenant. Under the Old Covenant God also commanded Israel to punish rebels by death. However, now, under the New Covenant, believers are commanded not to kill, but to disassociate with anyone calling themselves a Christian who is following an immoral life.

Please do invite your unbelieving neighbor into your house to share Christ with him, even if he is a drunkard or any type of sinner. However, disassociate with anyone claiming to be a Christian who is immoral or a drunkard. Do this so that he may realize the gravity of his sin and perhaps be saved from self-destruction, and also so that others are not led astray by his rebellion. May this doctrine keep us close to the grace of Christ where abundant forgiveness and power over sin can be found. But don't take it from me, study 1 Corinthians 5 for yourself for God's pure word unadulterated by my ravings.

Rescued by the Eternal Life Guard!

Does God rescue us? When I first heard the idea years ago that God does not rescue the fool or the unrighteous, Proverbs 19:19, I became quite afraid. Who is a greater fool or more unrighteous than me? Will God not rescue me? And what about you? Will he rescue you?

Rather than try to find assurance from the false hope that we are not a fool or not unrighteous join me in a quick study of the word "rescue" in Scripture to learn if God will in fact rescue us. The goal of this study will be to answer six questions:

1. What does our flesh want to be rescued from?
2. What does God want us to be rescued from?
3. Can we rescue ourselves?
4. Does God rescue all mankind, the righteous and the unrighteous?
5. What does God's grace teach us about rescue?
6. Should believers rescue other men?

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 37:21 (NIV), *"But Reuben heard this and rescued him out of their hands and said, 'Let us not take his life.'* " Reuben tried to rescue Joseph from his brothers.

1 Samuel 14:45 (NIV), *"But the people said to Saul, 'Must Jonathan die, who has brought about this great deliverance in Israel? Far from it! As the LORD lives, not one hair of his head shall fall to the ground, for he has worked with God this day.'* So the people rescued Jonathan and he did not die." The people rescued Jonathan from his father, Saul.

1 Samuel 17:35 (NIV), *"I went out after him and attacked him, and rescued it [the sheep] from his [the lion's] mouth; and when he rose up against me, I seized him by his beard and struck him and killed him."* David rescued a sheep from a lion.

1 Samuel 30:18 (NIV), *"So David recovered all that the Amalekites had taken, and rescued his two wives."* David rescued his wives from the Amalekites.

2 Samuel 22:20 (NIV), *"He also brought me forth into a broad place; He rescued me, because He delighted in me."* God rescued David from trouble.

2 Samuel 22:49 (NIV), *"Who also brings me out from my enemies; You even lift me above those who rise up against me; You rescue me from the violent man."* God rescued David from his enemies.

Nehemiah 9:28 (NIV), *"But as soon as they had rest, they did evil again before You; Therefore You abandoned them to the hand of their enemies, so that they ruled over them When they cried again to You, You heard from heaven, and many times You rescued them according to Your compassion,"* God rescued Israel from their enemies.

Psalms 6:4 (NIV), *"Return, O LORD, rescue my soul; Save me because of your loving kindness."* God rescued David's soul from judgment.

Psalms 18:19 (NIV), *"He brought me forth also into a broad place; He rescued me, because He delighted in me."* God rescued David from trouble.

Psalm 18:48 (NIV), *"He delivers me from my enemies; surely you lift me above those who rise up against me; You rescue me from the violent man."* God rescued David from his enemies.

Psalm 34:7 (NIV), *"The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him, and rescues them."* God rescues his people from trouble.

Psalm 82:4 (NIV), *"Rescue the weak and needy; Deliver them out of the hand of the wicked."* God rescues the weak and needy from the wicked.

Psalm 119:153 (NIV), *"Look upon my affliction and rescue me, for I do not forget your law."* God rescued David from trouble.

Psalm 144:10 (NIV), *"Who gives salvation to kings, who rescues David His servant from the evil sword."* God rescued David from the evil sword.

Proverbs 19:19 (NIV), *"A man of great anger will bear the penalty, for if you rescue him, you will only have to do it again."* Do not rescue an angry man from the effects of his sin.

Proverbs 23:14 (NIV), *"You shall strike him with the rod and rescue his soul from Sheol."* Punish your child to rescue him from God's judgment.

Isaiah 31:5 (NIV), *"Like flying birds so the LORD of hosts will protect Jerusalem He will protect and deliver it; He will pass over and rescue it."* God rescues Jerusalem from trouble.

Isaiah 46:2 (NIV), *"They stooped over, they have bowed down together; They could not rescue the burden, but have themselves gone into captivity."* Man cannot rescue himself from anything.

Isaiah 49:25 (NIV), *"Surely, thus says the LORD, 'even the captives of the mighty man will be taken away, and the prey of the tyrant will be rescued; for I will contend with the one who contends with you, and I will save your sons.'" God will rescue his people from tyrants.*

Jeremiah 39:18 (NIV), *"For I will certainly rescue you, and you will not fall by the sword; but you will have your own life as booty, because you have trusted in Me," declares the LORD.'* " God will rescue his people from the sword.

Daniel 6:14 (NIV), *"Then, as soon as the king heard this statement, he was deeply distressed and set his mind on delivering Daniel; and even until sunset he kept exerting himself to rescue him."* The King rescued Daniel from his own edict.

Daniel 11:41 (NIV), *"He will also enter the Beautiful Land, and many countries will fall; but these will be rescued out of his hand: Edom, Moab and the foremost of the sons of Ammon."* God rescues nations from judgment.

Daniel 12:1 (NIV), *"Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued."* God rescues the elect from the Lake of Fire.

Hosea 2:10 (NIV), *"And then I will uncover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and no one will rescue her out of My hand."* Sinful man cannot be rescued from God's punishment!

Micah 4:10 (NIV), *"Writhe and labor to give birth, Daughter of Zion, like a woman in childbirth; for now you will go out of the city, dwell in the field, and go to Babylon. There you will be rescued; There the LORD will redeem you from the hand of your enemies."* God rescued his people from Babylon.

Micah 5:8 (NIV), *"The remnant of Jacob will be among the nations, among many peoples Like a lion among the beasts of the forest, like a young lion among flocks of sheep, which, if he passes through, tramples down and tears, and there is none to rescue."* No one can rescue but God.

Matthew 27:43 (NIV), *"HE TRUSTS IN GOD; LET GOD RESCUE Him now, IF HE DELIGHTS IN HIM; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.' "* Man taunts Christ about rescue, even while he is rescuing us!

Luke 1:74 (NIV), *"To grant us that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear."* God rescues us from our enemies.

Acts 12:11 (NIV), *"When Peter came to himself, he said, 'Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.'" God rescued Peter from Herod.*

Acts 23:27 (NIV), *"When this man was arrested by the Jews and was about to be slain by them, I came up to them with the troops and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman."* Claudius rescued Paul from the Jews.

Romans 15:31 (NIV), *"that I may be rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints;"* God rescued Paul from the disobedient.

Galatians 1:4 (NIV), *"who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,"* God rescues us from our sins and from this evil age.

Colossians 1:13 (NIV), *"For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,"* God rescues us from the domain of darkness.

1 Thessalonians 1:10 (NIV), *"and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come."* Jesus rescues us from God's wrath.

2 Thessalonians 3:2 (NIV), *"and that we will be rescued from perverse and evil men; for not all have faith."* God rescues us from perverse and evil men.

2 Timothy 3:11 (NIV), *"persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me!"* Though Paul was eventually beheaded in Rome, God rescued Paul from losing faith despite persecutions and sufferings.

2 Timothy 4:17 (NIV), *"But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth."* God rescued Paul from the lion's mouth of many trials.

2 Timothy 4:18 (NIV), *"The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen."* God rescued Paul from every evil deed keeping his hope on the heavenly kingdom, though he

suffered many trials.

2 Peter 2:7 (NIV), *“and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men.”* God rescued Lot from destruction in Sodom.

2 Peter 2:9 (NIV), *“then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the Day of Judgment,”* God rescues godly men from temptation and judgment.

CONCLUSION

Here are some answers from the Scriptures to our questions:

1. What does our flesh want to be rescued from?

From dying with Christ so that our selfishness and our idols may live, Galatians 5:17.

2. What does God want us to be rescued from?

From dying for our selfishness and our idols so that Christ may live in us, 2 Timothy 2:9.

3. Can we rescue ourselves?

Sinful man cannot rescue themselves from Christ's transforming love, Hebrews 12:10.

Depraved man has no desire to be rescued to Christ-likeness, Ephesians 2:1-3.

4. Does God rescue all mankind, the righteous and the unrighteous?

God graces no one to rescue a life for selfishness or service to idols, Isaiah 30:15-16.

God graces some with belief in Christ to rescue them from judgment in Hades, Luke 16:25.

God graces some believers to escape sin and be rescued from sin's fruit, Galatians 6:8.

God graces some believers to do good and be rescued from fruitlessness, Galatians 6:9.

God graces some believers with rescue from suffering, 1 Corinthians 11:30-31.

God graces all believers with secure salvation to rescue us from falling away, Jude 1:24.

God graces all believers with various trials to rescue us from immaturity, James 1:2-4.

God graces elect mankind with rescue from judgment in the Lake of Fire, Revelation 20:15.

God graces elect mankind with eternal Christ-likeness rescuing us from mortality, 1 Corinthians 15:51.

5. What does God's grace teach us about rescue?

God is praised for rescuing our souls, for no one deserves his grace, Ephesians 1:11-14.

God does not enjoy our suffering, but our repentance, Isaiah 30:18, Ezekiel 18:23, Hebrews 12:11.

6. Should believers rescue other men?

Those rescued by grace are moved to serve as agents of God's grace, 2 Corinthians 1:3-7.

Like Christ we should rescue men to salvation through the gospel, Romans 9:1-5.

Like Christ we should not rescue people to live selfishly or serve idols, Galatians 5:11-12.

Consider Job's radical faith, "*Though He slay me, I will hope in Him*" (Job 13:15 NIV). Job had the hope that even if God ended his life in loss, despair, and unfortunate death that God was still his mighty rescuer to rescue him to eternal life.

For example, Jim Elliot and his comrades also decided NOT to rescue themselves from physical death by the angry natives with the guns they carried because God had already rescued their souls to eternal life while the natives did not yet know Christ. Elliot's story is excellently portrayed in the movie, The End of Spear.

Abraham also rescued Lot even though Lot's character was a mixed bag. Lot selfishly chose the better land when Abraham gave him the choice and Lot also chose to move into the wicked city of Sodom, though Peter writes that Lot did have a righteous soul. Abraham rescued Lot even though reasons could have been found to let him die.

Job, Elliot, and Abraham were undeserving men rescued by Christ who gladly served as agents of grace to rescue other undeserving men.

Finally, I conclude that Christ is no mere earthly lifeguard waiting to rescue our drowning bodies. Hardly! He is the eternal lifeguard acting to rescue our souls already drowned in sin. While our flesh seeks to live for selfishness and the care of our idols, Christ seeks that our selfishness would die and our idols crumble. Every move he makes in his creation is to rescue mankind to Christ-likeness for eternal life. Unending Love for his people is the foundation of his every decision. There is no vindictiveness with God. So, friend, if you think that God does not love you or has decided not to rescue you, think again. The very trial or crumbled idol you face has been ordained by God's love... for the very rescue of your soul. It is the tender mercy of Christ that serves us the bitter cup for our salvation.

God is my and your eternal lifeguard and the mighty rescuer of our souls!

Revelation 12:11, Not so Dear Life

We American Christians have grown soft in the pursuit of happiness. For example, I recently enjoyed chatting with a friend while at an amusement park about how to safely watch worldly movies using technologies to remove objectionable content. Later I reflected that as we *strolled at the park discussing movies*, Christians round the world *enlist as soldiers* of Christ to evangelize, disciple, and testify, even unto death. Revelation 12:11 (WEB) says, *“They overcame him because of the Lamb's blood, and because of the word of their testimony. They didn't love their life, even to death.”* While we hold on for dear life (and comfort), these disciples often lose their lives holding on to dear truth, the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We American Christians have also grown soft behind the American flag. While Christians round the world suffer for preaching the truth to their countrymen, we deceive ourselves believing that there is such a thing as a “Christian Nation” while we quietly preach the truth to ourselves in Sunday school. Certainly many American’s have bravely served in war, even losing their lives, for the noble goal of protecting their countrymen. But all is ranked in the military for priority decision making and there is a goal ranked higher than protecting the American “*way of life*.” We must soberly remember it is not our commander’s objective to save the “*way of life*” in America or any nation, but to save people from sin. He commands those that would obey to enlist in his military campaign. He commands you and me to follow him who is the “*Way, Truth, and Life*.” Warfare demands commitment, resolve, and sacrifice, whether a physical or spiritual campaign. Rank the campaigns and see for yourself below... or get back to the movies.

Warfare	Physical (flesh and blood)	Spiritual (not flesh and blood)
Suicide	Army News Service, Aug. 20, 2007 - In terms of a threat to Army National Guard Soldiers, it easily rivals rounds from a concealed sniper, the devastation of an improvised explosive device or a blast from rocket-propelled grenade. The threat doesn't stem from any foreign armed forces or military power, and casualties resulting from this threat are often the saddest and most heartbreaking of deaths for the family and friends of these soldiers. The threat is suicide, which is the No. 3 cause of death for National Guard Soldiers so far this year...	Like physical warfare the pressures of spiritual warfare can result in tragedy as terrible as suicide if we are unbelieving. Judas sought escape, yet our commander must lead on in spite of the loss, Matthew 27:1-10.
Fratricide	1863 - Lt. Gen. T. J. “Stonewall” Jackson, a famous Confederate Civil War general, was accidentally mortally wounded by his own troops at Chancellorsville, VA.. 2004 - Pat Tillman, a famous American football player, was a friendly fire victim in Afghanistan.	Like physical warfare our failures in spiritual warfare result in harming our own men, yet our commander will not give up the battle, James 4:1-

		12.
Purple Heart	The Purple Heart is a United States military decoration awarded in the name of the President to those who have been wounded or killed while serving on or after 5 April 1917 with the U.S. military. The National Purple Heart Hall of Honor is located in Newburgh, New York.	Like physical warfare there are honors bestowed in spiritual warfare and Paul championed the decoration of Christ-likeness, Philippians 3:7-11.
Command	You ask, What is our policy? I will say; <i>"It is to wage war, by sea, land and air, with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us: to wage war against a monstrous tyranny, never surpassed in the dark lamentable catalogue of human crime. That is our policy."</i> You ask, What is our aim? I can answer with one word: <i>"Victory - victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory however long and hard the road may be; for without victory there is no survival."</i> - Churchill	Like physical warfare strong leadership is needed to press soldiers to spiritual warfare with courage and resolve as Jesus commanded Peter to follow, John 21:15-19.
Objective	Temporal survival	Like physical warfare, spiritual warfare has an objective, though higher in rank, eternal life, Ephesians 6:10-20.
Rank	<i>"For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood..."</i> Ephesians 6:12a (WEB)	<i>"...but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world's rulers of the darkness of this age, and against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places."</i> Ephesians 6:12b (WEB)

Revelation 20:11-15, A.M.A.Z.I.N.G. Grace

The good news of Jesus Christ is wonderful news. This news has given new life to every believer, from the uneducated fool who knows nothing but simple faith in Christ, to the proud intellectual who knows all but still needs a savior. And the good news of Christ is superbly worded in the New Testament so that we cannot reduce salvation to mere head knowledge, but instead that our hearts would bow in submission and our hands be lifted in worship of the Lord Jesus Christ, Almighty God. One church I visited refused to even allow human fallibility to codify a doctrinal statement of the gospel believing that it was already excellently done for them with the Scriptures themselves.

I also have already suggested in a previous Zinger, [Optimism Out of Control, Part 2: In the Same Place!](#), that ratiocinative systems like Calvinism or Arminianism fall short of summarizing the good news as expressed in the Scriptures. Sadly the multitude of doctrinal codes in Christendom today has divided Christ's fellowship beyond our repair. The Mennonites are afraid to consider God's grace in predestination, as I often am. The Catholics are afraid to let faith be a gift of God's grace, but make it a work of man, as I often do. The Presbyterians are afraid to consider that God's salvation extends to all mankind in their haste to limit Christ's atonement, as I often am. The Baptists are afraid to consider that God's grace was effectively applied at the cross to all God's people and continue their efforts to apply it to themselves and others, as I often do. The Methodists are afraid to preach the urgency of salvation and are happy to simply play church, as I often do. And... the Lutherans who begat the reformation are now divided over the good news once again, as I often am. The church has had a great fall and all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put us together again, but the King will!

Fear is at the root of the division we see in Christendom today. We desperately need salvation. It is a most painful, nagging, uncertainty buried deep down in our souls. We need rest and assurance for our souls, but where can we go to get certain guaranteed salvation? We turn to church and the best doctrinal statements we can find; yet questions still remain like icy splinters in our hearts. How can anyone know if God will grant them heaven with certainty or give them the hell they deserve? How can we settle the matter today and find peace?

The answer, and there is an answer, is found with Jesus Christ and his word. Turn to him and you will find amazing grace to save and assure your soul. But will we turn to him or remain a divided body as each one turns to whatever code seems best to him? The last thing we need is yet another code, but since we are all firmly seat-belted into our distinct churches and doctrines speeding in different directions already let me throw this wrench into all our engines. Here is yet another ratiocinative codification of the gospel of Christ that was added to my simple faith that, I was taught, I then objected to, I then embraced, I then prayed about, I then deliberately forgot about, God then reminded me of, I then objected to again, I then forgot about again, God then reminded me of again, I then closed my eyes to God's powerful defense of, I then forgot about again, I then suffered for my refusal of, God then reminded me yet again, and now, I have the honor to tell you, by God's grace. I hardly have the same faithfulness of Apostle Paul, yet I have received grace from the same savior. And so I pray that this good news would break your engine and rebuild it again as he has mine and that we would see answer to Jesus' prayer, that we would be one, even as the Trinity is one.

A.M.A.Z.I.N.G. GRACE

Apart from our good deeds and even our faith God the Father predestined His people for salvation, Ephesians 1:4, 2:8-9.

Mankind is entirely and utterly bound to disobedience by God the Father for his purpose of giving mercy to all mankind, Romans 11:32.

Atonement is made for all mankind by God the Son, Jesus Christ, forgiving the sins of all mankind, I John 2:2.

Zealous faith in Christ is awakened in each individual human being by God the Holy Spirit at God's appointed time, I Corinthians 15:22.

Irrevocable gifts and calling are granted to all mankind whether believing or unbelieving, by God, Romans 11:28-31.

Not all mankind are chosen trust and obey Jesus before their physical death and punishment in Hades for rejecting Christ, Luke 16:19-31.

God finally saves all His people he predestined in the Book of Life from The Lake of Fire, which is instead prepared solely for the Devil and his angels, Revelation 20:11-15.

Revelation 20:11-15, Optimism Out of Control, Part 5: Hades Gives Up!

Good Reason for Fear

19) *"Now there was a certain rich man, and he was clothed in purple and fine linen, living in luxury every day. 20) A certain beggar, named Lazarus, was taken to his gate, full of sores, 21) and desiring to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. Yes, even the dogs came and licked his sores. 22) The beggar died, and he was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died, and was buried. 23) In Hades, he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far off, and Lazarus at his bosom. 24) He cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue! For I am in anguish in this flame.'*

25) *"But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that you, in your lifetime, received your good things, and Lazarus, in the same way, bad things. But here he is now comforted, and you are in anguish. 26) Besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, that those who want to pass from here to you are not able, and that no one may cross over from there to us.'*

27) *"He said, 'I ask you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house; 28) for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, so they won't also come into this place of torment.'*

29) *"But Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them.'*

30) *"He said, 'No, father Abraham, but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'*

31) *"He said to him, 'If they don't listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if one rises from the dead.' "*

Luke 16:19-31 (WEB)

Some find comfort by simply not reading these verses. Others find comfort by believing that this is a parable. Why not find comfort through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ to avoid the fate of this rich man who burns in Hell?

Good Reason for Fanaticism

11) *I saw a great white throne, and him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. There was found no place for them. 12) I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and they opened books. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to*

their works. 13) The sea gave up the dead who were in it. Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them. They were judged, each one according to his works. 14) Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15) If anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.

Revelation 20:11-15 (WEB)

Say what? Hades will be thrown into the lake of fire empty, giving up every soul! The rich man above will be plucked out of Hades to stand before the Great White Throne Judgment and his final fate (as ours) is penned in the pages of the Book of Life. I grew up sensibly on the farm where black was black and white was white, men were men and women were women, Hell was Hell and Heaven was Heaven. However, fanaticism for God's saving grace to all mankind should ignite through a little study of Greek and the revelation that Hell and the Lake of Fire are not the same place. For now we ask what is the final fate of the rich man who burns in Hell, is his name in the Book of Life, or will he also burn in the Lake of Fire?

Good Reason for Faith

4) For Christ is the fulfillment of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. 5) For Moses writes about the righteousness of the law, "The one who does them will live by them." 6) But the righteousness which is of faith says this, "Don't say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down); 7) or, 'Who will descend into the abyss?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead.)" 8) But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth, and in your heart;" that is, the word of faith which we preach: 9) that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10) For with the heart, one believes resulting in righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made resulting in salvation. 11) For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes in him will not be disappointed.

Romans 10:4-11 (WEB)

Can we know the rich man's fate? Well, can we know if our own name is in the Book of Life? Some imagine they wrote their own name in the book by believing, but we cannot ascend to Heaven with a pen. Others imagine they erased their unbelief by doing good works. However, we cannot descend into the abyss with an eraser to undo our crimes against Christ.

Why not instead repent, believe, and know that Jesus wrote our names in the book before the world began? Why not rejoice that his blood paid for the sins of all mankind? Jesus has chosen to forgive the sins of every single human being from the almost perfect to the heinous whether Hitler or Mother Teresa, the unborn or the dead, the Jew or the Arab, or me or you.

Rejoice!

The Rich man's sins are paid and forgiven...

just as are yours...

by the blood of Christ!

Revelation 20:11-15, Optimism Out of Control, Part 6: If, If, If, If, If, If, If, , , ,

1) Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2) When he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was hungry afterward. 3) The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."

4) But he answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.' "

Matthew 4:1-4 (WEB)

Praise God, Jesus is not bullied by Satan's taunting 'if', refusing even to speak in defense of his identity.

You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt has lost its flavor, with what will it be salted? It is then good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under the feet of men.

Matthew 5:13 (WEB)

Jesus challenges us with the 'if' of a thought provoking conundrum. Hey folks, salt that isn't salty isn't salt and never was salt!

9) Or who is there among you, who, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? 10) Or if he asks for a fish, who will give him a serpent? 11) If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

Matthew 7:9-11 (WEB)

Jesus highlights the silliness of doubting his goodness with the 'if' of a painful truth. What father is not good to his children and yet Jesus reminds us that even the best human dad is evil while he is trustworthy.

24) But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, "This man does not cast out demons, except by Beelzebul, the prince of the demons."

25) Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. 26) If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? 27) If I by Beelzebul cast

out demons, by whom do your children cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. 28) But if I by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then God's Kingdom has come upon you.

Matthew 12:24-28 (WEB)

Jesus exposes the sinister Pharisees with two impossible *'if's* and a one certain *'if.'*

21) Peter seeing him, said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?"

22) Jesus said to him, "If I desire that he stay until I come, what is that to you? You follow me." 23) This saying therefore went out among the brothers, that this disciple wouldn't die. Yet Jesus didn't say to him that he wouldn't die, but, "If I desire that he stay until I come, what is that to you?" 24) This is the disciple who testifies about these things, and wrote these things. We know that his witness is true.

John 21:21-24 (WEB)

John points out that Jesus might use a hypothetical *'if.'* He is not saying that Jesus' statement is untrue, but that the condition to satisfy the *'if'* might never be true. Jesus final will was still not revealed.

1) If therefore there is any exhortation in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any tender mercies and compassion, 2) make my joy full by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind;

Philippians 2:1-2 (WEB)

Paul uses *'if's* to exhort believers to love others like we are loved by God, that is, *'if'* you know God's love!

11) I saw a great white throne, and him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. There was found no place for them. 12) I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and they opened books. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works. 13) The sea gave up the dead who were in it. Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them. They were judged, each one according to his works. 14) Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15) If anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.

Rev 20:11-15 (WEB)

And how does the Spirit use this *'if'*?

He says *'if'* your name is not in the Lamb's book you are sentenced to the Lake of

Fire. Scripture also tells us explicitly of only three people that are not in the book: The Beast who is worshiped instead of Christ, The False Prophet who is heard instead of the Holy Spirit, and Satan who is followed instead of God. Matthew 25 further explains that the Lake of Fire is prepared for the Devil and his angels.

Yet Christians hope for eternal life, and through faith see their names in Jesus' book... written before the creation of the world! Faith did not add our names to the book, but instead opened our eyes to the great hope of our names ALREADY written! Do you trust that your name is already written in the Lamb's Book of Life? What is your destiny?

And Christians also hope for the defeat of Satan and also the defeat of the gates of the Hades. Friends, think about it! What is the only possible destiny of the unbelieving men punished in Hades... since Jesus died for them as well and loves them dearly?

If...

Revelation 20:13-15, Out of Control Optimism Part 8, Your Name in The Book of Life!

13) The sea gave up the dead who were in it. Death and Hades [HELL] gave up the dead who were in them. They were judged, each one according to his works. 14) Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15) If anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.

Revelation 20:13-15 (WEB)

My younger kids are at church youth group, my oldest is at a Christian college group, and my wife is grocery shopping. Wow, praise God! A whole night to myself! This has not happened in months, perhaps more than a year. Better yet there are no emergency house or automobile repairs waiting for me!

So I will relish this gift from God and seize the moment as well as my pen to write one more installment in my *Optimism Out of Control* series. I am hoping to write a longer more thoughtful conclusion to my series, *Optimism Out of Control - The Book*, but one has to warm up to these things after being away from literary endeavor for so long. So here is a quick little warm up, an expansion and revision of my comments on my previous post, [Revelation 20:11-15, Optimism Out of Control, Part 6: If, If, If, If, If, If, If, If](#).

So let's consider the Scripture the Holy Spirit gave us above. One might easily conclude that there is absolutely nothing optimistic about this passage at all. Even the mention of God casting the unredeemed into the Lake of Fire is a banned thought for most. But before we ban and burn the *Book* let's not be too hasty. God does call Himself '*love*' after all in I John 4:16. He also says his purpose is to show off his grace in Ephesians 2:7. And the complete atonement of ALL mankind was the purpose of His death on the cross as explained in I John 2:2. Furthermore, we must strive to understand God's grace in the hopes of agreeing with God's judgments, lest we imagine that we would bring tears to Heaven over the fate of the unredeemed. So let's cool the jets and take a slower look at this passage.

First, we see that all the people currently being punished in Hades are safely extracted to stand before the Lord at the Great White Throne judgment. This may be more fully explained in Matthew 25:31-46, though the ordering of the various judgments is disputed among theologians. None-the-less, the extraction of all people from Hades and the discarding of an empty Hades into the Lake of Fire is at least...

...potentially optimistic. After all why extract these people?

Second, we see that the final destiny of each individual person is truly the choice of God's grace alone, not man's choice. He alone has written the names of His chosen people in His *Book of Life* from before the creation of the world, Ephesians 1:3-10. There is no condition we could possibly meet to add our name, nor a condition we could fail to remove our name. Here is great optimism that our fate is fully and completely resting with God and He invites (and commands) us to rest in Him. Some try to pen their own name into *The Book of Life* with 'faith.' But you will find no true security if your 'salvation' hinges on your own decision in any way, and there will be no end to your deciding as you 'swing' one way, then another, for assurance. Why not look at Christ instead through the 'eye glasses' of true faith

and see your name in *His Book* written by His love from before you were born?

Great optimism is to be found through trusting our destiny with Christ.

Third, you may be afraid of the passage above because you have too quickly concluded who the redeemed are and who the unredeemed are. "How silly," you say, "Of course Christians are the redeemed and non-Christians are the unredeemed!" Yet grant me this, many whose names are in the *Book of Life* from before the creation of the world are still non-Christian right now because they still have yet to believe and even others still yet to be born! Yet they are redeemed already by the finished work of Christ!

Furthermore, in your fear you may have raced too quickly to a band-aid solution to a great problem, your sin confronted with Holy God in final judgment. You may fear that your name is somehow missing from the *Lamb's Book* and try some formula of 'faith' or multiple formulas until you find one that gives you rest. Yet, the Scripture above is clear that your ultimate destiny and the destiny of all mankind rests solely with Jesus and is already written in the *Book of Life*.

Surrounding yourself with good Christian people cannot change your destiny. Praying a prayer cannot change your destiny. Why even your 'faith' itself cannot change what God has determined before you were even born! 'Faith' is not a coin that you shove into the celestial turnstile to gain entrance to Heaven. Rather faith is trusting in what God has ALREADY fully completed for you. Remember, He is calling lost sheep home, not converting goats to sheep.

So here is very very great optimism! Your fate rests fully and finally with the God of love and grace who entirely paid for the sin debt of ALL mankind, yours included. And this God invites you to know through Jesus Christ that He has always loved you and will always love you.

So what is it gonna be? Trusting God or more of your devices?

Today while getting physical therapy for acute Patellar Tendonitis I saw a poster on the wall about determination. I commented to the therapist that I need to choose some top priorities to get determined about. She suggested that I determine to be patient. I laughed. I found out later that she is also a Christian.

So now I also ask myself, what is it gonna be Jeff, trusting God or more of your devices?

Lastly, consider a few parting thoughts about the unredeemed. Consider that only three people are listed explicitly as not in the *Lamb's book of Life* to be cast into The Lake of Fire. They are Satan, The Beast, and The False Prophet. Also be reminded that angels are people too, not just us humans. As for the rest of the fallen angels Hebrews 2:16 seems to indicate that the work of Christ does not cover their sins. Yet Colossians 1:20 might be interpreted to offer some hope even for the fallen angels, except for the three demons listed above. I am certainly not being dogmatic about that idea that some angels might be saved, but it is a useful study to ask the question and compare Hebrews 2:16 with Colossians 1:20.

We also know that because Jesus became a man His death vicariously applies to ALL mankind, but His death does not necessarily apply to angels because they are a different kind than man. Furthermore, it should also be noted that some fallen angels are already in prison as explained in II Peter 2:4 and Jude 6. So if the prison they are in, called Tartarus in II Peter, is parallel to Hades, then these fallen angels are among those extracted from Hades / Thalassa at the end of time as explained in the passage highlighted above, as well as the unbelieving rich man from Luke 16:23 and unrepentant men like him.

So if fallen angels are not named in the *Lamb's Book of Life*, at that time they will be sentenced to The Lake of Fire for *The Ages of The Ages*. Furthermore, if Christ did not die for angels, then to Lake of Fire they will surely go as well. Matthew 25:41, a overlooked verse, makes it plain that the Lake of Fire is "*prepared for... the Devil and his angels!*" However, the good news is that Christ did make full payment for the unrepentant rich man's

sin, so tell me why would not even his name be in the Book of Life in the end? Friends, the Lake of Fire is not prepared for mankind!

However, if YOU want to know for certain that Jesus has written YOUR name in His Book from before the creation of the world there is only one way to know for sure, and that is through faith in Jesus. Through faith in Christ you can know that your name is ALREADY written in the Lamb's Book of Life and that your eternal destiny in Heaven is ALREADY guaranteed! Your fate is in His hands regardless, so get to know Him, and if you know Him, you will see that He is your Savior, and He will win your trust and obedience.

Now I'm going to find a snack and watch a movie.

Revelation 22:12-21, Give You Revelation? Repent of Sexual Immorality While You Have Time

Third Day is one of my favorite Christian bands. Yet even so while listening to their 'Revelation' song a discerning hear might wonder what they seek when they sing 'Give me a revelation. Show me what to do.' Do they mean give me words from the Bible, God's inspired revelation? Do they mean give me inspiration from God beyond the Bible? Do they mean something less precise and more poetic?

The last nine verses of the Bible are revelation from God that show us what to do.

12) "Behold, I come quickly. My reward is with me, to repay to each man according to his work. 13) I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. 14) Blessed are those who do his commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter in by the gates into the city. 15) Outside are the dogs, the sorcerers, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. 16) I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify these things to you for the assemblies. I am the root and the offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star."

17) The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" He who hears, let him say, "Come!" He who is thirsty, let him come. He who desires, let him take the water of life freely. 18) I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, if anyone adds to them, may God add to him the plagues which are written in this book. 19) If anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, may God take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, which are written in this book. 20) He who testifies these things says, "Yes, I come quickly."

Amen! Yes, come, Lord Jesus.

21) The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with all the saints. Amen.

Revelation 22:12-21 (WEB)

This Scripture has excellent counsel to show us what to do. First and foremost, we need to prepare our hearts to stand before the King, Jesus Christ, who will reward those who obey his commands and punish those who disobey. Second, we need to repent from sorcery, from sexual immorality, from murder, from idolatry, and from lying. Third, we are warned not to add revelation to God's Holy Word.

In light of this revelation from God's book of Revelation, we are sternly warned not to seek revelation beyond God's Holy Word. The Bible is sufficient to show us what to do. So hopefully the Third Day song did not intend that message.

It may be that the words of Third Day's 'Revelation' song are less precise and more poetic. It is a moving song with a catchy beat. Thankfully the revelation of Revelation 22:12-21 is also moving, in fact gravely moving, and shows us exactly what to do. We ought to put those words to a catchy beat as well!

Third Day, 'Revelation' song lyrics follow...

*My life has led me down the road that's so uncertain
And now I am left alone and I am broken,
Tryin' to find my way, tryin' to find the faith that's gone*

*This time, I know that you are holding all the answers
I'm tired of losing hope and taking chances,
On roads that never seem,
To be the ones that bring me home*

*Give me a revelation,
Show me what to do
Cause I've been tryin' to find my way,
I haven't got a clue
Tell me should I stay here,
Or do I need to move
Give me a revelation
I've got nothing without You
I've got nothing without You*

*My life has led me down this path that's ever winding
Through every twist and turn I'm always finding,
That I am lost again (I am lost again)
Tell me when this road will ever end
Give me a revelation,
Show me what to do
Cause I've been tryin' to find my way,
I haven't got a clue
Tell me should I stay here,
Or do I need to move
Give me a revelation
I've got nothing without You
I've got nothing without*

*I don't know where I can turn
Tell me when will I learn
Won't You show me where I need to go
Oh oh
Let me follow Your lead,
I know that it's the only way that I can get back home*

*Give me a revelation,
Show me what to do
Cause I've been trying to find my way,
I haven't got a clue
Tell me should I stay here,
Or do I need to move
Give me a revelation
I've got nothing without You
I've got nothing without You*

Oh, give me a revelation

*I've got nothing without You
I've got nothing without You*

Revelation 22:17, The Spirit and the Bride say "Come!"

Recently I had the privilege of preaching to an assembly of believers about the beautiful body of Christ from the book of Ephesians. We learned that believers in Christ are His body, the church; that the central focus of Christ's reign is his work for the church; that the Christian is a new man, neither Jew nor Gentile; that the church is the great mystery of God's redemptive plan revealed to Paul; that the church is one body; that Christ dearly loves and cares for the church, just as husbands ought to care for their wives; and that he calls the church his bride.

It is downright amazing that Christ would take blackened despicable rebellious sinners and single us out for his love, court us with his winsome ways, engage us with his grace, marry us forever without reservation, and make us his fruitful bride. We ought to be speechless with ecstatic joy over all that Christ, our dashing suitor, has done, is doing, and has promised to do for us.

We ought to be speechless except for a final reminder to the church, Christ's bride, in the book of Revelation.

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" He who hears, let him say, "Come!" He who is thirsty, let him come. He who desires, let him take the water of life freely.

Revelation 22:17 (WEB)

The Spirit says "come!" The bride also says "come!" Dear friend, we are not perfect in the church. In fact we are far from it. We are terrible sinners. But we have got some great news! Jesus Christ gave his very life blood because of his love for sinful man.

Friend, come to Jesus Christ and join our fellowship at his cross.

We cannot, must not, will not be speechless about this awesome news!

Romans 10:6-11, One Nation Under God Vs Jesus is Lord

I have on my shelf a book titled, *The Pen is Mightier than the Sword*. This is true. Sadly this is true because quite often fickle human nature can be lead easily from one belief to another by error without placing building blocks on the permanent foundation of truth.

Consider that many Russians rallied under the *Communist Manifesto* to become the USSR. Believe it or not there are actually some good principles in this work that enabled the Soviet Union to stand under that banner for a time. However, there were also fatal flaws that brought the empire to its knees. Every good American knows this and is trained from kindergarten that communism is bad and must be brought to an end. However, we are not commonly taught just what the foremost flaw of communism is, that is the exclusion of Jesus Christ.

If that is the fatal flaw of the *Communist Manifesto* then what of the banner that we Americans stand under? I am a citizen of the United States and in our country school children say the *Pledge of Allegiance* every morning. In fact my wife and I home-school and my own children say the pledge every morning as well with every intention to continue.

The United States pledge was written by Francis Bellamy, a Baptist minister, in August 1892. Bellamy can be described as a Christian who was influenced by his first cousin, Edward Bellamy, who wrote the American socialist utopian novels, *Looking Backward* (1888) and *Equality* (1897). The original pledge has been modified from time to time with one notable change in 1954. In this year the Knights of Columbus persuaded Congress to add the words, '*under God*,' to the Pledge. The Pledge now became a patriotic oath as well as a public prayer. This sounds like a good principle as well, but could it be a fatal flaw to pledge, '*one nation under God*'?

Gladly the pen of God is also mighty in the heart of the Christian gospel in the book of Romans where we read,

6) But the righteousness which is of faith says this, "Don't say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down); 7) or, 'Who will descend into the abyss?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead.)" 8) But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth, and in your heart;" that is, the word of faith which we preach: 9) that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10) For with the heart, one believes resulting in righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made resulting in salvation. 11) For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes in him will not be disappointed."

Romans 10:6-11 (WEB)

The pledge, if you will, to become a Christian is simply to say and believe, '*Jesus is Lord*.' A comparison of this pledge with the pledge of my country does provoke some thought.

Pledges Compared	One nation under God	Jesus is Lord
Infallible authorship	No, man	Yes, Holy Spirit
God acknowledged	Yes, generally	Yes, specifically
God acknowledged by name	No, generally	Yes, Jesus is God
Humbly stated	No, sinful man boasts to be under	Yes, sinful man acknowledging Jesus

	God	over us
Scope of all nations	No, one nation only	Yes, Lord of all nations
Scope of all humanity	No, many not under God	Yes, Lord of believers and unbelievers
Scope of all events	No, good only	Yes, Lord of good and evil
Scope of all time	No, since 1892	Yes, Lord of all time, a continual reality
Spiritual adherents	No, inducted by birth / work / war	Yes, inducted by new birth / grace / gospel

First understand that I am certainly not beginning a campaign to reform the *Pledge of Allegiance* for Christ. I am hardly a Christian socialist! There are already too many misguided Christians attempting to advance the Kingdom of Christ by lobbying the halls of Congress. What I am doing, however, is asking you flatly, what is your pledge to God for his mercy? Have you lobbied the halls of Heaven with prayer to learn the good news that Jesus is Lord? Will you stand in the public square and pledge that to God and the nations?

Romans 3:20-24 & 5:20, The Federal 'Old Covenant Style' Marriage Amendment

Christian, I am confused.

What is the purpose of the proposed United States federal marriage amendment? *Is the purpose to restrain the sinful tendencies of mankind?* If so the Scriptures both teach and demonstrate that the law never ever was able to accomplish that purpose. David knew the law against adultery and murder, yet sinned anyway. Romans 5:20 (WEB) also explains that the law actually promoted more sin! *"The law came in that the trespass might abound; but where sin abounded, grace abounded more exceedingly."*

Suppose it was your own son or daughter fallen into sin, would you wave your hands and petition the government for a law to stop them? Jesus never did that! Paul never did that! They busied themselves with preaching the law of Christ and the gospel! Should not our hearts rather be broken wide open to God in prayer for the salvation of our fellow man? But broken hearts do not come easily when we actually think that we obey the law ourselves. You who have a marriage without sin what will you do to those who disobey the federal marriage amendment? Force counsel on them? Fine them? Imprison them? Execute them?

Friends, your eyes are plastered over, you cannot see your own sin, you are leaving the glory of the new covenant, and you are returning to the Jews under the shadow of the old covenant. But maybe I misunderstand your good intentions. *Maybe your purpose is to make a law to simply expose the sin of mankind?* But if so your standard is not high enough. The purpose of Christian law is to leave no one justified and all under conviction.

20) Because by the works of the law, no flesh will be justified in his sight; for through the law comes the knowledge of sin. 21) But now apart from the law, a righteousness of God has been revealed, being testified by the law and the prophets; 22) even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all those who believe. For there is no distinction, 23) for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God; 24) being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

Romans 3:20-24 (WEB)

Thus if we were to follow the pattern of Christ we might preach,

You have heard it said that marriage is defined as the union between one man and one woman and that anyone who disobeys is a sinner, but I tell you that a husband who does not literally love his wife with the same love God demonstrated through Jesus Christ, is nothing more than a selfish beast and he will certainly be damned unless a perfect sacrifice can be found for his sin.

Christian, I understand that God has appointed governments to govern, make laws, and punish evil doers. However, God has appointed Christians to preach the law of Christ which leaves absolutely no one self-justified and fosters a fellowship of those who know they are

sinners still with hearts broken and eyes fixed upon Jesus as our only hope for deliverance from sin. Can a federal amendment do that? Beware of those who would try to advance the precious altar of Jesus Christ by means of the halls of congress. Apparently they know nothing of brokenness or salvation.

Join me in protecting the sanctity of Christ's marriage to His people by means of the gospel. Brother and sister in the Lord, do you really want to entrust an issue so vital to any government? The Scriptures never once give government jurisdiction over the institution of marriage. Marriage is God's wonderful gift to His chosen people and perversions must be corrected with the preaching and praying of Christ's people. The church is not bound to governmental marriage policy perversions. Furthermore, the whole thing going bipolar, dividing the country into sinners on one side and hypocrites on the other. Which side should I choose because I am both a sinner and a hypocrite? Is there even one heart begging God to save us from our sin and hypocrisy?

Not one, yet God will save.

Romans 3:23, You're Not a Good Man Charlie Brown

I just finished watching an awesome play production of *Charlie Brown's Snoopy* at a local playhouse. The play producers and actors are good friends, and I was thoroughly entertained. I almost fell off my seat laughing to watch my normally mild-mannered friends roll out a Broadway class performance. Well done!

The grand finale song brought out the whole cast as melodramatic Charlie Brown mused about the possibility of anyone ever believing in him. His friends pondered the question themselves and one by one joined the rousing chorus committing to *belief in Charlie Brown*. Yet we should be reminded that words are more than words, and entertainment is often more than entertainment. It dawned on me that the conversation, music, and movies of unbelievers are, at a minimum, a reflection and more often a platform to preach their worldview. I wondered if I could *believe in Charlie Brown*. As a believer in Christ I am protective of the verb.

Yet I am a student of Charlie Brown, Snoopy, and their creator Charles Schulz. As a kid I loved the comics and read them over and over again. They passed the test of moral goodness in our home and so were a staple in my entertainment diet. I even wrote my own Snoopy comic as a gift to my 4th grade teacher! Now as an adult I have taught cartooning to children and often reference Schulz's style because it is easy to imitate. One Christmas tradition in my family is to watch my old VHS copy of Charlie Brown Christmas, which ends with a verbatim reading of the gospel message from Luke chapter 2. So after all that, why would I question whether I can believe in Charlie Brown?

The message behind Schulz's entertaining comic seems trustworthy enough, as we hear Linus van Pelt quoting Luke 2:8-14 to explain "*what Christmas is all about*." Schulz had even said in personal interviews that Linus represented his spiritual side. However, from the late 1980s Schulz described himself in interviews as a "*secular humanist*." Not quite the wholesome message of the Bible. He also added, "*I do not go to church anymore... I guess you might say I've come around to secular humanism, an obligation I believe all humans have to others and the world we live in.*"

So we see that the heart of Schulz's message to the world through Peanuts was much more than entertainment. Schulz, like all of us, was expressing his worldview with his words and actions. When Charlie Brown longs for someone to *believe in him*, he is asking for much more than someone to cheer for him. Charlie Brown is like all of us at heart, a secular humanist, putting trust in man and wanting others to trust in him. When Charlie Brown's friends conclude "*You're a good man Charlie Brown*" these words are rooted in the secular humanism of Schulz. Charlie Brown, Snoopy, and the whole Peanuts gang are the story of Schulz's faith in... humanity.

Now I am not on a Snoopy hunt. I plan to keep Charlie Brown Christmas on my shelf and look forward to watching it with my family in a few weeks, come December. Yet I ask, have any Christians noted that Charlie Brown is not a good man? Have any noticed that we cannot believe in Charlie Brown? Please don't think me silly to ask if you *believe in Charlie Brown*. What I am really asking is if you are part of the gang of Peanuts trying to believe in yourself and others? Schulz turned his face away from the blazing message of the gospel in hopes of finding a moral humanity, but the gospel reminds us that "*for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23 WEB).

While Schulz's work is incredibly well done moral entertainment by human standards, his life

message is the antithesis of the gospel of Christ. If only Schulz and his cartoon friends had ended their lives with the truth on their lips, "*You're not a good man Charlie Brown, ... but through the grace of God!*"

Romans 5:12-21, Out of Control Optimism

Part 7, Many = Many = All = All

Continuing our 'Out of Control Optimism' series I am reminded of a construct in Romans Chapter 5 that offers great hope for the believer in Jesus Christ, that is hope for himself and his fellow man. Paul explains a parallel comparison and contrast between the first man from God, Adam, and the second man from God, Jesus Christ.

12) Therefore as sin entered into the world through one man, and death through sin; so death passed to all men, because all sinned. 13) For until the law, sin was in the world; but sin is not charged when there is no law. 14) Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those whose sins weren't like Adam's disobedience, who is a foreshadowing of him who was to come. 15) But the free gift isn't like the trespass. For if by the trespass of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God, and the gift by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. 16) The gift is not as through one who sinned; for the judgment came by one to condemnation, but the free gift came of many trespasses to justification. 17) For if by the trespass of the one, death reigned through the one; so much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ. 18) So then as through one trespass, all men were condemned; even so through one act of righteousness, all men were justified to life. 19) For as through the one man's disobedience many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one, many will be made righteous. 20) The law came in that the trespass might abound; but where sin abounded, grace abounded more exceedingly; 21) that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 5:12-21 (WEB)

Consider and analysis.

Relation	Scope	Adam	Jesus Christ
Compare	One	First man from God	Last man from God
Contrast	One	A pattern or type	The original or anti-type
Contrast	One	One trespass / one sin	One gift / one act of righteousness
Contrast	Many	The many died by sin of one man	Grace of one man overflowed to the many
Contrast	Many	The many condemned for one sin	One gift of grace justified the many
Contrast	One	Death reigned through one man	Believers reign in life through one man
Contrast	All	All men condemned for one sin	All men justified by one gift
Contrast	Many	The many made sinners through one man's disobedience	Through the obedience of one man the many made righteous
Contrast	All	Sin increased	Grace increased even more
Contrast	All	Sin reigned in death	Grace reigned to bring eternal life

A careful study of the passage above shows that the many, in fact all men, stand condemned before God because of our relationship with Adam. However, the awesome news observed through the parallel construct above is that the many, in fact all men, stand justified before God because of the one act of righteousness of Jesus Christ. Those who believe and receive this good news will reign in life, while those who do not believe miss a great blessing because they live as condemned men EVEN THOUGH they and all mankind have been justified through the work of Christ.

For further proof, let's exercise some of our high school geometry theorems to prove that the work of Christ has justified all mankind as I argue above and in my article, **Justified!** Since I have been helping my own high school kids with their geometry proof homework this will be an excellent exercise for me. Let's use the algebraic Substitution Property or the geometric Transitive Property and the givens from the Scripture above to make our proof.

- Givens
 - The transitive property of equality states for any real numbers a , b , and c :
If $a = b$ and $b = c$, then with a substitution $a = c$.
 - The Many = Those who died as a result of Adam's sin, Romans 5:15
 - The Many = Those who the grace of Christ overflowed to, Romans 5:15
 - All men = Those condemned as a result of Adam's sin, Romans 5:18
 - All men = Those justified as a result of Christ's righteousness, Romans 5:18
- Direct Proof
 - The Many = Those who died as a result of Adam's sin - GIVEN
 - The Many = Those who the grace of Christ overflowed to - GIVEN
 - All men = Those condemned as a result of Adam's sin - GIVEN
 - All men = Those justified as a result of Adam's sin - GIVEN
 - Those who died as a result of Adam's sin = Those condemned as a result of Adam's sin - LOGICAL EQUALITY
 - Those who the grace of Christ overflowed to = Those justified as a result of Adam's sin - LOGICAL EQUALITY
 - The Many = All men, Geometric Transitive OR Algebraic Substitution property
- Indirect Proof
 - Begin with wrong assumption to expose contradiction
 - The Many Not Equal to All men, INDIRECT PROOF WITH WRONG ASSUMPTION
 - The Many < All men, CANNOT BE MORE SO MUST BE LESS
 - The Many = Those who died as a result of Adam's sin - GIVEN
 - Those who died as a result of Adam's sin < All men, Geometric Transitive OR Algebraic Substitution property
 - CONTRADICTION of Romans 3:23, Romans 5:18, and Romans 11:32
 - Initial assumption wrong so The Many = All men
- Alternate Direct Proof
 - All mankind has sinned and falls short of the glory of God, GIVEN in Romans 3:23
 - Again God has bound all mankind over to disobedience, GIVEN in Romans 11:32a
 - God did this in order to show mercy to all mankind, GIVEN in Romans 11:32b
 - Those bound to sin by God = Those who sinned = All Mankind = Those chosen for mercy, Geometric Transitive OR Algebraic Substitution property

Sorry to trouble you with a return to algebra and geometry proofs. I happened to love proofs during my youth and relished in a fleeting popularity with my classmates as they lined up to me for help. However, for many algebra and geometry proofs are a source of nightmares. The question is, do the proofs above bring you nightmares or joy? Do you see the

hopelessness of trying to persuade yourself along with the Jews that God only loves a subset of humanity? No, instead there is great joy in seeing that the Bible says that even though all mankind has sinned that God loves and forgives all mankind through Christ? Do you believe it?

We have got to share this '*Out of Control Optimism*' with somebody!

Romans 7:18, Ephesians 6:15, and Philippians 2:15, Star Peace

Recently I enjoyed viewing the *Star Wars* movie series. I know I married a woman and have three daughters, but even so I just can't get excited about movies like *Pride and Prejudice*. I need a good action adventure! I just love a good sci-fi thriller and *Star Wars* is a classic. Consider the dramatic conclusion with the Evil Emperor pitting Luke Skywalker against his father Darth Vader with evil designs that the victor would then become his sinister partner to take over the Universe. Luke and Darth battle back and forth with the light saber in a riveting scene until Luke finally cuts his father's hand off debilitating him.

The Evil Emperor reveals a wicked smile and urges Luke to deal the final blow and kill his father. Luke, however, casts off his weapon, says he will not kill his father, but instead appeals to Darth to come to the good side. He cries out, *"Father, I know that there is good in you!"* The Evil Emperor, enraged, then zaps Luke with blue lightning bolts one after the other with intent to kill Luke. Luke cries out again and again, *"Father! Father! Father!"* Finally, Darth does seem to search deep down and find compassion within himself enough to save his son from the Evil Emperor. Darth slowly picks up the Emperor and throws him down to his destruction.

The ending is impressive... very impressive.

Yet suppose we were to rewrite the script with a Christian ending. How would this scene look? Luke races to find his father, Darth Vader standing next to the Evil Emperor, both dressed in black. Luke shouts as he nears the two, *"Dad! Dad! Emperor! I have some great news! You would not believe what I learned!"*

Darth and the Emperor look at each other and say together, *"Boy, it is we who teach you. Come to the dark side Luke."*

Luke comes back, *"That is exactly the great news I wanted to tell you about. I've been reading in the most ancient writings in Romans 7:18 that in us 'dwells no good thing.' I'm already on the dark side with you guys! Isn't that great? And best of all the Master of All forgives me and you even though we do evil and one day he plans to destroy evil forever! Can you believe it?"*

The Emperor chimes in, *"I am the master of all. Who is your Master of All? Yoda?"*

Luke laughs, *"Don't be ridiculous. I've bagged all that Jedi stuff. I now serve the Master of Masters."*

Darth cries out, *"What are you saying son? Search your feelings!"*

Luke laughs again, *"No point in searching my feelings, dad, they are corrupted by evil as well. I have placed my complete trust in my new master and I am here to invite you to do that as well. What do you say guys?"*

Darth and the Emperor now laugh, *"Why should we do that? Can your new master give us greater power and skill with the light saber?"*

Luke responds, *"Fellows you got it all wrong, I am bringing you the good news of peace"*

described in Ephesians 6:15, not war. The good news is that even though there is no good in us and we all are evil on the inside that the Master of Masters loves us and forgives us."

Darth and the Emperor now shout, *"We are not evil"* as Darth turns his light saber on Luke cutting off his arm.

Luke slowly says to his dad, *"So you say you are not evil?"* while clutching his wound.

Luke breaks the silence, *"Dad, I know you wanted to become so powerful so as to have power over even death itself. You blamed yourself for my mom's death and wanted to bring her back from the dead. But the ancient writings say that man does not have this power. However, the Master of Masters does! Dad, the ancient writings say that my mother, your wife, is alive! She is under the care of the Master of Masters in the nether world! Dad, Emperor, won't you place your faith in my new master and receive him as Lord? I have the same problem as you guys. I am often controlling and want to be my own master and the master of others. But my new master has helped me with that and he can help you too. In fact in the ancient writings Philipians 2:15 says if we obey him with his help we will shine like the stars in the Universe! Give up the star wars and shine like a star through the Master of Masters.*

What do you say?"

Romans 7:9-25, Intrapersonal Conflict Resolution

'I wouldn't be paranoid if so many people weren't out to get me,' I joked to myself as I threw another training flyer in the trash titled, 'Dealing with Difficult People.' There must be a cunning reason that marketers have targeted me with hundreds of flyers teaching the means to deal with difficult people. Big bucks are to be made selling strategies for dealing with the whiny, selfish, ungrateful, and difficult people in our lives. Interpersonal conflict can be the most unpleasant experiences causing sleeplessness, eating disorders, anxiety, and more. So we are often tempted to find satisfaction making the other person at fault for our misery.

But what if the conflict is not interpersonal, but intrapersonal, where then could you turn for help? Inter-collegiate sport is competition with another college. Intra-collegiate sport is competition within the same college. Inter-personal conflict is disagreement with another person. Intra-personal conflict is disagreement with your self!

What if you are the difficult person you have to deal with? What if you honestly confessed to yourself that you have to deal with your attitude, your selfishness, your lust, your sin? What if it became clear that the problem following you around since day one is not others, but in fact yourself? It is said that '*only the sane people talk to themselves,*' for it is those with a bad conscience that '*cannot live with themselves.*' But what if you cannot live with yourself? What if you will not talk to your self? What if you will not listen to yourself? Where can you then turn? Paul writes about his intrapersonal conflict in book of Romans and offers God's resolution, the only resolution.

9) I was alive apart from the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. 10) The commandment which was for life, this I found to be for death; 11) for sin, finding occasion through the commandment, deceived me, and through it killed me. 12) Therefore the law indeed is holy, and the commandment holy, and righteous, and good.

13) Did then that which is good become death to me? May it never be! But sin, that it might be shown to be sin, was producing death in me through that which is good; that through the commandment sin might become exceedingly sinful. 14) For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am fleshly, sold under sin. 15) For I don't know what I am doing. For I don't practice what I desire to do; but what I hate, that I do. 16) But if what I don't desire, that I do, I consent to the law that it is good. 17) So now it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwells in me. 18) For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwells no good thing. For desire is present with me, but I don't find it doing that which is good. 19) For the good which I desire, I don't do; but the evil which I don't desire, that I practice. 20) But if what I don't desire, that I do, it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwells in me. 21) I find then the law that, to me, while I desire to do good, evil is present. 22) For I delight in God's law after the inward man, 23) but I see a different law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity under the law of sin which is in my members. 24) What a wretched man I am! Who will deliver me out of the body of this death? 25) I thank God through Jesus Christ, our Lord! So then with the mind, I myself serve God's law, but with the flesh, sin's

law.

Romans 7:9-25 (WEB)

To be sure, we all have interpersonal conflict and others are at least a small or perhaps a great source of hurt in our lives. However, has the gospel exposed your intrapersonal conflict to yourself? Have you found relief from the greatest hurt of being a sinner yourself? Have you found intrapersonal conflict resolution through the forgiveness of Jesus Christ?

Receive the forgiveness of Christ already given to every single one of his chosen people!

Romans 8:28-39, The Force Is Not With Us!

Have you ever been tempted to Christianize the world's stuff? For example the *Star Wars* story is an incredible good versus evil saga by George Lucas. Yet have you noticed that the heart of his message is that salvation from evil can be attained through democratic "freedom?" Is that true? This is the unfortunate sentiment of too many who are mesmerized by the temporal successes of the United States democracy.

What about the power of the gospel for believers to conquer evil? Better for us to put our hope there than in democracy. Have you also observed Skywalker's hope that good remains in his evil father Darth Vader? Is that true? Do any Christians still believe that our natures, minds, and wills are not good, but stinking rotting dead apart from the grace of Christ... at least according to Ephesians 2:1-3?

What about imitating the grace of Christ and loving our fathers and mothers, brothers, sisters, in-laws, neighbors, and colleagues even though we and they are not lovable at times and no good remains in them? Isn't the heart of grace to choose to love the totally unlovable as Christ has done for each of us? Worst of all, as a young person I naively tried to draw a parallel between the "Force" of *Star Wars* and the Holy Spirit. Sorry folks... am I the only one? My daughter tells me that some unbelievers have actually turned the "Force" into their own religion. Is it possible that we could be so silly? II Timothy 4:4b says so and II Timothy 4:3-4a explains how and why.

In contrast to *Star Wars* Paul says,

28) We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose. 29) For whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30) Whom he predestined, those he also called. Whom he called, those he also justified. Whom he justified, those he also glorified.

31) What then shall we say about these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32) He who didn't spare his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how would he not also with him freely give us all things? 33) Who could bring a charge against God's chosen ones? It is God who justifies. 34) Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, yes rather, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.

35) Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Could oppression, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36) Even as it is written, "For your sake we are killed all day long. We were accounted as sheep for the slaughter."

37) No, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38) For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39) nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from God's love which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:28-39 (WEB)

Friends, the *"Force"* is not with us, BUT GOD IS FOR US... for those who are called.

Romans 9:22-28, Not my people, My people

In December of last year I mentioned that Romans 8, the great Bible chapter of encouragement, also contains words of warning. If we live according to the sinful nature we will die. This month I would like to point out that Romans 9, the great Bible chapter of fear, also contains words of incredible encouragement.

We read here that God transforms those who are not his people into his people. This is hope beyond hope that God saves his enemies. Read for yourself,

22) What if God, willing to show his wrath and to make his power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23) and that he might make known the riches of his glory on vessels of mercy, which he prepared beforehand for glory, 24) us, whom he also called, not from the Jews only, but also from the Gentiles? 25) As he says also in Hosea,

"I will call them 'my people,' which were not my people; and her 'beloved,' who was not beloved."

26) "It will be that in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'children of the living God.' "

27) Isaiah cries concerning Israel, "If the number of the children of Israel are as the sand of the sea, it is the remnant who will be saved; 28) for He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, because the LORD will make a short work upon the earth."

Romans 9:22-28 (WEB)

Thus, God is able to change the hardened hearts even of those who are fully determined to have nothing to do with him. So, in a way, if someone is determined to remain bitter at God this is bad news for them because if God chooses he will have them singing his praises in a moment. In fact he does this all the time, not by coercion, but by his irresistible goodness. (Please note however, this is not truly bad news, but good news because God is truly good.)

I once heard a big barrel bodied man preach a fiery sermon through Romans 9, but he completely skipped over the verses above. Yet these verses bring both the power and goodness of God to the gospel! We can say with complete confidence, anticipation, and even joyous laughter to the worst enemy of Christ, *"Friend, you may have nothing but bitter and angry feelings towards Jesus, but I can guarantee that if God sets his sights on you, you will have only loudest praises for his goodness!"* Thankfully the verses above also teach that God is acting quickly!

Is God quickly bringing you to the point of praising Christ?

Sailing Sunset

**I am Disciplined
by the Grace
of Jesus
Christ**



Samuel(1) 10:5-6 plus, Much More Than Music

King Saul's debut into public service for God's people began with a spiritual revival through a band of traveling musician prophets.

5) "After that you will come to the hill of God, where the garrison of the Philistines is; and it will happen, when you have come there to the city, that you will meet a band of prophets coming down from the high place with a lute, a tambourine, a pipe, and a harp before them; and they will be prophesying. 6) Then Yahweh's Spirit will come mightily on you, and you will prophesy with them, and will be turned into another man."

I Samuel 10:5-6 (WEB)

Later, an evil spirit tormented Saul, but he found comfort through the music of his servant David.

When the spirit from God was on Saul, David took the harp, and played with his hand; so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him.

I Samuel 16:23 (WEB)

Yet sadly, we read that Saul was driven to jealous rage... also by a musical lyric.

6) As they came, when David returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet king Saul, with tambourines, with joy, and with instruments of music. 7) The women sang to one another as they played, and said,

"Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands."

8) Saul was very angry, and this saying displeased him. He said, "They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed only thousands. What can he have more but the kingdom?" 9) Saul watched David from that day and forward. 10) On the next day, an evil spirit from God came mightily on Saul, and he prophesied in the middle of the house. David played with his hand, as he did day by day. Saul had his spear in his hand; 11) and Saul threw the spear, for he said, "I will pin David to the wall!" David escaped from his presence twice. 12) Saul was afraid of David, because Yahweh was with him, and had departed from Saul.

I Samuel 18:6-12 (WEB)

Unfortunately Saul's love of music did not include a quiet confidence in God's love for him. David's successes revealed a nasty crack in Saul's character and faith. Saul envied David when he should have been rejoicing and thanking God for David. Though we may enjoy our collections of Christian music CDs, we should be reminded that the Christian life is much more than music.

Movies such as *The Sound of Music* and *Sister Act* attempt to move us through the redemptive power of music. In fact these movies may actually get the foot tapping of believer and unbeliever alike. But friends, music cannot save us from dread sins such as Saul's jealousy, which resides in all our hearts. Saul himself had an appreciation for music, but music could not save him from jealousy.

Sins of that caliber require the cross of Jesus Christ.

Samuel(2) 11:1-4, Counting Davids Costs

Men, we need more frank conversation about sexual temptation.

Many knew David's story before we fell into sin ourselves, so knowledge of this story alone is not enough to keep us from sin. Yet the story must be retold to teach us a healthy mistrust of ourselves and call upon God for grace, even now. Praise God for the past victories we have had in spite of defeats, but we should also be reminded that the fight against sexual temptation is not yet over.

1) At the return of the year, at the time when kings go out, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David stayed at Jerusalem. 2) At evening, David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the king's house. From the roof, he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful to look at. 3) David sent and inquired after the woman. One said, "Isn't this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, Uriah the Hittite's wife?"

4) David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in to him, and he lay with her (for she was purified from her uncleanness); and she returned to her house.

2 Samuel 11:1-4 (WEB)

The timing of David's sin is not recorded, but it is at least plausible that 10 minutes after David looked upon Bathsheba, he was with her in bed. We should consider that when we find ourselves standing in our own high place gazing upon a beautiful woman. We should also consider the cost David paid for his rash behavior.

11) "This is what Yahweh says: 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbor, and he will lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. 12) For you did this secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.' "

13) David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against Yahweh."

Nathan said to David, "Yahweh also has put away your sin. You will not die.

14) However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to Yahweh's enemies to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you will surely die."

2 Samuel 12:11-14 (WEB)

The following chapters record the fulfillment of Nathan's prophecy of God's judgment in David's life:

1. David and Bathsheba's son died

2. David's son Amnon raped his sister Tamar
3. David's son Absalom killed his brother Amnon
4. Absalom conspired against his father David
5. Absalom laid with his father's concubines on the palace roof in view of all Israel
6. Absalom was killed by Joab, David's military commander
7. David wept for Absalom his son

Brothers we can calculate the risk of sin's negative effects as pragmatic Americans, but we must also remember that the most negative aspect of sin is that it displeases God and puts us off his good path. We should find whatever reasons we can to keep ourselves from sin, but remembering that there is a holy God who sees all ought to be foremost. David paid a terribly high price for his sin. We also may have paid high prices. Yet here we stand by the grace of God and we would be best to fall upon him for help to finish our race whether we find ourselves fit or bruised and battered from the sinful choices of our past.

God help us.

Samuel(2) 11:8-11, Viagra or Uriah?

Men, we need more frank conversation about sexual temptation.

The effects of lust and the idolatry of sex destroys lives and opportunity to serve the Lord. Too many of us know that addiction to pornography and masturbation combined with worldly notions about love are a recipe for disaster. Great engines of sin have been built in our generation to pump the filth of pornography and lust at high pressure through the cracks in the defenses of our Christian homes and minds. Worst of all we must face the fact like men that if we have sinned then we have personally chosen the fleeting pleasure over God's will with no one else to blame but ourselves. Men, we need grace. We need grace to be true men. Though Satan has redefined manhood to mean uncontrolled passion and sexual conquest, we need the grace through Jesus Christ to be godly men who control our bodies and protect our women. Consider Uriah.

8) David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." Uriah departed out of the king's house, and a gift from the king was sent after him. 9) But Uriah slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and didn't go down to his house. 10) When they had told David, saying, "Uriah didn't go down to his house," David said to Uriah, "Haven't you come from a journey? Why didn't you go down to your house?"

11) Uriah said to David, "The ark, Israel, and Judah, are staying in tents; and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open field. Shall I then go into my house to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing!"

2 Samuel 11:8-11 (WEB)

Though David was a believer he sinned greatly by taking his brother Uriah's wife Bathsheba and she became pregnant. The story reminds us that true Christians can fall terribly. But worse David attempted to cover the deed by tricking Uriah into having sex with his wife Bathsheba so he would think the baby was his. The choice of Uriah to abstain from relations with his wife would be considered insane by the sex-crazed people of our age. Why not have relations with your own wife? Yet his resolve does not even compute in their best of reasonings because his first choice was faithfulness to ALL God's people. Read the whole story in 2 Samuel 11.

Our nation has made a joke out of sex and thus a joke out of ourselves. I get 100 spam emails a day advertising Viagra, Cialas, Levitra, and more. We have become a nation of fast food and fast sex junkies who swing by McDonalds for a super sized value meal and swing by the pharmaceutical company for a super sized sex life.

I grew up in the day when Huey Lewis and the News sang, *"I Want a New Drug."* He sang the song of a drug that would make him feel like he felt when he was with his lover. Friends, we don't have one new drug, we have ten! How long before we are selling drugs that take us the whole way from foreplay through intercourse to climax, and that without a partner?

Perhaps erectile dysfunction drugs have a place and a man humbly takes them in order to serve his partner, but the Huey Lewis Drug Company would not be making billions on that. Instead our email boxes are stuffed full of hard-core calories to feed the lust of our

super charged sexual idolatry.

Friends, I am no stranger to the passions of wanting to please my wife, but at what cost? We shame ourselves! Has anyone ever thought that the family men of the third-world must think that American men are simply idiots? While they work their tail off facing poverty, uncertainty, and danger to feed their family struggling to keep it down because they cannot afford another kid, we work 9 to 5, pad our 401ks, masturbate to pornography, and if we ever do have sex with a woman we need a pill to get it up! It's moronic.

Yet if I preach to fools, I also know myself to be a fool. Christian men, brothers, let's pray for each other in these times of great temptation. Let's pray for our sons. Let's pray that God would give us the grace to share in the character and faithfulness of Uriah so that our lives can be of service to Jesus Christ. And if it is our desire to serve our spouse in the bedroom why not sanctify our relations through the power of prayer leaving the result to Christ?

SAVED 5X

A pastor told a funny story. While walking seminary grounds musing about God, someone leaped from behind a tree startling him with the question, *"Are you saved?"* The frightened pastor called back, *"From what?"* while looking around for danger. After a moment, the pastor realized that the man was not warning him about pedestrian danger, but instead was doing evangelism in his own style and asking him if he has Christian salvation. The pastor answered that he was saved. We should ask ourselves and even pastors if they are Christians. However, the point of this story is to answer the question, *"Saved from what?"* From what danger does Christian salvation provide protection?

The pastor went on to show that we each need to be saved from the coming wrath of God. Jesus left the world promising that he would return one day to judge the world. Those following him will be rewarded, while those not following will suffer wrath. Paul encourages believers, *"For God didn't appoint us to wrath, but to the obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (I Thessalonians 5:9 WEB). John warns of future despair for unbelievers, *"They told the mountains and the rocks, 'Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb' "* (Revelation 6:16 WEB). Paul says again, *"and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead: Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come"* (I Thessalonians 1:10 WEB). And the promise of salvation is good, but not like a plate of cookies is good. It is good like having a fire extinguisher by your side when you wake at 3 AM with your bed on fire! Are you prepared for the fire of God's wrath? Jesus has a guarantee of salvation from the wrath to come.

All mankind has some appreciation for saving or protecting things of value. I saw a bumper sticker, *"Save the Manatees."* Manatees are a wonderful creation, but may become extinct without mankind's protection. Praise God for those protecting God's creation. Aspiring leaders also fulfill a God given passion to "save" people from need and harm with vision for hope and strategy for change. Thankfully few rob the title of *"savior"* from Christ, but all leaders exercise the savior image of God in their being through efforts to help their fellowman, even if they are woefully misled. Praise God for those providing for God's people. Even pop music expresses a lover's desire to save their beloved. Praise God for those pleasing their spouse. God has stamped his savior image in our being and though sin has marred his image in us and warped our efforts to save, we can still see traces of the rich character of God's salvation; protecting, providing, pleasing. Protection from God's wrath is clearly a primary dimension of salvation, but are other dimensions evident in Scripture?

SAVED PAST, PRESENT, & FUTURE

The pastor above answered that he *"was"* saved, past tense. But since God's coming wrath remains yet future how can one be saved already? Is salvation simply a one time event that each of us should quickly purchase like fire insurance so that when fire comes we can point back to the date we signed the policy? Romans 5:10 (WEB) offers insight, *"For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we will be saved by his life."* Here we see that salvation is past, present, and future. God has reconciled mankind to himself in the past while we were yet his enemies and before we even knew we needed to be saved. God brings individual men to receive their salvation being reconciled in the present receiving God's eternal love through faith in Christ, thus saving our hardened hearts. God will complete our reconciliation in the future as he changes us into his likeness day by day, though in this life we are sinners only perfect in him, but in eternity we will be completely perfect with him. God signed the policy

for the salvation of his people in the past, brings individual men to receive salvation in the present, and will complete our salvation in the future. Praise God for Jesus Christ who is the same yesterday, today, and forever!

SAVED 5X

Last summer our church youth studied I Timothy 2:14-15 (WEB) which states, *“Adam wasn't deceived, but the woman, being deceived, has fallen into disobedience; but she will be saved through her childbearing, if they continue in faith, love, and sanctification with sobriety.”* Can a woman be “saved” through child bearing? The word “saved” here is the same Greek word used for Christian salvation in John 3:17, John 10:9, and Acts 2:21. So can women be saved from God's wrath by bearing children? Surely our Father God is enraged at those who murder the unborn or malign motherhood by debasing women as sex objects. And just as surely he is pleased with those who honor or fulfill his design in motherhood. Yet the gospel makes it clear that only God's grace can shield us from his coming wrath. Even the best of mothers who reject Christian salvation will be sentenced to the punishment of Hades. So then what does I Timothy 2:14-15 mean?

Salvation is the major theme of Scripture. However, each time we read of salvation we should ask *“Saved from what?”* Some Scripture is explicit. I Thessalonians 1:10 (WEB) says, *“and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead: Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.”* Jesus rescues or saves us from the coming wrath of God. However, other Scriptures are not explicit. Do not assume that Jesus only saves from God's wrath. A study of the context shows that Jesus saves from other dangers as well. Since the same word can be used in multiple ways with multiple meanings, the context finally determines word meanings! In fact you will be amazed to discover that Christian salvation is all encompassing, even reaching beyond Hell. In this study I prove that the mighty arm of Jesus Christ reaches to save from 1) harm, 2) sin, 3) vanity, 4) Hades, and 5) the Lake of Fire. Saved 5X!

Jesus Christ is mighty to save us from harm!

The disciples called to Jesus in a storm, *“Save us, Lord! We are dying!”* (Matthew 8:25 WEB). Jesus commands the wind and the waves according to his pleasure. David cried out, *“Save me, God, for the waters have come up to my neck!”* (Psalm 69:1 WEB). Jesus has authority over every circumstance in our lives. We also read in John 9:1-3 (WEB), *“As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, 'This man didn't sin, nor did his parents; but, that the works of God might be revealed in him.' ”* Jesus has power to save from every harm and malady, yet at times has another purpose. We also read in I Corinthians 11:30-32 (WEB), *“For this cause many among you are weak and sickly, and not a few sleep. For if we discerned ourselves, we wouldn't be judged. But when we are judged, we are punished by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.”* Jesus saves us from harm, but also has wisdom enough to inflict pain, sickness, and even death to save us from greater harms such as dishonoring God. So our eyes look to Jesus who is mighty to save us from harm and wise to govern the trials in our lives.

Jesus Christ is mighty to save us from sin!

Most of us are eager to keep our bodies comfortable and our necks free from the noose. So being saved from harm and Hell is sensible. However, salvation from sin requires that we accept God's standard instead of our own. For God calls us not only to believe and be saved from Hell, but also to quit sinning to save us from our natural born love of corruption. God promises in I Corinthians 10:13-14 (WEB), *“No temptation has taken you except what is common to man. God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted above what you are able, but will with the temptation also make the way of escape, that you may be*

able to endure it. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry." Yet he also warns in I John 5:16 (WEB), *"If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life for those who sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death. I don't say that he should make a request concerning this."* Jesus calls men away from the destructiveness of sin and some believers obey and are saved. Yet other believers still disobey and are not saved from sin or from the fruit of sin, even though saved from Hell. Consider the fate of King David or Ananias and Sapphira. These believers were saved from Hell, but not from the dread effects of sin. So our eyes look to Jesus who is mighty to save some from sin by graciously granting obedience and consider that not all who obey the gospel are spared from other sins and suffer for it even to loss of life.

Jesus Christ is mighty to save us from vanity!

Most of us are also eager to live a meaningful life for our own good. What a waste of life to reach the end of life and have lived a useless life. So the offer of salvation from vanity is attractive. Yet the cost to be saved from vanity is to submit to the example and teaching of Christ. We may see the value of not doing the do nots, but do we see the value of doing the dos? If we are busy doing the dos we won't have time to do the don'ts! I Timothy 5:13 agrees that *"Idle hands are the devils workshop."* Paul also warns in I Corinthians 3:10-15 (WEB), *"According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another builds on it. But let each man be careful how he builds on it. For no one can lay any other foundation than that which has been laid, which is Jesus Christ. But if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, or stubble, each man's work will be revealed. For the Day will declare it, because it is revealed in fire; and the fire itself will test what sort of work each man's work is. If any man's work remains which he built on it, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, but as through fire."*

Paul also said at the end of his life, *"For I am already being offered, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight. I have finished the course. I have kept the faith. From now on, the crown of righteousness is stored up for me, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that day; and not to me only, but also to all those who have loved his appearing"* (2 Timothy 4:6-8 WEB).

It is certain that you and I will reach the end of our lives one day. What is not certain is will our lives have been lived in vain or served some useful purpose for Christ? Sadly even true Christians can make a total waste of their lives. So our eyes look to Jesus who is mighty to save the obedient from vanity and consider that not all who have obeyed the gospel have also served the great commission, and so they reach the end their lives empty handed.

Jesus Christ is mighty to save us from judgment in Hell, that is Hades!

Jesus said in John 3:36 (WEB), *"One who believes in the Son has eternal life, but one who disobeys the Son won't see life, but the wrath of God remains on him."*

Paul also said in Romans 10:9-10 (WEB), *"that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart, one believes resulting in righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made resulting in salvation."*

Paul says again in I Thessalonians 1:5-10 (WEB), *"5) and that our Good News came to you not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and with much assurance. You know what kind of men we showed ourselves to be among you for your sake. 6) You became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, 7) so that you became an example to all who believe in*

Macedonia and in Achaia. 8) For from you the word of the Lord has been declared, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone out, so that we need not to say anything. 9) For they themselves report concerning us what kind of a reception we had from you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, 10) and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead: Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come."

Have you ever thought it curious that God saves us from himself? It is his holy justice that demands our damnation and his gracious sacrifice that demands our salvation. Wrestle with that nut for a time and you will soon not only be thankful to escape Hell, but rejoicing to fellowship with the awesome God of Heaven with all God's people present and accounted for! So our eyes look to Jesus who is mighty to save every believer from God's wrath in Hell.

Finally Jesus Christ is mighty to save us, and all the elect, from the Lake of Fire!

Thank God if we have been saved from harm in this uncertain life, from judgment in Hell for unbelief, from the destructiveness of sin, and from a vain and useless life. Yet after this short life is over and this present world ended and even God's purposes for Hell are finished and men stand before the Great White Throne Judgment, who will be saved finally? The value of any previous saving is moot if we are not saved at the last judgment! There is no rejoicing in the preservation of precious cargo over millions of miles of perilous journey only to fail in delivering the cargo across the threshold to final safety.

Thankfully Jesus promises final safety to every soul whose name he has written in his Book of Life, *"11) I saw a great white throne, and him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. There was found no place for them. 12) I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and they opened books. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works. 13) The sea gave up the dead who were in it. Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them. They were judged, each one according to his works. 14) Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15) If anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire"* (Revelation 20:11-15 WEB).

Paul likewise teaches that God unconditionally and effectively predestined to save each of his chosen people from before the creation of the world, *"even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and without defect before him in love"* (Ephesians 1:4 WEB). Do you know if your name is in the Book of Life? You cannot write your own name in the Book for you are powerless to ascend to Heaven. Your pastor, parents, or Christian friend cannot write your name in the Book. Yet a brother can tell you the good news that faith in Christ IS NOT a pen to write your own name in Jesus' Book, but faith IS the glasses to see that Jesus your savior has already written your name there, as my brother told me. So our eyes look to Jesus who is mighty to save his chosen from the Lake of Fire and consider that his grace will not fail to save even one of his chosen... regardless of past judgments.

Do you believe that Jesus chose you? Through faith in Christ you can know that he has always loved you!

CONCLUSION

These reflections are cause for self examination and for the fear of the Lord who acts according to his wisdom. We reflect because we are not yet fully out of harms way. Hopefully, we see the value of humility and caution, for even if we have trusted Christ to save us from Hell, we are not finally saved from the sinfulness and vanity possible, for even a Christian. Yet we praise God for the thankfulness and joy available to those who know

that their name and the names of all God's people have been indelibly inscribed in the Book of Life by Christ before the foundation of the world. These are saved from the Lake of Fire and carried across the threshold into final safety.

Praise God!

Savior of the World!

They said to the woman, "Now we believe, not because of your speaking; for we have heard for ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world."

John 4:42 (WEB)

The adulterous woman told her town that Jesus is the Savior of the world.

Imagine that.

Yet is Jesus the Savior of the WHOLE world?

The adulterous woman whom Jesus spoke to at Jacob's well received the good news that Jesus is the Savior of the world. She must have figured that if Jesus was willing to talk to *her* that Jesus must be the Savior of the world, for she was triply outcast. She was outcast first because she was a woman, second for her promiscuity and adultery, and third for her Samaritan nationality. And who is lower than she? Yet that is the common cry of those who know Christ as their Savior. He is my Savior, thus he must also be yours because it would be impossible for you to be lower than me!

Yet is Jesus the Savior of the whole world? Answers to this question abound among schooled and unschooled theologians. One vein of thought holds that Jesus is not the Savior of the whole world because all are not saved. They reason well that Jesus is the Savior, and so, if someone is not saved it is because Jesus chose not to save them. They conclude that Jesus only chose some and so he is the Savior of a subset of mankind. Others reason well that Jesus is the Savior of the whole world because he made atonement for all mankind. They also reason that Jesus is the Savior, but if someone is not saved it is because they were unwilling to believe in Jesus with their own *free will*. They conclude that Jesus provided every ingredient of salvation except the final deciding factor of faith, which is provided by the subset of mankind that believes in Christ.

What have you concluded?

Frankly these views of salvation are so polar opposite that it would seem that they cannot both be Christian! This does not even include the exhausting list of views in between them that take the joy right out of Christian brotherhood. So the purpose of this study is my answer to the simple question, *'Is Jesus the Savior of the whole world?'*

I pray that my answer ignites that same fire in us that burned in the Samaritan woman who was willing to be a fool for Christ, persuading her whole town that Jesus is the Savior of the world. She who was a promiscuous adulterous Samaritan woman aroused her whole town to faith after spending minutes with Jesus Christ. If only a few minutes with Christ would open our eyes to the same passion! I hope to avoid difficult and muddled theology, but instead to simply ask the obvious questions without avoidance. And by God's grace, confident joy that Christ is the Savior of the world will propel us to persuade our own town to faith.

What do the Scriptures say?

Paul urged Timothy, *“For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and come to full 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, the testimony in its own times”* (I Timothy 2:3-6 WEB).

Paul urged again, *“For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we have set our trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe”* (I Timothy 4:10 WEB).

John explained to the early church, *“And he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world”* (I John 2:2 WEB).

John again explained, *“We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as the Savior of the world”* (I John 4:14 WEB).

Peter also says to the early church, *“Because Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring you to God, being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the Spirit”* (I Peter 3:18 WEB).

Paul urged Corinthians, *“For the love of Christ constrains us; because we judge thus, that one died for all, therefore all died. He died for all, that those who live should no longer live to themselves, but to him who for their sakes died and rose again”* (II Corinthians 5:14-15 WEB).

Paul likewise writes in the grand conclusion of Romans, *“For God has bound all to disobedience, that he might have mercy on all”* (Romans 11:32 WEB).

Score one for Christ is Savior of the whole world!

Yet Paul also says, *“But it is not as though the word of God has come to nothing. For they are not all Israel that are of Israel”* (Romans 9:6 WEB).

Jesus also says, *“... I told you, and you don't believe. The works that I do in my Father's name, these testify about me. But you don't believe, because you are not of my sheep, as I told you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me”* (John 10:25-27 WEB).

Hmm...score one for Christ is not the Savior of the whole world?

What do theologians say?

Certainly the answer, if there is one, is in the Scripture. Yet perhaps theologians can help us understand the Scripture. The question *‘Who is saved by Christ?’* has been at times hotly debated, and at other times fearfully avoided for centuries. Arthur Pink of the 20th century and Desiderius Erasmus of the 16th century are examples of men who reflected deeply on the subject, yet with radically polar answers to the question. While others conclude that the question cannot be answered.

Pink offers his answer with well defended proofs in *The Sovereignty of God* that Christ is not the Savior of the whole world, but only the Savior of the subset of mankind chosen for salvation. Even if you do not agree with Pink or think him ridiculous you would still be wise to read Appendix III, page 253, the Fourth Edition, where he outlines seven different usages for the word *‘world’* in the New Testament. The pages are very thought provoking. And if you continue to disagree with his logic you may find comfort to know that others who are more familiar with Pink's writings have concluded that Pink does not even agree with himself

all the time. So regardless of our conclusions we may at least have something in common with Pink! We are all capricious.

Erasmus also offers his answer with proofs defending the free will of man in his Latin work, *De Libero Arbitrio Dialectice Sive Collatio*. The book is commonly called *The Freedom of the Will in English*. Erasmus argues that Christ is the Savior of the whole world, but only the subset of mankind that chooses Christ by their *free will* is saved. Though I have not studied his work, I am familiar with his arguments as refuted in Martin Luther's rebuttal to Erasmus titled, *On The Bondage of the Will*. A study of the debate between Erasmus and Luther and their use of Scripture is a must for every Christian to gain a deeper understanding of saving grace. If you are new to the debate you will certainly be motivated to open the Scriptures for yourself and make your own salvation certain.

Good and godly men have agreed and disagreed with Pink, Erasmus, Luther, and many other theologians. A study of these and other theologians might be helpful to awaken our minds to the issues and questions surrounding our primary question. However, on a point so important only the Scripture itself will truly feed God's sheep. We do not want to be merely branded with memorized doctrine from a Christian sect or by the few theology books we have read. This is hardly progress in the quest for truth. The Scriptures may be difficult to understand on this point resulting in hundreds of interpretations, yet the right answer, if anywhere, is in God's Word. Though the Scriptures quoted above have resulted in opposing interpretations, the Holy Spirit may still give understanding.

Can my salvation be certain without a certain answer to this question?

Certainly!

Many believers have died since the creation of the world without a certain answer to this question or with opposing views, but all with a very certain faith that Christ died for sinners. A true believer may be uncertain of many things, yet we cling even more tightly to our Savior.

Yet if one insists that he is saved from the Lake of Fire because he is of a chosen subset of mankind or because of his *free will*, then... you will have uncertainty. The proponent of limited atonement can have no absolute assurance of salvation, while believing that he is saved and others are not. Disbelieving the gospel fact that Christ atoned for all mankind cuts loose an essential anchor! Neither can the proponent of *free will* have absolute assurance of salvation while believing that he is saved and others are not. Disbelieving the gospel fact that Christ predestined to save us apart from our will likewise cuts loose a second essential anchor of hope!

Fair enough if you are dizzied by my logic or if the extent of salvation doesn't interest you or if you are content simply resting in the arms of Jesus without a certain answer to our question. However, if you insist on persuading yourself that you are chosen and other men are not or on trusting in your *free will*, then there is a fly in the healing ointment of your gospel.

You need grace.

Can Christ's atonement be limited by God's choice?

Scripture is clear that Christ made atonement and paid the sin debt for all mankind. The very nature of his becoming a man in the incarnation requires that Christ is a representative for every man. Romans 5:12-21 explains that Christ is the new federal head of mankind replacing fallen Adam. Just as Adam represent all mankind in sin, Christ represents all mankind in righteousness. Christ is the atoning sacrifice for Jews and gentiles, men and women, free

and slave, every individual human being. The sin debt for every descendant of Adam has been fully paid through Christ's work on the cross.

This is good news!

Yet, can God choose to un-pay a particular person's sin debt or choose to reject Christ's payment or choose not apply the payment to our account? Because God chose to pay for mankind's sin debt through a historical death in our place he would have to reverse history to un-pay the debt. Because Christ and the Father are both God, he would have to argue with himself to refuse the payment. Because the work of Christ is already applied to all mankind by his grace, Romans 3:23-24, God would have to reverse grace to leave even one of his chosen ones un-forgiven. My previous article, [Justified](#), argues that we are justified *by* his grace which is *received* in faith and that the gavel of justification has already fallen for every one of God's chosen.

This is great news!

Even God CANNOT CHOSE to limit his atonement to a subset of mankind because he has ALREADY CHOSEN to make full atonement for all mankind. This is demonstrated in God the Son's obedience to God the Father's command in the incarnation and atonement. God cannot rescind himself.

Can Christ's unconditional love be conditioned by man's choice?

Scripture is also clear that Christ chose to save us unconditionally apart from every work of man. Jesus confronted his disciples saying, *"you did not choose me but I chose you!"* We read elsewhere that we did not love God, but that he loved us. If this is not convincing enough we read that we are predestined by God's grace from even before creation. So it is proved that it is impossible for our choices, whether good or bad, to add a condition to God's decision to love us unconditionally for we were not even created before he chose to save us. In this way God is a perfect Father who determined to love us before we were even born, though of course we need to be born again before we will be willing receive his love. Imagine if a father decided to withhold his love until his child loved him first. Sadly we earthly fathers can be like that. The good news is that our heavenly Father loves us, period!

Some suggest that God merely foresaw who would love him first and then determined to predestine them to salvation. We could ask *"Do we write our own name to the Book of Life with our faith?"* I heard someone say that salvation is a free gift, but you need to write your name on it. Friends, we are not even perfect fathers, but we do NOT give gifts to our own children that way! Think about it! WE love them. WE choose a gift for them. WE write their name on it. WE give it to them. Having to write our own name on a generic gift makes the gift no longer given or special! God's grace is so NOT a generic gift! Faith is receiving Christ's gift already inscribed with our name and seeing our name already written by Christ in his Book of Life through the lens of faith. This is a matter for rejoicing because left to our sinful selves not one of us would choose God nor write our name in his book, but he chose us.

This is great news!

Man cannot put a condition God's unconditional love because God's love will prevail over every sinner he chooses. Man cannot damn himself!

Is there another solution?

While explaining this to a friend they suggested, *"Surely there is another answer!"* To be sure every belief with a concept of heaven proposes the means to get there. But do not be

fooled by the myriads of answers. Someone once said that there are only two religions in the whole world, the 'do' religion and the 'done' religion. Study all the religions carefully and you will see that in every one you must merit heaven, except Christianity which grants heaven by grace received through faith.

Likewise, every explanation of salvation that accepts Christ's atonement for all mankind's sin yet rejects predestination must add some work of man, such as the decision of his *free will*, to secure atonement. Every explanation of salvation that accepts predestination but rejects Christ's atonement for all mankind's sin then has no certain basis to know that Christ's sacrificial work is applied to their individual account. Consider the salvation puzzle below.

WHICH PATH LEADS TO SALVATION?	
The left? I believe all mankind's sin is atoned, but only those freely willing are saved! Wrong, only his chosen are saved!	Or the right? I believe God's chosen are saved, but only a subset of mankind is saved! Wrong, all mankind is atoned!
HEY WHAT IF ALL MANKIND IS CHOSEN?	

Free will advocates refuse to take the path to the right. They prefer the uncertainty of salvation by *free will* rather than the certainty of salvation by God's free grace, but they are stopped by the doctrine of predestination. Limited atonement advocates refuse to take the path to the left. They prefer the meager atonement of a chosen few rather than the abundant atonement of all mankind, but they are stopped by the doctrine of Christ's atonement of all mankind. But will advocates of *free will* and limited atonement consider that all mankind is chosen?

Ok then, since Christ chose to atone for all mankind is all mankind then chosen to be saved?

We know from Luke 16:19-31 that the rich man is not saved from Hell for his unbelief while Lazarus the beggar enjoys paradise. If this is not true, then how could anything be trusted as true in God's Word? Unfortunately, however, modern evangelism, man's rejection of grace, and fear of damnation has reduced salvation to a single dimension for too many. The hasty call to '*get saved*' and the fearful response to '*be saved*' often bypasses an explanation of what we need to be saved from and what it means to believe in Christ. So let's slow down now and ask the question, '*saved from what?*' The Christian Scriptures highlight at least five major dangers that we need salvation from. Consider this chart, reprinted from my previous article, [Saved 5X](#).

Who Saves?	Who Saved?	Saved From?	How Saved?	Preacher's Role?	Bible Says?
God	Some	Harm	God commands the wind and the waves	Warn Men	Matthew 8:25
God	Believers	Hell / Hades	God opens our eyes, we believe	Evangelize Men	Romans 10:9-10
God	Obedient	Sin	God commands don't do bad, we obey	Rebuke Men	I Corinthians 10:13
God	Obedient	Vanity	God commands do good, we	Exhort Men	I Corinthians

			obey		3:10-15
God	Chosen	Lake of Fire	God predestined us to the Book of Life.	Trust God	Revelation 20:11-15

Two questions grab our attention immediately. First, is it possible to be saved from Hell, but not be saved from sin and vanity? I Corinthians 3 and 10 explain that, yes, it is possible to be saved from Hell, but not be saved from the effects of sinful choices or from the regrets of a life lived in vain. To be sure receiving Christ and the Holy Spirit is a great advantage in fighting temptation and avoiding vanity. And, if we are believers, we will be spared the punishment in Hell for those dishonoring Christ. However, these benefits still do not guarantee that we will escape sin and vanity. King David is an example of one saved from Hell, yet not saved from the sin of adultery and the consequences that followed. Ananias and Sapphira also serve as examples of believers whose lives ended ingloriously because of their sin. Paul's partner in ministry, Demas, is an example of a Christian who chose vanity rather than service to Christ. We should fully expect to see David, Ananias, Sapphira, and Demas in paradise, for their faith in God's grace saved them from Hell, but their lives still ended with deep regrets due to their disobedience.

Second, is it possible to not be saved from Hades and yet be saved from the Lake of Fire or vice versa? Take the time to read the last 4 chapters of Revelation to learn that Hades and the Lake of Fire are not the same place. Hades is a temporary place of punishment for men who die in unbelief. In the future at the Great White Throne Judgment all the souls imprisoned in Hades will be freed to stand before Christ for final judgment. Hades itself, after being emptied of all people, is no longer needed to punish unbelievers and so is thrown into the Lake of Fire, empty, never to be seen again. The Lake of Fire, then, is the final word of Scripture on the destiny of Satan, The Beast, The False Prophet, and anyone else whose name is not written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Now a believer is one who has received Christ as Lord and can know that their name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life through faith in Christ. Believers are promised salvation from Hell, Luke 23:43. Furthermore, those named in the Lamb's Book are granted salvation from the Lake of Fire. So thankfully it is impossible to be saved from Hades and not also be saved from the Lake of Fire. Christians are saved from both Hades and the Lake of Fire. Praise God!

However, non-Christians do not have this hope. They will be punished in the fires Hades for their unbelief and dishonor to Christ. Yet now we boldly ask is it still possible that the names of those punished in Hades will be found in the Lamb's Book of Life and so escape sentencing to the Lake of Fire? Though non-Christians are punished in Hades are they nevertheless saved from the Lake of Fire?

Now that is a question worthy of some Bible study!

Are the names of those punished in Hades nevertheless in the Lamb's Book of Life?

Now that is a silly question! Everyone knows that unbelievers are sentenced to eternity in Hell. Even non-Christians fear that! And even if unbelievers are plucked out of Hades then certainly it is only to be tossed into the Lake of Fire.

That much is certain... or is it?

The church of my youth chose a simple model. Hell was Hell whether you were talking about Hades, the Lake of Fire, or any other painful afterlife. Certainly no one wants to go to Hell, and so we were encouraged to trust and obey Jesus, and promised that our future would be free from fire. I made such a decision as a young boy, happy to be heading to Heaven, and zealous to get back to my life, but unfortunately with little to no understanding of a most deadly problem. My carnal nature loves sin and hates God. Later in high school the seeds of

sin in my heart blossomed into ugly black flowers. By the time I graduated I was weighted down with so much guilt that I couldn't look even the best of friends in the eye, much less myself. I eventually became convinced that I was going to Hell for my sin and no hope remained for me. In the same moment the Holy Spirit reminded me that Christ died for sinners and hope of salvation was kindled. As I entered college, God directed me into Biblical discipleship and, though ecstatic that Christ died for sinners, my pride locked horns with grace. Did I choose Christ or did the grace of Christ choose me, a rebel dead in my sins?

I was quite happy to be saved from Hell accepting Christ's death for sinners. However, Scripture is more than evident that unregenerate sinners do not have a will that is free to choose Christ, but instead we are spiritually dead apart from grace. Only the grace of Christ can awaken us to faith. So how could God choose to save me, a worst of sinners, and chose to leave even one other sinner unsaved? I became enraged at the thought and no longer wanted to be saved by grace, but was bound to the cross knowing that Christ was my only hope. Pride cloaked in false humility allowed me to think that my particular sins set me apart from the common salvation we all share. But the Scripture is clear, no matter how exotic we imagine our sins, they are still common to man and already paid for by Christ's sacrifice.

Persistent ignorance combined with hastily drawn conclusions blinded my eyes to the *Out of Control Optimism* we ought to have through God's grace. I had concluded that since the Bible is clear that men are saved by God's gracious choice and not our free will, and since the Bible is clear that men are punished in Hell, then the atonement of Christ must be limited to a subset of mankind and the remaining are damned to eternity in Hell. Scripture had not yet persuaded me that Hell and the Lake of Fire are different places, a totally foreign concept to my upbringing.

Hence, I invite you to answer with me what I consider to be the most significant theological question for anyone who has ever wrestled with grace. Are the men who are punished in Hell nevertheless named in the Lamb's Book of Life and thus ultimately saved from the Lake of Fire? The unbelieving men sentenced to punishment in Hades are often referred to as the 'wicked dead.' Let's consider a few select Scriptures on the destiny of the wicked dead.

What is the destiny of the wicked dead?

11) I saw a great white throne, and him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. There was found no place for them. 12) I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and they opened books. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works. 13) The sea gave up the dead who were in it. Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them. They were judged, each one according to his works. 14) Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15) If anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.

Revelation 20:11-15 (WEB)

These verses make it plain that Hades and the Lake of Fire are not the same place. Furthermore anyone whose name is not in the Lamb's Book of Life will be thrown into the Lake of Fire and conversely anyone whose name is in the Book of Life will not be thrown into the Lake of Fire. The fact that the wicked dead are released from Hades to stand before the Lord for final judgment... implies hope... if you believe their sins are atoned for by God's gracious choice. But if you believe the atonement is limited to a subset of mankind or

if you believe men effect salvation by their *free will* then there is no hope for them and it would seem, if you follow my logic in this article, no hope for you either!

25) "But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that you, in your lifetime, received your good things, and Lazarus, in the same way, bad things. But here he is now comforted, and you are in anguish. 26) Besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, that those who want to pass from here to you are not able, and that no one may cross over from there to us.'

Luke 16:25-26 (WEB)

This passage shows us that, though the wicked dead are released from Hades in Revelation 20, Hades is not Catholic purgatory. The wicked dead cannot escape from the fires of Hades through personal reform or the prayers of the Saints. Their home is Hell until released by Christ.

3:18) Because Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring you to God, being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the Spirit, 19) in whom he also went and preached to the spirits in prison, 20) who before were disobedient, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, while the ship was being built. In it, few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. 21) This is a symbol of baptism, which now saves you—not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22) who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, angels and authorities and powers being made subject to him.

4:1) Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind; for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, 2) that you no longer should live the rest of your time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. 3) For we have spent enough of our past time doing the desire of the Gentiles, and having walked in lewdness, lusts, drunken binges, orgies, carousings, and abominable idolatries. 4) They think it is strange that you don't run with them into the same excess of riot, blaspheming. 5) They will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. 6) For to this end the Good News was preached even to the dead, that they might be judged indeed as men in the flesh, but live as to God in the spirit.

I Peter 3:18-4:6 (WEB)

Christ preached the hope of the gospel, that mankind's sin are paid for, even to those currently being punished in Hades, so that they would live according to God in regard to the Spirit. Whoa! Really? Really!

For if God didn't spare angels when they sinned, but cast them down to Tartarus, and committed them to pits of darkness to be reserved for judgment;

II Peter 2:4 (WEB)

16) For most certainly, he doesn't give help to angels, but he gives help to the offspring of Abraham. 17) Therefore he was obligated in all things to be made like his brothers, that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make atonement for the sins of the people.

Hebrews 2:16-17 (WEB)

Here we also learn that some fallen angels are already being punished in Tartarus. Eternity does not look promising for the fallen angels because Christ did not die for them, but we do know that he did die for the sins of all mankind, even those currently being punished in Hades for their unbelief. So our question about the destiny of the wicked dead in Hades does not include fallen angels that are currently being punished in Tartarus. Our question concerns the members of mankind, the descendants of Adam and Eve, who are punished in Hell for their unbelief.

6) Since it is a righteous thing with God to repay affliction to those who afflict you, 7) and to give relief to you who are afflicted with us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, 8) punishing those who don't know God, and to those who don't obey the Good News of our Lord Jesus, 9) who will pay the penalty: eternal [eonian] destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might.

II Thessalonians 1:6-9 (WEB)

Homework is needed to understand this Scripture. Is this *'revealing'* of the Lord his judgment on Jerusalem in 70 A.D. or his coming as reigning king at the rapture and final judgment? If the passage is speaking about the Lord coming as reigning king perhaps the focus is the "complete destruction" of the earthly lives of the wicked. They themselves are finally saved, but everything they lived for is lost. However, if the passage is speaking about the Lord coming in judgment in 70 A.D. perhaps the focus is the sentencing of the unbelieving dead to Hades.

Thankfully we do know that unbelieving men will be released from Hades at the Great White Throne Judgment. Consider that Old Testament denotations for the word *'forever'* includes the meaning of *'forever'* in Lamentations 3:31 (WEB), *"For the Lord will not cast off forever."* *'Forever'* can also mean *'for a long time until God changes the plan'* in Exodus 31:16-17 (WEB), *"Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days Yahweh made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed."*

So unless you believe that the Sabbath command and the Old Covenant are still in force, then you must believe that God has the authority to do what is impossible for us, to end *'forever'* as well as to establish *'forever.'* The book of Hebrews explains that God ended the everlasting Old Covenant commands because they were weak and established the perfect New Covenant. This is food for thought.

More information about the meaning of the Greek word *"aion"* translated into English as *"eternal"* is available in my articles [Forever Is Not Forever? You Gotta Be Kidding Me!](#) and [Forever Is Not Forever? You Still Gotta Be Kidding Me!](#)

So is it then possible that Jesus could choose to release the wicked dead from Hades and from their sentence of eonian destruction, by his grace? It is a bold question and the only hope to prompt it is that Christ paid for the sins of unbelievers just the same as for believers, I Timothy 4:10.

8:20) Turn to the law and to the covenant! If they don't speak according to this word, surely there is no morning for them. 21) They will pass through it, very distressed and hungry; and it will happen that when they are hungry, they will worry, and curse by their king and by their God. They will turn their faces upward, 22) and look to the earth, and see distress, darkness, and the gloom of anguish. They will be driven into thick darkness.

9:1) But there shall be no more gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time, he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali; but in the latter time he has made it glorious, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

Isaiah 8:20-9:1 (WEB)

Isaiah understood that God's grace is mighty to save even those who curse God and are thrust unto utter darkness by God for their unbelief.

22) "For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me," says Yahweh, "so your offspring and your name shall remain. 23) It shall happen that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh will come to worship before me," says Yahweh. 24) "They will go out, and look at the dead bodies of the men who have transgressed against me; for their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind."

Isaiah 66:22-24 (WEB)

Isaiah also had confidence that all mankind would be present at the consummation of eternity future.

Yet the number of the children of Israel will be as the sand of the sea, which can't be measured or counted; and it will come to pass that, in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' they will be called 'sons of the living God.'

Hosea 1:10 (WEB)

Hosea understood that God's grace is mighty to make those who are not God's people into his children.

To properly understand John 10:25-27, quoted earlier, you must see that Jesus is pitching a hard ball to the unbelieving Jews when he says "*you are not my sheep*" for he means, "*you are not [behaving like] my sheep*" or "*you are not my sheep [yet].*" Advocates of a limited atonement make Jesus to say, "*you are not my sheep [and never will be my sheep because I*

am not dying for your sins.]” But Paul understood Hosea and Jesus properly as evidenced by his quotation of Hosea in Romans 9:25.

Why even an earthly father might say to his own hard hearted son, *“you are not my son,”* if the behavior of his son is unacceptable in the family. How much more does God expect holiness in his family! Why in Christ’s harshest rebuke ever he said to Peter, *“Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men,”* Matthew 16:23. This is an excellent passage to illustrate how to interpret the Bible properly. I think we all know that Peter is not literally Satan, yet Christ called him *‘Satan’* to his face. Jesus called him *‘Satan’* because Peter was hindering his mission *just like* Satan. And sadly our sin is often that bad as well that the Lord needs to blast us between our eyes with both barrels.

Proverbs 26:4-5 (WEB), says, *“Don't answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.”* We might ask if Jesus is straight shooter or an expert marksman? In order to hit the bull’s-eye of our sin the Lord does not always shoot straight with us, but speaks folly to fools. This is one main reason there is so much division in Christendom over our simple question. The Word of Christ is twisted and grossly misinterpreted by the grace haters and the ignorant who think Jesus’ straight talk to believers is foolishness and his foolish talk to unbelievers is straight. Yet God’s perfect Word hits the bull’s-eye and exposes our hypocrisy if we believe the atonement is limited to a subset of mankind for the Scripture is clear that Christ atoned for all mankind’s sin. And God’s word also exposes our hatred of grace if we believe that our *free will* imputed Christ’s righteousness to our account for the Scripture is clear that our salvation is all BY grace RECEIVED through faith from first to last.

Paul explains God’s design in the gospel, *“For as you in time past were disobedient to God, but now have obtained mercy by their disobedience, even so these also have now been disobedient, that by the mercy shown to you they may also obtain mercy. For God has bound all to disobedience, that he might have mercy on all”* (Romans 11:30-32 WEB). So for the praise of his grace God has tolerated disobedience in the gentiles and then in the Jews binding all mankind to disobedience for the purpose of having mercy on all mankind.

This thesis may be new to you.

Pursue your own study of grace to confirm your own destiny and share your comments below. Also useful would be a Bible study of the places currently unseen by us such as Paradise, Hades, Gehenna, Hell, Tartarus, Thalassa, the Lake of Fire, and the New Heavens and Earth as well as the people unseen by us such as deceased believers, the wicked dead, elect angels, fallen angels, imprisoned fallen angels, The Beast, The False Prophet, and Satan. Note that the only people specifically named as being cast into the Lake of Fire are The Beast, The False Prophet, and Satan. I propose that these three are all fallen angels, demons. And whatever uncertainty we have now will be made certain when God calls us to see unseen places and meet unseen people.

Is this Universalism? Shall we just party?

Proclaiming salvation BY grace RECEIVED through faith is likely to get us labeled insane by both the self-righteous and self-condemned. The self-righteous will begin to scream, *‘Universalism heresy!’* Yet my view espoused above is not universalism as you might think for not all are saved. Unbelievers are not saved from the fires of Hades and even disobedient believers are not saved from destroying their lives with sin or from wasting their lives with vanity. Furthermore, Satan, The Beast, The False Prophet, and any not named in the Book of Life are also not saved but finally sentenced to the Lake of Fire.

Universalism often paints a picture that God's grace eliminates all judgment. Instead judgment is coming and even the best of Christians may still suffer a beating. Jesus said,

47) That servant, who knew his lord's will, and didn't prepare, nor do what he wanted, will be beaten with many stripes, 48) but he who didn't know, and did things worthy of stripes, will be beaten with few stripes. To whomever much is given, of him will much be required; and to whom much was entrusted, of him more will be asked.

Luke 12:47-48 (WEB)

Yet all those Christ names in his Book of Life will be finally saved from the Lake of Fire. And what if God saved every last human being from the Lake of Fire by the same grace that saved you? What would your reaction be, you who claim to be saved by grace? Would you praise God or be indignant?

Likewise the self-condemned will begin to shout, '*Party on!*' Such is the hardness of our hearts and our foolish love of sin. The unregenerate would gladly trade torture in the fires of Hades for a few years of the fleeting pleasures of sin in this life and the gamble of escape from the Lake of Fire. But eternal destiny is not a gamble.

Yet if someone does believe that they have guaranteed salvation from the Lake of Fire through the grace of Christ can they remain unchanged? Hardly. In fact such a person is a born again believer and cannot remain unchanged!

So the truth is preached to remind rebels that the promise of salvation from the Lake of Fire stands only for those who Christ himself has named with his blood in the Lamb's Book of Life from before creation. So while I believe the names of every individual human being are in the Lamb's Book of Life, unbelievers would make a grave mistake to gamble their destiny on my words versus investigating the matter for themselves! But will the unbelieving investigate Christ? Unbelieving mankind continues to party on the precipice of the Lake of Fire as they gamble their lives away rather than know Jesus Christ their Savior and through him to know their certain destiny.

Jesus is the Savior of the world!

The woman at that well was persuaded that Jesus is the Savior of the world. Her whole town confessed to her, "*...Now we believe, not because of your speaking; for we have heard for ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world*" (John 4:42 WEB). A Biblical definition of grace has driven me to believe this as well. Jesus Christ is the Savior of the whole world. When I began following Christ I knew two things; that I was a sinner and that Christ was a Savior. Then a friend asked me if I had ever heard of 'grace.' I had never heard of the word before and as I learned more about grace I trembled to see more of my sin and rejoiced to know even more of God's love for me...and for all mankind. I was happy enough to be saved with little awareness, regard, or concern for the destiny of others until I learned about grace.

However, who wants to receive an undeserved gift at Christmas while your friends stand there empty handed? Praise God, his grace exposed my hypocrisy. Praise God, his grace helped my understanding until I knew from Scripture that Christ is not only my Savior or the Savior of believers, but the Savior of the world. I thank God that neither I nor mankind is empty handed, but we have been given the wonderful gift of Jesus. Shout it from the mountain tops! Christ is the Savior of the whole world!

What about you? Do you comfort yourself believing you are saved by your supposed *free will*? Do you console your doubts saying that God's choice to limit his atonement to a subset of mankind is too lofty a matter for you? Can you find joy in thinking that you are loved by God and saved by his gracious choice while the majority of your fellowman are eternally damned? Would you even be happy if Christ was the Savior of the whole world? Would you shout it from the mountain tops?

Be happy and shout because your only hope that Jesus Christ is your Savior is because he is the Savior of the whole world! Think about that. *Be happy and shout because your only hope that Jesus Christ is your Savior is because he is the Savior of the whole world!*

Do you believe Jesus is your Savior?

Finally friend be warned, if Jesus Christ is not your Savior then how could he write your name in the Book of Life? If Jesus Christ is not your Savior even if the whole world joins your rebellion against your Creator then you can have no hope. If Christ is not your Savior you are unprotected and unshielded from the holy wrath of God against sin. Why follow Satan to the very precipice of the Lake of Fire before acknowledging that Christ IS your Savior?

Find your name in the Book of Life through faith in Jesus Christ!

Should I Stay or Should I Go?

Life is filled with tough questions. Should I go to college or take this or that job? Should I marry or stay single? Should I have children or have none? Should I rent or buy a house? But by far the toughest question I have ever faced on numerous occasions is '*should I stay or should I go?*'

I and most of us usually find the safest easiest path toward our goals that also does not compromise our convictions or values. This is a reasonable life strategy. Solomon also preached that we should take safe paths,

25) Let your eyes look straight ahead.

Fix your gaze directly before you.

26) Make the path of your feet level.

Let all of your ways be established.

27) Don't turn to the right hand nor to the left.

Remove your foot from evil.

Proverbs 4:25-27 (WEB)

So we are agreed that wisdom leads us down the safe path. But what should we do about our propensity to also prefer the easiest path to our goals? Sometimes the safe is not the easiest! At those times we may be tempted to take a dangerous short cut because the way is easier. The long way around is often more difficult even though it is safer. Also with God in the equation we cannot rely on mere human wisdom in our decision making. With God in the equation, trust in him and obedience to him is the only safe thing to do now matter how crazy this may seem to worldly wisdom. Does it seem safe, easy, or wise for Christian missionaries to remain in Iraq during the present war? Hardly! Yet many because of their passion to show the love of Christ to the Iraqi people remain and risk their lives in this mission.

The point is that we all hate difficulty and we spend much energy in planning to avoid difficult circumstances. And yet I can safely say that everyone has already or will at some point face an unwelcome problem. At this point the toughest question will dance around the perimeter of the problems that besiege us taunting, '*Should we stay or should we go?*' 'Should we face the conflict or is it time to search for greener pastures? Though we may face this tough question in any area of life let's focus on an application of our relationship with the family of Christ and with the world.

Should I Stay?

David of the Old Testament is an amazing example of loyalty. Consider that several times David was nearly killed by King Saul's raging jealousy and spear, and yet David remained in his service. Eventually David did leave because King Saul again sought his life. During King Saul's hunt David even had the opportunity to kill Saul in a cave, but instead "*David also arose afterward, and went out of the cave, and cried after Saul, saying, 'My lord the king!' When Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the earth, and showed respect*" (1 Samuel 24:8 WEB). Consider, if your boss had attempted to kill you several times and now was chasing you across the country with an army would you then bow to his authority? David did. David stayed loyal to ungodly authorities because of his great trust in the Lord. Yet David was not foolish either. After reconciliation with Saul we read

that *"David swore to Saul. Saul went home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold"* (I Samuel 24:22 WEB). David remained loyal to King Saul, but they lodged separately!

Jesus of course is the perfect example of commitment. Jesus faced many conflicts and made many enemies during his ministry. Though Jesus only did good things the Jews sought to kill him. Consider how foolish the jealousy of men can become. Jesus literally raised Lazarus from the dead and the Jews responded by plotting to kill both Jesus and Lazarus! Their jealousy drove them mad. They knew that the raising of Lazarus would cause the people to love Jesus more and they were unable to rejoice with the people. They wanted the people to follow them and so killing Jesus and Lazarus became their only recourse. You would think that Jerusalem, the heart of Jewish religion and culture, would be the last place that Jesus would want to be.

Yet we read,

51) It came to pass, when the days were near that he should be taken up, he intently set his face to go to Jerusalem 52) and sent messengers before his face. They went and entered into a village of the Samaritans, so as to prepare for him. 53) They didn't receive him, because he was traveling with his face set toward Jerusalem. 54) When his disciples, James and John, saw this, they said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from the sky, and destroy them, just as Elijah did?" 55) But he turned and rebuked them, "You don't know of what kind of spirit you are. 56) For the Son of Man didn't come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."

Luke 9:51-56 (WEB)

Jesus stayed faithful to his mission and went to Jerusalem because of his commitment to the Father and his love for the Jews and all mankind and won the greatest victory that ever was or will be won.

Paul hated Christians. However, he met Christ while on the Damascus road and became a most loyal disciple. Keep that in mind should you have an enemy because of Christ. Some of the strongest objectors are destined to also become the strongest advocates, though not all. Now Paul faced a problem in Lystra. The crowds began to worship he and Barnabas. So Paul and Barnabas torn their clothes and shouted that they were only mere men bringing the good new of Jesus Christ.

18) Even saying these things, they hardly stopped the multitudes from making a sacrifice to them. 19) But some Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there, and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul, and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead.

20) But as the disciples stood around him, he rose up, and entered into the city. On the next day he went out with Barnabas to Derbe.

Acts 14:18-20 (WEB)

Paul did not call the police, but got up after being stoned and went back into the city that just stoned him! Paul stayed the course in the face of severe opposition.

Jesus also taught,

15) I pray not that you would take them from the world, but that you would keep them from the evil one. 16) They are not of the world even as I am not of the world. 17) Sanctify them in your truth. Your word is truth. 18) As you sent me into the world, even so I have sent them into the world. 19) For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth. 20) Not for these only do I pray, but for those also who will believe in me through their word, 21) that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that you sent me. 22) The glory which you have given me, I have given to them; that they may be one, even as we are one; 23) I in them, and you in me, that they may be perfected into one; that the world may know that you sent me and loved them, even as you loved me.

John 17:15-23 (WEB)

Jesus prayed that we would stay in the world, but not stay of the world. Jesus also prayed that we would stay one with believers, just as he is one with the Father.

Paul taught,

9) I wrote to you in my letter to have no company with sexual sinners; 10) yet not at all meaning with the sexual sinners of this world, or with the covetous and extortionists, or with idolaters; for then you would have to leave the world. 11) But as it is, I wrote to you not to associate with anyone who is called a brother who is a sexual sinner, or covetous, or an idolater, or a slanderer, or a drunkard, or an extortionist. Don't even eat with such a person. 12) For what do I have to do with also judging those who are outside? Don't you judge those who are within? 13) But those who are outside, God judges. "Put away the wicked man from among yourselves."

I Corinthians 5:9-13 (WEB)

Paul taught that we would not stay with rebellious Christians. Yet Paul also taught that we should stay witnessing to rebellious unbelievers in the world.

Paul also taught,

4) There is one body and one Spirit, even as you also were called in one hope of your calling, 5) one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6) one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all, and in us all. 7) But to each one of us, the grace was given according to the measure of the gift of Christ. 8) Therefore he says,

*"When he ascended on high,
he led captivity captive,
and gave gifts to people."*

9) Now this, "He ascended", what is it but that he also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10) He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.

11) He gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, shepherds and teachers; 12) for the perfecting of the saints, to the work of serving, to the building up of the body of Christ, 13) until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a full grown man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14) that we may no longer be children, tossed back and forth and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in craftiness, after the wiles of error; 15) but speaking truth in love, we may grow up in all things into him who is the head, Christ, 16) from whom all the body, being fitted and knit together through that which every joint supplies, according to the working in measure of each individual part, makes the body increase to the building up of itself in love.

Ephesians 4:4-16 (WEB)

Paul taught that we should stay committed to oneness with believers celebrating one another's different gifts as the body of Christ grows into a full grown man, even through the inevitable growing pains.

We also read,

10) We have an altar from which those who serve the holy tabernacle have no right to eat. 11) For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest as an offering for sin, are burned outside of the camp. 12) Therefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people through his own blood, suffered outside of the gate. 13) Let's therefore go out to him outside of the camp, bearing his reproach. 14) For we don't have here an enduring city, but we seek that which is to come.

Hebrews 13:10-14 (WEB)

Most importantly we must stay with Christ.

Should I Go?

David of the Old Testament is also an example of wisdom. His master King Saul's jealousy had grown out of control and David's life was in danger. David wisely avoided a dinner party with Saul, but asked Jonathon to be there and pay attention to Saul's reaction to David's absence. When Saul became outraged that David was not there and accused David and Jonathon of treason, Jonathon knew it was time for David to escape.

Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, because we have both sworn in Yahweh's name, saying, 'Yahweh is between me and you, and between my offspring and your offspring, forever.' " He arose and departed; and Jonathan went into the city.

I Samuel 20:42 (WEB)

David knew it was time to go away from Saul's uncontrolled anger.

Jesus also did not enjoy conflict, but escaped as long as he was able.

23) He said to them, "Doubtless you will tell me this parable, 'Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we have heard done at Capernaum, do also here in your hometown.' " 24) He said, "Most certainly I tell you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. 25) But truly I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up three years and six months, when a great famine came over all the land. 26) Elijah was sent to none of them, except to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. 27) There were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed, except Naaman, the Syrian."

28) They were all filled with wrath in the synagogue, as they heard these things. 29) They rose up, threw him out of the city, and led him to the brow of the hill that their city was built on, that they might throw him off the cliff. 30) But he, passing through the middle of them, went his way.

Luke 4:23-30 (WEB)

Jesus' teaching enraged unbelievers, but he was able to go through the angry mob.

Apostle Paul also set an example of when to go away.

17) "When I had returned to Jerusalem, and while I prayed in the temple, I fell into a trance, 18) and saw him saying to me, 'Hurry and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not receive testimony concerning me from you.' 19) I said, 'Lord, they themselves know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue those who believed in you. 20) When the blood of Stephen, your witness, was shed, I also was standing by, consenting to his death, and guarding the cloaks of those who killed him.'

21) "He said to me, 'Depart, for I will send you out far from here to the Gentiles.'"

22) They listened to him until he said that; then they lifted up their voice and said, "Rid the earth of this fellow, for he isn't fit to live!"

Acts 22:17-22 (WEB)

Paul did not entertain the unbelief of his Jewish brothers, but when they refused to believe then God told him to go to the gentiles who would believe.

Jesus also taught,

11) Into whatever city or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy; and stay there until you go on. 12) As you enter into the household, greet it. 13) If the household is worthy, let your peace come on it, but if it isn't worthy, let your peace return to you. 14) Whoever doesn't receive you, nor hear your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake the dust off your feet. 15) Most certainly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city.

Matthew 10:11-15 (WEB)

Jesus told us to go away from those who do not receive the message of the good news.

Paul taught,

9) I wrote to you in my letter to have no company with sexual sinners; 10) yet not at all meaning with the sexual sinners of this world, or with the covetous and extortionists, or with idolaters; for then you would have to leave the world. 11) But as it is, I wrote to you not to associate with anyone who is called a brother who is a sexual sinner, or covetous, or an idolater, or a slanderer, or a drunkard, or an extortionist. Don't even eat with such a person. 12) For what do I have to do with also judging those who are outside? Don't you judge those who are within? 13) But those who are outside, God judges. "Put away the wicked man from among yourselves."

I Corinthians 5:9-13 (WEB)

Restated here for emphasis Paul tells us to go away from rebellious Christians, but do not go away from witnessing to rebellious unbelievers in the world.

Paul also taught,

14) Don't be unequally yoked with unbelievers, for what fellowship do righteousness and iniquity have? Or what fellowship does light have with darkness? 15) What agreement does Christ have with Belial? Or what portion does a believer have with an unbeliever? 16) What agreement does a temple of God have with idols? For you are a temple of the living God. Even as God said, "I will dwell in them and walk in them. I will be their God and they will be my people." 17) Therefore

" 'Come out from among them, and be separate,' says the Lord. 'Touch no unclean thing. I will receive you. 18) I will be to you a Father. You will be to me sons and daughters,' says the Lord Almighty."

II Corinthians 6:14-18 (WEB)

Paul teaches us that we should go away from fellowship with unbelievers which I interpreted to mean do not marry, partner in business, or confide with an unbeliever.

And we read,

10) We have an altar from which those who serve the holy tabernacle have no right to eat. 11) For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest as an offering for sin, are burned outside of the camp. 12) Therefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people through his own blood, suffered outside of the gate. 13) Let's therefore go out to him outside of the camp, bearing his reproach. 14) For we don't have here an enduring city, but we seek that which is to come.

We must go away from false religion.

Finding Jesus Outside the Camp

How do we find Jesus outside the camp? Should we stay or should we go from our current position to find him? We have found both example and teaching to stay and to go. We need God's word and the leading of his Holy Spirit to guide us through the maze of this life. Jesus calls us to join him outside the camp. But where is this place? How do we find Jesus Christ in this crazy mixed up world? Where is his fellowship? I have a sad book on my shelf. The book simply lists the name and a paragraph or two about each Christian denomination in the United States. Sadly the book is over an inch thick. We are exhorted to come to Jesus outside the camp and yet we have established so many mini-camps professing Christ that new Christians today are burdened with carrying the past conflicts of Christians from every century since Christ. Like mentioned earlier the body of Christ has had and likely will have more growing pains till we become one full grown man.

To illustrate the problem let's just consider the names of a few organizations that simply profess Jesus Christ. Some organizations of professing Christians have labeled themselves with the name of their founding father such as the *Mennonites* after Menno Simons, the *Lutherans* after Martin Luther, or even the *Mormons* after the angel Moroni. Yet why would we do this silly thing? Isn't Jesus Christ our founder? Yes men have become great through Christ's work in their lives, but no man or angel no matter how great should have his name on the church of Jesus Christ.

Other organizations have labeled themselves according to their preferred form of church government such as the *Presbyterians* which means 'elder' for their government of elder rule, the *Catholics* which means 'universal' for the only true Christian church and church government, and *Episcopal* which means 'bishop' for their government by bishops over pastors over churches. None of these church governments is evil in design, but purposed to help organize Christ's people. Even the Catholic Church has a noble goal of demanding unity in Christ's family. In fact I myself am catholic with a small 'c' because every true believer is a member of the universal congregation of Christ. Catholic leadership, however, errs by trying to make a physical human organization equal to Christ's spiritual organization. Membership in Christ's church is gained only by possessing true faith in Christ. A membership card to a human organization cannot guarantee salvation. So why put the name of our church polity on our placard even if our church government is superior or we think we have a greater number of true Christian members? Why not call ourselves Christians?

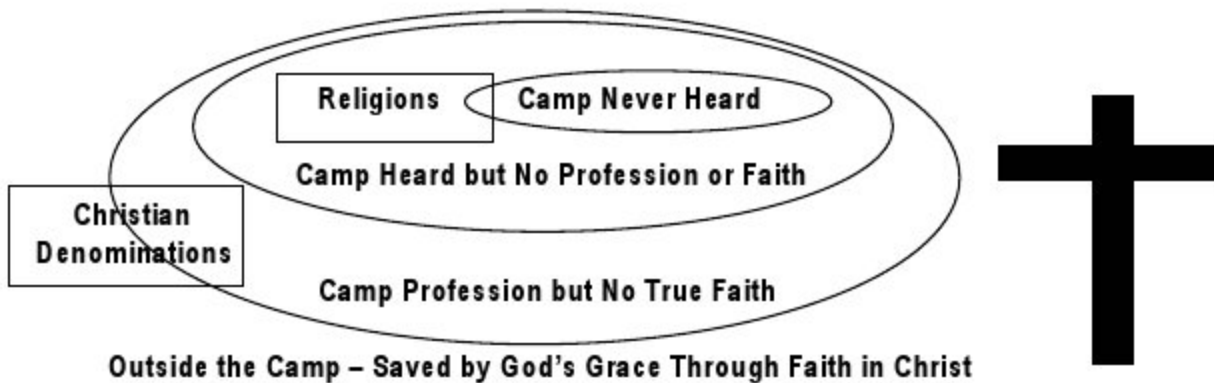
Finally other organizations have labeled themselves according to a key doctrine such as the *Pentecostals* who hold to the importance of spiritual gifts such as speaking in tongues and prophecy, the *Baptists* who know the importance of Baptism by immersion, though they are not all agreed whether once, thrice, forward, or backward, and the *Reformed* who debate the doctrines of the Reformation but often neglect to pray sincerely for their Catholic brethren. I think the most difficult assignment any of us will ever have in this life is to be right. Suppose we were right about Pentecost, baptism, or the Reformation and another were wrong? Would that be a cause for plastering my A+ test score on the door of my church? Wouldn't that instead be the cause for even greater humility in my victory and greater prayer and concern over my opponent's defeat?

Well I have said my peace. Efforts have been made in the past to scrap legacy systems and organizations to form new purer institutions. Yet the result has simply been the addition of

more and more denominations. What then is a wise course? How can the body of believers in Christ get from where we are now to grow into the one mature man promised in Scripture? How can we escape the camps of this world to join Jesus outside the camp? Here are my reflections on this question.

Directions to Jesus Outside the Camp

Below are boundaries defined by Scripture with circles and boundaries made by man with squares.



Outside the Camp - Saved by God's Grace Through Faith in Christ

So again how should we escape the camps of this world to join Jesus outside the camp? If you are in *Camp Never Heard* you must hear and believe the good news that Jesus has paid your entire sin debt and through faith in him you can have eternal life. And now that you have heard, you are no longer in *Camp Never Heard*! However, unless you leave your false religion if you have one, profess Jesus' as your savior, and place your trust in him you have now simply moved to *Camp Heard but No Profession or Faith*, an equally bad position. So you say "OK, OK, I'll believe in Jesus! Just go away!" But have you truly placed your complete faith in Jesus that he has forgiven all your sin past, present, and future and that he will give you eternal life guaranteed? You may even be a faithful member of a Christian denomination, but if your faith is not real you are still camping, but now in *Camp Profession but No True Faith*. Friend, to join Jesus *Outside the Camp* you must have faith that he has saved you by his grace alone. Do you believe that? Are you willing to suffer disgrace from this world who hates the grace of Christ and leave their camps?

Finally what should we do about the present denominational madness that has overtaken Christendom? Should we stay or should we go from that? Sadly denominational mini-camps do exist. I myself am a member of local church family myself and I think all Christians should be, and nearly every local church is denominational. Yet I am defined as a person by my faith in Christ, not whatever denomination I happen to be attending. I heard a pastor once say, "I am first a Christian, second a Calvinist, and third a Baptist." Yikes! This is pure silliness!

Christian friends, we must organize ourselves and work together to accomplish the work of Christ and this means commitment to a local fellowship of believers as well as commitment to the larger body of true believers. But folks, let's foster some passion for joining Christ outside the camp. Why not say, "I am first a Christian, second a Christian, third a Christian, and ashamed that there even is such a thing as denominations and Christians with different views!" I do know one thing, Jesus said, "I will build my church" and that is the one we need to be a part of. I also know that Jesus prayed that we might be one as he is one with the Father and folks that is pretty close. God help us to grow together as the body of Christ

into one mature man.

In the end, whether we stay or go in the midst of our current pickle it is God's plan to eventually conform us individually AND corporately into the image of his own Son. Examples above show that David, Paul, and Jesus were led to stay and go on numerous occasions. Yet Paul exhorts us, ***"Therefore put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand"*** (Ephesians 6:13 WEB). Thus we may be led to stay or go throughout our sojourn, but through the grace of God we will finally stand like our older brother, Jesus Christ.

Snowy Summit

**I am Disciplined
by the Grace
of Jesus
Christ**



Stretch Your Tent

Persevering after failure, hardship, or disappointment can be difficult if not impossible in our own strength. Even more difficult is when there is nobody to blame but ourselves for our situation. After we have kicked our own dog, shot our own foot, or burnt down our own shed, living with the outcomes of our own foolish behavior can be painful for ourselves and our loved ones to say the least. The question of the hour at times like this is, *"is there hope?"* "We all want to believe there is hope, even the good old American Dream promises hope. But is there really hope, hope that goes deeper to a sure foundation after the American Dreams have evaporated? Is there a hope that is against all hope because it promises that God himself will act righteously even after we have not?"

Depression and despair are two monsters that answer *"definitely not"* to this question. These two monsters are always looking for ways to claw into our lives. They always have a reason why you should pack it in, and give up hope. They always have reasons to persuade us that God is not good and that instead God is against us. Some of the most unlikely people have been plagued by these monsters. The skill of these monsters to infect and destroy a believers life should not be a surprise to us because they proceed directly from Satan himself. Satan's main objective is to derail believers and depression and despair are two of his most effective tools to accomplish it.

God's Word, however, answers *"you bet there is hope,"* for everyone who believes in the Lord. How can we know for certain that the hope offered to believers through the Lord is truly hope against all hope, and a hope that offers a sure foundation for the things that we build? Simply put, the hope that Jesus offers is exhaustive because it even includes the ability to raise the dead. And the guarantee of Jesus ability to do this is that He raised Himself from the dead. Believing in these things ought to leave us hopeful that if our good God can raise the dead he can certainly deliver us in the midst of our trial. So how should we respond to the hope offered through Christ while in the midst of our trial or uncertain circumstance? Contrary to our tendency to retreat at times like these God's word commands us to stretch our tent to prepare for the Lord's victory. Lets look briefly at the book of Isaiah and the exhortation in chapter 54 to stretch our tents.

Three Gospel Truths From Isaiah

First, we witness the call of Isaiah in Chapter 6. Isaiah's vision of Holy God seated on His throne leaves Isaiah utterly undone. Isaiah says, *"Woe is me! For I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for my eyes have seen the King, Yahweh of Armies!"* Immediately afterward Isaiah says *"Here I am. Send me!"* to the call of the Lord. Likewise in the gospel age we know that those understanding the gospel will respond *"send me!"*

Second, Isaiah, Judah's prophet, clearly recognized that God's message was for all humanity and not simply the Jews. In Chapter 24 Isaiah prophesies God's impending judgment upon the whole world because of sin. He says, *"The earth will be utterly emptied and utterly laid waste. For Yahweh has spoken this word."* Jesus later confirms this judgment in the gospel.

Third, Isaiah prophesies concerning the redemption to be found in Christ for all mankind. Like Paul's book of Romans, Isaiah 53:6 teaches that all mankind has gone astray into sin and correspondingly that God has laid all our sin upon Jesus Christ. These clear gospel truths are one reason this book is often called, *"the gospel according to Isaiah."*

Stretch Your Tent

1) "Sing, barren, you who didn't give birth; break out into singing, and cry aloud, you who didn't travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife," says Yahweh. 2) "Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch out the curtains of your habitations; don't spare: lengthen your cords, and strengthen your stakes. 3) For you will spread out on the right hand and on the left; and your offspring will possess the nations, and settle in desolate cities.

Isaiah 54:1-3 (WEB)

The exhortation here could be considered offensive by most standards. Can you image walking up to a barren woman and telling her to sing, rejoice, and build a bigger tent? This does not fit with our image of sympathy for those suffering through trials. Yet God's Word clearly commands this woman, who has been denied her hearts desire of children, to rejoice, and further more that her children are more than that of the woman who has a husband. How are we to understand this?

The spiritual children of the desolate woman are in view here. But how does she have more children? One way we could look at this is to ask a question. With whom do you feel a greater kinship with...the person who has gone through trial, or the person who has never known trial? The barren woman who continues to trust in the Lord certainly has more "kin" than the woman who has never known trial. And because of this the Lord exhorts her and us to stretch the tent to make room for a growing spiritual family identified by their need of the Lord.

Jesus himself acknowledged only obedient disciples as his family in Matthew 12:47-50. Physical children are certainly a God given blessing for which to be thankful. But a much greater joy is to be had as God uses us to build His spiritual family. Moreover any one of us, the barren included, can have spiritual children by first setting an example of obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ ourselves.

We also note that the command is to stretch the tent for this spiritual family, not beautiful paneled houses. The prophet has a good question in Haggai 1:4 for those that have obtained satisfaction in their American Dream.

You Will Not Suffer Shame

4) "Don't be afraid; for you will not be ashamed. Don't be confounded; for you will not be disappointed. For you will forget the shame of your youth; and the reproach of your widowhood you shall remember no more. 5) For your Maker is your husband; Yahweh of Armies is his name. The Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer. He will be called the God of the whole earth. 6) For Yahweh has called you as a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, even a wife of youth, when she is cast off," says your God. 7) "For a small moment I have forsaken you; but I will gather you with great mercies. 8) In overflowing wrath I hid my face from you for a moment; but with everlasting loving kindness I will have mercy on you," says Yahweh your Redeemer.

Isaiah 54:4-8 (WEB)

Standing before the Lord in our sin and receiving correction from His hand will leave a person forever changed. In fact if a man or woman were to see the extent of their sinfulness, spiritual paralysis would surely set in. We would need the Lord's assurance and Holy Spirit to learn to walk again. And that is just what we see here with the woman. The woman received discipline from an angry God and was deserted and abandoned in her sin. She is barren, desolate, and without the Lord. However, when the Lord's corrective hand is done He turns to her to win her back to Himself. Moreover, He also offers the promise that she will not be put to shame for her past sinfulness.

This promise is essential for the restoration of the woman and for our own restoration should we have fallen into sin. After we have acknowledged our own sin as truly terrible, we will naturally fear exposure and humiliation. God's promise is firm on this point, ***"you shall not be ashamed."*** God speaks tender words as He seeks to restore the woman and any fallen saint to Himself. These words of promise of course do not apply to the unbelieving who do not acknowledge their sin but instead glory in their shame, Philippians 3:18-19.

You Will Be Established

9) "For this is like the waters of Noah to me; for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah will no more go over the earth, so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you, nor rebuke you. 10) For the mountains may depart, and the hills be removed; but my loving kindness will not depart from you, and my covenant of peace will not be removed," says Yahweh who has mercy on you. 11) "You afflicted, tossed with storms, and not comforted, behold, I will set your stones in beautiful colors, and lay your foundations with sapphires. 12) I will make your pinnacles of rubies, your gates of sparkling jewels, and all your walls of precious stones. 13) All your children will be taught by Yahweh; and your children's peace will be great. 14) In righteousness you will be established. You will be far from oppression, for you will not be afraid; and far from terror, for it shall not come near you.

Isaiah 54:9-14 (WEB)

The woman and we are commanded to stretch the tent. We are promised that we will not be put to shame. And now we are promised that we will be established. Frankly the description of restoration that is planned for believers is down right exciting. There are battlements, rubies, jewels, and precious stones. And God himself will restore the woman and all believers from their desolation in sin to this beautiful picture.

God also promises that He will never rebuke us again. Are we to understand this as a promise to believers now, or in our eternal state? David held God's favor all his life but needed to be rebuked even in his final years as king, 2 Samuel 24. God's purpose in discipline and correction is always to establish us to positions of righteousness where we do not need His rebuke. So when we have accepted the Lord's rebuke we will not need to be rebuked again. Certainly we will never be rebuked in the eternal state because there will be no sin. However, we are not yet in the eternal state so the Lord may still rebuke us as is needed during this life.

Vindication From The Lord

15) Behold, they may gather together, but not by me. Whoever gathers together against you will fall because of you. 16) "Behold, I have created the

blacksmith who fans the coals into flame, and forges a weapon for his work; and I have created the destroyer to destroy. 17) No weapon that is formed against you will prevail; and you will condemn every tongue that rises against you in judgment. This is the heritage of Yahweh's servants, and their righteousness is of me," says Yahweh.

Isaiah 54:15-17 (WEB)

Finally we will receive vindication from the Lord. He will finish His work in us so that no weapon will prevail against us and we will be able to refute every enemy.

We note a difficulty in this passage. God first says that attackers are not from Him and then immediately says that He has created the destroyer! Is God's word confused or contradictory? No. We understand this to mean, first, that believers may be and most probably will be attacked through their lives but this is not necessarily from God's corrective hand, but instead from His sovereign hand of purpose. In fact, God may very well unleash destroyers into our lives for the very purpose of demonstrating the good things He has already built into our lives. In short all things, good and evil, come from the Lord. However, not all evil that comes into our lives is from God's hand of discipline.

Conclusion

So we see a progression here. First, the woman has transgressed and received a blow of chastisement commensurate with her crimes from the Lord. Second, we see that she is devastated from the Lord's chastisement and her barrenness. Third, the Lord returns to her with a command to stretch the tent in the midst of her barrenness. She is given a promise that she is loved and will not be put to shame. She is given a promise that she will be established. And she is promised words of wisdom to refute her enemies as her vindication from the Lord.

The New Testament reveals that the church herself is a restored bride just like this woman. Thus we ought to make every effort to participate in the fellowship of the church and encourage one another with the promises found in Isaiah 54. The New Testament also reveals that unbelievers, including unbelieving Israel, are just like the woman still rejected and we are waiting for the Lord to bring her back with deep compassion through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Are you part of the woman restored as the bride of Christ or part of the woman still rejected outside of Christ?

Ten Theological Absurdities

Christians, we might be guilty of sculpting the Christian faith to appear sensible to our unbelieving neighbors. We may be tempted to massage the truth hoping to make it reasonable to those who don't believe the truth. But can the supernatural be made natural, or belief acceptable to unbelief? Will this strategy work? Jesus said in 1 Corinthians 1:25 (WEB), *"because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."*

So perhaps foolishness isn't so bad after all. And two verses later in 1 Corinthians 1:27 (WEB) we read, *"but God chose the foolish things of the world that he might put to shame those who are wise. God chose the weak things of the world that he might put to shame the things that are strong."* Ok then, so even better, God can use our foolishness and weakness to conquer the wise and strong!

And further in Matthew 10:24-25 (WEB) Jesus says, *"A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be like his teacher, and the servant like his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more those of his household!"* And if we are scorned, no problem. Jesus got worse and yet he still won the greatest victory!

So rather than continue the charade, join me and add ten theological absurdities to your neighborly discussions across the hedgerow. (It is assumed that your conversational repertoire already includes the Trinity, the Incarnation, and Jesus' Resurrection, the big three Christian absurdities to the natural unregenerate mind. So those items are not included in the list below.)

1. Happy are the sad

No doubt the American ideal of democracy promising *"life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"* has found its way to every ear on the globe. While I certainly do not oppose these goals it is curious that Jesus founded his government on vastly different promises. He said in Luke 6 (WEB), *"Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh."* and also *"Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep."* Wise Solomon likewise said in Ecclesiastes 7 (WEB), *"It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men, and the living should take this to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter; for by the sadness of the face the heart is made good."*

These ideas may seem absurd, but only because our TVs, radios, mailboxes, computers, and phones are stuffed full of glad-handed salesmen and sales pitches from politicians to phonies for cars and clothes, diets and college degrees, all promising happiness. Why we cannot even discern that we have been had by the lies that we actually wanted to believe. But we should ask if the glad-handed have made delivery on their promises? It is certain that Jesus will deliver on his promises.

2. Slavery offers true freedom

Perhaps the biggest lie of our time told by the American people and heard the world a round is that *'freedom'* is the summum bonum of mankind's very existence. Yet one would think that someone somewhere would ask in the midst of the sales pitch, okay, but before I buy it, *'freedom'* from what? Perhaps democracy has obtained freedom from the tyranny of King George, but reading the newspapers it would appear we are now enslaved to a much greater tyranny... the tyranny of ourselves.

Yes, it is true that we no longer have taxation without representation, but honestly I ask, is taxation with representation any better? Jesus invites us to a radical, upside down, inside

out, and outright absurd way of thinking. He says in John 8:31-32 (WEB), "*Jesus therefore said to those Jews who had believed him, 'If you remain in my word, then you are truly my disciples. You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.'*"

True freedom, according to Jesus, is only found by holding to his teachings, that is obeying Jesus. True freedom is only found in submission, submission to our Creator. This seems to be quite opposite of the proud American brand of freedom, the spirit of independence.

Jesus also says more radically in Mark 10:43-45 (WEB), "*But it shall not be so among you, but whoever wants to become great among you shall be your servant. Whoever of you wants to become first among you, shall be bondservant of all. For the Son of Man also came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*"

Perhaps some might agree to obey God, since we think we can retain our pride if we only bow to God alone, but now even more absurdly Jesus says true greatness comes only by making ourselves slaves to all. Whoa. Too much for you? If doubting the cost, consider that Jesus has also prepaid your ticket for eternal freedom from a sinful heart and condemnation for sin. So you have nothing to lose and everything to gain by following his example.

3. Our spirit can interlude

To interlude means to "*participate in an intervening or interruptive period, space, or event*" I once made a casual reference that I could not attend an event due to my schedule, but that I would "*be there in spirit.*" My quick to correct theological friend noted that we are body, spirit, and soul, but that all our components are always at the same place at the same time. Now I only intended to use a common expression without any real meaning to my words.

However, since then I read 2 Kings 5:25-27 concerning Elisha's spirit and 2 Corinthians 12:1-3 concerning Paul's vision. Check it out for yourself. It would appear that the components of our existence may not always need to be at the same place at the same time. Now this has never happened to me, nor do I think we have the power to orchestrate or schedule these events. However, we are the Lord's servants and he will have his way with us, including the possibility sending our spirit on a mission while our body waits for the reunion. Freaky to think about.

4. Not reincarnation but trans-incarnation

Recently I was surprised to meet a man who called himself Christian and also believes in reincarnation. Of course each person is free to believe as they choose, and Hinduism likewise believes in reincarnation. Believe what you may, but this is not Biblical doctrine. So reincarnation is not true, but there may be something that could be wrongly perceived to be reincarnation, and for this discussion I have labeled it "*trans-incarnation.*" The prefix '*trans*' means across. With reincarnation the same person is given another incarnation (body) to continue living in their next life. However, with *trans-incarnation* the same calling or gifts are given to another person to continue the work of the prior person.

The highlighted example of this in Scripture is that Jesus says in Matthew 11 that John the Baptist is '*Elijah*' in fulfillment of Malachi 4:5. Yet John also says he is not Elijah in John 1. So who is John the Baptist? John remains John, BUT he is tagged by the spirit of God with Elijah's calling and gifts to continue Elijah's work in a supernatural way. We may also note that apparently God can do this so powerfully that the next person tagged almost appears to be a reincarnation of the prior person. For example some thought that because Jesus' work was so similar to John the Baptist that Jesus was in fact John, raised from the dead, Mark 6:14.

Finally, consider Matthew 17:11-13, "*Jesus answered them, 'Elijah indeed comes first, and will restore all things, but I tell you that Elijah has come already, and they didn't recognize him, but did to him whatever they wanted to. Even so the Son of Man will also suffer by them.'* Then the disciples understood that he spoke to them of John the Baptizer."

The use of the word '*comes*' and '*has come already*' implies that the trans-incarnation of Elijah's calling and gifts to John the Baptist was not a singular event. However, don't waste your time trying to figure out if you are Elijah "*trans-incarnate*." Your mission is to produce fruit in keeping with repentance!

5. The mortality rate is not 100%

Check your Old Testament for stories about Enoch and Elijah for proof. My only question is, are those the only two that didn't die or are there more that dodged the Grim Reaper that are not recorded in the Bible? Wow. Think about it. Imagine being ushered into Heaven, hosts of Angels, God's people, and King Jesus himself without even passing through death! Perhaps, the Lord did this for Enoch and Elijah to remind us that no one is dead to God, but instead we are all alive, whether here or there, or in the flash in between, Luke 20:37-39.

6. The dead will all be raised

And not only is the mortality rate not 100%, even if you do happen to die, you will be raised to life again! The awesome news is that ALL God's people will be raised to an eternal life of bliss with him. Check with Jesus to confirm if you are one of his. A few years ago at the workplace lunch table I turned the conversation to the resurrection of the dead. The discussion turned a tad uncomfortable while my colleagues reflected that it would be '*creepy*' to see a deceased loved one alive again. So would we prefer instead that they would just stay dead? Unfortunately our thoughts about these things are impacted more by corrupt horror movies than by the wholesome truth of the Bible. The resurrection will be an amazing day of joy for every believer and I personally look forward to seeing my Christian mother and brother again. Read I Corinthians 15 for more details on that.

7. Not all people are human

Some of you are already joking that a few of your acquaintances are in that category! But seriously, it is true that not all people are human. A person is defined as a being with identity, mind, will, emotion, and personality or potential to develop these attributes. So we see that all humans are people, including the unborn. However, there are more people than just humans.

Jesus is also human, at least since the incarnation anyway. But consider God the Father and also God the Holy Spirit. They are not human, but they are two of the three persons in the Trinity. Consider also all the Angels and Demons. They are beings, but not human beings. Instead they are real and living people with names such as Michael and Gabriel on the good side of things, and Legion and Lucifer on the evil side of things. Hey coolness, mankind is not alone in the Universe! Or maybe you don't think that is cool?

8. Invasion by evil aliens is coming

Now this concept might even be a stretch for my Bible believing evangelical friends, but here goes. Check out the last three verses of the book of Isaiah. Isaiah is an amazing Old Testament prophet who saw past his time all the way to the New Covenant through the Church Age to the last great battle on the Earth. So who are the dead bodies of those that rebelled against God mentioned at the end of Isaiah's book? Mankind has rebelled to be sure, but the bodies are not ours, since we are saved by grace. Furthermore Isaiah's verses make it doubly clear that ALL mankind is worshiping God and ALL mankind is horrified by these dead bodies. Okay, so who are they?

Re-read #7 above for a clue. Currently demons are not embodied, but apparently one day they will be on the Earth with bodies to match their evil character. Not a pleasant thought. If realized, I can only imagine the massive web of deception already spun by demonic forces for mankind's entrapment through our foolish search for alien brothers in the telescope of non-fiction and for monster thrills in the theater of fiction. If incarnate demons do walk this earth on day, very few humans will recognize who these evil people are or know that deliverance cannot not come from carnal warfare.

9. Forever is not always forever

We Christians often bandy about the word '*eternal*' only ever thinking it has one meaning, you know '*forever*.' However, pull out your Hebrew lexicon and look up the word '*eternal*' and you will find a laundry list of perfectly valid denotations. And certainly '*forever and ever*' is one very common meaning. But another denotation is '*forever UNTIL*' the person in view is deceased. Read Deuteronomy 15:17 in the Hebrew for an example of that. Another denotation is '*forever UNTIL*' God satisfies the terms of the contract. Exodus 31:16 is an example of that when compared with the terms of the New Covenant in Romans 14:5.

Frankly, the ending of the '*forever*' terms of the Old Covenant is one of the Jews strongest arguments for justifiably nailing Jesus on the cross. If Jesus was a mere man he would be blasphemous to even suggest the termination of an eternal covenant from God. Yet Jesus does claim to fulfill and terminate the Old and has begun the New AND he wasn't a mere man. He is God and has proved his authority to satisfy the terms of '*forever*' through the sacrifice of his own body. This is powerful stuff that has left pundits debating even to today.

Unfortunately, the translators haven't been more clear in their translation of the Hebrew word '*olam*' which means '*the duration of the subject in view*'. Thus the '*olam*' of a man's life is... 70 years. The '*olam*' of the Old Covenant was... until Christ abolished it. However, the '*olam*' of God's faithfulness is... forever.

We might also ask if this observation about the denotations of '*forever*' has implications for our understanding of the New Testament, particularly the sentence of '*eternity*' in Hell for unbelievers? The Greek word translated eternal in the New Testament is '*aion*'. And the classic work by John Wesley Hanson from 1875 makes it clear that '*aion*' is a synonym with the Hebrew word '*olam*'. I have written a short review of his work [here](#). Dr. Heleen Keizer has also written a dissertation proving the same titled, *Life, Time, Entirety - A Study of Aion in Greek Literature and Philosophy, the Septuagint and Philo*. Read her [315 page dissertation online](#) or an [abstract of her conclusions here](#).

Read their books, however, I am convinced that only the grace of God can persuade the self-righteous of this wonderful truth. The answer lies in the verdict of God's grace, not the fickleness of our faith, nor our supposed '*free will*', nor second chances. God's grace teaches us that the redeemed were not even saved by a first chance! Jesus blood atonement for his people was not a chance, but his mightiest act of deliberate love for all mankind. However, the unbelieving should be warned that only God's people and no other will gain entrance to glory and that only by the electing grace of God.

10. Hades / Hell is not the Lake of Fire

I mentioned this concept before, but it deserves to be re-mentioned again in our list of top ten Biblical absurdities. I grew up going to a small country church where the theology was quite simple; Heaven was Heaven, Hell was Hell, Jesus is Savior, and we trust in him to be saved. Of course that simple message is still truthful and powerful enough to lead many to salvation from destruction. And that may be your experience with the Christian message as well.

Now I don't have a goal to rock the boat or disturb our understanding unnecessarily, however, it should be noted that if we take a closer look that there is a bit more to the story. Read Revelation chapter 20 and you will see that Hell / Hades is not the Lake of Fire. In fact you will see that all those punished in Hell are safely extracted out of Hell for the final determination of their fate as written in the Book of Life, while Hell itself is cast into the Lake of Fire, empty of all souls. So it would appear that Hell is '*forever*' UNTIL God determines it is no longer needed and he discards it into the Lake of Fire forever and ever. Satan is also thrown into the Lake of Fire along with The Beast and The False Prophet, after which the New Heavens and the New Earth commence with no more sin, EVER. Now that is good news for all God's people, and because of electing grace, good news only for God's people.

Well, there you have it, ten theological absurdities. Please do not worry too much that God

uses foolish things to confound the wise. Though the above things may sound absurd or disturbing, God is good and he is good all the time. The upshot of all this is that since God can accomplish mighty things with foolishness, he might even be willing to use you for his mighty deeds :-). However, for now join me following Jesus on the next task he places before us whether mighty or mundane.

Maranatha.

The Bill of No Rights

Preamble

In this paper I compare man's claim of "*inalienable rights*" and "*freedom*" with the truth of Holy Scripture. This comparison is essential to keep the family of Christ from seduction to the philosophies of unbelieving mankind. Like the forbidden fruit in the garden, these philosophies are beautiful on the outside, but filled with Satan's lies about the grace of God and nature of man.

Specifically man has no "*inalienable rights*" before God and their fellowman, outside of Christ. This lie has bred millions of hardened sinners made even worse, if possible, by the false hope of "*freedom*" apart from Christ as they gnash and claw each other for their "*rights*" on the very precipice of destruction. Courts and councils attempt to mediate the very fights they will be sentenced to continue as torment, while doctors, lawyers, professors, bankers, and judges gather wages to wallow in luxury for a few fleeting moments. Don't you know that the worst torment of hell is that not one sinner there will ever relinquish their rights? The gnashing and clawing continues on and on and on as the unregenerate fight for the rights to their own platform of fire. Imagine a sinister, cold blooded murderer of his family receiving the death penalty in court while shaking his fist to God and man shouting, "*I have my rights!*" Of all sights in the world this is to be the most pitied, and apart from grace this is each of us. The claim of "*rights*" is an unseemly garment for sinners saved by grace.

But do we lay down our "*rights*" to be ruled by tyrants and ignorant men? No. Yet consider some in Nazi Germany persecuted the Jews as "*Christ killers*." They believed the Jews had no rights because of their sin against Christ and so murdered them wholesale. The Bible, however, teaches us that Christ was crucified by both Jew and Gentile, all mankind. Who then is qualified to cast the first stone? Man's fight for rights has taken the attention off of a much greater threat. Man has absolutely no rights remaining before Holy God, his wrath is burning white hot against his enemies, and it is only moments before they are sentenced to fire. Why fight for "*rights*" against your fellow man when the tidal wave of God's wrath is about to fall? Get salvation! Press your plea with Jesus Christ! If you have true rights in Christ and true security for eternity what does it matter if so called "*rights*" are lost for a few moments in this life? Trade your "*rights*" for salvation!

I. No right to be first

Man's sinful birth nature craves to be first. However, those following Christ know this is not a right. Jesus said,

24) A dispute also arose among them, which of them was considered to be greatest. 25) He said to them, "The kings of the nations lord it over them, and those who have authority over them are called 'benefactors.' 26) But not so with you. But one who is the greater among you, let him become as the younger, and one who is governing, as one who serves. 27) For who is greater, one who sits at the table, or one who serves? Isn't it he who sits at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.

Luke 22:24-27 (WEB)

II. No right to sue others in a court of law

Man's sinful birth nature defends his rights using words, weapons, and whatever is needed to protect one's self from attack. However, those following Christ know that this is not a right. Paul teaches,

Therefore it is already altogether a defect in you, that you have lawsuits one with another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?

1 Corinthians 6:7 (WEB)

III. No right to claim freedom except through Jesus Christ

Man's sinful birth nature believes he is free to do as he pleases and that he deserves this freedom. However, those following Christ have confessed their bondage to sin and received the right to become sons of God. Jesus confronts,

30) As he spoke these things, many believed in him. 31) Jesus therefore said to those Jews who had believed him, "If you remain in my word, then you are truly my disciples. 32) You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

33) They answered him, "We are Abraham's offspring, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How do you say, 'You will be made free'?"

34) Jesus answered them, "Most certainly I tell you, everyone who commits sin is the bondservant of sin. 35) A bondservant doesn't live in the house forever. A son remains forever. 36) If therefore the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."

John 8:30-36 (WEB)

IV. No right to pray

Strangely some would petition their government for the right to pray. Jesus, however, makes it plain that prayer from the heart can be neither approved or prevented by governments of men,

9) He spoke also this parable to certain people who were convinced of their own righteousness, and who despised all others. 10) "Two men went up into the temple to pray; one was a Pharisee, and the other was a tax collector. 11) The Pharisee stood and prayed to himself like this: 'God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of men, extortionists, unrighteous, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12) I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all that I get.' 13) But the tax collector, standing far away, wouldn't even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' 14) I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Luke 18:9-14 (WEB)

V. No right to blessing

Man's sinful birth nature blesses himself with every effort. However, those following Christ know that blessing cannot be obtained by effort but is granted as a gift from Christ. Paul teaches in Romans,

1) What then will we say that Abraham, our forefather, has found according to the flesh? 2) For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not toward God. 3) For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." 4) Now to him who works, the reward is not counted as grace, but as something owed. 5) But to him who doesn't work, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness. 6) Even as David also pronounces blessing on the man to whom God counts righteousness apart from works,

7) "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, whose sins are covered. 8) Blessed is the man whom the Lord will by no means charge with sin."

Romans 4:1-8 (WEB)

VI. No right to serve

Man's sinful birth nature presumes that at least he has the right to work. However, those following Christ know that opportunity to serve is also from the grace of God. Jesus said,

7) But who is there among you, having a servant plowing or keeping sheep, that will say when he comes in from the field, 'Come immediately and sit down at the table,' 8) and will not rather tell him, 'Prepare my supper, clothe yourself properly, and serve me, while I eat and drink. Afterward you shall eat and drink'? 9) Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded? I think not. 10) Even so you also, when you have done all the things that are commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy servants. We have done our duty.' "

Luke 17:7-10 (WEB)

VII. No right to repent

Man's sinful birth nature also imagines that he can come to God in repentance on the day of his own choosing. However, those following Christ know that God is not obligated in the least to give even one more moment of opportunity for repentance before executing judgment and more importantly that man does not even have the ability to leave sin without the kindness of God's grace. Paul preaches,

1) Therefore you are without excuse, O man, whoever you are who judge. For in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself. For you who judge practice the same things. 2) We know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. 3) Do you think this, O man who judges those who practice such things, and do the same, that you will

escape the judgment of God? 4) Or do you despise the riches of his goodness, forbearance, and patience, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? 5) But according to your hardness and unrepentant heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath, revelation, and of the righteous judgment of God; 6) who "will pay back to everyone according to their works:" 7) to those who by perseverance in well-doing seek for glory, honor, and incorruptibility, eternal life; 8) but to those who are self-seeking, and don't obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, will be wrath, indignation, 9) oppression, and anguish on every soul of man who does evil, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

Romans 2:1-9 (WEB)

VIII. No right to boast

Man's sinful birth nature incessantly boasts. However, those following Christ must lay down all boasts except the boast that we have a mighty savior. Paul writes,

21) But now apart from the law, a righteousness of God has been revealed, being testified by the law and the prophets; 22) even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all those who believe. For there is no distinction, 23) for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God; 24) being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; 25) whom God sent to be an atoning sacrifice, through faith in his blood, for a demonstration of his righteousness through the passing over of prior sins, in God's forbearance; 26) to demonstrate his righteousness at this present time; that he might himself be just, and the justifier of him who has faith in Jesus.

27) Where then is the boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith.

Romans 3:21-27 (WEB)

And again,

28) God chose the lowly things of the world, and the things that are despised, and the things that don't exist, that he might bring to nothing the things that exist, 29) that no flesh should boast before God. 30) Because of him, you are in Christ Jesus, who was made to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption: 31) that, as it is written, "He who boasts, let him boast in the Lord."

1 Corinthians 1:28-31 (WEB)

IX. No right to salvation

Man's sinful birth nature imagines that he deserves grace or can earn grace. However, those following Christ agree with Romans,

10) *As it is written, "There is no one righteous; no, not one. 11) There is no one who understands. There is no one who seeks after God. 12) They have all turned away. They have together become unprofitable. There is no one who does good, no, not so much as one." 13) "Their throat is an open tomb. With their tongues they have used deceit." "The poison of vipers is under their lips." 14) "Their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness." 15) "Their feet are swift to shed blood. 16) Destruction and misery are in their ways. 17) The way of peace, they haven't known." 18) "There is no fear of God before their eyes." 19) Now we know that whatever things the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may be brought under the judgment of God. 20) Because by the works of the law, no flesh will be justified in his sight; for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.*

Romans 3:10-20 (WEB)

X. No right to give offense except with the gospel

Man is an offensive rebel by birth nature. He rebels against parents, government, taxes, honor, and the good news of the gospel. However, those following Christ must remove all offense for the Lord's sake, except the offense of the gospel.

24) When they had come to Capernaum, those who collected the didrachma coins came to Peter, and said, "Doesn't your teacher pay the didrachma?" 25 He said, "Yes."

When he came into the house, Jesus anticipated him, saying, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth receive toll or tribute? From their children, or from strangers?"

26) Peter said to him, "From strangers."

Jesus said to him, "Therefore the children are exempt. 27) But, lest we cause them to stumble, go to the sea, cast a hook, and take up the first fish that comes up. When you have opened its mouth, you will find a stater coin. Take that, and give it to them for me and you."

Matthew 17:24-27 (WEB)

Paul, however, faithfully preached the offense of the gospel,

13) Therefore subject yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether to the king, as supreme; 14) or to governors, as sent by him for vengeance on evildoers and for praise to those who do well. 15) For this is the will of God, that by well-doing you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: 16) as free, and not using your freedom for a cloak of wickedness, but as bondservants of God. 17) Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

1 Peter 2:13-17 (WEB)

Full rights as sons and heirs of God's promises

Does mankind have any rights?

4) But when the fullness of the time came, God sent out his Son, born to a woman, born under the law, 5) that he might redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of children. 6) And because you are children, God sent out the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, "Abba, Father!" 7) So you are no longer a bondservant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

Galatians 4:4-7 (WEB)

Believers in Jesus Christ have the full rights of the sons of God and are the heirs of all God's promises. However, these rights are a gift of God's grace purchased by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. Not one right possessed by man has been earned, but instead is a gift of God's generous grace. Since this is the case let us follow the example of Jesus Christ who willingly laid down all his rights and thus was exalted above every name.

Lord help us to trust you in this way.

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The Declaration of Dependence

Preamble

When in the course of spiritual events, Christians must separate from unbelief, wickedness, and man supplanting God, to retain the privileged titles of sons and daughters of God, the fearful certainty of the coming wrath of God requires that we should declare the causes impelling us to reverence Christ.

These truths are self evident, all people, by birth-nature, are disobedient to the Lord Jesus Christ, and by nature reject their good creator in favor of idols, following Satan himself, and are thus subject to the judgment and wrath of God and are legally due only the right of suffering the painful consequences of sin, death, and eternal separation from God and all that is good in eternal damnation. Correspondingly, Holy God is under no compulsion or obligation to protect any one from the logical outcomes of sinful choices, to offer anyone eternal life, or to save anyone from a just decree of damnation. Except, God the Father for the demonstration of His grace has unconditionally elected His People to receive the gift of eternal bliss with the Lord Jesus Christ from before they were even born having done neither good nor evil. The elect themselves deserve damnation along with Satan himself in the Lake of Fire, but the death of God the son, the Lord Jesus Christ, serves as a substitute for the death they deserve. God the Holy Spirit convinces the elect of their sin, God's righteousness, and the judgment to come. The Holy Spirit also irresistibly brings a response of faith in Christ to his Church. Further, the elect of God only become brothers through faith in Christ and participation in the Church. No work, effort, or choice of man can produce the heart change needed for fellowship with God's family, but only the grace of God. Finally, those God the Father has elected, that Jesus has died for, and the Holy Spirit has sealed will with all certainty receive the gift of eternal life with Christ and His family. Thus each man's earthly and eternal destiny is absolutely dependent upon God.

Men Declare Independence

Only through grace are men able to declare dependence on the Lord. For every man and woman's first choice was to be their own god. Satan placed a temptation before Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. He whispered, *"for God knows that in the day you eat it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil"* (Genesis 3:5 WEB). Eve ate, Adam followed, and they thus declared independence from God. The ancient King of Tyre rose to great power and said, *"I am a god, I sit in the seat of God, in the middle of the seas"* (Ezekiel 28:2 WEB), yet another declaration of independence from God.

What of us? We all have done the same.

Nations Declare Independence and God Laughs

Likewise the nations plot and scheme for a plan, formula, invention, law, philosophy, ideal, or doctrine that will give them the peace and prosperity they crave. Will the God in heaven grant these cravings with no reverence to his crucified son, Jesus Christ? The Psalmist declares,

1) Why do the nations rage, and the peoples plot a vain thing? 2) The kings of the earth take a stand, and the rulers take counsel together, against Yahweh, and against his Anointed, saying, 3) "Let's break their bonds apart, and cast

their cords from us." 4) He who sits in the heavens will laugh. The Lord will have them in derision. 5) Then he will speak to them in his anger, and terrify them in his wrath: 6) "Yet I have set my King on my holy hill of Zion." 7) I will tell of the decree. Yahweh said to me, "You are my son. Today I have become your father. 8) Ask of me, and I will give the nations for your inheritance, the uttermost parts of the earth for your possession. 9) You shall break them with a rod of iron. You shall dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." 10) Now therefore be wise, you kings. Be instructed, you judges of the earth. 11) Serve Yahweh with fear, and rejoice with trembling. 12) Give sincere homage to the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish on the way, for his wrath will soon be kindled. Blessed are all those who take refuge in him.

Psalm 2 (WEB)

Dependence for Life

Instead we are wholly dependent upon God for the very beating of our heart. God himself gives and takes away life. *"...you take away their breath: they die, and return to the dust. You send out your Spirit and they are created..."* (Psalm 104:29b-30a WEB). Jesus confronts our restlessness with a simple question, *"Which of you, by being anxious, can add one moment to his lifespan?"* (Matthew 6:27 WEB). Is it possible to gain independence from God's authority over our life? No. He alone gives us life, sustains our life, and takes our life.

Dependence for Provision

We are also wholly dependent upon God for life provisions. Jesus teaches, *"Therefore don't be anxious, saying, 'What will we eat?', 'What will we drink?' or, 'With what will we be clothed?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things"* (Matthew 6:31 WEB). God is faithful to his promise to provide for our needs. *"Yet he didn't leave himself without witness, in that he did good and gave you rains from the sky and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness"* (Acts 14:17 WEB). Can we gain independence from God for our daily needs? No. Even if were we the richest person in the world we would still need the Lord every day.

Dependence for Salvation

More important than life, food, or clothing is our dependency upon God for salvation. One day each individual will stand before Christ for judgment. But how are we who rejected God to be saved? Romans teaches,

But the righteousness which is of faith says this, 'Don't say in your heart, "Who will ascend into heaven?" (that is, to bring Christ down); or, "Who will descend into the abyss?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead.)' But what does it say? 'The word is near you, in your mouth, and in your heart;' that is, the word of faith which we preach: that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart, one believes resulting in righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, 'Whoever believes in him will not be disappointed'

(Romans 10:6-11 WEB).

Can we go to heaven to petition for peace with God and calm his anger? Hardly! Can we go to Hell to undo the wrong we have done? Nope. We cannot even make the first step to appease God's wrath. Instead God invites us to receive by faith that he loves us and his wrath is already appeased.

Dependence for Everything

Jesus compared himself to a vine with us as his branches, a vivid picture that we are dead without him. Jesus said, *"I am the vine. You are the branches. He who remains in me and I in him bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing"* (John 15:5 WEB). Can a vine branch say, *"Enough! I've had it with the vine. I'm out of here!"*? Can the branch gain independence, pack its bags, and march down the field in search of another vine? No. Likewise we can do nothing apart from the vine, Jesus Christ. That is *'nothing,' 'nada,' 'zilch,' 'zero.'* Get the picture? Each man, including me and you, wants independence. God wants dependence.

Interdependence among God's People

Moreover God wants dependence upon himself and interdependence upon his people. Think of God as the *ultimate family man*. After all he does call himself our father. Not only does he smile when his children cooperate. He insists upon it. Consider Hosea 11:4 (WEB), *"I drew them with cords of a man, with ties of love; and I was to them like those who lift up the yoke on their necks; and I bent down to him and I fed him."* God deserves the credit for the times we have been cared for, fed, loved, and had burdens removed. Wow, God has loved us through people from the time of our birth to this day. Do you think that God is thrilled when we declare independence from him or each other? I think rather that this gets God pretty mad. God is the ultimate family man, building a Christian family. So check your independence at the door.

Independence from Unbelief, Wickedness, Obligation, and Man replacing God

The Scriptures do teach us to be independent in a few ways.

First,

14) Don't be unequally yoked with unbelievers, for what fellowship do righteousness and iniquity have? Or what fellowship does light have with darkness? 15) What agreement does Christ have with Belial? Or what portion does a believer have with an unbeliever? 16) What agreement does a temple of God have with idols? For you are a temple of the living God. Even as God said, "I will dwell in them and walk in them. I will be their God and they will be my people."

17) Therefore " 'Come out from among them, and be separate,' says the Lord. 'Touch no unclean thing. I will receive you. 18) I will be to you a Father. You will be to me sons and daughters,' says the Lord Almighty."

2 Corinthians 6:14-18 (WEB)

Second,

9) I wrote to you in my letter to have no company with sexual sinners; 10)

yet not at all meaning with the sexual sinners of this world, or with the covetous and extortionists, or with idolaters; for then you would have to leave the world. 11) But as it is, I wrote to you not to associate with anyone who is called a brother who is a sexual sinner, or covetous, or an idolater, or a slanderer, or a drunkard, or an extortionist. Don't even eat with such a person. 12) For what do I have to do with also judging those who are outside? Don't you judge those who are within? 13) But those who are outside, God judges. "Put away the wicked man from among yourselves."

1 Corinthians 5:9-13 (WEB)

Third,

11) ... make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, even as we instructed you; 12) that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and may have need of nothing.

1 Thessalonians 4:11b-12 (WEB)

Fourth, Christians must obey God alone in belief and practice,

28) saying, "Didn't we strictly command you not to teach in this name? Behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and intend to bring this man's blood on us." 29) But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men."

Acts 5:28-29 (WEB)

Christ Depends on His Father

If anyone would have the right to act independently it is Jesus Christ. Yet we read, *"Jesus therefore answered them, 'Most certainly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing of himself, but what he sees the Father doing. For whatever things he does, these the Son also does likewise' "* (John 5:19 WEB). God the son, Jesus Christ demonstrated perfect dependence upon God the Father. Wow!

Independent / Autonomous Christians and Churches?

If these terms mean independence from unbelief, wickedness, obligation, and man replacing God then all the more! However, if there is a spirit of independence or a cavalier attitude about keeping step with the one church that Christ is building then beware of the God who laughs from heaven! Perhaps to avoid the independent spirit of our age we should call ourselves *"Christ-dependent"* or *"Christ-governed."* Jesus prayed, *"The glory which you have given me, I have given to them; that they may be one, even as we are one"* (John 17:22 WEB). Paul wrote, *"There is one body and one Spirit, even as you also were called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all, and in us all"* (Ephesians 4:4-6 WEB). Jesus promised, *"...I will build my assembly, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it"* (Matthew 16:18b WEB). The church that Jesus is building is the only one that will be left standing. Make sure you are not independent from his church!

The Gospel of Utter Dependence Upon Christ

Thus I repudiate any doctrine that teaches an individual can absolve their guilt or justly deserved penalty of eternal damnation before Holy God through any work, effort, condition, or choice no matter how great or insignificant. Paul warns,

6) I marvel that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ to a different "good news", 7) but there isn't another "good news." Only there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the Good News of Christ. 8) But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you any "good news" other than that which we preached to you, let him be cursed. 9) As we have said before, so I now say again: if any man preaches to you any "good news" other than that which you received, let him be cursed. 10) For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? For if I were still pleasing men, I wouldn't be a servant of Christ.

Galatians 1:6-10 (WEB)

I instead join the people of faith through the ages who have suffered for the testimony that we have absolutely nothing within ourselves deserving eternal life, but it has been granted strictly as a free gift by the grace of God to all Christ's chosen ones. Apart from the unmerited grace of God we would suffer eternal damnation along with the rest of the non-elect. This I joyfully receive and proclaim.

Pledge of Dependence

Therefore, through Christ, I appeal to Almighty God for the rectitude of these intentions and do solemnly publish and declare to God and humanity that I always was and always will be wholly and absolutely dependent upon the Lord. I am thus absolved from allegiance to anything that opposes our salvation given by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. For the support of this document, with further reliance upon Christ, I pledge my life, fortune, and sacred honor.

Finally, opportunity to promote this good news is granted strictly as a gift of God's grace.

The Image of God in Man

What is the Image of God in Man?

Many find the image of God in the form or function of an individual. Americans in particular emphasize individualism. Some compare form with God as Trinity and man as body, soul, and spirit. Some compare function with a man as God's vicar. These may be true, but I propose there is more. Consider,

26) God said, "Let's make man in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the sky, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27) God created man in his own image. In God's image he created him; male and female he created them.

Genesis 1:26-27 (WEB)

This verse relates teamwork dominion and male / female sexuality to the image of God.

Perfect Oneness and Love Between Multiple Persons: Marriage / Church

I propose that one aspect of God's image in man often missed is this: perfect oneness and love between multiple persons. God himself is three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, perfectly united in one God. We marvel over this doctrine. Marvel also that the Scriptures say, *"Therefore a man will leave his father and his mother, and will join with his wife, and they will be one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they were not ashamed"* (Genesis 2:24-25 WEB). Here this aspect of God's image is revealed with three persons, a male and a female, united in one flesh marital relation with God's blessing. One could argue the full image of God within mankind requires male / female fellowship. An exclusive male or female fellowship or an individual misses this aspect of God's image.

The theme of perfect oneness and love between multiple persons is repeated in Jesus' prayer for his followers. *"The glory which you have given me, I have given to them; that they may be one, even as we are one; I in them, and you in me, that they may be perfected into one; that the world may know that you sent me and loved them, even as you loved me"* (John 17:22-23 WEB). So in addition to marital one flesh unity Jesus prays for Christian unity.

Wait! What about Jesus?

Wait! If multiple persons are essential to God's image, did Jesus miss this as an individual? Jesus was never an independent individual but always one with the Father. Consider, *"Philip said to him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us.' Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you such a long time, and do you not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father. How do you say, 'Show us the Father?' 10 Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I tell you, I speak not from myself; but the Father who lives in me does his works. 11 Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me; or else believe me for the very works' sake' "* (John 14:8-11 WEB).

Double wait! If we are created in his image as male and female, is God then also male and female? No. God always describes himself as our Father without a mother god. First, understand mankind is created in HIS image. We cannot reverse the direction and make God into our image. Second, the reason we must be male and female to be in God's image is more involved because Ephesians 6:31-32 (WEB) says, *"For this cause a man will leave his father and mother, and will be joined to his wife. The two will become one flesh. This mystery is great, but I speak concerning Christ and of the assembly."* So not only is male and female marital union an expression of the image of God, but a husband's self-sacrifice for his wife is also a picture of Christ and the church. Paul says this is a great mystery.

God not only showed his self-sacrificing male husbandly nature to us, his female bride, by dying on the cross, but also calls us creaturely male husbands to the same nature of self-sacrifice for our female wives. This is why God created us male and female to fully express his male nature, because he also fully shares his nature of self-sacrifice for us, with us, so we can live self-sacrificially for each other as he for us and ultimately be joined with him in perfect unity.

Men note, though marriage is a picture of Christ and the church, 1 Corinthians 11:11 teaches the inter-dependence of male and female. That is God also calls women to Christ-likeness through self-sacrifice. In the end God is the leader in self-sacrifice for us all and we are his children.

For this reason I oppose Bible translations that claim to modernize the message by exchanging male terms for God with neuter or female terms. I am also opposed to translations that change masculine references to mankind for neuter or male / female terms. References to humanity in the Scripture are typically male because men have been appointed head of women in marriage and leaders in the church to reflect the image of God in mankind. These translations change the inspired word of God and malign the very heart of the image of God in mankind.

What about Male and Female Animals?

Wait again! If we are created in his image as male / female, do animals also possess God's image? No. My thesis is that perfect oneness and love between multiple persons is an aspect of God's image. And male / female one flesh relationship is only one expression of this oneness. Jesus also prayed for oneness between believers regardless of gender. And though animals are also male / female, Ecclesiastes 3:18 reminds us that in our fallen state we may behave like animals, but we are still qualitatively different. Consider a brief comparison:

Image of God	Marriage - M/F	Church - Believers	Animal - M/F
Dominion teamwork	Yes, family	Yes, Great Commission	No, instinct only
Loving spiritual unity	Yes, if both Christian	Yes, common faith	No
Loving emotional unity	Yes, companionship	Yes, serve one another	No
Loving physical unity	Yes, shared pleasure	Yes, sharing in Christ's sufferings	No, Instinct only

The Union of Justice and Mercy, The Carrot and Stick, and More!

We worship God for the union of justice and mercy shown at the cross of Christ. God's justice demands that punishment be meted out for sin. God's mercy moved him to bear the punishment himself for those he would save. Justice and mercy crash together in love for mankind at the cross. Unbelief can remain only because of ignorance or an imbalanced understanding of justice and mercy. To receive salvation sinners need to see both the need because of the justice of God and the provision through the mercy of Christ, only visible in perfect measure at the cross. Justice is imbalanced in one who imagines he possesses some righteousness or that God unrighteously winks at sin. Mercy is imbalanced in one who imagines he can avoid separation from God for his sin or that God can forgive without justice being met. Marvel that balanced communication of justice and mercy to mankind was perfected by the teamwork of all persons of God the Trinity at the cross. Though each are equally God, at the cross the Father served as administrator of justice, the Son served as sacrifice of mercy, and the Holy Spirit still serves as messenger of the good news.

Likewise, God chooses to reveal his nature of justice and mercy through the teamwork of male and female temperaments for more effective romance, parenting, and discipleship. Paul says,

7) But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother cherishes her own children. 8) Even so, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you, not the Good News of God only, but also our own souls, because you had become very dear to us. 9) For you remember, brothers, our labor and travail; for working night and day, that we might not burden any of you, we preached to you the Good News of God. 10) You are witnesses with God how holy, righteously, and blamelessly we behaved ourselves toward you who believe. 11) As you know, we exhorted, comforted, and implored every one of you, as a father does his own children, 12) to the end that you should walk worthily of God, who calls you into his own Kingdom and glory.

1 Thessalonians 2:7-12 (WEB)

Two persons working toward a common goal allows one to pull and the other to push for more rewarding labor. A stubborn donkey is easily moved by one person leading with a carrot and another prodding with a stick.

God also chooses to reveal his numerous roles of service to mankind through the teamwork of spiritual gifts among believers. Paul teaches in Ephesians 4:11-13 (WEB),

11) He gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, shepherds and teachers; 12) for the perfecting of the saints, to the work of serving, to the building up of the body of Christ, 13) until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a full grown man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

No one Christian has all the gifts. However, as we each exercise our gifts we build each other up in unity and the likeness of Christ. Note that Christian discipleship is not on the list of spiritual gifts! The image of God I propose makes individual fulfillment of the Great Commission unthinkable. Discipleship of the nations is a commission to the body of believers each exercising their gifts together to make disciples, not individuals attempting to do it all.

Finally, though husbands and wives are called to consciously obey God's calling for their roles, we are more radically saying marriage expresses the image of God by the nature and

definition of the institution. Also, believers are exhorted to consciously exercise their spiritual gifts, but more radically God shines his image through us as we serve one another with his gifts.

Our Conversation and Bodies

God’s conversation with us in Scripture often shows two perspectives on one truth to enable us to more perfectly know him. For example 1 John 1:8 (WEB) says, *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”* and 1 John 3:9 (WEB) says, *“Whoever is born of God doesn’t commit sin, because his seed remains in him, and he can’t sin, because he is born of God.”* Unbelievers read this and say, *“See! The Scriptures contradict!”* Believers, however, understand God’s purpose in leading us from both before and behind to keep us on course to holiness. God has placed these same two perspectives on conversation from his image in maleness and femaleness to bless romance between us and produce godly offspring from us. The world pits righteousness and mercy against one another, but in the work of the gospel they are passionate lovers.

Our bodies are also created in God’s image. Psalm 89:10 speaks of God’s strong arm of protection. Isaiah 60:16 speaks of God nurturing his redeemed through royal breasts. And God does not only work through our bodies for nurture and protection, but for romance. The very design of the male and female body reflects God’s character of passionate love. Song of Solomon 2:6 (WEB) says, *“His left hand is under my head. His right hand embraces me.”* and Proverbs 5:18-19 (WEB) says, *“Let your spring be blessed. Rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe and a graceful deer—let her breasts satisfy you at all times. Be captivated always with her love.”*

Corruptions

If this proposition is correct, that an aspect of the image of God in man is perfect oneness and love between multiple persons, then we can easily look at a matrix of possible corruptions of this image. Consider the table below.

	Marital / Sexual	Familial / Parenting	Church / Fellowship
Anti	Anti-sexual 1 Timothy 4:3	Anti-family State child factories	Anti-fellowship Organization is bad
Mono	Mono-sexual Masturbation	Mono-family I trust only myself to parent	Mono-fellowship Meet with thyself alone
Homo	Homo-sexual Same gender sex	Homo-family I trust only my gender to parent	Homo-fellowship Meet with same sect alone
Inter	Inter-sexual Sex with other species	Inter-family Man in animal family / Tarzan	Inter-fellowship United by faith in “a” god
Omni	Omni-sexual Sex with all the above	Omni-family Group parents / “It Takes a Village”	Omni-fellowship Unity despite diversity of truth
Mal	Mal-sexual Adultery and discord	Mal-family Disrespect and discord	Mal-fellowship Gossip and discord
Dis	Dis-union Divorce	Dis-family Orphaned children	Dis-fellowship Breaking faith with brothers

This table presents devastating corruptions to this aspect of God’s image. The beautiful

images of marriage, family, and fellowship described earlier are nearly destroyed. The indictment is so broad that every one of us can be found guilty both individually and corporately. Painful exceptions also require compassion. One may want to marry, but cannot find a partner and so is called to abstinence. One may be a single parent through victimization. One may desire a pure Christian fellowship, but where is the fellowship that is not sectarian in some way? It may seem hopeless, but take great courage because Christ himself prayed, *"I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them through your name which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are"* (John 17:11 WEB). Oneness between us is as important, certain, and wondrous as oneness in the Trinity.

Church: The Protector of Marriage and Family From the Fall

Before the fall the primary expression of God's image of perfect oneness and love between multiple persons was in the marriage of a male and female. Since the fall this beautiful oneness has been corrupted. After the fall I do not think any people are promised unity again until believers in Christ, not even Israel. Moses even added laws permitting divorce, voiding oneness in marriage! However, Jesus prays for oneness among his followers as patterned after his oneness with God. Is marriage then no longer able to carry this image as a result of the fall? No way! In Mark 10:4-9 Christ repeals the additions of Moses permitting divorce and restores the ideal of marital oneness. Yet, in our fallen world the church is the agent of grace to foster oneness between married lovers and parents. Those eager for marital oneness need to joyfully focus on Christ and submit to the authority of a local church. If marriage or children have been thwarted or renounced for whatever reason Christians must still strive to fulfill this aspect of the image of God in themselves through unity with the body of Christ, though without sexual fulfillment.

Oneness in the World?

So we see perfect oneness and love between multiple persons from God's image created in marriage, lost through the fall, and restored through Christ under the protection of the church, now the primary expression of God's image to a fallen world. But what about unity claimed by unbelievers? First, unbelievers may be able to find a temporary unity through the pursuit of common idols. Utterly destructive sin might possibly be kept at bay in order to allow the common pursuit of fleshly lusts. This unity, however, is temporary as the appearing of Christ will blast the wicked into fiery dungeons full of weeping and gnashing of teeth for their unbelief. Second, unbelievers hope for unity with diversity of truth. This philosophy, however, is proved comical as violent men paint smiles of agreement over angry hearts bitter with differences. Jesus reminds us in Matthew 24 that there will be wars and rumors of wars until he comes. The only hope for unregenerate man is to repent and believe the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Any Doubts about God's Goodness?

God created us for perfect oneness and love between multiple persons from his image to enjoy marriage as husband and wife becoming one flesh, to raise godly offspring through fatherly and motherly temperaments partnered as one, and most importantly to lead sinners to Christian fellowship through God's many gifts at work in the members of Christ's one body. In eternity, the role of church (Ephesians 4:13) and parenting and marriage (Mark 12:25) will be finished, leaving only perfected saints in God's image.

Lord God, lead us on to perfect unity!

Continue on with [The Image of God in Man, Part 2](#) and [The Image of God in Man, Part 3](#).

The Image of God in Man, Part 2

I have often heard people who are going through a trial thank others for praying by saying, *"I have felt your prayers."* I have never openly objected to this exchange, but as a young Christian I have often wondered if this wasn't quite Biblical. Our knowledge of what people are doing out of our sight is limited whereas only God's is unlimited. However, I never made a big deal about it because it seemed like an innocent offering of Christian pleasantries. I know now that praying for others and being prayed for is no pleasantries, but serious business. You may know I have wrestled with a difficult thorn for many years and recently I lost further sleep. My wife asked our church to pray and I found sleep. So even though I don't know the details of prayers said for me, God knows, so because of him I can say, *"Thank you. I have felt your prayers."* However, I want to say more. I am nearly arrived to 40 years old and I am not only feeling the prayers of my current church family, but all my church families since childhood, my Christian wife, parents, spiritual mentors, friends, college friends, ministry friends, and colleagues. I wish somehow to express thanks for these prayers. It is my goal with God's help that the following paper would be an expression of my gratefulness.

The subject of this paper is a continuation of my previous paper, The Image of God in Man. In my previous work I argue that one vital component of the image of God in man is perfect oneness and love between multiple persons, expressed originally in the marriage of Adam and Eve and teamwork dominion before the fall and now primarily expressed in Christian fellowship. In this paper I will extend the discussion a further step with an explanation of a very intimate aspect of the image of God, namely Christ in the Father and the Father in Christ. Furthermore, this aspect of God's image is shared with mankind as believers in Christ and Christ in believers.

The gospel of John records,

8) Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us."

9) Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you such a long time, and do you not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father. How do you say, 'Show us the Father?' 10) Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I tell you, I speak not from myself; but the Father who lives in me does his works. 11) Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me; or else believe me for the very works' sake. 12) Most certainly I tell you, he who believes in me, the works that I do, he will do also; and he will do greater works than these, because I am going to my Father. 13) Whatever you will ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14) If you will ask anything in my name, I will do it. 15) If you love me, keep my commandments. 16) I will pray to the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, that he may be with you forever: 17) the Spirit of truth, whom the world can't receive; for it doesn't see him and doesn't know him. You know him, for he lives with you, and will be in you. 18) I will not leave you orphans. I will come to you. 19) Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more; but you will see me. Because I live, you will live also. 20) In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. 21) One who has my commandments and keeps them, that person is one who loves me. One who loves me will be loved by my Father,

and I will love him, and will reveal myself to him."

John 14:8-21 (WEB)

Jesus' words of encouragement to his disciples during the final week of his earthly sojourn are absolutely incredible. With his help I hope to 1) explain what it means for believers to be in Christ and Christ in believers, 2) show how this is God's plan for our spiritual growth, 3) defend how this is a most intimate, powerful, eternal, and infinite aspect of his image that he also designed in us, 4) share the story of the blacksmith's wife, the lumberjack's wife, the stone mason's wife, and the farmer's wife, 5) compare the excellencies of the Trinity with the insufficiency of Allah, 6) list a table of corruptions to his image of romancing converts into himself and he into them, and 7) finally to answer questions concerning implications for teaching disciples about God's image, human authority structures, romancing unbelievers to Christ, marriage and mystery, gender in eternity, and hope deferred.

Please be warned that the corruptions listed under point 6 are revolting perversions to the image of God and are not suitable for minors to read. Educating ourselves about sin requires discernment for any Christian. What I mean is the grace of God protected me from many deadly sins simply by keeping me ignorant. Yet, we live in a world where the image of God in man has already been slaughtered by Satan, the world, and our own sin with abominable images and teachings growing more available by the day. In fact as I myself learn more about God's image in man I painfully see my own offenses more clearly. Thus, to grow in grace to manhood we cannot remain ignorant, but must grow in knowledge of and appreciation for God's image in us as well as be proactive in offensive and defensive strategies against Satan's schemes to destroy mankind.

I am convinced that it is God's image in us that Satan most hates because Satan hates God most. Moreover, Satan's pride and lust for power can not bear that it is mankind who carries the image of God and not himself. Therefore, he will not stop his relentless campaign to entice men to join his efforts to build his own kingdom apart from God while viciously attacking believers to the very end. To effectively war against him we must proclaim a gospel of grace that has forgiven Christ's people for even the terrible offense of violating God's image in ourselves as we all have done to one degree or another.

1) Christ in the Father, the Father in Christ, believers in Christ, Christ in believers

One word picture useful to explain "*believers in Christ and Christ in believers*" is strength and weakness. Ephesians 6:10 exhorts, "*be strong in the Lord and his mighty power.*" God is strong and we are weak. I Corinthians 12:9 says, "*my power is made perfect in weakness.*" We are weak and God is strong. Consider a matrix of four combinations, two blessed and two vile.

God's Image Fallen	Strength	Weakness
Strength in...	Strength in Strength - Vile	Strength in Weakness - Blessed
Weakness in...	Weakness in Strength - Blessed	Weakness in Weakness - Vile

I have most often drifted off the road toward the *strength in strength* model and a few times toward *weakness in weakness*. That is on one hand to imagine my little strength in combination with God's great strength or that my weakness partnered with another man's weakness can accomplish much. Have you ever been tempted to think that you have strength to offer God or that it is OK to partner with man in sin to accomplish good? A number of years ago Satan nearly destroyed me through my own lust for power and delusional ideas

about *strength in strength* and *weakness in weakness*. Thankfully God spared me and has used the event to draw me closer to himself, his word, and his people. Again I thank you for praying for me. As for our matrix let's consider each cell in detail, the vile first and the blessed second so as to end on a positive note.

Strength in strength is vile. An example of this is Jesus' disciples, James and John. In Matthew 20:20-28 their mother approached Jesus and asked if they could sit at the very right and left of Christ in his kingdom. They brought their little strength before the God of the Universe with this bold request. Jesus gently warned them that this was not even his to grant. *Strength in strength* was rejected. The remainder of the disciples then became indignant with James and John. However, Jesus did not reject James and John but told all the disciples that he came to serve and die for them even though their attitudes of self-aggrandizement were vile. Later the crucifixion of Christ brought James and John to weakness so that they could be useful servants of Christ.

Weakness in weakness is vile. It is less common to find weakness partnering with weakness to attain a positive end. The human heart generally believes that power is the means to achievement. Upon reflection perhaps the daughters of Lot are an example of *weakness in weakness*. Lot's daughters became afraid as to how to preserve their family line. So they schemed together to get their father drunk and then to sleep with him so as to continue their family line. Their scheme is filled with weakness as they partnered together in sin, led their father to drunkenness, and then both joined with him in incest instead of calling on God for strength. You can read the whole story in Genesis 19:30-38. Later Scripture tells that God ended the line of Lot because he cannot bless weakness partnering with weakness. He cannot bless sin for the sake of a supposed good end. However, Christ, though righteous, willingly was made sin, because he knew that his Father remained strong.

Weakness in strength is blessed. Note that John 14:20 says *first that we are in him and second that he is in us*. I am not sure if this is the pattern through the whole of Scripture, but it further supports what it means for us to be in him. For us to be in Christ means that our sinfulness is hidden from view inside of Christ and all that can be seen on the outside of us is his righteousness. Perhaps Jesus says we are in him first because the first step to becoming a Christian is not Christian works but confession of sin and receiving forgiveness. When we are hidden in Christ the Father only sees the perfection of Christ when he looks at us, even though we are sinners still. The righteousness and justice of God is perfect and absolutely pure causing his wrath to burn white hot against even the least sin. Consider how hot his wrath must be stoked against those who offend and rebel openly! Yet the elect of Christ are preserved because our offenses are hidden from the Father's view inside of Christ. I must confess some of these concepts are hitting now like a sledge hammer, though I have been a Christian for over two decades. Frankly, be encouraged that if you have received Christ you do not need to ever become a Christian again, but be warned to fasten your seat belt for the wild roller coaster ride of God's grace or rather be thrilled that God has clamped you safely inside himself for protection!

Strength in weakness is blessed. You may have already caught on to the idea here. Next Jesus says *he is in us*. The picture here is that we are weak and can accomplish nothing in ourselves, but Christ comes inside of us to enable us to do his works with his power. Consider what Timon and Pumbaa said when they learned that Simba was the Lion King. Simba said, "Hey I'm just the same old guy." They said, "Yeah! But with power!" Likewise if Christ is in us we are filled with his power. Christ does not merely place us inside of himself to hide our sin, but also places himself inside of us to do his good works with his power. Jesus said in John Chapter 14 quoted above that we will do even greater things than Christ himself! Of course we accomplish these things not through our own strength, but through his strength in us. Similarly, Christ made himself nothing so that the Father could be glorified through him.

My discerning readers will note, however, that the table above is imprecise. The explanation

above gives a picture of our condition only under the fall. But, Adam and Eve reflected God's image even more perfectly before the fall. And the model above only seems to serve a purpose for sinful man. Can mankind without sin, that is Adam and Eve before the fall, or believers in eternity, enjoy being in Christ and Christ in us and to what purpose? Moreover, Christ is in the Father and the Father in Christ, but Christ is not in the Father to hide his sinfulness! And the Father is not in Christ because Christ is weak! The matrix above is "*insufficient*." It does not fully explain what it means to be "*in*." We need a model that is "*in*" sufficient. We need an additional matrix to outline this relationship when there is no sin. You can imagine that even more beauty is anticipated where there is no sin. One word picture useful here is authority and submission. John 15:10 (WEB) explains how Jesus was in the Father and how we are in Christ, "*If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and remain in his love.*" Christ was in the Father because he obeyed the Father's will. We are in Christ if we obey and remain within the bounds of his will and so in his love. If we step outside his commands we step outside his love and will suffer his wrath. Everything is happy in the home where children remain obedient to their father's commands. However, when children step outside this love they will be disciplined by their father.

But how is the Father in Christ and Christ in us? Consider John 14:10-15 again,

10) Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I tell you, I speak not from myself; but the Father who lives in me does his works. 11) Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me; or else believe me for the very works' sake. 12) Most certainly I tell you, he who believes in me, the works that I do, he will do also; and he will do greater works than these, because I am going to my Father. 13) Whatever you will ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14) If you will ask anything in my name, I will do it. 15) If you love me, keep my commandments.

When Christ obeys the Father, the Father is in Christ doing his works. When we obey Christ, Christ is in us doing his works. Do you want Christ to be in you? Then you must obey him! Do you want to be a great person like Christ? Then obey your authorities like Christ obeyed his father.

God's Image Perfected	Authority	Submission
Authority	Overpowering - Vile	Command obedience - blessed
Submission	Obey command - blessed	Leaderless - Vile

American culture no doubt is revolted by this table. The rally cry of Democracy is freedom! But has anyone ever asked, "*Freedom from what?*" Without question for most it is freedom to do as they please with instant whining at the suggestion of obeying another. The democratic ideal has nurtured a hardened brood of rebels whose philosophy of life is at complete opposite with our precious Savior. Why the most beautiful words ever uttered in the whole of history in Christ's lonely garden reflect uncompromising obedience even unto death, and that because he loved us. Jesus said, "*...nevertheless, not what I desire, but what you desire*" (Matthew 26:39). Again, let's consider each matrix cell in detail, the vile first and the blessed second so as to end on a positive note.

Authority with authority is overpowering. Authority does not partner with authority even in the godhead. The Father is the ultimate authority who accounts to no one but

himself. Christ, however, is subject to the Father. You will remember above that Christ told James and John that it is not even in his power to grant who will sit at his right or left. It is nearly humorous that James and John sought power with Christ and Christ confidently told them he doesn't even have that power himself! Yet it is not humorous because too often you and I are just like James and John ourselves. I Corinthians 15:28 also says that Christ will remain eternally subject to the Father. The point of what we are saying is that God does not blast at mankind with two barrels of authority, but instead sharp shoots with one barrel, God through Jesus Christ. A whole volume could be written on the subject of relations among the Trinity alone. John 16:14 shows that the Holy Spirit brings glory not to himself but to Christ. John 17:1 shows Christ subjecting himself in asking to be glorified by his Father, but for the purpose that he could bring glory to the Father. Really a Trinitarian God is the only possibility of a God that is unlimited in power and glory as well as humility. He does not pat himself on the back as monotheistic God must do. These excellent qualities of the true God were not invented by man, but observed by eye witnesses as recorded in the Christian Scriptures. Later in this paper I will also compare our God's multi-dimensional superiorities with the one-dimensional Allah!

Regarding overpowering authority, wise parents also know what I am talking about. Children often need rebuked or corrected, but it is overpowering when both parents chime in with the rebuke together. A child will be left despairing and who will they have to turn to then? A wiser strategy is for only one parent to speak the word of rebuke seeking the child's restoration. The other parent while in silent agreement with the rebuke can then serve as an effective mediator in the restoration. The world even understands this after a fashion with the terms "good cop, bad cop." The "good cop" retains an advocate relationship with the criminal while the "bad cop" brings down the hammer of threat and law. Together they may get a confession and progress toward restoration. Again authority partnered with authority is overpowering and ineffective, and not even modeled in God himself.

Submission with submission is leaderless. Not much needs to be said here. Imagine a group of people all eager to submit to leadership, but with no leader. In this case life would become a giant "Chip and Dale" comic strip. One would say, "You choose" while the other would say, "Oh no I insist that you choose!" No one would ever be offended, but truly all would be lost with no progress made in any direction whatsoever. Incidentally, this is often how a young man and woman can fall into sexual sin on a date. Men if you are asking a woman on a date it is your job to lead out with a godly plan. Of course leadership also means involving her in that decision and coming up with a plan together. But whatever you do, don't find yourself holding hands with a beautiful woman on the couch and no constructive plan ahead unless of course you are married and the kids are in bed!

Commanding obedience and obeying command is blessed. Again our crazy world imagines that fulfillment is found in freedom to do as you please. However, Christ explained that true freedom was to be found in obedience. "31) *Jesus therefore said to those Jews who had believed him, 'If you remain in my word, then you are truly my disciples. 32) You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.'* 33) *They answered him, 'We are Abraham's offspring, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How do you say, 'You will be made free?'* 34) *Jesus answered them, 'Most certainly I tell you, everyone who commits sin is the bondservant of sin. 35) A bondservant doesn't live in the house forever. A son remains forever. 36) If therefore the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed' "* (John 8:31-36 WEB). You will find this a common theme in the Scriptures which teach disciples to obey Christ, wives to obey husbands, children to obey parents, slaves to obey masters, Christians to obey church leaders, and citizens to obey governments. Authorities are blessed to command obedience and subjects are blessed to obey.

Also relevant to a discussion of authority is I Corinthians 11:2-16. I have explained in a previous article, [Absolutely True...However](#), that Corinthians teaches that a woman are

under a man’s authority, that is a wife is under her husband's authority, and women have been given glorious long hair to be the glory of men. This same passage also highlights a chain of authority as follows:

1. The Father is the head of Christ
2. Christ is the head of all mankind (that is men and women)
3. Man is the head of a woman

Liberated women may find great offense to this teaching. However, several questions could actually bring joyful acceptance by many. Woman, if you are offended at submitting to a man, your husband, should we all be offended at submitting to Christ? Should Christ be offended at submitting to the Father? Remember that someone once said, *“There is strength in submission.”* Moreover, consider the chain of glory as explained in John 17:1-5, 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, and Ephesians 5:25-28.

1. Woman is presented to man as glorious
2. Man (and woman) is presented to Christ as glorious
3. Christ is presented to the Father as glorious

If a woman is offended at being on the bottom of God’s chain of authority is she also offended that she is on the top of God’s chain of glory? Finally an important caveat, though man is head of a woman, man does not stand as mediator between God and woman. Christ alone is our mediator. That is man is commissioned with authority over woman, but Christ alone serves as savior of both man and woman.

2) Spiritual Growth

Spiritual growth takes place then when we take steps from the first matrix, God’s Image in Fallen Man, to the second matrix, God’s Image in Perfection. We begin in the first matrix without God in utter weakness with both an unwillingness to obey and incapacity to accomplish the Lord’s will. We grow into the second matrix gaining confidence before God because we are protected from wrath inside of Christ and gaining a willingness to obey and a capacity to accomplish the Lord’s will because Christ is inside of us. Another table will help to illustrate this process of growth.

Spiritual Growth	Believers are “in” Christ	Christ is “in” believers
Unbelieving	God is reconciling the world to himself in Christ not counting men’s sins against them, but many do not yet believe. II Corinthians 5:19.	Christ not in believers before they believe, but in fact Satan so they are not filled with Christ for good, but with Satan for evil. Eph 2:2.
Believing	Believers made aware of protection from God’s wrath in Christ and rejoice in salvation. Romans 5:10-11	Christ lives in believers permanently making our spirit alive to God and able to do his works. Romans 8:10.
Growing	If a man remains in Christ to hide his sin from the wrath of God he will bear much fruit, John 15:5. Christ promises to keep this man safely in his hand, John 10:28. Because we now believe that God loves us we are motivated to obey Christ and remain in his love, though obedience is not perfected until eternity, John 15:10.	If Christ remains in a man to fill him with strength to do good works he will bear much fruit, John 15:5. And Christ promises to continue his good work in this man, Philippians 1:6. Christ is at work in us to accomplish things even greater than he did, even though we remain imperfect sinners still, John 14:10-15.

Glorified	We are no longer in Christ to shield God's justice from our sin because we will no longer sin, but instead we will obey him perfectly and therefore be eternally in his love, John 15:10.	No longer will Christ be in us to overcome our sin because we will no longer be sinners, but instead he will be in us because we will do his will perfectly, John 14:10-15.
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The great joy of the elect of Christ is the discovery that the love of God chose us from before the foundation of the world. There never was any question in the mind of God that we would be saved from suffering the second death in the Lake of Fire. This is possible because the elect were always safely hid in Christ, even in unbelief. You will note that with Christ in us we will also grow in obedience, but perfection is attained only in eternity and then only as a gift of God's grace. We would also be remiss not to list some of the key ingredients to spiritual growth such as the gospel of Jesus Christ (Romans 1:16-17), Scripture (II Timothy 3:16-17), prayer (James 5:16), fellowship (I John 1:3-4), remaining in Christ, and Christ remaining in us (John 15:5).

Since even the best Christian remains a sinner while on this side of glory, spiritual growth must include an ability to face the Lord honestly with all our flaws. In unbelief we may turn to hypocrisy imagining that we can hide our sin from God. Or we may thumb our nose at God, sinning brazenly, caring nothing about him. However, in belief, God calls us to stand boldly before him knowing he loves us in spite of our sin and weakness, to openly discuss our sin with him, to join him in hating our sin, to join with him fighting against our sin, and to long with him for the day when we are in his presence without sin.

Paul was able to rejoice in his weakness,

1) It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. For I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. 2) I know a man in Christ, fourteen years ago (whether in the body, I don't know, or whether out of the body, I don't know; God knows), such a one caught up into the third heaven. 3) I know such a man (whether in the body, or outside of the body, I don't know; God knows), 4) how he was caught up into Paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. 5) On behalf of such a one I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except in my weaknesses. 6) For if I would desire to boast, I will not be foolish; for I will speak the truth. But I refrain, so that no man may think more of me than that which he sees in me or hears from me. 7) By reason of the exceeding greatness of the revelations, that I should not be exalted excessively, a thorn in the flesh was given to me: a messenger of Satan to torment me, that I should not be exalted excessively. 8) Concerning this thing, I begged the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9) He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Most gladly therefore I will rather glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest on me.

2 Corinthians 12:1-9 (WEB)

This passage is difficult, but only because of pride. Even as a Christian I want strength, but my flesh continues to believe I can find strength in myself. Paul learned, however, to rejoice in weakness, and so was filled with God's strength. Friends, we should not imagine that the battle to crucify our fleshly desire for strength or the battle to humbly receive his strength is a one time affair. Christ is not into affairs. His goal is an eternal marriage and he is the groom and we are his promised bride. He is a bridegroom committed to us for the duration and with determination that we would be made into his image, strength combined with

humble obedience.

Jesus teaches in John 10:9 that he wants his sheep to comfortably come in and go out to find pasture at will. The same chapter teaches that there are hungry wolves ready to pounce and hired hands that will fail, but he is the good shepherd, so do not be afraid.

Herein lies the secret for sinners to grow spiritually, first, we must be very bold in receiving his forgiveness for he has already forgiven all our sin in Christ. Second, we also must be very bold inviting Christ to work in us through his strength because we have no strength in ourselves. As we practice these two spiritual disciplines we will grow in him understanding grace by receiving grace and his good works will grow in us by obeying his commands.

As our pride dies we become more comfortable coming into Christ and with him coming into us and we will grow in grace, till we can even rejoice even in our weakness as Paul did, because we know that Christ has all the strength we will ever need and more. The beauty of God's design is that we may have imaginations of what we could do for God and work toward them. But gladly our work is rejected for the power of God's work in our lives. I say gladly because the growth in grace possible with him staggers the mind in contrast to our useless efforts. Friends, consider again that Jesus said in John 14:12 that anyone who has faith will do even greater things than Christ has done. Can we humbly accept that we are eternally forgiven in Christ and that he wants in us to do good works?

By now you should see the two greatest pitfalls to spiritual growth. On one hand Christ wants us to rest assured that we are safely in him and therefore protected from God's wrath even though we are sinners. However, if we deny our sin, I John 1:8, spiritual growth will be impossible because a veil of hypocrisy will remain or grow between us and God. God knows our sin, but we won't talk to him about it. How foolish! Or on the other hand, Christ wants us to accomplish awesome things through us, even greater things than he accomplished. However, if we imagine that we can do these things by human effort, John 15:5, we will instead accomplish nothing. Why move a mountain with our paltry little shovels? Bring in the dynamite of Christ's power!

3) Intimate, Powerful, Eternal, and Infinite

It seems to me that a better understanding of the Trinity doctrine can be gained by understanding the "in" doctrine above. Christian orthodoxy marvels that God is three persons in one God and rests content that this mystery cannot be understood. Yet the "in" doctrine gives us some clue about the relations that exist within the Godhead. We have already shown above that Christ is in the Father because he obeys the Father and thus remains perfectly in his love. We have also shown above that Father is in Christ because the Father's will is accomplished through his obedient Son. Is this not a major step in understanding how three persons are one? The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are perfectly one in will because the Son obeys the Father perfectly and yet at the same time they are three persons. Likewise they are one in all the attributes of God, except for person and roles. God's unity of will and attributes is to an infinite degree ruling out tri-theism and his distinction in persons and roles are eternal ruling out modalism. The point of what I am saying is that the loving intimacy throbbing within the Godhead is beyond imagination because it is intimate, powerful, eternal, and infinite. Consider again what Jesus said when Philip said "**Show us the Father.**" Jesus answered, "**Don't you know me.**" As you see Jesus was radically one with the Father and yet remains one person of the three person Godhead. But why should this rivet our attention? Because Jesus also prayed, "**that they may be one as we are one.**" This should arrest our attention for two reasons. First, God intends that believers share the same loving intimacy that exists within the very Trinity. Second, Jesus prayed that this would

come to pass and so it will!

All this sounds wonderful, but the price is high to enjoy this intimate and loving fellowship with God and his people. Jesus said, *“Whoever seeks to save his life loses it, but whoever loses his life preserves it”* (Luke 17:33 WEB). You must be willing to lose your life and count it as nothing. And again, *“He who loves his life will lose it. He who hates his life in this world will keep it to eternal life,”* (John 12:25 WEB). You must, in fact, be willing to hate your own life! Self-preservation is the antithesis of the Christian life. Every effort to preserve “I” must die in order to join the loving intimacy of Christian fellowship. Christ did not come to earth to represent himself, but as the Father’s ambassador from Heaven. Likewise, we are called not to represent ourselves, but Christ. Frankly, the level of commitment to and unity with another person is to such a degree that Paul said he dies every day. Paul put aside his fleshly craving to serve himself in order to serve Christ. Frankly, if you want to follow Christ, you must die to self first. Consider another table comparing sinful man’s efforts to preserve self with Jesus’ self-sacrifice.

Sinful man	Jesus
Man clings to worthless idols	refused all the kingdoms of this earth
Diana Ross sang “I will survive”	died in Jerusalem
United States declared independence	depended on God’s Word
Finds freedom in doing as one pleases	found freedom in obedience
Fled from God till all alone like a banner on a hill	was the firstborn of many brothers

We can see from Isaiah Chapter 30 that efforts at self-preservation will result in the saddest of endings. Sinful man flees from God’s rest to a place all alone, completely surrounded by his useless idols, like a banner on hill. Contrast this with Jesus, who set a perfect example of self-sacrifice and so extended the intimate fellowship of the Godhead to a great brotherhood among mankind. Thankfully, even though our rebellion has brought us to a place of helplessness, God is still able to pluck us from our perilous position to safety again within the great brotherhood he is building.

Unfortunately, loss of self is one of our greatest fears. If we give up our personal rights and personal space what will be left? I used to watch Star Trek and there was a sinister group of villains called *The Borg*. However, it is not quite right to call them a group because they were many persons, united in a spooky unified purpose, will, and mind to take over the universe. They would travel from galaxy to galaxy seeking to suck more and more individuals into their collection. Their calling card was, *“you will be assimilated!”* The Christian God likewise has a goal to bring us into an unbelievably perfect unity with him and with each other. However, unlike *The Borg* God is good. The pickle is that it is we, sinful men, who are bad and want nothing to do with a good God or with self denial in order to be brothers with our fellowman. A radical change, a new birth, is needed for man to even be willing to be *“assimilated”* into Christian brotherhood. You have heard that *“a man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still.”* God is after true love and intimacy with his people and therefore will not have artificial, pretended, or anything less than 100% true blue faith in and love for Christ. Don’t get me wrong you don’t have to have a faith to move mountains. But the question is do you have any faith in and love for Christ at all? God is a relentless and jealous suitor for our love and trust. He wants us to know that we can trust him and that not to trust him is perilous. He is on a red hot passionate mission to romance sinful men to true devotion.

What will you say to his love?

Really the teaching that Christ is in the Father, the Father in Christ, believers in Christ, and Christ in believers is incredibly passionate, even romantic! Sadly we American Christians have commercialized the good news. I myself have examined the Christian Scriptures thoroughly with a goal to build outlines, strategies, schemes, and devices to bring sinners to Christ. God's word says a true Christian will bear fruit and my anxious heart drove me to calculation. Though disciplined and trained in the study of Scripture by a respected Christian whom I still respect deeply, it was my wife who had never done an inductive Bible study in her life who rebuked me by saying, "*You are just making projects out of people!*" In contrast the throbbing intimate love God has within himself and has intended for us might be best described by the words "*romance*" and "*chivalry*." There is nothing artificial or contrived about it!

Unfortunately, these concepts are nearly dead in the world today. Recently I browsed Borders book store and saw a book titled *How to remake your wife or get the one you want*. On the cover was pictured a cheesy smiled man in front of a big red heart. Brothers, this is an excellent way to commit suicide. Buy the book and let your wife see it on your end table. You will be dead shortly. Consider some recent movie titles that also mock God's design for intimacy; *How to lose a guy in 10 days*, *Seven days and seven nights*, *My first 50 dates*, *The 40 Year Old Virgin*. And the world laughs at these abominable perversions of love!

One of my favorite movies is *Cyrano de Bergerac*. In this movie Cyrano wishes to court Roxanne with his love, but he is fearful she will be appalled at his big nose. She, however, does not seem to mind his big nose, but neither does she have any romantic interest in him. It is Christian, however, who catches her fancy. The problem is Christian has no eloquence with words and so he calls on Cyrano who despite the big nose is quite eloquent with words. Cyrano then agrees to write love lines for Christian to memorize for courting Roxanne. As the plot thickens Christian is shown to be a selfish beast who is only interested in kissing Roxanne. Cyrano rebukes him soundly, but Christian finds it impossible to control his passions. Christian then finally becomes disgusted with himself realizing it is the man behind the love lines that Roxanne really loves, Cyrano. Cyrano holding his end of the bargain continues to urge Christian to pursue Roxanne, but Christian instead seeks an escape by sacrificing his life in the French war. Now you would imagine that with Christian out of the way, Cyrano would reveal that he is the man behind the letters. However, this film is about chivalry and so Cyrano continues to maintain a high standard of chivalry hoping that Roxanne may notice him romantically despite his big nose. Though she is his friend she does not see romance in the big nosed man until the very end of his life. The movie ends with Cyrano fighting his selfish desires to the death in order to uphold chivalry while Roxanne weeps that she only now understands the character behind the man who really loved her.

Whether the director intended it or not *Cyrano* can be seen as a picture of the romance and chivalry in Christ towards mankind. Just as Cyrano spoke love lines to Roxanne *through* Christian, Christ has decided to speak the good news *through* Christians to reach the lost. But sadly because of our sin Christians are a poor reflection of our savior. I highly recommend the movie. I told you all this so I could mention one last abominable movie, *Roxanne* by Steve Martin. Steve Martin did a remake of *Cyrano de Bergerac* in which the plot remains similar though modernized, except for one detail. As soon as Christian is out of the picture, his recast of Cyrano hops in the sack with Roxanne for a round of unwedded sex. Chivalry and romance are truly dead. Yet the intimate teaching that we are in Christ and he in us offers hope that God will make good in what seems to be an impossible soap opera on this planet. That is with Christ's help we can be a part of romancing more people into fellowship with Christ, despite our failings. We must remind ourselves that though God may use us to minister the gospel it is the intimate romance and chivalry of God himself that is at work in us and in spite of us to effectively court yet more unbelievers to salvation. May God fill us with his heart of chivalry and romance so we can reflect his image!

Just how precious and powerful is God's heart of romance? This aspect of God's image

explains the passionate love that throbs within the Godhead, the Father for the son and the son for the Father. The depth of love shown to us is then more deeply understood when we consider that Christ willingly obeyed his Father and stepped out of the Father's love in order to receive wrath for our sin, so that we could be forgiven. It is simply impossible to imagine a God like this and more impossible to imagine that we are the beneficiaries of this love. The reason that a true understanding of the gospel will result in the good work of loving yet others is because a sinner cannot be blessed like this without an utterly passionate desire to serve his savior in reaching the lost somehow, someday, somewhere. Neither stumbling, failing, nor correction from the Lord will stop this desire because God's love for us never stops.

We ought to also regard God's image of romance in ourselves as especially precious because even the angels of Heaven do not possess God's image. Never are angels said to have been created in God's image. Never are angels said to be in Christ or Christ in them. We have shared in the rebellion of fallen angels, but they are not forgiven while we are. We will share eternity with good angels, however, they by merit, while we only by grace. This observation is not made to demean angels. Angels instead are in fact tremendously wonderful creatures of God excelling man in knowledge, strength, and many other capabilities. Yet it is man who is created in God's image, the intimate heart of which is Christ in the Father and the Father in Christ shared with us as believers in Christ, and Christ in believers. This precious fact is not a matter for boasting, but great humility, because it is all the result of undeserved grace. Thus we will excel angels in only one thing. We understand the heart of what it means to be saved by the grace of Christ with ourselves in Christ and Christ in us. For this the righteous angels marvel and rejoice!

4) Excellencies of the Trinity Compared with Allah

We have said already that our Trinitarian God really is the only possibility of God that is unlimited in power and glory as well as humility. However, a monotheistic god, such as Allah, is forced to pat himself on the back to advance his cause with mankind. Consider two salesmen who approached you with the invitation to join their company.

First, you dialogue with Mr. Allah. You say, *"Hello. How can I help you?"* He says, *"Obey me and gain bliss. Disobey and gain perdition."* You ask, *"Who do you represent?"* He says, *"I represent my self alone."* You ask again, *"Have you any record of positive relationships?"* He confesses, *"Many follow me in fear."* You say, *"That doesn't sound positive. Let me speak to your boss."* He says, *"I am the boss."* You ask again, *"Is there any history of love in your company?"* He confides, *"I love myself. It doesn't matter if my employees love me. Obedience only is demanded."* You say, *"It seems to me that you are quite full of yourself. I'm not interested!"*

Second, you dialogue with Jesus Christ. You begin again, *"Hello. How can I help you?"* He says, *"It is I who help you. Come follow me."* You say, *"I don't even know who you are. Do you have any record of positive relationships?"* He answers, *"I love my Father and my Father loves me."* You question again, *"You said you help me? Why should I trust you?"* He reminds you, *"I am trust worthy. I obeyed my Father, even unto death, in order to die in your place."* You say, *"You died in my place? I want to pay my own debts!"* He says, *"To pay your own debt you would have to be damned."* You ask again, *"You died so that I wouldn't have to be damned?"* He says, *"It was my Father's will."* You now ask, *"Can I speak to your Father about his love for me?"* He now says, *"When you speak to me, you are speaking to the Father as well, because we are one."* You say, *"You are that close?"* He says, *"We are that close. I am in him and he is in me. And we want you to share the same love that we have for each other, you in me and I in you."* You say, *"Wow, you are full of your Father's love. I am unworthy of this love. How can I repay you?"* He says, *"You cannot repay me, but I still love you."* You say, *"But how do I start?"* He says again, *"Follow me."*

Of course no man can invent the true God. The true God exists apart from the invention of any man. The gods invented by man couldn't be God at all. Nor could any man invent the excellence we marvel at in the Christian God; the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Consider another table comparing the Trinity with monotheism.

Christian Trinity	Monotheism
Christ sent by the Father, Luke 4:18	Allah never came to Earth
Christ obedient to his Father, John 15:10	Allah obedient to no one
Christ appointed by his Father, Hebrews 1:2	Allah appointed by no one
Christ in the Father, John 14:11	No one in Allah
The Father in Christ, John 14:11	Allah in no one
Christ glorified by the Holy Spirit, John 16:14	Allah glorified by himself
Christ glorified by his Father, John 17:1	Allah glorified by himself
The Father glorified by Christ, John 17:1	Allah glorified by himself
The Holy Spirit is messenger of the good news, John 16:5-15	Allah introduced by man

Some may look at the chart above and conclude that Allah has won the contest. They may reason that his power and authority are infinitely great because he is alone in greatness, while the Christian Trinity is filled with weakness because of the evidence of submission to authority by Christ. Allah stands as the cosmic Marlboro man independently strong. Yet Christ defines strength as submission to his Father. Frankly, who would you rather trust; a perfect Father and Son or the Marlboro man? Who would you give your life to; a man who praises his Father and is praised by his Father or a man who praises himself?

5) Four Wives

Thus far we have explained that there is an incredibly intimate, powerful, eternal, and infinite love throbbing between the three persons of our Christian God revealed to us as Christ in the Father and the Father in Christ. Moreover, this love of God effectively reaches out to mankind to court us with his love and win us to wholehearted devotion, even to the point of giving us the same intimate love for him and each other found within the Trinity himself. So not only is Christ in the Father and the Father in Christ, but Christ has also encouraged his disciples by saying *“you are in me, and I am in you,”* as we have already discussed. It would not be inappropriate to use the words passionate romance to describe the advance of God's love into our lives. Of course this is not a worldly romance where a lonely man courts a beautifully attractive woman, but a godly romance where a beautifully attractive God graciously chooses to court some of his enemies. The Scriptures themselves even refer to the church as the bride of Christ and Christ as our bridegroom. This being the case I have invented an extra-Biblical story about four wives, merging the parable of the four soils with the courtship of Jesus Christ and the parable of the two sons.

Often upon a time in a land very, very near there were four women who met to talk over tea. And as you could imagine the conversation of these lovely ladies would often turn to a discussion of the men in their lives. However, their conversation was no idle banter about laundry, cooking, cleaning, and hopeless despair over husbands that need a mother more than a wife. Instead, each of the four was newly married and though their marriages were far from perfect, in

fact quite corrupted by the selfishness found in young couples, each new bride had the hope that their marriage would somehow fulfill the dreams that had grown in their minds from childhood fairy tales. Yet, the problem remained that none of them had found the secret to fulfilling their dreams. How could their husband be Prince Charming and their marriage a fairy tale? And so the four wives met regularly to brainstorm for the answer to fulfilling their dreams. The blacksmith's wife shared that though she admired her husband's strength with the hammer and anvil, she just could not understand his work and tragically he left her and she now openly hated him. The stone mason's wife talked very excitedly about her husband's skill in laying stone, but their troubles often interfered with wedded bliss and most recently her husband hurt himself and has been unable to work. The lumberjack's wife bragged about her husband's ability to clear entire forests with his axe, but the grounds at their own home were overgrown and ugly causing great marital strife. And the farmer's wife complained that even though their ground was fertile the produce from her husband's garden was terrible and it was his fault that she was growing quite fat from his provision.

One day during a regular tea discussion the four wives were visited by a dashing man dressed in a black tuxedo who simply called himself Prince Charming. The four ladies giggled and invited the man to sit down. Each of the ladies felt a twinge of guilt at inviting such an attractive man to sit with them. They may have even admitted attraction to him, except that strangely he had repulsive gashes bleeding on each hand. They wanted to ask him about his hands, but the genteel nature of the tea party did not permit the discussion of such awkward things as reality. So they simply ignored his bleeding hands with great effort, effort equal perhaps to ignoring an Elephant in your living room. At first the ladies imagined that this man was simply an odd practical joke by their friends or husbands, but Prince Charming maintained his sincerity and explained that he was the true Prince Charming and came to end their quest and provide the answer to their most important question. He explained that if they obeyed the directions in his Book they would have a fairy tale marriage and their own husband would be Prince Charming. Being impatient and wanting a fast answer they begged Him to stay and simply tell them the answer Himself. He explained that this could not be because they must acknowledge the matter of His hands which was impossible at their tea party. Moreover, He quietly said that He Himself was the definition of romance and that He would win each of them that He chose. At this the four women shrieked indignantly and threw the man out the door leaving His book broken on the floor. The women no longer giggled, but quietly made excuses to leave and go home. Though the man's promises seemed fanciful and His ego unbearable the four women each secretly snatched pieces of His Book as they passed by. The romance promised simply overpowered their reservations.

The blacksmith's wife went home and read Isaiah 54. She was quite startled to discover that a woman described in the Book was in fact herself. Just like the woman in the Book she had no children and her husband had left her. However, the Book explained that the true Prince Charming is her husband. Moreover, the Book also explained that the true Prince Charming had created the blacksmith who forged the weapons that brought trials into her life so that her hope in the true Prince Charming would bring victory even over trials. The blacksmith's wife cried in despair over her losses and her self-destructive bitterness toward her own blacksmith husband and wiping her tears said she did not have the strength to hope for the fairy tale any longer. Nonetheless, she hoped against hope and obeyed the command of Isaiah 54 to sing, enlarge her house, and be not afraid and eventually she understood, even though her heart was initially very hard. She

understood that perfect romance can only exist in this world with the true Prince Charming, and only in the eternal fairy tale in the sky will all His people enjoy perfect romance forever. Why she even astounded all her friends by forgiving her blacksmith husband and saying, "I'm as guilty as he," though he never returned. Even so her belief in future glory gave her unconquerable hope.

The stone mason's wife read Jeremiah 23:29. She read that though her own husband cannot work, that the Book of the true Prince Charming is like a hammer that breaks rock into pieces. She wondered if the hammer of the true Prince Charming could even break her troubles into pieces. Her stone mason was a good man who could hammer stone into pleasing works, but he could not provide shelter from troubles, especially now. The stone mason's wife also cried in despair over her troubles and also could find no strength to hope for the fairy tale any longer. Nonetheless she also found comfort in Prince Charming's Book, "In this world you will have trouble, but take heart I have overcome the world." She likewise obeyed Prince Charming's command and took heart and eventually she and her stone mason husband together learned to trust the true Prince Charming with all their troubles.

The lumberjack's wife read Psalm 29. Though the first two wives were broken to tears by Prince Charming's Book, the lumberjack's wife was utterly undone. In fact she simply stared into space for an hour, before crying, "I am stripped bare! The true Prince Charming has been working perfectly to serve me and my family through my imperfect lumberjack husband and I myself have filled my house with strife from ungratefulness!" The lumberjack's wife remained catatonic for years and never said a word to her three gossiping girl-friends again. Eventually after much tender care she likewise obeyed the command of Psalm 29 and ascribed to Prince Charming the glory he deserved for working good through her lowly lumberjack husband. You simply would not believe the fairy tale that began when the lumberjack's wife thanked the true Prince Charming for her lowly lumberjack husband and then greeted her lumberjack at the end of the day with a kiss and thanked him for working hard all day, even though their own yard was still in weeds. In the years that followed they managed to clean a bit of their own grounds in between the kissing.

The farmer's wife read John 6. Curiously after reading this difficult passage in Prince Charming's Book she began to chuckle. She chuckled more and more until she was rolling on the floor laughing. She had seen her three friends each broken to tears by the Prince's Book and she was determined that she would likewise obey, but without all the whiny shows of weakness. She had been raised in a farm family herself and knew that fairy tales can come true, but only with long hard work. Yet the Book oddly explained that fairy tale romance can be attained only by EATING the true Prince Charming like he was bread. She again laughed at this proposition boasting irreverently that after years of eating her husband's terrible produce that eating the true Prince Charming would be a delicious piece of cake. Sadly, however, after a mouth full of Prince Charming she discovered that He was quite different food than she had ever eaten before and found it quite revolting to her. She spit Him out with disgust and with her hands on her hips insolently said, "Well I never!" and stomped back to her farmer husband. Rather than obey the Book she preferred to eat her farmer husband's goods while complaining, blaming, and growing to a new dress size annually.

And so three wives found the fairy tale with the true Prince Charming through obedience to the Book even though at the first they found neither strength, or sense to obey. And the fourth wife made great boasts, but because of the personal cost rejected Prince Charming and His fairy tale for a life that ended

sadly ever after.

Friends, you will note that joyful obedience to Prince Charming's Book was the answer to the four wives deepest need and longing and ours as well. That same book also says, "*To him therefore who knows to do good, and doesn't do it, to him it is sin.*" (James 4:17 WEB). And again, "*And whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord, and not for men*" (Colossians 3:23 WEB). No doubt you have guessed that my story is not simply about men, women, marriage, and romance though an application there may benefit many of us. However, I am talking about the courtship of Jesus Christ with mankind. He is the true Prince Charming that we must have. His kingdom is the land of the true eternal fairy tale. Trust in him and obedience to his book is the only way to attain it. Have you obeyed his command to trust fully on and only in him?

6) Corruptions to Romance

In part one of [The Image of God in Man](#) I presented a table of corruptions to perfect oneness and love between multiple persons. The table listed ways that sin has destroyed oneness in marriage, family, and Christian fellowship. However, our conclusion was positive as we recalled that Jesus himself prayed that we would be one as he is one with the Father and Holy Spirit. In this paper, *The Image of God in Man, Part 2*, I would like to present a table of corruptions to romance, comparing the commonly understood perversions to earthly romance with the less commonly understood perversions to spiritual romance. I use a listing of sexual perversions documented in modern clinical psychology plus a few additional perversions. Most of us can picture a beautiful romance between a man and a woman where a gentleman's winsome courtship wins the hand of a lovely lady leading to a beautiful romantic relationship and marital commitment. Likewise God is a suitor and mankind is the object of his courtship with the purpose of a beautiful romance culminating in a marriage. The Scriptures explain that he is the bridegroom and believers are the bride. In earthly romance suitors are attracted to lovely ladies in hopes of finding fulfillment. In divine romance, however, God is not attracted to his enemies, but romances us nonetheless, that is he wins our love in order to demonstrate the power of his grace. Perhaps you are uncomfortable comparing the earthly-sexual romantic with the spiritual romantic. I am uncomfortable myself! Yet, Paul himself in the Scriptures associates the false gospel of works salvation through circumcision to the grotesque procedure of emasculation. The purpose of extending the comparison further in the following table is to help us better recognize perversions to the gospel and restore the ideal of godly romance to Christian evangelism.

Also consider one last caveat before examining my table below. The unbelieving Jews of Jesus' day until this day are no doubt enraged by the association of the romantic with God. Their God is high and mighty, holy, as is ours, but theirs is untouchable. Why they would not even say his name! They immediately tried to stone Jesus for saying the name '*Yahweh*' in John 8:59. What do you think they would do when we call Jesus our friend, brother, or even our bridegroom? The true God is holy, but he is also romantically intimate. He reached down to touch us and intends us to touch him. The unbelieving pagans of Jesus' day and ours are likewise enraged, but they because the best romance is holy romance. Their ancient false gods and modern desecrations of sexuality are not holy, but as dirty as the gutter. And because their only experiences with romance and sex have been sinful their gods either have nothing to do with sex or are likewise sexual sinners. What angers them the most about Christian doctrine is that we, even more than they, rejoice in sexuality and romance, but unlike them we thank God for these wonderful gifts and desire to use them only as God intended. If only they understood that God designed sexuality in man as a reflection of his very own image! In fact romance and sexuality are some of God's most precious gifts given to mankind to be protected with the greatest care.

Thus I say again intimate love and romance is at the very heart of Trinitarian relations which

he further extends by reaching out to us in love and desires to share with us for each other. The love observed as Christ in the Father and the Father in Christ is extended to us as believers in Christ and Christ in believers is made plain in the table below. Remember the Holy Spirit himself says that eternity will begin with the wedding supper of the Lamb. The parable of the Ten Virgins in Matthew 25 explains that believers are like virgins waiting for the arrival of the bridegroom in order to begin the wedding banquet and consummate the marriage. Therefore it is fitting to compare earthly and spiritual romance. God is romancing sinners into himself and himself into sinners.

Perfect Romance	Earthly	Spiritual
Betrothal	Man eyes woman	Father eyes His people in Christ
Courtship	Man wins woman	Holy Spirit wins unbelievers
Engagement	Man asks woman	Jesus asks for confession and belief
Marriage	Bridegroom weds bride	Christ weds the church
Consummation	Husband loves wife	Christ perfected in His People
Lovers	Husband and wife	Christ and His People

God is passionately reaching out to mankind through Jesus Christ to court us with his love and take us to himself as shown in the table above. Strangely enough God commands believers to participate in reaching yet others with the good news of his love. This is strange because since we are still sinners it becomes inevitable that we will introduce corruptions to the beauty of his romance with mankind. No doubt it would be better for him to bring the flowers and chocolates to each person by himself so the loves lines will not be flubbed up. Yet God apparently throws in this extra challenge to show even more powerfully that his romantic passion for the lost is so hot that it cannot be hindered in the least by our failings. What is more, since he is at work within believers he is in effect personally present through us to say the love lines. Nonetheless, it would be wise for us to consider a listing of corrupt ideas about God's perfect romantic nature. In this way we can strive to remove corruptions and better imitate him. This will also serve to remind unbelievers that we are only a poor reflection of Christ, and if they only new him personally they would have no choice but to receive his love.

Corrupt Romance	Earthly	Spiritual
Betrothal	No marriage	God doesn't choose to save or love
	Wives as trophies	God only loves the loveable
	Arranged marriage	God saves without winning our love
Courtship	Rape	God forces a confession without winning the heart
	Fornication	God wins the heart without a confession
	Incest	God quits courting unbelievers to exploit believers
	Exhibitionism	God reveals truth without love
	Fetishism	God avoids the truth for fleshly topics
	Frotteurism	God advances without our commitment

	Masochism	God enjoys his own suffering
	Pedophilia	God advances commitment without understanding
	Sadism	God enjoys making us suffer
	Transvestic fetishism	God wants our works, but not our hearts
	Voyeurism	God motivated by conquest and lust, not love
Engagement	Stood up at the altar	God not faithful, salvation falsely promised
Marriage	Adultery	God rejects his people for another
	Divorce	God not faithful, salvation can be lost
	Common law marriage	God permits unbelief in heaven
Consummation	Celibacy	God has no eternal pleasure in store for his people
	Emasculation	God's grace cannot please, man must please himself
	Subincision	God maims truth and love seeking self pleasure
Lovers	Man and man	God loves only himself and not us
	Woman and woman	God missing so man must love himself
	Man alone	God alone, not concerned with man
	Woman alone	God doesn't exist, man alone

You may have to grab a dictionary for some of the words above. I worked my best to make the comparisons above sensible. However, please do not miss the main point because of disagreement with a detail above. The main point is that God is absolutely none of the things listed in the table above! Yet because of the sin that remains in each of us we may think he is like that or represent him like that to others. He is the perfect romantic, but our view or representation of him is often corrupt. Again I emphatically say, God is not in any way like the things listed in the chart above. Instead he is a wonderfully dashing Prince Charming and if only you knew him you too would be captivated by his love. Look to his cross and know him!

7) Implications

How should we then teach disciples about God's precious image of intimate love designed in mankind while protecting this image given to us from corruption by Satan, the world, or even ourselves? Consider a brief discussion of strategy. One short term strategy is the use of ignorance to protect young disciples from things they do not yet need to know. Ignorance of how to sin has saved many from destruction. For example medicine is useful to heal. However, medicine may be used improperly causing injury or even death. Thus in our household we place medicines out of reach from children. As another example, sex is a wonderful gift from God. But all would agree it is wrong to discuss the mechanics of sex with small children. They must remain ignorant of this subject. Yet, at some point they likewise must be taught. There are even other examples where we should be cautious in educating ourselves. I do not know how to make a bomb with household supplies. I know it can be done, but I am wise to not even bother to educate myself because it could only serve the purpose of mischief or temptation.

The Bible says take only ways that are safe. No need to learn about unsafe paths unless God

has called us to minister to one tempted or fallen on that path. Yet God's purpose is that he would take great pleasure in us and we would take great pleasure in him, fully experiencing the wonder of his image in us. This cannot be obtained through ignorance. So if ignorance is one strategy another strategy is education. Knowledge of how to sin can be overpowered by knowledge of God's superior design. Satan's motive is not only to mar and destroy God's image in mankind, he is also attempting to establish his own kingdom where his way is praised as better. However, he will never be able to make one improvement upon the superior design of Jesus. So growth in Christian discipleship requires educating disciples about the wonder of God's creation, especially his image created in us. Yet because of sin in the world learning about God's goodness is no walk in the park. Each good thing from God is able to be corrupted by Satan. Why Satan has even led some to corrupt the very gospel itself! So should we proceed with fear preferring ignorance because it would be better not to know than to corrupt good things from God? Or should we proceed with confidence knowing that even though we may stumble, God's design is clearly better than any of Satan's corruptions?

To me it seems we have no choice but to proceed boldly in the war to prove God's superior designs because the world is already filled with abominable images and teachings further corrupting the image of God in man. Though we may be able to keep young disciples ignorant for a time they will see these corruptions whether we like it or not. Thus we should make every effort to learn about God's creation and thank him for it, as well as warn our selves about the terrible corruptions possible. Consider one possible scenario. Jesus explained that marriage is a wonderful gift for us during this age, but that in the age to come we will neither marry nor be given in marriage. Here is a truth that Satan may corrupt as he has already begun to corrupt. The world gives marriage little respect and it would not be surprising if Satan leads them to eventually abolish the institution themselves. However, Christ will not end earthly marriage in Heaven because he disrespects it. He created marriage for a wonderful purpose. In eternity, however, he simply plans to replace earthly marriage with the even more wonderful spiritual marriage, Christ to his bride, the church. Christians also know the truth that the age to come doesn't begin until we see Jesus Christ face to face. Thus, earthly marriage is ordained until we see Jesus.

Lastly, since we do not possess sufficient wisdom in ourselves to fight Satan's schemes we must lean wholly on the Lord's word and prayer.

How can we design human authority structures better by modeling them after the authority structures observed within the Godhead and blessed in Scripture? Several observations can be made about authority and submission from the relationship between the Father and Son. First, authority and submission are not bad, but in fact very blessed. Second, lines of authority and responsibility are crystal clear in the Godhead. The Father commands and the Son obeys. Third, there is no role reversal or democracy within the Godhead. The Son never commands or votes with the Father, but only obeys him. Fourth, the Son is not demeaned by obedience, but instead exalted. Are we blessed then to adopt these principles in human authority structures? One axiom of the world is that *"power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely."* To control corruption many nations have turned to Democracy. The premise is that by limiting the power of individuals or groups of individuals that corruption will be restrained. For example, Saddam Hussein, was a corrupt man who abused power to kill many. It would be fair to ask if Democracy, therefore, has done a better job of restraining corruption. Considering that the United States has permitted the murder of tens of millions of unborn children it does not seem that Democracy has effectively curbed corruption either.

Where did we go wrong? There is error in the world's axiom. Power does not corrupt. Mankind is already corrupted in sin, not because of power, but because of a sin nature inherited from Adam. Further, absolute power does not corrupt absolutely, because God is absolute in power and yet not corrupted. Interestingly the Scriptures do not avoid

human authority structures because of sin. God places sinful men in positions of authority in spite of their sin. Further, the Scriptures also command subjects to obey their authorities in spite of their sin as far as Christian conscience will permit. One advantage of this system is that when a human authority sins, God is able to deal with the sinful authority because the one responsible is clearly seen. Yet history also shows that when God punishes a nation there is suffering for the righteous and the unrighteous. And who will suffer if God punishes the United States for the tens of millions of unborn babies killed? There will likely be suffering for all! God's word says, *"Don't seek revenge yourselves, beloved, but give place to God's wrath. For it is written, 'Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, says the Lord' "* (Romans 12:19 WEB).

The conclusion of the matter is that human organizations should accept that obedience is blessed and authority and responsibility should be clearly defined. Finally, having clear lines of authority does not rule out plural or team leadership. For example, the Scriptures point to multiple elders and deacons as church leaders so that they would be accountable to each other and to God together. Consider a Scriptural organizational chart of the universe below.

God the Father						
God the Son						
Angels	Disciples	Husband	Parents	Master	Church Leaders	Government
		Wife	Children	Slaves	Disciples	Citizens

You will note that the Scriptural organizational chart is very clear. The only potential for confusion is that disciples are accountable to both Christ as well as some other human authority. Confusion could arise in this situation when a human authority commands obedience which would result in the violation of Christian conscience. In this case the Christian is commanded to obey Christ first and therefore disobey the human authority as demonstrated in Acts 5:29. This chart shows that we are all under Christ. You will also note that is virtually impossible for a human to not have at least one human authority also over them. Church leaders should be in a plural arrangement and accountable to each other, and still remain under the authority of human government. A Christian king would likewise be called to submit to church leaders. The only two conceivable arrangements for a human to not have another human authority is an unbelieving king or a solitary spiritual leader that is also king of his realm. However, neither of these would be advisable positions. Yet we know that sin pulls each of us toward the altar and throne of independence!

How can we partner more effectively with God in romancing unbelievers to Christ?

The unbelieving need to be won to belief that Christ has died for them and persuaded to invite Christ into their lives. Several points from the discussion above stand out as key to partnering with God in this romance. First, we need to point people to Christ and not to ourselves. Second, we need to eliminate corrupt understandings of our romantic God. Third, we need to model joyful obedience to our authorities. If we grudgingly obey our authorities, why would those we are reaching be interested in obeying Christ and their authorities?

Fourth, we need a resolve to experience the intimate union of Christ in the Father, the Father in Christ, believers in Christ, and Christ in believers. We need to eagerly desire and doggedly work toward the same oneness between us that exists between Christ and the Father. We must be "assimilated" and bring as many with us as are willing!

Can we understand more about marriage and mystery as explained in Ephesians Chapter 5 and what blessing is to be gained?

Paul teaches that a husband and wife's relationship is like the relationship between Christ and the church. He says this is a mystery. Good romance retains the element of mystery rather than itemized action plans. I know I have already risked the romantic with too many tables and lists above, yet I will risk one more table. One may be tempted to think that the comparison between human marriage and spiritual marriage in Ephesians Chapter 5 implies a fairy tale romance with no picture of pain. However, this is not the case at all. To be sure the tale does end happily ever after, but sometimes there may be very painful circumstances in human marriage, just as there is in spiritual marriage. The earthly marriage of husband and wife and the spiritual marriage of Christ and believers have this in common, blessing and trial. The only difference is that if there is tension between Christ and the church, the church alone is the offending partner. If there is tension between a husband and wife, either one or both is the offender.

Blessing	Husband and Wife	Christ and Church
Conversation	Companionship	Fellowship
Intimate union	Physical	Spiritual
Security	Commitment	Forever forgiven
Trial		
Dissatisfaction	Spouse short of expectations	Christ loves us though we fall short
Silent treatment	Spouse not talking to us	Christ loves though we neglect prayer
Anger	Spouse offended	Christ loves though we're offensive
Fights	Spouse argues and fights	Christ loves though we resist his will
Separation	Spouse leaves	Christ faithful though we are faithless
Divorce	Spouse divorces	Christ disowns those who disown him
Conclusion		
Eternity	Earthly marriage ended	Spiritual marriage consummated

Earthly marriage and spiritual marriage both have blessing and trial in common. Yet the perfect response of Christ through trials with his bride serves as an example to earthly marriage partners going through trial. What I am saying is that Christian partners are each called to live sacrificially for each other just as Christ does for us. And if our spouse does let us down our marriage is not any worse than that of Christ's betrothal to the church. Thus Christ can be a great counselor and comforter whether your marriage is blessed or filled with trial.

Is it possible to make any conclusions about the perpetuation of gender in eternity future?

Several facts from Scripture lead to the conclusion that gender will be maintained in eternity future. I discussed some of these facts in [The Image of God in Man](#) as well as the Zinger [Marriage Part 2: The Divine Marriage Amendment](#). However, it may be useful to itemize a complete argument at this point.

Redeemed mankind will continue as male and female in eternity future because: 1) Genesis 1:27 explains that we are created male and female to reflect God's image and so in glory we can predict the perfection of rather than the removal of gender, 2) Ephesians 5:32 explains

that male to female earthly marriage is given to man to reflect the image of his self-sacrifice for us, Christ to man, and so in glory since he never stops giving to us we will never stop giving to each other, though not as earthly husbands and wives, but as spiritual brothers and sisters with God as our Father and Christ as our husband, and 3) Galatians 3:28 is wrongly interpreted to mean that differences will be eliminated in eternity, because this verse means that in Christ differences are made insignificant now for though I am a gentile and a man it doesn't matter in the least because Jesus made me see that I am the same as any other person and in eternity my earthly ancestry cannot be changed, nor my gender.

How can those whose hope has been deferred continue to hope?

Each of us have had the terrible experience of loss. Suppose we lost a job, a family member to death, our health, or even a marriage. Does the Christian faith have hope to offer when the best things of this life lie crumbled in ruins? Yes. Case in point, marriage is one of God's greatest gifts to mankind and originally the primary expression of God's image of loving oneness in mankind. Thus, suffering through a broken marriage may be one of the greatest losses. How can one find hope after such a loss? First the body of believers in Christ now stands as the primary expression of God's image of loving oneness. The value of fellowship found within the body of Christ trumps anything possible in marriage while we are in the spiritual warfare of this age. That is even if your marriage fails through faith in Christ you still have a winning hand. But you may rightly point out that the body of Christ is missing some of the components of loving oneness found in marriage. This is true. However, Paul reminds us in I Corinthians 15 that though Christian fellowship is a comfort through the trials in this life our greatest hope is not this life at all, but our future life with Christ our bridegroom and his bride in eternity. We are anticipating the wedding supper of the lamb and the consummation of the most fantastic marriage imaginable. Loss of an earthly marriage is tragic, but the shadow of this loss will be erased by the brilliance of our marriage to Jesus Christ.

Imagine the fellowship we will enjoy with him and each other when sin is forever erased and Christ's enemies are gone. Though hope is deferred our hope remains unconquerable because 1) God is greater than all our sin, 2) God still works miracles, 3) Jesus is returning for his bride, 4) Satan and sin will be banished from heaven and earth, and 5) the image of God in mankind will be perfectly, completely, finally, and eternally restored.

Conclusion

Writing this paper I hoped to accomplish two things. First I wanted to brag about our God's excellence observed as Christ in the Father and the Father in Christ. I wanted to show how our God's excellence cannot be matched because he is humble and magnificent, graceful and powerful, submissive and commanding. He is the perfect balance of everything that is needed to be the most wonderful God. Secondly, I wanted to humbly say that though mankind has fallen into sin it is God's purpose to restore his image in his people perfectly as believers in Christ and Christ in believers. I hoped you would join me in amazement over this inexpressibly good gift from God. Our time and energy is wasted on cheap idols that cannot serve or satisfy in the least. However, here is a prize that is neither an idol nor a waste of effort, that of Christ-likeness!

Finally, I didn't see this at first, but a strange combination of themes has coalesced; love, trust, obedience, and intimacy. We want love and intimacy. Yet, Satan would sell us these things without trust or obedience. Because Satan's counterfeit of romance is pleasure without commitment it is fleeting. However, God's plan demands that pleasure and commitment grow in tandem because he wants to give us eternal romance. Love and intimacy will grow when trust and obedience also grow. My friend, do you know what I am talking about? Do I know what I am talking about? What I am saying to the married and potentially married is that if we want romantic conversation and great sex with our spouse

then we must trust God and honor and obey our authorities as Christ commands. What I am saying to host of unwed sex partners is why appreciate pleasure and depreciate commitment? Why not instead obey Christ and marry, appreciating both pleasure and commitment? What I am saying to the unmarried and divorced is that your longings are only temporarily deferred. Keep trusting and obeying Christ and prepare for the ecstasy of perfect intimacy with Christ and his people in eternity. Consider the example of our promised husband who obeys his father by remaining chaste, though he is hot with passion for the consummation of his marriage to us, his bride.

Now that is what I'm talking about!

Thankfully Christ says he is returning soon, *"He who testifies these things says, 'Yes, I come quickly.' Amen! Yes, come, Lord Jesus."* (Revelation 22:20 WEB).

Continue on with [The Image of God in Man, Part 3](#) or back to [The Image of God in Man](#).

The Image of God in Man, Part 3

Well Worth Writing about ... Again

In ninth grade I savored a small taste of glory. A good friend persuaded me to join the Future Farmers of America at school. My parents were not farmers, but I lived in a farming community so I gave it a try. The FFA excels at two things in particular, creating agricultural related contests... and giving awards to the contest winners. And so it wasn't long before I found myself on the dairy cattle judging team. Yes... I can judge the qualities of cows. We trained long and hard the whole year and by the end of the effort you could put four cows in front of me and I could rank them best to worst and lecture for half an hour as to the reason why. Thus prepared we entered the state FFA dairy cattle judging contest at the State University. I still remember judging all those sets of cows, a wet-behind-the-ears high school freshman, even praying that if God helped me to win I would be his witness. (BTW, that is not a recommended prayer, though God did later call me to be his witness. Simple obedience without bargaining with God is the wise course.) The next day at the award ceremony I was hoping that I might have at least placed in the competition. Suspense grew and the winners were announced beginning with 10th place. I listened for my name with great anticipation, but by the time they got down to 2nd place my name wasn't called and I quit listening. I concluded that once again delusions of grandeur had unseated my sensibility. So I returned from the clouds only to be jolted by an elbow in my ribs, *'Get up there Jeff! You won first place!' ...Say what?!?!'*

That was a mere earthly award and long forgotten by most, save my children, who hear the story from time to time, and my wife who dusts the trophy, wondering if we really need a lifelike scale model of the *'Ideal Holstein Cow'* on our shelf. But what if instead there was an award that eclipsed every earthly prize and gripped our soul and imagination like no other? What if someone elbowed you and I in our seats and said, *'Get up there girl! Get up there boy! You won the greatest award that can be won!'* Such is the prize in store for every last man, woman, and child chosen for forgiveness by God's grace. Consider the utter tongue tying awesomeness of the undeserved gifts of grace we've been given. First, we are created in the very image of God! Imagine the best and most perfect father, brother, husband, friend, beneficiary, counselor, and more all rolled into one. That is God and he designed us to be like him! We are not God, but we are created in his image to be like him, reflections of his great glory. Second, though we've fallen into sin, God gives us the privilege (and command) of walking with him by faith, and watching him miraculously use even the evil in our lives for the good... if we patiently wait for his timing. Though sin has terribly marred his image in us, God's purpose is only the greater good. His purpose is that we would receive and thus reflect his most dazzling character quality, his grace in forgiving and blessing undeserving rebels through his Son's sacrifice. And third, one grand day in the near future, also by his grace, all his people will be freed from the last chains of sin finally and forever, and be wholly restored to the likeness of his glorious image. We are given eternal loving friendship and brotherhood with God and his children, and no more fights, ever!

Friend, the Bible explains clearly in I John 2:2 (WEB), *"And he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world."* So I elbow you in your seat. *'Wake up boy! Wake up girl! You could not earn an award this great. YOU'VE BEEN GIVEN THE GREATEST PRIZE THAT CAN BE GIVEN, GUARANTEED BY GRACE ALONE!'*

OK Since the Prize is Guaranteed

Since the prize is guaranteed for every individual chosen for forgiveness, and since we have confidence not in ourselves, but in the work of Christ, if we are Christians, let's rest from fear for a moment to reflect again on the prize that awaits us. We are guaranteed to be

freed from the last chains of sin finally and forever, and wholly restored to the likeness of his glorious image to enjoy eternal loving friendship and brotherhood with God and his children, and no more fights ever! Unbelievable! We will have absolutely no more conflict, but instead eternal love, friendship, and brotherhood serving one another with our bodies, souls, and spirits perfected into the likeness of his glorious image. Consider a few of the ways he created us to be like him. He is the Creator that created good and very good in the beginning. And like God, Mankind is designed by God to create also, now fallen however, we are frustrated with the fragile and broken things we create with our self-centered aims, but then, when like him, 'the Master of All Good Workmen shall set us to work anew!' He is the Heavenly Father that made us his children and showers us with his unconditional love. And like God, Mankind is designed by God to father also, now fallen however, fathers nag, fret, and argue conditions hoping to keep our families on the straight and narrow, but then, when like him, we will eat, work, play, dance, and sing, as happy children in the house of the one Father of all our spirits. He is the older brother that willingly walked in our shoes without a stumble and calls us brothers in spite our stumbling. And like God, Mankind is designed by God for brotherhood also, now fallen however, we often condemn our brothers for their failures...while coddling our own weaknesses, but then, when like him, we will cheer for the success of everyone else with no thought of our own estate, and we too will be blessed beyond measure. This is great hope, not the hope of wishful thinking, but the hope of guaranteed, promised blessing. True hope!

And lastly He is our bridegroom waiting to wed us in Heaven. God also created us male and female for marriage to even more intimately express his image in mankind. For Christ is the true bride groom, the bride groom who prepares our bridal suite in glory, whose engagement ring we wear, if we know ourselves to be his. And like God's relationship to us, Mankind is designed to reflect his love for us in the marriage of a husband and wife. Now, fallen, most of mankind rejects his marriage proposal and even if we know ourselves to be his, we wrestle with doubts or flirt with the handsome things of this world. Unbelievers do not wrestle with doubts but reject his marriage proposal without conscience, and they also reject his very image within us as reflected in Biblical marriage. Nonetheless if there are doubts now... there will be no doubts then when his chosen people see him face to face and not one member of his bride is missing or blemished. He will welcome us to his wedding banquet for feast and fellowship and take us into his chambers in marital consummation for eternity. Bride of Christ make your wedding dress white with his red blood shed for us! Make ready, for he calls, and his arrival is now even closer than before. The Bridegroom is at the gates!

His Consummate Wedding and Marital Union

What a wonderful discovery to find ourselves created in God's likeness. He is the Creator, our Heavenly Father, our older brother. And like him, though in a lesser degree we are creators, fathers, and brothers. And these are only a few of the more well known dimensions of God's image reflected in us. But the one dimension that has gripped my soul and imagination the most is that he is our Bridegroom and we are his chosen bride. And those that believe in him look forward to the consummate wedding that will inaugurate eternity.

Scripture reveals a great mystery,

22) Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23) For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the assembly, being himself the savior of the body. 24) But as the assembly is subject to Christ, so let the wives also be to their own husbands in everything.

25) Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the assembly, and gave himself up for it; 26) that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word, 27) that he might present the assembly to himself gloriously, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without defect. 28) Even so husbands also ought to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself.

29) For no man ever hated his own flesh; but nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord also does the assembly; 30) because we are members of his body, of his flesh and bones. 31) "For this cause a man will leave his father and mother, and will be joined to his wife. The two will become one flesh." 32) This mystery is great, but I speak concerning Christ and of the assembly. 33) Nevertheless each of you must also love his own wife even as himself; and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Ephesians 5:22-33 (WEB)

There are numerous mysteries revealed by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Yet one of the greatest mystery revealed to us is the image of God designed into mankind expressed in the marriage of a husband and wife. The awesome union of God the Father with God the Son cascades to the union of God the Son, the Bridegroom, with the church, His bride, which further cascades to the reflection of his glorious image in the marital union of a simple husband and wife. Marriage itself was created by God to be a reflection foreshadowing the grandest, the greatest, the most majestic wedding that ever will be as Christ the Bridegroom closes this world's history to commence eternity marrying his bride, the church. Our humble physical intimacy with husband and wife becoming 'one flesh' is a tiny taste of the ecstasy that awaits the saved when our union with Christ is face to face and our veil of sin removed forever.

Our lives are real stuff, but they are a mere metaphor, a shadow, compared to the reality that is coming. God himself purposed the frustration of the world we live in now. No doubt this brokenness ranges from the petty to the nightmarish for both you and me. Yet God decreed our bondage to sin in order demonstrate his most amazing grace in our lives. And so even though we were wonderfully created in the image of God at the first, now we are marred with sin. His image within us is not defaced beyond recognition, but we could be considered garbage now compared to the glorious transformation that awaits for us. So for now the things we create break and fail, earthly fathers and families miss the mark, brothers and friends let us down, and even blessed marital union is less than a perfect fit or never fits due to this world's brokenness. Standing in our own weakness and sin we are uncomfortably fit, poorly fit, badly fit, misfits, and unfit.

But the great news is that though we are not fit, God is perfectly fit, and we are also a perfect fit in him. Consider Jesus' words from the upper room once again.

8) Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us."

9) Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you such a long time, and do you not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father. How do you say, 'Show us the Father?' 10) Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I tell you, I speak not from myself; but the Father who lives in me does his works. 11) Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me; or else believe me for the very works' sake. 12) Most certainly I tell you, he who believes in me, the works that I do, he will do also; and he will do greater works than these, because I am going to my Father. 13) Whatever you will ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14) If you will ask anything in my name, I will do it. 15) If you love me, keep my commandments. 16) I will pray to the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, that he may be with you forever: 17) the Spirit of truth, whom the world can't receive; for it doesn't see him and doesn't know him. You know him, for he lives with you, and will be in you. 18) I will not leave you orphans. I will come to you. 19) Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more; but you will see me. Because I live, you will live also. 20) In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. 21) One who has my commandments and keeps them, that

person is one who loves me. One who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him, and will reveal myself to him."

John 14:8-21 (WEB)

God the Father and God the Son are perfectly fit together. Jesus is *'in the Father'* because he obeys his father's will. The Father is *'in the Son'* because he puts his commands in his obedient Son. The union of the Father and the Son is nothing but constant purpose and pleasure to perfection. And our union with Christ is designed with the same goal. We are *'in the Son'* if we obey Christ's will. And *'Christ is in us'* because his commands live in the obedient. But we do not always obey his commands and so purpose and pleasure are traded for pain. Yet, Praise God, there is an additional saving dimension to our relationship with Christ. We are *'in the Son'* because God has hid our sin from his wrath *'inside'* the protective grace of Christ. Our sin is hidden from view of God's wrath against sin, restoring pleasure out of thankfulness for Christ. And *'Christ is in us'* if he has entered our being to empower us to do his will, restoring purpose by enabling us to serve God. So God the Father and God the Son are in joyful union, perfectly fit together, and God the Son and his chosen people are also the perfect match and fit for a perfect union. We are sinners needing a savior, and Christ is the savior who chooses to save us! This is the only marital union planned for heaven and eternal joy.

Our Corrupted Weddings and Marital Unions

Normally if our possessions become marred, defaced, or corrupted we toss them to the trash. If they are trash, then the trash is where they belong! And frankly we ourselves and our marriages are trash and worse than infectious trash because of how terribly sin has defaced God's image in us. Remnants of God's image are discernible, yes, but the poisonous corruption laced throughout our existence makes us an offense to anything holy. We ourselves would not aid and abet criminals in our own household. How much less should holy God overlook unholy sinners in his household. And he cannot overlook us. In fact we would be trashed by God, except for one thing, his gracious choice to save. God has chosen to demonstrate his marvelous grace in redeeming, restoring, and setting his unconditional love upon mankind, the unworthy recipients of his mercy and favor. We all deserve his damning fire, but he has given us his passionate fire.

And since God has chosen to redeem and restore our broken lives we are therefore commanded to strive to remove the evil from our corrupted lives and marriages, restoring marital union to be the reflection of his image and the union that exists between the Father and the Son, and the Son and the Church. We read, ***"Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the bed be undefiled; but God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers"*** (Hebrews 13:4 WEB).

Much work remains to be done to clean house in the church of God so that we could be the lighthouse we are called to be to our lost world. We are plagued with all the same corruptions within our own ranks as can be found in the world. Marriage is dishonored among us through divorce which God hates, remarriage instead of reconciliation, separation, estrangement, wife beatings, homosexuality resulting from ingratitude, fornication on every street, spousal silent treatments, murder of our marital fruits, chauvinistic rejection of God's design in sexuality, genderless ideals, pornography for fast pleasure with zero relationship, smutty books otherwise known as female porn, lustful looks across church pews, and lustful displays by women dressed like the world. These things dishonor God's design in marriage and defile our marriage beds.

Perhaps at the pinnacle of recent offenses is the William P. Young's spiritual tale *The Shack*. How this book can be acclaimed by noteworthy Christian leaders and so many Christian laity baffles my mind. One review compared the historic value of Young's book to Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Friends, our sensibility is castrated. At the heart of the offense Young portrays our God as a woman. To be sure the Christian faith, more than any other movement, has elevated women to their proper dignity. God works through woman just as

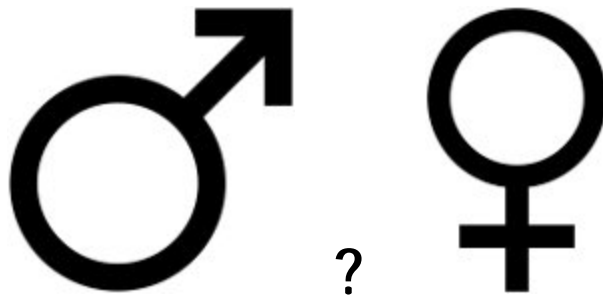
significantly as men. Today in Sunday school we were also reminded from Luke 8 that the very ministry of our savior Jesus Christ was financed by women. All this is true, and it is a perfectly good thing to proclaim that God works equally through both men and women, but to then move with Young and portray God as a woman is a rattle snake strike at the very heart of the image of God created within mankind. One can only hope that Young penned his book in utter ignorance. [Click here](#) for a thorough review of *The Shack*.

Consider again God's incredible gift given to mankind. First we are made in his image, second we are redeemed through his Son, and third we are promised perfect restoration to his image in glory. Perhaps Satan's envy over our marvelous position is part of what drives his determination to harm us with his lies and his gross caricatures of our Savior commonly found in books like *The Shack*. So let's remind ourselves once again of the truth from God's word, "**God created man in his own image. In God's image he created him; male and female he created them**" (Genesis 1:27 WEB). So we see that maleness and femaleness is one brilliantly shining aspect of God's image that he has shared with mankind. But do not be ignorant. Do not neuter our God. This does not mean that HE is both HE and SHE!

Instead God created us in his image as male and female to even better illustrate his absolute maleness. Yes, that is right! If there ever was an Alpha Male worthy of honor, it is our God, because he is also the Alpha Leader in humility and kindness. HE IS THE HUNK WE WANT! You may ask how this can be. Consider a sentence from a previous article, [The Image of God in Man](#).

So not only is male and female marital union an expression of the image of God, but a husband's self-sacrifice for his wife is also a picture of Christ and the church. Paul says this is a great mystery. God not only showed his self-sacrificing male husbandly nature to us, his female bride, by dying on the cross, but also calls us creaturely male husbands to the same nature of self-sacrifice for our female wives. This is why God created us male and female to fully express his male nature, because he also fully shares his nature of self-sacrifice for us, with us, so we can live self-sacrificially for each other as he for us and ultimately be joined with him in perfect unity.

The concept above may be difficult to grasp, but if you come to understand it then you will truly appreciate the awesome value of both men and women, and just how incredible God's gift of marriage is to mankind. And even harder for me to grasp is that Christ would create and recreate us to be like him, yet so foundationally different, for power, authority, and grace only ever flow from him to us. Likewise, God has made wo-man like man, fe-male like male, yet also so wonderfully different. It is this likeness and difference that is sized so perfectly for us to be '*in Christ*' and Christ to be '*in us*', in the proper order. And it is our likeness... and difference that makes sanctified union so thrilling, yet so easily misunderstood. For everyone believes to some degree that it is good to be good, that is we want goodness to dwell within us. Though unfortunately since sin has entered the world our notions of what is good are skewed. However, very few believe and understand that it is possible for the sinful to have union with goodness, for the petty to have union with the magnificent. That is the mystery revealed in the gospel, that mankind, though sinful, is safely hidden from God's wrath in Christ, and he is in the believing empowering us to do his will. The marital union of husband and wife is a beautiful reflection of God's saving relationship with mankind, that the elect are in him and he is in the believing. And sadly you will also realize that male chauvinists, woman's libbers, and gender neutrality causes are the ones guilty of the great crimes of selfishness and rejecting God's beautiful design within themselves. They have lost a great blessing, but God's grace reaches even to these depths. The beginning of understanding may be to agree that Christ our bridegroom is male and that he courts his female bride, the church. And since he is the author of true romance he initiates and we respond. Is your heart cold or passionate for such a romance?



Fallen mankind has broken, abused, and misused their very selves, even defacing the most intimate aspect of God's image shared with us. The three pictures below represent corruptions and misapplications of God's image in us. It is as if we were given a fine china dish only to use it as an ash tray. It might work after a fashion, but how much more fitting to use the dish to eat cherry pie alamode instead! Or it is as if we were given a 2x4 stud and used it as a shovel to eat our fill. You might be able to use a board as a spoon, but with our eyes open and sensibility awake something is clearly amiss. Instead, lumber is for building shelves to hold fine dishes which are used to serve cherry pie! What about you? Are you too broken to be broken over our brokenness illustrated by lesbianism, homosexuality, and transgender confusion?



The awesome news is that even though God's image in mankind has been defaced, mankind will be restored perfectly into his image forever in glory. The two pictures below illustrate one beautiful aspect of God's image that he has shared with us. God is revealed to be male caring for his female creation and Christ as bridegroom loving his bride the church. You will note the smaller parallel image within creation and within the church. This smaller picture represents husband and wife relations which are a tiny picture of his relationship to us. This is the great mystery revealed in the gospel noted in Ephesians 5:22-33. And so now you see that when we honor marriage and keep the marriage bed undefiled we honor him and his image in us. You will note that the two images below are identical but flipped. Both images could represent God's role as creator or as Savior. But in the first image God is on top to show that he is Almighty God over all. In the second image God is on the bottom to show that he is the humble servant of all. And even harder to diagram is the glory that he is in us and we are in him! So whether he is exerting his power on the top or he is humbly serving on the bottom or he is doing his good pleasure in us or we are comforted in him, he is always God and always male.



So we rightly challenge Young and those thumbing the nose at God and his image in us. These insolent rebels would arrive at the glorious wedding that awaits us and look our

handsome groom in the face, saying, *"I am the man and you are the woman."* These charlatans do not even know what an honor it is to be male and what a glory it is to be female because they do not even know what God's purpose and design is in creating male and female. They are hopelessly ensnared in the gender wars orchestrated by Satan's lies. Yet grace covers even these offenses, and especially so, since for most, such as I, it is ignorance that veils this glory from our view. For the Lord has reminded me of conversations with my dear mother incomplete, prayers by my aunts and uncles yet unanswered, arguments with school friends totally misunderstood, discipleship by friends also misunderstood and forgotten,... and two moments of understanding in the past prayerfully laid aside until now, according to God's wisdom.

Perhaps God's design with me is so I could fully appreciate and say to you that it is God's gracious choice alone that makes the difference and that apart from his grace we are as foolish as we know each other to be. But today, by his strong hand alone, I testify that God is good, his creation is good, and his design in creating Eve for Adam is very good. And God's purpose for breaking my idols is so that I could also testify by God's grace that, even though God's creation is good and his design in marriage is very good, these things are only a picture of something that is even better in eternity future.

God is awesome!

Those knowing the Bible better may argue that Paul reassigns his own gender in making disciples, so what's the big deal. For he says, *"But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother cherishes her own children. ...As you know, we exhorted, comforted, and implored every one of you, as a father does his own children, to the end that you should walk worthily of God, who calls you into his own Kingdom and glory"* (1 Thessalonians 2:7,11-12). But it is one thing for Paul to say his ministry was like a mother and like a father and quite another to say God reveals himself as a woman. Not once in the whole of Scripture did God ever reveal himself to us as a woman. Rather, God revealed himself to us a man, the man Jesus Christ. Again this is not because women are in any way inferior to men. Instead it is to respect and honor his position as God-Bridegroom over his Church-Bride. The persistent may continue to argue that Jesus also compared himself to a female chicken saying, *"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets, and stones those who are sent to her! How often I would have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you would not!"* (Matthew 23:37 WEB). Yet this simile is hardly evidence to say that God's identity or revelation of himself to mankind is in any way female. He is the man, our bridegroom. And we believers are his woman, the church. And if the marriage of Adam and Eve in the garden was very good then the marriage of Christ and his church will be even better, in fact VERY VERY GOOD, for he is an AWESOME GOD.

Those rejecting God's goodness are blind to the marvelous parallels God has designed between the physical and the spiritual. For example physical seed flows from husband into wife to conceive life, just as spiritual seed flows from Christ into people to conceive spiritual life. And so maleness within mankind is a picture of Christ. Also a mother doesn't initiate life but nurtures life, just as the church nurtures spiritual life. And so femaleness within mankind is a picture of the church. But those rebelling against God's word hamstring the strength of men and deface the beauty of women. Young and his followers find it vogue to characterize our bridegroom as a woman. Should the bride then be characterized as a man? The offense is the exact equivalent of removing the simile from our goal to be Christ-like. The Lord himself commands us to strive to be LIKE Christ, but to strive to BE Christ is to depose him. The Lord humbled himself to enter our world as a human being, but not as a woman, to remind us that he is not the church, but the Savior of the church, our bridegroom. Thankfully our wedding day with Christ will not be spoiled, for those rejecting their bridegroom will not even make it through the door. These people are rejecting their share in the bliss that awaits our marital consummation with Christ.

An Honest Question

While in conversation with the daughter of my cousin about heavenly glory she said she

didn't want to go. *'Who wants to be a ghost and not be male or female?'* she asked. This young teen was fully enjoying being a woman with the prospects of marrying a man and anything less than this fulfillment would be like trading water for chocolate. Many Christians believe that we will be genderless or all male or all female in glory. We do read in Galatians 3:28 (WEB), *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."* Yet I understand this truth to be regarding our salvation and value before God. God loves and values all mankind equally whether black or white, male or female. But it should be noted that this verse must not be used to prove that God then blends all the beautiful diversity he created into a gray mud in Heaven. Instead I have concluded that since the God the Son chooses to retain his identify as Son in submission to God the Father for all eternity, I Corinthians 15:28, that God's original creation design of reflecting his image in mankind through male and female is also retained for all eternity. Though Matthew 22:29-30 (WEB) makes it clear that marriage as we know it will be dispensed, *"But Jesus answered them, 'You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like God's angels in heaven.'*" God has not revealed everything, but his revealed Word is sufficient to save and also sufficient to get our hearts pounding for the glory that awaits! Do you know the Scriptures? Do you know the power of God? Is your heart pounding with passion or with fear?

The Heart of the Matter

So how do we gain Christ as bridegroom and how can we even begin to make ready for a wedding and marital union with Christ, our Creator? The answer to both questions is the same. We can do nothing to earn God's love in the first place or to encourage him to love us more. Instead we receive by faith that God already loves us unconditionally, has forgiven all our sin, and has given us every blessing possible. That is what he asks of us, simply to trust him! Additionally, we do not need to attempt to make ourselves better to get God to continue to love us after becoming a Christian. He has always loved us, loves us now, and will continue loving us forever. No effort on our part could earn the blessings he showers upon us. And no effort on our part will serve to reduce our sin and increase our holiness. We cannot change our black leopard spots. Instead we continue the Christian life the same way we started, by faith, trusting that God himself will continue the good work that he began in us, changing us to be like him. That again is what he asks of us, simply to trust him! So just like it is written in Romans 1:17 (WEB), *"For in it is revealed God's righteousness from faith to faith. As it is written, 'But the righteous shall live by faith.'*" Christ wants us to walk with him by faith from the beginning of the Christian life to the end. That is all. That is how we gain Christ and prepare for our wedding day.

Of course Christians should super-naturally desire to serve God out of gratitude for what Christ has done, but we still need to remind ourselves from time to time that our service cannot earn grace. Grace by definition cannot be earned. But what if we understand that and sincerely seek direction as to how to return love for God out of gratitude? For me the most significant advice on how to grow in our ability to serve is found in Mark 9:35 (WEB), *"He sat down, and called the twelve; and he said to them, 'If any man wants to be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all.'"* This is so upside down, backward, and inside out from my or your natural way of thinking. I, and perhaps you too, have wasted so many years trying to make ourselves bigger thinking we would be more well equipped servants, but in the end we merely outsized ourselves wasting opportunities because of our own ignorance or worse seeking glory for ourselves. The Lord of Glory made himself smaller coming down to us laying aside his glory so he and his commands would fit into our understanding. And yet at the same time if we know him to be the biggest and only God there should be no question that we all easily fit into him. Sadly there is a prideful insecure Alpha male and selfish controlling Queen Bee inside of each of us. But if we are ready to exit that rat race and give to Christ out of gratitude for his love, then Jesus' counsel above is the best. We must cease the efforts to make ourselves bigger and instead make ourselves last of all being willing be a true servant and friend to everyone God brings across our path. Faith and humble service are fine garments to wear to the wedding party ahead.

Our Bridegroom is a Romantic

Finally, Jesus, our bridegroom, is a romantic who loves weddings. In fact it is his full-time work right now, getting ready for his wedding! Read a few select passages of Scripture below in conclusion as you leave my thoughts to reflect on your own invitation and reception at the Lord's banqueting table.

We see his romantic passion in Song of Solomon 1:1-2:2 (WEB).

1) *The Song of songs, which is Solomon's.*

Beloved

2) *Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth;
for your love is better than wine.*

3) *Your oils have a pleasing fragrance.*

*Your name is oil poured out,
therefore the virgins love you.*

4) *Take me away with you.*

Let's hurry.

The king has brought me into his rooms.

Friends

We will be glad and rejoice in you.

We will praise your love more than wine!

Beloved

They are right to love you.

We see his wedding mirth in John 2:1-11 (WEB),

1) *The third day, there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee. Jesus' mother was there. 2) Jesus also was invited, with his disciples, to the marriage. 3) When the wine ran out, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no wine."*

4) *Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does that have to do with you and me? My hour has not yet come."*

5) *His mother said to the servants, "Whatever he says to you, do it." 6) Now there were six water pots of stone set there after the Jews' way of purifying, containing two or three metretes apiece. 7) Jesus said to them, "Fill the water pots with water." So they filled them up to the brim. 8) He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the ruler of the feast." So they took it. 9) When the ruler of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and didn't know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the ruler of the feast called the bridegroom 10) and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when the guests have drunk freely, then that which is worse. You have kept the good wine until now!" 11) This beginning of his signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.*

We see his demands for faith resulting in holiness in Matthew 22:8-14 (WEB),

8) *"Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited weren't worthy. 9) Go therefore to the intersections of the highways, and as many as you may find, invite to the marriage feast.' 10) Those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together as many as they found, both bad and good. The wedding was filled with guests. 11) But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man who didn't have on wedding clothing, 12) and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here not wearing wedding clothing?' He was speechless. 13) Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and throw him into the*

*outer darkness. That is where the weeping and grinding of teeth will be.' 14)
For many are called, but few chosen."*

Well Worth Waiting for ... Still

So not only is Christ our bride groom well worth writing about but he is well worth waiting for.

I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth have passed away, and the sea is no more. 2 I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband. 3 I heard a loud voice out of heaven saying, "Behold, God's dwelling is with people, and he will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; neither will there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more. The first things have passed away."

Revelation 21:1-4 (WEB)

Make ready for the wedding! Meet me there!

Go back to [The Image of God in Man](#) or [The Image of God in Man, Part 2](#).

Thessalonians(1) 1:6-7 - The Art of Imitation

Today I prepare to teach a class of youth how to draw cartoons and use free software such as **Pencil**, **Creatoon**, **Synfig**, and **Blender** to render animated movies. I am blessed with the opportunity to foster creative talent in others even while I am still learning myself. The invitation before us is to muster every talent, resource, and energy to build and serve the kingdom of Christ... even cartoon animation! Since I am also learning along with the students in my classroom it is important that I also teach a most important art, a much more important than the drawing of cartoons. For this art finds application not only in the arts, but in every dimension of life from God and country to marriage and family to friendship and career.

It is the art of imitation.

God designed us to learn and grow, yes. However, we learn and grow best with and from others. Of course individuals have cut paths to new knowledge and innovation, but never without at least beginning with the results of prior entrepreneurs and persevering with great support from others somewhere. Most commonly progress is made by groups and teams of people with a common goal challenging one another on to greater achievement. Doggedly following in the wake of those who have pressed the front lines of the goals you seek will one day give you a seat among the servant leaders of your chosen field.

Each of us may have many aspirations. However, there is no aspiration so great as to manifest the humble character of Jesus Christ. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11:1 (WEB), "***Be imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ.***"

Later he encouraged the church at Thessalonica saying, "***You became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all who believe in Macedonia and in Achaia***" (1 Thessalonians 1:6-7, WEB).

Paul strove to imitate the example of Christ and to be an example worthy of imitation himself. Pride did not keep Paul from learning from others and so aside from Christ himself Paul became the model missionary, par excellence. So "***And whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord, and not for men***" (Colossians 3:23 WEB) and through humble imitation and the grace of God I pray that you also reach the par excellence of God's calling for you.

A few guidelines for the art of imitation

- Follow God and his design and purpose for yourself first, Matthew 6:33
- Choose role models of that purpose second, 1 Corinthians 11:1
- Choose role models wisely, 1 Thessalonians 1:6
- Choose several role models for a balanced perspective, 1 Corinthians 3:1-9
- Observe the choices that led to their success, 3 John 1:11
- Imitate those choices and make them habits, Hebrews 6:12
- Befriend role models to follow them more closely, Hebrews 13:7-8
- Note the weaknesses of your role models, 1 Corinthians 15:33
- Return to God and confess your own weaknesses, 1 John 1:9-10
- Seek to be a godly example to others, 1 Thessalonians 1:7

Thessalonians(1) 2:4, Another Point of Grace

I Thessalonians 2:4 (WEB) states, *"But even as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the Good News, so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, who tests our hearts."* John 14:1 also states, *"Don't let your heart be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me."* Curiously all three underlined words above are derived from the Greek word, *pisteuo*, with the same Strong's reference number of 4100.

We all know that Christians *pisteuo* God, but does God also *pisteuo* Christians? Popular Christian lyrics harmonize, *"He believes in you."* Others commonly boast, *"If you cannot trust in yourself who can you trust in?"* Or again, *"If you want something done right you have to do it yourself!"* Or the persuasive, *"Ah come on, just trust me."* Or again, *"The foundation of solid relationships is trust."* Or the pine of hopeless romantics, *"I need to find someone I can trust."* Or the book I now read, *"Building Effective Relationships [through trust]."* Or the grand conclusion of Cinderella's daily speech in the Magic Kingdom or the High School football coach pep rally exhortation, *"You have to believe...in yourself."*

Though we all want to trust in others, others to trust in us, and ultimately to trust in ourselves, perhaps now we have found Biblical support for the practice. For if God trusts in us why shouldn't we trust in ourselves? In fact if our trust relationship with God is reciprocal, us trusting God and God trusting us, we have every reason to trust in ourselves and to urge others to trust in us as well. For if the God of the universe depends on us, why then we are at least equal to God and possibly greater, and we are then in agreement with *Invictus* and in fact *'the captains of our souls.'* Yet before we launch into the skies with our new confidence let us double check the Scripture above.

Greek study observes that *'entrusted'* and *'believe'* above both are from the same word *'pisteuo'*, yet a study of the context shows that *'pisteuo'* is used differently in the two verses above. In the case of I Thessalonians 2:4 *'pisteuo'* is followed by the direct object *'The Good News.'* Thus a more careful reading shows that God does not *'trust in man'*, but *'entrusts man with'* the gospel. The *'with'* is absent in the Greek but is implied by the direct object. In the case of John 14:1 there is also a direct object, *'God.'* Man is commanded to *'trust in'* God.

Webster's explains the difference between *'entrust with'* and *'trust in'*. To *'trust in'* someone is to place *'total confidence in the integrity, ability, and good character of another.'* To *'entrust with'* is to *'give over something to another for care, protection, or performance.'* When we *'trust in'* God we are dependent upon his dependability. When God *'entrusts us with'* the gospel he is not dependent upon our dependability, but instead gives us an assignment leagues beyond our ability causing us to further *'trust in'* him for help. Greek word studies and word comparisons are useful only in as far as we remember that even the same Greek word can have different meanings depending upon the context, just as English words.

Of course other Scriptures make it plain that God loves us, but does not *'trust in'* us. *"But Jesus didn't trust himself to them, because he knew everyone"* (John 2:24 WEB). Furthermore, we should love each other, but not *'trust in'* each other. *"Don't put your trust in princes, each a son of man in whom there is no help"* (Psalm 146:3 WEB). Jesus is the faithful prince that God or we can trust in because Jesus is God. Finally, we should soberly consider our weakness and never *'trust in'* ourselves. *"One who trusts in himself is a fool; but one who walks in wisdom is kept safe"* (Proverbs 28:26 WEB).

Ironically the world with raised hand, bold facade, and trembling heart preaches trust in your self and trust in me, while we preach with trembling hand, no facade, and bold heart, trust in God alone! The foundation of confidence on this earth and solid relationships is not trusting each other, but trusting in God, receiving his love, and loving each other as he loves us!

Three Dangerous Ways to Lose Your Religion

Following are three dangerous way to lose your religion.

1. Reject Jesus as your personal Savior
2. Do not add your name to Heaven by trusting Jesus
3. Do not fear God's eternal wrath

If you do these three things you will lose your religion and...

...become a confident mature Christian! What? Yes, consider...

1. Reject Jesus as your personal Savior and receive Jesus as Savior of ALL God's people!

While Jesus loves each individual person, his work on the cross was not for individuals and a private personal expression of faith. Instead his work on the cross was as the second Adam, a perfect vicarious sacrifice, for ALL God's people. Jesus is the ultimate family man, building His family. His salvation is not personal, but corporate, inviting ALL mankind to enjoy restored fellowship with Himself and His family.

Beloved, while I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation...

Jude 3a (WEB)

2. Do not add your name to Heaven by trusting Jesus and instead trust that Jesus has written your name in glory from BEFORE the creation of the world!

The hymn writer and many still sing, "There's a new name Written down in glory, And it's mine, oh yes, it's mine!" Unfortunately, this hymn perpetuates the fearful religion of conditional salvation, that there is something we must do, from being good enough to "accepting Jesus," to get God to love us eternally. Instead Jesus invites us to Christian faith, trusting that he already loves us unconditionally and eternally. Predestination used to scare me as the reason that I could not be saved, but friends this is the reason that all God's people will be saved!

3) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4) even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and without defect before him in love, 5) having predestined us for adoption as children through Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his desire, 6) to the praise of the glory of his grace, by which he freely gave us favor in the Beloved, 7) in whom we have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8) which he made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, 9) making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he purposed in him 10) to an administration of the fullness of the times, to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth, in him.

Ephesians 1:3-10 (WEB)

3. Do not fear God's eternal wrath and allow God's perfect love to cast out fear!

Many evangelists have created entire churches full of hypocrites happy to have found the recipe to win God's love, huddled in reverent fear, while escaping His eternal wrath. They prayed a prayer, went forward to the altar, thought a thought, stopped a sin or two, bought a pass by "*trusting*" Jesus, or discovered the "*safe*" fellowship of the chosen few. Friends, complete confidence in God's love for us cannot come until every condition to guarantee his love through human decision has failed and we open our eyes to the bedrock of his unconditional eternal love, an unshakable place to stand.

18) There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear has punishment. He who fears is not made perfect in love. 19) We love him, because he first loved us.

1 John 4:18-19 (WEB)

Losing your religion in these ways is good, but may have dangerous repercussions.

Timothy(1) 2:11-15, The Total Depravity of Man... and Woman

I have written elsewhere that I am opposed to efforts to re-translate Scriptural references of man and mankind to gender neutral terms. Please read my article, [The Image of God in Man](#), to understand my reasons why. Though recently, upon further reflection, I wondered if it wouldn't be useful for the politically correct to gain ground for gender equality in the arena of theological terms.

For example, the doctrine of the *depravity of man* has been examined inside and out for centuries, without equal time on the *depravity of woman*. I say this facetiously because we all understand that the doctrine of the depravity of man does include both genders, all races, and all ages of people. However, since we do have the magnifying glass on woman for now let's consider a Scripture on woman and sin.

This is of particular interest to me because, though at one time my social interactions were almost solely limited to the discipleship of college men, now God has lead me to marry a woman, given me three daughters, and blessed me to be the only man in an office of five women. Don't tell me God doesn't have a sense of humor!

Thus poised consider this zinger of Scripture from Paul.

11) Let a woman learn in quietness with full submission. 12) But I don't permit a woman to teach, nor to exercise authority over a man, but to be in quietness. 13) For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14) Adam wasn't deceived, but the woman, being deceived, has fallen into disobedience; 15) but she will be saved through her childbearing, if they continue in faith, love, and sanctification with sobriety.

1 Timothy 2:11-15 (WEB)

Wow.

Now that cuts against every grain in modern culture. First, we see that God does not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man. I believe the focus of this command speaks to the realm of Christian authority, the family and the church, and so may not include business or government. Second, we see that Adam was not deceived, but Eve. This does not mean Adam did not sin. Rather Adam sinned with full knowledge and his eyes open, whereas Eve was misled. Third, we see that Eve also sinned. This fact can actually be of some encouragement. A fellow who is all too well acquainted with his own sin when facing conflict with women may be inclined to think that all the fault is his. He may reason, "*certainly a creature so beautiful, attractive, and smooth of speech could not be a sinner.*" However, this is not the case at all as our study reveals.

The corruption of sin extends to man and woman, ugly and beautiful, smart and dumb, black and white, young and old. Only with God's grace can Christian men and women consider one another compassionately as fellow soldiers in the fight against sin. The fact of woman's sin is also quite important to the young man ready to marry the beautiful woman on his arm. He should marry, but also be reminded that he and his beauty possess enough sin together to

destroy one other. They would be wise to ask God to be with them every step of the way.

Lastly we also see that God urges women to be "*saved*" through raising children. Obviously this does not mean that women are justified before God by the work of raising children. Women are saved by God's grace, just the same as men. Instead, God is saying that if women want to be saved from a fruitless Christian life they should pursue marriage and motherhood. Sometimes God does place a special call on a woman away from marriage or motherhood. If so there are tons of places to serve Christ within his family. However, this Scripture reminds us that marriage and motherhood is a very great purpose and honor for women. Praise God that even though women also suffer from a depraved sinful nature that God loves them and has redeemed them to wonderful purposes... just as men.

Timothy(1) 5:24, What happens in Vegas...

The world promises, "*What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas.*" Do you want to hit the slots, but the prudes think it evil? Take a trip to Vegas, your secret will be safe there. Do you want to pamper yourself, but your spouse has the check book under lock and key? Take a trip to Vegas, they will take care of you. Do you want to savor fine dining and loosen up with finer wine, but feel guilty about the decadence? Take a trip to Vegas, you deserve it. Do you want to take off your wedding ring, but have doubts? Take a trip to Vegas, though it is sin city, you are promised that, "*What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas!*"

The promise is enticing.

Can Vegas deliver?

Can the good, or more likely the bad and the ugly committed in Vegas truly stay in Vegas? Can we hide our deeds from our fellowman? Possibly. Can we hide our deeds from God? The Christian Scriptures report, "*Some men's sins are evident, preceding them to judgment, and some also follow later*" (1 Timothy 5:24 WEB). The Bible warns that sooner or later, our sins will become known.

What happens in Vegas does not stay in Vegas.

The Bible also promises, "*For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God*" (Colossians 3:3 WEB) Did you hit the slots, but now prudently regret the evil? Take a trip to Christ, your sin will be safe with him. Did you pamper yourself, but now realize you robbed your spouse? Take a trip to Christ, he will take care of you. Did you fill yourself with gluttony and drunkenness, but now see that decadence is decadent? Take a trip to Christ, even though you don't deserve him. Did you take off your wedding ring, but now have no doubts that through unfaithfulness you have joined the lowest of low? Take a trip to Christ, he is the final and only sacrifice for your sin.

God guarantees that, "*What is hidden in Christ, stays in Christ!*"

Disciplined by the Grace of Jesus Christ

Home Bible Optimism Articles

Timothy(1) 6:12, 1 Corinthians 9:24, 2 Timothy 4:7, Fight and Run!

Recently I reread the book *The Pursuit of Holiness* by Jerry Bridges. Bridges encourages us to pursue holiness. The Scriptures also remind us in Hebrews 12 that without holiness no one will see the Lord. We must pursue holiness! But how much holiness is enough to see the Lord? Libraries have been written debating this question.

II Timothy 3 speaks of people who boast about knowledge of the Lord, but deny his power to change their lives. The true Christian life, however, is marked by knowledge of Christ that also has power to change us. But how much change is enough? My personal testimony is that I am sinner still, but nonetheless God has changed me, and one day in eternity I will be perfected into his image!

I thus found great encouragement through Bridges book... except for page 107. On this page Bridges graphs the progress in holiness in a Christian's life. The graph is a simple positively sloped line with holiness gradually increasing over time and with the Christian's greatest level of holiness being achieved at the end of life. I find this model to be discouraging, unrealistic, and unbiblical.

A pastor friend of mine once taught on the same subject and instead he drew a graph that had ups and downs through the Christian's whole life with the end not necessarily higher than the beginning.

Truly? Yes truly!

Consider King David's life. He committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered Uriah in the middle of his life. David's holiness dipped to an all time low in the middle of his life. How would you graph that? Consider Moses also. He disobeyed God in front of the whole assembly by striking the rock instead of speaking to the rock. God then punished him by not letting him enter the Promised Land. Moses' greatest sin was at the very end of his life. How should we graph that?

Or take me for example. As a high school youth, peer pressure lead me to a foul tongue. I could cuss with the best of them. Later at the beginning of my college years when I was restored to Christ, his grace enabled me to clean up my language. Yet later I made a mistake and took a job with greedy money makers because I wanted money too and I found that profanities returned to my internal thoughts, and were barely kept from leaving my mouth. Even today the profane is still with me from time to time. And what strength will I possess in restraining the tongue at the end of my years?

I have heard that elderly Christians often become more easily irritated or impatient, even returning to profanity themselves. Several months ago I was pushing an elderly retired Christian Pastor's wheelchair through his nursing home and the wheel pinched his finger and he said, "*Damn!*" How should we graph that? I do not mention this story to condemn him, but in fact to commend him. I commend him because I know that though he is still in the struggle with sin, he still maintains his faith. The one condemned is the one who throws in the towel altogether and rejects Christ as their lord and savior.

Friends, don't throw in the towel!

What would you think of a coach who said to his team, *"You are amazing athletes! When you begin the contest you will not be at your best. But you will get better and better. And at the very end of the contest you will be your best!"* Say what?

The coach of Scripture says the Christian life is a fight. *"Fight the good fight of faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you confessed the good confession in the sight of many witnesses"* (1 Timothy 6:12 WEB). You will get knocked down. Get back up!

The Christian life is also a race. *"Don't you know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run like that, that you may win."* (1 Corinthians 9:24 WEB). You will trip. Get back up!

Apostle Paul said of himself,

6) For I am already being offered, and the time of my departure has come. 7) I have fought the good fight. I have finished the course. I have kept the faith. 8) From now on, the crown of righteousness is stored up for me, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that day; and not to me only, but also to all those who have loved his appearing.

2 Timothy 4:6-8 (WEB)

Paul does not boast about the level of holiness he reached, but humbly says five words, *"I have kept the faith."*

Lord God, help us to finish our fight, our race, with our eyes on you!

Timothy(2) 2:10, Save the Chosen!

Unfortunately there is much confusion about Christian salvation and the Chosen Ones of Christ. I was also confused about these concepts myself for many years even as a follower of Jesus. On one hand the gospel message is that we must believe in Jesus and be saved. Yet on the other hand we also read that God has predestined us to salvation from before the foundation of the world. Unfortunately Christendom has a great fissure of confusion dividing the followers of Jesus on these two points.

For example I was raised in a church passionate to see their children and neighbors trust in Jesus for salvation. Yet they avoided the subject of election because it was difficult to understand and seemed to be a matter to be left with God since man could do nothing about it anyway. Unfortunately they and others still in confusion miss the great encouragement that being one of Christ's chosen ones is intended to be. We can have great confidence that none of our sin will ever separate us from the love of God because he knew about it all and dealt with it all from before he even made us. Unfortunately, there are those that would preach election as the reason that we cannot be saved rather than the love of God that guarantees our salvation!

On the other side of the divide there are churches teaching that election alone is salvation and bypass the need for each one to personally receive Christ to be saved and transformed. They also are passionate to see their children and neighbors know the Lord. Yet they avoid the subject of being born of the spirit because it is difficult to understand and seems to be a matter to be left with God since man can do nothing about it anyway. Unfortunately they miss the whole point of salvation, the radical transformation of the sin nature brought about by receiving Christ's forgiveness. Remember that even the elect of God are first born with an unbelieving sin nature that desperately needs saving grace. Unfortunately this is the legacy of Adam, but praise God for the good news of Christ's love!

So we have two great ironies. One group has received Christ, but cannot have the unconquerable assurance they should have until they know God as the Father who has chosen them. While the other group blindly imagines themselves to be elect of God, but impossibly so with a sin nature not yet conquered by grace. Fortunately, Paul offers us some help to untangle this confusion.

Paul writes, ***"Therefore I endure all things for the chosen ones' sake, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory"*** (II Timothy 2:10 WEB). Conclusions listed from this one little verse could fill in the great divide among Christians all by itself.

1. Paul speaks of chosen ones and so we should not avoid this subject.
2. Paul speaks of obtaining salvation and so we should not avoid this either.
3. Paul earnestly *sought the salvation of the chosen ones* and so we should
 - a. assure those who received Christ they were chosen by God before creation for eternal life and
 - b. warn the unbelieving chosen ones that they will go to Hades if they do not personally receive Christ.

If you still find yourself confused you may eventually need to confess with me that some of our confusion is the result of both rebellion and hypocrisy. Every atom of flesh in us and all mankind is in rebellion against the grace of God whether it is hatred of God's grace in

predestination or hatred of God's grace in giving spiritual birth to spiritually dead people. We must receive both of these truths to fully receive God's grace.

Furthermore, apart from Christ we and all mankind also suffer greatly from blind hypocrisy as one man's fist hammers heaven asking "*God, how could you choose me and not all mankind?*" while another man's fist hammers his neighbor saying, "*God chose me and not you.*" Fortunately, the good news is that Christ is the savior of all mankind and has atoned for all our sin, and so our hypocritical hammering will stop sooner or later!

Timothy(2) 3:8, Optimism Out of Control, Part 4: Concerning The Faith

Continuing our *Optimism Out Of Control* series consider yet another curious verse. Paul warns and instructs his protégé Timothy thus, *"Even as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind, who concerning the faith are rejected"* (2 Timothy 3:8 WEB).

First, Paul warns Timothy that the world is and will continue to be filled with evil men of the worst kind. Paul compares these men to Jannes and Jambres, named here for the first time. These men were the powerful cronies of Pharaoh who directly opposed the command of God given through Moses. Consider that Scripture records that Jannes and Jambres had super natural power like Moses. Yet their power was through Satan and was used to directly oppose the living God. Paul gravely warns Timothy to caution against men such as this.

Second, Paul points out that men such as this are rejected. But in the midst of this rejection there is a curious hope. Paul says, *"who concerning the faith are rejected."* The meaning of *"concerning"* in this context means that they are rejected from having faith in Christ, but not necessarily rejected absolutely from all God's blessings.

For example, if I was a Christian camp counselor in charge of a group of unruly boys I likely would need to discipline them from time to time. I might have to say, *"concerning lunch you are rejected."* My meaning would be that they would not receive lunch as punishment, but implied is that grace will be extended after that.

Here is curious hope for ones such as you and I who also have been and still are evil men of the worst kind and yet have been graced with faith. Ones such as you and I who are painfully aware of our wretchedness often cry out to God, *"How could you move my heart and save me, a sinner, and yet leave the hearts of my unbelieving friends and family unmoved? Lord please move me to tell them the good news and Lord please move their hearts to believe!"* That is, while we sit in the cafeteria eating our lunch, joy cannot be complete with the unruly boys missing and unrepentant, because after all NO ONE deserves God's goodness and grace! Though we may be angered because of the unruly boy's sin, we want them at the party too.

So 2 Timothy 3:8 implies a curious hope, in fact *'out of control optimism'*, because even if wicked men are rejected by God from receiving faith... their rejection is not absolute. But how can this be? I like you have been taught on one hand that unbelievers will be sentenced to hell and also that all the elect of Christ will be brought to faith in Christ. To be sure there are no unbelievers in heaven and everyone in heaven will be a believer. Yet we have this hope, Christ is the savior of all mankind, believer and unbeliever.

Perhaps we can summarize our optimism from this curious verse thus, *"Friend, believe now or believe later, for if you be the elect of Christ you will most certainly believe one day, though you may serve a sentence in hell if you persist in your rebellion."*

Further study must reveal how all these facts add up.

Titus 2:11-14, The Pride and The Grace

Two years ago someone said something disturbing.

I had a temporary job as a waiter and was hustling some dishes back to the kitchen. While standing in the elevator I balanced my heavy load on the hand rail for support. However, since others were behind me I lifted my load and turned around to greet them. One answered me by saying, "Man you have got pride!" "Got Pride?" was a buzz-word among the staff meaning "Put your best foot forward!" She meant to compliment me, but I wondered if her understanding of pride was backwards.

The grace of God has enabled me to face others again despite my shameful sins, but not pride. Pride is sin. It causes us to exalt self, to cover up our sins, or worse to glory in them.

For example deep in the basement of this same restaurant there is also a meeting room called '*The Pride*.' Here during breaks the staff enjoy sexual jokes, boast about sexual conquest, and play the mating game in a '*Lion's Pride*'... just like animals. But here is nothing to be '*proud*' about as God's gift of holy marriage fidelity is dragged into the sewer. Woe to us that '*Pride Lands*' like this abound in our nation!

God help us to bring mankind back to the only location of salvation, "*The Grace!*"

11) For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, 12) instructing us to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we would live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age; 13) looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, 14) who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify for himself a people for his own possession, zealous for good works.

Titus 2:11-15 (WEB)

Oh that some could be rescued from the growing tidal wave of filth in our nation and brought to the foot of the cross of Christ with purified hands raised in worship. Now that place would be called '*The Grace!*'

To Battle with the Sword of the Spirit and Prayer!

I have had the privilege and challenge of discipleship by Christians from several Church traditions. I am privileged because God has shown me loving correction and teaching through these brothers. Moreover God has used these brothers to introduce me to powerful doctrines that I would never have heard otherwise. For example I was directed to study Ephesians and learned that God elected to save us from before the foundation of the world apart from even our consciousness, much less our works. This doctrine was to me like a triple dose of Syrup of Ipecac for the soul, a revolting medicine to empty the bowels of hypocrisy. Brothers, there is no other doctrine like it to propel a rebel sinner to lay his life, even all of mankind's history, naked before Holy God. Swallow it for yourself and be cured!! I was also encouraged to study God's covenants with man to learn that the Christian now stands under a new and better covenant. Yet strangely enough some prefer to remain at Mount Sinai under the old covenant. Paul himself expresses appall about this in Galatians 3:1-5. Also challenging has been becoming sincere friends with those of various church traditions without simply overlooking important differences. God help us press toward a fellowship that upholds the word of Christ! In this paper I would like to discuss my views of another powerful doctrine that I maintain from the Alma Mater church of my youth. To be specific what are the weapons of the Christian's warfare?

An Introduction to War

You can join the military and learn much about the theories of warfare. However, there is one important fact about war that can only be learned from Ephesians 6:12 (WEB).

For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world's rulers of the darkness of this age, and against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Notice there are two wars raging across the world. The first is war between men. The second is war between Satan's forces and mankind. Enough said for now.

The Bloody God of Battle in the Old Testament

Many pacifists imagine that God is appalled at the death of men in warfare. I argue instead that God is also the God of bloody battles! In Genesis Chapter 14 our father Abraham led 318 armed men into battle to rescue Lot. Joshua, Israel's leader, was commanded by God to destroy the Canaanite men, women, young, and old, leaving no survivors. Judges is filled with stories of mighty men fighting pagan nations by the will of God. Elijah, the prophet of God, slaughtered 450 prophets of Baal in the Kishon Valley. Consider David, a man after God's own heart! David killed Goliath. David killed 200 Philistines as dowry for his first wife. David became so famous that people sang, "*Saul has slain his thousands and David his tens of thousands.*" Yet, as a foreshadowing, David was prohibited from building the temple because he was a man of war. Finally we read in Psalm 104:29, "*you take away their breath: they die, and return to the dust.*" Friend, God is not afraid of death. In fact, God himself is the cause of all death, including death in war. Each of us will die on the day of his choosing by the means of his choosing. Of course if your faith is in God you can take great

courage that Christ will be with you even in your death.

God's Commission to the State in the New Testament

Other pacifists would argue that God ordained war in the Old Testament, but not in the New Testament. Yet a brief study of Scripture will reveal that this answer is incomplete. Consider Romans 13:1-5 (WEB),

1) Let every soul be in subjection to the higher authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those who exist are ordained by God. 2) Therefore he who resists the authority, withstands the ordinance of God; and those who withstand will receive to themselves judgment. 3) For rulers are not a terror to the good work, but to the evil. Do you desire to have no fear of the authority? Do that which is good, and you will have praise from the authority, 4) for he is a servant of God to you for good. But if you do that which is evil, be afraid, for he doesn't bear the sword in vain; for he is a servant of God, an avenger for wrath to him who does evil. 5) Therefore you need to be in subjection, not only because of the wrath, but also for conscience' sake.

This Scripture plainly says that God has ordained the state to wield the sword to punish evil doers. I understand this to include both capital punishment and the waging of warfare. Note also, Jesus commends a Roman Centurion's faith and does not rebuke his military occupation in Matthew 8:5-13.

Thus I believe the state is ordained to wield the sword in capital punishment and war even under the New Covenant dispensation. However, the state must also be warned that there is no rejoicing in this commission, but instead great fear. Isaiah, who was eventually sawed in half for his ministry, prophesied that God would use Assyria to punish the wickedness of the Israelites. Assyria was then called by God to destroy the Northern Israeli Kingdom. Isaiah then tells us in Isaiah 10:12-19, that Assyria became proud because of their victory and so God decided to severely punish them as well through Babylon. Thus God has ordained the state to wield the sword, but God's sovereign dealings with nations in this arena are well beyond the power and wisdom of man.

Christian Participation in State War Functions?

Now let us reconsider the question *"what are the Christian's weapons of warfare?"* and *"may a Christian participate in the state war function?"* I remind us that in Ephesians 6:12, quoted above, Paul states *"our wrestling is not against flesh and blood."* I interpret that though there are two wars, the Christian is called solely to spiritual war. A further study of Ephesians 6:10-20 reveals the weapons of our warfare to be 1) the belt of truth, 2) the breastplate of righteousness, 3) feet fitted with the readiness of the gospel, 4) the shield of faith, 5) the helmet of salvation, 6) the sword of the Spirit, and 7) prayer. These spiritual weapons when used by believers in Christ are a 1,000 fold more effective in the long run to subdue evil men and nations than the steel sword. If you are still unconvinced, consider four more points from Scripture.

Point 1: A Thorough Change of Covenants

The book of Hebrews explains that there has been a wonderful change of covenants from the old covenant given at Mount Sinai to the new covenant given at Mount Calvary. Consider Hebrews 8:13 (WEB), *"In that he says, "A new covenant", he has made the first old. But that which is becoming old and grows aged is near to vanishing away."* If there has been

a change of covenants it is fair to ask what is different? God commanded Israel to wage war under the old covenant and blessed them for their obedience. Does God now command Christians to wage war against their enemies? The answer is yes, but against different enemies!

Point 2: Enemies and Weapons Contrasted

Consider the enemies of God's people in the Old Testament. Abraham fought against Kedorlaomer. Lot resisted Sodom and Gormorah. Elijah fought the prophets of Baal, Ahab, and Jezebel. Joshua defeated the Canaanites. Samuel and the judges fought the Philistines. David fought all of Israel's enemies. Their weapons were spears, swords, bows, arrows, and more.

Though every one of these people listed above is an enemy of God by nature, under the new covenant every single one of them is also a potential brother or sister in the Lord! Who then is the enemy we fight? We all have two spiritual foes. First our closest foe is our own destructive sinful nature. Second, Satan's forces are lying in wait to recruit us to evil against our good God and his people. Only the Christian has weapons to war against our sin nature and Satan as listed above.

Point 3: Jesus Christ's Example

Which war did Jesus fight? What weapons did he use? Jesus used Scripture and his own word to preach against evil in mankind. We see a sermon against sin in Matthew Chapter 23. Jesus also prayed to the Father for support. We see an example of Christ's prayer life in John Chapter 17. Jesus also refused to call upon legions of warrior angels for protection. Matthew 26:53 (WEB) says, *"Or do you think that I couldn't ask my Father, and he would even now send me more than twelve legions of angels?"* Christ's example proves that he fought a spiritual war with spiritual weapons. But did he explicitly teach on this subject? In Christ's final hour in Gethsemane we see a final rebuke to his disciples. Peter lifts a sword to protect Jesus from harm. But poor Peter was still blind as a bat to Christ's purpose. Perhaps Peter had visions of striking down evildoers even in his own family just like Moses and Joshua at the foot of Mount Sinai. But Peter, we are no longer at the foot of Mount Sinai!! Christ came to die for the sin of every man! Christ rebuked his disciples saying, *"...Put your sword back into its place, for all those who take the sword will die by the sword"* (Matthew 26:52 WEB). Jesus has begun a new covenant with a new way to fight evil. Are you interested in fighting evil with spiritual weapons and with the cross of Christ?

Point 4: Paul's Example

Some feel it unfair to compare our lives to Christ in this matter. After all we do not have the commission to die for the sins of the world like Christ. Ok. Let's consider the example of Apostle Paul. Which war did Paul fight? What weapons did he use? Paul was called to suffer. In Acts 9:16 (WEB) we read, *"Go your way, for he is my chosen vessel to bear my name before the nations and kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name's sake."* Paul suffered without retaliation or trusting in the state for deliverance from his suffering. In Acts 14:19-20 (WEB) we read, *"But some Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there, and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul, and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. But as the disciples stood around him, he rose up, and entered into the city. On the next day he went out with Barnabas to Derbe."* Paul rejoiced in sufferings. He says in Colossians 1:24 (WEB), *"Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the assembly."* Paul counted his life worth less than nothing except to be used of God to save others. He says in Romans 9:3 (WEB), *"For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brothers' sake, my relatives according to the flesh."* Paul also fought a

spiritual war using spiritual weapons. Against every comfortable notion of following Christ, Paul laid his very flesh on the chopping block of humanity for the sake of the gospel. What could propel a man to such passion? You can have this same passion for the lost by simply testifying that unbelievers go to hell for their sins and the only reason you do not is because of the grace of Christ.

Point 5: Early Church Example

The early church, closest to Jesus and the Apostles also excluded themselves from military service. *Worthy is the Lamb* by Ray Summers makes a point of this fact in the introduction of his commentary on Revelation. [Read it for yourself here.](#)

Fearful Disciples

Recently a Christian told me they liked my view because they did not want to go to war. Unfortunately they misunderstand my view. Frankly it would be much more comfortable to meet my enemies while I held an M16 or after I lobbed a few missiles over their borders. But instead I advocate walking into my enemy's living room with no defense except the Bible and the prayer that he would become a brother in Christ's family. Friends, we have no choice about going to war. We are in the midst of war whether we like it or not. The enemies of Christ are truly enemies by nature. They back-bite, hate, steal, lie, and kill with no qualm of conscience. The question is how should Christians fight against such hatred? Brothers, I myself was won by grace.

The Death of the Wicked

What about the wicked lost in battle? Is there rejoicing when God ordains the death of wicked? Since coming to Christ I count all men everywhere my brothers, at least according to the flesh. If God ends the life of the wicked I would count it a shame that they never experienced God's grace as I have. I also press on in the spiritual war by following the example of Christ and Paul to take the good news to lost humanity. God himself says, *"Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked?" says the Lord Yahweh; "and not rather that he should return from his way, and live?"* (Ezekiel 18:23 WEB). How can a Christian sit on his sofa and rejoice when a nation conquers an enemy land saying, *"Perhaps God will use this to advance the gospel!"* How foolish! Since when do Christians depend on the state to fulfill the great commission through military conquest? What hope does the state have to offer the lost? Democracy? Can Democracy save us from the impending wrath of God? God may very well pave a road for the gospel through war or any plan of his choosing. But did it ever occur to you that you do not need to wait for war to get your body off the sofa and find the means to take the good news of the gospel to your enemy?

To Battle with the Sword of the Spirit and Prayer

For these reasons I am registered as a Christian Conscientious Objector to warfare in my country. For these reasons I am also not a pacifist, but instead press on to fight the good fight for Jesus Christ using spiritual weapons to fight a deadly spiritual war. For the sake of Christ and his commission I am excused from service in the wars of this earth to serve in the wars of heaven.

*3) For though we walk in the flesh, we don't wage war according to the flesh;
4) for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the throwing down of strongholds, 5) throwing down imaginations and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.*

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 (WEB)

Christ be with you and your family.

P.S. - October 2009

Last Saturday I heard my Pastor and several good friends play in a live band at a Christian community event. They are evening and weekend musicians, but sounded like pros! Everyone appreciated how they helped turn the entire event to the glory of God through worship and praise music. One song was particularly well done and also a fitting conclusion for the points made in this article, *Hope to Carry On* by Rich Mullins. The lyrics follow.

Hope to Carry on - Rich Mullins

*I can see Jesus hanging on a cross
I can see Jesus hanging on a cross
Oh, I can see Jesus hanging on a cross
He came looking for the lost*

*And love has come
Love has come
Love has come
And given me hope to carry on*

*I can hear Jesus saying Father forgive (Father forgive)
I can hear Jesus saying Father forgive (Father forgive them)
I can hear Jesus saying Father forgive
And what a thing He did*

*Love has come
Love has come
Love has come
And given me hope to carry on*

*And I can see love
Love is all I want to see
It can make a beggar rich
It can set a prisoner free
I know He can do it for you
God knows He did it for me*

*And I can see love
And love is all I want to show you
Love
Love`s the only way to go
And love
But love is all a man might need to know
This I know*

*And you know Peter put away his sword
I can see Peter putting away his sword
Well I can see Peter put away his sword
He won`t fight no more*

*Love has come
Love has come
Love has come
And given me hope to carry on
To carry on, To carry on*

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Unlikely Preachers

Read unlikely preaching from
a few unlikely preachers.

Whose Name is Jealous

God has given many names to himself for our sake throughout Scripture. Perhaps one of the most powerful names given is recorded in Exodus 34:14 (WEB), *"For you shall worship no other god; for Yahweh, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God."*

As Christians we are taught elsewhere in Scripture that jealousy is dangerous and wrong to maintain in our hearts, and this is true. Yet here we read in Exodus that the God whom we serve identifies himself to us by the name of *"Jealous."* While the nature of jealousy is something that is much too powerful for man to bridle in his heart, God tells us that his very nature is jealous and gives himself *"Jealous"* as a name. Consider, that the Almighty God of the universe who is all powerful, all knowing, has all things at his disposal, and is unstoppable in his plans is also jealous. But what would God be jealous for if he already has all things? If you review the verse above you will notice that God does not yet have all things that he will have. He does not as yet have all mankind's praise and worship. The Almighty God will not lose any contest for praise and worship because of his awesome power, love, and grace. One day the nations will roar with praise and worship of the Lord God Almighty, Revelation 15:4. But how can we be sure this will happen? The power of God is unrestrained in this purpose. But if God is so powerful, why the delay? God is also patient for each one to come to repentance. But can we be sure that God will not give up on the mission of leading hardened rebels to praise Him? We can be assured because his very name is Jealous and he is jealous for our salvation.

The Powerful Effect of Jealousy in Man

Solomon in the book of Proverbs shows us just how powerful jealousy really is. He says, *"Wrath is cruel, and anger is overwhelming; but who is able to stand before jealousy?"* (Proverbs 27:4 WEB). Consider the powerful emotions of anger and even fury when a man gives himself fully over to them. Yet Solomon in his wisdom teaches us that jealousy is greater than both. Let's briefly look at a number of examples of human jealousy and the effects on those involved.

In Genesis we read,

- 1) *When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister. She said to Jacob, "Give me children, or else I will die."*
- 2) *Jacob's anger burned against Rachel, and he said, "Am I in God's place, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?"*
- 3) *She said, "Behold, my maid Bilhah. Go in to her, that she may bear on my knees, and I also may obtain children by her."* 4) *She gave him Bilhah her servant as wife, and Jacob went in to her. 5) Bilhah conceived, and bore Jacob a son.*

Genesis 30:1-5 (WEB)

Rachel's jealousy drove her to demand children or death and finally to give even her own husband to her maidservant.

Further in Genesis we read that Joseph had dreams that he would rule over his family. The family's response: *"His brothers envied him, but his father kept this saying in mind"* (Genesis 37:11 WEB). Later, propelled by jealousy, his brothers sold their own brother into Egyptian slavery and told their father a devious lie, that Joseph has been devoured by ferocious animals. In truth jealousy had turned Joseph's brothers into ferocious animals.

Even those called to minister before the Lord are not immune from the terrible effects of jealousy. In the book of Numbers we read,

25) Yahweh came down in the cloud, and spoke to him, and took of the Spirit that was on him, and put it on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied, but they did so no more. 26) But two men remained in the camp. The name of one was Eldad, and the name of the other Medad; and the Spirit rested on them. They were of those who were written, but had not gone out to the Tent; and they prophesied in the camp. 27) A young man ran, and told Moses, and said, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp!"

28) Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Moses, one of his chosen men, answered, "My lord Moses, forbid them!"

29) Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all Yahweh's people were prophets, that Yahweh would put his Spirit on them!"

Numbers 11:25-29 (WEB)

Thankfully Moses rebuked Joshua for his jealousy to remind us all that God gives his Spirit to whom he chooses.

Later, in Israel's history, is recorded the tragic account of Saul's jealousy toward David.

6) As they came, when David returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet king Saul, with tambourines, with joy, and with instruments of music. 7) The women sang to one another as they played, and said,

"Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands."

8) Saul was very angry, and this saying displeased him. He said, "They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed only thousands. What can he have more but the kingdom?" 9) Saul watched David from that day and forward. 10) On the next day, an evil spirit from God came mightily on Saul, and he prophesied in the middle of the house. David played with his hand, as he did day by day. Saul had his spear in his hand; 11) and Saul threw the spear, for he said, "I will pin David to the wall!" David escaped from his presence twice.

1 Samuel 18:6-11 (WEB)

Solomon also reminds us that jealousy may work powerfully in the heart of an offended husband, *"For jealousy arouses the fury of the husband. He won't spare in the day of vengeance"* (Proverbs 6:34 WEB).

Just how terrible is jealousy? The Gospel itself reminds us that it was envy, a relative of jealousy, that Christ exposed at the cross. *"When therefore they were gathered together,*

Pilate said to them, 'Whom do you want me to release to you? Barabbas, or Jesus, who is called Christ?' For he knew that because of envy they had delivered him up" (Matthew 27:17-18 WEB).

And because of ignorance, unbelief, and the remaining sinfulness in men's hearts the battle with jealousy continues even though Jesus has forgiven the sins of all men. Even as early as the book of Acts we read *"The next Sabbath, almost the whole city was gathered together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with jealousy, and contradicted the things which were spoken by Paul, and blasphemed"* (Acts 13:44-45 WEB). Lord God please deliver your people from the dread effects of jealousy in our hearts.

The Over-Powering Jealousy of God

The effect of jealousy in man is powerful. However, the jealousy of God is over-powering, consuming, and an unquenchable fire. We have already read that he has given himself the very name of Jealous. Scriptures also teach us, *"For Yahweh your God is a devouring fire, a jealous God,"* (Deuteronomy 4:24 WEB), *"You shall not bow yourself down to them, nor serve them; for I, Yahweh your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and on the third and on the fourth generation of those who hate me; and showing loving kindness to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments"* (Deuteronomy 5:9-10 WEB), *"You can't both drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You can't both partake of the table of the Lord and of the table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?"* (1 Corinthians 10:21-22 WEB). The power and jealousy of the Lord will not be outdone. If we find ourselves consumed with jealousy, God help us to hand it over to the Lord Jesus and His solution before we are destroyed.

God's Jealous Strategy With Our Idols

In the introduction to this article we highlighted Scripture that explains God's purpose. He is jealous for us to praise and worship Him with our whole heart. But what if our heart is divided? What if idols remain in competition with the Lord in our lives? I understand from Scripture and from personal experience that our wise and loving Heavenly Father also has a strategy to deal with these imitation gods because of His jealousy. First we should not imagine that God is threatened by even the most difficult idol. It is not as if His hands become sweaty and nervous before the big game as He wonders who will finally win the heart of His people. There is absolutely no question in His mind though there may be in ours. And if there is any question in our minds God will do the most unusual thing. He will reluctantly, because of his love for us, but willingly allow us to give ourselves to the service of whatever idol we have chosen. If he wants to win our heart completely how could he do it any other way? He is so jealous and powerful He waits patiently until all our idols have crumbled and our hearts are truly ready for Him. His jealousy demands everything from us and he will do with nothing less.

Perhaps he is reluctant because of the pain he knows we will experience when our idol crumbles. If we have harbored an idol for ourselves, even serving it our entire lives, God is preparing for the day when that idol will be proved to be what it has been all along, worthless trash. God has no doubt about his victory over every idol in our lives because it is true that he is worth all our praise and worship. The great promise from the Lord himself is that he will change our hearts so that we ourselves will gladly trash all our idols in favor of the Lord. No longer will we attempt to serve the Lord with 99% of our heart in order to find a home for that one coveted idol. No longer will we tempt the Lord saying, *"Lord I will give you everything, if you will but give me this one thing."* This is a simple explanation of Isaiah 30:15-22 as well as my own experiences with idols.

God's Jealous Strategy with Israel

Not only is God prepared to take radical measures with our idols, He is also currently taking radical measures to win back the heart of his people, Israel. Israel is close to the heart of God in many ways. His Holy Scriptures came through them. The Messiah Himself was physically descended from them. In history future, believing Israel, will play a part in demonstrating the grace of God to the world. God himself has even called Israel the "**Apple of His eye**" in Deuteronomy 32:10 and Zechariah 2:8. But things are not yet as they should be or will be. Israel as a people, like all of us, turned from the living God to serve idols. And God in his jealous anger handed them over to these idols. God says of Israel, "**They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God. They have provoked me to anger with their vanities. I will move them to jealousy with those who are not a people. I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation**" (Deuteronomy 32:21 WEB).

Paul explains in Romans 11:11 that this dynamic is still at work between unbelieving Israel and believing Gentiles. We believing gentiles are the foolish nation chosen to provoke Israel. So we see the consuming jealousy of God goading the jealousy of Israel so that at the right time God can quench the fire of man's jealousy with the fire of His love. How can you not be filled with joy anticipated as you read Zechariah 8:1-8,

1) The word of Yahweh of Armies came to me. 2) Yahweh of Armies says: "I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great wrath."

3) Yahweh says: "I have returned to Zion, and will dwell in the middle of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be called 'The City of Truth;' and the mountain of Yahweh of Armies, 'The Holy Mountain.' "

4) Yahweh of Armies says: "Old men and old women will again dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, every man with his staff in his hand for very age. 5) The streets of the city will be full of boys and girls playing in its streets."

6) Yahweh of Armies says: "If it is marvelous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in those days, should it also be marvelous in my eyes?" says Yahweh of Armies.

7) Yahweh of Armies says: "Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country; 8) and I will bring them, and they will dwell within Jerusalem; and they will be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness."

The Christian and Jealousy

We have shown how jealousy can destroy a believer's life. James speaks most openly about these wicked desires,

1) Where do wars and fightings among you come from? Don't they come from your pleasures that war in your members? 2) You lust, and don't have. You murder and covet, and can't obtain. You fight and make war. You don't have, because you don't ask. 3) You ask, and don't receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.

James 4:1-3 (WEB)

Unfortunately many of us know from personal experience that jealousy is terrible. Yet can anything be gained from an understanding of the effects of jealousy? Oddly enough, Paul, says in Romans 11:13-14 (WEB), *"For I speak to you who are Gentiles. Since then as I am an apostle to Gentiles, I glorify my ministry; if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh, and may save some of them."* No doubt if jealousy could eventually lead someone to Christ that would be good. Paul also said, *"For I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy. For I married you to one husband, that I might present you as a pure virgin to Christ"* (2 Corinthians 11:2 WEB). If we were jealous for someone to know Christ that would be good as well.

The Christian and Christ's Jealousy

The cross of Jesus Christ is the final demonstration of God's jealousy for his people and their salvation. What in the entire universe could possibly come close to threatening the jealous love that Christ has showed to his people while on that cross? Nothing, absolutely nothing will ever, ever even come close. His jealous love is matchless and undefeated. All have been God's enemy, but even if you happened to be the worst enemy of God your sin has been quenched in the blood of the cross as if it were nothing. Christ's forgiveness was and is without gall, spite, or vindictiveness and is free, perfect, forever, guaranteed, and precious.

Friend, come to Jesus Christ and see!

Optimistic Outline



I am not the first to leap for joy over this awesome news!

The Apostle Paul said, **"Therefore God also highly exalted him, and gave to him the name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, those on earth, and those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father,"** (Philippians 2:-11 WEB).

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_the_Apostle

The Pastor Watchman Nee said, **"God...held council with His Son even before the foundation of the world so as to have His Son come down and go to the cross in order to reconcile all things back to himself, rescue fallen mankind, and resolve the rebellion of Satan,"** (God's Plan and the Overcomers, Nee).

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Watchman_Nee

The poet George MacDonald said, **"Every atonement that God cares for; and the work of Jesus Christ on earth was the creative atonement, because it works atonement in every heart. He brings and is bringing God and man, and man and man, into perfect unity: 'I in them and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one... Justice then requires that sin should be put an end to; and not that only, but that it should be atoned for... but there is no refuge from the love of God; that love will, for very love, insist upon the uttermost farthing,"** (Justice, MacDonald).

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_MacDonald

The statesman Abraham Lincoln said, **"It is everybody or nobody,"** (Unity, Volumes 13-14, Lincoln when questioned who would ultimately be in Heaven). **"I believe the will of God prevails. Without Him all human reliance is vain. Without the assistance of His divine Being, I cannot succeed. With that assistance I cannot fail. Being a humble instrument in the hands of our**

Heavenly Father, I desire that all my works and acts may be according to His will; and that it may be so, I give thanks to the Almighty, and seek His aid," (The Creed of Abraham Lincoln in His Own Words, Wood). **"[All that was lost by the transgression of Adam was made good by the atonement: all that was lost by the fall was made good by the sacrifice - Cogdal],"** (The Almost Chosen People, Wolf)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious_views_of_Abraham_Lincoln

The writer Madeleine L'Engle said, **"All will be redeemed in God's fullness of time, all, not just the small portion of the population who have been given the grace to know and accept Christ. All the strayed and stolen sheep. All the little lost ones,"** (A Stone for a Pillow, L'Engle).

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madeleine_L'Engle

And even the entertainer P.T. Barnum said, **"I believe that finally every created soul will be drawn, not forced, to choose to seek, and when he chooses to seek will be helped to find eternal life. I have no knowledge of place or time. I have the great hope ... I base my hope on ... the attributes of God, ... the office and character of Jesus Christ, ... the trend of Scripture,"** (Why I am a Universalist, Barnum).

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/P._T._Barnum

The Apostle, the pastor, the poet, the statesman, the writer, and the entertainer above have all agreed that **Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind.** Following is my defense of the same. The publication is available for free here at DGJC.ORG/OPTIMISM and various locations online. If possible, read the supporting articles referenced throughout the book also found here at DGJC.ORG. The next and previous page links are at the page bottom. The book outline is below and on the right sidebar. You can use the book outline links to jump directly to particular pages, but I recommend reading the pages in sequence. Also, if possible, read the supporting articles referenced throughout the book.

1. [Optimism Abstract](#)
2. [Salvation Inception](#)

3. [Christendom Confusion](#)
4. [A Thought](#)
5. [Let's Celebrate!](#)
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Optimistic Abstract



After decades of defeat in a wrestling match with grace I am now thankful to offer a helping hand to those seeking escape from confusion and even self-righteous deception. Read on to discover the awesome Biblical news that God loves you... because he loves all mankind! I thank God for the patience and prayers of many Christians and especially a few Christians who showed me grace while I thrashed through life searching for the answers that were right in front of me, to God be the glory.

I also thank my editors for their review of the *Optimism Out of Control* manuscript. Their suggestions and corrections were invaluable. However, any remaining faults in grammar, tone, logic, and use of Scripture are my sole responsibility. Also the book developed over a period of years as collections of articles and concepts were assembled. Thank you for your patience if you discover unnecessary repetition. Further time and effort certainly could have improved the work, but the urgency of clarifying the gospel of grace pressed for publication. I kindly ask you to contact me at DGJC.ORG/CONTACT with your own suggestions and corrections.

The *Optimism Out of Control* book has grown to be longer than anticipated. It can be read in several hours. I recommend reading the chapters through in sequence for the best understanding of my arguments. Also if you find the book confusing please persevere through the appendix where many more questions are answered. If you just cannot find the time you are invited to read the...

Optimism Abstract

Salvation Inception

Again, my simple thesis is that ***Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind.*** A related thesis is that ***salvation is without condition and a free act of God's grace, given by him to chosen mankind.*** This salvation is not conditioned on any work, action, thought, or choice of man. God has given grace to all mankind without our invitation or pre-condition. This salvation cannot be missed, ruined, or lost, since God himself secures the beginning, middle, and end. The inception and finale of salvation is God. The result is guaranteed.

This is incredibly optimistic. Christ's salvation is the only source of confidence and peace. He is the foundation to build your life upon. Unfortunately, the message is often clouded by hasty conclusions, poor interpretations, divided opinions, incomplete understandings, and inaccurate Bible translations. Sin itself obscures the message of salvation at times, though God's Word is not obscure. God has spoken truth and love to reach both our minds and our hearts.

Perhaps that is one reason for the apparent obscurity. God could have given the Bible in the form of an encyclopedia or a step-by-step guide to salvation. That may have been clearer to our minds. We could easily memorize the outline and the steps. The knowledge would be locked in our minds, but the heart of salvation would be missed. God does want to explain the gospel to our minds, but he also is determined to share his love with our hearts. He is more than a teacher to us. He is our lover. If we read the Bible as notes from our teacher, we will miss God's heart. The Bible is not just a textbook for salvation, but also history, prose, poetry,



and song. The Bible is God's love letters to our hearts.

Love is a common desire worldwide. Why would anyone ever refuse God's love? Why is there even one non-Christian in the world? If Jesus is so good, why isn't everyone cheering for the Son of God? Why argue with the idea that God has chosen to love you, me, and all mankind, in Jesus Christ? Can we name one valid objection to Jesus Christ? Did Jesus ever wrong one person? Can we see one imperfection in his words or actions?

Consider this dialogue between Peter and Jesus in Luke 5:1-11 (WEB).

1) Now while the multitude pressed on him and heard the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret. 2) He saw two boats standing by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them, and were washing their nets. 3) He entered into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the land. He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat. 4) When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into the deep, and let down your nets for a catch.'

5) Simon answered him, 'Master, we worked all night, and took nothing; but at your word I will let down the net.' 6) When they had done this, they caught a great multitude of fish, and their net was breaking. 7) They beckoned to their partners in the other boat, that they should come and help them. They came, and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. 8) But Simon Peter, when he saw it, fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord.' 9) For he was amazed, and all who were with him, at the catch of fish which they had caught; 10) and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon.

Jesus said to Simon, 'Don't be afraid. From now on you will be catching people alive.' 11) When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything, and followed him.

This story shows that we really do not want God to get close to our hearts. We are afraid, and hide our sin from his eyes. Peter asked Jesus to leave because Jesus' holiness convicted him and made him uncomfortable. I suggest that atheism and false religion share a similar motivation to Peter's. We build defenses that keep us at a "safe" distance from God. Atheists choose the lie that God does not exist to keep him away. The religious choose a veneer of self-righteousness to shield themselves from God's gaze, while clinging to their fire insurance policies. If we dare to take a step closer to him, we dress ourselves up, hoping to hide our sin. We know we have done bad things and so we are uncomfortable around Jesus because he is good. We are just like our fallen parents, Adam and Eve, who tried to hide from God in the Garden of Eden.

Since we hide from God, special tactics beyond education are needed to defeat unbelief and reach the heart of sinners hiding from God's love.

However, there is no hiding from God, even if we pretend that he does not exist. One day we each will stand before him. I pray that God will use this book to conquer our opposition to Jesus, our fear of exposure, and our doubt about his love and forgiveness. The climax of God's love for mankind is seen in perfect measure at the cross. The cross fully exposed our hatred of God when we crucified Christ. However, the cross also displayed God's flood of forgiveness through Jesus' willing death for our sins. Jesus prayed from the cross in Luke 23:34b (WEB): "***Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing.***" That is the proclamation of forgiveness and salvation for you, me, and all mankind.

The initial pages of this book lay the groundwork for a thorough explanation of my thesis by introducing important concepts, reviewing my previous articles, and beginning at the end with the grand conclusion of Christian salvation found in Romans 11:32.

Flying Impossible!

My thesis is simple. **Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind.** However, most of mankind does not believe this good news, even many of those who call themselves Christians. Can any special strategies be used to overcome this disbelief? Consider a history lesson from Wilbur and Orville Wright.

Suppose someone does not believe flight is possible. He tells you that flight is imaginary and we have been fooled. We would call this unbeliever insane! Airplanes are everywhere and we all know about them. However, not too long ago the opposite was true. The Wright brothers were considered insane, or at least foolhardy, to claim that they could fly an airplane.

According to *The Wright Brothers* by Fred Kelly, Wilbur and Orville proved to themselves and their neighbors that they could fly quite well. Good conscience demanded that they tell the United States government of their breakthrough. This discovery was larger than the Wright family and needed to be shared with their countrymen. So the Wright brothers wrote to the United States War Department, hoping to show off their airplane. They received only replies that no money would be granted for flight research until it was proved that fixed-wing horizontal flight was possible. It was possible! They wanted to demonstrate it! They wrote again and again, but only received the same response, unbelief every time.

Magazines likewise banished the idea to the realm of science fiction. How could the Wright brothers persuade the unbelieving? They hatched a plan to 'fly by' the 300th anniversary celebration of the colonization of Jamestown in Virginia. Many military officers would be present, and the prank would leave mouths gaping. Unfortunately, a mishap during take-off foiled their plans, but they would not give up. After further rejections the Wright brothers moved to their last plan - they turned East, in hopes of discovering a buyer in Europe. Their conscience was clear about serving their own nation first, so they turned elsewhere. This was the winning tactic. Just before a deal was closed with France, the United States came to its senses. The United States War Department learned about the deal the Wright brothers were signing and unbelief quickly dissolved. They invited the brothers to demonstrate and were shocked with the opportunity of the century.

Perhaps we should not be so hard on the disbelieving. Before the Wright brothers, flying was a crazy idea reserved for the eccentric. History is filled with stories of the adventurous trying to fly with all sorts of contraptions. Many lost their lives. Who among us would easily believe that flight was reality at the moment when the impossible became possible? Very few.

Thankfully unbelief was not the inspiration for the Wright brothers or others like them. These visionaries have shown amazing persistence in working hard, questioning tradition, seeing things as they are, humbly learning, changing, applying knowledge, and never giving up. Furthermore, the Wright brothers have taught us an important lesson about strategies for persuading the unbelieving. The invention of flight was so important that they were compelled to use creative means to persuade their audience to believe when reason alone was not enough. In their case, they planned a 'fly by' to show off the truth, and they also found a constructive use for envy.

The Wright brothers' story is the perfect introduction to this book. We face a similar problem to what Wilbur and Orville solved. Most people did not believe flight was possible, even after the Wrights had proved it. Likewise, most people do not believe that Jesus is their savior, and also the savior of all mankind, even after God has proved it. Apparently reason alone is not enough persuasion here, either. There are certainly limits to the comparison of the Wright brothers' experience and Christian faith. But there is one question that is certainly worth asking.

Are special tactics for responding to stubborn disbelief in Christ *integral* to the gospel message?

Most explanations of the gospel have limited themselves to merely educating their audience with facts about Christ and salvation. But listing facts only teaches the teachable. The gospel is also true for the unteachable! So does Jesus employ special tactics to reach the unteachable?

As we re-examine the gospel, we will also consider the possibility of special Biblical tactics, and the implications of Proverbs 26:4-5 (WEB), which says: "***Don't answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.***"

We will also consider the implications of Romans 11:13-14 (WEB): "***For I speak to you who are Gentiles. Since then as I am an apostle to Gentiles, I glorify my ministry; if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh, and may save some of them.***"

Why Read?

I have introduced my thesis.

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind.

I have stated that reason alone is insufficient to persuade people to believe.

Since we hide from God, special tactics beyond education are needed to defeat unbelief and reach the heart of sinners hiding from God's love.

I have asked if God uses special persuasive tactics.

Are special tactics for responding to stubborn disbelief in Christ *integral* to the gospel message?

Now I ask, why are you reading this book? I assume you are here because someone recommended it, or you stumbled upon it. However, you are now at least several pages into it, and so I ask, why you are reading? What are you searching for?

I am not asking because I need to know your reasons. You do not need my permission to read. However, it would be good for you to know your own reasons for reading. Some possible reasons might include:

- You are curious.
- You are objectively researching Christian belief.
- You seek safe haven from God's wrath.
- You seek help with doubts.
- You want to compare our thoughts.
- You want to contrast our thoughts.
- You hope to help my understanding.
- You hope to help your own understanding.
- You are looking for controversy.
- You wish to refute my ideas.
- You do not know why.

Take a moment to reflect.

It would be good for you to know your own reasons for reading this book.

Here is an encouragement to eagerly seek God, from Jeremiah 29:11-13 (WEB),

'For I know the thoughts that I think toward you,' says Yahweh, 'thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you hope and a future. You shall call on me, and you shall go and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You shall seek me, and find me, when you search for me with all your heart.'

Whatever your reasons for reading this book, I invite you now to seek God first with your whole heart. The verse above suggests that God can be found, but only if we seek him with our whole heart.

Previously Stated

Hopefully, you have reflected about your purpose for reading this book and have a good reason to continue. So I invite you to continue to explore my thoughts and I hope you find encouragement there. Books are a trip into the mind of another, as much as that is possible.

The ideas in this book developed their shape while I hammered them out in my previous writings. So my earlier articles may be the best introduction. Please note, however, that my understanding has grown through the decades, so I am currently revising my earlier works to be consistent with the latter.

My *Optimism Out of Control* DGJC.ORG/ZINGERS article titles include:

- *Matthew 16:15-21, Optimism Out of Control*
- *Hosea 1:10, Optimism Out of Control, Part 2: In the Same Place!*
- *Isaiah 66:22-24, Optimism Out of Control, Part 3: All Mankind*
- *Timothy(2) 3:8, Optimism Out of Control, Part 4: As Far As The Faith*
- *Revelation 20:11-15, Optimism Out of Control, Part 5: Hades Gives Up!*
- *Revelation 20:11-15, Optimism Out of Control, Part 6: If, If, If, If, If, If, If,,,*
- *Romans 5:12-21, Out of Control Optimism Part 7, Many = Many = All = All*
- *Revelation 20:13-15, Out of Control Optimism Part 8, Your Name in the Book of Life!*
- *Corinthians(2) 5:14-15, Out of Control Optimism Part 9, Jesus Loves All the Little Children of the World!*
- *Colossians 1:15-23, Out of Control Optimism Part 10, The Parable of the Pew!*

My other salvation-related article titles include:

- *Christian Teaching*
- *Ephesians 1:3-4, Chosen!*
- *Revelation 20:11-15, A.M.A.Z.I.N.G. Grace*
- *SAVED 5X*
- *Justified!*
- *'In' Doctrine*
- *Savior of the World!*
- *A Quintessential Defense of FREE WILL*
- *Matthew 18:7, My BODACIOUS Father*
- *Isaiah 63:17, Whoa! Whoa! Whoa! Whoa! Whoa! Whoa! Whoa!*
- *Am I Catholic, Protestant, or Christian?*
- *Matthew 25:31-46, Who are the Goats?*

My complete article list is found at DGJC.ORG/ARTICLES.

God's Word is perfect. The Holy Spirit is the master communicator of meaning with unmatched style. Even so, we often question God's wisdom. We would only ever be wrong to do so. However, you would certainly not be wrong to accuse me of error. Again, please do contact me with comments and corrections at DGJC.ORG/CONTACT.

So at this early stage of my book, I'll warn myself from Proverbs 10:19 (WEB): "***In the multitude of words there is no lack of disobedience, but he who restrains his lips does wisely.***"

Job's Counselors

I have asked you to consider why you are reading this book. You should ask me why I am writing this book! What is my answer?

I am writing this book to clarify the gospel of Jesus Christ from current confusion.

The Old Testament man, Job, had big questions for God. Three people, speaking volumes, tried to counsel him. After all their words, his questions remained. Likewise, we have a great need to understand Christian salvation, yet divisions and disturbing questions remain commonplace.

Job's fourth counselor, however, was used by God to reach Job's heart. He spoke briefly and with clarity. Now, it would be too bold to suggest that I can stand in his shoes. I certainly have not written briefly. Yet I hope to add clarity and remove confusion at one particular point in the gospel, choosing Elihu as my example. Consider Job Chapter 32 (WEB).

1) So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes. 2) Then the wrath of Elihu the son of Barachel, the Buzite, of the family of Ram, was kindled against Job. His wrath was kindled because he justified himself rather than God. 3) Also his wrath was kindled against his three friends, because they had found no answer, and yet had condemned Job. 4) Now Elihu had waited to speak to Job, because they were elder than he. 5) When Elihu saw that there was no answer in the mouth of these three men, his wrath was kindled.

6) Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite answered, 'I am young, and you are very old; Therefore I held back, and didn't dare show you my opinion. 7) I said, "Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom." 8) But there is a spirit in man, and the Spirit of the Almighty gives them understanding. 9) It is not the great who are wise, nor the aged who understand justice. 10) Therefore I said, "Listen to me; I also will show my opinion."

11) Behold, I waited for your words, and I listened for your reasoning, while you searched out what to say. 12) Yes, I gave you my full attention, but there was no one who convinced Job, or who answered his words, among you. 13) Beware lest you say, "We have found wisdom, God may refute him, not man;" 14) for he has not directed his words against me; neither will I answer him with your speeches. 15) They are amazed. They answer no more. They don't have a word to say.

16) Shall I wait, because they don't speak, because they stand still, and answer no more? 17) I also will answer my part, and I also will show my opinion. 18) For I am full of words. The spirit within me constrains me. 19) Behold, my breast is as wine which has no vent; like new wineskins it is ready to burst. 20) I will speak, that I may be refreshed. I will open my lips and answer. 21) Please don't let me respect any man's person, neither will I give flattering titles to any man. 22) For I don't know how to give flattering titles; or else my Maker would soon take me away.'

Elihu was bold, humble, and understanding. He spoke the truth in love and hated flattery. That is a good goal for all of us -- and it is my specific goal in writing to you.

Disclaimer

You certainly do not need to agree with me or any particular guru to be a follower of Christ. However, to be a follower of Christ, you do need to actually *follow Christ*. Since Christ is one, then we should expect to become one in our thinking as we each grow closer to him. But today we still remain far from the perfection of Christ, and at times sadly far from each other. The Body of Christ suffers from painful dismemberment. What I am trying to say is, since I can be very wrong at times, I should include a disclaimer.

My propositions might be wrong, but I assert them because I think I am right.

Okay, there is my disclaimer. Each of us will stand before the Lord to give an account. If I or others have led you astray, we will have to give account to God for misleading the misled. Yet, each one of us will also have to give account for our own wayward decisions, and for allowing ourselves to be misled. The one who tempts others off the path is guilty, but one who steps off the path is likewise guilty.

Of course, the one who helps others *onto* the path is instead blessed and rewarded. That is the blessing and reward I seek through my clarification of the gospel. I ask you to compare my teaching with the words of the Bible for the proof of any statement that I make. We should be like the Berean people whom Paul talked to about Jesus. They did not believe Paul because he sounded good or even because he was an Apostle. Instead they compared his words to the Bible. We read in Acts 17:10-12 (WEB),

10) The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the Jewish synagogue. 11) Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so. 12) Many of them therefore believed; also of the prominent Greek women, and not a few men.

Check God's Word to test for truth!

Start at the End

Anyone making a point needs to consider how to begin, continue, and conclude. We could just dive in and figure it out as we go, but planning can be useful; so my plan is to tell you how I was introduced to grace theology, reveal the fiery question that burned my house down, and share with you my discovery of the Bible's grand conclusion about

salvation.

While leading the Allied forces in World War II, Winston Churchill said, "*Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.*" Likewise, this is not the end of my book, but it is the end of the introduction. It is also an excellent time to show you the grand conclusion of the Bible.

FIRST

I first looked to the cross of Jesus Christ for forgiveness the summer before I entered college. I was raised in a churchgoing family, but my sinful behavior through high school drove me to begin a relationship with Christ, based on his forgiveness at the cross. I knew I was a sinner and that Jesus died for sinners, but I still knew very little.

SECOND

The Lord quickly introduced me to grace theology and discipleship. I learned that salvation is completely unmerited and that Jesus had chosen me for salvation even before my decision to trust him. Frankly, I did not want to be saved that way, and a burning question grew in my mind.

The Bible says Christ died for all mankind, but very few are born again, and apparently most are sentenced to eternal Hell. How could he choose me and not others? Am I certain he did choose me?

I did not understand. Most of my friends and the books I read seemed to slide off one side of the issue or the other. Some suggested that God's grace only predestined a small subset of mankind to eternal life. Others suggested that Christ died for all mankind, but only those choosing Christ with their *free will* were finally saved. However, *free will* proponents appeared to compromise God's grace by saying Jesus did not complete *all* of our salvation; we need to do the *part* of choosing. And the *Limited Atonement* proponents appeared to compromise Jesus' atonement by saying it was for *part* of mankind and not *all*. I tried at different times to find rest in one or the other of those answers, but my questions grew, and they darkened my relationship with Christ.

Furthermore, God's grace exposed a much bigger problem. My initial understanding of my sinfulness was incomplete. Biblical grace exposed that my self-righteousness hated God and I certainly hated my unanswered questions. Yet Christ was my only hope!

I searched for an answer. I read the Bible. I read commentaries. I read books. I listened to other Christians. I argued with God. I avoided the question. I focused on serving. Worst of all, I ignored my questions and just went to church.

THIRD

Eventually the Lord led me to discover and embrace Romans 11:32-36 as the grand conclusion of redemption, grace theology, and the gospel of Jesus Christ. God has helped me to understand this passage and receive it with joy, and through it he has helped me to be honest about my sin and eager to share the good news. My questions about salvation are fully answered, my confusion is erased, and my love for Christ is restored. It may be that you have a similar question to mine. I hope to help you as I have been helped. So I will begin at the end, at the grand conclusion of salvation in Romans 11:32, and explain this important passage of Scripture to you. I do not claim special revelation or insight, but simply open eyes, through Christ's love, to see and accept what is plainly said.

Grand Conclusion

Are you embarrassed about your spiritual questions? Are you scared of looking foolish? Are you scared of being wrong? We often try to hide our ignorance, but we should resist this. There is too much to be lost if we are wrong. There is even more to be gained when we are right with God. Ignoring the hole in our roof directly harms us and our estate. I am often secretive about my questions, but to no positive end. We should boldly ask questions of God and Christian friends. We might think our questions are humbling, but we can take heart in knowing that God thinks every one of our questions are important and provides every answer we need in his Word. For me, Romans 11:32-36 has become the million-pound anchor for my soul and the answer to my fiery question. It is the grand conclusion of Paul's treatise on Christian salvation.

Romans 11:32 answers the three biggest questions that mankind has ever had or will ever have for God our creator. How did sin enter the world? What is God's purpose in sin and salvation? Who is ultimately saved from God's wrath against sin?

One warning before we continue. These questions are answered clearly and simply, but most people refuse to accept the answers. The reasons that most reject the truth include the fear of man, the loss of investment in other answers, their imaginary god meeting the true God, or rejection of grace in favor of *free will*. Man's natural condition is to hate

salvation by grace and instead to love salvation by self. We should instead be thankful that we are not saved by our *free will* choice, but by God's *free will* choice to love us unconditionally. The happy news of the gospel is that Jesus has forgiven us apart from all our choices; in fact he forgave us while we were yet his enemies. As we already discussed, when the obvious is rejected, special tactics may be needed to help unbelievers see what they do not want to see. The truth is still good and true, even for those who reject it.

Our key Scripture, Romans 11:32-36 (WEB), says,

32) For God has bound all to disobedience, that he might have mercy on all.

33) Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out! 34) 'For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?' 35) 'Or who has first given to him, and it will be repaid to him again?' 36) For of him, and through him, and to him are all things. To him be the glory for ever! Amen.

There you have it.

So what do you think? Do you see the answers to our three questions?

The remainder of this book will expand on these concepts at length.

Christendom Confusion

As a new Christian, I learned that not all Christians agree. Sadly we are divided over many things. New Christians need to be nurtured just like newborn infants, but when there are family dysfunctions, newborns can suffer. For example, I read an account of a church family which divided over the shade of green for the new carpet in the sanctuary. Yikes! The tragedy is that when families divide, the children suffer most. Thankfully, God is our Father and not the church! Though the church is a haven for believers young and old, God alone is our perfect Heavenly Father. Nonetheless, it is tragic to think how self-centered, weak, and poor in judgment we Christians and our churches often are.

Christians have also divided over more significant matters. The Protestant Reformation in the 16th century is an example. In that case, there was a sharp disagreement about the gospel message itself. Martin Luther believed one thing while Catholic orthodoxy believed another. Moreover, the protesters could not even come to an agreement among themselves. Further splintering continued. Some followed Martin Luther (Lutherans), some followed John Calvin (Presbyterians), and still others followed Michael Sattler (Anabaptists). Also note that the Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church had already divided centuries earlier. Today the Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Anabaptists are not just three groups, but have each divided again, too many times to count. This is just a short account of the "*organized*" church. We ought to call ourselves the "*disorganized*" church! Other Christians prefer to follow Christ apart from this confusion, but they are not without their own sin and divisions as well.

My son once said as a young boy, "*It would be great if we could all live in one giant house!*" That was a special season of time for our family. We lived in a rented apartment. It had a large screen door that opened onto a grassy field surrounded by other apartments. Each neighbor had a screen door just like ours, and kids would pour out onto the field every evening and weekend to play kickball and other games. We had fun, but at day's end everyone needed to go home. My son thought it would be great if we could all go home to the same house so the fun would never end!

Sadly, because of the divisions, we Christians no longer live in the same house. This is nothing new. Divisions among Christians began in the first century as I Corinthians 1:10-17 (WEB) records Paul pleading,

10) Now I beg you, brothers, through the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment. 11) For it has been reported to me concerning you, my brothers, by those who are from Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. 12) Now I mean this, that each one of you says, 'I follow Paul,' 'I follow Apollos,' 'I follow



Cephas,' and, 'I follow Christ.'

13) Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized into the name of Paul? 14) I thank God that I baptized none of you, except Crispus and Gaius, 15) so that no one should say that I had baptized you into my own name. 16) (I also baptized the household of Stephanas; besides them, I don't know whether I baptized any other.) 17) For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the Good News—not in wisdom of words, so that the cross of Christ wouldn't be made void.

If Christians began dividing in the 1st century and 2,000 years later the divisions have multiplied into the thousands, what hope is there?

Much.

There is hope because Jesus prayed in John 17:20-23 (WEB),

20) Not for these only do I pray, but for those also who will believe in me through their word, 21) that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that you sent me. 22) The glory which you have given me, I have given to them; that they may be one, even as we are one; 23) I in them, and you in me, that they may be perfected into one; that the world may know that you sent me and loved them, even as you loved me.

So we press forward with confidence, knowing that the prayer of Christ has been heard. Jesus' prayer is hot on our Heavenly Father's mind as he works his will in this world. Will you and I keep step with Christ and the oneness for which he prayed? Or will we be the cause of yet another division? Do we need to be confronted with the prophet's words yet

again in Malachi 2:10 (WEB), as he asked, ***"Don't we all have one father? Hasn't one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, profaning the covenant of our fathers?"***

So, looking past carpet color disputes, please join me in revisiting the gospel message.

Soteriologies

Soteriology is the study of salvation and the destinies of mankind. It is from the Greek root *soteria*, meaning *salvation*. Wikipedia defines *soteriology* as *"the study of religious doctrines of salvation."* One can see why this is a particularly important subject. For example, it is said, *"All is well that ends well."* Religious doctrine may touch on various subjects, but the subject of how to confirm our positive end ought to hold a special place of significance. Jesus asks us in Luke 9:25 (WEB), ***"For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits his own self?"***

The major religions are different primarily because they have different understandings of God and different salvation recipes. The Christian, Jewish, and Muslim religions each have different instructions for a positive end. There are also differences within these major labels themselves. For example, there are Protestant and Catholic Christians. There are Reformed and Orthodox Jews. There are also Sunni and Shi'a Muslims. Beyond that there may even be cultural expectations as to what it means to be Christian, as well as doctrinal and practical expectations. Catholic Christians in the United States see things differently than Catholic Christians in Argentina. Also, the expectations from our contemporaries are not the same as Christians from yesteryear, nor even the same as the Bible itself.

New Christians are often surprised to learn that there are divisions over the gospel. How can one determine if a particular church or individual is close enough to the Bible to be authentic? There are too many variations of Christian salvation to highlight them all in this short book. Furthermore, you certainly do not need one more book explaining why I think I am right and others are wrong. Instead I plan to highlight the two most common views and then propose a model for evaluating and categorizing any understanding of Christian salvation that you may encounter.

In the end, the Bible itself strangely says that you do not need a teacher, but that the Holy Spirit is your teacher -- that is, if you are a Christian. We read in I John 2:27 (WEB),

As for you, the anointing which you received from him remains in you, and you don't need for anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is no lie, and even as it taught you, you will remain in him.

So ask God to give you understanding as you continue your study. If you discover errors in my thinking, please talk to me.

The two most common views of Christian salvation found in various denominations that I want to highlight are [Arminianism](#) and [Calvinism](#).

In a nutshell, Arminianism is the belief that Jesus died for *ALL* mankind, but only those individual people who provide the missing *PART* or condition of choosing faith with their *free will* are finally saved to eternal life. Arminianism is named after [Jacob Arminius](#), who supported this view.

Calvinism is the belief that Jesus died only for *PART* of mankind, but he provides *ALL* of salvation to guarantee eternal life for these chosen ones, and God also leads these chosen ones irresistibly to faith in Christ. Calvinism was named after a prominent historical proponent of this idea, [John Calvin](#). Calvinism, sometimes called [Augustinism](#) has its roots in the theology of Catholic [Saint Augustine](#).

You may be well acquainted with these different views. You may even be sick of hearing one more word about them! However, consider one last thought. As I compared and contrasted these two views, a model for evaluating any salvation doctrine was born. The model proposes two questions, each with only two answers for a combination of only four possibilities.

Is God the savior of *ALL* or *PART* of mankind?

Does God do *ALL* or *PART* of the saving?

SALVATION EVALUATOR	PART OF MANKIND	ALL OF MANKIND
------------------------	-----------------------	----------------------

PART OF SALVATION	?	?
ALL OF SALVATION	?	?

If we use the words *ALL* or *PART* carefully, we can divide every view of Christian salvation into one of these four categories. No one could ride on the fence unless their doctrine was internally contradictory or they simply did not take a position on the subject. This exercise will be very useful to understand current Christian salvation doctrines, and also useful to explain my own view of salvation.

Please also note that Christian salvation can sometimes refer to salvation from sin and other times salvation to eternal life. In this discussion, however, my four-part matrix is used specifically to categorize the different views of salvation to eternal life.

PART for PART

In this model Christ did *PART* of salvation for *PART* of mankind.

This model assumes that when Jesus died on the cross he only paid for the sins of *PART* of mankind. Furthermore, suppose he only did *PART* of the work so that individuals must meet an additional condition to be saved.



For an extreme example, suppose that Mother Teresa is not within the *PART* of mankind that Jesus forgave. Or suppose she misses the condition needed for salvation. Then even she will not be saved from eternal damnation in the end, regardless of her great goodness. By way of contrast, suppose Hitler is within the *PART* of mankind that Jesus chose to forgive. And suppose he somehow meets the condition needed for salvation. Then he will be saved from damnation to eternal life in the end, regardless of his great evil.

Thankfully, this view *disagrees* with I John 2:1-2 (WEB) which explains that Jesus did die for *ALL* mankind.

1) My little children, I write these things to you so that you may not sin. If anyone sins, we have a Counselor with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. 2) And he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.

This view also *disagrees* with Ephesians 2:8-9 (WEB), which explains that we are saved by grace apart from any work.

8) For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9) not of works, that no one would boast.

Therefore, the *PART-for-PART* model of salvation is rejected by nearly all followers of Christ.

PART for ALL

In this model Christ did *PART* of salvation for *ALL* of mankind.

Some believe that when Jesus died on the cross he paid for the sins of *ALL* of mankind. Furthermore, he only did *PART* of the work so that individuals must meet an additional condition to be saved.



For example, consider that Mother Teresa and Hitler are both within the *PART* of mankind to whom Jesus *offered* forgiveness, because in this model Jesus died for *ALL* mankind. However, if Mother Teresa does not meet the particular condition required for salvation, because she has sinned even once, she cannot be saved from eternal damnation in the end. However, if Hitler meets the particular condition required for salvation, typically suggested to be man's *free will* acceptance of Jesus, even though he sinned terribly in many other ways, then he will be saved from eternal damnation to eternal life in the end. Of course, some might say that the condition is simply to be "*good enough*." Yet how would you measure that with confidence?

Thankfully, this view *agrees* with I John 2:1-2. However, it *disagrees* with Ephesians 2:8-9. Classic Arminianism fits the description of the *PART-for-ALL* salvation model.

Another verse that has been used to suggest the Arminian view is Galatians 3:2 (WEB). This verse could be understood to imply that our act or choice of faith invites the work of the Spirit. "***I just want to learn this from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by hearing of faith?***"

ALL for PART

In this model Christ did *ALL* of salvation for *PART* of mankind.

Based on this, when Jesus died on the cross he only paid for the sins of *PART* of mankind. Yet he did *ALL* of the work so that the chosen individuals simply trust that Jesus has completely saved them.



For example if Mother Teresa is not within the part of mankind that Jesus forgave, then she will not be saved from eternal damnation in the end, regardless of any condition she tries to meet. However, if Hitler is within the part of mankind that Jesus forgave, then he will be unconditionally saved from eternal damnation to eternal life in the end regardless of his great sins.

Thankfully, this view also *disagrees* with I John 2:1-2. It does *agree* with Ephesians 2:8-9, however. Classic Calvinism fits the description of the *ALL-for-PART* salvation model.

A verse that suggests this view might be Romans 9:6 (WEB), which could be understood to imply that God has only chosen a subset of mankind. ***"But it is not as though the word of God has come to nothing. For they are not all Israel that are of Israel."***

One should also note that the definition of *"faith"* used by Calvinist Christians differs radically from the definition used by Arminian Christians. For Calvinists, Jesus has paid the price for salvation and applied it to your account. It is guaranteed. We are simply invited to *"trust"* in his finished work. It is like a million dollars already deposited into your bank account by your father. Believing does not deposit the million dollars into your bank account, because it is already there! Instead, believing simply changes your life and attitude toward your father.

For Arminians, Jesus has paid the price for salvation, but it is not yet deposited into your account. We must meet the condition of trusting in his work through our *free will*. It is like a million dollars offered, but not yet deposited, into your bank account. In this case, belief is the condition needed to receive the million dollars so you can deposit it in your account yourself. Otherwise the money is not even there!

This illustration may not be perfect, but it at least illustrates the difference between Arminian and Calvinistic *"faith."*

'Love Wins' by Rob Bell

My desire to write this book was born after I read Rob Bell's book, *Love Wins*, published in 2011. His claim that all mankind is finally saved created a stir among Christians that prompted me to investigate his ideas for comparison with my own. Since you are reading my thoughts, I would also encourage you to read his also, and then compare everything to the Bible.

Do read his book rather than base your conclusions on second hand opinions from me. I do not intend to do a detailed review of his work, quoting his propositions and then defending agreement or disagreement. Instead the purpose of this book is to share my own opinions about salvation. I would rather get into trouble myself for being *in the arena*

than merely critiquing Bell from the sideline! However, here are a few quick thoughts about his book.

First, he has my salute. He has shown an enthusiasm for salvation that prompted him to write a book, speak, and preach! He believed something strongly enough to do something. He also attempted to explain the riddle of salvation that has divided Christians for millennia. Sadly, most Christians do not even share their faith. Most do not believe anything strongly enough to try to persuade others. Bell did something, at least. Moreover, he recognized a weakness in Christian orthodoxies that has resulted in divisions with no sides squaring perfectly with Scripture, at least to his satisfaction, or mine, for that matter. Our *PART* and *ALL Salvation Evaluator* has exposed that much about Arminianism and Calvinism. So Bell did his own homework and proposed a solution. For that he has my kudos. Frankly, we might debate just how far Bell's errors actually fall from the errors found in Arminianism and Calvinism. One thing is certain, salvation doctrines cannot be so different and all be right! So at a minimum the Arminians, the Calvinists, Bell, or even all three need to exit stage left now that *Bell* has sounded.

That said, I do agree with those concerned that Bell's theology has fallen too far away from Christianity to be accepted as orthodox. For example in Chapter 3, titled *Hell*, he concludes that Hell is not a specific place beyond earth for the punishment of unbelievers after judgment. Instead he says it is the suffering endured in this life and the next for rejecting Christ. Bell sees Hell only as the natural suffering for sinful choices, but not as the active punishment of God upon unbelievers. He is not the only Christian who holds this view, wrong as it is. Yet a careful study of Luke 16:19-31 and Revelation 20:11-15 makes it clear that Hell, called *Hades* in the Greek language, is a place distinct from Heaven and Earth, designed by God for the punishment of unbelievers after their death.

I should also note here that Hades is not the same place as the Lake of Fire, which is an important component of my own view to be explained later. Unfortunately, the English word *Hell* is commonly understood to mean the place of eternal punishment. Yet *Hell* is not consistently translated in most English Bibles, referring sometimes to Hades, other times to Gehenna, and rarely to the Lake of Fire. Please note that if I use the word *Hell* in this book I am referring to Hades and not to the Lake of Fire.

In Chapter 4, titled "*Does God Get What God Wants?*" Bell concludes that since the book of Revelation says the gates of the New Jerusalem "*never shut,*" people will be able to sin in eternity. The open gate implies that people can choose to stay inside and be holy or leave God and sin. However, since the gate remains open, they can always come back at any time throughout all eternity. Whoa! I am so looking forward to the day that God transforms my humble existence into sinless glory with all of God's people around his throne. Bell's interpretation of Heaven does not sound very Heavenly to me, nor does it square with the Biblical picture of the glorification of the redeemed. Bell has been vilified for suggesting a type of universal salvation, but his views ultimately are not even that hopeful! He should not be vilified, but instead pitied. How does Bell reason out this conclusion? In a nutshell he argues that the heart of God's love is giving people the freedom to choose, even to the point of choosing evil in Heaven. This is an unfortunate definition of love, and strangely also held by many Christians.

A Christian friend once insisted to me that we must have *free will* because God is a gentleman that would never force his grace upon us. To be sure, God does not coerce us, but just as surely he breathed life, uninvited, into the spiritually dead! Spiritually dead people cannot be coerced, but Jesus can choose to breathe life into anyone he chooses... by his grace.

However, I did greatly appreciate Bell's chapter title, "*Does God Get What God Wants?*" While I do not agree with most of Bell's conclusions in the chapter, I am comforted that the title was headed in the right direction. His chapter title should have led us instead to Romans 9:18-21 (WEB). If there ever was a hammer-and-anvil verse in the Bible to transform rebellious men with the sovereignty of God, this is it.

18) So then, he has mercy on whom he desires, and he hardens whom he desires. 19) You will say then to me, 'Why does he still find fault? For who withstands his will?' 20) But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed ask him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?' 21) Or hasn't the potter a right over the clay, from the same lump to make one part a vessel for honor, and another for dishonor?

God does get what God wants. However, Bell falls far short of seeing the glory that God will get as the savior of all mankind, removing our every blemish in heaven by his mighty hand of grace.

Perhaps God will lead Rob to reconsider. Perhaps you will reconsider as well.

Three Rebuttals

After reading Bell's book, I then read three rebuttals to his salvation theology. His ideas created enough stir for concerned Christians to quickly take up their pens against his heresy. Fair enough. Since the book gained fame among believers and unbelievers alike, his claims ought to be openly compared with the Bible. Otherwise the light of the gospel could be hidden by confusion and could lead many astray. So take a moment with me to briefly consider Bell's three counselors. Again, I do not intend to give them a

thorough review, but only touch on a few points. I would recommend that you also read these books for yourself.

Larry Dixon wrote a work which he titled *Farewell, Rob Bell: A Biblical Response to Love Wins*. On page 14 Dixon says that Bell's statements "*imply that believing the gospel has no transactional effect upon the sinner, that belief is immaterial to the reality of being in the Father's love.*" Dixon understands Bell to say that faith does not activate or help to deposit Jesus' payment for our sin into our account. Bell seems to believe that Jesus' payment is applied by God before we believe. Christians, then, are those people who believe in what God has already done for them. Dixon sees this as a heretical error, because he believes that faith does play a "*transactional*" role in applying Jesus' work to each individual person's account. Dixon and Bell clearly have different definitions of faith. You may remember from our previous discussion that Arminian and Calvinist understandings of the gospel also define faith differently. Considering this point alone, it would appear that Dixon falls into the Arminian category, while Bell falls into the Calvinist category. However, as already explained, Bell is far from an orthodox Calvinist. Also, on page 14 Dixon says, "*...Bell disparages belief, arguing that the reality of forgiveness applies to all without their asking for it. How unlike human forgiveness Bell's position is.*" This is a very strange statement from Dixon. I wonder if he would actually say it again. The Bible explains that God's forgiveness is *decidedly unlike* human forgiveness. We humans typically offer conditional forgiveness. God, however, gives unconditional forgiveness and blessing. That is the evangelical definition of grace. Dixon is certain that Bell is a heretic, but what should we now think about Dixon?

Michael Wittmer wrote *Christ Alone: An Evangelical Response to Rob Bell's Love Wins*. On page 12 Wittmer explains that "*evangelicals hold that faith is an open hand, a passive receiving of God's precious gift to anyone who accepts it.*" Wittmer and Bell also appear to have different definitions of faith. Unfortunately, Wittmer did not more clearly distinguish the difference between *faith* that is trust in the finished work of Christ versus *faith* that is the condition to activate salvation. Wittmer is apparently from the Calvinist camp, but he sounds Arminian at times. His explanations suggest that we can add our own name to the Lamb's Book of Life by taking up the pen of faith, instead of using the eyeglasses of faith to see our name in the Book from before the foundation of the world. Wittmer also expressed concern over Bell's "*second chance*" theology, which offers hope that unbelievers will repent even after their death. On page 31 he says that "*those who assert there is a chance for postmortem salvation inadvertently claim to know better than God what God should have included in his Word.*" However, Wittmer should know that grace theology teaches us that our spiritual condition does not even allow for a first chance. Hopefully he is not implying that salvation is a chance. There is not one element of chance in the salvation of Jesus Christ, but instead God's determined love is set on each of his chosen ones. Wittmer shares his specific objection to second-chance salvation on page 30: "*[Bell] may not want people to use his book as an excuse not to follow Jesus now, but it is easy to see how many could logically draw this conclusion.*" I hope to discuss the idea of salvation after death, and the thought that people might use this as an excuse to not follow Christ, later in this book.

Mark Galli wrote *God Wins - Heaven, Hell, and Why the Good News is Better than Love Wins*. Galli's book is my personal favorite. He writes on page 64 that "*what the Bible plainly teaches is that we come to faith only by the gracious intervention of God.*" Galli is clear that we are spiritually dead apart from grace and that only God's grace awakens us to faith. He says on page 72,

[W]ithout the intervention of God, we have about as much hope as a corpse. And that's the gospel. Not that we have an innate free will, but that God in his freedom came to us to rescue us from spiritual slavery. Through the work of Jesus on the cross, and through the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit, our wills are liberated. Then and only then can we actually recognize Christ, his love, his forgiveness, his grace. Then and only then can we finally respond in faith.

Well said. Galli then illustrates how Christ brings us to faith with a picture of a drowning man who reaches for help. That example is less well said. His illustration could be improved by adding the miraculous component that the man was fully drowned, completely dead, and then revived to life and pulled from the water! Galli also gives brief treatment to our key Scripture, saying,

Universalists quote many other passages with the word 'all' in them, but in context, most of those really mean 'all Israel', or 'all kinds of people' or 'both Jews and Gentiles' will be saved. One example is found in Romans: 'God has imprisoned everyone in disobedience so that he could have mercy on everyone' (Romans 11:32). Paul has been discussing the place of Jews and Gentiles in the scheme of salvation, so clearly the 'all' here means both Jews and Gentiles - not all within each group.

Galli's treatment of this key verse is too brief for the spotlight it deserves. Curiously, I have never read one Christian work that focused on this verse in detail. The grand conclusion of the book of Romans and the theology of grace certainly deserves at least a decent commentary on this amazing verse. Perhaps there is a work out there already, but I have not found it. So, Lord willing, I hope to exegete Romans 11:32 now.

It would appear that with my book I have the notable position of being Bell's *fourth counselor*. I was not as quick with my pen as the first three due to my schedule and work load, so perhaps the stir has long died down. Yet perhaps the intermediate time has been useful to you, me, and Bell for proper reflection.

Now I hope to help you by clarifying the definition of faith, the possibility of salvation "chances" during and after life, the meaning of Romans 11:32, and strategies for confronting stubborn unbelief.

Other Theologians

Before we charge ahead, let's review a longer list of notable individuals with opinions about Christian salvation. Theologians of all stripes have taken up their pens to give reasonable explanations of the gospel. Hopefully we all agree that the Bible is the source definition of the gospel. However, it is not wrong to write books that attempt to explain the meaning of the Bible. I am doing it myself right now! But, before going deeper into my thoughts, let me invite you to consider the valuable efforts of others.

We've just briefly looked at:

- *Love Wins* by Rob Bell
- *Farewell, Rob Bell* by Larry Dixon
- *Christ Alone* by Michael E. Wittmer
- *God Wins* by Mark Galli

Other books on my shelf about salvation include:

- *All of Grace* by Charles Spurgeon
- *Ashamed of the Gospel* by John MacArthur
- *Knowing God* by J.I. Packer
- *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis
- *Predestined for Hell?* By John Rice
- *The Bondage of the Will* by Martin Luther
- *The Doctrines of Grace* by James Montgomery Boice
- *The Five Points of Calvinism* by David N. Steele
- *The NICNT, The Epistle to the Romans* by Douglas Moo
- *The Sovereignty of God* by Arthur W. Pink

Since Christian Universalism is also part of our discussion, consider:

- *All in All* by A. E. Knoch
- *All You Want to Know About Hell* by Steve Gregg
- *Ancient History of Universalism* by Hosea Ballou
- *Christ Triumphant* by Thomas Allin
- *Destined for Salvation* by Kalen Fristad
- *God's Methods with Man* by G. Campbell Morgan
- *Hope Beyond Hell* by Gerry Beauchemin
- *In the End, God* by John A. T. Robinson
- *Terms for Eternity: Aionios and Aidios...* by Ramelli and Konstan
- *The Calvinist Universalist* by Stephen Campana
- *The Evangelical Universalist* by Gregory McDonald (Robin Parry)
- *The Gospel of God's Reconciliation of All in Christ* by Ernst Stroeter
- *The Greek Word Aion - Aionios...* by John Wesley Hanson
- *The Inescapable Love of God* by Thomas Talbott
- *The Modern History of Universalism* by Thomas Whittemore
- <http://AionianBible.org>
- <http://www.apocatastasis.org>
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apocatastasis>
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_Universalism
- <http://concordant.org>
- <http://evangelicaluniversalist.com>
- <https://www.facebook.com/groups/lbelieveinBiblicalChristianUniversalism>

- <http://www.hopebeyondhell.net>
- <http://www.mercyuponall.org>
- <http://www.tentmaker.org>

I have written a short review of many of these books in my article *Book Reviews* in the *Appendix* at the end of this book.

All of the above sources call themselves Christian and hopefully read the same Bible, yet they each have differences in understanding with one another. Several of these differences are great enough that a theologian with one view might label the others heretics. Read these authors for yourself and you will agree that they certainly cannot all be true. The differences are large enough that our eternal fate would be radically impacted if one or the other proves to be true. Now I am not endorsing any of these books in particular, but simply making you aware of the wide range of ideas that professing Christians have. There may be as many different ideas as there are different people in the pews!

Despite the differences, if we strictly apply our *PART* and *ALL Salvation Evaluator* to each of the above theologians, we ought to be able to place each one neatly into one of the four categories previously introduced. However, in some cases the writers do not write precisely or consistently enough for us to know for certain what they believe. Thus, they may appear to sit on the fence between opinions. This is quite common! Of course one can be a true follower of Christ and still be uncertain about many things. True Christians can still be excellent followers of Christ and yet have many unanswered questions, even concerning matters as weighty as salvation theology. However, two men who did not ride the fence and proposed definite answers are C.S. Lewis and Dr. James Boice.

C.S. Lewis is well known, with a "*coffee-table acceptance*" in Christendom. He says in *Mere Christianity*, page 52,

God created things which had free will. That means creatures which can go either wrong or right. Some people think they can imagine a creature which was free but had no possibility of going wrong; I cannot. If a thing is free to be good it is also free to be bad. And free will is what has made evil possible. Why, then, did God give them free will? Because free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having.

C.S. Lewis may be one of the most honest philosophers of all time. He openly acknowledged that God submits to defeat in order to allow for the *free will* of man. He says in *The Problem of Pain*, page 127, that "*it is objected that the ultimate loss of a single soul means the defeat of omnipotence. And so it does. In creating beings with free will, omnipotence from the outset submits to the possibility of such defeat.*" He believed that God arrested his own sovereignty to permit men to have *free will* over their own fate and eternal destiny.

Though this view seems problematic, he nonetheless became the contemporary champion of Arminian-style salvation. C.S. Lewis clearly understood that truth cannot be unreasonable, relative, or changeable. Nor does truth sit on the fence between options. So, after reflection, he chose to believe that Jesus did *PART* of salvation for *ALL* of mankind, and that the determining condition of each individual's salvation rests with their choice of faith by *free will*. Lewis does protect the good news that Christ died for *ALL* mankind. However, he does some Scripture-bending to lessen God's sovereignty and make room for man's *free will*. That is his explanation of why some are saved from eternal Hell, while most are not.

On the other hand, Dr. James Boice, perhaps less well-known, says in *The Doctrines of Grace*, page 125,

If Jesus died for all the sins of all men, unbelief included, then all are saved, which the Bible denies. If he died for all the sins of all men, unbelief excluded, then he did not die for the sins of anybody and all must be condemned. There is no other position, save that he died for the sins of the elect people only.

Boice, like C.S. Lewis, understood that two opposing ideas cannot both be true at the same time. However, in his case he chose to believe that Jesus did *ALL* of salvation for *PART* of mankind, and that the determining condition for each individual's salvation rests with the electing grace of God. This view likewise has problems, as in 2 Peter 2:1 -- which explains that Jesus "*bought*" those who will be sentenced to Hades and also 1 John 2:2 which explains that Jesus' death atoned for the sins of the whole world, both believer and unbeliever. Boice acknowledges these problematic passages, but like Lewis he also does some Scripture-bending to account for his understanding that most are condemned to eternal damnation. Yet Boice does uphold that God's grace alone is to be praised for the salvation of his chosen people, apart from any condition supplied by man.

So how can two respected Christian theologians have such different understandings? Are the mechanics of salvation intended to remain mysterious?

Streams of Thought

We should also review a list of the major organized movements with opinions about Christian salvation. Just as individuals have expressed their views, groups of individuals with shared beliefs have also rallied around their beliefs. The chart below is a basic categorization of the major streams of spiritual thought. The analysis is a generalization and so may not be true for particular churches.

I Marvel that so many professing Christians and even cults say the words that we are saved '*by grace through faith*' yet also have such radically different understandings of salvation. The good news for Jesus' chosen people is that God's grace has forgiven even our misunderstandings.

Streams of Spiritual Thought Charted:

- I. Atheism - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atheism>
- II. Agnosticism - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agnosticism>
- III. Religion - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion>
 - A. Cults - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cult>
 - B. Polytheism - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polytheism>
 - C. Monotheism - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monotheism>
 - 1. Unknown God - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unknown_God
 - 2. Known God
 - a. God One with Universe
 - i. Panentheism - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panentheism>
 - ii. Pantheism - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pantheism>
 - 1. Buddhism - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism>
 - 2. Hinduism - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism>
 - b. God Distinction from Universe
 - i. Impersonal force - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Absolute_\(philosophy\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Absolute_(philosophy))
 - ii. Personal God - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Personal_god
 - 1. Deism, not involved - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deism>
 - 2. Theism, involved - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theism>
 - a. Islam - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam>
 - b. Judaism - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judaism>
 - c. Jesus NOT God
 - 1. Unitarianism - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unitarianism>
 - 2. Jehovah Witnesses - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jehovah's_Witnesses
 - 3. Mormonism - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mormonism>
 - d. **Jesus IS God - Salvation by Grace through Faith**
 - 1. **Apostolic** - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apostolic>
 - 2. **Catholic** - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholicism>
 - 3. **Eastern Orthodox** - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/EastOrthodox>
 - 4. **Protestant** - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protestant>
 - a. **Lutheran** - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lutheranism>
 - b. **Presbyterian** - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presbyterianism>
 - c. **Anabaptist** - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anabaptists>
 - d. **Anglican** - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglicanism>
 - e. **Methodist** - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Methodism>
 - f. **Charismatic** - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charismatic>
 - g. **Other** - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_denomination

Certain Knowledge

We also need to consider the certainty of salvation. Most Christians agree that followers of Christ can have certain knowledge of their salvation. Yet how could our understanding

of salvation be so radically different from one another with each claiming that they are certain? Someone is claiming to be certain, but just as certainly is confused or deceived!

The Bible confirms in I John 5:13 (WEB) that we can have certain knowledge of salvation.

These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

Let's consider our four categories of salvation, each in turn, to see if they reasonably allow for this certain knowledge of eternal life.

PART for PART: REJECTED BY ALL

This view is rejected by nearly everyone calling themselves Christian, so we have not been giving it much attention. Furthermore, it seems doubly impossible that certain knowledge of salvation can be known in this quadrant. If Christ only did PART of salvation for PART of mankind, how could you be absolutely sure that you met the condition required for salvation? You would have to rely on your own evaluation of your performance, yet on judgment day only God's evaluation will matter, not yours. Then, even if you did make the grade since Christ only died for PART of mankind, perhaps you are not even in the winning subset chosen for salvation, even if you met your condition for salvation. For example, the Jehovah Witnesses used to believe that only 144,000 were saved according to Revelation Chapter 7. However, when their own adherents exceeded 144,000, they joined the rest of Christians interpreting that number as symbolic. The point is that certain knowledge of salvation is doubly impossible with this model.

PART for ALL: ARMINIANISM

Arminian Christians claim that *free will "faith"* is the condition that secures their salvation. Jesus did PART of salvation, but left the final PART to be performed by each individual person: the condition of faith. God built the house, but the *free will* act of faith is the key that unlocks the door. However, since faith is the final condition required to unlock salvation, then true security and certainty of salvation is ultimately dependent upon the so called *free will* act of *"faith"* instead of directly and fully on finished work of Christ. Ultimately the adherents to this view must trust in their *"trust"* for certain knowledge of salvation. Rather than humbly entering Heaven saying *"Christ died for me,"* they will instead boast, *"I trusted Christ!"* They can have no true security with this foolishness because they can never be absolutely sure that their act of *"faith"* is authentic and sufficient to guarantee salvation. They will agree that some are deceived with false faith and are not saved while others have true faith and are saved. However, if salvation doctrine leaves any condition for salvation with man, then man ultimately cannot have certainty of salvation. My Calvinist friends will acknowledge this point.

ALL for PART: CALVINISM

Calvinist Christians claim to have faith fully on and directly in Christ. Their understanding of *"faith"* is radically different from the Arminian Christian. For Arminians, *"faith"* is the condition satisfied by the *free will* choice of a subset of mankind, though salvation is available to all. The question as to why some sinful people would choose faith while others do not is left unanswered by Arminians. However, for Calvinists, *"faith"* is not a condition to win God's love, but instead an act of obedience commanded for all God's chosen people, enabled only by the Holy Spirit. In their understanding, *"faith"* does not activate salvation, but instead is the fruit of being born again. In the case of the Calvinist, salvation is only available for the chosen subset of mankind. Only those people targeted by God's grace will ever come to faith. Some Calvinists argue that possession of faith is proof that you are God's chosen. But again with this understanding, faith itself becomes the object of confidence rather than Christ himself. Either way knowledge of salvation for the Calvinist requires confidence that they are part of the chosen subset. So, according to reason, they cannot have true security either. Faith must be based on facts and the critical fact we have is that Jesus Christ died on the cross for the sins of ALL mankind. Everything we objectively know according to the Bible is that the work of Christ is equally applied to every single human being that ever lived. Christ has replaced Adam as the new federal head of humanity as explained in Romans Chapter 5. Thus, faith that Christ saved only a portion of mankind is an impossibility and totally unbiblical. Adherents of this view are in fact trusting in their imagination. Again, fear of eternal damnation inspired their imagination to hope that God loves them and the minority, because they think that God hates and damns the majority. How sad! My Arminian friends will acknowledge this point.

ALL for ALL: CHRISTIAN UNIVERSALISM

So at this point in the discussion most Christians will attempt to find middle ground to stand upon between the Arminian and Calvinist views. One man said to me that he is a four and one half point Calvinist. Others will say that they are not Calvinist, but instead *"Calvinistic."* I have even heard the term *"Calminian"* and *"Arminisitic"* as attempts to find the middle ground. However, when I introduced my *Four Square Salvation Evaluator*, we agreed that our two questions needed to be answered absolutely with only one of two answers possible. Did Christ do *PART* or *ALL* of salvation for those who are finally saved? If even one condition is required of mankind, no matter how small, then Jesus only did *PART*. Did Christ intend his salvation for *PART* or *ALL* of mankind? The two answers to these two questions now drive us to consider the *ALL* for *ALL* quadrant in our *Salvation Evaluator*.

Only the view that Christ did ALL for ALL of mankind allows for the certainty of salvation that is promised in Scripture. Only this view allows a believing person to

say to their unbelieving neighbor with great confidence, "God loves you, me, and all mankind, but the only difference between you and me is that you do not believe it and are in grave danger of punishment for dishonoring Christ, God's only son who died for us!"

Nit Picky?

If you are new to the various viewpoints of Christian salvation you may be having a growing distaste for the minutia highlighted thus far. You might feel that these distinctions are simply the result of people with too much time or who are too eager to argue. Perhaps we would all be wiser to let God be God and let those who desire to follow Christ simply follow him. This is an excellent thought. The Psalmists also said in Psalm 131 (WEB),

- 1) *Yahweh, my heart isn't arrogant, nor my eyes lofty;
nor do I concern myself with great matters,
or things too wonderful for me.*
- 2) *Surely I have stilled and quieted my soul,
like a weaned child with his mother,
like a weaned child is my soul within me.*
- 3) *Israel, hope in Yahweh,
from this time forward and forever more.*

Yet, we also need to protect the gospel from false interpretations and explain the gospel to our own generation. I would encourage you to allow your mind to be captivated by the gospel and the questions we have raised. Search the Scriptures for answers to these questions. Do this to make your own election sure and to grow in your love for God and your love for all God's people.

The gospel is God's message to you, me, and all mankind concerning our eternal destiny. One cannot be too picky about getting that right.

If you are not new to this discussion you might likewise be sick of the centuries of theology and debate that has not provided a simple solution. So rather than attempt to move Mount Everest to another location on the globe, you might feel that it is wiser to let the "**secret things**" rest with God. Perhaps God does not intend us to understand some of these questions at this time. Moses likewise said in Deuteronomy 29:29 (WEB), "**The secret things belong to Yahweh our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.**"

It may be that the answers to the questions I raised have not been revealed. But if they were revealed, would you want to know them?

Turn with me to that question next.

A House Divided

Consider one more interjection before I defend the thesis of my book. When I became a Christian, I was so overjoyed about being restored to fellowship with God. I was also so excited to have the huge pack of guilt removed from my back. I literally skipped. However, it was not long before my joy was sobered with two painful realities. One, I was still a sinner. Two, other Christians were still sinners. I was ready for heavenly fellowship, but instead my eyes were opened to the struggle of rugged discipleship. Wizenod believers sometimes rhyme,

*To live above with the saints we love,
Ah, that is the purest glory;
To live below with the saints we know,
Ah, that is another story.*

We have hard work to do. We must confront destructive sin in the lives of our Christian brothers, for we are our brother's keeper. However, we must also "**take the log out of our own eye**" and deal with our own sin first. Our goal should be joyful, godly fellowship with all God's people. Jesus prayed for it and so we should pursue it.

Yet great divisions remain, as I have already highlighted the division between Arminian and Calvinistic thought. This division specifically highlights just how destructive sin can be -- even within Christendom. One might hope that Christians could agree on something as basic as Salvation. Yet we are reminded that we are ultimately saved by grace and not by our understanding of grace. So it continues to be extremely sad when disagreements and misunderstandings result in division.

One historic example directly related to our theme is the division between the General and Particular Baptists. I attended Baptist churches in the past and so I have some insight into this division. (However, for the record and in keeping with Jesus' prayer for unity, I am not a Baptist, but a Christian.) The division between General and Particular Baptists falls directly on the line between Arminians and Calvinists. So a study of this historic division in the body of Christ may bring understanding to our discussion.

You can read more about Baptists here http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Particular_Baptists and here http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General_Baptists.

General Baptists believe that Christ's atonement is available "*generally*" to all mankind, but only those people exercising the *free will* choice of faith are finally saved. They are classic Arminians. In contrast, Particular Baptists, sometimes called Regular Baptists, believe that Christ's atonement only applies to a "*particular*" subset of mankind, referred to as "*the elect*," who are born again to faith. They are classic Calvinists. Of course this is a simple analysis of the division for there are many other points of agreement, disagreement, and variations of thought. Furthermore, there are way more than two camps of Baptists, but many splinter groups and sects historically related to these two larger categories. Baptist Christians suffer from the same disunity found in every other category of Christian fellowship.

Why highlight this division? This division is especially useful to show us how labels and interpretations subtly shift from generation to generation placing band aids over our painful outstanding questions. Historically, the General Baptists did not thrive as well in America; the Particular Baptists did better, giving birth to the denominations we know now as the General Association of Regular Baptists, Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America, Continental Baptist Churches, Sovereign Grace Baptist Association of Churches, Sovereign Grace Baptists, and others. The large well known Southern Baptist Convention remains split on the Arminian / Calvinist debate.

One interesting explanation of the Arminian / Calvinist puzzle has been hammered out in the furnace of Baptist theological debate. Many Calvinist Baptists, because of their strong emphasis on proper Biblical exegesis, have acknowledged the Scriptures I highlighted earlier (Ephesians 2:8-9 and 1 John 2:1-2). They agree that Salvation is ALL by grace. They also agree that Christ's work has atoned for ALL mankind. Yet they think that SOME people are sentenced to eternal damnation while others are saved. So how can this be?

These "*Calvinists*" have proposed that Christ's atonement itself must be understood to be divided into two components. The first level of Christ's atonement is "*general*," toward ALL mankind, but does not actually reconcile anyone fully to God. We might legitimately question what "*part*" of the atonement does not atone -- if it does not atone, then what does it do? Continuing, the second level of Christ's atonement is "*particular*" toward an elect subset of mankind, and does reconcile them fully to God. They have concluded that this is the answer to why SOME within mankind are not saved, even though the Bible says the sins of ALL mankind are atoned. This view could possibly be called the *General + Particular* view of the atonement.

Wait a minute!

This is starting to sound like the General and Particular Baptists all over again! We are back where we started, except this time instead of a division between Christians, we have divided Christ himself! We are well reminded that Jesus said that a "**house divided cannot stand**" and neither can a divided atonement.

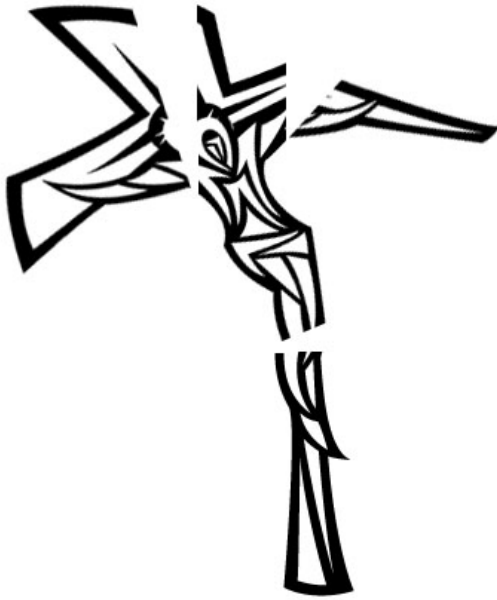
So we see that the Arminian / Calvinist puzzle is no simple matter to explain. Instead, it causes a dizzying array of logic, interpretations, and verbal gymnastics even from thoughtful theologians and has left the body of Christ in a Full Nelson on the wrestling mat with Satan on top.

Christ Dismembered

There is confusion and division in the body of Christ. Though Satan appears to be getting the upper hand, through grace God sees us "*in Christ*" as if all God's people have perfect understanding and unity -- even though we are far from it in any practical sense. It is like God the Son is a giant safe or vault and we are hidden safely inside, protected from God the Father's holy wrath against our sin. However, God still wants us to strive to think and behave with Christ-like unity. We are hidden safely "*in Christ*," but God the Son also intends to live inside of us transforming us into Christ-like obedient sons of God with him.

Jesus prayed in John 17:20-23 (WEB),

20) Not for these only do I pray, but for those also who will believe in me through their word, 21) that they may all



be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that you sent me. 22) The glory which you have given me, I have given to them; that they may be one, even as we are one; 23) I in them, and you in me, that they may be perfected into one; that the world may know that you sent me and loved them, even as you loved me.

I pray that the hope of God's love and salvation for all mankind could serve the Body of Christ and bring understanding and unity.

A Thought



Our *Salvation Evaluator* matrix has been useful to categorize different streams of thought concerning Christian salvation. When the factors of [*PART or ALL*] of mankind and [*PART or ALL*] of salvation are considered carefully, there is no fence riding. You might possibly ride the fence between *PART* and *ALL*. You could argue that this subject is similar to the mystery of the Trinity being three in one, or Jesus being both fully human and fully divine. However, the great philosopher C.S. Lewis and the great theologian James Boice both agreed that there is no fence riding, though each from different sides of the fence.

SALVATION EVALUATOR	PART OF MANKIND	ALL OF MANKIND
PART OF SALVATION	REJECTED BY ALL	ARMINIANISM C.S. LEWIS
ALL OF SALVATION	CALVINISM JAMES BOICE	?

We have also shown that the three cases considered thus far all have a dispute with Scripture, more or less. Here are the few Scriptures we considered.

I John 2:1-2 (WEB) explains that Jesus did die for *ALL* mankind. Verse 2 specifically highlights that Christ atoned for the sins of believers and unbelievers -- for the church and the whole world.

1) My little children, I write these things to you so that you may not sin. If anyone sins, we have a Counselor with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. 2) And he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but

also for the whole world.

Ephesians 2:8-9 (WEB) explains that we are saved by grace apart from any work and that even faith itself is a gift of God.

8) for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9) not of works, that no one would boast.

I have also said that all Christians agree that the *PART for PART* combination is bad math. I have shown that the *PART for ALL* model (Arminianism) and the *ALL for PART* model (Calvinism) both dispute Scripture and reason. First, they both claim that adherents can be certain of their salvation. Yet it is impossible that two systems could be so different and yet both be true. Either one OR both of these views is in grave error. Second, since Arminian theologians claim that "*faith*" is the condition that secures their salvation, then their security is ultimately dependent upon their act of "*faith*" instead of directly and fully on Christ. They trust in their trust. Thus they have no true security. Adherents can never be absolutely sure that God agrees that their act of "*faith*" is authentic and sufficient to guarantee salvation. Third, Calvinist theologians do claim to have faith fully on and directly in Christ, but they also claim he only saves a chosen subset of mankind. Thus their security requires confidence that they are part of that chosen subset. They can have no true security either, because faith must be based on facts and the critical fact we have is that Jesus Christ died on the cross for the sins of *ALL* mankind. They are trusting in their imagination. Fear of eternal damnation inspired their imagination to hope that God loves them and the minority, because they think that God hates and damns the majority. Again, how sad!

Curiously, when Jesus was physically present on this earth his ministry challenged both the Jew and the Gentile in different ways. The Jews believed that they were God's chosen people, while also believing that the Gentiles were not chosen. Jesus angered them by loving the Gentiles. The Gentiles, however, believed that good people could touch the divine with religious acts. Jesus angered them by saying, "***I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me***" (John 14:6b WEB).

Two thousand years later, mankind continues to pass by to the left or to the right of the cross of Christ like unbelieving Jews and Gentiles from Jesus' day. But God continues to invite us all to come instead to the foot of the cross. Unfortunately, the hypocrisy typified by the Jew and the false religion typified by the Gentile still obscure our understanding of God's loving grace toward ALL mankind even today.

Hopefully, I have been fair and balanced in my analysis because I have personally served time as both an Arminian and a Calvinist. Yet now I am confident that the grace of God is a whole lot more comprehensive than either Camp Left or Right.

Join me now in considering the *ALL for ALL* combination next.

ALL for ALL

In this case consider the good news that Christ did ALL of salvation for ALL of mankind. Some believe that when Jesus died on the cross he paid for the sins of ALL of mankind and that he did ALL of the work so that any individual can simply trust that Jesus has completely forgiven us ALL already.



For example, suppose Mother Teresa and Hitler are both within the part of mankind that Jesus forgave. (They are because Jesus died for *ALL* mankind!) Furthermore, since Christ did *ALL for ALL*, unconditionally, Mother Teresa and Hitler are both spared from the Lake of Fire in the end by God's grace and saved to live with God and *ALL* his people in eternity. This is a most curious thought, especially with you and me there as well.

This view agrees with I John 2:1-2 (WEB) which says that Jesus did die for *ALL* mankind.

1) My little children, I write these things to you so that you may not sin. If anyone sins, we have a Counselor with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. 2) And he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.

This view also agrees with Ephesians 2:8-9 (WEB) which explains that we are saved by grace apart from any good work.

8) for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9) not of works, that no one would boast.

Christian Universalism fits into this case. Yet, because the Bible is clear about the punishment of unbelievers after death in Hell, most Christians also reject this view. However, for a fair assessment of each quadrant let's take a closer look at the Scriptures.

Romans 11:32-36

Consider a thorough exegesis of Romans 11:32-36 (WEB).

32) For God has bound all to disobedience, that he might have mercy on all.

33) Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out! 34) 'For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?' 35) 'Or who has first given to him, and it will be repaid to him again?' 36) For of him, and through him, and to him are all things. To him be the glory for ever! Amen.

We ought to give our most serious attention and interpretive skill to these verses. I believe this paragraph of Scripture is the grand conclusion of grace theology for three reasons. First, the paragraph is squarely at the end of Apostle Paul's treatise on grace and Christian salvation, a logical place for a grand conclusion to be. These words are not

a mere point or transition, but the summation of Paul's entire explanation of grace from Romans 1 through 11. Second, Romans 11:32 is followed immediately by an equally grand doxology of worship (that is Romans 11:33-36) and five concluding chapters which focus on instructions about our response to this grand conclusion, that is Romans 12-16. Third, I have already suggested that Romans 11:32 answers the three biggest questions that mankind has ever had or will ever have before God our creator. Any concluding word about grace and Christian salvation ought to answer our biggest questions. This grand conclusion does not disappoint. Again these questions are:

1) How did sin enter the world? 2) What is God's purpose in sin and salvation? 3) Who is finally saved from God's wrath against sin? Let's dissect this verse for the answers to these three questions.

For God

God is the subject of the grand conclusion of grace theology. He is the subject of the sentence, the person in focus, the actor on the stage of everything. "*For God!*" It is certainly fitting that God would take the place as subject of the grand conclusion of redemption.

has bound

How has God acted? The main verb is "to bind." So "God has *bound?*" This is curious, and in fact a bit dark and unexpected. Freedom is what we seek, honor, and exalt. Yet, "*God has bound.*"

all

Who has he bound? "*God has bound all.*" We are the direct object, that is ALL mankind, even ALL creation. But how can there be rejoicing in this dark thought? We might instead prefer to read that God has bound darkness, or bound Satan, or bound all evil. But we read that "*God has bound all.*" We are the object of his binding. What could this mean? And does "*all*" mean ALL? Is it only representatives from all categories of men as Mark Galli suggests in his book *God Wins*, or all men generally, or every single human that lived for all time? Perhaps we misunderstand. Perhaps we are ALL bound to his goodness or bound to forgiveness.

to disobedience

Darkest of dark. "*God has bound all to disobedience!*" Who is this God? Certainly this must be a mistranslation! Certainly this must be an error from an evil scribe from millennia past! Yet, this is an adverbial clause modifying the verb, "*has bound,*" by answering the question, "*has bound to what?*" But in light of the answer... who cares about grammar? Why would God do that, and how could he possibly be good to do that? Yet if we are reading and understanding correctly, then we now have the answer to our first question.

1) How did sin enter the world? All men are bound to sin by the will of God.

The Biblical answer to the origin of sin is radically different than the answer suggested by C.S. Lewis. As already discussed, Lewis believed that *free will* was required for a true expression of love. Lewis also believed that giving man *free will* then allowed for mankind's choice of evil. Though Lewis was a most excellent philosopher, he is in grave error on both of these points. God's true loving grace is instead all the greater because he saves us, not out of our *freedom*, but out of our bondage to sin. Lewis' suggestion that *free will* allows for the choice of evil is simply mistaken logic. Actually God himself is the only being that ever lived with a perfectly free will, yet there is no possibility of his choosing evil. A will that is free is truly free! I write further about *free will* in my article, [*A Quintessential Defense of FREE WILL*](#).

Furthermore, we now also see that "*all*" means every single human that has lived for all time, for Paul is simply restating Romans 3:23. If "*all*" means ALL in Romans 3:23, as all Christian theologians agree, then it certainly must mean ALL here. Though one might object saying that "*all*" simply means representatives from all categories of men, that is Jews and Gentiles, but not necessarily every individual. At least it would be consistent to say that Romans 3:23 and Romans 11:32 both mean every category of men, but not every individual. We should be consistent because the context for both verses regarding Paul's points about Jew and Gentile being alike under sin are the same. However, Romans 3:23 is easily understood to mean every individual person, just as Romans 11:32 should be understood to mean every individual person, whether Jew or Gentile. If we say "*all*" does not mean each individual, but only each category, are we then saying that there are some people who do not sin? Are some people not bound to disobedience by God? Hardly. The point is that ALL who sin, and ALL sin, do so because God has ordained it. Plus we now see that Galli is wrong to suggest that "*all*" merely means "*all categories of men.*" "*All*" can only mean ALL mankind in Romans 11:32 -- that is every single individual Jew and Gentile, even all creation.

Paul did warn us in Romans 8:20 that there is an actor on the stage that subjected creation to frustration. Paul is now telling us plainly in his grand conclusion that it is God himself who has subjected creation to frustration. God is the reason that each individual human that has ever lived for all time is a sinner. This truth can also be confirmed in Isaiah 30:28. So God has bound ALL men to disobedience.

Why Lord? How can this be?

that

Thankfully we see the beginning of another adverbial clause to answer the question as to why "*God has bound.*" Thankfully God is willing to disclose the reason for binding us all to disobedience. The thought of God's decree being the reason that we stumble, fall, and disobey seems utterly dark. It is as if we were wickedly fooled and our only hope turned out to be trying to destroy us in the end. If God himself were proved to be evil, what hope could possibly exist? Yet now a light shines through the darkness. God offers an explanation.

But one very important question comes to mind first. The English phrase "*that*" could be heading towards "*allow*" or "*oblige.*" One offers possibility while the other states certainty. The possibility of hope is better than nothing, but certainty is better than everything. So for this phrase, let's dive into the Greek for more clarity.

The Greek word translated "*that*" is "*iva.*" On page 378 of *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* by Walter Bauer, "*iva*" is defined as "*a result which follows according to the purpose of.*" To further help us, "*iva*" is used several other times in the book of Romans.

Now we know that whatever things the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, that [iva] every mouth may be closed, and all the world may be brought under the judgment of God.

Romans 3:19 (WEB)

and if children, then heirs: heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with him, that [iva] we may also be glorified with him.

Romans 8:17 (WEB)

The dictionary definition and the prior context in Romans indicate that "*that*" means "*for the purpose of a certain result.*" Just as the law certainly holds every individual accountable to God, so God's purpose and result in Romans 11:32 is certain. Just as future glory is certain for God's children that endure suffering, so God's purpose and result in Romans 11:32 is certain.

So let's read his certain purpose.

he might have mercy on

Now that sounds better, much much better. God's purpose was not to do evil, but ultimately to show mercy. In a nutshell, God could not demonstrate forgiveness if he had nothing to forgive. Now one might still reject such a god saying that binding us to sin for the purpose of forgiving our sin still seems cruel. Suppose a father chained his son to a boulder and when neighbors asked why, he said so that he could set him free one day. Such a father would be imprisoned. God, however, will not be imprisoned, but instead worshiped by all.

C.S. Lewis also rejected this scripture in *Mere Christianity* when he wrote, "*God created things which had free will. That means creatures which can go either wrong or right.*" The truth about God's sovereignty over all creation, even evil, was difficult for Lewis to accept, as it is for all of us.

We had concluded above that the phrase "*that*" means "*for the purpose of a certain result.*" However, we now have the word "*might*" to consider. That sounds like "*possibility*" again. Let's dive back into the Greek. The phrase "*he might have mercy on*" is from the Greek word transliterated "*eleese.*" This special verb means "*to have mercy on.*" This specific verb and its conjugation is used only one time in the whole Bible! The verb tense in the Greek is in the *3rd person aorist active subjunctive singular tense*. The *3rd person singular* indicates that Paul is writing about a single third person, namely God, the actor on the stage of mercy. The *active* tense indicates that the action is not passive but active. God is actively demonstrating mercy. He is not a passive forgiver! The *aorist* tense, sometimes called the "*fairest*" tense was used by the Greeks to denote a general reference to past action. In this case the *aorist* tense refers to the work of our "*Fairest*" Lord Jesus who brought mercy to ALL mankind. Christ's work on the cross forgiving ALL mankind's sin is a finished and completed work. The payment has been made and received by the Father. Finally, the *subjunctive* mood typically indicates action that is... possible or potential, but not certain.

Whoa! Stop the train!

At first glance, this thought seems to mean that God has made mercy possible, but it is only definite for those adding the missing *PART* of faith. Or maybe mercy is definite only for the *PART* of mankind that is chosen for forgiveness. That is the most common interpretation and fits well with either Arminian or Calvinistic theology.

So is my entire thesis unraveled?

According to www.ntgreek.org,

If the subjunctive mood is used in a 'purpose' (or in a 'result') clause, then the action should NOT be thought of as a POSSIBLE result, but should be viewed as the stated outcome that WILL HAPPEN (or HAS HAPPENED) as a result of another stated action. The use of the subjunctive is not to indicate that something 'may' or 'might' result from a given action, but it is stating the 'purpose of' or 'reason for' an action. The subjunctive mood in a purpose clause actually functions more like a verb in the indicative mood rather than in the optative mood. It is not stating the possibility or probability of an action, but instead telling the intention of the primary action.

Whew! That is good news... if you are among those bound to disobedience. Romans 11:32 is not speaking about *'possible'* mercy, but instead... certain and guaranteed mercy!!!

Yet we still may ask how can God get away with locking mankind in bondage to sin even if his goal is to set us free? Well he is God, so he will do what he pleases. He does not answer to us, but instead we answer to him. And how would we stop him anyway? In fact, Romans 11:32 is not telling us what he plans to do, but what he has already done. Further, God's wisdom in such matters is quite beyond our comprehension. Paul's response is simply to break out in worship with the concluding doxology. **"How unsearchable are his judgments!"**

Paul also explained earlier in Romans that God's grace is such that his mercy does not merely release us from our bonds, but overwhelms and floods our lives with his goodness. His mercy will finally and totally erase all the pain of our past bondage. We may have many complaints about our trials and bondage now, but we are well advised to hold our tongue. Shortly we will have no complaints, but instead reason for over the top rejoicing and praise for our savior.

Romans 5:16-18 (WEB), says,

16) The gift is not as through one who sinned; for the judgment came by one to condemnation, but the free gift came of many trespasses to justification. 17) For if by the trespass of the one, death reigned through the one; so much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ. 18) So then as through one trespass, all men were condemned; even so through one act of righteousness, all men were justified to life.

Furthermore, the earlier picture of a father who chains his son to a boulder and then unchains him later does not capture the wonder of what God is actually doing. God does not simply reach down from Heaven with a key to unlock our bonds to set us free. Instead, his very holy and powerful presence intimately indwells undeserving sinners and empowers us to break the bonds. God shares his supernatural power with us to break the bonds that he ordained. He shares his power with us as the Holy Spirit regenerates individual people, one by one, leading us to faith and victory over sin, sooner or later, whether today or even in the depths of Hades. The bonds he created are too strong for us, but God designed these bonds to be smashed only through the demonstration of Christ's power at work in and through us! I'll take some more of that power!!!

That is the meaning of Romans 8:37 (WEB), **"No, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."**

That is the meaning of 2 Corinthians 4:6-10 (WEB).

6) seeing it is God who said, "Light will shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 7) But we have this treasure in clay vessels, that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God, and not from ourselves. 8) We are pressed on every side, yet not crushed; perplexed, yet not to despair; 9) pursued, yet not forsaken; struck down, yet not destroyed; 10) always carrying in the body the putting to death of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.

That is the meaning of Isaiah 54:16-17 (WEB).

16) 'Behold, I have created the blacksmith who fans the coals into flame, and forges a weapon for his work; and I have created the destroyer to destroy. 17) No weapon that is formed against you will prevail; and you will condemn every tongue that rises against you in judgment. This is the heritage of Yahweh's servants, and their righteousness is of me,' says Yahweh.

People get ready! Let Jesus flex some supernatural power in your life! Live through Jesus Christ!

Ephesians 2:7 (WEB), an often overlooked but favorite verse of mine, also agrees that God acted with good purpose, "***that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.***"

Now we have the answer to our second question.

2) What is God's purpose in sin and salvation? God decreed our bondage to sin in order to provide opportunity to forgive sin and demonstrate his power at work in us to conquer sin. God is showing off his grace and we happen to be the beneficiaries! He is flexing his grace muscles. He is modeling his beautiful grace on the world's runway by indwelling sinners.

Awesome! So who are the beneficiaries again?

all.

ALL? *ALL* who? Wait a minute! *ALL* mankind? The parallel construct of this verse demands that this second use of the word "*all*" is equal to the first use of the word "*all*." That is, it refers to every individual human being that ever lived for all time. That is right. Just as God has bound *ALL* humanity to sinful disobedience, so he has chosen *ALL* mankind for mercy, even *ALL* creation. Though *ALL* mankind is not presently indwelt by the Holy Spirit, *ALL* mankind has already been forgiven at the cross, and one by one, sooner or later, *ALL* mankind will reap the benefits of Christ's mercy. Sounds like the certain guaranteed universal salvation of *ALL* mankind to me.

Praise God for his love for us and our neighbors!

3) Who is finally saved from God's wrath against sin? ALL mankind. Looks like our favorite 'Romans Road' collection of verses from the book of Romans has a few potholes in it!

The Biblical answer to the scope of salvation is also radically different than the answer suggested by Dr. James Boice. As already discussed, Boice believed that since some men are sentenced to eternal damnation, it is an obvious conclusion that their sins are not atoned. Thus God's grace is really only extended to a subset of humanity. Yet Romans 11:32 could not be more clear, that just as *ALL* are locked in bondage to sin, so *ALL* are granted mercy. Dr. Boice is likewise a most excellent theologian, but in the effort to tie a neat bow on his theological system he has also made a grave error. Read on to discover my explanation of this conundrum.

Of course right now the Arminian Christians may be reading back through my explanation to argue that the usage of "*might*" must mean possibility and not certainty. They may reason that salvation is only possible because each individual must exercise their *free will* to meet the condition of "*faith*" in order to be finally saved. Impossible! Faith is not the condition to God's unconditional love. Instead, Faith is trusting in God's unconditional love. The Calvinist Christians may immediately see the error in Arminian thinking, for salvation by grace is unconditional or else it would be of works. Calvinists may argue that "*all*" must mean every category and not every individual. Again impossible! The only basis for individual personal confidence in God's love is through confidence in his universal love for *ALL* mankind.

Yet both the Arminian and the Calvinist argue that since the Bible teaches that people go to eternal damnation, then it is impossible that *ALL* would be finally saved. That is an excellent point to continue our discussion. So let's turn to re-examine the question of the destinies of mankind in light of additional Scriptures.

Luke 16:19-31

Consider the words of Luke 16:19-31 (WEB),

19) Now there was a certain rich man, and he was clothed in purple and fine linen, living in luxury every day. 20) A certain beggar, named Lazarus, was taken to his gate, full of sores, 21) and desiring to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. Yes, even the dogs came and licked his sores. 22) The beggar died, and he was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died, and was buried. 23) In Hades, he lifted up his

eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far off, and Lazarus at his bosom. 24) He cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue! For I am in anguish in this flame.'

25) But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that you, in your lifetime, received your good things, and Lazarus, in the same way, bad things. But here he is now comforted, and you are in anguish. 26) Besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, that those who want to pass from here to you are not able, and that no one may cross over from there to us.'

27) He said, 'I ask you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house; 28) for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, so they won't also come into this place of torment.'

29) But Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them.'

30) He said, 'No, father Abraham, but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'

31) He said to him, 'If they don't listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if one rises from the dead.'

So we see it is certain that the wicked will be sentenced to Hades. So at least the Scriptures are clear that not all are saved from Hades. So are we back to where we started?

Some would attempt to bypass the meaning of this story. One strategy is to explain that the story is simply a parable, a fictional story told to communicate a general truth. However, the account does not have the features of a parable. None of Jesus' parables mention specific individuals by name such as this story does. This story mentions Abraham by name. Also if this were a parable, what would be the general truth taught? The main point of this story is that if the wicked do not repent, they will be sentenced to Hades after they die. The Holy Spirit is not using a parable to teach us about the certainty of Hades. Instead he gives us a real life and afterlife account.

A second strategy often used to dispel the fear of Hell is to teach that Hell is simply the trials and natural consequence of a life lived apart from God both here and in the afterlife. Unbelievers may say with all seriousness that a particular trial was "*Hell*." One might find consolation thinking that they are surviving now without God just fine and so perhaps Hell in the afterlife will also be fine. However, the trials of this life are nothing compared to the judgments of Hell. The Rich man was in anguish! Furthermore, the rich man *died* and was *buried*. This account is not about God's punishments in this life. In fact the account above is given to teach exactly the opposite point about the life and afterlife of the unbelieving. The wicked man had many comforts in his lifetime upon the earth, but after life he was judged and sentenced to Hell for his sin and unbelief where every comfort was stripped away. He begged to come back to warn us!

Hell is not a parable or the natural consequence of sin, but the active punishment of God upon the wicked dead.

One point that should be noted is that the WEB Bible translation properly identifies the Rich man's place of punishment as "*Hades*" though most English translations use the more ill-defined English word "*Hell*."

Revelation 20:11-15

Consider also Revelation 20:11-15 (WEB),

11) I saw a great white throne, and him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. There was found no place for them. 12) I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and they opened books. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works. 13) The sea gave up the dead who were in it. Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them. They were judged, each one according to his works. 14) Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15) If anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.

This passage of Scripture, little known and even less taught, helps us understand several important points. First *Hell* or *Hades* is not the same place as the *Lake of Fire*. This is a fact never pointed out to me in a lifetime of Sunday school. Hades appears to be a temporary place of punishment for the wicked. In this passage we see that Hades is emptied of all people and then Hades is thrown into the Lake of Fire empty of all living beings. I've touched base on this subject previously in my article, [Revelation 20:11-15, Optimism Out of Control, Part 5: Hades Gives Up!](#)

The Great White Throne Judgment is instead the final judgment for all of God's creation. It is the final sentence for the redeemed and unredeemed. We certainly have no escape from God's sovereign will now. Nor will there be any escape when all of creation is laid bare before him. Man's supposed *free will* accounts for nothing, but only the free will of Holy God. All creation will stand before the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Jesus will sit on The White Throne arrayed in the brilliance of his glory. Sin and imperfection will not stand in his presence. Only those who are hidden safely in Christ will stand. Every darkness, evil, and any unredeemed will be blasted from his presence with the force of his holy omnipotence. There is no redemption for any sinner outside of the protection of Christ.

The passage above is clear and undisputed. Even if someone endured millennia in Hades for their wickedness and escapes at this point to stand before the Lord of Glory, *IF* their name is not found written in the Book of Life, they will be thrown into the Lake of Fire. There is absolutely no escape from judgment to the Lake of Fire for the unredeemed. There is absolutely no hope for the unredeemed. The Lake of Fire is their destiny.

So we return again to the definition of Christian faith. I have introduced various views of Christian salvation, many of which are in direct opposition to each other. Arminian Christians, following C.S. Lewis, hope to write their own name into the Book of Life with their *free will* act of faith. Yet I have proven that it is not possible to write your own name in the Lamb's Book. "*Faith*" is not a "*pen*" with which to write your name into Jesus' book. Instead faith is the "*glasses*" with which to see your name there from the foundation of the earth. Calvinists claim to wear the "*glasses*" and see their name in the Lamb's Book. Yet somehow they are confident that their names are written in the Lamb's Book, but equally confident that most are not. Are we still no further in understanding?

Now, consider a very important lesson in logic: the Holy Spirit's use of the word "*IF*."

If a statement is true, the contra positive is always logically true. But only when the converse is true will the inverse also logically be true. For example:

Statement: *if A then B ~ given as true.*

Contra positive: *if not B then not A ~ logically always true.*

Converse: *if B then A ~ possibly true, but not always.*

Inverse: *if not A then not B ~ true only if converse is true.*

Negation: *if not A then B ~ true if the original statement is false, a test.*

Note also in logic that an even number of nots such as "not not A" is the same as A, while an odd number of nots such as "not not not A" is the same as not A. Let's apply this logic to Revelation 20:15.

Statement: ***If anyone was not found written in the Book of Life, he was cast into the Lake of Fire.*** ~ given as true in Revelation 20:15.

Contra positive: ***If anyone was not cast into the Lake of Fire he was found written in the Book of Life*** ~ logically always true.

Converse: ***If anyone was cast into the Lake of Fire he was not found written in the Book of Life*** ~ obviously true in this case.

Inverse: ***If anyone was found written in the Book of Life, he was not cast into the Lake of Fire*** ~ logically true since the converse is true.

Negation: ***There was one found written in the Book of Life, who was cast into the Lake of Fire*** ~ false since God's word is trustworthy so the original statement is tested true.

Hopefully this is not too tedious a return to high school logic. However, our effort has proven the beautiful conclusion that the inverse of Revelation 20:15 is also true.

If anyone was found written in the Book of Life, he was not cast into the Lake of Fire.

I've written more about this concept in my articles [Revelation 20:11-15, Optimism Out of Control, Part 6: If, If, If, If, If, If,,](#) and [Revelation 20:13-15, Out of Control Optimism Part 8, Your Name in the Book of Life!](#)

Typically when I propose this concept most people object with the question, "*You are not suggesting a second chance are you?*" Larry Dixon also expressed a valid concern that Rob Bell was proposing some sort of "*second chance*" salvation. So let me make one thing perfectly clear: I am definitely not proposing "*second chance*" salvation. Rob Bell is guilty as charged and I have the exact same concern about his theology. Because he believes that mankind has the *free will* to choose their destiny, he correspondingly believes that each individual's salvation is hanging in the balance, and subject to "*chance*" and even the possibility of "*second chances*."

However, the gospel of grace makes it perfectly clear that "*chance*" has no part in Christian salvation. There is no such thing as a "*second chance*." In fact there is also no such

thing as a "first chance!" Curiously, it would seem that Dixon's very objection to a second chance exposes that he believes salvation has a first chance. Yet if Dixon or any other believes that salvation is by "chance" at all then they have a complete misunderstanding of grace. Salvation by the grace of Christ leaves absolutely nothing to chance. God's determined love is set upon all his chosen people with certainty. That is what makes the good news great news. The final salvation of elect mankind is certain and guaranteed, not because of man's will, but because God has willed it! If salvation included an element of chance, then surely your sin nature and mine would find even the smallest crack to bounce through God's safety net into perdition.

But take heart: there is no falling from the hand of our Heavenly Father as he promised in John 10:28 (WEB), ***"I give eternal life to them. They will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand."***

If the grace of God cannot fail in saving his lost sheep in this life, then the grace of God will not fail to save any remaining lost sheep at The Great White Throne Judgment, even those punished severely in Hades for their rebellion. Surely someone saved by grace ought to be thankful for that!

Matthew 25:31-46

Consider Matthew 25:31-46 (WEB),

31) But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. 32) Before him all the nations will be gathered, and he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33) He will set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. 34) Then the King will tell those on his right hand, 'Come, blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 35) for I was hungry, and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me drink. I was a stranger, and you took me in. 36) I was naked, and you clothed me. I was sick, and you visited me. I was in prison, and you came to me.'

37) Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry, and feed you; or thirsty, and give you a drink? 38) When did we see you as a stranger, and take you in; or naked, and clothe you? 39) When did we see you sick, or in prison, and come to you?' 40) The King will answer them, 'Most certainly I tell you, because you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

41) Then he will say also to those on the left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels; 42) for I was hungry, and you didn't give me food to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me no drink; 43) I was a stranger, and you didn't take me in; naked, and you didn't clothe me; sick, and in prison, and you didn't visit me.'

44) Then they will also answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and didn't help you?'

45) Then he will answer them, saying, 'Most certainly I tell you, because you didn't do it to one of the least of these, you didn't do it to me.' 46) These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

Theologians debate the timing of Jesus return, whether before or after the Millennium described in Revelation 20:1-6. The timing of his various judgments is also disputed. This subject is relevant to our discussion because it would be helpful to know if the judgment described above is a judgment that sends unbelievers to Hell (that is Hades) before Revelation 20:1-6. Or, is it a judgment that sends the unredeemed to the Lake of Fire after Revelation 20:1-6? We have already explained that Hades and the Lake of Fire are not the same place. Luke 16:19-31 teaches us that unbelieving humans are currently being punished in Hades for their rebellion. So then we should ask: is the judgment described above the sentencing of unbelievers to Hades, the sentencing of the unredeemed to the Lake of Fire, or something else?

One clue is underlined in verse 41 above. Based on the underlined words, I conclude that the Sheep and Goat Judgment is the same event as the Great White Throne judgment also described in Revelation 20:11-15. This passage adds more detail and explains that the Lake of Fire is prepared for... the devil and his angels.

Again this is good news for mankind. Sadly we all have been partners with Satan and his angels in some way or another. We sin because we love our sin. We deserve Satan's destiny in the Lake of Fire. However, God has demonstrated his grace, his undeserved favor toward mankind, by forgiving all mankind at the cross and giving us Heaven for eternity. However, the devil and his angels are sentenced to the Lake of Fire for *The Ages of The Ages*. Satan and the demons are the goats on Jesus' left, not mankind! Each of us deserve the destiny of Satan, yet by God's grace alone we are given grace and glory instead. I discuss this further in my article, [Your Theory about the Goats... Is it Really Possible? Matthew 25:31-46](#).

Revelation 20:10

Revelation is difficult to understand, but we must consider Revelation 20:10 (WEB),

The devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet are also. They will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Only three people are explicitly named in Scripture as destined to the Lake of Fire. They are Satan, The Beast, and The False Prophet.

So how do we determine the nature of the members of this Unholy Trinity: The Devil (Satan / Dragon), The Beast (First / Sea Beast), and The False Prophet (Second / Land Beast)? Are they human beings, demonic beings, or non-being forces?

Everyone agrees that Satan is a demon, a fallen angel. Well, not everyone agrees. Mormons are confused about that, suggesting that Satan is actually Jesus' brother. A few others have defined Satan as the epitome of evil, but that he is in fact not a being, not a person. However, I easily side with the majority, that Satan is a being, a non-human spirit person with mind, will, and emotion. He is the Chief fallen angel actively leading his rebellion against God.

However, what about The Beast and The False Prophet? Revelation 13 introduces both a First Beast from the sea and Second Beast from the land. A comparison of Revelation 13:14 and 19:20 shows that the Second Beast is later referred to as The False Prophet in Revelation 16:13, 19:20, and 20:10. Thus the Second Beast and The False Prophet are the same person.

Revelation 16:13-14 also shows us that the mouths of The Dragon (Satan), The Beast, and The False Prophet are each the *source* of demonic spirits. This is initial evidence that these three beings share a common nature. This is one argument that they are not human beings, but instead demonic beings. Humans do not beget demons, but Satan, The Beast, and The False Prophet are the source of demonic activity. They are the demon chiefs!

13) I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits, something like frogs; 14) for they are spirits of demons, performing signs; which go out to the kings of the whole inhabited earth, to gather them together for the war of that great day of God, the Almighty.

Revelation 16:13-14 (WEB)

Secondly, we already know that Jesus became a human being to pay for the sins of all mankind and thus I have reasoned that all mankind is spared the Lake of Fire. Jesus did not become an angel and so apparently the sins of fallen angels are not atoned and they will suffer the Lake of Fire. Thus, those sentenced to the Lake of Fire are demons, fallen angels, and not human beings. Otherwise, if they were human, their sins would be paid for and they would not be sentenced to the Lake of Fire. Matthew 25:41, previously mentioned, also clearly states that the Lake of Fire is ***"prepared for the Devil and his angels."*** Jude 6 and 2 Peter 2:4 also make it clear that fallen angels will be present at the final judgment, hence the goats on Jesus' left.

Further study could be done to confirm the identity of The First Beast as demonic. Some are certain that The Beast of Revelation is the Roman Empire, Nero, the Pope, or someone else altogether. The image of a beast arising from the sea first appears in Scripture at Isaiah 27:1. Leviathan is also mentioned earlier in the book of Job, but that reference may simply be from the animal kingdom. However, Isaiah's reference surely points to a larger Spiritual oppressor, perhaps the very same being mentioned in Revelation 13:1. Now, I am not suggesting that demons actually abode in the sea, but this Biblical metaphor illustrates an invisible, but very real, demonic landscape. The tumultuous sea is used to picture the caustic habitat of demons.

In that day, Yahweh with his hard and great and strong sword will punish leviathan, the fleeing serpent, and leviathan the twisted serpent; and he will kill the dragon that is in the sea.

Isaiah 27:1 (WEB)

Now, consider an important concept. The Revelation drama reveals illustrations of real people and interaction between the seen and unseen worlds. I have also shown from

Revelation 16:13-14, above, that demons are assigned various tasks in their great war against God and mankind. The "**frog**" demons were sent to rally the kings of earth for war on the yet future Great Day of God. Thus I propose that The First Beast is an actual demon chief alongside of Satan whose evil mission gave rise to the wicked Roman Empire. His evil mission was accomplished through the wicked Roman Empire. Thus he is portrayed with ten horns and seven heads illustrative of the Roman Emperors as explained in Revelation 13 and 17. Yet because The Beast stands alongside Satan and is literally cast into the Lake of Fire with Satan, we know that he is also a demonic being.

Likewise for an early mention of a false demonic prophet we read,

20) A spirit came out, stood before Yahweh, and said, "I will entice him." Yahweh said to him, "How?" 21) He said, "I will go, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets." He said, "You will entice him, and will prevail also. Go and do so." 22) Now therefore, behold, Yahweh has put a lying spirit in the mouth of these your prophets; and Yahweh has spoken evil concerning you.

2 Chronicles 18:20-22 (WEB)

Perhaps, this deceiving spirit mentioned in the Old Testament, or another like him, is the demon called "*The False Prophet*" in Revelation 20. Yet identifying the Second Beast with the demonic seems more problematic, at least initially. The First Beast does not seem particularly human, but instead governmental, and so perhaps my proposal that a particular demon empowered Rome does not seem unreasonable. However, the Second Beast instead seems to be more personal and human. In fact, since the Second Beast gets his power from the First Beast he then seems like a human tyrant controlled by a demon, that is by the First Beast. Common candidates for the Second Beast include Nero, Domitian, the Roman Concilia to enforce state worship, the Pope, and numerous others throughout history.

However, just like my proposal that the First Beast was a powerful demon whose work was manifest in the birth and growth of the Roman Empire, so I propose that the Second Beast was a powerful demon whose work was manifest in the wickedness of a Roman Emperor, perhaps Nero or Domitian. Countless hours of effort have been spent in the effort to determine the identity of the Second Beast, The False Prophet, with the mysterious number of "**666**" given in Revelation 13:18 (WEB).

Here is wisdom. He who has understanding, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man. His number is six hundred sixty-six.

The expression "**number of a man**" seems to indicate that "**666**" is the identity of a specific human being. Some efforts at gematria identify Nero as the Second Beast, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Number_of_the_Beast. While this could easily be the case I also propose that Nero, or whoever the actual Second Beast proves to be, was specifically empowered by a demon. Thus the Second Beast demon is finally damned to the Lake of Fire, not the human being he possessed. Though one might question my concern to "save Nero," I am convinced he is saved by the same blood of Christ that saved you and me. The expression above may also be better rendered "**human numbering**," meaning according to human calculation. Consider that the mysterious number "**666**" is referenced at the end of a chapter discussing Satan, The Beast, and the False Prophet. Certainly this triple "6" number must point to the terrible nature of demonic power that falls short of God's perfection in the Holy Trinity. Since "7" is a picture of God's perfection and completeness, the number "**666**" may point to the climax of evil in the Unholy Trinity. What worse scenario can you image than Satan working through a demonic government working through a demonic tyrant?

Revelation 20:10 then finally confirms that the demonic beings of Satan, The Beast, and The False Prophet are damned to the Lake of Fire for The Ages of The Ages. God is not pronouncing doom to mere movements or governments. How does one throw a movement into the Lake of Fire? How does one torment a government for The Ages of The Ages? Instead the only things ever mentioned as thrown into Hades or the Lake of Fire are people and places. Further, it would seem curious for the Holy Spirit to explicitly highlight the damnation of Satan with one government and one government leader. So, for my last point, the common destiny of the Unholy Trinity is likewise strong evidence for the common nature of these three beings. This is especially so since Matthew 25:41 explicitly says that the Lake of Fire is "**prepared for the Devil and his angels.**"

Read more about my understanding of Revelation in my articles in the [Appendix, Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News!](#) and [Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News! \(Part 2 with Grudem, Riddlebarger, Chilton, Summers, and Ewing\).](#)

Finally consider an extra-Biblical comparison. Just as there are three demon leaders (Satan, the Beast, and the False Prophet), so God himself is three persons (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit). The Bible does not highlight this parallel explicitly, but I mention it for you to ponder. You or I might be tempted to think that the salvation and fate of mankind is uncertain and in question. Too often my (and perhaps your) ministry efforts and actions reflect this uncertainty. However, take a moment and fully rest in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Actually, you are advised to rest in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ now and forever! Our eternal destiny rests fully in his hands. Our salvation is not uncertain! Through his grace he does not consider us his enemies, but his chosen family -- redeemed for all eternity.

However, if we are not born again, our birth nature opposes God because our hearts are bad. We crucified Christ, but Christ loves and forgives us. Fallen angels also hate God,

but God has promised to crush the head of Satan. Satan is the true enemy of God in this cosmic spiritual war.

Thus for the demonstration of his grace, God created angels and decreed that some would fall into rebellion and become his enemies destined for the Lake of Fire. Why? Perhaps to help us better understand grace, God decreed a dark frame to contrast his glorious mercy. Apparently grace could not be fully praised and appreciated any other way. The parallels between God's good nature and the evil nature of demons are noteworthy. Consider a comparison of the Holy Trinity with the Unholy Trinity.

Role	Holy Trinity (God is good)	Unholy Trinity (Anti-God is evil)
The Head	The Father	The Devil
The Image	The Son	The Beast
The Voice	The Holy Spirit	The False Prophet

Friends, the salvation of mankind is not uncertain, nor is our salvation in question. But sparks will fly until God throws his enemies (that is, Satan and the fallen angels that follow him) into the Lake of Fire for *The Ages of The Ages*.

1 Corinthians 1:17-25

Consider 1 Corinthians 1:17-25 (WEB),

17) For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the Good News—not in wisdom of words, so that the cross of Christ wouldn't be made void. 18) For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are dying, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19) For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise. I will bring the discernment of the discerning to nothing." 20) Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the lawyer of this world? Hasn't God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 21) For seeing that in the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom didn't know God, it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save those who believe. 22) For Jews ask for signs, Greeks seek after wisdom, 23) but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews, and foolishness to Greeks, 24) but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God; 25) because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

The Bible says that God is so wise that his "*foolishness*" is wiser than our "*wisdom*" and that his "*weakness*" is stronger than our "*strength*." Since this is in the Bible, Christians would all agree with the words above.

Now suppose God used his foolishness and weakness to expose our foolishness and weakness to remind us of our utter dependency upon him for salvation, and that we are saved by grace and not saved even by our understanding or our choices.

How does this relate to our current discussion? No doubt there are many that are beginning to dispute the propositions of this short book. I do not fault your reaction. It certainly is a radically different approach than the more commonly accepted views of Arminianism and Calvinism. Yet, my proposition does not fit neatly into common Universalism, either. Many Universalists wrongly teach that there is no punishment after death for the unbeliever or that unbelievers are punished temporarily in the Lake of Fire. However, I understand that unbelievers are punished after death in Hades, but that no human being will ever enter the Lake of Fire. Based on the preceding reasoning from Scripture, I believe that *ALL* mankind, every individual descendant of Adam and Eve, is deeply loved by God and will certainly be saved from the Lake of Fire by the electing grace of God alone.

You may ask why God did not make it clearer. Why are not more aware of this good news? God has made his love for *ALL* mankind quite clear, but his message is obscured by our hypocrisy and turning Christ into yet another religion. Perhaps the wisdom of God knows best how to lead us sinners from our darkness and dread fear into the glorious light of his salvation. Perhaps he does not want to cast these pearls before those whose hearts are not ready. Perhaps since he has already made eternal salvation from condemnation for all his chosen people a certainty, his focus is now transformational salvation from sin and our hatred of our God. He has won the decision in the courtroom of Heaven, but now intends to win the decision in each of our hearts. Perhaps we cannot know why God did not make it clearer.

You may also ask why God did not just settle all this earlier in history. That is an excellent question as we consider how God has given us additional pieces of revelation

throughout history. Adam and Eve did not even have a Bible, but only the verbal promise that someone was coming, a deliverer. Prophets came and brought the Word of the Lord, the Old Testament, but they were not the deliverer. One day John the Baptist came and announced that someone was here, the deliverer had arrived -- Jesus Christ. His disciples gave us the New Testament. God's word concludes with the words that someone is coming again. The Lord Jesus Christ will return in power and great might for the final salvation of all his people. Until then, we seek to understand his holy Word and obey him as we wait for his return.

Hopefully I have gently exposed the religiosity and hypocrisy that can be found in both Arminianism and Calvinism. The exposure of sin is essential for healing. Doctors cannot heal without a diagnosis, and Christ cannot remove our sin without grabbing the root and pulling it out. That is painful. Yet sin must be pulled out if we are to continue to grow in Christ-likeness and to live for him and others, fully confident in his grace for all.

2 Corinthians 5:14-21

Consider 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 (WEB),

14) For the love of Christ constrains us; because we judge thus, that one died for all, therefore all died. 15) He died for all, that those who live should no longer live to themselves, but to him who for their sakes died and rose again. 16) Therefore we know no one after the flesh from now on. Even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know him so no more. 17) Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new. 18) But all things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ, and gave to us the ministry of reconciliation; 19) namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not reckoning to them their trespasses, and having committed to us the word of reconciliation. 20) We are therefore ambassadors on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21) For him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

This passage clarifies a few things. Just because Jesus has written every human being's name in the Lamb's Book of Life does not mean everyone is saved in every dimension. Christ has died for all mankind, but not all *live*! God has reconciled all mankind to himself through Christ, but not all acknowledge their forgiveness in Christ. All are forgiven, but not all are saved from the prideful refusal to be happy about forgiveness, and others are simply ignorant of the good news. Most of those in the Lamb's Book, the elect, are still unbelieving, and unless they are graced with faith they will suffer punishment in Hades for their unbelief. The first born nature of rebellion still rules their heart.

We know this to be true for no one is born with faith. Each individual must be born again through the Holy Spirit and come to faith in Christ to know God. Even though the unbelieving elect are saved from the Lake of Fire, they are not saved from unbelief and punishment in Hades unless they repent. Even though their names are in the Lamb's Book of Life they will still suffer punishment in Hades for their rebellion. Furthermore, even many Christians who are saved from Hades are also not saved from sin and the consequences of sin. Even though Christians are blessed children of God and saved from Hades, we can still ruin our earthly lives with sin. Salvation has numerous dimensions including rescue from the Lake of Fire, from Hades, and from sin as I discuss in my article, [SAVED 5X](#). Jesus warned that broad is the road to destruction and many enter through it!

Now what if someone were persuaded that his name is in the Book of Life, yet instead of serving Christ in gratitude, he simply lived like the Devil for his selfish interests? Such a person is certainly the fool mentioned in Proverbs 26:4-5. Such a person could hardly dare to call himself a Christian or a follower of Christ. Regardless of the hope of the Good News, such a person really has no hope. Such a person lives a life of fearful expectation of the coming judgment. Furthermore, Romans 10:9 makes it clear that to be truly saved one must both confess with the mouth *and* believe with the heart. Punishment in Hades awaits everyone without a Christian heart. The Scripture has important words of warning for such a person which I will come to shortly.

Again, the Scripture above confirms that Christ has died for all. These verses even explain that all mankind is already positionally reconciled to God *"in Christ"* apart from faith. Most would teach that each individual is placed *"into Christ"* only as he believes in him. But I understand that those predestined to salvation are never outside of God's grace because they are always positionally in Christ. However, as each individual is awakened as a new creation, he *realizes* his position in Christ and begins to live in Christ. The elect of God are in desperate need of the salvation of their hearts through the new birth. However, God's gracious purpose for his chosen ones was decreed before we believed, before we were born, and even before creation. See my article ['In' Doctrine](#) for further discussion.

A related thought is that most Christian theologies suggest that justification, the legal proclamation of our right standing with God, happens per individual either immediately before or after personally trusting Christ. However, I suggest that justification was pronounced for all God's people one time at the cross. Again see my article [Justified!](#) for more details.

Unfortunately too many professing Christians imagine or have been taught that the *free will* choice of *"faith"* is the activating ingredient in our personal salvation. They imagine *"faith"* to be like a string that reaches from their prayer to Heaven's courtroom to hammer the gavel of their justification.

However, picture this: a venomous criminal with only the courtroom floor between himself and the lawful judge that he hates. If the police were not restraining him and the judge's bench was not so high, he would simply reach out and kill the judge. We know this to be accurate imagery because there was one time in history when the judge stepped down from his bench. We know that God's holy angels were commanded to stand by. The good judge gave himself into the hands of the criminal. Mankind universally conspired to kill the Christ! When will such a venomous criminal ever exercise his *free will* to repent? He does not even want to be saved. He does not want to be at peace with the judge. He hates the judge. He wants to kill the judge! He wants to be his own judge... and the judge of everyone else. But he just cannot reach the gavel of justification across the courtroom floor. The true judge will not relinquish the gavel to the criminal because he is the good judge. The criminal cannot change his heart to begin to love the judge because he hates the judge BY HIS VERY NATURE. He is not free, but locked in bondage to sin. Even if the criminal could suddenly begin to be good, it would not be enough to mend the error of his past rebellion. Even if the criminal would magically transform into Mother Teresa, he still must pay the price for his past crimes. Claims of *free will* decisions for Christ and "*faith*" that "*writes our name in Heaven*" simply miss the heart of grace.

The crux of the matter is that Jesus Christ imputed righteousness to our account while we still hated him and while we loved only ourselves, according to Romans 5:10. The essential point is that there will never be any positive change until God himself reaches inside the individual's life to replace his heart of stone with a heart of flesh. The good news is that Christ alone has sacrificed his body and poured his blood on the Father's righteous bench to proclaim our justification. He did this while we criminals were still spitting out venom dressed in our rags of self-righteousness. But the sound of Jesus' gavel silences Satan, the prosecuting attorney, who still drones on listing our sins for an easy indictment. All of this transpires before the courtroom audience. God's holy angels are astonished that Christ could forgive us, the very partners of Satan. They never cease to marvel over God's glorious grace toward his redeemed.

Of course most of us do not appear to be venomous criminals... at least not until our self-righteous attitudes are confronted with God's glorious grace and Christ's love for ALL mankind.

If you are an evangelist consider that the purpose of evangelism is NOT to add names to the Book of Life! How can we do that anyway? Instead, consider that the purpose of evangelism is to bring the elect of God from unbelief to belief, from spiritual death to spiritual life, from disobedience to obedience, and from certain punishment with the wicked in Hades to joyful communion with Christ... to receive Christ's finished work on their behalf.

Lastly, 2 Corinthians 5:16 also tells us that we are not to view others from a worldly point of view. The world believes that some are evil, but only those who do good meet a good end. Someone once told me that all unbelievers think that everyone will be saved in the end. Friends, I have yet to meet an unbeliever who thinks that all are saved. They typically believe there are at least enough people worse than them to fill the seats in Hell so that they will not have to go there. Thus on this point, Arminianism and Calvinism both speak from a worldly point of view.

John 10:25-30

Consider John 10:25-30 (WEB),

25) Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you don't believe. The works that I do in my Father's name, these testify about me. 26) But you don't believe, because you are not of my sheep, as I told you. 27) My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28) I give eternal life to them. They will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29) My Father who has given them to me is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand. 30) I and the Father are one."

This seems to be a problematic passage for those believing that all mankind is finally saved. Here Jesus tells the unbelieving Jews that they are "*not his sheep*." The Lord's grave words at the Sheep and Goat judgment used in Matthew 25:31-46 suggest that there are only two categories of people in the whole world. There are sheep (of the lost and found variety) and goats. Doctrines like predestination and particular atonement teach us that goats do not become sheep, and sheep do not become goats. Sheep are the redeemed people of God, while goats are the unredeemed. So are these unbelieving Jews then goats with no hope of salvation?

Perhaps I have concluded too hastily and we need to drop back to the Calvinist understanding of the gospel.

In fact, this is one of the passages that led me to a Calvinistic understanding of the gospel in the past. The message seems clear enough, so what else could be concluded? The message seemed clear until I read Hosea 2:23.

Hosea 2:23

Consider Hosea 2:23 (WEB),

***I will sow her to me in the earth; and
I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy; and
I will tell those who were not my people, "You are my people;"
and they will say, "My God!"***

This passage is peculiar in that God specifically calls rebellious Israel *"not my people."* But after he has changed their hearts he reverts to calling them *"my people."* We have already said that sheep do not become goats and goats do not become sheep. Yet here those who are *"not his people"*, then become *"his people."* These words parallel Jesus' words of calling the stubborn Pharisees *"not my sheep"*, but those who repented he then calls *"my sheep."*

Why doesn't God call rebellious Israel simply *"my bad people?"* Perhaps God is willing to call a *"lost sheep"* a *"goat"* or actually *"not a sheep"* in order to get their attention. For an extreme example consider that Jesus even called Peter *"Satan"* to his face in Matthew 16:23. Was Peter then actually Satan? Certainly not! So why should we be surprised if he calls the unbelieving Jews, the rebellious elect, *"not his sheep"*, even though they are the *"lost sheep"* of his pasture? Furthermore, our wicked hearts need to be so radically changed that we become new people. We must be born again.

The story is told of a father with a rebellious son. The son rebelled further and further from family values until the father firmly and painfully told the rebel, *"You are not my son."* The ice of those words combined with time and reflection brought the father's son back to his senses and heartfelt repentance. The father received him with open arms weeping with joy over his son.

This strategy, which I call the *"Hosea Strategy"*, is an integral component of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Note also that Paul references Hosea 2:23 in Romans 9:25. Romans Chapter 9 is the most difficult and avoided chapter in the whole New Testament. The chapter is often avoided by Christians because it appears to teach that God hates people and has chosen some people for salvation and others for eternal damnation before they were even born.

However, I suggest that you re-read the Romans Chapter 9 with the insight that God does have special strategies, such as the Hosea Strategy, for confronting unbelief in mankind.

Paul threatens in Romans 9:18-24 (WEB),

18) So then, he has mercy on whom he desires, and he hardens whom he desires. 19) You will say then to me, "Why does he still find fault? For who withstands his will?" 20) But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed ask him who formed it, "Why did you make me like this?" 21) Or hasn't the potter a right over the clay, from the same lump to make one part a vessel for honor, and another for dishonor? 22) What if God, willing to show his wrath and to make his power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23) and that he might make known the riches of his glory on vessels of mercy, which he prepared beforehand for glory, 24) us, whom he also called, not from the Jews only, but also from the Gentiles?

Yet Paul promises in Romans 9:25-26 (WEB),

25) As he says also in Hosea, "I will call them 'my people,' which were not my people; and her 'beloved,' who was not beloved." 26) "It will be that in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'children of the living God.' "

I have written further on this subject in my article, [Hosea 1:10, Optimism Out of Control, Part 2: In the Same Place!](#)

Proverbs 26:4-5

Consider Proverbs 26:4-5 (WEB), which I mentioned in the beginning of this book,

4) Don't answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him. 5) Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.

If God does have special strategies for dealing with unbelief in mankind, does he give us any explanation or instruction to do likewise ourselves? I introduced this book with a story about the Wright brothers and the special strategies they used to persuade others that flight is possible. Believing in flight does have a very practical importance. However, believing that Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of the whole world is infinitely more important. The good news should change the importance and priority of everything. If we truly know God's love, we will be filled with affection for him and love for our neighbor.

Yet sadly, just like people did not believe the Wright brothers, people also do not believe the gospel and reject Jesus and his love. Therefore, Jesus has given us an example in John Chapter 10 of how to confront unbelief as we already discussed. Solomon has also given us an instruction, cited above, for answering foolishness, a special strategy for dealing with unbelief.

Now we see that one reason the body of Christ is ridiculously divided over the gospel is because our unbelief, hypocrisy, and religiosity has blinded us. We have not seen the beautiful truth that Christ is the savior of all mankind. We have interpreted the words of Scripture as if God only ever throws straight fast balls. However, the Scripture above shows us that God also throws curve balls to the unbelieving. I suggest that God's Word is perfectly worded to answer both the foolish and the wise.

It would appear that many, including myself at times, have interpreted Jesus' answers to the foolish as wisdom and so have joined the unbelieving in their folly.

The Word of God truly has laid our hearts bare before his penetrating gaze. Thankfully, there is grace.

Jonah 3

Consider another well-known example of God's special strategies for confronting the wickedness of men. Consider the story of Jonah and the whale. Most know that Jonah was swallowed by a large fish and dramatically saved. So this '*happily ever after story*' often finds itself in Children's storybooks along with cuddly stuffed whales. However, the whole story is both more dramatic and more joyful than commonly portrayed. Find the book of Jonah in the Old Testament and read it for yourself.

Did you also know that this story reveals yet another tactic that God may employ to graciously move his people away from the destructiveness of evil?

1. God told Jonah to preach against the sin of Nineveh to help them.
2. Jonah did not want grace to come to Nineveh so he ran away.
3. So God stopped Jonah with a storm and a large fish.
4. Then Jonah had a change of heart in the belly of the fish.
5. Then God commanded the fish to vomit Jonah onto dry land...

Now let's pick up the story at Jonah Chapter 3 (WEB),

1) Yahweh's word came to Jonah the second time, saying, 2) "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I give you." 3) So Jonah arose, and went to Nineveh, according to Yahweh's word. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey across. 4) Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried out, and said, "In forty days, Nineveh will be overthrown!" 5) The people of Nineveh believed God; and they proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from their greatest even to their least. 6) The news reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and took off his royal robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. 7) He made a proclamation and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, "Let neither man nor animal, herd nor flock, taste anything; let them not feed, nor drink water; 8) but let them be covered with sackcloth, both man and animal, and let them cry mightily to God. Yes, let them turn everyone from his evil way, and from the violence that is in his hands. 9) Who knows whether God will not turn and relent, and turn away from his fierce anger, so that we might not perish?" 10) God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way. God relented of the disaster which he said he would do to them, and he didn't do it.

How are we to understand this?

God said, through Jonah, that Nineveh would be overthrown in 40 days. However, Nineveh repented and was not overthrown. So did God lie or misrepresent himself? His word to Nineveh included no condition, just a flat statement that Nineveh would be overthrown in 40 days -- period. Yet Nineveh was not overthrown in 40 days, but instead spared because of their repentance. Let's consider three possible explanations.

1. **God's threat of overthrow included an unspoken condition.** That is one possible interpretation, however, the Ninevites' words in response suggest otherwise. The Ninevites said, "*Who knows whether God will not turn and relent, and turn away from his fierce anger, so that we might not perish?*" So it is clear that the Ninevites were not aware of mercy conditioned on their repentance. In fact they clearly did not know if God would relent even if they repented! From their point of view they were moved to repent for the mere possibility that God might relent and offer mercy.
2. **Jonah spoke of overthrow, but that was not the message God intended.** This is not a valid understanding either. The Holy Spirit makes it clear that Jonah's words were in fact God's words to Nineveh. The Scripture says, "*Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried out, and said, 'In forty days, Nineveh will be overthrown!' The people of Nineveh believed God;*" The message of overthrow in 40 days was from God through Jonah.
3. **God threatened powerfully for a guaranteed effect.** A final possibility is that God threatened Nineveh so powerfully that his intended effect, the Ninevites' repentance, was guaranteed. With this model of understanding we suggest that God's *sovereign* plan never intended to overthrow Nineveh in 40 days and that his words were a threat only -- guaranteed to result in Nineveh's repentance. He spoke his threat persuasively to guarantee his purpose. Though, one very very very important caveat to this understanding is that we can only conclude this in retrospect! To respond to any of God's warnings concluding that he is making a mere threat and will not follow through is not recommended. We are advised to repent hoping that God may extend mercy.

So do I propose that God employs this same tactic through the gospel of Jesus Christ?

One way he certainly does not employ this tactic is to merely threaten the unbelieving with judgment and punishment in Hades. Jesus does not simply threaten the fires of Hades; the unbelieving, wicked dead are actually sent there. Some would suggest Luke 16:19-31 is a parable, yet it has none of the elements of a parable. The rich man who refused to help poor Lazarus was sent to Hades fire, as Jesus makes quite plain. Consider also that Revelation 20:5 makes it clear that the unbelieving dead remain dead in Hades while believers live. Thus it is again clear that Hades is not empty, but filled with the unbelieving. Revelation 20:13 also says that Hades then finally gives up these wicked dead. So again Hades is not empty or how could Hades give up the dead? Jesus also preached hope by saying in Matthew 16:18 that grace would overcome the gates of Hades. Hades needs to be overcome because it is filled with wicked men who have yet to acknowledge their redemption. Why does Christ need to overcome the gates of Hades if no one is being punished there? Paul even joins the chorus in 1 Corinthians 15:55 saying that Christ will steal all victory from both death and Hades! Hades will be finally robbed of all victory when the grace of God proves victorious even for the unbelieving elect currently being punished there. The gospel warnings of punishment in Hades after death for the unbelieving disobedient are not a threat, but certain reality. Friend, take care!

However, we also see that Christ is willing to call his "*lost sheep*," "*not my sheep*" in John 10:26. He is also willing to call "*his people*," "*not my people*" and his "*loved one*," "*not my loved one*" in Hosea 2:23. Now this tactic is very similar to God's strategy with Nineveh. The strategy is also very fitting. Consider just what an unbeliever really is in the first place. An unbeliever is one of God's precious creations, deeply loved by God and redeemed by Christ, who rejects the love and forgiveness of our Heavenly Father in order to remain god of his own life. He rejects his election just as Esau rejected his birthright... for a bowl of soup. Jesus is perfectly willing to label these wicked unbelievers as non-elect, not his sheep, not his people, not his chosen. Just like God wanted the Ninevites to fear destruction, so the unbelieving elect can only fear eternal damnation. However, just like the Ninevites repented and were not destroyed, so the love of Christ has already guaranteed the final salvation of all his chosen people. Not one of Christ's elect can ever stumble into the Lake of Fire, but will be brought to repentance sooner... or later.

Though all mankind is chosen for the atonement of sins, most are not yet chosen to simply believe this good news about their redemption. Yet even so, they are loved by God from before the foundation of the world with a guaranteed home in Heaven.

The story of Jonah and Nineveh is another example of God's special, gracious strategies to care for rebellious, unbelieving mankind.

Acts 13:48

Consider Acts 13:48 (WEB),

As the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of God. As many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

This verse is commonly cited by Calvinists to defend their view that Christ has only atoned for the sins of a subset of mankind. The verse seems to say that everyone who is appointed to eternal life will believe immediately when they hear the gospel. However, in light of our discussion we see instead that the Holy Spirit is recognizing God's election in those who believed, while at the same time offering no assurance to the unbelieving elect in their rebellion. The elect of God often remain in stubborn unbelief even after hearing the gospel. This verse does not mean that they are not elect and not loved by God, and never will believe. Instead, all the unbelieving elect will believe, sooner... or later. However, no comfort will be given to the wicked until they repent.

The Apostle John uses a similar strategy on the positive side of the equation when he refers to himself as the "disciple whom Jesus loved." Should we be offended that he singles himself out as the one whom Jesus loved? No. Instead we should wake up, smile, and say "I also am the disciple whom Jesus loves!"

God's special love does not mean that his love is therefore limited. I tell each of my children that they are my favorites. So when I focus my special love on one child, that does not mean I no longer love the others. Instead, I love each of my children in a special way. God, even more so, loves each human being with his special love.

Let's Celebrate!



These observations are a cause for great celebration... at least for believers and me.

As I explained, questions about the extent of God's grace in salvation grew like a dark cloud in my life, clouding my relationship with Christ. I was not sure I would be able to rejoice in Heaven. I needed to agree that Christ had done the right thing in saving some while eternally damning others. Yet I could not and so continued to search the Bible for answers.

In the end, my own hypocrisy and blindness were exposed, but the good news totally erased the pain of my error!

I guess we could feel badly about the sentencing of Satan, The Beast, and The False Prophet to the Lake of Fire. However, for me it was not quite the same concern to think about Satan going to the Lake of Fire as my family member or my neighbor. Furthermore, my own escape from eternal damnation is guaranteed by the same love God has for all mankind. Yet now I can agree that when God sentences an unbeliever to an eon in Hades that he has simply been assigned to a punishment that is fit for his unregenerate nature. Without the new birth, we do truly hate God; Hades is a fitting punishment. Unbelievers would not even want to go to Heaven where God is praised openly all day long. Yet, I also have the hope that the "*gates of Hades*" will not prevail against the grace of God as I first explained in my article, [Matthew 16:15-21, Optimism Out of Control](#).

We may prefer to hold on to familiar theological systems. We may prefer the company of the majority view. Unfortunately these choices may neglect the truth. Beware. We miss great joy when salvation is tainted with even the smallest work of man. If we supply even the tiniest condition to our salvation then grace is no longer grace. The party is ruined. We also miss great assurance if we limit God's love to an imaginary subset of mankind. How then can we be confident that God loves us unconditionally if he does not love all? If we suggest any limitation to the atonement of Christ then we add hypocrisy to the invitation list. The party is over.

I invite you to a radical reconsideration of your Christian faith... if you have faith. I invite you to believe that Jesus Christ is the Savior of all mankind. In fact your own salvation is wholly dependent upon this truth! So I invite you to believe that the burning passionate love of God for all mankind places all mankind, from Mother Teresa to Hitler, on equal ground at the foot of the cross. Why join the majority of mankind who continue to cling to self-righteousness of some form or another? Why refuse to believe that **Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind?**

Yet we know that in order to demonstrate his patient grace, God allows the majority of mankind to continue in unbelief. God has ordained the existence of sin and allows mankind's ongoing rebellion against him for one reason only: to show off his grace.

Romans Chapter 11 gives an explanation of the dynamic of belief and unbelief among the elect and explains the future party that is planned when faith is finally awakened in all God's people -- even the hardest hearted. Join me and read the Chapter in full.

Romans 11:1-32

Read Romans 11:1-32 (WEB), again,

1) I ask then, did God reject his people? May it never be! For I also am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. 2) God didn't reject his people, which he foreknew. Or don't you know what the Scripture says about Elijah? How he pleads with God against Israel: 3) "Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have broken down your altars. I am left alone, and they seek my life." 4) But how does God answer him? "I have reserved for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." 5) Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. 6) And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.

7) What then? That which Israel seeks for, that he didn't obtain, but the chosen ones obtained it, and the rest were hardened. 8) According as it is written, "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear, to this very day."

9) David says, "Let their table be made a snare, a trap, a stumbling block, and a retribution to them. 10) Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see. Always keep their backs bent."

11) I ask then, did they stumble that they might fall? May it never be! But by their fall salvation has come to the Gentiles, to provoke them to jealousy. 12) Now if their fall is the riches of the world, and their loss the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fullness?

13) For I speak to you who are Gentiles. Since then as I am an apostle to Gentiles, I glorify my ministry; 14) if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh, and may save some of them. 15) For if the rejection of them is the reconciling of the world, what would their acceptance be, but life from the dead? 16) If the first fruit is holy, so is the lump. If the root is holy, so are the branches. 17) But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the root and of the richness of the olive tree, 18) don't boast over the branches. But if you boast, it is not you who support the root, but the root supports you. 19) You will say then, 'Branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in.' 20) True; by their unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by your faith. Don't be conceited, but fear; 21) for if God didn't spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you.

22) See then the goodness and severity of God. Toward those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in his goodness; otherwise you also will be cut off. 23) They also, if they don't continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. 24) For if you were cut out of that which is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree, how much more will these, which are the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?

25) For I don't desire you to be ignorant, brothers, of this mystery, so that you won't be wise in your own conceits, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, 26) and so all Israel will be saved. Even as it is written,

"There will come out of Zion the Deliverer, and he will turn away ungodliness from Jacob. 27) This is my covenant with them, when I will take away their sins."

28) Concerning the Good News, they are enemies for your sake. But concerning the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sake. 29) For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. 30) For as you in time past were disobedient to God, but now have obtained mercy by their disobedience, 31) even so these also have now been disobedient, that by the mercy shown to you they may also obtain mercy. 32) For God has bound all to disobedience, that he might have mercy on all.

33) Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out! 34) "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" 35) "Or who has first given to him, and it will be repaid to him again?" 36) For of him, and through him, and to him are all things. To him be the glory for ever! Amen.

Are you still God's enemy? Do you doubt? Are you ready to celebrate with God and his family? God has promised to turn away ungodliness from Jacob! God has promised that his gifts and calling are irrevocable! God's love for the unbelieving elect will not fail! Are you now ready to lay aside conditional salvation? Have you received the unconditional love of Christ?

Lord, give me boldness to make disciples through the gospel of grace!

Final Analysis

In the final analysis both Arminianism and Calvinism wittingly or unwittingly bend Scripture to fit their model of salvation. Of course everyone knows that faith must also be reasonable. Thus we might stretch our interpretations of Scripture to fit the best models available to us. Furthermore, since Arminianism and Calvinism are both considered orthodox and commonly accepted, perhaps that is why followers of Jesus Christ have not been able to find unity even on the critical doctrine of Christian salvation. Yet I am convinced the Biblical view is that Christ is the savior of all mankind. Let's take one last look at our *Salvation Evaluator* matrix.

SALVATION EVALUATOR	PART OF MANKIND	ALL OF MANKIND
PART OF SALVATION	REJECTED BY ALL	ARMINIANISM C.S. LEWIS
ALL OF SALVATION	CALVINISM JAMES BOICE	CHRIST SAVIOR OF ALL

Let's note the strengths and weakness of each view.

PART for PART: REJECTED BY ALL

The weakness in this view is seen by nearly everyone and the view is rejected.

PART for ALL: ARMINIANISM

This is the most common view found in Christendom. However, the idea that mankind has a *free will* to choose faith is simply not supported in Scripture and misses the good news that we are saved instead because of God's free will. Many proponents reason that the existence of *free will* is *implied* by the fact that we are commanded to trust Jesus. They reason that if God asks us to do something then we must have the ability to do it. Yet has anyone, except Christ, demonstrated the ability to obey God's commands without sin? Arminian reasoning also neglects the clear Bible teaching that we are spiritually dead unless we are individually made alive by the Holy Spirit. A dead person is not *free* to do anything. We must be born again for spiritual life to begin. Moreover, grace would not be grace if any condition of salvation rested with the individual person. These compromises are bad enough, but the greatest was admitted by C.S. Lewis when he said that God arrested his sovereignty to allow for the "*possibility*" that people would choose or not choose him with their *free will*. Arminianism is guilty of deposing God to make way for *free will* so that man can be god of his own salvation. Adherents of this view are guilty of exalting their *free will* over the glory of God's sovereign grace and are in fact worshiping an imaginary god. Consider the difference between two simple testimonies. One man claims he is saved because he chose Christ. Another man trusts that Christ chose him. Which testimony gives praise to God's grace? Friends, there is no Biblical defense that God is not sovereign or that he ever momentarily ceased to be the God of our salvation. This is good news for us because God's gracious choices are trustworthy!

ALL for PART: CALVINISM

There are very few true Calvinists, but most modify their position in some way allowing for a *free will* choice of faith. Once while in an "*iron sharpening*" session with a brother, he asserted that the two great pillars of the church are God's sovereignty and man's *free will*. I am sure he is not alone in that assertion. But those are hardly the two pillars of the church. The companion truth to God's sovereignty is not man's *free will*, but instead man's *responsibility* for his sin. Some oppose the idea that God is sovereign over both good and evil, claiming that then we would no longer be responsible for our sin. Yet the Scripture is clear in Romans Chapter 9 that both are true: God is sovereign over sin and we are responsible for our sin. Those who continue to object to this truth must simply answer God's question to them in Romans 9:20. Yet, true Calvinists are commended for holding fast to the sovereignty of God. However, they also hold to the indefensible position that Christ effectively died for only a subset of mankind. As such they undermine the incarnation and the very person of Christ and his vicarious atonement. The critical heart of salvation is that the death of Christ on the cross serves as a substitute for the death we deserve. We all deserve an eternal death penalty for our rebellion against God, but Christ literally died in our place. Holy God cannot overlook justice, but justice was satisfied in our Heavenly trial by the death of Christ. So we ask: did Christ represent all mankind on the cross, or only a subset of mankind? The Scripture is clear in Romans 5 that Jesus has replaced Adam as the new federal head of mankind and so he represents ALL. I have focused on this point in my article, [Romans 5:12-21, Out of Control Optimism Part 7](#),

Many = Many = All = All. There is absolutely no Biblical defense to see it any other way. The Calvinist is likewise just as misguided as the Arminian. The Arminian view ultimately deposes God from his sovereign throne, while the Calvinist view undermines the greatest work of God the Son: his incarnation and substitutionary atonement for the sins of all mankind.

ALL for ALL: CHRIST SAVIOR OF ALL

Likewise there are few who believe that Christ will save all mankind. Someone once suggested that the majority of unbelievers are Universalists. However, the truth is that the majority of unbelievers are Arminian or Calvinist in theology. If they believe God exists at all, they think he is a good guy that will save those who make the grade or those who choose God with their supposed *free will*. They believe that everyone has the ability to choose to trust Jesus and live a good life. Since they imagine themselves better than Hitler and other evil people they hope to meet the condition of being "*good enough*" and pass the test. Or if they realize that they failed the test, they somehow imagine that they are the subset of students given the gracious gift of a passing grade while the rest are flunked.

Furthermore, the few Christian Universalists that do exist are not unified, each interpreting the Scripture in different ways as summarized in the Wikipedia article *Christian Universalism*. This article categorizes Christian Universalists as evangelical, charismatic, and liberal, each answering the difficult question of Hell and eternal damnation in different ways. For example, many Universalists explain away Hell suggesting that Luke 16:19-31 is merely a parable, which we have already concluded is unbiblical.

Three Christian Universalists that have caught my attention are *Madeleine L'Engle*, *John Wesley Hanson*, and *Abraham Lincoln*. L'Engle had a simple confidence that the grace of God would somehow answer our unanswered questions in the end and be victorious for all mankind. Sadly she was rejected by mainstream Christianity for her beliefs. (As an aside, she has always made an impression on me ever since my 6th grade atheist teacher read *A Wrinkle in Time* out loud to the class.) Hanson on the other hand is a well thought out evangelical Universalist theologian, most noted for his classic work, *The Greek Word Aion - Aionios Translated Everlasting - Eternal in the Holy Bible Shown to Denote Limited Duration*. This classic work is available for free from the U.S. Library of Congress website and also [from my website](#). He was likewise rejected by "orthodox" Christianity. Dr. Heleen Keizer has also written a dissertation proving the same titled, *Life, Time, Entirety - A Study of Aion in Greek Literature and Philosophy, the Septuagint and Philo*. You can read her [315 page dissertation online](#) or an [abstract of her conclusions from my website](#). Finally, Abraham Lincoln is known and respected by all, yet few know that he also held to Christian Universalism.

Sadly one can believe variations of Arminianism, Calvinism, or even try to stand on the mystery in the middle and be accepted in most churches today -- as long as you believe that the majority of mankind will be eternally damned to the Lake of Fire. This is a most curious and even pitiable indictment of present day orthodoxy. Arminianism and Calvinism vehemently oppose each other, yet adherents could happily attend almost any church while holding either view as long as they agree that most of mankind is eternally damned. How can Christian love of the truth withstand this terrible inconsistency yet be unwilling to consider that Jesus Christ did *ALL* for *ALL* mankind?

I have proved that Arminianism fails to worship God for his sovereignty. I have also proved that Calvinism fails to worship Christ for his incarnation and vicarious atonement. So 1) is there any solid Biblical defense for the position that Christ will save even the unbelieving men he calls "not my sheep?" 2) Is it truly possible that the unbelieving could be punished in Hades, yet be extracted safely and spared from the Lake of Fire? 3) Does Biblical Universalism properly warn the unbelieving of their certain punishment after death?

The answers to these three questions are yes, yes, and yes!

1) YES, there is ample Biblical defense to show that Jesus' label of "*not my sheep*" does not mean that these people are not elect. As already explained, Hosea 2:23 makes it clear that the same unbelieving people called "*not my people*" are then called "*my people*" when they have repented and trusted God. Another clear passage that is also connected to our Romans 11:32 interpretation is Romans 11:28 (WEB), "**Concerning the Good News, they are enemies for your sake. But concerning the election, they are beloved for the father's sake.**"

So even though the unbelieving are considered enemies for their rejection of the gospel, they are still loved on account of election. They are the rebellious elect. Isaiah 53:6 reminds us that we, all mankind that is, are sheep gone astray.

2) YES, there is ample Biblical defense to show that Hades is emptied at the Great White Throne judgment as already explained in Revelation 20:13-14. When the Sheep and Goats stand before King Jesus, redeemed mankind on the right will be finally saved, even to the surprise of the newly believing humans (Matthew 25:37-39), while the fallen angels on the left are banished to the Lake of Fire for *The Ages of The Ages*. You may say that this is impossible because the New Testament consistently warns unbelieving humans of their eternal punishment. I hope to speak to that in the pages ahead.

3) YES, Biblical Universalism certainly does warn the unbelieving. Biblical Universalism states quite plainly that the sins of both believing and unbelieving mankind are forgiven based solely on the work of Christ and that nothing can ever separate us from the unconditional love of Christ. However, if unbelievers do not repent from their self-righteousness

and trust that Christ has already paid for their sins and the sins of all mankind apart from all conditions, then they will most certainly be punished for the duration in the fires of Hades.

Happy Hypocrites!

The choice is before us.

Years ago someone introduced me to the concept of being a happy sinner. We might think that until we are in Heaven that the trials of this life can serve absolutely no good purpose. We might think that until we are safely in Heaven with Jesus that our eyes should only be filled with tears for our current trials. Surely God does not want us to take sadistic pleasure in our trials. However, an engaged woman spends little time in gloom for not being married! Instead she is busy making preparations because she is soon to be married to the man of her dreams!

Jesus likewise took no joy in the suffering of his cross. But he did look beyond the suffering to the joy he would purchase. Hebrews 12:1-3 (WEB) says,

1) Therefore let's also, seeing we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let's run with perseverance the race that is set before us, 2) looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3) For consider him who has endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, that you don't grow weary, fainting in your souls.

Jesus endured the cross, but he did not enjoy it! The joy he looked forward to was the eternal fellowship he purchased with us, his chosen people, and his Heavenly Father.

Let's strive to get ready, discarding the hypocrisy in our lives as we get ready to walk down the aisle with him and all of God's chosen ones. We will not reach perfection in this life, but for his sake we strive to give him our *"utmost for his highest."* Then on that awesome day our bridegroom will snap his fingers and erase all of our remaining sin, and we will walk down that aisle with him in perfect glory!

Partying Pagans?

Perfect glory awaits all God's people in Heaven, but we are far from that now. So what should we do? Martin Luther said, *"Be a sinner and sin boldly, but believe and rejoice in Christ even more boldly."* Really? Sin boldly?

Yes!

As much as we may strive to get ready for that great wedding day, there is something even more important than making progress in righteousness. Really? Sure, we should make progress in right living. But even more importantly, we must testify to God's grace in our lives, telling the world that even the best Christian is still a sinner till the day he dies. In fact as we get closer to Christ, we are even more aware of just how far away from him we really are. Just how close do we think we are when we compare our lives with Holy God himself? Some unbelievers might have a better sense of their standing than some of us Christians! They might laugh at the idea of Christians trying to imitate God. And it is a laughable undertaking. Yet God commands us to follow him and he empowers us with his Holy Spirit.

The point is that you and I should remember to enjoy and praise Christ our savior even in the midst of our sinfulness.

Paul said in Philippians 2:17-18 (WEB),

17) Yes, and if I am poured out on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice, and rejoice with you all. 18) In the same way, you also rejoice, and rejoice with me.

While in the midst of the agony of pouring out his life to serve others, Paul invited his Christian brothers to be glad. Wise Solomon also says in Ecclesiastes 5:19 (WEB),

19) Every man also to whom God has given riches and wealth, and has given him power to eat of it, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labor—this is the gift of God.

So there is little value in seeking sadness when happiness is a gift of God. There is enough sadness from day to day without hunting for more. Yet Solomon also says in Ecclesiastes 12:12-14 (WEB),

12) Furthermore, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh. 13) This is the end of the matter. All has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. 14) For God will bring every work into judgment, with every hidden thing, whether it is good, or whether it is evil.

We are right to enjoy God and the life he has given us. God does not want us walking around on egg shells pretending that we have not sinned! There is no point in hiding our sin from the Lord. Yet we are also warned to keep God's commands. One day we will stand before him at the judgment and every hidden thing will be revealed.

However, because of grace we can be happy and enjoy God right now in the midst of our struggle with sin. Yet we should also be motivated to obey him and please him. To help you understand this dynamic, imagine a relationship with a perfect father. The perfect father would be good and fun while caring for us in his home. He would also be fair and just in disciplining us as needed.

Now quit imagining because God is our perfect Heavenly Father!

RSVP Review

Yes, God is our perfect Heavenly Father, but are we his good children?

While putting my thesis into words I conducted an informal interview for feedback. Talking out ideas with others can be very useful to develop one's own understanding. Good questions can also be very useful to get to the heart of the matter with others. Jesus asked his disciples questions frequently. So I asked numerous people this question:

What would be your reaction if you learned that the grace of Christ ultimately saved all mankind in the end, both believer and unbeliever?

The following answers expose serious problems in the average evangelical Christian's understanding of grace.

1. *"You have a case of optimism out of control."*

That was one response and the namesake of this book. The response offers a thumbs up for trying, but still only smiles at me as if I were insane.

2. *"That would not be fair after all our effort."*

This response indicates a serious misunderstanding of grace. Biblical grace is at least defined by most Christians as God's unmerited favor toward the redeemed, even if there is disagreement on the details. Some have used the acronym G.R.A.C.E., (God's Riches At Christ's Expense), to define salvation very simply. That being the case, then grace is already *unfair* by definition. We all deserve eternal death for our sin, yet God graciously decided to save his people. How is it then sensible that one saved person could say it is *"not fair"* that another person is also *unfairly* saved - regardless of the circumstance? If even one is saved, that is already unfair. What would be the problem with God unfairly saving a few more or all? It may be that the one quoted above has never really received grace in his heart, but has only memorized the traditional Christian lingo.

3. *"Then there would be no reason to refrain from sin."*

This response is very similar to the one above and likewise indicates a serious misunderstanding about grace. This person must believe that he is saved from condemnation by his efforts to refrain from sin. He must imagine that he has refrained from sin just enough when compared to other worse sinners. He must think that he has made the grade and is saved while the others are condemned. But just where does he draw the line? Just how good do we need to be in order to be saved? Are we saved if we are *"not terrible?"* Are we saved if we are simply a positive number on the scale? Or is it much tougher -- do we need to be almost perfect? No. None of these human scales of righteousness are

sufficient. According to God's word and his perfect holiness, absolutely no sin or impurity can stand in his presence. None! Simply trying to refrain from sin is not enough for a sinner to gain Heaven. Furthermore, Christians do not obey Christ because of the threat of Hell, but because of his unconditional love! This person's argument against God's love for all mankind is instead an awkward testimony to his own unbelief and self-righteousness.

4. *"Well I guess that would be okay, whatever God decides."*

This response is deadpan apathy. Yikes! Understanding grace in one's own life seems like a reason for deep passion and empathy towards others. One would think that seeing grace in another person's life would also be a reason for great joy. The grace of God, when understood -- even minimally -- breaks us out of our self-centered shell to know love for someone else besides ourselves. It is like welcoming a new family member into the household. It is cause for celebration! So how could someone who understands grace, even in the least, have such an apathetic response to the question? It would be like receiving a million dollar inheritance, being cured of cancer, and getting married to the girl of your dreams all on the same day. Then when you learn that the same thing happened to your brother and neighbor you respond by saying, *"Whatever."* Again, the one quoted above may say he is saved by grace, but deep inside, something in his heart has grown foul.

5. *"That would probably be awesome in heaven, but it is certainly not great now."*

This ambivalent response is hard for me to understand. On one hand there is an intellectual agreement that this would be awesome. Yet on the other hand there is a very bold confession of a sinful attitude. Perhaps the one quoted is just a painfully honest hypocrite. Perhaps, the question caught him off guard and there was a guarded response. Perhaps there is wishful thinking fighting with doubts. Whatever the reason, the expected high flying joy is definitely having trouble taking flight.

6. *"There must be a compromise between Arminian and Calvinistic thought."*

Another insisted that there must be a compromise between Arminian and Calvinistic thought. He felt it may not be immediately evident, but there must be ground to stand on between *ALL or PART* of God's role in redemption, or a line to stand on between *ALL or PART* of mankind. However, neither the theologian Boice, nor the philosopher Lewis thought there was ground in the middle. Realistically the only place to stand between those options is 1) do not know, 2) do not want to know, or 3) do not care. Yet most people attempt to straddle the fence, like the one quoted above. Understandably, it is a challenge to our understanding. The Bible is clear that people are punished in Hell, so the *ALL for ALL* combination does not seem like a viable option at first blush. However, are we willing to have hope that the grace of Christ will even conquer the gates of Hell as he promised in Matthew 16:18 (WEB)? ***"I also tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my assembly, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it."***

7. ... [no response, silence, next subject] ...

The most curious response I received was absolutely no response, silence, and a turn to the next subject. I can at least relate to the sinful hearts expressed above because of my own sinful heart. However, to have zero response seems the oddest response of all to me. Perhaps we are so calloused and spiritually desensitized that thoughts of God, judgment, eternal bliss, and eternal damnation no longer evoke any emotion whatsoever. Then again, Jesus faced the same challenge in his own generation as recorded in Matthew 11:16-19 (WEB). His contemporaries would neither dance nor mourn when he spoke the truth.

16) But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces, who call to their companions 17) and say, "We played the flute for you, and you didn't dance. We mourned for you, and you didn't lament." 18) For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon." 19) The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!" But wisdom is justified by her children.

Jesus also told a parable relevant to the responses above. The Parable of the Wedding Banquet in Matthew 22:1-14 (WEB) gives us a picture of apathetic responses to a wedding invitation. Verse 3 says ***"[the king] sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the marriage feast, but they would not come."***

Each of the Christians quoted above wants to come to the *"wedding banquet"* of Jesus. However, the banquet they imagine is not very joyful. There is no celebration of the victory of God's grace over sin for mankind. Instead it sounds more like a poo poo party.

Though, one person replied to my interview question,

8. "That would be plain awesome."

This response seems like the only sensible reaction for someone saved by grace.

I know my question and the responses above do not offer any additional Biblical defense for my position. However, they do reveal that the hearts of those professing to be Christians quoted in #1-7 above are not standing on ground more solid than I. In fact, those quoted are standing on very shaky ground. Moreover, the most common evangelical Christian responses were incriminatingly devoid of grace. The Bible says, "**For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks**" (Matthew 12:34 WEB). The answers from these mouths have exposed some fairly wicked hearts. I can understand each of them too well. All is not lost, however, for these ugly responses barely come close to matching my own sin.

Forgetting what is behind, let's continue learning about the grace that has covered all. Lord willing we will discover if there are solid Biblical answers to the many objections that Jesus Christ is the savior of all mankind.

Mystery in the Middle

Hopefully I have persuaded you to consider the weaknesses of the popular traditional salvation models. Both Arminianism and Calvinism are reasonable at points, but unreasonable at other points. These facts ought to be enough cause for every Christian to consider the interpretation of Scripture that Christ is victorious in the salvation of all mankind. Yet perhaps you still do not feel comfortable with *ALL of PART*, or *PART of ALL*, or *ALL of ALL* combinations of the *Salvation Evaluator*. Perhaps the *Mystery in the Middle* feels safer than parting ways with tradition.

SALVATION EVALUATOR	PART OF MANKIND	ALL OF MANKIND
PART OF SALVATION	REJECTED BY ALL	ARMINIANISM
ALL OF SALVATION	CALVINISM	ALL SAVED

**MYSTERY IN
THE MIDDLE**

However, before you try to find rest in the mystery in the middle, please consider a few more points. First, the majority of Christian thought has always insisted that Christian faith be reasonable. Faith properly defined and understood is confident reliance and trust on factual evidence. Israel was commended for their obedient witness and walk through the sea on dry land. However, later they are rebuked for not trusting God even though they witnessed the incredible first hand fact of his power to deliver.

Christianity likewise requires no "*leap of faith*," but instead confident trust in the facts of Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection. So Arminianism and Calvinism are at least commended for being coherent reasonable systems. They refuse to stand on mystery. Yet, even so they remain at odds with Scripture.

So please consider again the two questions posed by the *Salvation Evaluator*.

Is God the savior of ALL or PART of mankind?

Does God do ALL or PART of the saving?

Can you find any possible middle ground between God as savior of ALL or savior of PART? Any reasonable model of understanding must make one choice, ALL or PART! Can you find any middle ground between God doing ALL or PART of the saving? Is there any middle ground between UNCONDITIONAL and CONDITIONAL love? Any reasonable model of understanding must make one choice, ALL or PART!

Second, there have been some forms of Christian faith that have emphasized *Sacred Mysteries* as introduced at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sacred_mysteries. Some may argue that the Trinity and Divinity of Jesus fall into the realm of mystery and so salvation is also a mystery. Certainly the knowledge of God himself and his love extends beyond our abilities to comprehend. Paul tells us in Ephesians 3:8 (WEB), that the riches in Christ are "**unsearchable**." He says again in Ephesians 3:18 (WEB) that Christ's love "**surpasses knowledge**." And yet again in Romans 11:33 (WEB), "**How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out!**" Yet these statements are about God himself.

However, are the facts of our salvation also a mystery? Certainly not! The Bible promises that through faith we can have confident knowledge of our salvation. John writes in 1 John 5:13, "**...that you may know that you have eternal life...**" Do we have confident knowledge of our salvation? If we answer yes, then I ask, "*On what basis?*" I have already shown that the Arminian Christian adds human condition into the salvation equation, and thus insecurity. I have also shown that the Calvinist Christian adds self-deception into the salvation equation suggesting that they are loved, but not all. So then is mystery the missing ingredient in the salvation equation?

Friends, the mystery in the middle is the worst of all places to stand! Faith is confident reliance upon the facts of Jesus Christ. How could it be better to ignore the beautiful facts of Christ and his Word in order to stand on the question mark of mystery? Why choose this model of understanding? Should we explain the apparent conundrum of salvation with the appeal to mystery? We must not trust our salvation and the damnation of others to a mystery! Jesus Christ is not a mystery, but instead he is the mystery revealed! Colossians 1:26 says (WEB), "**the mystery which has been hidden for ages and generations. But now it has been revealed to his saints.**" We must trust that Christ loves us and our neighbors, unconditionally! Salvation is neither a mystery nor a paradox as further discussed in my [Appendix](#) article, *Real or Apparent Paradox?*

Finally, regarding faith we are reminded,

Now faith is assurance of things hoped for, proof of things not seen.

Hebrews 11:1 (WEB)

Just because we cannot see the things we hope and trust in does not mean they are a mystery! Instead, exactly the opposite is true. Christian hope is founded on the rock solid facts of Jesus Christ!

Wait Another Minute!

So, is that it? Is that my incredibly awesome idea? Yes, that is it. For believing that Jesus Christ is the Savior of all mankind I was accused of having a case of "*optimism out of control*." I hope I have written rationally enough to persuade you that my optimism is not out of control, but in fact in control and Biblically defensible. More than that, the message that Christ is Messiah and Savior of all mankind is The Message of the Bible. This is the Gospel -- the Good News!



I have suggested a model for evaluating salvation doctrines. I have weighed the pros and cons of the four possible scenarios. I have introduced you to the most common theories of Christian salvation. I have invited you to read the ideas of other respected theologians. I even took a closer look at the views of Bell, Dixon, Wittmer, Galli, Lewis, and Boice. I also explained my own theory.

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind. However, most do not believe the good news and pervert either the scope of salvation or the means of salvation due to hypocrisy, religiosity, or simple ignorance.

Now we turn to answer the many objections that we ourselves and others may have about the good news. We will also consider God's special tactics to confront unbelief. By the way, what is your response to the good news?

II Thessalonians 1:6-10

Objections? Wait another minute! What about the Scriptures that say unbelievers will be sentenced to everlasting destruction and banished from the Lord for their wickedness? Good question. Consider II Thessalonians 1:6-10 (WEB),

6) Since it is a righteous thing with God to repay affliction to those who afflict you, 7) and to give relief to you who are afflicted with us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, 8) punishing those who don't know God, and to those who don't obey the Good News of our Lord Jesus, 9) who will pay the penalty: eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might, 10) when he comes in that day to be glorified in his saints and to be admired among all those who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

This passage is clear that those who do not know God will be punished with eternal destruction. So even though I suggested that the Arminian and the Calvinist bend Scripture to fit their salvation model, now it seems that I am also bending Scripture and there is no possible way that all mankind can be saved. However, before we conclude too soon, consider a few questions.

Who are those mentioned above who do not know God and do not obey the gospel? Are they unbelieving mankind or only fallen angels? We see from Luke 16:19-31 that unbelieving men are punished in Hades, but later are safely extracted in Revelation 20:13. We also see from Revelation 20:7-10 that fallen angels, demons, are sentenced to the Lake of Fire for *The Ages of The Ages*. However, this passage seems to be clearly talking about unbelieving men being punished with *eternal destruction*, not angels only.

So is the punishment described above the temporal punishment of Hades or *The Ages of The Ages* condemnation in the Lake of Fire? Which punishment is in view? If the judgment mentioned above is the Great White Throne judgment at the commencement of eternity, then the Lake of Fire must be in view. However, if it is the judgment at each individual's death or at Christ's intermediate judgments, then the verse above must be talking about unbelieving men being sentenced to Hades or even simply sentenced to the destruction of their wicked earthly lives. Yet can it possibly be Hades because this punishment is described as eternal? That is a good point which leads us to a very curious observation in the Scripture.

Are you ready for a curious observation?

Simply stated, the Hebrew and Greek words translated as '*eternal*' do not always mean forever. "Aha," you say, "now Jeff is bending the Scripture!" Yet, consider Deuteronomy 15:17 (WEB),

Then you shall take an awl, and thrust it through his ear to the door, and he shall be your servant forever. Also to your female servant you shall do likewise.

In this verse the Hebrew word for '*forever*' was used to mean the time until the death of the master or servant. Certainly the servant is not bound to his master eternally, even beyond death! This observation causes us to pull our Hebrew dictionary off the shelf. Look for yourself and you will see that there are several valid denotations for the Hebrew

word 'olam,' including 'eternal,' 'forever,' and also 'a long time, until.' I have already written at length about this in point #9 in my article, [Ten Theological Absurdities](#). This may be a new idea for you, so take the time to do your own homework before you shake your head in disbelief.

The Old Testament Hebrew word 'olam,' translated 'eternal,' and the New Testament Greek synonym word 'aion,' also translated 'eternal' have been mistranslated at times. The Greek word 'aion,' pronounced 'I - own,' is translated 'eternal' and 'forever' in the New Testament. However, the meaning of 'olam' and 'aion' is 'age' or the 'duration' of the subject in view. 'Aion' can also simply mean 'complete.' For example 'aion' can refer to the length of a man's life, the temporal time in Hades, *The Ages of The Ages* in the Lake of Fire, and the infinity of God. The subject itself determines the length of time meant by 'aion.' In fact, the etymology of the present day word 'eon' descends directly from 'aion!' This is a critical observation. Our modern New Testament translations have failed to properly communicate the duration of the punishments applied to the unbelieving.

Hebrews 9:26 (WEB) is an example where 'aion' is properly translated as 'age' because 'eternal' simply does not make sense.

or else he must have suffered often since the foundation of the world. But now once at the end of the ages [aion], he has been revealed to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

I had originally hoped to expand on these thoughts myself. However, recently the Lord has blessed me through a reunion with John Wesley Hanson's classic 1875 work titled, *The Greek Word Aion-Aionios translated Everlasting-Eternal in the Holy Bible Shown to Denote Limited Duration*. I was first introduced to this work in college by a good friend, but sadly my memory is largely untrustworthy and I forgot about the essential points made in this book. None-the-less, this classic work is available for free from the U.S. Library of Congress website and also [from my own website](#). This 88 page book is a must read for anyone who agrees or disagrees with my conclusions. There is little point to my adding further to this definitive work. Study this volume for yourself and your faith and understanding of the Bible will be challenged in radically positive ways, if you are willing to let go of tradition and all self-righteousness. Dr. Heleen Keizer has also written a dissertation proving the same, titled *Life, Time, Entirety - A Study of Aion in Greek Literature and Philosophy, the Septuagint and Philo*. You can read her [315 page dissertation online](#) or an [abstract of her conclusions on my website](#). You might think it is incredulous to claim that 'aion' is mistranslated in many Bibles. Unless you are competent in ancient Greek you may not even know how to verify this for yourself. *The NASB-NIV Parallel New Testament in Greek in English* is an invaluable resource on my shelf. [Young's Literal Translation](#) of the Bible is also a valuable resource.

Thomas Talbot also makes a critical observation in *The Inescapable Love of God*. Talbot suggests that 'apo' is also mistranslated in 2 Thessalonians 1:9 as 'from.' Talbot proposes that 'apo' should instead be translated 'at' in this case. So a proper translation would be ***"who will pay the penalty: eonian [or complete] destruction at the face of the Lord and at the glory of his might."*** Talbot's proposal then makes even better sense that the unbelieving are punished at the Lord's coming judgment which is the subject in context. Unbelieving mankind will suffer the complete loss and destruction of their wicked earthly lives and ambitions unless they repent. The verse is not saying that the unbelieving are punished with eternal separation from God!

As an aside while discussing grace with a friend, he made an interesting comment to me. He said that people who believe salvation is completely unmerited eventually degenerate to believing that all mankind is saved. He mourned the thought. However, I cannot mourn, but must rejoice!

Will you rejoice with me?

Daniel 12:1-4

Wait! We must also consider Daniel 12:1-4 (WEB). Does this Scripture speak about the eternal damnation of unbelieving mankind?

1) At that time Michael will stand up, the great prince who stands for the children of your people; and there will be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time. At that time your people will be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. 2) Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. 3) Those who are wise will shine as the brightness of the expanse. Those who turn many to righteousness will shine as the stars forever and ever. 4) But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end. Many will run back and forth, and knowledge will be increased.

It would seem that there could be no other conclusion. Part of mankind is saved and the remainder is not. Period. Yet, the meanings of the underlined words above may help us more clearly understand and apply Daniel 12:1-4 and what it teaches about the extent of Christ's salvation.

Your people

The Hebrews words "*ben `am*" are translated "*your people*." A literal translation would be "*the sons of your people*" or perhaps more briefly "*sons of mankind*." The natural question is who is this group of people? Possibilities include all mankind, believing mankind only, National Israel generally, every individual Israelite particularly, or believing Israel only. Other Old Testament usage of "*am*" includes both all mankind and particular people such as the nation of Israel. We also notice that the archangel Michael protects these people, whoever they are. We know from the New Testament in Hebrews 1:14 that angels care for the redeemed and in Matthew 18:10 that children have guardian angels. So it seems clear that "*your people*" means the redeemed people of God. However, this phrase alone does not clearly indicate the extent of those elected to eternal life within mankind -- whether *PART* or *ALL*. We need to look at the larger context.

Your people

The second occurrence of "*your people*" in the English translation above is really the abbreviated "*am*" in Hebrew. The Hebrew "*ben*" is omitted, but implied as the messenger from God in Daniel's vision is still talking about the same people group. The messenger says that "*your people*" will be delivered. So we can take heart that the protection of God through Michael, his powerful agent, is effective. Yet we still look for clarity in the passage about the specific number of these people.

Everyone who is found written in the book

Does this phrase clarify or qualify who is meant by "*your people*?" We have already said that "*your people*" are those effectively protected by God, so this phrase is not qualifying, but further clarifying that protection is guaranteed for *ALL* "*your people*." It would be impossible that *ALL* "*your people*" were protected, but then only *PART* were listed in his book. God is telling us that *ALL* of "*your people*" are secured with each one's name specifically penned in his book. This is a great encouragement to believers.

Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth

This phrase is most commonly, and perhaps most easily, understood to mean deceased humanity. Old Testament patriarchs would speak about "*resting with their fathers*" and the New Testament speaks about those who "*sleep*" meaning those who have physically died. However, are these multitudes deceased humans only, or are imprisoned fallen angels also included in this group? This is a critical question. We know from 2 Peter 2:4 that the crime of some fallen angels has warranted their early imprisonment, while others remain at large. So it is at least possible that the "*multitudes*" here refers to a mixed group of people, including both humans and fallen angels. I admit it seems odd to speak of angels, who are spirit beings, as sleeping in the dust for they do not have bodies that turn to dust as do humans. Or do some angels have bodies? I have pointed out in my article, [Ten Theological Absurdities](#), that one day fallen angels will be embodied. So perhaps it is not so odd that demons will also awake from the dust. Also some theologians are certain that the demons currently imprisoned in Tartarus are the angels that fell into sexual sin with mankind in Genesis 6. Because of this great sin they were specially punished immediately in Tartarus, as explained in 2 Peter 2. If this is true, then these fallen angels do have bodies; it would be impossible to have sex without a body!

Will awake

Whoever the "*multitudes*" are we see that they "*will awake*." When is the timing of this event and are the saved and unsaved raised at the same time? The answer to this question is most important to our understanding of this passage. The verse seems to indicate that the "*Many...will awake*" together at a single event in the future. Some may dispute that, but let's consider that option first. Events future from Daniel's time include A) the first coming of Christ, B) Christ's coming in judgment upon Jerusalem in 70 A.D., C) the resurrection at Christ's second coming, and D) the Great White Throne Judgment at the commencement of eternity.

The Great White Throne Judgment seems to be the best possible match for this event. In fact just prior to The Great White Throne Judgment there is the resurrection of the "wicked dead." Unbelieving mankind, now sufficiently punished for their unbelief, and the imprisoned angels are extracted out of Hades and Thalaasa, respectively, for final judgment as explained in Revelation 20:11-15. We know that all humans and angels are removed from their prisons because it is specifically noted that Hades is thrown into the Lake of Fire, empty of all beings, whether human or demonic. Most Christians do not appreciate the significance of this fact as it relates to Christ's final victory in the salvation of ALL mankind. Instead most understand Revelation 20:11-15 to be only the final sentencing of the wicked dead to the Lake of Fire, presuming the group to be humans only. However, Daniel 12:1-4 indicates a specific time in the future when "*multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt*." The Great White Throne Judgment appears to be synonymous with Daniel 12:1-4 which explains that at that time some are resurrected to eternal life and others to condemnation. So Daniel 12:1-4, rather than undermining the argument of this book, instead strongly supports the conclusion that some are saved and some are damned at The Great White Throne Judgment. Contrary to popular salvation theology, we see that grace allows for the salvation of even unbelieving mankind at The Great White Throne Judgment because they are elect. Yet the Devil and his demons are instead sentenced to the Lake of Fire.

Of course some may argue that the timing of the awakening in Daniel 12:2 is not the same for the saved group and the unsaved group. They may say that deceased believers are raised first to life earlier and that deceased unbelievers are raised later at The Great White Throne Judgment for condemnation. This model, however, does not fit well with the Lord's conversation in Matthew 25:31-46 (the Sheep and Goat Judgment), which I also understand to be synonymous with the Great White Throne Judgment. Daniel 12 and Matthew 25 are clear that the final judgment will have both redeemed and unredeemed people standing before Christ at the same time.

Thus Daniel 12:1-4, Matthew 25:31-46, and Revelation 20:11-15 are all speaking about the same event.

They are each speaking about the final salvation of unbelieving mankind after their extraction from Hades and the condemnation of the Devil and his angels to the Lake of Fire, Matthew 25:41. You may disagree and say that the saved in Matthew 25 do not include the unbelieving elect, that is human beings extracted from Hades. Yet doesn't it seem odd that believers who are already reigning with Christ would have to face the Great White Throne Judgment and question their salvation again before the Lord? Hardly. The sheep who are incredulous at the Great White Throne Judgment are the unbelieving elect extracted safely from Hades and spared from the Lake of Fire by the grace of God alone. They are incredulous that God's grace could save them even after a sentence in Hades. Of course if you are a believer now, then you could never be incredulous about such a thing. You fully understand how God's grace has saved you apart from any act of your will, solely by his electing grace. You also should know that if the grace of Christ has saved us now it certainly can save unbelieving mankind then!

So are you incredulous or do you confidently trust in Christ?

Further note that when Daniel 12:1 says "**Michael... protects your people**" the emphasis could mean "**Michael [the arch angel]... protects your people [mankind].**" Michael says "*your people*" meaning mankind, in contrast to his people, that is angel-kind.

**Some to everlasting life, and
some to shame and everlasting contempt**

Some of the multitudes that "*will awake*" are granted eternal life, while the remainder are sentenced to everlasting contempt as already explained above.

**Those who are wise will shine as the brightness of the expanse.
Those who turn many to righteousness
will shine as the stars forever and ever.**

Those with wisdom will lead many to righteousness. The gospel clarifies that true righteousness is from God, as explained in Romans 1:16-17. Righteousness cannot be found in man or man's will. I have argued in this book that both Arminianism and Calvinism fall short of proclaiming this righteousness. The Arminian claims that his *free will* choice of Christ makes the difference. The Calvinist rejects the Arminian claim, but also rejects Christ's atonement for all mankind.

Dear Reader, I pause to ask you which gospel have you received? Do you believe that Christ died for *ALL* mankind? Do you believe that salvation is *ALL* of grace? Have you been led to the righteousness that is from God? Are you shining with the truth?

Seal the book

Why would the messenger in Daniel's vision tell him to "*seal up the words?*" Why would God hide the truth? God has chosen to incrementally reveal his redemptive plan through history for his greater glory. I have also suggested in my article that the "*Hosea Strategy*" is a key component of God's ministry to the hardhearted. Likewise, Mark 4:11-13 explains that Jesus also uses parables for a similar purpose.

The good news is that the fullness of God's love for mankind is no longer hidden, but completely revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. Do you want rock solid hope for your salvation, as well as good news for all mankind? It can only be found through faith in Jesus Christ.

This study has proved very fruitful for me and I trust for you as well.

John 3:16

John 3:16 is the most famous verse in the entire Bible. And anyone familiar with John 3:16 would naturally say that my entire thesis is unbiblical and unfounded. John 3:16 is commonly understood by all to mean that eternal salvation has been offered, but is only granted to those believing in Jesus.

John 3:16 (WEB) says,

For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal [aionian] life.

Yet is the common translation and understanding of John 3:16 correct? I have argued elsewhere that the meaning of the Greek word 'aionian,' is much richer than the simple translation 'eternal.' Greek studies prove that valid denotations for the word 'aionian' include 'age-during,' 'entire,' 'complete,' 'whole,' and 'unbroken,' but rarely 'eternal' time. A reading list for your own research is posted in my article, [Book Reviews](#). I also invite you to read my articles, [Forever Is Not Forever? You Gotta Be Kidding Me!](#) and [Forever Is Not Forever? You Still Gotta Be Kidding Me!](#)

Now please read John Chapter 3 (WEB) with me again, reconsidering the meaning of the Greek work 'aionian.'

1) Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. 2) The same came to him by night, and said to him, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him.'

Nicodemus approaches Jesus at NIGHT to SEE God's Kingdom.

3) Jesus answered him, 'Most certainly, I tell you, unless one is born anew, he can't see God's Kingdom.'

Jesus says that God's Kingdom can only be SEEN by those born from above.

4) Nicodemus said to him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born?'

Nicodemus does not SEE.

5) Jesus answered, 'Most certainly I tell you, unless one is born of water and spirit, he can't enter into God's Kingdom. 6) That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7) Don't marvel that I said to you, "You must be born anew." 8) The wind blows where it wants to, and you hear its sound, but don't know where it comes from and where it is going. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.'

Jesus answers again that SPIRIT BIRTH is needed.

9) Nicodemus answered him, 'How can these things be?'

Nicodemus still does not SEE.

10) Jesus answered him, 'Are you the teacher of Israel, and don't understand these things? 11) Most certainly I tell you, we speak that which we know, and testify of that which we have seen, and you don't receive our witness. 12) If I told you earthly things and you don't believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?'

Jesus confronts Nicodemus' BLINDNESS and unbelief.

13) No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended out of heaven, the Son of Man, who is in heaven. 14) As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15) that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal [age-during, whole, unbroken] life. 16) For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal [age-during, whole, unbroken] life.

Jesus answers that trust in him is the only way to AIONIAN life.

17) For God didn't send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through him.

Jesus reminds Nicodemus that he condemns no one but instead saves!

18) He who believes in him is not judged. He who doesn't believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God. 19) This is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil. 20) For everyone who does evil hates the light, and doesn't come to the light, lest his works would be exposed.

But those hiding in DARKNESS are condemned because they do not trust Jesus.

21) But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his works may be revealed, that they have been done in God.'

Those knowing the truth will come into the LIGHT.

22) After these things, Jesus came with his disciples into the land of Judea. He stayed there with them and baptized. 23) John also was baptizing in Enon near Salim, because there was much water there. They came, and were baptized; 24) for John was not yet thrown into prison. 25) Therefore a dispute arose on the part of John's disciples with some Jews about purification. 26) They came to John and said to him, 'Rabbi, he who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified, behold, he baptizes, and everyone is coming to him.'

Many were coming to JESUS.

27) John answered, 'A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven. 28) You yourselves testify that I said, "I am not the Christ," but, "I have been sent before him." 29) He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. This, my joy, therefore is made full. 30) He must increase, but I must decrease. 31) He who comes from above is above all. He who is from the earth belongs to the earth and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all. 32) What he has seen and heard, of that he testifies; and no one receives his witness. 33) He who has received his witness has set his seal to this, that God is true.

Jesus testifies to what he has SEEN and heard.

34) For he whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for God gives the Spirit without measure.

GOD GIVES THE SPIRIT without measure!

35) The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand. 36) One who believes in the Son has eternal [age-during, whole, unbroken] life, but one who disobeys the Son won't see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.'

The one trusting Jesus HAS aionian life. The disobedient will not SEE life... until their eyes are opened to trust in Christ.

So which valid denotation of 'aionian' is Jesus using in his conversation with Nicodemus? Jesus condemns no one and has forgiven everyone! Jesus said, **"I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly."** (John 10:10b WEB). Friends, Jesus is not selling fire insurance here, but teaching us the truth about the change of heart needed to trust that Christ already loves and forgives us so that we can live a whole, unbroken, completely restored life, both now and forever!

Purgatory?

So is Hades properly understood to be Catholic Purgatory? There are many views in Christendom about the afterlife. Catholic Christians believe in the existence of Purgatory, while Protestants would consider the Catholics to be in error on this point. Catholic doctrine holds to a temporary place of punishment and purification in the after-life for the redeemed. According to Catholic doctrine, all people spend more or less time in Purgatory depending upon the good and bad things they did in this life. For the Catholics, the after-life is a multi-step process until they arrive in Heaven. Protestants, however, emphasize that the afterlife is a single step with one fork in the road and two destinations: eternal Heaven or eternal Hell. Protestants reference Hebrews 9:26-28 (WEB) to prove this point,

26) or else he must have suffered often since the foundation of the world. But now once at the end of the ages, he has been revealed to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. 27) Inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once, and after this, judgment, 28) so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, without sin, to those who are eagerly waiting for him for salvation.

This verse says that people die and face judgment once at the end of their life. This was the teaching I grew up with and feel naturally comfortable with. However, from our study this far I have shown that Hebrews 9:27, while certainly true, does not explain the whole story. At a minimum we see from Revelation 20:13-14 that Hades is in fact a temporary place of punishment. One day Hades will be emptied of all people and then Hades itself will be thrown into the Lake of Fire empty of all people. The Great White Throne Judgment punctuates this present world and marks the commencement of eternity.

I am not suggesting that the Biblical doctrine of Hell, that is Hades, is like Purgatory or even similar to it. The Catholic Church has taught that one could work or pay one's way out of Purgatory with good deeds and penance. More can be learned about views on Purgatory here <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Purgatory>. However, the Bible does not teach that unbelievers will somehow escape punishment for their rejection of Christ. Certain punishment in Hades is the destiny of all unbelieving men. No one should think that they can conquer Hades, work their way out of Hades, or escape from Hades through any means whatsoever... except by the grace of God. Recently a person was pictured in front of the U.S. Supreme Court during the gay marriage debate with a shirt proclaiming, "*Hell will be fun.*" Luke 16:19-31 makes it clear that the torments of Hades will bring even the hardest heart to immediate regret. There will be no man-made escape for those punished in Hades. The only escape is the grace of God alone.

In a nutshell, Protestants (and Catholics) could benefit by expanding their understanding of afterlife events through more careful Bible study. Is your faith built on the truth of the Bible or the traditions of men?

The Bottom Line

We live in a world that is often only concerned about the bottom line. We want to know if our team won, if the business deal ended in the black, if the goal was reached. We want the headline, and perhaps the summary, but have little time to actually live it or get emotionally involved. We want the college degree now. We want to lose weight now. We want to get rich now. In a nutshell we want the facts so we can get on with our own business and retreat to the comfort of our own homes. However, we do not have the patience to live, work, and breathe for 365 days a year and still be pursuing the same goal as years turn into decades.

Why are our resumes strung with pages of job experience? Why are we so good at making new friends, but not keeping the old friends? Why are so many marriages failing? How could our grandfathers stay with the same woman, visit the same friends, and do the same work for a lifetime? Why do so many begin to follow Christ, yet either bail out or end their days warming a pew? We have been duped by the promises of unscrupulous marketers. Vain promises have drained us of our strength and perseverance for anything different or difficult.

Sadly, Christian evangelists have often done the same thing as the unscrupulous marketers that surround us, myself included. Christian salvation is marketed with the same strategy that Lou uses to sell cars. We get a customer hot for the sale with money burning a hole in his pocket, but he drives away not even knowing what he has purchased.

Warnings like "*Are you saved?*" and "*Pray this prayer*" lead you to believe that you can take action to add your own name to the Book of Life. You have entirely missed the point of grace. You think you have "*bought*" salvation, but do not even know what it is! You have bought, but you have not rested in the Father's love. You have your fire insurance policy, but you have no fire or passion for Christ. There is no heart for a life of rugged discipleship for our lover.

Instead, true faith is a longing to leave sin and a commitment to righteousness. Open the car hood of your life and check the timing and temperature of your engine! Get to a hospital for open heart surgery to see if you actually have a new heart of flesh or the same old heart of stone! Is the fire of Christ burning in your life or are you just a good (or perhaps bad) church kid?

What if instead you looked at Jesus Christ and received that you have been loved by him from before the very beginning? What if instead you confessed that your eternal destiny is fully in the hands of Christ... period? What if you truly believed that the victory was guaranteed and played for the love of the game and the love of your coach? Then you would be thankful for your eternal destiny and thankful to live for him now.

Another friend suggested that if we told people that Christ had already forgiven all their future sin, then there would be no reason to quit sinning. What an unfortunate understanding! First, this man must think that fear is a more powerful motivator than love. However, love, hands down, is the most powerful force in the universe. Secondly, this man is blind to his own sin, voting a nebulous victory for himself, but without the power of God's love in his life. My friend's heart is exposed, not as God's son, but as a slave to sin. Sin is bad and harmful and this man does not even seem to know it! Why would you prefer to know God as an angry slave master? Why not know him as he actually is, as your loving Heavenly Father?

The point is that Christian salvation is much more than salvation from a bad end, but also salvation from the harm of sin now. Read my article, [SAVED 5X](#), for a larger list of the things we all need protection from. Yes Christ finalized the TRANSACTION for our eternal salvation at the cross. And now Christ fights for our TRANSFORMATION, opening our eyes and leading us to faith, a purposeful life, and Christ-likeness.

It is given that we want salvation for a pleasurable life after death. But do we want salvation from sin now? Do we want to be transformed into Christ-likeness? Do we want to suffer with him for opposing self-righteousness and proclaiming grace? Or, do we just like the style of the W.W.J.D. wristband?

Playing Church

We all agree that a truthful understanding of salvation is essential for the Christian. However, if you have made it this far in my book you are now aware that those claiming to follow Christ can be categorized into at least three opposing views: the Arminian, the Calvinist, and those confident in the victory of grace for all mankind. Of course there are varieties and shades of each, as well as fence sitters. However, let's suppose by some miracle we did all come to the exact same understanding of Christian salvation.

Would we then be one as Jesus is one with the Father, as he prayed in John 17?

I fear that coming closer to agreement on one thing might increase the pressure of the differences on other things. Squaring one corner could expose misalignment on the other corners. Frankly, the unity Jesus prayed for seems like a hopeless endeavor. So we often settle for *"playing church"* rather than pursuing Christ-likeness.

I feel particularly stretched because I have sincere Christian friends in all kinds of church denominations and theological camps. All my Christian friends could not even fellowship under the same roof! And worse, sometimes we are under the same roof, but true fellowship is not happening there either. We need grace.

However, since I dared light a match to the explosive issue of Christian salvation, while the match still burns, let me light a few additional fuses. Specifically, we are commanded to follow Christ, so what should that look like? The whole subject of this book has been how to start a relationship with Christ on the right foot. A relationship with Christ must begin with the confidence that God has, in fact, paid for all of our sin -- past, present, and future -- and the sins of all of his people. However, the Christian life does not stop at the beginning! Now that we have a relationship with God through faith in Christ, we must continue by following him and imitating his words and actions. We are commanded to follow his example. We must do this, not to stay saved or to earn and keep the salvation we already have, but instead simply to please Jesus through obedience to his commands. Obedience to Christ is the mark of the Holy Spirit's transforming work in the believer's life. So, what should it look like to follow Christ?

As one example, I hold to the view of Christian non-participation in earthly war, as I learned while growing up in a dear Mennonite congregation. Instead, Christians are called to enlist in spiritual war -- the Great Commission! Christ's command for Peter to put his sword away was reserved for the last hour at the critical fulcrum between choosing the kingdoms of this world or the Kingdom of Christ. I have written at length about this in my article, [To Battle with the Sword of the Spirit and Prayer!](#) Yet while discussing this with a friend, we considered a curious question. Would Jesus have personally pulled the trigger to fire the nuclear bombs of World War II? One brother said, *"Most certainly yes!"*

Wow! Really? So even if we could agree on the weighty matter of Christian salvation, could we then agree on what it actually means to follow Christ? Does national patriotism and mere earthly defense trump fidelity to the mission of Christ? To be sure, God has sanctioned governments to wield the sword. To be sure Jesus Christ is also the sovereign agent behind every event in world history. For example God appointed wicked Rome to destroy Jerusalem in 70 A.D. for their rejection of Christ. Yet those who know they belong to Christ have been conscripted instead to follow the example and commission of Christ into deadly spiritual war. Guns and ammo will never accomplish peace in the Middle East. However, the Bible and prayer are powerful weapons with which to wage war. We are called to leave home, family, farm, job, and country to offer our lives as a sacrifice in making disciples of the nations. Can one do that with gun in hand? Clearly one cannot when following the pattern of Jesus. What part of the word **"not"** do you not understand in 2 Corinthians 10:3-4? Please reconsider and read my article, [Luke 22:26, Major George Buxton Persuades Sergeant Alvin York](#).

Where are the recruitment officers for the Lord's army? Where is the passion for Christian mission? We Americans have reduced the highest Christian ideal to honoring those fallen in mere earthly battles for our supposed democratic freedom. Weak "*constitutional*" theology and weak knees have found the American church hiding behind the red, white, and blue. Where is the praise for Abel and Zechariah mentioned in Luke 11:51? Why don't we have a Memorial Day for these men? They and countless others in history past have lost their lives preaching Christ to their own family and neighbors. They demonstrated fidelity to Christ unmatched in our present generation! They carried a cross, not a cross-bow. Remember them well.

Once I suggested that I go to Afghanistan as a missionary. Another said he would not send his worst enemy to that country. Are we then followers of Uncle Sam or of Christ? Christ came to serve those who counted him their enemy. Should we not do likewise, if we claim to follow him? Who is ready to pull the trigger to drop themselves as a "*grace bomb*" into enemy lands? Jesus dropped himself into our world. Friends, we have walled ourselves into a safe game of "*American church*." However, the church is called to be the spiritual military camp to serve the nations with the weapons of God's word and prayer. My view may seem odd or radical to you. I am well aware that I am in the minority, yet certainly not alone. Consider Preston Sprinkle's book, *Fight*, for further challenge. My own articles *Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News!* and *Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News! (Part 2)* explain our need for Christ-likeness in battle.

As another example, while a young Christian, I favored non-denominational churches because they seemed better suited for outreach. They have a passion for reaching the lost that at least moves them to preach Christ rather than denominational distinctions. Since then I learned that every church has its issues of course, even non-denominational churches. Yet problematic denominationalism led me to write the article, *Should I Stay or Should I Go?* It is a good question to ask when faced with divisions in your own fellowship.

So if we cannot find a satisfactory Christian fellowship to call home, should we start yet another Christian group? Can one more denomination or sect be the source of Christian unity? Hardly! Jesus could have tried to find better men to start his new movement, but where would he find them? Instead he stuck with his weak disciples and set a resolute path to die for all mankind in Jerusalem. Christ determined to love his disciples, the Pharisees, the Romans, and the Greeks -- that is ALL mankind. So we are best advised to stick with him. It is true that Christ's work divides us into believers and unbelievers, yet his ultimate goal is not to divide, but to weld his chosen people together with love and himself at the center for all eternity. Jesus refused to start another human sect, but instead my article title highlights, *He Went To Jerusalem*.

We near the end of my review of the various views of Christian salvation. The Protestant Reformation from the 16th century sparked a division over the doctrine of salvation that has cascaded into so many divisions that many churches no longer even hold to the views of their namesake. The body of Christ has become a divided mess! Even after reading Martin Luther I do not know if he believed that "*faith*" is the "*pen*" that writes our name in the Lamb's Book of Life or the "*glasses*" that enable us to see our name written there from before the foundation of the earth. Did Luther think that "*faith*" was the condition that activated salvation? What quadrant would he fall into in our *Salvation Evaluator*? I am not sure. But I know that it is even worse for you and me because in addition to Luther's opinion and the thousands of others since then, we now also have my opinion to consider. I cannot imagine that more words of men can possibly help untangle the mess.

So are we playing church or are we following Christ? Are we literally trying to walk in the footprints Jesus has left us?

Gospel Foolishness

The heart of the problem with Arminian and Calvinist efforts to codify the gospel is that they do not include gospel foolishness and they depend upon a mistranslation of the word "*aion*." These models assume that the Bible is written to educate teachable people. These models adopt a purely informational and educational strategy for winning converts that appeals only to the natural mind. Furthermore, these models assume that the gospel can be simply codified. I have written about the challenges of gospel codification in my article, *Revelation 20:11-15, A.M.A.Z.I.N.G. Grace*.

Some Christian traditions even refuse to adopt systematic theologies. They feel that the Scripture has already codified the truth in the most perfect way. But our weak human models of the gospel attempt to interpret the words of the Bible as if the Holy Spirit only ever throws straight fast balls. Yet, we have seen that God is also willing to throw curve balls to the unbeliever's foolish swing of the bat. Just like the Wright brothers needed special tactics to confront unbelief, so we see that God himself is the author of special tactics. Solomon teaches us how in *Proverbs 26:4-5*. Hosea lived it with stubborn Israel and his family as recorded in *Hosea 2:23*. Jesus put it into practice in *John 10:25-30*. Paul employs it in Romans 9:1-29. Even the great prophet had to swallow a painful pill in Jeremiah 20:7a (NASB),

O Lord, You have deceived me and I was deceived.

Now we see that the Holy Spirit has used some very crafty strategies to pitch curve balls to the Left and Right wings of Christendom. He has deceived us and we were deceived.

Three quadrants of our salvation matrix have stepped up to the plate for a big swing and a miss. Fortunately God's ultimate purpose is not to strike us out and leave us losers. His purpose is to heal us with his grace! However, like a good doctor he also needs to remove the cancer of our pride and hypocrisy for true healing. That is painful. In fact we would not or could not do it ourselves, hence the curve balls.

Specifically, our *Salvation Evaluator* matrix has exposed the hypocrisy of imagining that God chose us but not all men. We are also exposed for the religiosity of thinking that we chose the grace of God with our *free will* while others did not. Friends, only the *will that has been freed* by the grace of God trusts that Jesus has paid for the sins of all mankind. Apparently just as Jesus faced the Right and Left responses of the Jew and Gentile in his day, these mistakes still are with us today.

Of course if we are Christians we may still honestly wonder why he has not opened all mankind's eyes to faith. Why does most of humanity remain unbelieving? Why have only a few believers been called to faith? Three words come to mind: work, witness, and worship. Jesus has left us with work to do, succinctly explained in 2 Corinthians 5:20. Jesus also says we are to witness like him in I John 4:17. And Jesus has left us with a grand doxology of worship found in our key verse, Romans 11:32-36.

No doubt there are true believers within both Arminian and Calvinist camps who understand their codifications of the gospel ultimately fall short. There are also good followers of Christ who still have serious questions, even about the gospel. However, there are just as many or more who claim to follow Jesus yet their hope is not based upon the truth. They have not been to the foot of the cross. Instead they stand upon lies that exalt man and debase Christ. They are Christians in name only, not in heart. Thus gospel foolishness is still needed to reach the rebellious elect. We read in I Corinthians 1:18-31 (WEB),

18) For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are dying, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19) For it is written,

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise. I will bring the discernment of the discerning to nothing." 20) Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the lawyer of this world? Hasn't God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 21) For seeing that in the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom didn't know God, it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save those who believe. 22) For Jews ask for signs, Greeks seek after wisdom, 23) but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews, and foolishness to Greeks, 24) but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God; 25) because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

26) For you see your calling, brothers, that not many are wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, and not many noble; 27) but God chose the foolish things of the world that he might put to shame those who are wise. God chose the weak things of the world that he might put to shame the things that are strong. 28) God chose the lowly things of the world, and the things that are despised, and the things that don't exist, that he might bring to nothing the things that exist, 29) that no flesh should boast before God. 30) Because of him, you are in Christ Jesus, who was made to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption: 31) that, as it is written, "He who boasts, let him boast in the Lord."

Just like an insane person cannot be reasoned with, so an unbelieving person cannot be taught the good news without gospel foolishness.

The Arminian boasts in his *free will* choice of God while the Calvinist blindly claims that he alone is chosen. However, the only testimony that will stand is the cross of Jesus Christ, his blood shed for all mankind.

Curious Combo

Since foolishness to the foolish is integral to the gospel message, this creates the possibility of a curious combination of circumstances. Specifically, the religious unbelieving could actually drive other unbelieving toward Christ through preaching pieces of the gospel. The religious unbelieving might teach some true things about Christ that could help others take steps toward Christ. Though if the leader does not know the whole path to the cross, then *"the blind lead the blind"* as Jesus warned.

Consider again Jesus' words in John 10:25-30 (WEB),

25) Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you don't believe. The works that I do in my Father's name, these testify about me. 26) But you don't believe, because you are not of my sheep, as I told you. 27) My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28) I give eternal life to them. They will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29) My Father who has given them to me is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand. 30) I and the Father are one."

Now suppose we were Jesus' disciples standing there without fully understanding Jesus implementation of the [Proverbs 26:4-5](#) and [Hosea 2:23](#) tactics to reach the stubborn unbelieving. We would most likely conclude that those who disbelieve, such as the Jews described above, are truly not Jesus' sheep. We might also conclude that since Jesus said these people are not sheep, then they can never become his sheep and they are goats for all eternity. We might think they are non-elect, non-chosen, non-predestined. Yet, since we are very concerned about our own skin, we would also be happy to believe that we are Jesus' sheep. How convenient for us! In fact Peter may have been such an unbeliever in the Olive Garden when he drew his sword to kill the Pharisees. Peter still needed to learn that Jesus also loved the Pharisees and died for them, just as he died for Peter.

Furthermore, if we were Arminian style disciples we would conclude that we are Jesus' sheep because of our good *free will* choice to follow Christ. If we were Calvinist style disciples we would conclude that we are Jesus' sheep simply because Christ chose us and not the unbelieving Jews above. Either way we would be happy, but none-the-less big stinky hypocrites.

Now I boldly ask: if followers of Christ are this confused about God's love for all, are they actually following the Jesus who is and truly believing in him in the first place? This is a good question! Consider one of the toughest verses in the whole Bible in John 6:66 (WEB), ***"At this, many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him."***

It is possible to follow Christ, to serve him, and to even be used by him, yet to be confused about his purpose and eventually turn away from him. Yet, we see that most do not openly turn away, but instead turn to the religion of a graceless Christ.

The grace of Christ forgives a lot more confusion than we might be comfortable with. In fact his grace covers *ALL* sin for *ALL* mankind for *ALL* time. We are often not even aware of just how bad we actually are. We can be offensive hypocrites yet blind to how we hurt others. Yet the fragrance of Christ takes away our offensive sins. His grace also takes away the sins of those who offend us.

Jesus always seems to have the perfect words for every occasion and even for the ideas on this page. He says in Luke 10:19-21 (WEB),

19) "Behold, I give you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy. Nothing will in any way hurt you. 20) Nevertheless, don't rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." 21) In that same hour Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit, and said, "I thank you, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for so it was well-pleasing in your sight."

Do you think you are Jesus' sheep because of something you have done? Do you think you have written your own name in Heaven by choosing *"faith?"* That is foul. Are you trying to get people to write their own names in Heaven? That is really foul.

Can you instead repent of your self-righteousness and rejoice through faith that Christ has written ALL his chosen one's names in Heaven from before the creation of the world?

That is fragrant grace.

Constructive Envy

I have shown that special tactics are required to help those who persist in stubborn unbelief. The stubborn may have various reasons for rejecting the good news that Jesus Christ is the savior of all mankind. Foremost among them is the spiritual pride of thinking that we are *PART* of a supposed chosen subset forgiven by God, such as the Jews. Or equally crummy, we may imagine that we provided *PART* of the condition to be eternally loved by God, just like pagan religions. Since pride of this nature is bad news, when the stubborn unbelief persists, even further special tactics may be employed.

Paul explains another special tactic in Romans 11:13-15 (WEB),

13) For I speak to you who are Gentiles. Since then as I am an apostle to Gentiles, I glorify my ministry; 14) if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh, and may save some of them. 15) For if the rejection of them is the reconciling of the world, what would their acceptance be, but life from the dead?

Acts 22:1-22 (WEB) also provides an excellent demonstration of this tactic by Paul,

1) "Brothers and fathers, listen to the defense which I now make to you." 2) When they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, they were even more quiet. He said, 3) "I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, instructed according to the strict tradition of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God, even as you all are today. 4) I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. 5) As also the high priest and all the council of the elders testify, from whom also I received letters to the brothers, and traveled to Damascus to bring them also who were there to Jerusalem in bonds to be punished.

6) As I made my journey, and came close to Damascus, about noon, suddenly a great light shone around me from the sky. 7) I fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?'

8) I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?'

He said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you persecute.'

9) "Those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they didn't understand the voice of him who spoke to me. 10) I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?'

"The Lord said to me, 'Arise, and go into Damascus. There you will be told about all things which are appointed for you to do.' 11) When I couldn't see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus.

12) "One Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well reported of by all the Jews who lived in Damascus, 13) came to me, and standing by me said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' In that very hour I looked up at him. 14) He said, 'The God of our fathers has appointed you to know his will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear a voice from his mouth. 15) For you will be a witness for him to all men of what you have seen and heard. 16) Now why do you wait? Arise, be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.'

17) "When I had returned to Jerusalem, and while I prayed in the temple, I fell into a trance, 18) and saw him saying to me, 'Hurry and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not receive testimony concerning me from you.' 19) I said, 'Lord, they themselves know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue those who believed in you. 20) When the blood of Stephen, your witness, was shed, I also was standing by, consenting to his death, and guarding the cloaks of those who killed him.'

21) "He said to me, 'Depart, for I will send you out far from here to the Gentiles.' "

22) They listened to him until he said that; then they lifted up their voice and said, "Rid the earth of this fellow, for he isn't fit to live!"

Paul -- actually the Holy Spirit through Paul -- was willing to make constructive use of envy to confront the spiritual pride of the Jews who rejected Jesus as their savior and the savior of both Jew and Gentile. The results as you see were explosive. The Jews hated the thought that both the Jews and the Gentiles were equally needy of grace. The Jews thought God's blessing was focused only on them and limited to them unless the Gentiles jumped through the hoop. However, Paul crossed the line in reaching out to both Jews and Gentiles with the good news. Though it may appear like Paul is giving up on the Jews, really he is playing his last, but most powerful card through the constructive use of envy.

Paul was willing to risk conflict for the greater good of helping at least some stubborn unbelievers appreciate the foolishness of their unbelief.

Paul always makes a point of giving the Jews ample opportunity to change their mind and acknowledge Jesus as Messiah. In fact Paul taught that the Jews ought to even have the first opportunity to hear the gospel. Romans 1:16-17 (WEB) says,

16) For I am not ashamed of the Good News of Christ, because it is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first, and also for the Greek. 17) For in it is revealed God's righteousness from faith to faith. As it is written, "But the righteous shall live by faith."

However, if stubborn unbelief continued, Paul became a burr under their saddle to get things kicking. You may have noticed that this Biblical strategy is strangely similar to the winning tactic employed by the Wright brothers. When the U.S. government rejected flight, the Wright brothers turned to Europe. Then the U.S. woke up.

Now let's move on to my concluding thoughts.

Eternal Destiny



Thank you for taking the time to read my thoughts concerning the gospel of Jesus Christ. I would be grateful to receive your thoughts and comments at DGJC.ORG/CONTACT. I can think of no other subject that has grabbed my attention as powerfully as the cross of Christ. Hopefully you feel the same way. The love of Jesus Christ and his tender caress in removing the thorns of sin from the hearts of his people is nothing less than pure ecstasy. The hymn writer said it best...

*It was grace that taught my heart to fear...
and grace my fears relieved.*

My incredible thought at the beginning of this treatise was this:

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind.

Hopefully I have taken enough time and reasoned soundly enough to persuade you that my optimism is in control and Biblically defended, even if you still disagree with me. And at whatever points you or I are in error or disagreement, I am fully persuaded that the grace of God has covered and will overwhelmingly cover them all.

My view is certainly optimistic for the believer. However, the unbeliever, the one rejecting grace and refusing obedience to Christ's commands, has no confident optimism in his own worldview. The Arminians with their free will and the Calvinists with their limited atonement can offer no true assurance or guarantee before Holy God. So while God is constant is his love for all mankind, unbelievers

do not know him as the God of grace. Grace is not at the foundation of their salvation recipe so their hearts can only contain fearful expectation of coming judgment, even though their fears are painted over with a thin veneer of religion. How sad!

The Scripture is clear that damnation to the Lake of Fire is the certain destiny of all the unredeemed. It is a matter of fact by definition that the unredeemed are not purchased back by God and thus are lost for all eternity. Yet sadly unbelieving mankind inwardly fears this destiny even though they were already redeemed at the cross and guaranteed a home in heaven.

Yes it is true that Jesus Christ is not the savior of the unredeemed. They are not chosen by him for grace. They are not graced with repentance. Conscious torment in the Lake of Fire is their destiny for The Ages of The Ages. There is no escape.

So if you reject that Christ paid for the sins of all mankind the only possible hope for any of us is that you are wrong. So why reject your election and wait in fearful expectation? Why deny that Jesus has paid for your sin, bought you back for his very own, redeemed you from condemnation by dying on the cross for you? If you do not consider yourself one of Jesus' chosen people then be warned that damnation is the only destiny of the unredeemed. Only those whose sins are paid for by the blood of Christ are redeemed and purchased back for eternity in Heaven. Friend, Jesus has fully paid for all your sin! You are redeemed! Why not believe? Why live like a pauper when the King of the Universe is your Father?

Consider Hebrews 10:26-30 (WEB),

26) For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more a sacrifice for sins, 27) but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and a fierceness of fire which will devour the adversaries. 28) A man who disregards Moses' law dies without compassion on the word of two or three witnesses. 29) How much worse punishment do you think he will be judged worthy of who has trodden under foot the Son of God, and has counted the blood of the covenant with which he was sanctified an unholy thing, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? 30) For we know him who said, "Vengeance belongs to me;" says the Lord, "I will repay." Again, "The Lord will judge his people."

The Scripture is clear that *fearful expectation* is the only possibility for those who refuse to rest confidently in Christ. There is no bending of that Scripture. Furthermore, even the elect of God, those whom Jesus has redeemed, whose sins are fully paid, will be punished in the fires of Hades if they do not repent and receive the grace of Christ.

The warning from 2 Peter 2:1-9 (WEB) says,

1) But false prophets also arose among the people, as false teachers will also be among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, denying even the Master who bought them, bringing on themselves swift destruction. 2) Many will follow their immoral ways, and as a result, the way of the truth will be maligned. 3) In covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words: whose sentence now from of old doesn't linger, and their destruction will not slumber. 4) For if God didn't spare angels when they sinned, but cast them down to Tartarus, and committed them to pits of darkness to be reserved for judgment; 5) and didn't spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah with seven others, a preacher of righteousness, when he brought a flood on the world of the ungodly; 6) and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, having made them an example to those who would live in an ungodly way; 7) and delivered righteous Lot, who was very distressed by the lustful life of the wicked 8) (for that righteous man dwelling among them was tormented in his righteous soul from day to day with seeing and hearing lawless deeds): 9) the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment;"

Even the unbelieving redeemed will be punished in Hades after this life, unless they repent. Though the Lord has purchased all mankind with his blood, temporal punishment in Hades is certain for unbelieving mankind if they do not repent. I will now conclude briefly with a few quick thoughts about the redeemed and the reprobate while letting the Scripture itself be my conclusion with Revelation 22:7-21.

The Redeemed

A wonderful eternity is planned for the redeemed people of God as explained in Revelation 21:1-7 (WEB) which says,

1) I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth have passed away, and the sea is no more. 2) I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband. 3) I heard a loud voice out of heaven saying, "Behold, God's dwelling is with people, and he will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4) He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; neither will there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more. The first things have passed away." 5) He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." He said, "Write, for these words of God are faithful and true." 6) He said to me, "I have become the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give freely to him who is thirsty from the spring of the water of life. 7) He who overcomes, I will give him these things. I will be his God, and he will be my son."

I am particularly drawn to the fact that Heaven will be a new order, a new arrangement of things. The trials of this life have calloused us to our pitiful condition as we comfort one another with melodramatic words and thin encouragement such as *"no pain, no gain."* However, God is not cruel like we might be tempted to think at times. Instead he is a loving Heavenly Father and the brief trials and pain we endure in this life only serve his good purpose. It certainly is not weak to look forward to the day when all pain and mourning are finally taken away. I look forward to the day when we stand with the Lord in glory with every tear wiped away. What a glad day when our Sonship and inheritance is crowned in glory and sin and brokenness are removed forever for all God's people!

I can hardly wait to be there with you. Will you be there with me? What do you say?

The Reprobate

In contrast to the redeemed, the Lake of Fire is the sentence for the reprobate, the unredeemed who are not chosen for grace. The final words in Revelation 21:8 (WEB) say,

But for the cowardly, unbelieving, sinners, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their part is in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.

Review the list of those sentenced to the Lake of Fire. The Lord's judgment will be certain and swift. He will not punish anyone unjustly, but instead it is the unredeemed wicked who will be damned. Those who pretend to believe should not think that they will escape while they are also cowardly, vile, murdering, and sexually immoral... *if* their sins are not redeemed. Those who are brave and pure, yet who reject the grace of Jesus Christ through their unbelief and false gospels will not escape... *if* their sins are not redeemed.

Those outside of Christ will be placed into the blast furnace of God's wrath for *The Ages of The Ages*.

There will be no escape from this judgment for the unredeemed.

However, those chosen by Jesus Christ for grace, those sinners hidden safely inside of Christ, are secure in the Father's love. They are commanded to repent and turn away from wickedness as we read in 2 Timothy 2:19 (WEB),

However God's firm foundation stands, having this seal, 'The Lord knows those who are his,' and, 'Let every one who names the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness.'

Are you loved by the Lord? Do you want to have no doubt that you have been chosen by Christ from before the foundation of the world? Look to Jesus Christ and his cross for the proof. Belief cannot add your name to his Book of Life, but with eyes open to the cross you can know that God has always loved you and will always love you! With the eyes of faith open you can see your name inked in the Lamb's Book of Life from before the creation of the World. Are you a descendant of Adam? The second Adam has redeemed you! Confess his name and strive to please your lover!

Revelation 22:7-21

I end my proofs with the conclusion of Scripture, Revelation 22:7-21 (WEB),

7) "Behold, I come quickly. Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."

8) Now I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. When I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who had shown me these things. 9) He said to me, "See you don't do it! I am a fellow bondservant with you and with your brothers, the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God."

10) He said to me, "Don't seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand. 11) He who acts unjustly, let him act unjustly still. He who is filthy, let him be filthy still. He who is righteous, let him do righteousness still. He who is holy, let him be holy still."

12) "Behold, I come quickly. My reward is with me, to repay to each man according to his work. 13) I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End."

14) Blessed are those who do his commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter in by the gates into the city. 15) Outside are the dogs, the sorcerers, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

16) I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify these things to you for the assemblies. I am the root and the offspring of David; the Bright and Morning Star."

17) The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" He who hears, let him say, "Come!" He who is thirsty, let him come. He who desires, let him take the water of life freely.

18) I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, if anyone adds to them, may God add to him the plagues which are written in this book. 19) If anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, may God take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, which are written in this book.

20) He who testifies these things says, "Yes, I come quickly." Amen! Yes, come, Lord Jesus.

21) The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with all the saints. Amen.

Evangelism & Discipleship



Recently I was asked, "What are the practical effects of believing that Jesus is the Savior of all mankind." My friend does not believe that Jesus is the savior of all, but was simply trying to understand why this is such an important point. I then realized that my book was missing an important chapter on application. My friend's point is well taken. If there are no practical applications of a truth or even a theory yet to be proved as truth, then its value is quite limited.

However, in this case, the fact that Jesus is the Savior of all mankind is the most practical, useful, purposeful, glorious truth in the entire world. This truth has the grandest impacts on your personal well-being and your relationship to every other person on the planet as well as creation itself. Believing the truth about God's grace for mankind will pull your head out of the sand and turn your life right side up! You will be able to receive your proper title as God's child and be a true brother or sister to your neighbor.

Students of the Bible may well note that the book of Ephesians is divided into two parts. The first half teaches the reader truth about God's love for mankind and, in particular, the church. Careful observers have noted that there is not even one imperative statement in the entire first half of the book. There is not one instruction to action, but only teaching the truth about God's love for us.

The second half, however, focuses entirely on the actions and behaviors required of Jesus' followers. God's Word in Ephesians can be neatly divided into two chapters titled: Belief and Practice. However, my book is lopsided on theory and theology, so hopefully I learn a lesson from Ephesians and promote Christian action. My favorite verse on practical obedience is I John 3:18 (WEB), "***My little children, let's not love in word only, or with the tongue only, but in deed and truth.***"

If you believe that Jesus loves and forgave you because he also loves and forgave all mankind, then we have important work to do! Love with actions and truth just like Jesus!

In the following pages of application I quote many Bible verses. No doubt you will be familiar with most of them. My goal in quoting them to you is not to simply serve the same meal again, but to invite you to chew on the Scripture with the seasoning that Jesus is truly the Savior of all mankind.

Follow Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So how do we even begin to follow him?

Matthew 4:18-20 (WEB) says,

18) Walking by the sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers: Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew, his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. 19) He said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers for men." 20) They immediately left their nets and followed him.

We can begin to follow Jesus with great confidence since we know he loves all mankind. We do not have to impossibly determine if we are part of a *chosen sub-set* loved by Jesus. Rather we follow Jesus knowing that we are part of the ***chosen super-set*** loved by Jesus and he asks us to follow him. So we can follow Jesus with great confidence!

Matthew 16:24-27 (WEB) says,

24) Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. 25) For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, and whoever will lose his life for my sake will find it. 26) For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his life? Or what will a man give in exchange for his life? 27) For the Son of Man will come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he will render to everyone according to his deeds."

We can also be certain that if we do not follow Jesus we have traded the great purposes that God has for our life for... nothing. Since Jesus could not love us more, to turn away from his love to any other thing is a crying shame. Only complete confidence in the love of God for me and you will embolden us to give Jesus everything he asks. If we want to

pretend that we are part of a chosen loved sub-set or that our choice of God's love *plus* his love cinched our destiny, then we do not truly understand God's love. Friends, we must have rock solid confidence that Jesus' love penetrates through our core to have loved us while we were yet his enemies. Without it, we will not be able to give Jesus all that he asks. Furthermore, because his arms are stretched wide his love includes all the Pharisees on his right and all the Pagans on his left. We can have unwavering confidence that he loves us as well, whether we are self-righteous Pharisees or godless Pagans or somewhere in between. His love is fully given to all. What does he ask of us? He wants our entire life -- our complete devotion.

John 6:66-71 (WEB) says,

66) At this, many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. 67) Jesus said therefore to the twelve, "You don't also want to go away, do you?" 68) Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69) We have come to believe and know that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 70) Jesus answered them, "Didn't I choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?" 71) Now he spoke of Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, for it was he who would betray him, being one of the twelve.

Following Jesus demands our complete commitment. Our weak human strength cannot provide this level of commitment. Our promises cannot maintain this commitment. Only complete dependence upon the faithfulness of God and his guaranteed love for us can provide this commitment. We may flatter or fool ourselves thinking that we are the chosen subset because we are devoted followers of Jesus. That is radical commitment of sorts, but unfortunately not a commitment to the true Jesus, the Jesus who loves all mankind. Remember it is the Pharisees who were angry with Jesus when they learned that he does in fact love all mankind, including the Gentile *"sinners."* Friends, as much as we waiver about the love of God toward all mankind, we will also waiver in our commitment to him.

Do not waiver about God's love for you and me! Following Jesus demands one hundred percent confidence in his love for us as well as his love for others. Leave your nets and follow Jesus!

Believe Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So what does it mean to believe in him?

Mark 9:21-24 (WEB) says,

21) He asked his father, "How long has it been since this has come to him?" He said, "From childhood. 22) Often it has cast him both into the fire and into the water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us, and help us." 23) Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." 24) Immediately the father of the child cried out with tears, "I believe. Help my unbelief!"

The boy's father highlights a problem that is common among even the most mature Christians. We ought to believe in God with rock solid confidence, yet even the strongest Christian may have doubts. One response to the thesis that Jesus is the Savior of all mankind has been *"I want to believe, but it seems too good to be true!"* We should join the man above and ask God to help us overcome our unbelief!

Furthermore, some interpret this verse to mean that through *"faith"* we can accomplish whatever we determine. If this is true we would not only have *"faith"* in God, but we would also *be* God! This verse is not saying that we can always accomplish our will, but instead that through faith we can receive and always participate in God's will. In fact this misunderstanding of the meaning of *"faith"* is the heart of this generation's misunderstanding of the very gospel. *"Faith"* is not the condition to God's unconditional love, but instead faith is trust that God already loves us unconditionally! *"Faith"* never added one person to the Lamb's Book of Life, but instead faith opens our eyes to the rock solid fact that God has always loved his people. Do you doubt it? Ask God for help to overcome your unbelief!

Jude 22-23 (WEB) says,

22) On some have compassion, making a distinction, 23) and some save, snatching them out of the fire with fear, hating even the clothing stained by the flesh.

Efforts to tell others that Jesus is their Savior and the Savior of the world are often rejected. Sadly religion, tradition, and avoidance are always more popular than grace. This verse reminds us that the doubting are to be shown mercy. Jesus commands us to believe in him, to trust him with our entire lives. It is a good thing to question the ice before trusting it with your ice skates. Test Jesus and you will find that he does not change with the seasons, because "**Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever**" (Hebrews 13:8 WEB). He will never crack or melt in the heat, but instead is a solid rock! Friends, Jesus is so trustworthy it is a sin to not trust him, so get your questions answered and your doubts erased! Do not let your doubts turn you away from God.

John 20:24-29 (WEB) says,

24) But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, wasn't with them when Jesus came. 25) The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." 26) After eight days again his disciples were inside and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, the doors being locked, and stood in the middle, and said, "Peace be to you." 27) Then he said to Thomas, "Reach here your finger, and see my hands. Reach here your hand, and put it into my side. Don't be unbelieving, but believing." 28) Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29) Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen, and have believed."

Even one of the twelve disciples who walked and talked with Jesus for three years doubted. The expression "*doubting Thomas*" lives on 2,000 years later in his honor. Yet this verse highlights Jesus' patience even with the doubting. Jesus is not intentionally obscure, but wants each of us to get to know him through faith. Ask God to show himself to you. But do not ask to see him and then be lazy or sleeping when he makes himself known. Do not ask to see him and then not be willing to shout to the world with Thomas, "**My Lord and my God!**"

Faith is not the condition to God's unconditional love. Faith is trusting that God loves us unconditionally because he loves all mankind. Believe in Jesus!

Trust Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So what does it mean to trust in him?

In the Bible "*trust in*" is basically a synonym for "*believe in*." Since belief and trust are the vital components of receiving God's salvation, let's hit it again.

1 John 1:9-10 (WEB) says,

9) If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us the sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10) If we say that we haven't sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Getting turned on to something requires passion. So what can give us passion for Christ? How about total forgiveness of all your sins: past, present, and future? God loves us like the wonderful Heavenly Father that he says he is and so he is trustworthy. Yet some interpret 1 John 1:9 to mean that Jesus only forgives us if we ask. Is this true? I have mentioned elsewhere that Jesus asked the Father to forgive us from the cross, even though no one was asking. Is there more proof?

Romans 5:9-11 (WEB) says,

9) Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we will be saved from God's wrath through him. 10) For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we will be saved by his life. 11) Not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

Now here is good news, awesome news, that ought to get us totally turned on to Jesus. The death of Christ reconciled us to God, forgiving all our sins, while we were yet his enemies! The love of God was fully given before we were Christians or even acknowledged Christ. The heart of my thesis in this book is that there is no condition to God's

unconditional love... not even our faith. In fact it is silly to suggest that "trust" is the condition to God's unconditional love. It is silly because God wants us instead to trust that his love for us is unconditional and already given, just like Romans 5:9-11 says! The point is that we must be fully persuaded of God's unconditional love for us to know him as he is and to make him known.

If you believe God loves you on those terms, then you will be passionate to know and make known that he loves all mankind exactly the same way. Logically, to the exact same degree you have doubts about whether mankind's sins are forgiven, you will have doubts that your own sins are forgiven. This is true unless you are hypocritically trusting in a condition to God's love that you supplied. If you are trusting in a condition that you supplied, you may appear to have confidence, but again you are standing on thin ice above the fires of Hades.

Gerry Beauchemin boldly says on page 165 of *Hope Beyond Hell*, "*The only way I [or you] can be truly assured I will be saved is if I believe that God saves all [mankind].*" Do you claim that God loves you 100%? On what basis? A Christian can be 100% confident that God loves him because God loves all mankind. Robin Parry goes as far to say in *The Evangelical Universalist* that Calvinism has in fact corrupted the morals of its adherents. The Calvinist is 100% confident that God loves him and equally confident that God does not love all mankind. Parry boldly says that such a person has become morally corrupted from a false gospel and false understanding of the nature of God's love.

Trust is not the condition to God's unconditional love, but instead faith that God loves us unconditionally because he loves all mankind. Trust in Jesus!

Hope in Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So what does it mean to hope in him?

Titus 2:11-14 (WEB),

11) For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, 12) instructing us to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we would live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age; 13) looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, 14) who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify for himself a people for his own possession, zealous for good works.

Christ is returning and Christians are waiting for this blessed hope. Yet most of mankind is not waiting or ready and thus has no hope!

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 (WEB) says,

13) But we don't want you to be ignorant, brothers, concerning those who have fallen asleep, so that you don't grieve like the rest, who have no hope. 14) For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.

This passage speaks of hope, yet some truths offer no hope. For example, there is no hope for the unredeemed. If sin is not paid for, sinners can have no hope of salvation, ever. There appears to be no hope for Satan and his demons because apparently their sins are not paid for according to Hebrews 2:16. However, the passage above teaches us that Christians can have great hope because we believe and know that God will resurrect the Christians who have already died.

Now this passage also says that, "***like the rest, who have no hope.***" Does this mean that unbelievers will never ever have hope? Certainly not! The passage is speaking about the "hope" that we live by through faith. Both the believing and unbelieving redeemed have a glorious eternal destiny waiting for them. Jesus redeemed, paid the sin debt, for all mankind while we were yet his enemies! Believers have received this hope and live by it. However, unbelievers refuse to repent of their self-righteousness and believe that their sins are paid for and so they do not live by this hope. They choose the hard road even though their sins are fully paid.

Christians eagerly await the return of Christ because we know that Jesus loves mankind dearly. Unbelievers, however, shrink back at the thought of facing the Lord of the Universe. Just like Adam and Eve hid in the garden, they hide behind false religion, atheism, and agnosticism. Yet Jesus will return for his people!

Jesus promised in John 14:1-3,

1) Don't let your heart be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me. 2) In my Father's house are many homes. If it weren't so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you. 3) If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and will receive you to myself; that where I am, you may be there also.

The angels also promised in Acts 1:10-11 (WEB),

10) While they were looking steadfastly into the sky as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white clothing, 11) who also said, "You men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who was received up from you into the sky, will come back in the same way as you saw him going into the sky."

The point is that our lover, Jesus Christ, is currently away, but he is returning and has told us many things about his future plans to "*make his enemies a footstool*" and to return for his bride, the church, and to consummate eternity with the final salvation of all mankind. Biblical Christianity offers great hope! Do not settle for anything less!

Hope in Christ is not a wish but a confidence that Jesus Christ will reveal his salvation to all mankind in time. Hope in Jesus!

Read Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So why do we read about him and his commands?

Joshua 1:7-9 (WEB),

7) Only be strong and very courageous. Be careful to observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded you. Don't turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. 8) This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it; for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success. 9) Haven't I commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Don't be afraid. Don't be dismayed, for Yahweh your God is with you wherever you go.

The Bible is God's Word given to us so that we can learn about his love and care for us. In the verses above God spoke directly to Joshua after Moses died in order to encourage Joshua and guide him as the new leader of Israel. God urges Joshua to be strong and courageous and to meditate on the Bible. Reading the Bible and meditating on God's written message to mankind is vital for us to enjoy the successful Christian living that God desires.

Colossians 3:15-17 (WEB),

15) And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body, and be thankful. 16) Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your heart to the Lord. 17) Whatever you do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father, through him.

We need the message of Christ in our conversation so that we can teach and admonish one another. While our own words and ideas may range from useful to useless, God's words and his message are perfect and wonderfully useful. Paul encourages Jesus' followers to add the words and message of Christ into our conversation. Read the Bible, meditate on the meaning, and mention the message and words of Christ in your conversation with others.

Hebrews 4:12-13 (WEB),

12) For the word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and is able to discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13) There is no creature that is hidden from his sight, but all things are naked and

laid open before the eyes of him to whom we must give an account.

God's word is alive and active and powerful to change our lives. We are in need of heart surgery, but what scalpel can be used to perform spiritual operations on our hearts? God's word is compared to a double-edged sword because the Bible is able to cut away the cancer of unbelief in our lives. We must read the Bible to allow the Holy Spirit to change us from our natural love of vice to the supernatural virtue of Jesus Christ.

Read the message of Christ to enjoy the Christian prosperity that God desires for you. Share his message with others in your conversation. Allow the Holy Spirit to operate on your heart with God's Word. Read Jesus!

Talk to Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So how do we talk to him?

Matthew 6:5-15 (WEB) says,

5) When you pray, you shall not be as the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Most certainly, I tell you, they have received their reward. 6) But you, when you pray, enter into your inner room, and having shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. 7) In praying, don't use vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their much speaking. 8) Therefore don't be like them, for your Father knows what things you need, before you ask him. 9) Pray like this: "Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. 10) Let your Kingdom come. Let your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. 11) Give us today our daily bread. 12) Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors. 13) Bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen." 14) For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15) But if you don't forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

God is our loving Heavenly Father and he wants us to talk with him, heart to heart. He wants no facades or religion, but person to person conversation. More than that, he knows us and our needs better than we know ourselves. The point is that we should have great confidence that our conversation with him will never be misunderstood. If there is any concern at all, the concern is that we are not being honest with ourselves. The cure for our hypocrisy is the solemn reminder that we need to forgive others and that we are fully dependent upon God for our forgiveness.

John 14:11-14 (WEB) says,

11) Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me; or else believe me for the very works' sake. 12) Most certainly I tell you, he who believes in me, the works that I do, he will do also; and he will do greater works than these, because I am going to my Father. 13) Whatever you will ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14) If you will ask anything in my name, I will do it.

Wow! God is listening to our prayers and he will answer them! While some have earthly dads with resources to buy them cars and college, we all have a Heavenly dad with infinite resources available for our care. However, we should be reminded that God's goal for our lives is that we would grow to share in his character. God does always answer our prayers, but sometimes the answer is "no", as seen in 2 Corinthians 12:8-9.

Romans 8:26-27 (WEB),

26) In the same way, the Spirit also helps our weaknesses, for we don't know how to pray as we ought. But the Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groanings which can't be uttered. 27) He who searches the hearts knows what is on the Spirit's mind, because he makes intercession for the saints according to God.

Wow that is even more amazing! Ever felt like you do not even know how or what to pray? This is a very common problem because the truth is that we all find ourselves in situations where we have no idea what the solution could be. Sin has broken and twisted our lives beyond repair. We should keep praying nonetheless because, if we are Christians, the Holy Spirit is living inside of us and he will lead our prayers.

John 16:23-28 (WEB) says,

23) In that day you will ask me no questions. Most certainly I tell you, whatever you may ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. 24) Until now, you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be made full. 25) I have spoken these things to you in figures of speech. But the time is coming when I will no more speak to you in figures of speech, but will tell you plainly about the Father. 26) In that day you will ask in my name; and I don't say to you that I will pray to the Father for you, 27) for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me, and have believed that I came from God. 28) I came from the Father, and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world, and go to the Father.

Jesus wants to make our Heavenly Father known to us. Though the Bible may be hard to understand at times, God's purpose is not to be obscure. Instead he has revealed himself to us and plans to do so more and more. Why does he keep us in suspense and why is he taking so long? I don't know. Perhaps our finite minds can only be opened to the infinite God in small increments. Perhaps our sin and need for repentance slows down the progress to see God face to face. Take heart! Jesus is praying for us and working to reveal our good Heavenly Father to us.

Prayer to Jesus and our Heavenly Father is critical to help us get to know God and understand his good purposes for all mankind. Talk to Jesus!

Love Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So what does it mean to love him?

John 14:23 (WEB) says,

Jesus answered him, 'If a man loves me, he will keep my word. My Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our home with him.'

Love for Jesus is not mystical or ethereal! Jesus asks us to show our love very practically by obeying his commands. While the world's notion of love is freedom to please one's self, God's definition of love is commitment to please others. Jesus demonstrated loving obedience to his Father and now asks us for the same loving obedience. Has Jesus won your willingness to give up your self-serving attitudes to instead serve others?

John 21:15-19 (WEB) says,

15) So when they had eaten their breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me more than these?"

He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I have affection for you."

He said to him, "Feed my lambs." 16) He said to him again a second time, Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me?"

He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I have affection for you."

He said to him, "Tend my sheep." 17) He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you have affection for me?"

Peter was grieved because he asked him the third time, "Do you have affection for me?" He said to him, "Lord, you know everything. You know that I have affection for you."

Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. 18) Most certainly I tell you, when you were young, you dressed yourself and walked where you wanted to. But when

you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you don't want to go." 19) Now he said this, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. When he had said this, he said to him, "Follow me."

Peter had just boasted earlier that even if all the other disciples fell away, he would never fall away. Yet all the disciples did run away and Peter denied Jesus three times! Jesus now confronts Peter about his boast to remind Peter of the value of humility and to restore him to his calling: to feed the sheep of Jesus. Do we love Jesus? Are we better than others? Are we willing to humbly feed Jesus' sheep? Are we willing to feed both the believing and the unbelieving, both the lost sheep and the found sheep? Are we willing to show love to all mankind?

1 John 4:20 (WEB) says,

If a man says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who doesn't love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?

Jesus challenges us to show our love for him by loving our brother. God's commands are not burdensome, odd, or unreasonable. Jesus is building a loving family and he commands us to love one another. Are we with excuses like Cain asking, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Or are we committed to saying, "I am my brother's keeper!"

Jesus asks us to show our love to him by obeying him and loving others. Love Jesus!

Obey Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So what does it mean to obey him?

John 8:31-36 (WEB) says,

31) Jesus therefore said to those Jews who had believed him, "If you remain in my word, then you are truly my disciples. 32) You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." 33) They answered him, "We are Abraham's offspring, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How do you say, 'You will be made free'?" 34) Jesus answered them, "Most certainly I tell you, everyone who commits sin is the bondservant of sin. 35) A bondservant doesn't live in the house forever. A son remains forever. 36) If therefore the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."

Jesus has a great promise for his followers. He plans to show us the truth about this life and to set us free! What an awesome promise and hope! This fallen and broken world takes its toll on every person who ever lived causing us to feel burdened and in bondage to pain and trials that we want to shake off, but just cannot. However, there is great hope. Jesus promises freedom. Yet, the freedom of Christ comes with a price... we must obey his teaching. Though the world may offer freedom, true freedom only comes through obedience to Jesus Christ.

Furthermore there is an orderly recipe above. First we must simply obey, even if we do not understand all the reasons for God's commands. We must submit our will to the will of Jesus. We must honestly understand the difference between what we want to do and what God wants us to do... and then choose God's will. Second, through obedience we will come to know the truth. A master's business can only be learned through obediently serving in his workshop. The same is true with God. Third, through knowledge of the truth we will be set free from our bondage because we will know, understand, and trust in God's loving purposes. There is no other way, but to trust and obey.

1 John 5:1-5 (WEB) says,

1) Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God. Whoever loves the Father also loves the child who is born of him. 2) By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep his commandments. 3) For this is loving God, that we keep his commandments. His commandments are not grievous. 4) For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world: your faith. 5) Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Jesus wants no hypocritical claim of affection for him. If we claim to love God we must also obey his commands. In fact, obeying his commands is the only accepted expression of showing our love for God. God is our loving Heavenly Father and because he is our Father and we are his children we also need to obey him. The world understands love to be giving others license to do whatever they want, to please themselves. This is not love, but instead makes us a danger to ourselves. A good parent would not leave his children unsupervised or without direction. God knows that true love will direct his children to do only what is best for themselves and others. Thankfully the commands of God are not burdensome, but are wholesome and good. In fact as we already learned, God's commands are the pathway to learning more and more about God and enjoying true freedom as his sons and daughters. Through obedience we take our station as the children of the King of the Universe. We receive the honorable position of princes and princesses in his kingdom. We also enjoy fellowship as brothers and sisters with one another!

Obey Jesus in order to know the truth and to find true freedom. I am convinced that obeying Jesus' commands is the recipe to help you see that Jesus does in fact love all mankind. Obey Jesus!

Imitate Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So what does it mean to imitate him?

1 John 3:1-3 (WEB) says,

1) See how great a love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God! For this cause the world doesn't know us, because it didn't know him. 2) Beloved, now we are children of God, and it is not yet revealed what we will be. But we know that when he is revealed, we will be like him; for we will see him just as he is. 3) Everyone who has this hope set on him purifies himself, even as he is pure.

Jesus began his ministry with the simple call "*follow me.*" He wants us to learn from him and become like him. I have been baffled by the present animosity that the non-Christian world has toward Jesus. Perhaps they are getting their picture of Jesus from the poor examples of us struggling Christians! Instead, they should read the historic account of Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. If they read about Jesus there, they will see that he is The Champion of love for all. He preaches against hypocrisy and vice. He is kind to the brokenhearted. He condemns no one! Why he is the epitome of valor, the grand gentleman, the hero of heroes! The great Christian hope is that one day our very natures will be transformed so that we will be like him. No longer will we struggle with envy, anger, and hypocrisy. We will be like Jesus effortlessly! Meanwhile, because this is our hope, we strive to purify ourselves to be like him now.

1 John 4:17-18 (WEB) says,

17) In this love has been made perfect among us, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because as he is, even so are we in this world. 18) There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear has punishment. He who fears is not made perfect in love.

In fact the Bible says that if we are Christians, we are already like Jesus in this world. Even though we are terribly poor imitations of Christ, Jesus has given us the assignment to follow in his footsteps. We are like him because we have a purpose in this world to serve God and be like Jesus. Furthermore, if we are Christians we have the Holy Spirit working powerfully within us to accomplish the purposes of God. While we may be painfully aware of our inadequacies, Jesus is nonetheless marching on, working his will both in us and through us. Giving up is not an option! The work of the Holy Spirit will be effective in changing and transforming us. Though no one will ever be perfected in this life, progress will be made in learning to forgive, serve, and love others. So we submit to the Holy Spirit's work in our lives and we look forward to the end of sin and perfect Christ-likeness in glory.

Imitating Jesus is hard work because our birth nature is not like Jesus. Just as Jesus loved all mankind, we are to share his love with all mankind. Thankfully, the hard work of transformation is not ours alone, but instead it is God who changes us, and so we learn to keep in step with the Spirit. Imitate Jesus!

Share Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So what does it mean to share him with others?

Matthew 28:16-20 (WEB) says,

16) But the eleven disciples went into Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had sent them. 17) When they saw him, they bowed down to him, but some doubted. 18) Jesus came to them and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. 19) Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20) teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you. Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

This passage in the Bible is called "*The Great Commission*." It is Jesus' last words to his followers. It is our assignment. It is The Great Commission! After giving us his own example of how to make disciples, he then commands us to continue to follow him, to imitate him, and make yet more disciples of Jesus. The Christian faith is not merely reading the Bible and understanding facts about God, but it is sharing Jesus' love with others and asking others to follow Jesus. God's intention is that the good news about Jesus' death on the cross for the sins of ALL mankind would be shared with ALL mankind. This world is filled with Satan's lies about God, suggesting that God does not love all mankind and that we are condemned. Read Zechariah 3:1-10 to see just how mean Satan can be toward Joshua and also toward us. The Great Commission is our great mission to defeat these lies and be used by the Holy Spirit to bring the good news to ALL mankind.

Acts 1:9-11 (WEB) says,

9) When he had said these things, as they were looking, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight. 10) While they were looking steadfastly into the sky as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white clothing, 11) who also said, "You men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who was received up from you into the sky, will come back in the same way as you saw him going into the sky."

Understandably after Jesus gave the Great Commission and then ascended into Heaven, the first disciples were stunned. I personally have never witnessed anyone teach with the authority of Jesus, work miracles, be raised from the dead, and ascend into Heaven. No wonder the disciples were reeling with their heads spinning. So God sent two angels to stop their spinning heads and point them back to their assignment. Friend, God's love for all mankind is proved without a doubt. Why do you stand there? Go tell your neighbor!

Matthew 22:34-40 (WEB) says,

34) But the Pharisees, when they heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, gathered themselves together. 35) One of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, testing him. 36) "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?" 37) Jesus said to him, " 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38) This is the first and great commandment. 39) A second likewise is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40) The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.' "

But we may still have questions and doubts. Answer your questions! Erase your doubts! Do whatever hard work is needed to get your feet planted on the solid rock of Jesus Christ! Pray! Read the Bible! Show your love for God by obeying his commands! And if you do not know how to begin The Great Commission, then begin (and end) with The Great Commandments above. Jesus keeps it simple for us because there are only two Great Commandments: 1) love God and 2) love your neighbor as yourself. God's commands truly are not difficult to understand or burdensome. The only challenge is that we must lay down our self-interests in order to be concerned about others.

The good news is too good to keep to ourselves. God does not just love you, but he loves all mankind! Salvation is not personal, but universal! Jesus commands us to join his forces to fight against the lies of Satan and tell our family, friends, and neighbors about God's love. Share Jesus!

Fellowship with Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So how do we fellowship with Jesus now?

Jesus loves to eat, drink, talk, and laugh with us, his chosen people. He created us for this very purpose. Consider that his first miracle was to turn water into wine at a wedding! We can be so excited that we are promised eternity in the home of this man! Glorious fellowship is promised.

Don't let your heart be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me. In my Father's house are many homes. If it weren't so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and will receive you to myself; that where I am, you may be there also.

John 14:1-3 (WEB)

Okay, glorious eternal fellowship sounds great! But how can we fellowship with Jesus in this broken world now? How can we find real comfort from Christ's presence and the presence of his family when so much is ruined by sin? Furthermore, Jesus has been gone for a long time! Yes, but he has left us with the Holy Spirit, our comforter. Also we need to be reminded that because of sin we especially need the fellowship of other real live Christians. Sin often separates us and causes us to personally withdraw. This is not good and so we must fight against this to live openly with Christian friends. Hebrews 10:24-25 (WEB) warns,

Let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good works, not forsaking our own assembling together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as you see the Day approaching.

Also finding Christian fellowship can be difficult and especially difficult to find Christians who are confident that Jesus loves all mankind. However, we cannot and must not be idle or despair just because something is difficult. Hard work must be done to find and even build godly Christian fellowship. Jesus likewise warned in Matthew 8:19-20 (WEB),

A scribe came, and said to him, 'Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.' Jesus said to him, 'The foxes have holes, and the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.'

So hard work remains to find and build Christian fellowship. However, we must also remember that Jesus invites us to another kind of fellowship in this broken world. Jesus invites us to participate in the fellowship of his sufferings. We can like it or not, but this world is filled with suffering and Jesus invites us to join him in fighting the good fight against evil despite suffering. Though we may be tempted to relieve suffering by "going with the flow" Jesus set the example of swimming upstream and invites us to follow. Jesus' disciple Peter was well acquainted with suffering for wrong doing, but also for right doing.

12) Beloved, don't be astonished at the fiery trial which has come upon you, to test you, as though a strange thing happened to you. 13) But because you are partakers of Christ's sufferings, rejoice; that at the revelation of his glory you also may rejoice with exceeding joy. 14) If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed; because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. On their part he is blasphemed, but on your part he is glorified. 15) For let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or an evil doer, or a meddler in other men's matters. 16) But if one of you suffers for being a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God in this matter.

1 Peter 4:12-16 (WEB)

Thankfully Jesus' purpose is not eternal suffering! Jesus never enjoyed suffering, but "**endured the cross**" looking instead to the joy that the cross would achieve. What joy did the cross achieve? The redemption of mankind and glorious eternal fellowship! What joy does our suffering achieve? We can share intimate fellowship with Jesus and through suffering become like him. He suffered because of his love for all mankind and so will we! So we must look to Jesus for strength to endure the cross that he has assigned. We also look forward to that day when we raise our drink with Christ in celebration of victory!

But I tell you that I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on, until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's Kingdom.

Fellowship with Jesus is the best. Fellowship with Jesus right now is comfort through the trials we share with Jesus. And fellowship with Jesus then will be eternal comfort with absolutely no more trials and celebration of the victory he has won in our lives! Fellowship with Jesus!

Prove Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So what does it mean to prove Jesus?

Psalms 34:8-16 (WEB) says,

- 8) *Oh taste and see that Yahweh is good.
Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.*
- 9) *Oh fear Yahweh, you his saints,
for there is no lack with those who fear him.*
- 10) *The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger,
but those who seek Yahweh shall not lack any good thing.*
- 11) *Come, you children, listen to me.
I will teach you the fear of Yahweh.*
- 12) *Who is someone who desires life,
and loves many days, that he may see good?*
- 13) *Keep your tongue from evil,
and your lips from speaking lies.*
- 14) *Depart from evil, and do good.
Seek peace, and pursue it.*
- 15) *Yahweh's eyes are toward the righteous.
His ears listen to their cry.*
- 16) *Yahweh's face is against those who do evil,
to cut off their memory from the earth.*

Jesus commands us to trust and obey him and boasts that God is good and there is no better salvation. However, to back up his words, Jesus asks us to prove him -- to test him. He says, "**Oh taste and see that Yahweh is good.**" We are often like finicky children unwilling to eat the food that is before us. I never ate sour cream before I entered college because I did not want to eat anything sour! So then I tried sour cream on a potato and learned that sour cream is creamy! I loved it. I can no longer eat a potato without it! So what lies and misunderstandings about God's faithfulness have we believed and swallowed? Jesus invites us to prove him, to test him, to taste and see that He is good!

John 10:1-5 (WEB) says,

- 1) *Most certainly, I tell you, one who doesn't enter by the door into the sheep fold, but climbs up some other way, is a thief and a robber.*
- 2) *But one who enters in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.*
- 3) *The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out.*
- 4) *Whenever he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.*
- 5) *They will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him; for they don't know the voice of strangers.*

Do not follow the voice of a stranger! Our good Heavenly Father has proved his love for us by sending his one and only son, Jesus, to die on the cross for our sins. His love

could absolutely not be greater. He challenges us to test his love and erase all of our doubts! He wants our whole heart without reserve and he is confident that he has all the love and forgiveness that we will ever need and more. Do you still have doubts? Taste and see that the Lord is good, but do not follow a stranger!

Romans 10:10-13 (WEB) says,

10) For with the heart, one believes resulting in righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made resulting in salvation. 11) For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes in him will not be disappointed." 12) For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, and is rich to all who call on him. 13) For, "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Jesus promises that when we give our lives to him, he will protect and care for us, guaranteeing that we will never be put to shame. Of course this does not mean that we will never have trials. Instead it means that Jesus will be by our side and be our defender through even the worst of circumstances.

Jesus challenges us to test him on his promises because he is so confident that he is and has everything we will ever need and want. Jesus is the best! Prove Jesus!

Revere Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So what does it mean to revere Jesus?

17) When I saw him, I fell at his feet like a dead man. He laid his right hand on me, saying, "Don't be afraid. I am the first and the last, 18) and the Living one. I was dead, and behold, I am alive forever more. Amen. I have the keys of Death and of Hades. 19) Write therefore the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will happen hereafter;

Revelation 1:17-18 (WEB)

Jesus holds the keys to death and Hades. He appoints the time our death and he raises the dead. He also locks the unbelieving in the punishments of Hades and will empty Hades on the last day. Friends, our destiny is not in the hands of our supposed *free will*, but in the hands of Jesus' will. Jesus is the God of our past, our present, and our future. So we are advised to revere Christ.

Twenty-first century sentiment emphasizes authenticity and sincerity. Pastors preach in jeans. Parishioners sport sweats. Yet, even the actors and actresses in my oldies movie collection are wearing collared shirts with ties and Sunday best dresses. The motto for today is *"get comfortable."* This is not bad in itself. However, if we remember our sin problem, letting it all hang out before Holy God is not honesty, but harlotry, not beautiful, but brazen. We should answer Joan Osborne's question, *"What if God was one of us? Just a slob like one of us?"* Friends, Jesus left Heaven to be one of us, but he was never a slob like all of us. Instead he is a perfect gentleman, the servant of all, the King of the Universe, and the coming judge. He searches our hearts with a fiery eyed love that burns through every idol to melt the hardest hearted.

Jesus' passion for mankind propelled him to warn the unrepentant that judgment is coming. He called us at our worst **"hypocrites," "blind guides," "whitewashed tombs," "murderers,"** and **"snakes!"** He warned unbelievers of sentence to **"outer darkness," "weeping and gnashing of teeth,"** suffering where the **"worm does not die,"** and **"agony!"** Spineless forms of Universalism have lost touch with the reality of human corruption and the consequences that follow without repentance. We are all summoned to stand before the almighty judge of the Universe to give account. Even the most irreverent fool will then revere Christ.

Jesus' eternal love for mankind also promises his people that **"no one can snatch [his sheep] out of his hand."** The love of Christ given to chosen mankind from even before creation is utterly inescapable! The love of God is so wide, long, high, and deep that it **"surpasses knowledge!"** In other words, God's love even partially understood **"blows our minds!"** Just consider the goodness that God has prepared for his people in eternity. **"...Scripture says: 'No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined the things that God has prepared for those who love him' "** (1 Corinthians 2:9 NOG). Just to wet our appetites, the Apostle Paul was caught up into Heaven and was not even allowed to repeat what he heard there. Even the most reverent Christian will then revere Christ even more!

Jesus spoke both words of warning and words of promise. He warned mankind about the consequences of sin in this life as well as the afterlife punishments in

Hades. He also promised paradise for the believing as well as eternal glory for chosen mankind. Jesus calls the shots! Revere Jesus!

Worship Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So what does it mean to worship Jesus?

Isaiah 45:22-25 (WEB) says,

22) Look to me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. 23) I have sworn by myself. The word has gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and will not be revoked, that to me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath. 24) They will say of me, "There is righteousness and strength only in Yahweh." Even to him shall men come; and all those who raged against him shall be disappointed. 25) All the offspring of Israel will be justified in Yahweh, and will rejoice!

Though most of mankind does not know or follow Jesus, nor are they excited about him... the day is coming when every single human being will bow his knee and shout "***There is righteousness and strength only in Yahweh.***" While presently the majority of mankind knows nothing of the Lord's grace, the day is coming when all the redeemed will see the Lord face to face. Though the unbelieving will have to suffer shame for their unrepentance, they too will finally repent and join the happy crowd shouting praises to God. Note: worship sometimes gets confused with singing in church services. While singing can be a form of worship, the shouting of praises by the redeemed over Christ's final victory is more like the loud ecstatic praise at a nail biting come-from-behind victory.

Philippians 2:9-11 (WEB) says,

9) Therefore God also highly exalted him, and gave to him the name which is above every name, 10) that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, those on earth, and those under the earth, 11) and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Again every knee will happily bow in Heaven, on Earth, and under the Earth! Friends this verse is saying everyone will praise God from Heaven, to Earth, to the depths of Hades, under the Earth... that is ALL mankind!

Revelation 5:9-14 (WEB) says,

9) They sang a new song, saying, "You are worthy to take the book, and to open its seals: for you were killed, and bought us for God with your blood, out of every tribe, language, people, and nation, 10) and made us kings and priests to our God, and we will reign on the earth." 11) I saw, and I heard something like a voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousands of ten thousands, and thousands of thousands; 12) saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who has been killed to receive the power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honor, glory, and blessing!" 13) I heard every created thing which is in heaven, on the earth, under the earth, on the sea, and everything in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb be the blessing, the honor, the glory, and the dominion, forever and ever! Amen!" 14) The four living creatures said, "Amen!" Then the elders fell down and worshiped.

Again every knee will gladly and willingly bow in ecstatic response to Christ's victory over sin and death. Get ready!

True worship of Christ is not rote or ritual. Instead, through accurate knowledge of God and persuasion about his love for ALL mankind, we throw our hats to the air in jubilation. Worship Jesus!

Optimistic Study Guide



The Biblical proofs cited in the body of my *Optimism Out of Control* book were sufficient evidence for me to know that my Optimism was in fact not out of control, but instead was founded on the truth of Scripture and the knowledge of the character of God.

Jesus Christ truly is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind.

However, what is sufficient proof for me may not be sufficient proof for you! So I have attached an abstract and study guide below that simply asks questions for you to answer from the Bible. I hope you find the guide helpful in your quest to know God and know his love for both you and others. I pray that these resources help you to be a disciple and make disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Optimism Study Guide

Also, while pursuing my own optimistic study, numerous objectors asked hard questions about my hope in Christ. The following appendix contains some of the best objections and even better answers. I hope you continue reading through the [Appendix](#).

Appendix

Admittedly the ideas in this book are controversial... as was Jesus himself.

While many have been able to find fellowship in a tidy theological camp, I have both agreement and disagreement with available traditions. My goal in pursuing Christ has been to be pro-Christ, anti-denominational, thoroughly Biblical, and willing to consider the hard questions. Yet I do not want to be dogmatic and close the door to discussion. The truth does not change with discussion, yet God can use discussion to help both you and I grow in the truth. So, this last chapter is a place to air important feedback and discussion about this clarification of the gospel, as well as additional supporting arguments.

You were already invited to make comments and raise questions on each page of the book online. However, if you prefer to email me questions at DGJC.ORG/CONTACT I will answer them in the online [Appendix](#). I will remove your name to protect your privacy.



Aion

Most Christian Universalists have observed, as I, that the Greek word "*aion*" is at times wrongly translated "*eternal*" in the English Bible when the meaning can also be "*age*", "*life*", "*entire*", "*complete*", and "*world*". To help your own study I have used the <http://www.blueletterbible.org> to find every usage of the Greek words "*aion*," "*aionios*," and "*aidios*" in the New Testament.

aion: Strong's G165 occurs 128 times in 102 verses in the Greek concordance.

aionios: Strong's G166 occurs 71 times in 69 verses in the Greek concordance.

aidios: Strong's G126 occurs 2 times in 2 verses in the Greek concordance.

My online chart lists the references to these Greek words in the World English Bible and the Young's Literal Translation along with my notes. This may help your own study of this fascinating word. Download all the New Testament 'AION' verses at...

DGJC.ORG/OPTIMISM/AION

My articles [Forever Is Not Forever? You Gotta Be Kidding Me!](#) and [Forever Is Not Forever? You Still Gotta Be Kidding Me!](#) also offer my understanding of this important subject.

Arminian & Calvin Only?

One thoughtful reader asked...

READER>> Why do you only compare Arminianism and Calvinism? There are many other religions and many other Christian denominations. So why do you only focus on the Arminian and Calvinist denominations?

ME>> That is an excellent question. Your question reminds me why this salvation discussion is so difficult. It is too easy to miss prerequisite concepts. First, understand that the labels "*Arminianism*" and "*Calvinism*" are not the names of particular Christian groups or denominations. Instead, these labels originated in history past to describe particular ways of thinking about salvation. There is no church of Jacob Arminius or church of John Calvin, the two men whose names have become attached to these particular views of salvation.

Instead, various Christian denominations and individual Christians throughout history have adopted one view or the other, or attempted modified views. For example, there are Baptist churches that are Arminian in their salvation doctrine and there are Baptist churches that are Calvinist in their salvation doctrine. There are also Presbyterian churches that are Arminian in their salvation doctrine and there are Presbyterian churches that are Calvinist in their salvation doctrine. There are also individual Christians within Baptist, Presbyterian, Catholic, Methodist, and all kinds of churches with an Arminian or Calvinist view of salvation, perhaps even agreeing or disagreeing with the view of their church or pastor. There are also many Christians who simply follow Jesus and are totally unaware of these distinctions.

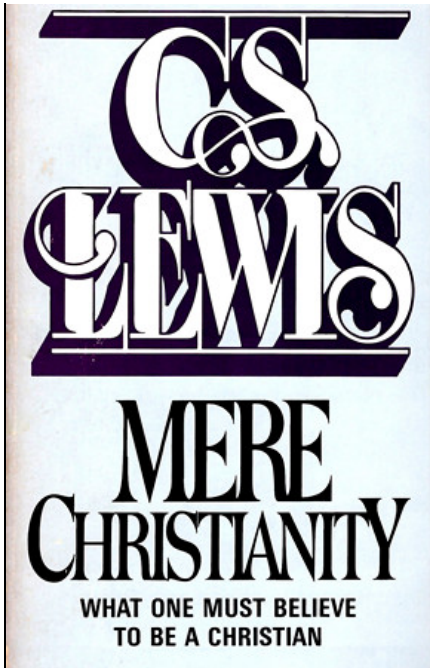
Yet even so, the salvation view of most Christian denominations and individual Christians can be categorized as either Arminian or Calvinist. Do you believe Christ paid for the sins of *ALL* mankind or only a chosen *PART*? Do you believe Christ completed *ALL* of salvation for the saved or only a *PART*? Secondly, understand that Arminianism and Calvinism are the two most common views of salvation found within Christendom. So it is fitting that any book about Christian salvation should also consider these views in the discussion. This book has simply put the magnifying glass of comparison and contrast on Arminian and Calvinist doctrine, regardless of what flavor church denomination you attend. My goal has been to help clarify the gospel of grace to you and point out the strengths and weaknesses of Arminianism and Calvinism, the most popular salvation models currently accepted.

Book Reviews

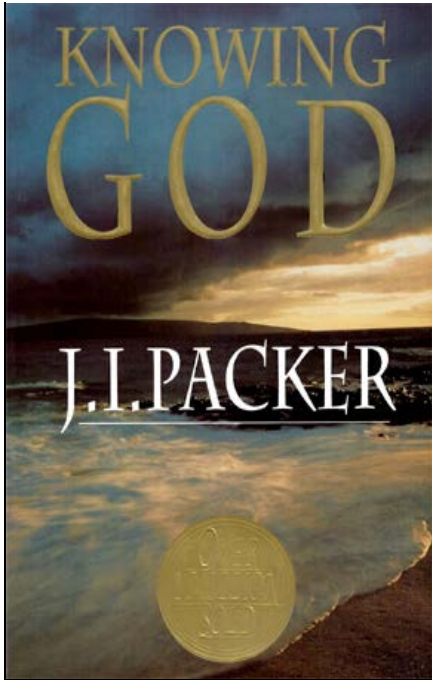
My book has mentioned other authors and their books. Friends have also asked me to read additional books to challenge my understanding. Each of the authors below has attempted to consistently and systematically answer questions about Christian salvation. The variation of conclusions is surprising and even disturbing. Read the books below ([index](#)) to learn more about the thoughts of others and of course compare them to the Bible. If you do read each book below you will see that many authors conclude that Christ will save all mankind, though each reason from their tradition. How could it be otherwise? Because of this there is still quite a range of understanding even among those that happily conclude that God saves all. Hopefully the happiness is not ruined by these differences! I have addressed some of the differences in my article, [Yes, but Even Harder Questions](#).

Conventionally book writers should not write reviews of similarly themed books. The review and conclusion should be left to the audience. So please consider the notes below an introduction to books you may not be familiar with and an encouragement to read them yourself.

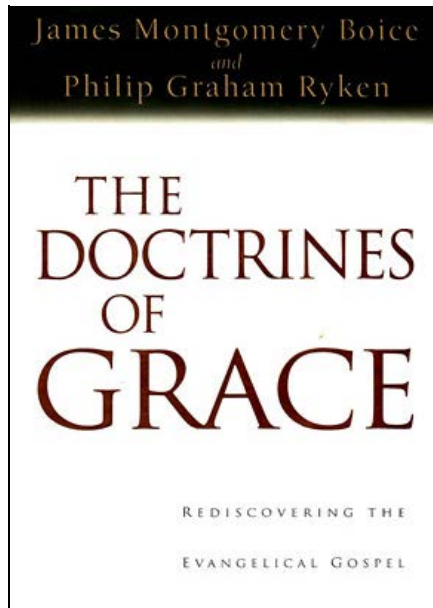
My memory is largely untrustworthy, but it is possible that this is my second time reading many of the books below. The thought occurred that a friend recommended some of these books in the past and that while reading these authors I prayed that one day, when I became a more mature Christian, that I might write my own defense of Christ's victory. I certainly have not been faithful to maintain a consistent position through the decades, and worse I have been quite hypocritical. However, I mention these things so that I can give thanks and confess... to God be the glory.



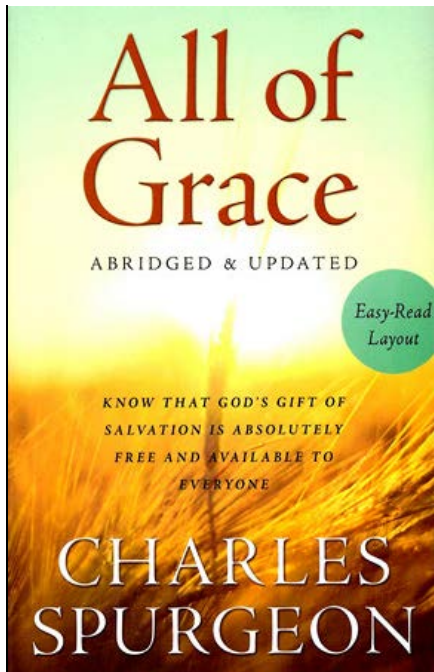
C. S. Lewis wrote *Mere Christianity*, the most popular Christian view today worldwide. He says on page 52, *"God created things which had free will. That means creatures which can go either wrong or right. Some people think they can imagine a creature which was free but had no possibility of going wrong; I cannot. If a thing is free to be good it is also free to be bad. And free will is what has made evil possible. Why, then, did God give them free will? Because free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having."* Lewis is the modern champion of Arminian salvation and orthodoxy, that God loves all mankind, but his "love" respects man's *free will* to reject Christ and as a result to be damned by God for all eternity. So that is one view of God's love. My article, [Other Theologians](#), offers further review of Lewis.



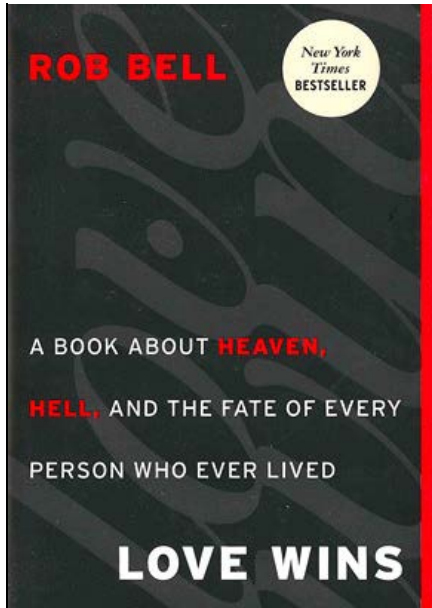
J. I. Packer wrote *Knowing God*. Packer's excellently worded volume is one of the top books that have shaped present day evangelical thought. Packer's position is classic Calvinism and he has won many to this way of thinking through his book on salvation theology. The best part about the book, however, is that strictly speaking it is not a theology book in the sense you might imagine. Instead it is simply a book about '*knowing God*' and the life changes that can be expected when one does know God. I am greatly encouraged every time I read the book... except for one point. Packer writes that God certainly does not love all mankind. He follows the traditional explanations that Christ died for all mankind, but only those also specially chosen by God's grace to be born again will place faith in Christ and be finally saved. The remainder are then instead eternally damned by God's wrath. Packer makes no mention of the eonian nature of punishment in Hades thus a haunting question remains. Can one who thinks that God does not deeply love all mankind truly know God?



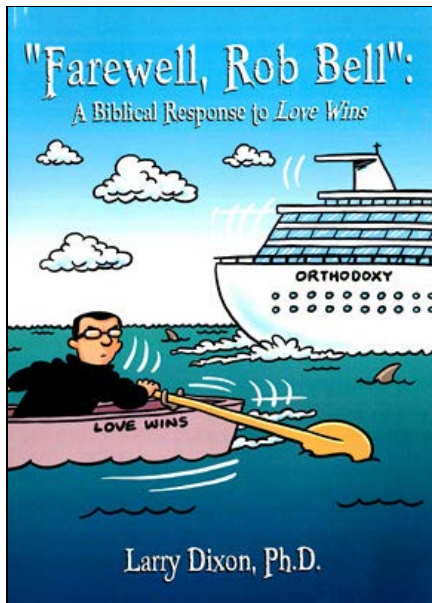
James Boice wrote *The Doctrines of Grace*, a solid defense of Calvinistic salvation. He says on page 125, *"If Jesus died for all the sins of all men, unbelief included, then all are saved, which the Bible denies. If he died for all the sins of all men, unbelief excluded, then he did not die for the sins of anybody and all must be condemned. There is no other position, save that he died for the sins of the elect people only."* Though Calvinism is not as popular as Arminianism it is a strongly held and defended orthodoxy. Calvinism concludes that God only loves a subset of mankind and his love is guaranteed to win these chosen to salvation while the majority are damned by God for all eternity. So that is another view of God's love. My article, [Other Theologians](#), offers further review.



Charles Spurgeon wrote *All of Grace*. Spurgeon, called the Prince of Preachers, is one of the most respected Calvinists in history. He won many to repentance saying, "Meet me in Heaven!" I would easily recommend the book, yet it is not without fault. He seems to undermine grace on page 131 saying, "The Lord does... produce new birth in all who believe," but instead only those who are born again can believe in the first place, I John 5:1. Yet he also says, "I will go as far as Martin Luther, in that strong assertion of his, where he says, 'If any man doth ascribe aught of salvation, even the very least, to the free-will of man, he knoweth nothing of grace, and he hath not learnt Jesus Christ aright.'" Yet sadly Spurgeon did not understand the temporal nature of punishment and that even the redeemed, if unbelieving, are punished in Hades, 2 Peter 2:1-2. But the redeemed, even if punished in Hades, will never suffer in the Lake of Fire, so his warning to escape wrath can only result in adding human conditions to God's unconditional love.

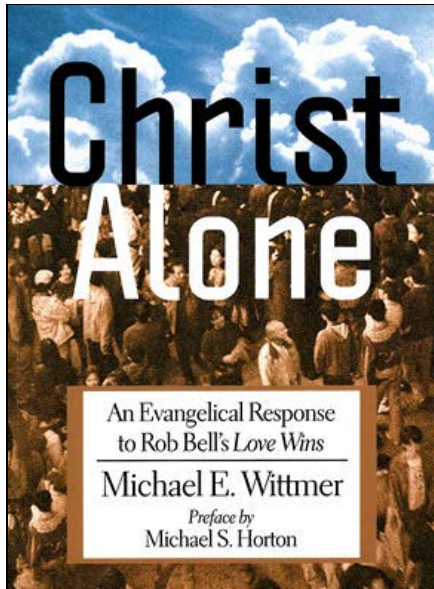


Rob Bell wrote *Love Wins*, an alternate explanation of the gospel. The desire to write my book was born after reading his book. His supposed claim that all mankind is finally saved created a national stir that prompted me to investigate his ideas to compare with my own. The spoiler is that his book is hardly definitive that all mankind is saved, but instead he thinks the saved can still choose to sin and leave God in Heaven. That is yet another view of God's love and power (or lack of power) to transform. Sadly Bell's book also lacks the precision that one might hope for in a theological treatise. My article, '[Love Wins](#)' by Rob Bell, offers further review.

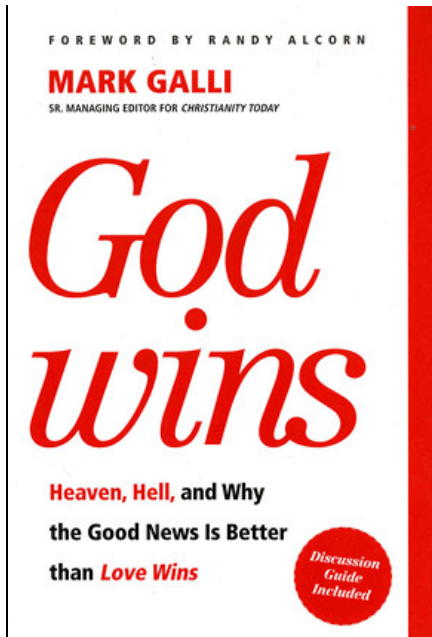


Larry Dixon wrote *Farewell, Rob Bell* to refute *Love Wins*. On page 14 Dixon says, "These [Bell's] statements imply that believing the gospel has no transactional effect upon the

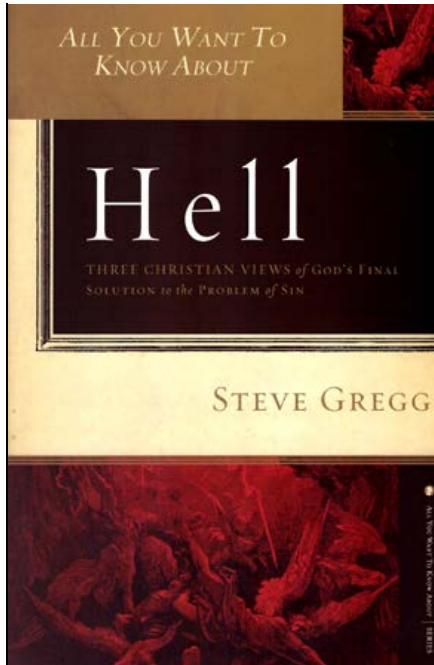
sinner, that belief is immaterial to the reality of being in the Father's love." Dixon understands Bell to say that faith does not activate or help to deposit Jesus' payment for our sin into our account. Bell understands that Jesus' payment is applied by God before we believe. Christians then are those people who believe in what God has already done for them, meanwhile the sins of unbelievers are also paid. Dixon sees this as a heretical error because he believes that "faith" plays a "transactional" role in applying Jesus' work to each individual. My article, [Three Rebuttals](#), offers further review.



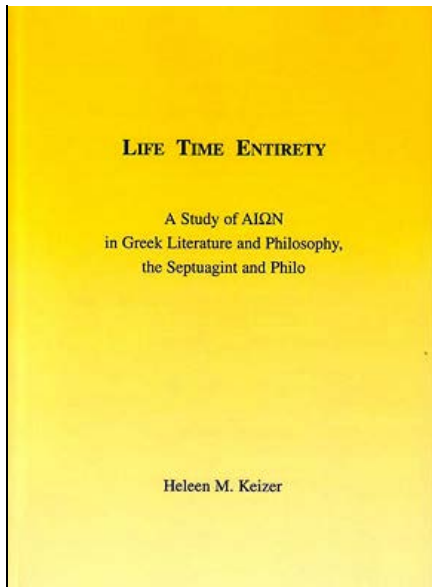
Michael Wittmer wrote *Christ Alone* to refute *Love Wins*. On page 12 Wittmer explains that "...evangelicals hold that faith is an open hand, a passive receiving of God's precious gift to anyone who accepts it." Wittmer and Bell also appear to have different definitions of "faith." Unfortunately, Wittmer did not more clearly distinguish the difference between "faith" that is trust in the finished work of Christ already applied to our account versus "faith" that is the condition to activate salvation. The language of "passive receiving" needs further explanation. Wittmer is apparently from the Calvinist camp, but he sounds Arminian at times. My article, [Three Rebuttals](#), offers further review.



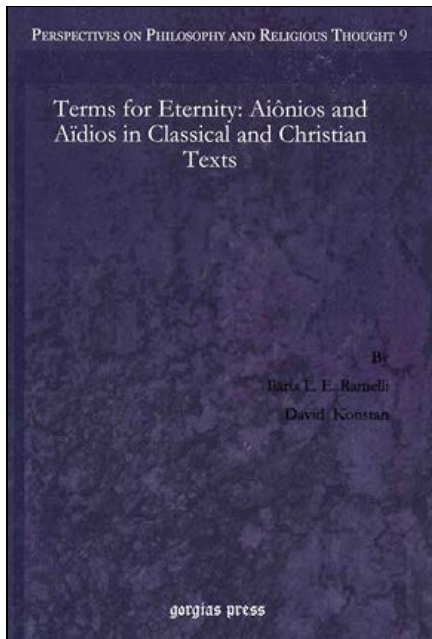
Mark Galli wrote *God Wins* to refute *Love Wins*. Galli says, "*Universalists quote many other passages with the word 'all' in them, but in context, most of those really mean 'all Israel', or 'all kinds of people' or 'both Jews and Gentiles' will be saved. One example is found in Romans: 'God has imprisoned everyone in disobedience so that he could have mercy on everyone' (Romans 11:32). Paul has been discussing the place of Jews and Gentiles in the scheme of salvation, so clearly the 'all' here means both Jews and Gentiles - not all within each group.*" Galli's treatment of this important verse is too brief. The grand conclusion of grace theology deserves serious commentary. My article, [Three Rebuttals](#), offers further review.



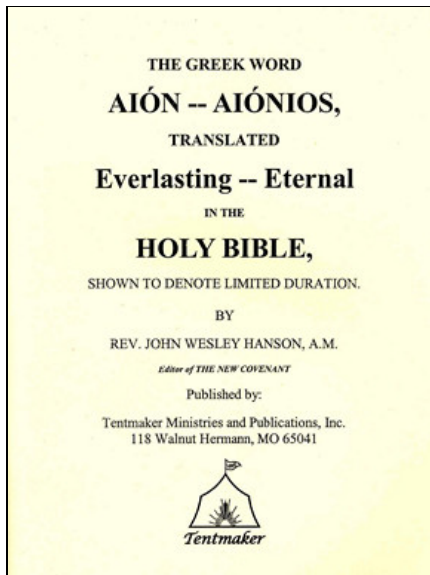
Steve Gregg of [The Narrow Path](#), wrote *All You Want to Know About Hell*. Gregg presents an equitable description of three Christian views of Hell that have been held throughout history. Gregg does not endorse a particular view because he has not taken a position yet himself. Thus one might hope that his analysis is more balanced as a result. The three views of Hell explained in his volume are the *traditional* view that Hell is eternal punishment for the unbelieving, the *conditional* view that Hell is temporary with human immortality being conditioned upon faith, also known as annihilationism, and the *restorationist* view that Hell is temporary with the guaranteed posthumous salvation of unbelieving mankind, also known as Christian Universalism. The big surprise for today's evangelical is that all three of these views co-existed in Christian thought for the first 5 centuries! Gregg cites that of the six major schools of theology in the early centuries of the church four were *restorationist*, one was *conditional* immortality, and the last school at Rome adopted the present *traditional* view while anathematizing the *restorationists*.



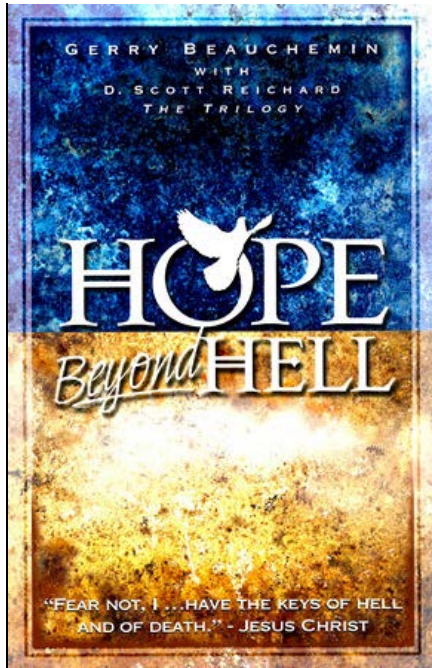
Dr. Heleen Keizer wrote *Life Time Entirety* to explain the meaning of the Greek word "aion." Her 315 page PhD dissertation shows that the Greek word "aion" originally denotes "life time," "duration," or "complete life," but not "eternal." This understanding is foundational for those believing that grace is victorious even for the unbelieving. Curiously Dr. Keizer completed her research and dissertation without prior knowledge of John Wesley Hanson's research. You can read her [315 page dissertation online](#) or an [abstract of her conclusions on my website](#). My article, *Forever is not Forever? You Gotta Be Kidding Me!*, offers further review.



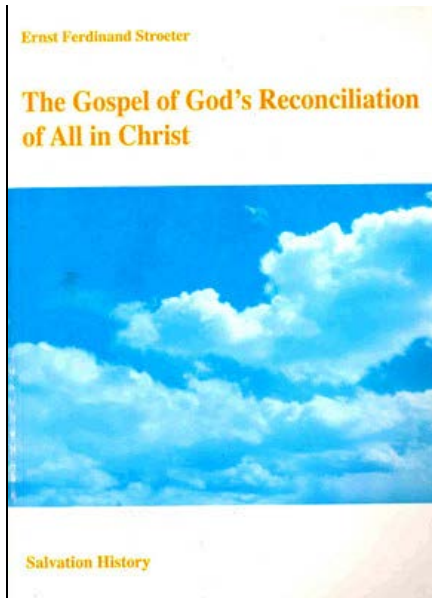
Ilaria Ramelli and David Konstan wrote *Terms for Eternity: Aionios and Aidios in Classical and Christian Texts*. This highly technical volume quotes hundreds of sources from classical literature, the Septuagint, early church fathers, and church fathers after Origen to determine the meaning and usage of *Aionios* and *Aidios*. They conclude that *Aidios* nearly always means eternal in the absolute sense. *Aidios* is used twice in the Bible: Romans 1:20 concerning God and Jude 6 concerning the bonds on fallen angels. *Aionios*, however, has a range of meanings including, "life," "age," "generation," and "eon." *Aionios* can also mean "eternal," but only when God is the subject. Ramelli and Konstan concur with Keizer and Hanson and conclude saying, "Needless to say, the ethical implications of this question are profound."



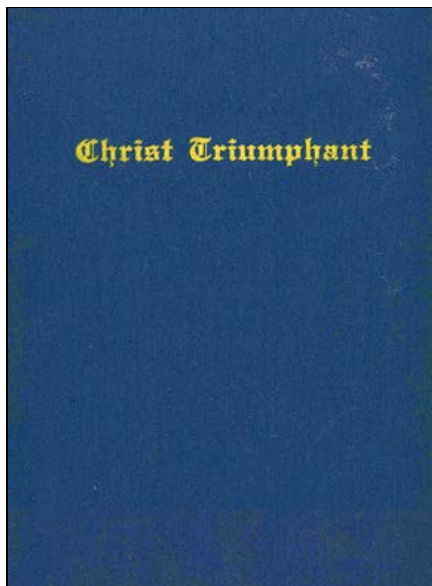
John Wesley Hanson wrote *The Greek Word AION - AIONIOS Translated Everlasting - Eternal in the Holy Bible Shown to Denote Limited Duration*. His classic work planted a seed of thought that gave birth to my optimistic understanding that Jesus is the savior of all mankind. I do not agree with Hanson's interpretation of every Scripture, particularly Matthew 25. Yet, Hanson cleared the way to understand that grace is completely apart from human condition and God does in fact truly love all mankind. This classic work is available for free from the U.S. Library of Congress website and also [from my own website](#). My article, [Forever is not Forever? You Gotta Be Kidding Me!](#), offers further review.



Gerry Beauchemin wrote *Hope Beyond Hell*. He offers four corrections to traditional Hell theology: the meanings of "aion," "gehenna," and "apollumi," and the error of *free will*. On page 82, he happily agrees with the Calvinists that God always accomplishes his sovereign will to save his chosen people and he also agrees with Arminians who believe that God loves all mankind. Like me he has added these two simple facts into the awesome news that Jesus is the savior of all mankind and thus there must be *Hope Beyond Hell* which he proves with Scripture. On page 165 he boldly says, "*The only way I [or you] can be truly assured I will be saved is if I believe that God saves all [mankind].*" I totally agree! Otherwise your "faith" is built on something other than grace. Beauchemin is a courageous defender of truth versus tradition.

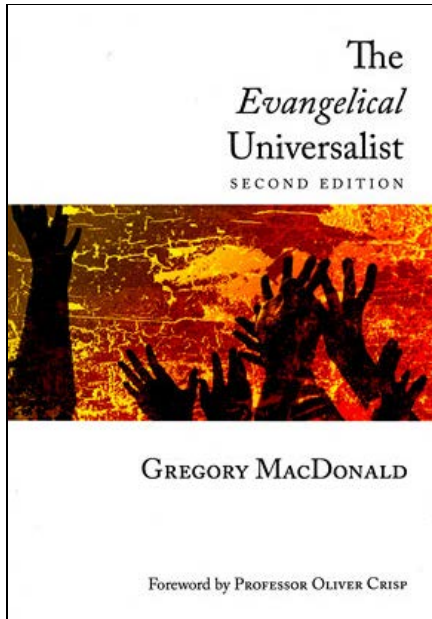


Ernst Stroeter, a United Methodist pastor, wrote *The Gospel of God's Reconciliation of All in Christ*. He is no weak, liberal, wishful thinker with disregard for Scripture. He offers solid exegesis of Colossians 1:15-20 and the cross of Jesus Christ as proof of God's love for mankind. He says on page 168, "*we must discard the pious illusion that there is safety for us because we became believers - that we are safe because of something we did. We must shed the belief of a personal, solitary faith and learn to rest in a different way in the redeeming grace for all humankind.*" He defends the cross like no other and was persecuted for it. Stroeter does speculate further than I prefer about the salvation of fallen angels and also about eons before Genesis 1:3 and after Revelation 22:21.

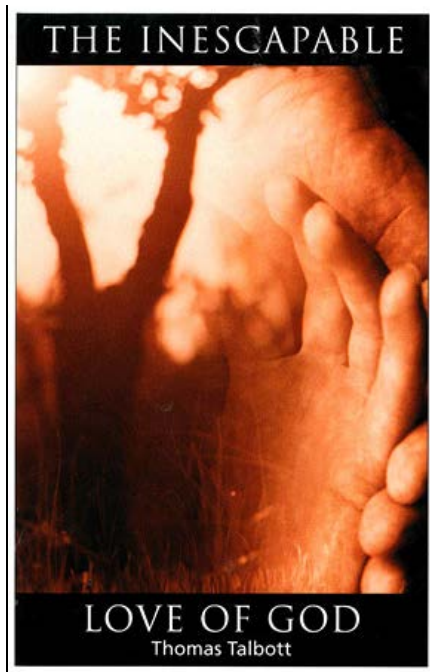


Thomas Allin wrote *Christ Triumphant, The Larger Hope Asserted*. He argues for the final victory of Christ with Scripture, Christian reason, and the testimony of early and later

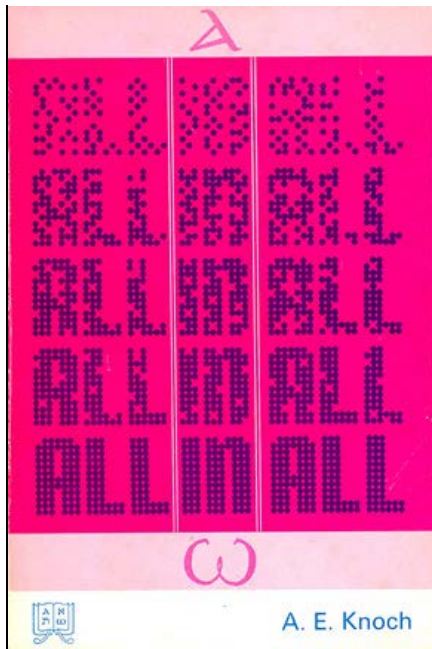
church fathers. He highlights Romans 11:32 and countless other Scripture. He reasons that a god who merely offers love till the point of death followed by eternal damnation, if unbelieving, is not the gracious God of the Bible. He cites Origen, Clement, Gregory, Jerome, and many others as well as church creeds, hymns, and liturgies. Allin insists that God will salt all mankind with fire and condemn the unbeliever to Hades. However, because "aion" is temporal these judgments are for purification, not damnation, 1 Peter 4:6. He concludes, "God shall be all in all!" - Amen!



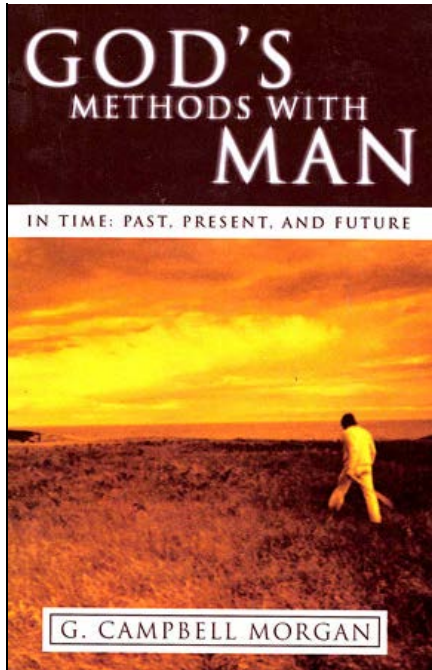
Robin Parry wrote *The Evangelical Universalist* under the pseudonym Gregory MacDonald. Parry reasons carefully as he questions traditional Hell theology. He notes that Calvinism and Arminianism are each reasonable at points, but also unreasonable. They cannot both be true and one is not preferred alone. That is why Christians are so divided over this point! Parry says on page 23, "To my mind, Christian reason seems to lead either to Calvinist universalism, or away from Calvinism." So true! Also Parry and Beauchemin both agree with Hanson, that the "aion" of the Lake of Fire is only an age of punishment for unbelievers. Yet I still think a better explanation is that the "aion" of Hades is temporary punishment for unbelievers, but the Lake of Fire is for *The Ages of The Ages*, yet only for fallen angels. I highly recommend Parry.



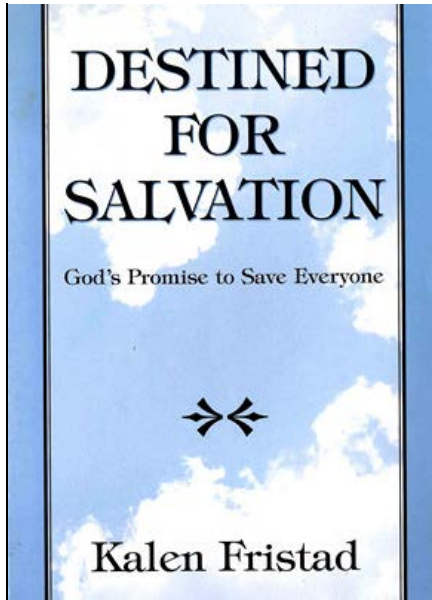
Thomas Talbott wrote *The Inescapable Love of God*. Part I & II are the most readable well stated defense of Christ as Savior of all that I have reviewed. Read it! One would have to turn off all reason and reliance on Scripture to deny his proofs. Part III, however, is more difficult to follow. He argues against a retributivist God, but he should clarify that God's holiness would hypothetically demand the eternal banishment of even the least blemished sinner... were it not for Christ. Thus the believing worship Christ for his sacrifice which now demands our salvation and transformation. This high bar is our guarantee that the redeemed will not bring even our least blemish into glory. Talbott concludes saying Christian faith is the logical wager between hope and despair. Though Christian hope is not a wager, but instead repentance from hypocrisy to confess Christ as our savior and the savior of all mankind.



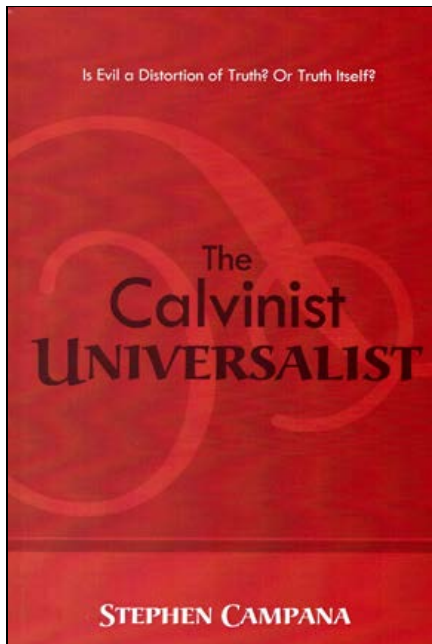
A. E. Knoch wrote *All In All*. Knoch's volume proposes a very interesting model of redemptive history with 5 distinct eons between eternity past and eternity future. I plan to study this further. Knoch's understanding of eon, eon of eons, and the eons of the eons supported his conclusion that all mankind will be finally saved. Knoch also played a key role in the compilation of the [Concordant Bible](#). This Bible translates "aion" as "eon" and also consistently translates every Greek word with only one English word to help the reader observe the Holy Spirit's word choices. Knoch has much to contribute to this discussion, but unfortunately he also muddies the waters. His "eonian" theory is tied into the most dogmatic dispensational system I have ever seen. Knoch also parted ways with orthodoxy concerning the Trinity and the deity of Christ. Too bad. More can be learned about Knoch at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adolph_Ernst_Knoch.



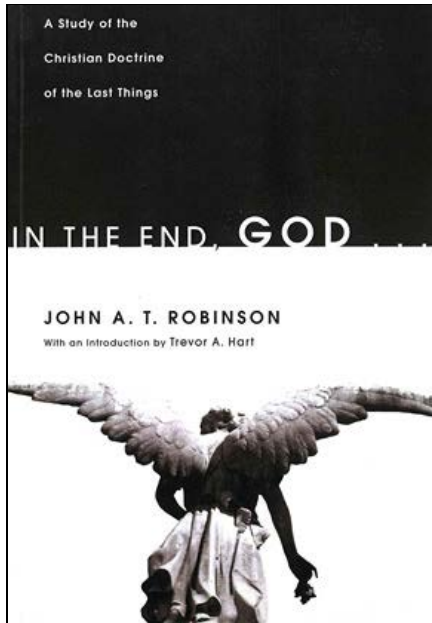
G. Campbell Morgan wrote *God's Methods with Man*, including a chart of the history of redemption. Those with a dispensational flair will be encouraged, while the remainder will be challenged. He makes critical observations of history's "aions." Morgan strongly states on page 135 that, "Names entered in the [Book of Life] are found there only by virtue of the atoning blood of Jesus Christ." This is the good news since Christ died for all mankind (+1)! He also notes that 1 Corinthians 2:7-10 says that the mystery of God's love for ALL mankind is only revealed to the church. God loves ALL, but only the church believes it (+1)! Yet somehow he also concludes that man's will can finally resist grace (-1) and oddly that there is an inner church within the church (-1). Some of Rob Bell's thoughts parallel this book. (Score: 0) My own redemptive history chart can be found in my article, [Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News!](#)



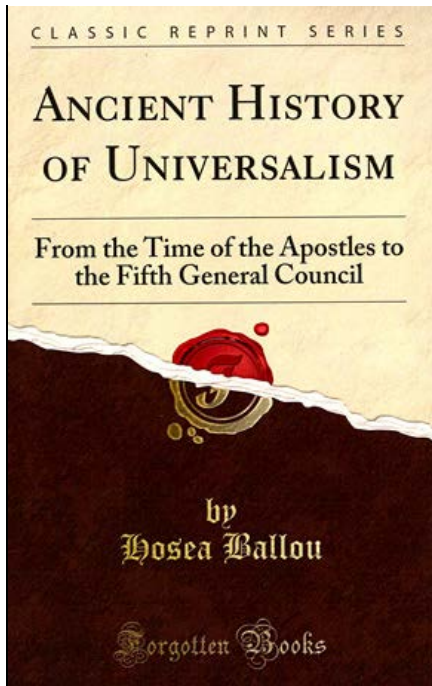
Kalen Fristad wrote *Destined for Salvation, God's Promise to Save Everyone*. Fristad argues for the salvation of all mankind with similar reasons as other evangelicals including that "aion" means age or a temporal duration, that man does not have *free will* to effect God's unconditional love, and that God's judgment, even in Hades, are loving acts toward his unrepentant people. On page 44 Fristad, in the gentlest way, boldly calls belief in *free will* idolatry! He also provides useful chapters on the history of Christian Universalism and strategies for sharing the good news without fear. Fristad does fail to protect the inspiration of Scripture suggesting that Luke 16:19-31 is a parable and that OT Scripture was influenced by the writer's wrong cultural views of God. However, the OT Scripture was God breathed! I recommend the book with caveats.



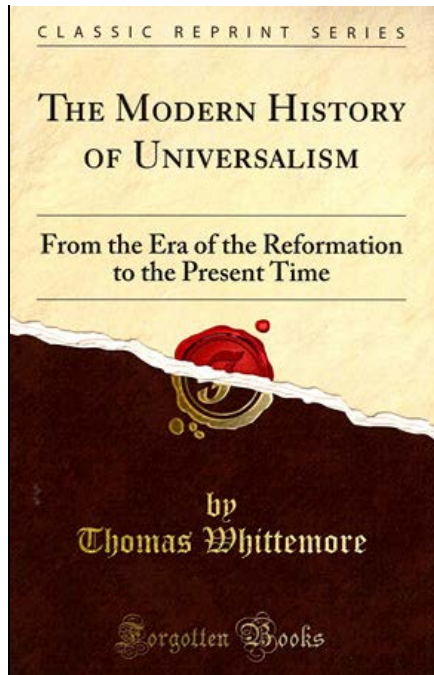
Stephen Campana wrote *The Calvinist Universalist*. He says on page 149, "...the consistent Calvinist will either embrace universal salvation or reject Calvinist election." He also considers my own conclusion that the Lake of Fire is not designed for mankind, but for fallen angels. Like me, he also asserts that mankind's fallen nature was ordained by God, NOT man's supposed *free will*. He proposes mankind was created with a sinful nature, while I propose that God subjected his sinless creation to vanity after the proclamation of 'very good', but before the rebellion of Satan and mankind. Though we agree that sin entered the world because God ordained our fallen natures which now lust to be god. Campana could more careful when describing God's sovereign and prescriptive will. Saying that God "*wanted*" Adam to sin does not best describe God's motives. Instead God "*ordained*" the existence of sin, to create the opportunity to demonstrate his grace, forgiving and leading us away from sin. While I may not agree with all Campana's arguments, he emphasizes an essential component in the defense of universal salvation, the necessity for faith to be reasonable.



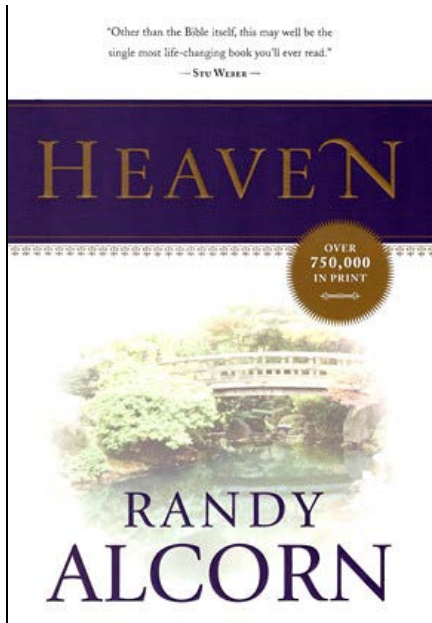
John Robinson wrote *In the End, GOD, A Study of the Christian Doctrine of Last Things*. Robinson offends epistemology and inspiration so gravely with the invention of *eschatological myth* that many will throw the book away after Chapter 5, if they get that far. I nearly did myself! Yet he makes key points in chapters "*The Resurrection of the Body*," "*The End of the Lord*," and "*All in All*." He is accused of arrogance by Trevor Hart for asserting that God must save all mankind because of Christ. On that point I join Robinson! Yet Robinson missed the eonian nature of Hades and instead violates inspiration to explain Scripture. Thomas Torrance also condemns Robinson for saying the gospel includes the *mythological reality* of eternal damnation for the unbeliever. Yet Torrance is self-condemned saying the *mystery of sin* requires the damnation of unbelievers though their sins are atoned! My review continues in my article, [The Good, Bad, and Ugly of John Robinson](#).



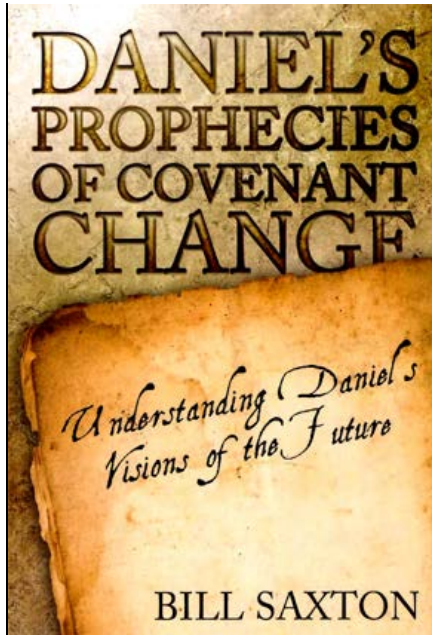
Hosea Ballou wrote *Ancient History of Universalism*. Very interesting! Today an overwhelming majority of Christians understand hope in the universal salvation of mankind to be heretical. However, this forgotten book, originally published in 1885, documents the history of Universalism from the Apostles to the Fifth General Council in 553 A.D.. Read the volume and you will be surprised to learn that many Christians held that Jesus would finally reconcile his entire creation to himself. In fact Universalism prospered until condemned by Catholic politics in 553 A.D. Origen and other early church fathers were strong voices that Christ would be "all in all" even saving Satan!



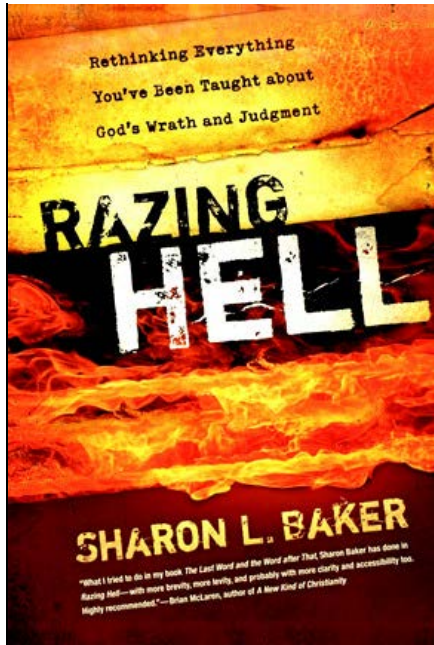
Thomas Whittemore wrote *The Modern History of Universalism*. The most surprising fact in this volume is the ample and consistent witness to Christ as savior of all mankind throughout nearly all of church history. Adherents included Calvinists, Arminians, churchmen, dissenters, Catholics, protestants, Anabaptists, Baptists, Europeans, Americans, and Internationals. Whittenmore suggests that the greatest irony of the Reformation is that many protestants rejected Catholic purgatorial Hell only to embrace it again. Also a hilarious conversation is recorded between John Murray and an objector on pages 323-324 that is worth the price of the book. Murray is the Father of American Universalism. The book concludes with important theological distinctions between various Universalists.



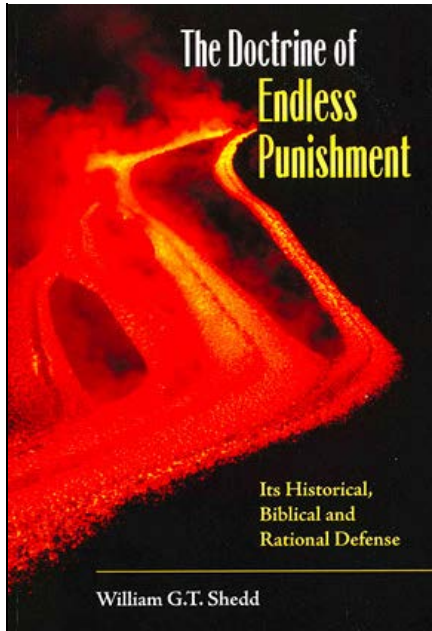
Randy Alcorn wrote *Heaven*. He rejects universal salvation siding with Arminians that "*free choice*" gains us Heaven. He agrees that the present Paradise and Hell are temporary. He also agrees that the Hebrew "*olam*" can mean finite duration. He uses Colossians 1:20 to assert the complete restoration of all things such as plants, animals, rocks, and stars. He even asserts the final salvation of the unborn and children because "*God in his... special love for children covers them with Christ's blood,*" page 355. If only his excitement for complete reconciliation would include unbelievers. If "*olam*" can mean finite then the Greek "*aion*" can also mean a finite time in Hell. Alcorn should trust that just like the unborn, "*God in his special love covered all mankind with Christ's blood.*" As an aside check out page 352 for speculation about sex in Heaven!



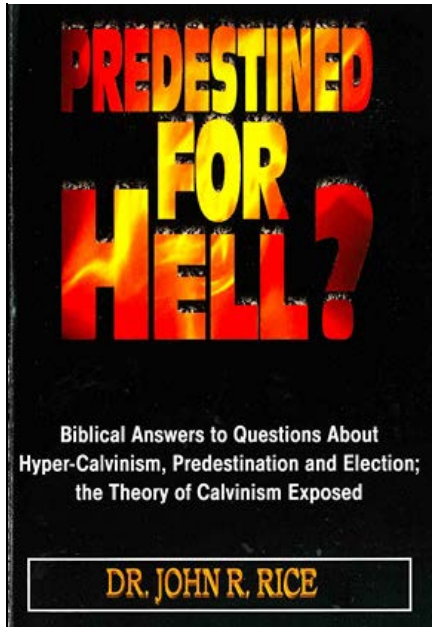
Bill Saxton wrote *Daniel's Prophecies of Covenant Change*. Saxton does not address the scope of mankind's salvation. However, he does give thorough treatment to Daniel's prophecies that relate to my proposed understanding of Daniel 12:1-4, Matthew 24-25, and Revelation. Eschatology is not my strength and so I would be glad take a wide path around these debated and divisive subjects in order to simply enjoy brotherhood trusting God with unanswered questions. Yet the grace of Christ draws me, and hopefully you as well, to search deeply into the prophesied future of mankind's redemption. Saxton does not propose a definite answer to the timing of the resurrection and judgment forecast in Daniel 12:2, but instead a possible dual meaning. Daniel 12 follows closely after Chapter 11 which he understands to detail the life of 1st century King Herod. Yet Daniel 12:1-4 also appears to speak about resurrection and final judgment. Thus Saxton has not answered all my remaining questions, but he does inspire me to strive to perfect my understanding of mankind's redemption with Biblical proofs.



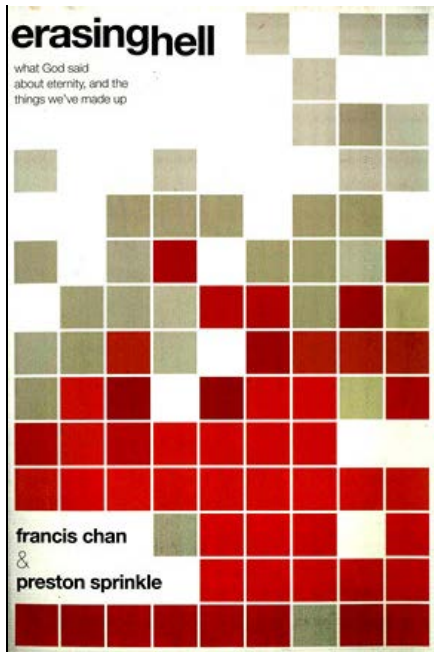
Sharon Baker wrote *Razing Hell* and is accused of Universalism. Yet, she says that people can reject Christ and chose annihilation in the Lake of Fire. She inconsistently says we are forgiven before we repent, but we must receive forgiveness to avoid condemnation. She rejects the idea that Christ's death was needed to propitiate God's wrath because that would make God evil and retributive. Since the Bible does portray God as wrathful, she concludes that these ideas are not inspired, but instead human error. Baker believes that since "aion" is temporal, unbelievers will get a second chance after Hell, kind of like Arminianism X 2. Her book discredits inspiration and of course "chance" salvation, whether first or second, denies the power of God's grace in raising the dead.



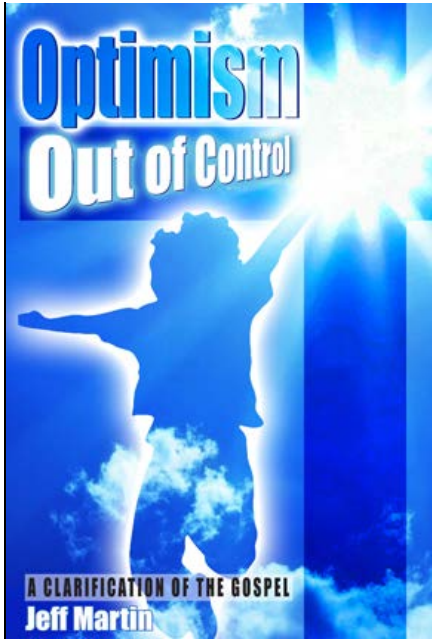
William Shedd wrote *The Doctrine of Endless Punishment*, with historical, Biblical, and rational arguments. Shedd speaks well against annihilationism and Hell as mere suffering in this life. Yet he says on page 95, *"the most dangerous [form of Universalism], is that which concedes the force of the Biblical and rational arguments respecting the guilt of sin, and its intrinsic desert of everlasting punishment, but contends that redemption from it through the vicarious atonement of Christ is extended into the next world."* My view exactly! Shedd says there are only two "aions," the present and the next. What about the Jewish age, the church age, and the New Heavens and Earth? Shedd says if we agree mankind has *free will* then it is proved that eternal punishment is required for unbelievers. Excellent logic, but a bad premise! He also implies that we are saved or damned by our penitence or lack thereof! Mr. Shedd, where is the grace?



John Rice wrote *Predestined for Hell?* He was a well-known evangelist and founder of Sword of the Lord publishing. Rice vehemently opposed orthodox Calvinism, yet he labeled himself a Calvinist because he believed in the P of T.U.L.I.P., the perseverance of the saints. Yet he rejected the L, limited atonement. Curiously Rice also staunchly defends *free will* as the reason that any individual is saved, which is classic Arminianism. There is so much misunderstanding about these things and Dr. Rice's book simply adds to the confusion. My own thesis makes it clear that I have both a strong agreement and a strong disagreement with Dr. Rice. I wonder what he would say about the optimistic idea that Jesus really is the savior of all mankind, though unbelieving humans are punished in Hades, but not the Lake of Fire?



Francis Chan and Preston Sprinkle wrote *erasing hell*. They wrote a book of concern about modern day evangelicals who have effectively erased the warnings about Hell from their gospel. Chan does well to remind us of the need to warn the unbelieving about the punishment waiting for those who reject the grace of Christ. Yet he also disagrees with those who would hope for any kind of universal salvation of mankind. Curiously at the end of his book, Chan confesses that he cannot definitively say that Hell is eternal. I agree that a gospel that does not warn the unbeliever about punishment in Hell is not the gospel. Yet I also wonder what Chan and Sprinkle would think about the idea that unbelievers are punished in Hades, yet safely extracted out in Revelation 20:13-14?



I, Jeff Martin, wrote *Optimism Out of Control*. Like many above I have defended God's victorious grace in the final salvation of all mankind with Biblical arguments concerning 1) God's free will to save mankind, 2) mankind's lack of *free will* to save ourselves, 3) the meaning of "*aion*", 4) the temporal nature of afterlife punishment, 5) and Christ's atonement of all mankind as the Second Adam and new federal head of all humanity. These arguments are nothing new. My additional contributions to the discussion include the observation that Hades and the Lake of Fire do not serve the same purpose. Unbelieving man is punished temporally in Hades, while the Lake of Fire is prepared to damn only Satan and his angels for The Ages of The Ages. I also observed the "*Hosea Strategy*" which is essential for a consistent Biblical hermeneutic. Jesus followed the example of Hosea as well as followed his own counsel in Proverbs to speak foolishness to the fool, calling his stubborn lost sheep, "*not my sheep*."

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But ya gotta accept it!

OBJECTORS>> BUT YA GOTTA ACCEPT IT!

ME>> Friends, consider these questions:

WHAT "IT" DO WE HAVE TO ACCEPT?

What is the "IT" that we must accept in order to be a Christian? If I hear correctly, many are saying that we must accept Jesus' *offer* of forgiveness in order to *be* forgiven. However, there is a fundamental difference in the "IT" that must be accepted. This understanding of "IT" is not true to grace and instead is a condition to God's unconditional love. Instead, to become a believer, to become a Christian, one must accept that Jesus has already paid for our sins and has already forgiven us from the cross. What is the "IT" that we must accept? We must accept that God loved us *before* we loved him and fully paid for our sins and forgave us *while* we were yet his enemies. Are we willing to repent of *all* our self-righteousness and from every man-made condition to instead receive God's unconditional love? The history of his cross is proof of this very fact! Read the account yourself. Mankind did not accept Jesus, but crucified him, while he forgave us. But are we willing instead to accept that God loves us and *ALL* his people unconditionally and that Jesus has already forgiven all mankind from the cross before the asking? Or are we like ignorant Peter saying, "**You will never wash my feet**"? Join believing Peter and say, "**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead**" (1 Peter 1:3 WEB). Friend, the truth of God's forgiveness given to all mankind is plain to see. Only blindness could obscure our vision. Only a radical new birth through the Holy Spirit can open our eyes.

WHY DO WE HAVE TO ACCEPT "IT"?

When they say "*But ya gotta accept it,*" what is the *reason* that we must accept "IT"? What is the purpose, the goal, the end of this accepting? If I hear correctly they are saying that we must accept the offer of forgiveness in order to be forgiven and thus to escape the Lake of Fire. Fire insurance is their goal. Again there is a fundamental difference in the reason that we must accept Christ. Their understanding of the reason is not true to grace and instead illustrates the addition of a condition to God's unconditional love. Their understanding falls short of accepting that the elect of God have never and will never be in danger of eternal damnation. Their understanding misses God's great purpose in salvation. Though they may quickly object, asking then, what is the purpose of Christian salvation anyway? Why do we examine ourselves to see if we are of the faith? Why do we sacrifice time and money to tell others about Christ? Certainly neither time, nor money, nor all the persuasive speech in the entire world, nor any human condition, can add someone's name to the Lamb's Book of Life! Predestination teaches us that elect mankind's sin has been paid from before the foundation of the world. So then why do we have to accept that Jesus loves us and has already forgiven us if we are already forgiven?

We need to be saved from our corrupt and self-righteous hearts in order to know God as our loving Heavenly Father and begin to fellowship with him! Our hearts need to be changed toward God because God wants to be our friend. God's heart does not need to be changed toward us. He is resolute in his love! Jesus is bringing lost sheep into his fold. We also need the indwelling Holy Spirit to fight against destructive sin in our lives. Furthermore, if our hearts are not changed we will not escape punishment in Hades, nor will we even want to be in Paradise worshipping Christ until we are changed. Are we still like Adam and Eve hiding in the garden behind religion, atheism, or agnosticism? Why not hear God's voice of forgiveness calling our names? Friends, simple confidence that God has already forgiven us and all mankind from the cross will change our hearts and prepare us for joy with Christ and *ALL* his people. We must accept his unconditional love to have a changed heart, to repent of our hypocrisy, to begin fellowship with Christ, and

to escape punishment in Hades. Why wait? Yet unbelievers must be warned that even if they waste their lives with religion, destroy their lives with sin, and suffer an age in Hades resisting grace until the very threshold of eternal damnation, even so, not they or any human being for whom Christ died will ever enter the Lake of Fire which is prepared for... the Devil and his angels.

CONSIDER "IT"!

The religious Jews who crucified Christ did so because they hated him. Christ rejected their religion and the Jews hated him for that. Christ also befriended the Gentiles and told them they didn't need the Jewish religion and the Jews hated him for that. Friends, are we modern day "Jews" who have made a religion out of "Christ?" The gentiles likewise joined in hatred toward Christ for his claim to be the only way to God. Are we modern day "Gentiles" whose open minds are closed to the grace of God given only through his Son Jesus Christ? Yes, the name of "Jesus" is on our lips and maybe in our worship songs, but have we restricted the love of God from all mankind? Have we said God does not love all mankind along with the Calvinist? Have we added human condition to the grace of God? Have we said God only forgives those who accept Jesus along with the Arminian? If so we crucify Christ all over again no matter how much we praise Christ's name!

Can Such a Minority View Be True?

FRIEND>> How can such a minority viewpoint be true or even worth consideration? Furthermore, Christians have translated and studied the Scriptures for 2,000 years. How can you suggest that there is a mistranslation of the word "eternal?"

ME>> Those are excellent questions. In fact I have asked them of myself quite often over the past year. Let me give reply.

We both agree that **"narrow is the gate, and restricted is the way that leads to life! Few are those who find it"** (Matthew 7:14 WEB). However, some have complained that my understanding is not only narrow, but is the minority of an already small minority. The first point is that one should not think of my view as a minority of the minority or a sub-set of the sub-set. True believers have always been a very small minority throughout history. However, the next larger group has been the religious, and then the largest group is the a-religious. So while the repentant stand at the foot of the cross, the self-righteous and the unrighteous fall to the left and the right of true healing. So the paramount question is not how large a particular group is, but instead what is the truth? A second equally important question is whether we are believers, merely religious, or pagan? The body of religious people has always been greater than the body of true believers.

Consider Joshua and Caleb. These two men and their families were the lone believers when the scouts returned from the Promised Land in the book of Exodus. The entire family of Israelites followed the complaining and fears of the unbelieving scouts and thus were excluded from entering the Promised Land. Two people and their families are a pretty small minority out of roughly two million Israelites. In fact Hebrews 3:16 - 4:2 uses this very example to urge those that will listen to place their faith in Christ in the present generation.

You are also right to question my authority to suggest that the word "eternal" is mistranslated in the New Testament. I do not have formal training in Greek or Hebrew. I could not even recite the Greek alphabet in order. Yet I have been compelled by grace to answer the question of the extent of God's grace toward not only myself, but also my fellow human beings. Through study of the Greek lexicon on my shelf and critical online resources, I do not only suggest, but assert that the Greek words "aion" and "aionian" never mean simple eternal time, but instead most definitely mean "age," "eonian," "entire," or "complete." This observation alone should be motivation for every Christian to at least reconsider the great question of the final salvation of our fellowman. Everyone in the least acquainted with saving grace and God's unconditional love ought to be driven to muster their greatest energies to learn about the extent of God's love for others. I do not find tradition a safe place to stand, especially, in light of history. Do you?

Of course if you do not find my Greek research trustworthy, I am not offended. But please check out John Wesley Hanson's classic 1875 work titled, *The Greek Word Aion-Aionios translated Everlasting-Eternal in the Holy Bible Shown to Denote Limited Duration*. This classic work is available for free from the U.S. Library of Congress website and also [from my own website](#). Dr. Heleen Keizer has also written a dissertation proving the same titled, *Life, Time, Entirety - A Study of Aion in Greek Literature and Philosophy, the Septuagint and Philo*. You can read her [315 page dissertation online](#) or an [abstract of her conclusions on my website](#). [Young's Literal Translation](#) also properly translates the Greek word "aion" as "age."

Compatibilism is the Answer? (AKA Molinism)

FRIEND>> Compatibilism is the answer! Your arguments pit God's sovereignty against man's free will. That is the error of your thinking because these ideas can co-exist and they are compatible.

ME>> So you say... and actually *compatibilism* is the majority view held by both the schooled and unschooled theologian alike. A basic explanation of compatibilism can be found at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Compatibilism>. Compatibilism really is a variation of the 16th century heresy, Molinism, explained at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Molinism>. Both attack the sovereign grace of God so that man can be god of his own salvation.

Those that hold this view should at least consider the challenge of Martin Luther in his book, *Bondage of the Will*. Frankly, most American Protestants do not even understand the heart of Luther's Reformation and the contest that was at stake for the gospel of grace at that time. Luther strongly stated, "If any man doth ascribe aught of salvation, even the very least, to the free-will of man, he knoweth nothing of grace, and he hath not learnt Jesus Christ aright." Sadly many protestant churches pride themselves claiming to hold the true gospel, while thinking that Catholics fall short. The truth is, however, that both Catholicism and American Protestantism continue to make the same mistake that Luther tried to correct! I find this misguided Protestant finger pointing to be offensive and massively hypocritical. Luther's book, *Bondage of the Will*, is a must read for this generation. I have also written my own short article on the same subject, [A Quintessential Defense of FREE WILL](#).

Why do Christians continue to cling to their own supposed *free will*, instead of clinging to the gracious free will of the Savior? Why would we be so motivated to invent such an odd word as "*compatibilism*" to defend the incompatible? Why not instead seek the Lord, even pound on the doors of heaven for a better answer? Why not consider the happy truth that Christ willed to pay for the sins of ALL mankind completely apart from our will? The cursing of Peter makes it abundantly clear that *no one* freely willed that Christ die on the cross to pay for our sin except our gracious God himself, Matthew 26:74. Perhaps you are cursing too?

Did John Calvin Originate Calvinism?

READER>> *Did Calvinism Originate with John Calvin?*

ME>> Actually, John Calvin did not originate Calvinistic thought. The roots of Calvin's theology are also evident in the theology of Saint Augustine, a most famous Catholic priest from the 4th Century. This is a very curious fact considering that the Catholic Church then condemned Calvin and some of the Reformers for holding to Augustine's theology in the 16th Century! Sadly Christians have gone back and forth from *Calvinism* to *Arminianism* through the centuries because neither theologies find complete support from the Scriptures. As far as the understanding of Augustine and Calvin, there appear to be some differences, but the essence of "*Calvinism*" is shared by both these men.

Saint Augustine

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustine_of_Hippo

<http://www.theopedia.com/Augustinianism>

John Calvin

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Calvin

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calvinism>

Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News!

READER>> *What is your view of eschatology?*

ME>> *Eschatology* is one of the most difficult and dividing sciences in Christian theology. *Eschatology* is the part of theology concerned with death, judgment, and the final destiny of the soul and of mankind. *Eschatology* is simply the study of future good news! The challenge is understanding and interpreting Biblical prophecy about the future of mankind's redemption. The bold claim of the *Optimism Out of Control* book is the complete and final salvation of all mankind. This claim, if reasonable, must then be consistent with Biblical prophecy about the future of mankind's redemption.

So how and when will Jesus return? What future hope remains for mankind's redemption? G. Campbell Morgan wrote *God's Methods with Man*. He and many others have designed various charts of the history of redemption. Motivated by these charts and studying the Bible, I propose my own chart of the history of redemption below.

Unfortunately just like other areas of discussion, not all Christians agree. So there are several main veins of thought to consider. They are each oriented around different understandings of Jesus Christ's return with respect to the 1,000 year epoch before the Great White Throne Judgment described in Revelation Chapter 20. The major views are summarized as follows:

1. **Dispensational Pre-Millennialism, Future**

1. The literal 1,000 year epoch remains still future.
2. Christ will return physically to inaugurate the Millennial Kingdom.
3. Old Covenant worship will be revived to fulfill Old Testament prophecy.
4. Commended for insisting there is future hope for ethnic Israel.
5. Anti-Christian for reviving the Old Covenant after the glorious New Covenant.
6. Endorsed by Darby, Scofield, Ryrie, and others.
7. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dispensationalism>

2. **Non-Dispensational Pre-Millennialism, Future**

1. The literal 1,000 year epoch remains still future.
2. Christ will return physically to inaugurate the Millennial Kingdom.
3. Christ will reign on earth as New Covenant King to further demonstrate grace.
4. Commended for not reading external meaning into Biblical symbols.
5. Can neglect the relevance of Old Testament symbols and first century context.
6. Endorsed by Spurgeon, Schaeffer, Erickson, and others.
7. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historic_premillennialism

3. **A-Millennialism, Present**

1. The figurative 1,000 years from Christ's first to second advent, the Church Age.
2. Christ will return after the Church Age to inaugurate the New Heavens and Earth.
3. Christ reigns from Heaven now and will reign physically on earth then.
4. Commended for navigating toward the simplest sensible model.
5. Yet if Isaiah 65:20 is the final New Heavens and Earth why is there death?
6. Endorsed by Augustine, Hoekema, Riddlebarger, and others.
7. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amillennialism>

4. **Realized Post-Millennialism, Past**

1. The literal 1,000 year epoch was the Church Age to the Great Schism, 1054 A.D..
2. Christ will return in the future to inaugurate the New Heavens and Earth.
3. Christ reigns from Heaven now and will reign physically on earth then.
4. Commended for similar simplicity with A-Millennialism.
5. Stretches the timing of Revelation 20:7-15 from 1054 A.D. to Christ's return.
6. Endorsed by some Roman Catholics and others.
7. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East-West_Schism

5. **Post-Millennialism, Future**

1. The literal 1,000 year epoch remains still future.
2. Christ reigns through Gospel Victory to usher in the Millennial Kingdom.
3. Christ will return after the Millennium to inaugurate the New Heavens and Earth.
4. Commended for great hope and optimism in the power of the gospel.
5. Can neglect that gospel progress proceeds at the pace of God's choosing.
6. Endorsed by Calvin, Boettner, Rushdoony, and others.
7. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postmillennialism>

6. **Variations of the Above Can Include**

1. Partial Preterism like Christ's judgment on Jerusalem in 70 A.D., Matthew 24:15.

2. Prophecies about repentant Israel's special roles still future, Isaiah 66:12.
3. Optimistic, pessimistic, or realistic outlooks for the temporal future.
4. Ranges of Biblical interpretive methods from literal to symbolic.
5. Short and long range prophecy as well as dual fulfillment, Matthew 24:3.
6. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_eschatology
7. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_eschatological_views

7. Full Preterism (all prophecy is fully realized)

1. The 1,000 years is the figurative span from Christ's first advent to 70 A.D..
2. Christ's second coming was his judgment on Jerusalem in 70 A.D..
3. Christ reigns as king in Heaven with no future physical coming prophesied.
4. Commended for observing that prophecies may already be fulfilled.
5. "*Blessed Hopelessness*" for saying that all prophecy is already fulfilled, Titus 2:13.
6. Endorsed by Alcasar, Preston, Harden, and others.
7. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Preterism>

The views above are listed on a continuum from Old Testament promises not yet realized to New Testament promises completely realized. The Dispensational and Full Preterist views are understood to fall outside of Christian orthodoxy. Yet since eschatology is such a difficult subject matter Christendom has been more or less accommodating to each of the other views. A more thorough study and explanation could take volumes and even after studying numerous volumes myself I find it hard to determine the matter with the confidence I would prefer.

Ezekiel confronted the pride of the King of Tyre prodding that he was "*wiser than Daniel.*" Yet Daniel had the wisdom to confess after receiving prophetic visions, "*I heard, but I didn't understand,*" (Daniel 12:8 WEB). I confess that I hear, but do not understand as clearly as I would prefer. Yet Jesus still urges us, "*let the reader understand,*" (Matthew 24:15 WEB). So we seek understanding.

In the end I am convinced that my primary thesis, that all mankind will be finally saved, can be consistently integrated with many of the proposed views above. Though one's understanding of Jesus' words "*this age*", "*the age to come*", and "*the ages to come*" will of course be different according to one's preferred framework. We also know that conflicting frameworks cannot all be right. Certainly all of the proposed models above miss the mark to some degree, some more and some less. This is unsettling. I wish I could add a more definite view of eschatology to the defense of my thesis. Yet, even so, my list of proofs in the body of *Optimism Out of Control* are more than sufficient evidence of God's love for all mankind, at least enough evidence for me.

That said, I will share my current understanding about Christ's promised return in order have greater appeal to my reader through my transparency. As a simple church goer I held the Pan-Millennial view, that is it would all "*pan out*" in the end. I still hold this view! After coming to faith I initially held to the Non-Dispensational Pre-Millennial Future understanding. Then, frankly while working on this book I moved to the A-Millennial or Church Age understanding. The good news is that the next major event anticipated for both of these views is the return of Christ. So whatever confusion remains now will certainly be cleared up then! Since my understanding has recently changed I ask your patience if you discover inconsistencies in my words.

Several observations have pointed me to the A-Millennial or Church Age model of understanding. *First*, Revelation 20:1-6 does not say anything about the Millennium being a supernatural time of peace, but simply that Satan is restricted from deceiving the nations. Since 1 Peter 5:8 warns us that Satan is prowling around seeking to devour individuals, Revelation 20:3,8 could simply be saying that Satan is restricted from rallying the nations against Christ's people. *Second*, Isaiah 65:17-25 and 66 are explicitly prophesying about the New Heavens and Earth, not a Millennial Kingdom. Admittedly Isaiah 65:20 does not appear to fit the New Heavens and Earth because of its mention of child birth and death. However, the explicit identity of this forecast is not the Millennium, but the New Heavens and Earth. *Third*, Ezekiel's temple and the river that flows from it are clearly a picture of the infinite love, grace, and mercy found in Jesus Christ. A literal display of Ezekiel's temple and river would not even fit on the planet! Models that insist in the revival of Old Covenant temple worship to satisfy Ezekiel's and other Old Testament prophecy have missed the main point of the book of Hebrews. These models also miss the Holy Spirit's use of Old Testament symbol hyperbole to point to the glory of Christ's first advent. *Fourth*, Matthew 24:3 lists two or three questions from the disciples. Thus, it is no stretch at all to see that Jesus' answer includes both partial preteristic statements about his coming judgment on Jerusalem in 70 A.D. as well as his second coming in glory as reigning king at the end of the Church Age. *Fifth*, Jesus warns that blasphemy of the Spirit in Matthew 12:30-32 will not be forgiven in "*this age*" or "*the coming.*" Universalists commonly understand that unbelieving humans will suffer in the "*coming age*" of the Lake of Fire, but then eventually be saved even from there. Since, I hold that humans will never enter the Lake of Fire then what is "*the coming*" age? As a Pre-Millennialist the answer was the coming Millennial Kingdom. However, now as an A-Millennialist "*this age*" could instead refer to the end of the Jewish Age, while "*the coming*" is the Church Age. *Sixth*, the living, reigning, and first resurrection of the saints in Revelation 20:4-5 is often understood to be the physical resurrection at a Pre-Millennial rapture. However, the passage is just as easily understood to be the spiritual resurrection to new life as a Christian. Also the Holy Spirit is encouraging us that Christians who are terribly martyred have not lost, but are victors in Heaven until we will meet them again in glory. *Seventh*,

while Preterism makes essential points that Christ did come in judgment on Jerusalem in 70 A.D., Full Preterists make a gross error negating Christ's promise to return in the body to consummate the marriage to his bride, John 14:3 and Acts 1:11. So reasonable explanations can be found for the A-Millennial Church Age understanding while defending the universal salvation of all mankind.

Below is my proposed chart of redemptive history with twelve categories of people, eight ages of redemptive history, and the location of these people during each era. Please note that I do not list twelve and eight divisions as if they were special numerical divisions as some forms of Dispensationalism attempt. Instead these categories are simply for illustrative purposes. The chart shows the distinction between the redeemed and the unredeemed, that is mankind versus fallen angels, as explained in my article, [Revelation 20:10](#). The chart below also shows the distinction between Hades, Tartarus / Thalaasa, and the Lake of Fire, that is temporal punishment versus damnation for *The Ages of The Ages*, as explained in my article, [2 Thessalonians 1:6-10](#). Understanding this is a great hope for those trusting that Christ has paid for the sin of all mankind.

The chart is complex. For the best reading strategy choose a category of people and follow their location horizontally across the ages of redemptive history. Alternatively choose an age of redemptive history and consider the locations vertically down the categories of people. Do you know who you are? Where you are? What time it is?

Where?			When?							
			Innocence		Fallen			Glory		
			Eternity Past	4000 BC Creation	Fall to Sin No Law	1500 BC Moses' Law	Advent of Christ 0-33 AD	Church Age Kingdom Age	Great White Throne	New Heaven and Earth
Who?	God	Father	God's Perfect Fellowship John 10:30	God's Perfect Fellowship with Adam in the Garden of Eden	Living in Unapproachable Light, 1 Timothy 6:16			God's Perfectly Restored Fellowship with All Mankind in the Holy City	All Restored Acts 3:21	
		Son			Pre-Incarnate, John 8:58		Incarnate, John 1:14			Paradise, Luke 23:43
		Holy Spirit			Everywhere, Psalm 139:7		Indwelling Believers, John 14:17			
	Mankind	Living Mankind	No Fall No Death Gen 1:31	Serving the Savior or Satan on Earth, Ephesians 2:1-5			Blessed in Paradise, Luke 16:22	No Hades No Dead Rev 20:3		
		Deceased Believing Mankind								
		Deceased Unbelieving Mankind		Punished in Hades until the final judgment, Luke 16:23 and Rev 20:13						
	Holy Angels	No Creation No people	Serving Mankind at God's Command, Hebrews 1:14							
			Imprisoned Angels	Imprisoned in Tartarus, 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6						Fallen

Angels	Fugitive Angels	Gen 1:1	No Fall	Rebelling Against Christ Accusing Mankind 1 Peter 5:8 and Revelation 12:10	Thalaasa, Rev 20:13	Lake of Fire Prepared for the Devil and his Angels	Angels Forgiven?	
	First Beast Demon		No Unholy Angels		Lake of Fire Revelation 19:20		Col 1:20 Yes?	
	False Prophet Demon		Gen 1:31		Abyss Revelation 20:2		Mat 25:41 Rev 20:10	Heb 2:16 No?
	Satan							

The basis for this chart is several critical observations from Scripture. ([printable version](#))

First, Hades, Tartarus / Thalaasa, and the Lake of Fire are not the same place according to Luke 16:23, 2 Peter 2:4, Jude 6, and Revelation 20:13-14. Furthermore, both Hades and Tartarus / Thalaasa, a prison for demons being held for future judgment, are temporary locations, emptied of their unbelieving human inhabitants as well as their imprisoned demons at the Great White Throne Judgment. Punishment in Hades is distinct from condemnation in the Lake of Fire because Hades is for an Age whereas The Lake of Fire is for *The Ages of The Ages*. Punishment in Hades is also distinct because God cares for the unbelieving humans punished in Hades (Psalm 139:8 and 1 Peter 4:6). However, God does not appear to care for Satan (Genesis 3:15 and Hebrews 2:16), and damns fallen angels to the Lake of Fire for *The Ages of The Ages* (Matthew 25:41 and Revelation 20:7-10).

Second, Christ has redeemed all mankind, believing and unbelieving, as the second Adam, our vicarious substitute. (See Romans 5:12-21, Romans 11:32, and 1 John 2:1-2.) However, he has apparently not redeemed fallen angels (Hebrews 2:16).

Third, faith does not cause redemption, but faith receives the redemption already given at the cross by the death of Christ (Romans 5:10). Faith is repentance from self-righteousness to receive Christ's righteousness already given (Romans 1:17 and Ephesians 2:8). *Free will choice* is not the condition to God's unconditional love, but a changed heart is happy to trust in God's unconditional love (John 3:3).

Fourth, the believing redeemed will join Christ in paradise after death (Luke 23:43) and will be resurrected at Christ's return to rule with him again on Earth (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 and Revelation 20:4). The unbelieving redeemed will suffer in Hades if they do not repent from their self-righteousness and receive grace through faith (Luke 16:23 and 2 Peter 2:1), and apparently they will stay in Hades until the Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:5). Though 1 Peter 3:18-20 and 4:6 might suggest that new life can be realized even for some in Hades. Christians and perhaps all mankind will also need to stand before Christ at the Bema Seat Judgment as explained in Romans 14:10-12 and 2 Corinthians 5:10. I am not sure of the timing of this event or whether it is a personal or group interview with Christ. We should make ourselves ready.

Fifth, the Lake of Fire, the second death, is prepared for the Devil and his Angels, not Mankind, as explained in my article, [Matthew 25:31-46](#). Furthermore, it is wrongly assumed that the judgments in the Bible are for humans only and divide believer from unbelievers, when instead some of these judgments include both humans and fallen angels and divide the sheep from goats (Matthew 25:41, 2 Peter 2:4, Jude 6, and Revelation 20:7-15). Some conclude that even Satan and his Angels will be redeemed based on the "**all**" of Colossians 1:20. This is a small difference with my understanding. We all can see that the pages of the Bible end with those named in the Lamb's Book of Life enjoying God's presence for a blessed eternity. I and many others have also argued that those finally saved are all Mankind by means of Christ's atonement (1 John 2:1-2 and Revelation 20:15). The pages of the Bible also end with Satan's head crushed, as promised in Genesis 3:15, and with the fallen angels cast into the Lake of Fire for *The Ages of The Ages* (Revelation 20:10). If grace is ever extended to Satan, it is not explicitly stated in the Bible. Obviously the chart above is fairly comprehensive, but it does not include every concept. For example at one point in history Satan had direct access to God's throne (Job 1:6) but at another point in history he is denied this access (Revelation 12:7-12).

Sixth, Peter said in Acts 3:21 (WEB), "**whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God spoke long ago by the mouth of his holy prophets.**" The Greek word translated as "restoration" is "*apocatastasis*" which Thayer's Greek Lexicon defines as, "*the restoration of that perfect state of things that existed before the fall.*" Ilaria Ramelli and David Konstan point out in *Terms for Eternity: Aionios and Aidios in Classical and Christian Texts* that "*aion*," typically translated "*eternal*" in the English New Testament, instead generally means "*age*" or "*eon*." They also note that the definitive Greek word for eternal, "*aidios*" is only used twice in the Bible: once in Romans 1:20 concerning God and once in Jude 6 concerning the bonds on fallen angels. Since Ramelli and Konstan argue even for the salvation of Satan they conclude that "*aidios*" in Jude 6 must mean transcending the ages, but not finally eternal. They reason that these demons are being "*held for judgment*" and thus there must be an end to these

"*aidios*" bonds after their judgment. However, it could also be that these demons with "*aidios*" bonds are held in Tartarus / Thalaasa to be extracted for sentencing at the Great White Throne Judgment and then with the "*aidios*" bonds still on they are cast into the Lake of Fire. Thus they are held for judgment, but the "*aidios*" bonds are not released as they are cast into the Lake of Fire. This is one data point for the argument that fallen angels are eternally damned. Further, if the Sheep and Goat Judgment of Matthew 25 is synonymous with the Great White Throne Judgment of Revelation 20 and with the Great Judgment Day of Jude 6 for the imprisoned angels, then it is clear that the goats are held for judgment and further sentenced to the Lake of Fire. So the "*aidios*" bonds do not end at the Great Day of their judgment, but continue further. How much further? Is the "*apocatastasis*" fulfilled with the final salvation of mankind at the Great White Throne Judgment? Or is there further fulfillment of the "*apocatastasis*" with the salvation of the Devil and his angels sometime after *The Ages of The Ages* beyond the pages of Scripture?

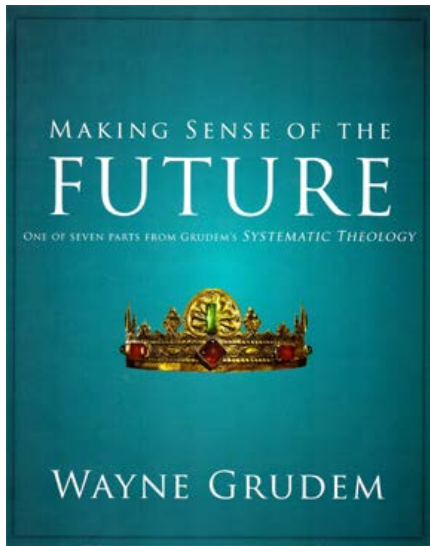
The point is that our lover, Jesus Christ, is currently away, but he is returning and has told us many things about his future plans to "*make his enemies a footstool*" and to return for his bride, the church, and to consummate eternity with the final salvation of all mankind. Biblical Christianity offers great hope for mankind! Do not settle for anything less!

Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News! (Part 2 with Grudem, Riddlebarger, Chilton, Summers, and Ewing)

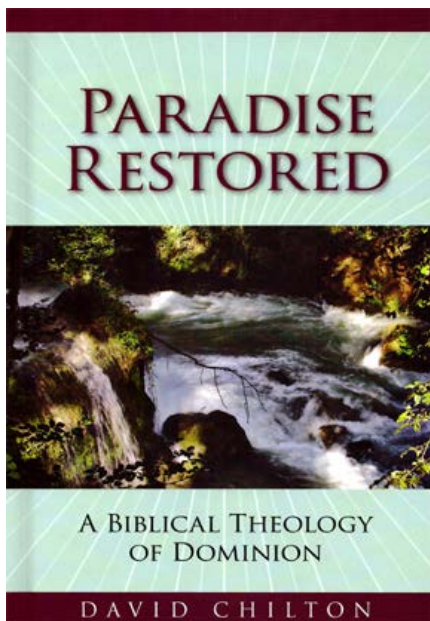
READER>> *What is more of your view of eschatology?*

ME>> Previously I mentioned that I hold the A-Millennial understanding of future things. I believe that the present Church Age is the Millennial Kingdom of Revelation 20:1-6 and that the second coming of Christ at the Great White Throne Judgment will occur at the end of this present Church Age. The eternal New Heavens and Earth will then begin after that.

Below are a few books on my shelf from various viewpoints that I recommended for your own study. Of course the hard work of Bible study is always recommended. Yet the books below may be the next best option to inviting Grudem, Riddlebarger, Chilton, Summers, and Ewing to your own Bible study. Also, I have read books on Dispensational Pre-Millennialism and Full Preterism, but do not recommend any below because of their distance from Christian orthodoxy. The works I do list below span the Non-Dispensational Pre-Millennial, A-Millennial, and Post Millennial views. However, you will note after reading them that they do not define one another's labels consistently. Take care not to get ensnared in semantic or camp jargon debate.

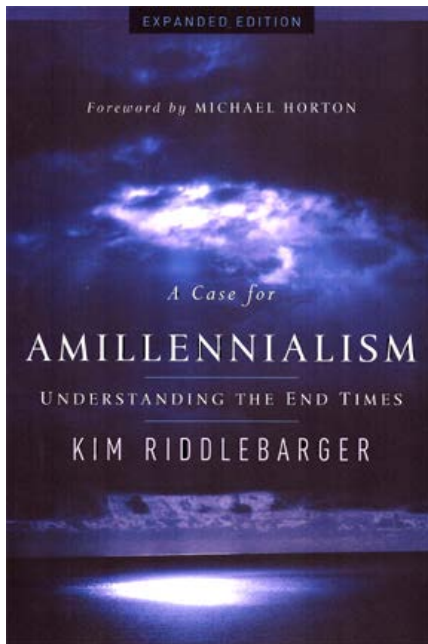


Wayne Grudem wrote *Making Sense of the Future*, a primer on Christian eschatology from a non-dispensational pre-Millennial view point. Grudem is a careful theologian listing numerous Biblical proofs for any position that he holds, including eschatology. For example, he references Psalm 72, Isaiah 11, Isaiah 65, and Zechariah 14 as pointing to a future Millennial reign of Christ on earth. On page 72, Grudem says, "*All this speaks of an age far different from the present age, but short of the eternal state in which there is no more sin or suffering.*" I find much value in Grudem's analysis, though I have recently stepped away from the pre-millennial understanding.

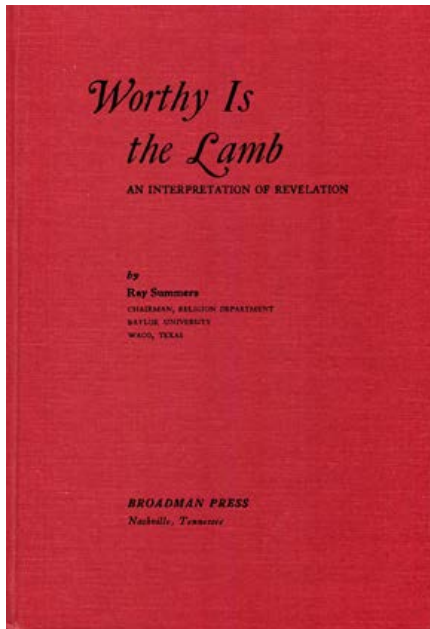


David Chilton wrote *Paradise Restored, A Biblical Theology of Dominion* just as the famed [John Milton](#) wrote *Paradise Lost* as well as *Paradise Regained*. Both Milton and Chilton

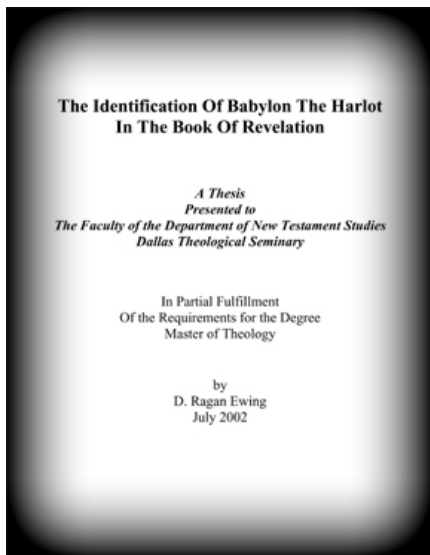
have much to write about Paradise! Chilton's work represents the Post-Millennial view. Yet he explains that the length of the 1,000 years is the figurative time frame of the Church Age, similar to the A-Millennial view of Riddlebarger. So how do they differ? The nature of the Millennial Kingdom proposed by Chilton is more Kingdom-like with a call for Christians to work through civil government to "*Christianize*" the nations. Chilton emphasizes greater continuity between the Old and New Covenants even suggesting that failed Israel was ex-communicated from the church. However, most Christians would instead say that unbelieving Israel has not joined the church until they bow to personal faith in Christ.



Kim Riddlebarger wrote *A Case for A-Millennialism: Understanding the End Times*. Riddlebarger defends the A-Millennial position, not that "A" means "No" Millennial Kingdom. Instead he explains that the 1,000 years of Revelation 20:1-6 is the figurative length of time for the Church Age, between Christ's first and second advent. His arguments and others persuaded me to adopt this view. For example he notes that Revelation 20:1-6 says nothing about the 1,000 years being a time a peace, but only that Satan is restricted from deceiving the nations. While I might not agree with all Riddlebarger's analysis and assignment of Revelation's symbols, I found his book to be extremely helpful to understand what is happening in the present Church Age.



Ray Summers wrote *Worthy is the Lamb, An Interpretation of Revelation*. Summers defends partial preterist components of Revelation such as the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.. He also defends futuristic components such as the second coming of Christ. Summers adds insight into the methods that are best used when interpreting the symbols and images found within Revelation. He reminds us of the relevance of Old Testament symbols, first century context, and styles found in apocalyptic literature. For example, in the midst of Revelation's war theme, Summers reminds us that first century Christians were especially hated by the Romans because they refused to participate in the state war function. They followed the Lamb! Summers does go further than I prefer when interpreting symbols at a few points, but he adds considerably to the discussion.



Ragan Ewing wrote *The Identification of Babylon the Harlot in the Book of Revelation*. Ewing's effort is not a book per-se, but his doctrinal defense. Ewing wrote his Master's Thesis for Dallas Theological Seminary in 2002 and argues that Babylon the Harlot in the book of Revelation is in fact first century Jerusalem. He meticulously defends both external evidence for a pre-70 A.D. authorship of Revelation as well as internal evidence that identifies Jerusalem as the adulterer that played the harlot with Rome. Ewing also points out that a pre-70 A.D. authorship is not essential to understanding Jerusalem as the Harlot. If authored after 70 A.D. Revelation could then instead be explaining the fate of Jerusalem rather than predicting it. Also Ewing did not mention but could have further noted that Revelation is John's contribution to the same subject matter as Matthew and Luke's Olivet Discourse, the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. as predicted in Matthew 24:15-16 and Luke 21:20. Ewing's complete text is available online and also [from my website](#).

Efforts and theories have been multiplied and exponentiated to make sense of John's Revelation, especially Chapter 13 and the famed number of the Beast, 666. I hope to avoid adding my ignorance to the discussion except as it relates to determining the nature of the members of the Unholy Trinity: The Dragon (Satan), The Beast (First / Sea Beast), and The False Prophet (Second / Land Beast). Are they human beings, demonic beings, or non-being forces? Several simple observations may guide our understanding of Revelation.

First, John does not invent Revelation's symbols to communicate a message with his own wisdom. Instead he records what Christ revealed to him in visions about the real interactions between the immaterial and material world, the unseen and the seen, Heaven and Earth. Thus, one would expect the images seen by John to be illustrative rather than photographic. After all, just how does one photograph the awesome glory and majesty of the unseen world? Isaiah saw Heaven's throne, only in part, and was completely undone, Isaiah 6:5. How does one videotape the war between the Archangel Michael and God's Archenemy Satan? Well, it is being fought out in the world around us, but Jesus helps us to see better with the illustrations that he painted for John to share with us. However, just because the paintings are illustrations, even cartoonish, that does not mean they represent the ethereal. Satan is not a fictional or conceptual Dragon, but a supernatural spirit being, a fallen angel, who leads real demons in a real war against God and his people.

Second, the Revelation of Jesus Christ given to John is set on a stage with many of the backstage curtains pulled aside. The drama that John saw reveals the interactions between the immaterial and material world, the unseen and the seen, Heaven and Earth. Thus the people, places, and things in view may be front stage, back stage, or moving between. Wisdom must then be used when interpreting the actors and props seen, whether they are front stage or back stage, that is earthly or Heavenly, or even a combination. Those demanding literalistic or excessive complication in the interpretation of Revelation's drama have missed the context.

Third, we should observe an important pattern shared by the Gospel of John, John's first epistle, and Revelation. Each of his books is introduced with a poetic division of *threes* that is evident as a structural framework for the book. The Gospel of John begins, "***In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God***" (John 1:1 WEB). *Three* dimensions of Christ are listed. Furthermore, John's Gospel is filled with various sets of *sevens*, just like Revelation! Likewise John's epistle begins, "***That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we saw, and our hands touched, concerning the Word of life***" (1 John 1:1 WEB). The epistle content is structured around the *three* senses of hearing, sight, and touch! Now, in Revelation 1:4 (WEB) we read "***John, to the seven assemblies that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from God, who is and who was and who is to come; and from the seven Spirits who are before his throne.***" Apparently by no coincidence we see the *three* of past, present, and future, and again *seven* spirits! Revelation 1:8 (WEB) says again, "***I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.'***" Revelation 1:19 (WEB) also agrees, "***Write therefore the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will happen hereafter.***" So while the debate in Revelation often centers on what is first century and what is future, we should also be reminded to consider what was already past! For example we might try to determine what single point in history is referred to by the *Great Tribulation*, when the drama actually on stage is the *Great Tribulation* of Satan's war against God and mankind from Genesis 3:1 to Revelation 20:10. This drama contains the *three* elements of past, present, and future for the 1st century Christians then... and for 21st century Christians now. Thus, first century Christians were encouraged to hold fast by the example of martyrs in their past as we are encouraged to hold on by their example now. Revelation contains a vital message for all Christians during the entire Church Age.

Fourth, the immaterial unseen world is real. It is substantial. It is tangible, though not through physical senses. For example, read 2 Kings Chapter 6 to learn from Elisha about the near presence of the holy angels protecting God's people. Read Daniel Chapter 10 for a rare exchange, the angel Gabriel revealing his and the Archangel Michael's battle with the Prince and Kings of Persia. The veil is briefly removed between the unseen and the seen. Paul also warns in 1 Corinthians 10:20 that the pagan sacrifices of unbelievers are in fact offered to demons! While pagans may be blind to the fact, any idolatry is in fact a victory for Satan. The unseen enemies of God actually rejoice behind the curtain in their victories as people fall to the worship of false gods, or even fall to baser materialism and sensuality.

Fifth, just as Michael and Gabriel had and have specific assignments in the war against Satan, and just as guardian angels are assigned to *their* children, Matthew 18:10, so Satan and his demons attack specifically and purposefully. Satan and his demons are not nebulous enemies, but are people (though not human) with names, minds, wills, and intent to harm mankind. They strategize, plan, act, and regroup. Just as God commands his righteous angels on the battlefield, so Satan commands his demons.

Now consider Revelation 16:13-14 (WEB),

13) I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits, something like frogs; 14) for they are spirits of demons, performing signs; which go out to the kings of the whole inhabited earth, to gather them together for the war of that great day of God, the Almighty.

Satan knew his time was short because he lost the greatest battle in the first century. Christ conquered all at the cross and now reigns on David's throne as King of Heaven. Satan is doomed and he knows it. Understanding the present Church Age to be the Millennial Reign of Christ, in Revelation 20:1-6, we see that The Beast and the False Prophet are damned to the Lake of Fire since the first century, Revelation 19:20. The defeat and removal of the influence of these demons was the eventual death of the wicked Roman Empire. Ewing's proposal above also makes good sense as we see Revelation Chapter 17 and 18 forecast the destruction of Old Covenant unbelieving Jerusalem, illustrated as the Harlot who rode The Beast. We also see that Satan is temporarily restrained from deceiving the nations from the first century until the very end, Revelation 20:2.

However, just before this restraint happened, Revelation 16:13-14 records that the Unholy Trinity releases three demons assigned to the kings of earth to prepare for the final battle to be fought on that Great Day of the Lord at the end of the Church Age, Revelation 20:7-10. The Beast and The False Prophet are permanently locked up. Satan is temporarily locked up. However, their demon "**frog**" agents have been merking in the mire for 2,000 years in preparation for the final battle when their leader, Satan, is released for one last contest at the end of the Church Age. One does not need to look too far or even have great insight to see the influence of these demon "**frog**" sons of Satan still at work in our world. Obviously, "**frog**" is a metaphor for these demons, perhaps to describe their stealth, quick and deadly accuracy, amphibious adaptability, ability to hibernate, or ability to multiply tragedy like tadpoles. Thankfully, we know that Christ has promised victory!

7) And after the thousand years, Satan will be released from his prison, 8) and he will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to the war; the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. 9) They went up over the width of the earth, and surrounded the camp of the saints, and the beloved city. Fire came down out of heaven from God, and devoured them. 10) The devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet are also. They will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Revelation 20:7-10 (WEB)

Since the introduction of Revelation indicates subject matter that is past, present, and future some have concluded that the symbols of Revelation are not specific, but instead typify various wicked kingdoms and kings through all Church history. Certainly some of the symbols are general in nature, but we see that The Beast and The False Prophet are specifically cast into the Lake of Fire at the beginning of the Church Age Millennium. We also see that Satan is presently bound from deceiving the nations, but that he will be released in the future. These are specific accounts of victory for the first century church, not idealized illustrations. Yet they are also the *founding examples* of victory that Christians have won, and will win through the entire Church Age until the last Great Battle.

Revelation had a critical message for the first century church and has a critical message for the church today! The Christians of the first century faced incredible persecution from both the Jew and the Roman at the inauguration of the New Covenant Christian faith. Revelation guaranteed victory to the fledgling first century church in their dire contest with the adulterous harlot Jerusalem, the demonic empowered Roman government, and the demon possessed Roman Caesar. Christ himself destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and eventually the demonic Roman powers that hated the Church. He bound Satan and threw The Beast and the False Prophet into the Lake of Fire. Victory!

Now, however, the Church to this very day should be both warned and encouraged. We must be warned that Satan, The Beast, and The False Prophet released their demon "**frog**" agents into our present world to prepare for the final battle of Gog and Magog on the Great Day of the Lord which remains yet in our future! The good news is that just as victory was promised to the first century church, so victory is promised to God's people on that Great Day. Through this radical plan Christ is unifying his one Church because believers through all Church history participate in the *very same* battle! Both the Full Futurist and the Full Preterist miss this critical fact by pushing the message of Revelation fully into the future or fully into the past. Yet God will demonstrate his grace both in and through his obedient Church with the grand finale of the same contest at the end of this present Church Age.

The great contest in the first century was led by Satan using the adulterous harlot Jerusalem, the demonic empowered Roman government, and the demon possessed Roman Caesar. History proves that Satan has employed these same tactics again and again throughout the Church Age with his demon "**frog**" agents. The ongoing influence of demons is evidenced to this day by false religions such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Mormonism. These demons also build their lairs in the modern governmental infrastructures of Communism, Socialism, Fascism, and even Republics. These lairs then become homes for demon crazed political leaders like Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, and Ho Chi

Minh. Of course we are each accountable for our choices, but if we do not choose Christ, then we are pawns and prey for Satan's destructive schemes of envy, selfishness, abortion, addiction, anger, genocide, greed, homosexuality, perversion, pornography, infidelity, divorce, and pride. Satan's objective is to destroy by twisting, spoiling, contaminating, perverting, ruining, and breaking everything good that God has created. The hymn writer warns that we live in a "world with devils filled." I have proved in my article, [You are Wrong About Matthew 25:31-46!](#), that the "ethnos" gathered before Christ at the final judgment includes both humans and demons, Matthew 25:32 and Revelation 20:13. Thus it is no coincidence that Revelation 20:8 says that when Satan is released he will gather the "ethnos" for battle against God's people. Satan will round up both his demons and unbelieving mankind, who so easily serve as his pawns, to attack God's people.

So are we following the example of the first century church? Are we following the Lamb? Are we ready to stand in battle like Christ and with Christ? Are we battling mere flesh and blood or are we fighting the good fight against God's true enemy, that is Satan and his demons?

For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world's rulers of the darkness of this age, and against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Ephesians 6:12 (WEB)

One thing is clear, Satan's web of deception will be world-wide with a clear black and white division across the globe. While God's grace currently endures lukewarm gray spaces in our world there will only be two categories of people on that day: the attacker and the attacked, the wolf and the lamb. There will be no nations to oppose the 'Hitler' of that day. Satan will be released to round up all the wicked to attack *both* God's beloved saints and his beloved city. Though God destroyed unbelieving Jerusalem in 70 A.D. the fact that *both* the beloved saints *and* the beloved city will be attacked by Satan on that Great Day yet to come ought to give everyone pause. God destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D., but he still loves Israel dearly! And so we return to the grand conclusion of Romans.

25) For I don't desire you to be ignorant, brothers, of this mystery, so that you won't be wise in your own conceits, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, 26) and so all Israel will be saved. Even as it is written,

"There will come out of Zion the Deliverer, and he will turn away ungodliness from Jacob.

27) This is my covenant to them, when I will take away their sins."

28) Concerning the Good News, they are enemies for your sake. But concerning the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sake. 29) For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. 30) For as you in time past were disobedient to God, but now have obtained mercy by their disobedience, 31) even so these also have now been disobedient, that by the mercy shown to you they may also obtain mercy. 32) For God has shut up all to disobedience, that he might have mercy on all.

Romans 11:25-32 (WEB)

Friend, if you fall short of trusting that Jesus does in fact love all mankind, every individual Jew and every individual gentile, you will be deceived into joining the attacker. Flee your doubts! Leave your false graceless religion! Do not join Satan in attacking Christ's beloved! God loves you and your neighbor! Fight on God's side against Satan and his lies! Stand like a lamb for God's people so the victorious Lamb can be your defender!

Essential Observations

OBJECTION>> *The Optimism Out of Control book is too long and difficult to read. Can you please summarize your essential observations?*

ME>> Yes, I apologize for the length of the book. While defending the truth that **Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind** I may have spent too many words answering objections. I list my essential observations below.

1. The salvation of mankind and the doom of Satan is the gospel. (Genesis 3:15)
2. Why say God loves his enemies first, if it is merely an offer? (Romans 5:8-11)
3. Grace by definition is unmerited unconditional blessing. (Romans 3:23-25)

4. Faith is not a condition to, but trust in his unconditional love! (Romans 3:3-4)
5. All mankind is atoned by Christ the God-man, the second Adam. (Romans 5:12-19)
6. God bound all to sin so that he could give mercy to all. (Romans 11:32)
7. Jesus, like Hosea, sometimes calls his lost sheep, "not my sheep." (John 10:26)
8. Unbelieving humans are punished in Hades if unrepentant. (Luke 16:19-31)
9. Hades is not the same place as the Lake of Fire. (Revelation 20:11-15)
10. Hades is temporal and emptied at the final judgment. (Revelation 20:11-15)
11. Why defeat Hades, if not to save the unbelieving dead? (Matthew 16:18)
12. Christians, with Christ, are not judged at the final judgment. (1 Thessalonians 4:17)
13. Unbelieving humans are at the final judgment. (Matthew 25:31-46, Revelation 20:13)
14. Unbelieving humans are the sheep on Jesus' right. (Matthew 25:34-40, Rev 20:13)
15. Some fallen angels are held for future judgment. (2 Peter 2:4, Jude 6)
16. Fallen angels are at the final judgment. (Jude 6, Revelation 20:13)
17. Jesus is not the helper of fallen angels. (Hebrews 2:16)
18. Fallen angels are the goats on Jesus' left. (Matthew 25:41-46, Revelation 20:10-15)
19. The Lake of Fire is prepared for Satan and his angels. (Matthew 25:41)
20. Jesus allows unbelieving humans to fear the destiny of Satan. (Revelation 21:8)
21. Christ's purpose is to show off his grace in kindness toward his chosen. (Ephesians 2:7)

I hope these points inspire valuable reflection for all Christians.

Perhaps my additional defense of the gospel of Christ's victorious grace was unneeded since there are so many already, some of which are reviewed in my article, [Book Reviews](#). However, I was well into writing *Optimism Out of Control* before realizing the ample existing witness. Yet I do highlight two significant observations, which I have not seen elsewhere. First, I note the distinct intermediate punishments of humans and fallen angels in Hades and Tartarus, and concluding destinies in Heaven and the Lake of Fire, respectively. Second, I note that accurate hermeneutics must recognize that Jesus, like Hosea, sometimes calls his lost sheep, "*not my sheep*", and is willing to allow the rebellious elect to fear the destiny of Satan. I hope these contributions to the discussion help the body of Christ grow further toward maturity.

Evangelicaluniversalist.com discussion

I joined [evangelicaluniversalist.com](#) discussion to get feedback on my book. However, the forum discussion has since been closed. The feedback was helpful, but also clouded by strange views from other contributors such as reincarnation and Unitarianism. Following are the titles of my posts archived at <http://jeff-martin-reposted.signedon.net>:

BUT YA GOTTA ACCEPT IT!

Fallen Angels are the Goats on Jesus' Left

Is 'free will' faith saving faith?

The Optimism Out of Control book now for sale

Pinning down the slippery Arminian and Calvinist

Real or Apparent Paradox?

Requesting Critical Reviews of Optimism Out of Control

The Good, Bad, and Ugly of John A. T. Robinson

There is no punishment after death for the redeemed!

Universalism + Free Will = One Very Strange Bird

Wow... so what do you really believe?

Your Reasoning is Backwards!

Fallen Angels at The Great White Throne Judgment?

OBJECTOR>> Fallen angels will not be judged at The Great White Throne Judgment or The Sheep and Goat Judgment. You are wrong about that. The Goats on Jesus' left are unbelieving mankind that will be damned to the Lake of Fire.

ME>> I certainly respect that we have a different view of these things. However, please consider one more amazing observation from the Scripture. Traditional understanding holds that The Great White Throne Judgment and The Sheep and Goat Judgment are the final judgments of human beings. Tradition maintains that believers, those who accepted Jesus, are the Sheep on the right, while unbelievers, those who die without faith, are the Goats on Jesus left. Even many Christian Universalists think that unbelieving mankind is sent to the Lake of Fire, but that they are finally released sometime beyond the last page of the Bible. However, others in church history (including myself) differ from this traditional understanding for a number of reasons and now I want to bring one more totally amazing reason to the table. Again, I am convinced that the Lake of Fire is *only* prepared for the devil and his angels and that no human being will ever enter these fires. I am convinced that the final judgment of Jesus also includes the judgment of fallen angels and they alone are the Goats on Jesus' left sent to the Lake of Fire.

First, consider a quick review of my reasons already given. If you have not already read my proof that Jesus is the Savior of all mankind, please start at the beginning of my book, *Optimism Out of Control*.

- Jesus paid for the sins of all mankind, therefore not even one human being can be eternally damned, not even unbelieving mankind, 1 John 2:1-2. If God himself has paid for our sin and his wrath is appeased, who then remains to condemn us? Furthermore, faith does not cause our election to forgiveness, but instead faith trusts that we are already chosen for forgiveness from before the creation of the world, Ephesians 1:4! But are not unbelievers punished after death?
- Jesus does punish unbelieving mankind in Hades after death. However, even in Hades his love for all mankind continues, Psalm 139:8. Contrary to tradition, even unbelievers will be finally released from their punishments to receive salvation, Matthew 16:18 and Revelation 20:13. Jesus deeply loves all mankind, yet there is still punishment in Hades for those who reject the grace of God even though they are already forgiven. Punishment for the unbelieving is promised in 2 Thessalonians 2:9. However, read the YLT Bible to see that the word "*eterna*" is mistranslated from the Greek word "*aion*" and should instead read "*eon*," "*age*," or "*complete*." So unbelievers are punished for the "*age*" of Hades. Love does not remove punishment, but instead God punishes us because he loves us! But does Jesus love the fallen angels also?
- Jesus does not help fallen angels, Hebrews 2:14-16. Therefore demons will suffer the Lake of Fire. Furthermore "*The Ages of The Ages*" of the Lake of Fire is quite different than the "*Age*" of Hades. Jesus' plan from the beginning has been to crush the head of Satan, Genesis 3:15. During the course of history, some demons have already been imprisoned in Tartarus for future judgment, 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6. Scripture then ends with the salvation of the elect, even from Hades, and the condemnation of the Devil and his rebel angels to the Lake of Fire, Revelation 20:10. So when will these fallen angels be judged?
- Jesus' Sheep and Goat Judgment in Matthew 25 strongly appears to be the same as The Great White Throne Judgment in Revelation 20. Since Scripture says that fallen angels are being "*held for judgment*" on "*The Great Day*," the most obvious timing for this judgment is the Sheep and Goat Judgment and The Great White Throne Judgment when Jesus stands all his subjects before him for final judgment. Daniel 12:1-4, Matthew 25:31-46, and Revelation 20:11-15 each appear to be talking about the same event. So the subjects that stand before Jesus at the final judgment will include both the unbelieving humans just released from Hades and the demons just extracted from Tartarus. But how can we be certain?
- Jesus says explicitly that the Lake of Fire is... "***prepared for the devil and his angels***" (Matthew 25:41 WEB). The Lake of Fire is not prepared for humans. Though we deserve the same fate as the Devil and his Angels, yet because of the grace of Jesus mankind is spared damnation. The Devil and his Angels, however, are sentenced to the Lake of Fire. Is there more proof?

Some have objected to my understanding saying that fallen angels will not be present at The Sheep and Goat Judgment or at The Great White Throne Judgment. However, the Scripture is clear that these fallen angels are presently being held for future judgment. Consider,

For if God didn't spare angels when they sinned, but cast them down to Tartarus, and committed them to pits of darkness to be reserved for judgment.

2 Peter 2:4 (WEB)

Angels who didn't keep their first domain, but deserted their own dwelling place, he has kept in everlasting bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day.

Jude 6 (WEB)

The Scripture is clear that these imprisoned fallen angels are being held for judgment at some point in the future. Jude 6 is very clear that the timing of this judgment will be on "**The Great Day**." I have proposed that this Great Day is the same day as The Sheep and Goat Judgment and The Great White Throne Judgment.

However, if that is not enough proof already (and I think it is), consider one last proof directly from Revelation 20:13 (WEB),

The sea [Thalaasa] gave up the dead who were in it. Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them. They were judged, each one according to his works.

Have you ever thought it curious that both the sea [*Thalassa*] and *Hades* gave up the dead that are in them? Why the distinction? Why both *Thalaasa* and *Hades*? Perhaps the reference to the *sea* and *Hades* is doubly expansive in order to communicate the certainty that all the dead will be raised. Perhaps the language is slightly poetical or apocalyptic and so should not be pressed too hard for meaning.

Alternatively, the Holy Spirit is at least noting the distinction that people are released from two separate locations to stand before Christ's Throne. Clearly one location is *Hades*, the temporary place of punishment for deceased unbelieving humanity. Could *Thalaasa* then be the place of punishment for fallen angels or perhaps the retreat for fugitive fallen angels?

Consider two possible explanations. First we note that the Holy Spirit borrows the term "*Tartaroo*" from Greek mythology in order to help the first century reader understand that the fallen angels are held in a separate, harsher prison than unbelieving mankind, 2 Peter 2:4. There could be a connection between *Thalaasa* and *Tartarus* in that *Thalaasa* was a Greek goddess whose counterpart *Tethys* was a *Titan* imprisoned in... *Tartarus*. There is also a small parallel between the mythological *Titans* and the speculation that the *Nephilim* were rebellious angels that pro-created with humans in Genesis 6:4, perhaps the very angels imprisoned in *Tartarus*. Now I am *not* saying that the Holy Spirit believed in Greek mythology! However, it may be that the mythological idea of the *Titans* was inspired by the historic *Nephilim*. My main point is that rebels are escorted from both *Hades* and *Thalaasa* which offers further support for the presence of fallen angels at the final judgment.

Alternatively *Thalaasa* could simply refer to the *sea*. Certainly we should not think that some deceased humans are in *Hades* while others are in the *sea*! Instead, the *sea* could just as easily refer to the place of punishment for fallen angels or possibly the retreat for fugitive fallen angels. For example, in Matthew 8:28-34 the Lord helped two demon possessed men by casting the demons into a herd of pigs, which then promptly drowned themselves in the *sea* [*Thalaasa*]. Again, rebels are escorted from both *Hades* and *Thalaasa* which supports the presence of fallen angels at the final judgment.

Note also that Revelation 21:1b (WEB) says, "**and the sea [Thalaasa] is no more.**" This verse always seemed odd to me, that the New Heavens and Earth would not have seas. However, in the context it seems clear that the meaning is that there will no longer be any place of temporary punishment or retreat for whoever was held in *Thalaasa*, perhaps the demons. The punishing grounds of both *Hades* and *Thalassa* are to be ended! Thus, mankind will be released from *Hades* and finally saved to glory through the grace of God alone. They are the sheep at the Sheep and Goat Judgment, in Matthew 25! The demons, however, are extracted from *Thalassa* to be judged and sentenced with Satan to the Lake of Fire for *The Ages of The Ages*. They are the Goats at the Sheep and Goat Judgment! This is good news concerning the final salvation of mankind. This is also good news if you hope to enjoy the ocean on the New Earth!

So there is strong evidence for the presence of fallen angels at The Sheep and Goat Judgment, also called The Great White Throne Judgment. First, these fallen angels are being held for punishment on "**the great day**" (Jude 6). Second, the Lake of Fire is "**prepared for... the devil and his angels**" (Matthew 25:41 WEB). Third, *Thalaasa*, whether a picture from Greek mythology or simply the *sea*, is clearly a place distinct from *Hades* that is also emptied of rebels for judgment on that Great Day.

If you object to my proposal above you should at least answer these three questions. Why do you think the Holy Spirit distinguishes between the dead in *Thalaasa* and the dead in *Hades* as mentioned in Revelation 20:13? When do you think "**The Great Day**" is for the judgment of the fallen angels, 1 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6? Why do you think Revelation 21:1 says there is no longer any sea?

So again it is further supported that the Goats on Jesus' left at The Sheep and Goat Judgment (that is The Great White Throne Judgment) *are* the fallen angels to be summoned

from *Tartarus* or *Thalassa* to stand before Christ. They are the Goats on Jesus' left sentenced to the Lake of Fire "**prepared for the devil and his angels**" (Matthew 25:41 WEB). Thus by the grace of Christ alone, no humans will ever enter The Lake of Fire! Instead the Sheep on Jesus' right are unbelieving mankind to be released from *Hades* and finally graced with understanding and joy over their Savior and ours, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Yet be warned by the gospel. Humans who reject grace will be punished in Hades, even though their sins are forgiven, because the God who loves also disciplines! Why test the Lord? Repent and receive the good news that *YOUR* sins are forgiven... because the sins of *ALL* mankind are forgiven!

Forever Is Not Forever? You Gotta Be Kidding Me!

Some chide...

SOME>> Forever Is Not Forever? You Gotta Be Kidding Me!

ME>> You make an excellent point. I had come to the conclusion that "*forever*" and "*eterna*" in the New Testament must not always mean "*forever*" and "*eterna*" because the context of grace demands salvation satisfaction even for the unbelieving. And so I concluded that the Holy Spirit used the word "*forever*" and "*eterna*" to describe the long, but finite time of punishment in Hades for the unbelieving. I also concluded that if Abraham's faith could reasonably trust that God could "**call things that are not, as though they were,**" then I was not unreasonable to conclude that God could save people from "*eterna*" punishment in Hell. Furthermore, it is also evident and believed by orthodox Christians that Jesus abolished the "*eterna*" Old Covenant in his flesh. So I concluded that "*eterna*" does not always mean "*forever*" when God is in the picture.

The Lord has, however, recently corrected my understanding. My logic was sound but incomplete. I had already shown that the Hebrew word "*olam*" does not always mean eternal, but instead it means the duration of the subject in view. Every Hebrew lexicon denotes this fact. Yet without much homework I concluded that the same must be true of the Greek word translated "*eterna*" in the New Testament, the Greek word "*aion*." Recently the Lord blessed me through a reunion with John Wesley Hanson's classic 1875 work titled, *The Greek Word Aion-Aionios translated Everlasting-Eternal in the Holy Bible Shown to Denote Limited Duration*. This classic work is available for free from the U.S. Library of Congress website and also [from my own website](#). This 88-page book is a must read for anyone who agrees or disagrees with my conclusions. There is little point to my adding further to this definitive work. Study this volume for yourself and your faith and understanding of the Bible will be challenged in radically positive ways, if you are willing to let go of all your self-righteousness. Dr. Heleen Keizer has also written a dissertation proving the same titled, *Life, Time, Entirety - A Study of Aion in Greek Literature and Philosophy, the Septuagint and Philo*. You can read her [315 page dissertation online](#) or an [abstract of her conclusions from my website](#). You might think it is incredulous to claim that "*aion*" is mistranslated in many Bibles. Unless you are competent in ancient Greek, you may not even know how to verify this for yourself. *The NASB-NIV Parallel New Testament in Greek in English* is an invaluable resource on my shelf. [Young's Literal Translation](#) is also a valuable resource.

Read Hanson's work for yourself, but here is my brief review:

1. Hanson and Keizer irrefutably prove that the Greek word "*aion*" is a synonym to the Hebrew word "*olam*" and that they both mean "the duration of the subject in view." Thus "*aion*" can mean the finite duration of a man's life, the finite duration of the Old Covenant, the finite duration of Hades/Hell, the infinite duration of The Lake of Fire, and the infinite duration of God himself.
2. Hanson applies this definition to his interpretation of Matthew 25:31-46 and concludes that the "*aion*" in view is the Christian age in this world and that unbelievers' lives are punished and destroyed in this life when they reject Christ. However, he concludes that these believers are saved from punishment in the afterlife through grace in spite of their unbelief. This is a common view in many Christian Universalist circles. They conclude that Hell is the pain suffered in this life by rejecting God's ways. While this view may be attractive at the level of human reason, I find it to be unbiblical and I do not agree with it.
3. I do agree with Hanson's definition of the Greek word "*aion*," but I currently disagree with his application and interpretation of Matthew 25:31-46. The "*eterna* fire" mentioned in Matthew 25:41 certainly appears to be the Lake of Fire spoken of in Revelation 20. This is clear because the Devil and his angels are sentenced to this eternal fire. Yet, I also agree with Hanson that no human beings are damned to the Lake of Fire. So what is the explanation? Hanson simply did not see that the Sheep and Goats standing before Christ at the Great White Throne judgment include both human beings and fallen angels. 2 Peter 2 makes it clear that there are both human beings and fallen angels currently imprisoned in Hades and Tartarus. Hades and Thalassa are then emptied of both unbelieving mankind and the imprisoned angels at the Great White Throne judgment as explained in Revelation 20:13 and Matthew 25:31-46. Human beings are saved on the right, while the fallen angels are sentenced to the Lake of Fire on the left. How could the Holy Spirit be more clear when he says, "**...prepared for the Devil and his angels.**" I've explained this more completely in my articles, [Matthew 25:31-46](#) and [You are Wrong About Matthew 25:31-46!](#)
4. Hanson also applies this understanding to verses like 2 Thessalonians 1:9. In this case Hanson is certainly correct that Paul is reminding the new Thessalonian believers that

the wicked unbelieving humans will be punished at Christ's coming judgment. However, we also see in Revelation that those punished in Hades are eventually extracted out.

5. Hanson also makes use of the argument that a God of love would never damn human beings for eternity. This argument makes an attractive appeal, but unfortunately it weakens his primary argument about the meaning of "aion." He weakens his argument because the primary characteristic of God is to be praised in the salvation of mankind, not his love, but his grace. If Christ had not atoned for the sins of corrupt mankind, then the justice of God could have damned the entirety of mankind without lessening God's character trait of love in the least. The perfect love of God within the Trinity would continue on eternally without flaw. We may find it hard to swallow, even as Christians, but we are utterly corrupt in sin and deserve damnation. God would be just to damn us without being unloving at all, that is if Christ had not died. In fact Satan and his demonic followers are people too, yet they will be sentenced to the Lake of Fire for *The Ages of The Ages*. However, there is a new justice in town. Christ has freely, without condition, chosen to love all mankind. Christ has atoned for the sins of all mankind; therefore, his grace now demands the salvation of those atoned. One whose sins are paid for absolutely cannot be eternally damned. Never! If the wrath of God is appeased, who then remains to condemn? Friend, who can possibly condemn? No one! That is the rock Christians stand on -- the loving grace of God. However, the unbelieving elect do not yet stand on or live by God's love. They are un-believing! But one day, sooner or later, God will touch his finger of grace to their hearts as well. Why wait? Why suffer? Why burn in Hades to the very brink of the Lake of Fire before believing that the grace of God has already made it impossible for you to be damned or ever be separated from the love of God your Heavenly Father? Believe!

6. Hanson also cites proofs that universal salvation was commonly accepted in the early centuries of the church and that it was not until A.D. 544 that this understanding was condemned and anathematized as heretical. This would be a worthy study to verify. Obviously I already believe that this was the Apostolic view.

Finally, I had suggested that understanding the Holy Spirit's use of "eternal" as "limited duration" required the faith of Abraham to **"call things that are not, as though they were."** However, I was wrong about this and again apologize for my haste. I have corrected this in the book. Absolutely, no irrational or miraculous "leap of faith" is required at all because the Greek word "aion" is often mistranslated as "eternal" and "forever" when it should be translated as "age", "eon", or "complete." Hanson could have even further supported his conclusion by pointing out that the etymology of our modern word "eon" points directly back to "aion." So unbelieving humans will most certainly spend an eon in Hades, but an eon is not forever and has a beginning... and an end. Hades will be emptied of all souls and then Hades itself will be tossed into the Lake of Fire, emptied of all souls, never needed again for all eternity.

A shorter explanation of the meaning of "aion" can be found at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aeon>. However, it should be noted that though Hanson's work is definitive for me, it is not definitive for everyone. For example at <http://carm.org/what-do-greek-dictionaries-say-about-aionion> Matt Slick argues that Christian Universalists are completely wrong to suggest that the word "aion" can refer to anything less than eternal. However, on his one page argument, Denotation #3 reads as follows, "describes duration, either undefined but not endless."

Have those who persist in rejecting my thesis truly been to the foot of the cross? Have they seen their religious hypocrisy terribly exposed and completely cleansed by the blood of Christ? Have you received grace?

Forever Is Not Forever? You Still Gotta Be Kidding Me!

SOME>> Forever Is Not Forever? You Still Gotta Be Kidding Me!

ME>> This is an excellent point already briefly discussed in my previous article, *Forever Is Not Forever? You Gotta Be Kidding Me!* The main point is that I do boldly say with others that the Greek word "aion" and its adjective "aionios" are often misunderstood and mistranslated in many translations of the Christian Scriptures. This Greek noun and adjective have a much richer meaning than simple infinite duration. Now if you are not a student of the Greek language you may not know how to determine the truth of the matter.

Two quick steps into the discussion are first: the English word "eon" directly descends etymologically from the Greek word "aion." This much is plain to see and perhaps enough to motivate your further study. Friend, you and I both already know that "eon" does not mean "eternal" but is a long period of time with a beginning... and an end! This fact alone ought to give every Christian pause to reconsider the usage of "aion" within the New Testament. Second: the subject of salvation by grace received through faith alone ought to embolden every believer to thoroughly examine the Scriptures to understand the extent of God's grace even for the unbelieving. If God has saved anyone by grace, why would we be offended that he would save even the unbelieving by that same grace, even after an eon in Hades?

Hoping for better things however, to help your further study I have used the <http://www.blueletterbible.org> to find every usage of the Greek words "aion," "aionios," and "aidios" in the New Testament.

aion: Strong's G165 occurs 128 times in 102 verses in the Greek concordance.

aionios: Strong's G166 occurs 71 times in 69 verses in the Greek concordance.

aidios: Strong's G126 occurs 2 times in 2 verses in the Greek concordance.

The large chart attached at DGJC.ORG/OPTIMISM/AION lists the references to these Greek words in the World English Bible and the Young's Literal Translation along with my notes. This spread sheet could be a useful starting point for your own study.

Other resources to study also include:

- *The Greek Word Aion-Aionios translated Everlasting-Eternal in the Holy Bible Shown to Denote Limited Duration* by John Wesley Hanson, available for free from the U.S. Library of Congress website and also [on my own website](#).
- *Life, Time, Entirety - A Study of Aion in Greek Literature and Philosophy, the Septuagint and Philo* by Dr. Heleen Keizer available [online](#) or in [abstract on my website](#).
- *Terms for Eternity: Aionios and Aidios in Classical and Christian Texts* by Ilaria Ramelli and David Konstan. Ramelli and Konstan defend that 'aidios' is the only Greek term that always means eternal, used twice in the New Testament at Romans 1:20 and Jude 6.
- **The NASB-NIV Parallel New Testament in Greek in English**
- **Young's Literal Translation** of the Christian Scriptures.
- **Concordant Literal New Testament**.
- **WWW.CARM.ORG** contains articles in opposition to the victory of grace for all mankind. Read <http://carm.org/look-word-aionion> and <http://carm.org/what-do-greek-dictionaries-say-about-aionion> for an alternate view.
- **A longer list of books to consider is available on my website.**

A. E. Knoch proposes in his book *All In All* that the Holy Spirit uses the words "aion" and "aionios" in very distinct and precise ways to refer to five distinct eons between eternity past and eternity future. Knoch insists that "aion" never means eternal. Knoch preferred the term "eon" in the *Concordant Bible Translation* rather than "age" which is used in Young's Literal Translation because "eon" has the useful adjective "eonian" while Young uses the cumbersome "age-during." Knoch also argues that his five proposed "eons" correspond to five "worlds," two of which are the pre-flood and the post-flood world. Knoch also says that these "worlds" are different than the administrations within a particular "eon," such as the Old and New Covenant administrations of grace within the present "eon." Knoch offers a detailed chart of his theory on page 160 of *All In All*. He also makes the assertion that "aion" does not even have to mean "eternal" in verses like Romans 1:25. This Scripture says God is blessed unto the "ages," meaning the "eonian times." Knoch's understanding is actually very reasonable because saying that God is blessed through all the "eons" does not contradict that God is also blessed eternally beyond the "eons." Knoch makes some very acute observations worthy of every theologian's consideration. His proposed five eons are charted below in parallel with the Tabernacle.

Eternity Future - Post-Eonian			
Tabernacle		Time	
Holies of Holies Inner two Holies	The Holy of Holies	Lake of Fire Fifth Eon	Eons of Eons Last two Eons
	The Holy	Millennial Kingdom Fourth Eon	
The Court		Present Third Eon, Flood to Return	
The Camp		Second Eon - Gen 1:2 to Flood	
Outside the Camp		First Eon - Creation to Gen 1:2	
Eternity Past - Pre-Eonian			

Dr. Heleen Keizer concludes, at slight variance from Knoch, in her work *Life, Time, Entirety - A Study of Aion in Greek Literature and Philosophy, the Septuagint and Philo* that

"aion" has been used to mean "eternal," but even richer than "age" or "eon" the original meaning is "life," "complete," or "entire." Wow! Reread John 3:16 with this understanding!

A thorough study of Scripture will help us understand the meaning of these words and the Holy Spirit's usage in context. The primary denotations and synonyms possible from the above resources and the Greek lexicon are summarized as:

- **eon, eonian:** an age, general or particular, with a beginning and end, not eternal.
- **entire, whole, life, complete, unbroken:** a purposeful whole unbroken life.
- **eternal:** lasting forever in the past and/or the future.
- **world:** the world and human condition during a particular age or circumstance.

Thank you for giving this your very careful attention. Again the large chart attached at DGJC.ORG/OPTIMISM/AION lists the references to these Greek words in the World English Bible and the Young's Literal Translation. This spread sheet could be a useful starting point for your own study.

Knoch's five eon chart above suggests that the last two eons are a Millennial Kingdom and the Lake of Fire Judgment. Knoch points to 1 Corinthians 15:23-28 and 15:50-55 as forecasting the end of the Lake of Fire. However, as much as I agree with Knoch's critical observations about the eons of redemptive history, his eonian model may be shifted one notch to far into the future. I understand 1 Corinthians 15 to point instead to the end of death and Hades judgment for mankind at the Great White Throne Judgment with Satan and his demons cast into the Lake of Fire at the commencement of either the last eon or eternity. Knoch's model also includes a rigid mapping of five eons to five elements of the Tabernacle. That is certainly possible, but my proposed model below is simpler to emphasize the main point: God is demonstrating his grace through various eons within history between eternity past and future. Consider my proposed revision to Knoch's eonian chart below.

Eternity Future (Post-Eonian)	
Redemption Manifest for Mankind	
Fallen Angels Damned for the Last Eon or for all Eternity	
Tabernacle	Time
Holy of Holies	Church Eon
Outside the Holies	Eons before Christ
Eternity Past (Pre-Eonian)	

In this simplified model of understanding, the cross of Christ stands as the fulcrum point between the "ages" before Christ and the "ages" after Christ. Hebrews 9:26 points to this understanding.

Finally, two critical verses to examine are Revelation 14:11 and 20:10. The common English translation of both of these verses speak about torment "*forever and ever*." Reference both these verses at DGJC.ORG/OPTIMISM/AION and your own Bible. You will see that Revelation 14:11 is talking about wicked men, while Revelation 20:10 is talking about wicked angels.

So after all this work is my primary thesis at variance with Scripture? Do wicked men then share the same destiny as wicked angels? Let's take a closer look at these two verses.

Comparison	Revelation 14:11	Revelation 20:10
World English Bible	The smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever . They have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.	The devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet are also. They will be tormented day and night forever and ever .
	and the smoke of their torment doth go up to ages of	and the Devil, who is leading them astray, was cast into

Young's Literal Translation	ages ; and they have no rest day and night, who are bowing before the beast and his image, also if any doth receive the mark of his name.	the lake of fire and brimstone, where are the beast and the false prophet, and they shall be tormented day and night -- to the ages of the ages .
Greek	καὶ ὁ καπνὸς τοῦ βασανισμοῦ αὐτῶν εἰς αἰῶνας αἰῶνων ἀναβαίνει καὶ οὐκ ἔχουσιν ἀνάπαυσιν ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς οἱ προσκυνοῦντες τὸ θηρίον καὶ τὴν εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ καὶ εἴ τις λαμβάνει τὸ χάραγμα τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ	καὶ ὁ διάβολος ὁ πλανῶν αὐτοὺς ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν λίμνην τοῦ πυρὸς καὶ θείου ὄπου καὶ τὸ θηρίον καὶ ὁ ψευδοπροφήτης καὶ βασανισθήσονται ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰῶνων
Subject of Torment	Wicked men branded with the mark of the Beast.	Wicked fallen angels; Satan, the Beast, and the False Prophet.
Length of Torment	εἰς αἰῶνας αἰῶνων	εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰῶνων
εἰς	into, unto, to, towards, for, among	
τοῦς	the	
αἰῶνας	ages, eons	
τῶν	of the	
αἰῶνων	of ages, eonian	
Literal translation	for ages of ages	for the ages of the ages

So are the phrases above identical? The WEB Bible and most English Bibles translate the phrases identically. However, I show above that they are not identical in wording in the underlying Greek. But are they identical in meaning? No, they are not identical in meaning either! The torment promised for wicked men is for a long time, in fact **"for ages of ages."** This likely points to torment in Hades during the pre-Church Age and the Church Age. However, the torment promised to Satan and his angels is for the definite specific time period of the Lake of Fire, **"for the ages of the ages!"** Notice the absence of the definite article **"the"** in Revelation 14:11 and the presence of the definite article **"the"** in Revelation 20:10. Consider all the possible interpretations of these observations:

- Wicked men share the same eternal torment as wicked angels. Though I have refuted this understanding to my own satisfaction due to the underlying differences in the Greek between Revelation 14:11 and 20:10.
- Wicked men share the same eonian torment as wicked angels. Some Christian Universalists propose that human beings will be punished in the Lake of Fire along with Satan and the demons, and then extracted some time beyond the pages of Scripture not explicitly mentioned.
- Wicked men are punished **"for ages of ages"**, through the church age, even to the brink of the Lake of Fire, while Satan and his angels are punished **"for the ages of the ages"**, the Lake of Fire which is prepared for them, Matthew 25:41. The Lake of Fire is not prepared for human beings.

I have also proposed a more complete chart of these events in my article, [Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News!](#) Rejoice with me that wicked mankind will be punished temporarily **"for ages of ages"** both now and in Hades up to the Great White Throne Judgment. Rejoice also that Satan and his demons, the enemy of God and mankind, will be damned to the Lake of Fire **"for the ages of the ages"** after the Great White Throne Judgment. Finally rejoice that Christ will rule forever.

Thank you for pursuing your own independent study of these things. The implications are incredible and so faithful handling of God's word is critical.

God is Not a Retributivist!

SEVERAL UNIVERSALISTS>> God is not a retributivist! You seem to have hope that God will be ALL in ALL and finally save ALL humanity, yet you portray God as an angry retributivist against sin and unrepentant sinners. This is a wrong view of God.

ME>> A number of authors listed in my article [Book Reviews](#) have argued that traditional theology is wrong because God is characterized as a retributivist. Their concern is that a

God of love would not exact justice by getting even. That is a good point to note. In fact, Jesus himself made the Old Covenant obsolete with his New Covenant. So the **"eye for an eye"** theology never was the final will of God. However, care is needed in our understandings and explanations because many Christian Universalists have seriously stepped out of bounds. They say that the Old Testament depictions of God's wrath are not Holy Spirit inspired, but instead fallible human interpretation of world events based on a wrong view of God.

So then how should we understand God? Is he a retributivist?

The dictionary explains:

A retributivist advocates the punishment of criminals in retribution for the harm they have inflicted. Retributivists desire requital according to merits or deserts, especially for evil. In the realm of religion, retributivist theology teaches the distribution of rewards and punishments in a future life.

So what does the word of God say?

First, we remember that the Holy Spirit teaches us in the Old Testament that Cain was placed under a curse for murdering his brother, yet God also was merciful to him, Genesis 4. We also remember that God was grieved over the sinfulness of mankind and drowned the entire world except for eight people, yet God did not stop loving both the living and the dead, Genesis 6 and 1 Peter 3:19-4:6. We also consider that God took the life of David's child to Bathsheba because of his adultery and murder of Uriah. God then punished David even further saying the sword would never leave his household, yet David continued to be a man after God's our heart, 2 Samuel 11-12. God punished sinners severely under the Old Covenant.

Second, we might think that the removal of the **"eye for an eye"** penal system has taken away all punishment under the New Covenant. However, nothing could be further from the truth. In fact the demands for obedience and honor to the crucified and risen Lord are now even greater! Jesus himself warned the unbelieving Jews that Jerusalem would be leveled to the ground for their rejection of him as the Messiah, as it then was in 70 A.D., Matthew 24. Ananias and Sapphira learned the hard way that lying to the Holy Spirit in front of the body of Christ will cost you your life, Acts 5. King Herod did not give glory to God, but instead glorified himself and was struck dead instantly, Acts 12. So we see that God remains the same righteous judge presently under the New Covenant as he was under the Old Covenant. 2 Peter Chapter 2 says that God will pay back harm to those that have done harm. 2 Peter Chapter 3 continues that the God who judged the ancient world with flood waters will judge the present world with fire.

Thankfully water and fire are both used to cleanse and to purify. God's ultimate goal is not to destroy sinful humanity with death by drowning and burning. We know this because 2 Corinthians 5:21 (WEB) says, **"For him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."** God himself took the ultimate penalty for ALL mankind's sin. There will be NO eternal judgment and penalty for those for whom Christ died, that is ALL mankind.

Yet, God also understands the depth of our depravity and his fiery love does not mince words or dance around our wickedness with kid gloves. God is perfectly willing to serve just desserts to teach us or even simply to protect his other children.

Consider the words of Isaiah and David,

"Tell those who have a fearful heart, 'Be strong. Don't be afraid. Behold, your God will come with vengeance, God's retribution. He will come and save you.'"

Isaiah 35:4 (WEB)

"David says, 'Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, a stumbling block, and a retribution to them.'"

Romans 11:9 (WEB)

Consider also the words of Malachi 3:1-6,

1) "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me; and the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, behold, he comes!" says Yahweh of Armies. 2) "But who can endure the day of his coming? And who will stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire, and like launderer's soap; 3) and he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi, and refine them as gold and silver; and they shall offer to Yahweh offerings in righteousness. 4) Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasant to Yahweh, as in the days of old, and as in ancient years. 5) I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the

sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against the perjurers, and against those who oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and who deprive the foreigner of justice, and don't fear me," says Yahweh of Armies. 6) "For I, Yahweh, don't change; therefore you, sons of Jacob, are not consumed.

God is the loving Father of us ALL. And though he may pay retribution according to his wisdom, thankfully his fiery love passionately seeks our purification always and will never condemn us eternally.

Have Other Christians Made this Observation?

Another thoughtful reader suggested...

READER>> I know that you want your book, *Optimism Out of Control*, to stand on Scripture alone, but I think that it would be helpful to include citations from other Christians over the past 2,000 years who have thought what you are thinking. It would remove this objection to your book: "If you're right, then has this gone unnoticed for 2,000 years until Jeff Martin came along?"

ME>> Excellent suggestion. Thanks. I had already pointed my reader to other sources in my articles *Other-theologians* and *Book Reviews*. There are many who have held to various forms of Christian and non-Christian Universalism. Though it is not the conventional understanding, there are noteworthy groups and individuals who have held to Evangelical Universalism, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_Universalism.

This article http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_reconciliation also adds further to the discussion with this quote, "George Whitfield in a letter to John Wesley says that Peter Boehler, a bishop in the Moravian Church, had privately confessed in a letter that 'all the damned souls would hereafter be brought out of hell.' " The doctrine that people will be extracted out of Hell as explained in Revelation 20:13 is not well known, but certainly I am not the first to observe it. John Wesley Hanson's classic 1875 work titled, *The Greek Word Aion-Aionios translated Everlasting-Eternal in the Holy Bible Shown to Denote Limited Duration* also lists other notable Christian Universalists throughout history. Modern evangelical movements that identify with this understanding typically do not prefer the label *Universalist* in order to distance themselves from the Unitarian Universalist movement. Instead they may prefer the label *Restorationist* and use rally cries such as *The Victorious Gospel* and *Greater Grace*. Google those words for more information. Here is also a longer list of evangelical Universalists, though I have not researched the list personally: <http://evangelicaluniversalist.com>.

One might ask why this understanding is not conventional if it is really true. Religion is always more popular than grace. Perhaps professing Christians feel that the available orthodoxies are close enough to the mark that asking further questions about grace is now taboo. Also Protestantism is so anti-Catholic that the very suggestion that people are extracted out of Hell immediately evokes indignant cries about "*working one's way out of purgatory*." Sadly because Catholics and the majority of Protestants think they have been saved by their *free will* choice of faith, they immediately think that I am saying that those extracted from Hell have a "*second chance*" to exercise their *free will* to get back into God's grace. Hardly. How could someone who understands grace even make these comments? If anyone is extracted from punishment in Hell, it is purely by the grace of God alone, the only way that anyone is ever saved in the first place.

So in answer to your question, yes there are others who have shared similar views throughout church history and today. However, since my work is original and not simply echoing the writings of another, you may not be able to find someone who has added up all the facts exactly as I have. In fact, because I hold a minority view, my interpretation may land in a miscellaneous bucket along with some very unbiblical views.

Lastly since the gospel does speak foolishness to the unbelieving, it may be difficult to easily quantify this view in written theology. In fact historians often debate and struggle to precisely state the beliefs of Christians past. This may be one of the reasons. Like Christ himself, they proclaimed that he is the savior of all mankind, yet also like Christ they warned the unbelieving that they are not his sheep. Historians may struggle to efficiently label these faithful ministers of the gospel. For myself, though I am confident that Jesus is the savior of all mankind, I still assert to those who reject the grace of Christ in favor of their *free will*, their "*religion*," their "*limited atonement*," and their "*tainted faith*" that they will spend the duration in Hades. Furthermore, *IF* they are not also saved by the gracious choice of Christ and listed in the Lamb's Book of Life, then they will also be eternally damned. There is no other salvation than the electing grace of Christ. So neither do I fit neatly into a Universalist camp that neglects the gospel.

So why not believe the good news? Christ *HAS* paid for your sin!

Hebrews 2:16 Does Not Say Fallen Angels Are Damned

Another reader says...

READER>> *Hebrews 2:16 Does Not Say Fallen Angels Are Damned*

ME>> Let's look at the passage more closely.

The KJV translates Hebrews 2:16, "***For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham.***"

The KJV translation paraphrases this verse to emphasize the argument that Jesus became a man and not an angel and so Jesus is empathetic to the needs of mankind.

The NASB translates Hebrews 2:16, "***For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham.***"

The NASB, however, interprets the verse to mean that because Jesus became a man he is therefore the helper / redeemer of mankind and not of angels. Check out the verse for yourself at the <http://www.blueletterbible.org> for further study.

Consider the whole argument flow of Hebrews 2 (WEB) below,

1) Therefore we ought to pay greater attention to the things that were heard, lest perhaps we drift away. 2) For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, 3) how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation—which at the first having been spoken through the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard, 4) God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders, by various works of power and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will?

Point 1: Pay attention because Jesus is greater than angels.

5) For he didn't subject the world to come, of which we speak, to angels. 6) But one has somewhere testified, saying, 'What is man, that you think of him? Or the son of man, that you care for him? 7) You made him a little lower than the angels. You crowned him with glory and honor. 8) You have put all things in subjection under his feet.'

For in that he subjected all things to him, he left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we don't see all things subjected to him, yet. 9) But we see him who has been made a little lower than the angels, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God he should taste of death for everyone.

Point 2: The world to come is also subject to mankind, not to angels, with Jesus leading the charge in dominion by tasting death for us.

10) For it became him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many children to glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings. 11) For both he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one, for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brothers, 12) saying,

'I will declare your name to my brothers. Among the congregation I will sing your praise.' 13) Again, 'I will put my trust in him.' Again, 'Behold, here I am with the children whom God has given me.'

Point 3: Jesus is not ashamed to call us his brothers and sisters.

14) Since then the children have shared in flesh and blood, he also himself in the same way partook of the same, that through death he might bring to nothing him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15) and might deliver all of them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. 16) For most certainly, he doesn't give help to angels, but he gives help to the offspring of Abraham. 17) Therefore he was obligated in all things to be made like his brothers, that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make atonement for the sins of the people. 18) For in that he himself has suffered being tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted.

Point 4: Jesus broke the power of Satan because he is not the helper of sinful angels, but the helper of sinful mankind.

The literal translation of Hebrews 2:16 (WEB) from the Greek is:

English	Strong's	Greek
For	g1063	<i>gar</i>
most certainly	g1222	<i>depou</i>
He doesn't	g3756	<i>ou</i>
give help	g1949	<i>epilambanomai</i>
to angels	g32	<i>aggelos</i>
but	g235	<i>alla</i>
He gives help	g1949	<i>epilambanomai</i>
to the offspring	g4690	<i>sperma</i>
of Abraham	g11	<i>Abraam</i>

In conclusion, it would seem that the KJV is guilty of allowing a bias of understanding to wrongly influence the translation. Hebrews 2:16 is saying that Jesus is not the helper of Satan and his angels. Does the verse go as far to say that the Devil and his angels are outside of the redemption purchased at the cross? Some have interpreted the "apokatastasis" of Acts 3:21 and the "all things" of Colossians 1:20 to include fallen angels as well. The happy news is that the redemption of ALL mankind is explicitly taught in Scripture. As for Satan, the arch enemy of Christ, it is also explicitly taught that Christ is not his helper and his destiny is the Lake of Fire. Is there an end to his condemnation to the Lake of Fire? The Scriptures are silent on that question.

How Can You Say Revelation 21:8 Does Not Apply to Humans?

Another questioned...

READER>> How can you say Revelation 21:8 does not apply to humans? If you say that only fallen angels are sentenced to the Lake of Fire, since when were demons cowardly, unbelieving, vile, murderers, sexually immoral, magicians, idolaters, and liars? This is clearly speaking about human unbelievers.

ME>> This is a most excellent question.

Here is Revelation 21:8 (WEB) again,

But for the cowardly, unbelieving, sinners, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their part is in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.

The demonstration of Grace is God's purpose in creation and redemptive history and so grace should always be the interpretive lens of Scripture. The believing elect, having received grace and being led by the Holy Spirit, are well equipped to interpret the Scripture. The Holy Spirit even says boldly that, "**you don't need for anyone to teach you,**" for we have an anointing from Him, 1 John 2:27 (WEB).

To that end I make an observation, the passage says that "**all liars, their part is in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur.**" I boldly assert through the interpretive lens of grace that in this case "all" does not mean "all" in this context. The immediate context and the whole context of Scripture is essential for rightly dividing the word of truth. In my key exegesis of Romans 11:32, I explained that "all" does mean all because all mankind are sinners. Reread my article, [Romans 11:32-36](#) for my complete argument. However, in the case of Revelation 20:8 "all" cannot mean all liars, because everyone is a liar according to Romans 3:4. If all liars are damned to the Lake of Fire then you and I are

damned as well. Likewise even Christians are at times cowardly, unbelieving, vile, murderers, sexually immoral, magicians, and idolaters. Yet these sins are forgiven for all mankind through the death of Christ. No doubt even your theology agrees with my logic so far. So in light of all of Scripture, in this case "all" must mean all those outside of Christ, that is the non-elect. Only the non-elect sinners are consigned to the Lake of Fire. However, those predestined for grace certainly are saved from the Lake of Fire even though we are liars and sinners of various types. Do you follow this logic?

So the damned are those whose sins are not paid for, those who owe an obligation to the judge at the Great White Throne Judgment, but have nothing to pay the obligation. However, the sins of all mankind are paid for, according to I John 2:1-2. Thus the only beings remaining with a sin debt are the fallen angels. Coincidentally only fallen angels are explicitly named as cast into the Lake of Fire, that is Satan, The Beast, and The False Prophet. Furthermore, the Scriptures explicitly state that the Lake of Fire is "**prepared for... the Devil and his angels**" (Matthew 25:41 WEB).

But can Revelation 21:8 really only apply to angels? Yes, I've already proved that God's chosen people are also guilty of all these sins, but exempt from damnation due to the fact that our sins are paid! That is the good news!! Fallen angels, however, are vile, but their vileness is not atoned. Jesus became a man and is the vicarious substitute for mankind, but not the angel kind. Consider that Satan is called a murderer and the Father of Lies, John 8:44. Ezekiel 28 also highlights Satan's idolatry. He worshiped his own beauty and not the beauty of Christ. Yet can we say that angels are cowardly, sexually immoral, and magicians? This seems odd to give these labels to the fallen angels. Yet Satan and his demons are guilty of these crimes even if only because they tempt and applaud mankind's stumbling in these areas. Consider also that some believe that embodied fallen angels are specifically guilty of sexual immorality in Genesis 6:1-4 and were punished as explained in 2 Peter 2:4. Though I am uncertain of these details, I am certain that fallen angels will be condemned at the Great White Throne Judgment as explained in Daniel 12:1-4, Matthew 25:31-46, and Revelation 20:11-15. In the end, Satan and his demonic following are the only people outside of Christ at the Great White Throne Judgment as they are sentenced the Lake of Fire for *The Ages of The Ages*. Finally, Isaiah believed that one day all mankind would bow down in worship before the Lord, Isaiah 66:22-24.

Friend, is your question really a question of Biblical exegesis? Or instead is your question really about how grace is applied to the forgiveness of your own sins for your own salvation? Are you convinced that your choice of faith has signed the deal for your salvation? Why not trade in your "*personal salvation*" to join the salvation of ALL God's people? Why not trust that Christ signed the deal for your salvation with his blood at Calvary, as well as the salvation of ALL mankind.

How Could Anyone Not Believe This Awesome News?

READERS>> *How could anyone not believe the awesome news that Jesus is the savior of ALL mankind?*

ME>> A good question. Opponents voice reasons that they do not believe Jesus is the savior of all mankind. However, if you agree with the Biblical, rational, and historical proofs in the [Optimism Out of Control](#) book you may wonder how anyone could possibly not believe! The good news is so clear! Following are a few reasons to remind us to be merciful to those who doubt.

- Traditional *Christian* understanding, that most of humanity is eternally damned, has a majority following. It can be very difficult to break from majority opinion.
- Even adults are impacted by peer pressure. Concluding at variance with one's religious community may result in difficult social repercussions and even rejection.
- Suggesting that the Greek word "*aion*" is better translated as "*age*", "*entire*", "*life*", "*whole*", or "*unbroken*" sounds suspect. Seekers may feel unqualified for Greek studies.
- Most think that after death you go to Heaven or Hell. However, very few know that Hades is temporal, while the Lake of Fire is the final judgment for fallen angels.
- Biblical Christian Universalist fellowship can be very difficult if not impossible to find. Furthermore, few want to join a movement without a local presence.
- True Christian faith will never stand as a peer with the religions of the world. True Christian faith stands alone as radical stance by definition and so has a high cost.
- Salvation granted through the *free will* choice of Jesus Christ appeals strongly to the natural man. However, super-natural new birth is required to see otherwise.

These are just a few reasons why many find it difficult to believe that **Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind.**

Keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. And have mercy on some, who are doubting; save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh.

Jude 21-23 (NASB)

I Do Not Agree

One thoughtful reader writes...

READER>> *In summary, thanks for sending your article and reading my response (below). I hope it is helpful and that you can see why I do not agree with your conclusions, based on the Scriptures.*

ME>> You are welcome. Fair enough.

READER>> *I don't see Scripture indicating that I need to worry "whether I am part of the elect or not." Rather, I just need to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation (Acts 16:31, Rom. 10:9-10, etc). Afterward, out of gratitude for having been saved, I ought to live in line with my new identity (Eph. 4, 5, 2Pet.1:3-11, etc). The question of "whether I am elect or not" will take care of itself. By definition, if I believe in Jesus Christ for salvation and receive His free gift of salvation, I am part of the elect. If I reject Jesus Christ, or believe for a short time and then fall away (1 John 2:19), by definition I was never part of the elect. Regarding "assurance" and "how one may know that one truly believes," 1 John and James deal with that point. Regarding whether God will in fact save those who believe in Jesus, there's no need to worry about that either.... God always keeps His promises, as shown by all of Scripture. But do you know of anywhere in Scripture where people are instructed to try to figure out if they're part of the elect or not? To my knowledge, and as you wrote, Scripture teaches BOTH that God sovereignly chooses people to be part of His elect, and that we humans are morally responsible for our actions (and must believe in Christ to be saved). These two truths are both taught (sometimes in the same verse! 2 Tim. 2:19).*

ME>> 2 Peter 1:9-11 commands us to make our election sure. This is a critical issue in order to insure that those professing Christ actually have saving faith. Many people profess faith in Christ yet revolt against his words, **"you did not choose me, but I chose you."** Many begin to follow Jesus, but turn away when they hear more detail about the truth. Or since faith, repentance, and conversion are too painful they instead convert Jesus into a palatable American. It is important to understand that when Jesus says trust me, he is not saying *"Take the action to trust me, perform the work of trusting me, and then I will add your name to the Book of Life."* Rather he is saying to his elect, *"Trust me, I have written your name in my book from before the foundation of the world."* These are two radically different understandings of faith. One is salvation by grace, the other by works. More specifically you say that one must believe in Christ to be saved. I agree that faith is required for salvation from sin and salvation from Hades. However, since faith cannot add our name to the Lamb's Book of Life then actually not even *"faith"* cannot save someone from the Lake of Fire. Only the electing grace of God can pen our name in the Lamb's Book of Life, the final criterion for salvation from the Lake of Fire, Revelation 20:15. The importance of faith is that trust in Christ enables us to see our name in the Lamb's Book of Life, to see that our names are already there because God has always loved us! This is the happy news!!

READER>> *On the page [Gospel Foolishness](#), you wrote: "The Arminian boasts in his 'free will' choice of God while the Calvinist boasts that he alone is chosen." I would certainly not boast that "I alone am chosen," and I don't know of any Calvinist who would do so. Certainly our boast should be in Jesus Christ. If you ask me whether God has chosen a particular set of people for salvation, I would say 'Yes,' the scripture informs me that He has. And if you ask me whether I am part of that subset, I would say 'Yes, that seems to be the case,' because (to the best of my knowledge) I believe in Jesus Christ and I see the evidences mentioned in 1 John allowing me to "know" that I have eternal life. But is there any self-based pride in this? Absolutely not. Rather (Romans 9:11/context, 11:6, Ephesians 1) my election is all based on God's unconditional, sovereign, loving, eternal, choice, not based on any goodness inside me. So there is nothing for me to boast about regarding myself. Hence I disagree with your phrase mentioned above, as a straw-man argument.*

ME>> Thank you for this correction. You are right that I should not use the same word *"boast"* when addressing the error of the Arminian and the Calvinist. They are both in error, but errors of a different nature. It is the Arminians who *"boasts"* because their salvation is based on their own decision, their own work. But Grace teaches us that this is boastful. However, the Calvinist error is to claim that they are part of an imaginary chosen subset of humanity. This error is more properly labeled *"blindness,"* just as Jesus labeled the Pharisees, *"blind guides."* I have corrected that language in my article [Gospel Foolishness](#). Above you also say it *"seems to be the case"* that you are part of that chosen subset. This does not sound very certain. Why the reservation? Why not great boldness? Your choice of words proves a critical point made previously in my book: that the Calvinist cannot be 100% certain that they are part of the chosen subset of saved humanity. Please read my article, [Certain Knowledge](#) again. I also write more on this subject below.

READER>> *As I understand what you are saying, you believe that after death, those who believe in Jesus will go to heaven while those who disbelieve will go to "hell"/"hades", as a place of "temporary punishment." Then at the day of final judgment, you believe that God will extend a pardon (because of Christ's sacrificial death) to every individual human who has ever lived (i.e. every human's name will be listed in the Book of Life; there will be no one whose name is not in the Book of Life), after which all the humans will go into permanent heaven and live forever with God. You base this on several passages, especially Romans 11:32 ("For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all") and Hosea 2:23 ("I will say to those called 'Not my people,' 'You are my people'"). All of the passages which are traditionally interpreted as teaching that some humans will end up in everlasting punishment you reinterpret in the following 2 ways: either (1) they are only talking about 'temporary hell', (2) they only apply to demons, not humans. Some of this I agreed with, and some I disagreed with, on Scriptural grounds.*

ME>> Yes I do believe Romans 11:32 is the grand conclusion of Christian salvation and yes I believe all mankind will be finally saved from the Lake of Fire, though most are not saved from sin, unbelief, and punishment in Hades. However, please note that there is one critical gospel caveat: The foolishness of the gospel warns the unbelieving that those

who reject this good news and the grace of Christ that they are not *"his sheep"* and they will spend the duration in Hades. This sentence still stands for unbelieving mankind whether Jew or gentile.

READER>> ...I disagree with your fundamental premise in the book, that all humans will end up being saved and entering into eternal life. I disagree not for emotional or tradition-based reasons, but for Scriptural reasons, as follows. First, I think that your "four square salvation evaluator" is too simplistic. "Save" (greek *sozo*) does not always mean save from sin... (1 Tim 2:15) "All" (greek *pantas*) does not always mean "all (individual people in the world)"... sometimes it means "all (people in a particular group which is being discussed in a context)" or "all (types of people...)" or both (types of people)" (Mark 1:5, 4:31, John 3:26, 4:29, 8:2, 12:32, Acts 2:45, 22:15, 26:4, Romans 3:9, 16:26, 1 Cor 10:33, Gal 2:14, Col 3:11, etc) "Have mercy" does not look exactly the same for all people... God's mercy on some involves giving food/water/rain/family/etc, but God's mercy upon others involves far more, to the point of opening our eyes to believe in Him for eternal life. (Acts 14:17) Being the "savior of all men" does not necessarily mean that they are always "saved" from Hell or from the lake of fire, or saved to the same destiny, or in the same way, or to the same extent (1 Tim 4:10) It seems that when you read in Romans 11 "...that He may have mercy upon all", you infer that this means that God will eventually redeem all humans and bring them into heaven... but this conclusion is not required by this verse in its context, and does not fit other passages of Scripture. I agree with Galli's point that "all" here in context is referring to "both Jews and Gentiles." (For example, verses 25-31 are comparing these two groups).

ME>> I am sorry that you think my *Four Square Salvation Evaluator* is too simplistic. In fact I thought the simplicity of this model actually helped the reader to understand the simple errors and difficulties evident in the historic Arminian and Calvinistic debate. Regarding the question of "saved from what?", I address the various dangers we need to be saved from in my articles, [2 Corinthians 5:14-21](#) and [Saved 5x](#). However, the focus of the salvation question in my *Four Square Salvation Evaluator* is only the question of eternal salvation, that is salvation from the Lake of Fire. Since you were confused about that I added further clarification in my article, [Soteriologies](#). Likewise, I also address the different possible meanings of the word "all," but as you say we come to a different conclusion.

READER>> You wrote in [your article] [Romans 11:32-36](#) "We should be consistent because the context for both verses regarding Paul's points about Jew and Gentile being alike under sin are the same. However, Romans 3:23 is easily understood to mean every individual person, just as Romans 11:32 should be understood to mean every individual person, whether Jew or Gentile." "easily understood to mean"? On the contrary, the context of Romans 3 is more in favor of a meaning of "both Jews and Gentiles" than "each individual". I agree with you that each individual has sinned, but that is not the primary contextual point of Rom 3:23. Therefore, Rom 3:23 cannot be used to infer that Romans 11:32 is talking about every individual person.

ME>> I am surprised that you say this. The larger context of Romans 3:23 begins by quoting Psalm 14:3 saying, "**There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God.**" The meaning of the Psalm and Romans 3:9-23 is commonly understood by all Christians to say that each individual human being is guilty of sin, not merely all types of people. I am merely pointing out that the larger context of Romans allows me to conclude that Romans 11:32 can also be interpreted to mean every individual human being without doing any violence to the rules of interpretation. However, the definitive proof is the means Jesus used to make payment for mankind's sin. He became a man and is identified as the new federal head of all humanity in Romans Chapter 5. He does not represent part of humanity, but the entirety of humanity. By the very nature of how he paid for sin, the sin payment must apply to all mankind -- that is every individual human being that ever lived or will live. He did not pay for the sins of some with cash or a mere token, but he became a man and thus the vicarious substitute for all! One cannot simply apply his death to part of mankind because he became the substitute for all mankind. To do so would be to somehow divide Jesus' body into a part that died for some, and a part that did not die for others. How could we do that when instead his body was broken for all his people?

READER>> A related verse is 1 John 2:1-2, "the whole world" in context being "not only Jews... also people from every tribe and nation... but not necessarily EVERY person from every tribe and nation". For example, John 12:19, etc.

ME>> That is curious. I understand John to be saying that Christ is the atoning sacrifice for not only our sins, meaning not only believers, but that Christ is also the atoning sacrifice for unbelievers as well. The "us" and "them" under the New Covenant is no longer Jew and gentile, but instead believer and unbeliever.

READER>> (Also, God's "binding us to sin" does not mean that He "caused" us to sin... rather that He "ordained"/"allowed" such... There are multiple levels of causality, not only a single level. (Genesis 50:20, etc). I'd highly recommend reading Bruce Ware's two books on this: "God's Lesser Glory" and "God's Greater Glory.")

ME>> I am not sure if your debate is with me or with the Bible on this point. I also agree that God has not soiled his holy hands with the works of Satan. It was Satan who tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden, certainly not God. Yet the Bible clearly says that God himself is finally responsible for both the origin and the purpose of sin as explained in Isaiah 30:28, Romans 8:20, and Romans 11:32. God is not a tempter, but Satan none-the-less, evil though he is, still serves God's sovereign purposes. Specifically, God decreed the existence of sin in order to demonstrate his grace. Though admittedly if you reject this you are on the side of the majority for most are unwilling to swallow this truth. However, at least take note that I stand with the great theologians Martin Luther, Jonathon Edwards, and many others concerning God's sovereignty over sin.

READER>> On Hosea 2:23, this is a very important verse. It is important to recognize the historical context. God had made an eternal covenant / promise to Abraham and his

descendants in Genesis 12 and following. In Deuteronomy 27-30, God told His people that even if they were punished to the point of diaspora (28:63ff, 30:1-6), eventually He would bring them back... because God's covenant with them was permanent. He would never permanently let them go. Then when Israel sinned and was eventually sent into exile, many of the prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc.) still foretold (based on the promises in Genesis-Deuteronomy) that God would bring them back. So when Hosea presented his prophecy, this was not a general case... it was not saying that "in general, God always relents and allows evildoers back into his presence, after a temporary of punishment." Instead, it was a very special "not-my-people"... God had temporarily "disowned" them (in the sense of ceasing to bless them physically as a nation) because they had disowned Him... but He had never forgotten about them or about His promise (Hosea 11:8). Paul then quotes this in Romans 9:25-26 to show that the Gentiles were now included as promised... but again, the fact that the Gentiles would be included was LONG foretold... even back to Genesis 3:15, 12:3, etc, and certainly Isaiah 42:4/Matt 12:21. So again, Hosea 2:23 / Romans 9:26 / inclusion-of-the-Gentiles is not a general "principle" (so I think your "Hosea Principle" is incorrect), but a specific prophecy and fulfillment about certain people / groups that God had predestined for salvation. In your book, you take Hosea 2:23 out of context and apply it to the unbelievers, in your hope that God will call them "My people" in the end... but this directly contradicts the other Scriptures (see below) that explain exactly what God will do with those unbelievers: consign them to the lake of fire forever. Thus your application of the "Hosea principle" leads you to contradict the clear teaching of other scriptures, and I respectfully and earnestly appeal to warn you that this is very wrong.

ME>> Romans 4:16 explains that the promise to Abraham does not follow the physical lineage of Abraham, but instead the spiritual lineage of Abraham, to all those who share the faith of Abraham. Of course we would need further conversation to outline the impact of this promise as it relates to this life, to Hades, and to the Lake of Fire. Furthermore the gospel makes it clear that the doctrine of predestination guarantees God's faithfulness to both chosen Jews and chosen Gentiles. Romans 11 also explains a relationship between the belief and unbelief of the Jews and Gentiles that results in a curious dynamic of envy that propels all people to Christian faith. The conclusion of redemptive history is not further distinction between Jew and Gentile, but in fact the tearing down of the dividing wall. The Jews were merely the starting point of God's plan to bring salvation to the entire world as explained in Isaiah Chapter 49. Thus the Gentile world has much to learn about both the character and methods of God through his dealings with Israel.

Regarding your disagreement with the "Hosea principle" you may have a point to make in that my language could be more precise. It is certain there is particular Biblical language to explain the special relationship that God had with Israel under the Old Covenant. There is also particular language to describe the special relationship he has with believers under the New Covenant. However, I do not want the fact that I am neither a "Dispensational Theologian" nor a "Covenant Theologian" to detract from my main point. My main point is that God uses strong language that appears to rule out any possibility of salvation for both unbelieving Jews and unbelieving Gentiles. Then when evidence of repentance is found, God warmly calls both believing Jews and Gentiles his children. This is seen in the language of Hosea toward the Jews when God calls them, "not my people," then calls these same people, "my people" after they repent. This is also seen in the language of Jesus toward the Syrian Phoenicia Greek woman in Mark 7:24-30. Jesus pitched a hard fast ball saying that his help was unavailable to her. He even joined the hypocritical Jews in referring to her as a gentile "dog." It is hard for me to believe that Jesus even said that! Perhaps he only said it ironically as a rebuke to the Pharisees. Regardless, she understood him to call her a gentile "dog" and his words caused the woman to humble herself even further. As a result of her acknowledgement that she did not deserve his help, Jesus then poured out his grace healing her daughter. The point is that the "Hosea principle" is most certainly a "modus operandi" that Jesus employs with both the Jews and Gentiles to test our hearts and bring our hard hearts to repentance when needed. Romans 11:29 certainly guarantees God's faithfulness even to the unbelieving Jews mentioned in Romans 11:28. The verse also explains the reason for God's faithfulness to unbelieving gentiles in Romans 11:30. God is the faithful savior of both the unbelieving Jews and gentiles.

READER>> Regarding your page 2 *Thessalonians 1:9*... Here you say that 2 Thess 1:9 "everlasting destruction" refers to temporary punishment, because of Deut 15:17. It does not make sense to me that you are using an argument about the Hebrew word ("olam") to interpret 2 Thess 1:9 (written in Greek, not Hebrew), a completely different language and culture... and especially that there are no contextual clues that this "everlasting destruction" in 2 Thess 1:9 is "temporary." Something to consider -- How could God have possibly made it any more clear about the "everlasting/eternal destruction" that is coming for unbelievers? If you seek to use the argument that from Deut 15:17 "everlasting" means "temporary," how then could God ever make clear to you or other people that this really does mean everlasting/eternal/forever? In fact, if you persist in this line of reasoning, what prevents someone from taking other (Greek) words meaning "everlasting" in the NT (such as John 3:16!) and applying your Deut 15:17 Hebrew 'olam' argument to it, and coming to the conclusion that our eternal life is also only temporary? Or that the devil's eternal torment in the lake of fire is also temporary? In the case of certain Old Testament usages of "olam" indicating "for a long time" rather than truly "forever/everlasting," the reason we know that such is the correct meaning of "olam" is that we see other verses which indicate the "end" of the time period in question. (e.g. Jer. 25:9 uses "olam" about an "everlasting desolation," and then verse 12 clarifies that this period is only 70 years). But 2 Thess 1:9 has no such qualifiers.

ME>> Good point. Hebrew and Greek are different languages and the Old Testament and New Testament are from different times and cultures. Yet consider these three good points.

FIRST) there is Old Testament Biblical precedent for the grace of God abolishing / fulfilling / satisfying the "everlasting" as he did with the Sabbath command and numerous Old Testament everlastings including the Old Covenant itself. When God satisfied / fulfilled / abolished the eternal commands of the Old Covenant he truly accomplished the impossible (impossible for us, but possible for him). Thus it is not so radical to consider that God could do the same in the New Testament time period.

SECOND) the New Testament does say that the "gates of Hades" will not overcome the work of the church in Matthew 16:18. This statement is more than wishful thinking. This is a promise. The promise is even prominently linked to the first public acknowledgement of Jesus as Messiah. The promise specifically offers hope beyond Hades. So if God has achieved the impossible in nailing the Old Covenant to the cross in public spectacle as explained in Colossians 2:13-15, then why are you so incredulous that the grace of God can bring an end to Hades? In my book I simply proposed a Biblical interpretive model that explains how this is possible. Furthermore, Jesus says in Matthew 10:28 that body and soul are destroyed in Hades. Yet Revelation 20:13 says unbelievers are extracted alive, out of Hades. By "destroyed" Jesus must not mean ruined beyond hope of his grace, but that the potential to live for Christ, hear the words "well done my faithful servant", or avoid great punishment is missed.

THIRD) both the Arminian and Calvinist models of salvation fall short of reason at different points. Because they fall short and because faith must also be reasonable, we must be willing to consider alternate models. The model I have proposed certainly does not have any more weaknesses and I think has greater strengths. Furthermore, the model I propose remains faithful to two critical gospel facts, 1) Jesus became a man and through his death he became the substitutionary atonement for ALL mankind, and 2) salvation is ALL of grace with no work of man even remotely accepted. Calvinism fails at point 1 and Arminianism fails at point 2. As for your argument that "everlasting" cannot have multiple meanings in the New Testament without also allowing for the end of Satan's doom, the end of Heaven, or confusion, consider the Old Testament use of "olam" which also has multiple usages in the Old Testament. Context is needed to determine the meanings of words. In fact it is proven through John Wesley Hanson's scholarly work that the Hebrew "olam" and the Greek "aion" are synonyms and mean the "duration of the subject in view." I have added a brief review and copy of Hanson's work [on my website](#). Dr. Heleen Keizer has also written a dissertation proving the same titled, *Life, Time, Entirety - A Study of Aion in Greek Literature and Philosophy, the Septuagint and Philo*. Read her [315 page dissertation online](#) or an [abstract of her conclusions on my website](#).

READER>> You wrote in [Certain Knowledge](#) "Some Calvinists argue that possession of faith is proof that you are God's chosen. But again with this understanding faith itself becomes the object of confidence rather than Christ himself. Either way knowledge of salvation for the Calvinist requires confidence that they are part of the chosen subset. So, according to reason, they cannot have true security either." I disagree... Calvinists can have security, exactly as 1 John describes. When a Calvinist looks back at his life and notices the various changes that 1 John describes, he realizes that his "faith" is real and he can know that he has eternal life. His faith is placed in Christ and His promises, not in these life changes. But the life changes give him 'assurance' and show him that his faith is genuine.

ME>> Confidence in Christian salvation can never be gained by "looking back at our life!" This is the reason the Gospel of John typically uses "believe" in the present active tense. One might easily fool oneself into such confidence by referencing some transcendental experience from the past. Yet life experience can only ever offer subjective proofs. Even if we could look back and testify to miracles, a changed life, or angel sightings, even these are totally insufficient for confidence in salvation. Grand as they may appear, they are mere tokens that can also be possessed by the unbelieving. Jannes and Jambres performed real miracles in rebellion against Moses, II Timothy 3:8, and they thought they were in the right. Bill's Story in Alcoholics Anonymous has truly helped many reform and leave a life of alcoholism, even though acknowledging a higher power, but still without saving faith in Jesus Christ. And as for angel sightings, both Mohammed and Joseph Smith lay claim to that, yet without saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Christian assurance can only and must only come through confidence in the gospel facts and promises found in the person of Jesus Christ. So again I say that anyone who believes that the atonement is limited in scope will correspondingly be limited in assurance of salvation. However, they may have deceived themselves into such assurance. Consider, if I tell you that I paid for all the oranges in a basket and that you can have one for free, then you can pick any orange with great confidence knowing that it is already paid for. If you have faith in my promise, then you will happily pick an orange, any orange. If you do not have faith you are still free to pick an orange because they are still paid, but you refuse. Now suppose I tell you that I paid for particular oranges in the basket, but not others, and only I know which oranges I paid for, then how will you determine which orange to pick out of the basket for free? What objective fact do you have to lay claim to a particular orange? In this case, claim of "faith" can only be a pretense because it cannot be founded on an objective fact. Calvinistic orange picking can only be a form of Russian Roulette.

READER>> Regarding your page [Matthew 25:31-46](#) I didn't understand your argument on verse 46. Were you saying that this "eternal punishment" is the same thing as the temporary punishment of Luke 16? It seems that you did not finish explaining on this page how this "eternal punishment" fits with your theory that no one will end up in the lake of fire.

ME>> I never said no one ends up in the Lake of Fire. In fact I said quite the opposite. All the unredeemed are sentenced to the Lake of Fire with no escape from this judgment. Matthew 25:31-46 makes it perfectly clear that the Devil and his angels will be sentenced there for *The Ages of The Ages*. I was merely pointing out that this passage does not say anything about *humans* being damned to the Lake of Fire, but only the goats on his left, which I have proved to be the Devil and his angels. Yet, for the extreme demonstration of his grace, God apparently allows the unbelieving elect to follow Satan to the very precipice of the Lake of Fire. But will the rebel elect succeed in their mission of self-destruction? Not a chance with the grace of God on watch!

READER>> You wrote in [2 Corinthians 5:14-21](#) "These verses even explain that all mankind is ALREADY positionally reconciled to God 'in Christ' apart from faith. Most would teach that each individual is placed 'into Christ' only as they believe in him. But I understand that those predestined to salvation are never outside of God's grace, because they are always positionally 'in Christ.' However, as each individual is awakened as a new creation, then they realize their position 'in Christ' and 'live in Christ.'" I disagree. The phrase "the world" here (in context and in the light of other scriptures) could mean "men and women from every nation"...the phrase and context does not require it to mean "every

individual". As to which of these two are in view, although the local context might allow both meanings, I think that if you look at the context of other Scriptures (such as listed below), it is more accurate to take it as "men and women from every nation."

ME>> I will double check my statement that all the elect are positionally "in Christ" before they place faith in Christ. I know that this understanding is not standard. However, if anyone agrees to the doctrine of predestination in the least then there must be an acknowledgement of some sort that the elect are ultimately protected from the wrath of God from before the creation of the world. As for whether "all" means every individual human being, 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 makes it clear that it is in fact the entirety of humanity. It does not make sense to say that God died for "all types of people," and therefore "all types of people died." The "all" in this verse is parallel proving that because Christ died for every individual human, therefore every individual human is proved to be spiritually dead apart from spiritual rebirth. I expand on this point in my article, *'In' Doctrine*.

READER>> You wrote in *Let's Celebrate* "As I explained questions about the extent of God's grace in salvation grew like a dark cloud in my life, clouding my relationship with Christ. I was not sure I would be able to rejoice in Heaven. I needed to agree that Christ had done the right thing in saving some while damning others. Yet I could not and continued to search the Bible." I have likewise struggled emotionally with this, but have "solved my problem" in a different way than you. I have to admit that God knows better than I do... and if (for example) my dear friend for whose salvation I pray every day is eventually sentenced by God to eternal destruction in the lake of fire, I have to trust that God knows best and that I will be able to rejoice in His wisdom and goodness when I get to heaven, even if God doesn't grant my request for my friend's salvation... and even if I cannot now imagine how I will be able to rejoice if my friend is not saved.

ME>> That is a possible conclusion as well, but it is lacking the passion demonstrated by Paul in Romans 9:3. Salvation by grace, when truly received, emboldens one to stand before his maker and say, "How could you save a disgusting, wicked, wretch like me and leave even one other person unsaved?" And then wait for the answer.

READER>> Regarding your page *RSVP Review*. Here you seem to be arguing that because God saving everyone would be a cause for celebration, therefore it must be true. This is an appeal to an emotion, not scripture. If someone responded without enthusiasm for your incorrect Scriptural interpretations, you here describe their lack of enthusiasm as "callousness" and "standing on shaky ground" and "devoid of grace," simply because they were not expressing happy emotions when you presented your view to them. This is a very dangerous line of reasoning. Instead, we ought to go with the Scripture, not with what makes us happy or emotionally satisfied. I realize that in your other pages you give arguments from Scripture. But here on this page, you give an emotional argument, and one that I think is very dangerous.

ME>> My concluding paragraph on that page makes it clear that I am not saying something is true because the thought results in a celebration. However, I am saying that my question did expose that the majority of professing Christians interviewed turned to works salvation as a defense of their belief and attitude. That is not good. Rather than coming to terms with pure grace, they have comfortably taken credit for a portion of their salvation adding condition to God's unconditional love. That is not good at all. The majority found peace concerning the damned by claiming to merit their own salvation in some way. Thus I agree that my interview question is very dangerous. I could get in a lot of trouble for exposing that kind of hypocrisy.

READER>> Here are some more verses which indicate to me that many humans will end up in the lake of fire in the end. It seems you did not discuss these verses: [Daniel 12:1-2, Matthew 7:13-14, John 3:36, John 5:28-29, Rev 14:9-12, and Revelation 21:8ff.] Also, I realize that you consider many of the "judgment verses" below as applying only to the "temporary hell," not the final/permanent lake-of-fire judgment. However I see no Scriptural evidence that people who are in the temporary hell will be spared from going into the final/permanent lake-of-fire judgment, so I think these verses below about Hell also contradict your view (that all humans will eventually be saved), [Matthew 5:29-30, Matthew 7:21-23, Matthew 8:11-12, Matthew 13:41-42, Matthew 22:11-14, Matthew 25:30, John 15:6, and Luke 13:22-28.]

ME>> Thank you for highlighting these verses. You are right that I do not think that all these verses are speaking about condemnation to the Lake of Fire. Plus we must consider that Jesus warns and threatens the unbelieving elect even though they are never in danger of the Lake of Fire. However, Jesus does damn the non-elect reprobate to the Lake of Fire. Jesus may speak the same careful words to one group, the other, or even simultaneously to both. You must at least concede that much to me. You say, "First, I think that your "four square salvation evaluator" is too simplistic. "Save" (greek sozo) does not always mean save from sin". Let me clarify about salvation: I understand there are at least five things the Bible tells us we need to be saved from. The short list is salvation from 1) harm, 2) sin, 3) a fruitless life, 4) Hell (Hades), and 5) the Lake of Fire. I write at length about this in my article, *Saved 5x*. Now, you accused me of being too simplistic, but when you list all these verses above and suggest they are only talking about salvation from number 5, the Lake of Fire, you are the one being too simplistic. You have inspired me, however, to add a comprehensive study of the various afterlife destinies referenced in your verses and the remainder of the New Testament. Lord willing I will make progress in my article, *Salvation: Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How* and my article, *Forever is Not Forever? You Still Gotta Be Kidding Me!* The most troubling passage that you highlighted to me is Daniel 12:1-4.

1) 'At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. 2) Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. 3) Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever. 4) But you, Daniel, roll up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge.

I have found fault with both the Arminian and Calvinistic system of Christian salvation, others may find fault with me as you have done. Certainly I am not the Holy Spirit, so my interpretations can also be wrong. I keep my hope in the grace of Christ alone. I also openly appeal for help from the grace of Christ and interpretive wisdom from the Holy Spirit. With their help I also hope to add a page about Daniel 12:1-4 in this book as well. Lord willing I will do so. I do thank you for reminding me about it and for praying for me. This passage could be interpreted to unravel my thesis. Or perhaps the passage speaks of the salvation of man and the condemnation of Satan and his followers. It is important to note that 2 Peter 2:4 makes it clear that the present nether world, Hades, also has a compartment called Tartarus. Tartarus currently contains particular fallen angels who were punished in a special way, whereas other demons still roam freely. The point is that demons will also be among those extracted from Hades / Tartarus at the end of time to face their final judgment as explained in Revelation 20:13. This fact may be relevant to interpreting Daniel 12:1-4 which I hope to do in my article, [Daniel 12:1-4](#).

Dear reader, I do thank you for taking the time to give me all your valuable feedback. It was an essential exercise to put my beliefs to a real life test. I hope we can continue the dialogue. Currently I just finished reading *Erasing Hell* by Francis Chan. Chan glosses over the distinction between Hell / Hades and the Lake of Fire, a vital component to my salvation model. He also improperly makes Hell to be synonymous with The Lake of Fire at times when he does mention it. It is true that the common understanding of Hell is final damnation. However, Biblically, Hell is the temporal punishment in Hades. The Lake of Fire, however, is condemnation for *The Ages of The Ages* after the Great White Throne Judgment. Chan also says something very interesting on page 86 of his book, "*The debate about Hell's duration is much more complex than I first assumed. While I lean heavily on the side that says it is everlasting, I am not ready to claim that with complete certainty.*" This is a curious statement by someone writing a book with the main point that people have erred greatly saying that Hell is temporal or punishment in this life. I think I should write Mr. Chan a note pointing him to the good news in Revelation 20:14. Hell is a real and certain punishment for the unbelieving. However, the good news is that Hell / Hades is finally tossed into the Lake of Fire, *empty*, never to be needed again, forever. Then those extracted from Hell / Hades, both humans and fallen angels, will stand before the Lord of glory for their final judgment. If anyone's name is not found in the Book of Life they will be cast into the Lake of Fire for The Ages of The Ages.

Friend, do you want to know with certainty that your name is in the Book of Life? Do you want more confidence than "*it seems to be the case?*" You cannot add your name yourself. You cannot gain confidence through your own decisions. Instead, through faith in Christ, through eyes opened by the Holy Spirit, you can see your name printed in the Lamb's Book from before the foundations of the world, though of course only if you are one of Jesus' chosen.

So I guess the pertinent question is who has the unbiblical optimism? Can your choice of "*faith*" add your name to the Book of Life? There is no optimistic future through that means. Grace teaches us that we did not choose Jesus, but that instead he chose us. Your definition of "*faith*" falls short of the true confidence we can have trusting that Christ loved all his chosen ones before we loved him.

Is all mankind elect? NO!

One Pastor strongly objected...

READER>> Is all mankind elect? NO!

ME>> Dear Pastor,

Thank you for your study of election that you emailed to me. Thank you also for taking the time to fully understand my view. I have no desire to break with tradition unnecessarily. When one does break with tradition, there are often misunderstandings. Yet you have not misunderstood. Second, thank you for not ignoring this difference. I was short sighted in thinking that the difference did not matter or could be overlooked. Third, thank you for your faithfulness to Regular Baptist tradition which has many good components. Fourth, thank you for humbly praying that if I am wrong the Lord would correct me, but also that if you are wrong that the Lord would correct you. We both need the Lord and stand by his grace alone.

Sadly after reading your study below, I continue to disagree with your interpretation. Yet happily, I still understand the Scripture to teach that all humankind is elect and will be finally saved from the Lake of Fire. I am also compelled to be the Lord's servant and warn those who reject grace that they will be punished for the duration in Hades. Again, I do not have any desire to break with tradition unnecessarily. Yet after studying your objections I have become even more certain that Jesus is the savior of all mankind. There have been others in history that have held this view as well as contemporaries with whom I am initiating fellowship. However, we are a fellowship with "*no place to lay our heads.*"

I have written at length in my book, [Optimism Out of Control](#), to defend my understanding. Of course you have read this already and disagree. I would invite you to invest the effort to read it one more time. It would also be important for you to read my answers to other objections in the [Appendix](#) of my book. I hope to answer your important objections below. My first goal in doing so is to hold myself accountable to be faithful to the Scriptures. My second goal is to invite you to join my understanding and re-forge partnership in

making disciples. What a wonderful mission calling lost sheep to trust that Jesus loves them, has forgiven them, and wants to transform them into his image.

Since the minority has broken with tradition on this point, the majority could easily dismiss this view as suspect without any research or reconsideration needed whatsoever. Yet I hope to defend that Christ is the savior of all mankind with Scripture. To that end, I begin by saying that your misunderstanding of Scripture and grace are easily repaired with five corrections.

FIVE CORRECTIONS TO TRADITION

1) Hopefully we agree that only the elect, those chosen by God's grace without any condition satisfied by man, are *predestined* to His good purposes. Yet you reduce election to only or primarily address our eternal state. Consider that Jesus elects nations, groups, and individuals to *various* good stations, some temporal and others eternal. One could be elect or not elect in one dimension while being elect or not elect in another dimension. For example, Israel was specially chosen as the ancestry of Christ and the guardian of the Old Testament Scripture, Romans 9:4-5. Yet God has also specially chosen to love other nations, Isaiah 19:24. The Twelve were specially chosen as Apostles, John 6:70. Yet God has also specially chosen to work in the lives of all believers, 1 Peter 2:4-5. Christians are alone chosen for repentance and receiving forgiveness, Romans 2:4. Yet Christ also chose to forgive all mankind, even the unbelieving unrepentant, from the cross, Luke 23:34 and 1 John 2:1-2. The Scriptures do not speak of only one "*election*," but numerous. Ephesians also makes this plain when the Holy Spirit says in Ephesians 1:11, "*we were also chosen.*" If we were "*also*" chosen, then there is more than one dimension to election. The context of grace enables believers to interpret rightly and boldly. Christ elected to forgive *ALL* mankind from the cross from before the creation of the world, Ephesians 1:3-10. However, *NOT ALL*, but only some are elected to receive and believe the fact that they are forgiven apart from all conditions before they die, Ephesians 1:11-14. Christ's death has already reconciled God's heart to all mankind, past tense! Since we are reconciled (past tense), how much more will those who live be saved from sin by his life, Romans 5:10.

2) Hopefully we both agree that only the elect, those chosen by God's grace without any condition satisfied by man, are *saved* from a bad end. Yet you make salvation to be primarily single-dimensional so that salvation from Hades is equal to salvation from the Lake of Fire. Consider that if Jesus elects nations, groups, and individuals to various good stations, then he also saves nations, groups, and individuals from various bad stations, again both temporal and eternal. One could be saved or not saved in one dimension while being saved or not saved in another dimension. One generation of Israelites was saved from slavery in Egypt, Micah 6:4. Yet, many Israelite generations were not saved from slavery, but died as slaves in Egypt over 400 years, even though they also were loved by God, Genesis 15:13. Even those Israelites that God did save from slavery were saved only due to His gracious choice and no merit of theirs, Deuteronomy 9:6. Noah and his family were saved from the flood, 1 Peter 3:20. Yet, the remainder of mankind was not saved from the flood, even though they also were loved by God, Genesis 6:6 and 1 Peter 3:18-20. David asked for salvation from lying lips, Psalm 120:2. Yet, Ananias and Sapphira were not saved from lying to the Holy Spirit, or from punishment, even to the loss of their lives, though they were Christians and saved from Hell, Acts 5:1-11.

Christians, because we have received forgiveness, now have reconciled hearts to God and are saved from the power of sin, Romans 6:1-4, from fruitless lives, 2 Peter 1:4, and from punishment after death, Luke 23:43. Yet those who reject grace are not saved from the 'aion' (duration) of punishment in Hades, Luke 16:19-31. The fire of Hades is a fit punishment for their hardened hearts. So though there is one faith, Ephesians 4:4-6, there are many dimensions to salvation. Again, the context of grace enables believers to interpret rightly and boldly. No doubt we agree that Christian salvation is a package deal that saves from both sin and judgment. Yet we disagree about how the Lake of Fire fits into the package. David said he could even go to Sheol and not be outside of God's love, Psalm 139:8. Jesus taught that the gates of Hades will be finally defeated by God's grace, Matthew 16:18. So even the redeemed will be punished in Hades if they continue to reject grace, 2 Peter 2:1. Yet the redeemed will not go to the Lake of Fire, Romans 11:32, Revelation 20:15. The gates of Hades will be defeated!

3) Hopefully we agree that Greek studies are helpful and a word can have several valid denotations and different applications. As just proved above, the same Greek word translated "*salvation*" can be applied to salvation from sin, futile purpose, harm, Hades, and the Lake of Fire. Likewise the Greek word "*aion*" is used to describe the duration of different epochs. For example "*aion*" in Romans 16:25 indicates the "*duration*" of the earth to the present time, while "*aion*" in Romans 16:26, one verse later, indicates the "*eternal*" God. Matthew 28:20 likewise speaks of the end of "*aion*," this "*age*." Other non-eternal uses of "*aion*" include Matthew 24:3, Luke 16:8, Luke 20:34-35, John 9:32, Acts 3:21, Romans 12:2, 1 Corinthians 1:20, 2:6-8, 3:18, 10:11, 2 Corinthians 4:4, Galatians 1:4, Ephesians 1:21, 2:2, 2:7, 3:9, Colossians 1:26, 2 Timothy 4:10, Hebrews 6:5, 9:26, and Hebrews 11:3. John Wesley Hanson's classic work proves that "*aion*" means the duration of the object in question whether finite or eternal. Septuagint usage proves that "*aion*" is synonymous with Hebrew "*olam*" which can mean temporal or eternal. [Read Hanson's work from my website](#). (Though I do not agree with Hanson's application in Matthew 25:31-46.) Dr. Helena Keizer's dissertation proves the same: *Life, Time, Entirety – A Study of Aion in Greek Literature and Philosophy, the Septuagint and Philo*. Read her [315 page dissertation online](#) or read an [abstract of her conclusions from my website](#). The English word "*eon*" even descends etymologically from "*aion*!" Yet you and tradition chose "*aion*" to mean "*eternal*" in 2 Thessalonians 1:9. Why?

The context of grace is a better interpretive tool than tradition when choosing between valid denotations. If you are convinced that you are saved from eternity in the Lake of Fire because of your *free will* choice of Christ, then you have little need to answer the question as to why you chose Christ while the

majority did not. You give your *free will* the credit. Or if you are persuaded that Jesus set his special love on you and paid for your sin while also not loving others and not paying for their sin, then again there is little need for Greek studies. You have missed the beauty of the cross that paid for the sins of all, as highlighted in particular by the Pharisees' hatred of Christ for extending grace to the Gentiles. Yet Jesus loved both the Pharisees and the pagans. He forgave us all from the cross even though *no one asked* for forgiveness.

4) Hopefully we both agree that Jesus identified the unbelieving Jews as, "**not his sheep**," in John 10:26. Yet you interpret Jesus' words to mean they were not elect and never would be elect. You conclude that they are not sheep, or even lost sheep, but instead goats. You conclude that these Jews whom Jesus spoke to are eternally passed over by God's love and damned with hatred by God for eternity. Yet, consider from point #1 in this list that election is not a single dimensional concept. Just because these particular Jews were apparently not elected to believe (at least as evidenced at that moment) does not mean that Jesus did not elect to pay for their sin, or that they did not believe later. And if you agree that they could believe later, then you must also agree that they were predestined from before they were even born and thus ultimately always God's sheep, albeit, lost. Simply, Jesus is willing to confront stubborn lost sheep by saying they are "**not his sheep**." Jesus is employing the pattern of Hosea 2:23 to confront the stubborn unbelief of these Jews. Certainly you do not interpret Hosea 2:23 to mean that God's love for his people is "*off again*" and then "*on again!*" God's eternal love for his people is eternally constant according to Jeremiah 31:3. Yet God clearly says in Hosea 2:23 that the unbelieving are, "**not my loved one**," and then again after their repentance they are, "**my loved one**." How is this to be understood? Romans 9:13 likewise quotes Malachi 1:1-3 saying that God hated Esau. So does God only love a small subset of mankind while allowing his hatred and wrath to damn the majority for all eternity? Or does God simply offer love to mankind, but only those who reciprocate are spared from damnation? There is a better answer as explained in Romans 11:28. Jewish unbelievers and all unbelievers are enemies of the gospel because of their rejection of Christ, yet they are loved on account of election. *ALL* mankind is loved by Christ because they are *ALL* elect, yet they remain enemies of the gospel until they are converted and place faith in Christ.

5) Hopefully we both agree that true Biblical faith must be reasonable and maintain integrity with both the Scriptures and logic. The *Four Square Salvation Evaluator* was designed to help people think through the Biblical and logical questions needed to properly understand salvation by grace. Yet after reading your objections below I am having trouble figuring out just what your view is, whether Arminian or Calvinist. I am very clear that you object with my understanding. Yet, both Boice and Lewis concluded that there is no middle ground between Arminianism and Calvinism. Could I ask you to explain your specific view in more detail? For example, Boice boldly believed that if God loves you at all then there is absolutely no escape from his love and determination to bring you safely to final salvation. I believe exactly the same. However, since he neglected the distinction between Hades and the Lake of Fire and the meaning of "*aion*," he then concluded that God does not love, nor will ever love the majority of mankind who are damned. This is an unfortunate error.

On the other hand Lewis boldly believed that God makes an offer of love to every individual, but for love to be true love, God must allow each individual's *free will* choice of faith to be the determining factor in their final salvation. He has my respect for being clear on this point, though I strongly disagree with his view of the character of God's love. He also did not appreciate the distinction between Hades and the Lake of Fire and so concluded that most of mankind is damned because they do not accept Christ with their *free will*. Lewis also offers no Biblical explanation as to why a few repent and most do not because his view is not Biblical. Lewis missed the point of grace: God loved us first while we still hated him. I can also respect a third person who has doubts and is struggling to understand how all these things add up. He has simple faith in Christ and knows that Christ is the judge of the whole Universe and he trusts God's judgment without telling God he cannot extend saving grace to all mankind. This person also has my respect. However, you have objected strongly to my understanding that all mankind is elected to salvation from the Lake of Fire. You have said that God simply cannot save all mankind! Yet I am struggling to completely understand how you yourself have answered the important questions raised in my book.

Please consider these five points and my request for further explanation of your view of grace. In the meantime, I am concerned that your view does not have both feet planted on the bedrock of God's grace. I began to be aware of this when you said, "*surely you believe in free will*" and also, "*but God uses means in salvation*." Do you then believe that our *free will* is the deciding factor in our final salvation as Lewis did? Perhaps I misheard. You did use the metaphor, "*it is a free gift, but you have to write your name on it*." With a proper understanding of grace we should instead say, "*God has written our names all over his free gift, but we must repent of all self-righteousness before we will be willing to receive it*." We are rebellious children with terrible attitudes, yet with a Father who has written our names all over his gifts to us. However, until we repent we will not receive his gift! In your objections below you observe that Isaiah 53:6 says that Christ died for all sin and that according to John 3:16, Christ died for the world. You conclude that since "*the Bible teaches all of the above and so must we!*" Your words betray a curious confession. You are certain that some are saved including yourself, yet the most you can say about Christ's death for *ALL* is that "*the Bible teaches it and so must we?*" It sounds like you are saying, "*I trust that Christ paid for my sin and so I am spared damnation, and even though I do not understand how it works, Christ also paid for the sins of all mankind, but most of them are going to be damned*." That is not good. You gravely urge your own audience to take action to escape the Lake of Fire. Yet your tone could only result in persuading fearful people to "*pray a prayer*" or meet a "*condition*" to "*write their name on the gift*." Instead, we are calling lost sheep not to reach up, but to fall down on their knees and repent of all self-righteousness to receive the gift already given. It would seem we really do have two different gospels and partnership with this difference would be difficult as you already know.

Your points are listed in gray below and my comments follow, referencing my points 1 through 5 above.

PASTOR'S POINTS HIGHLIGHTED WITH MY ANSWER FOLLOWING EACH POINT

1) Is all mankind elect? NO (Note- "elect" is from the Greek word "eklektos" which has four variations in the NT and is used a total of 55 times; the below is an exegetical summation of the above answer)

All mankind is not elect in every dimension. For example most of mankind is not elected to trust in Christ, but the wrath of God is still appeased for all mankind through the death of Christ. #1

a. Specific individuals (e.g. Ishmael; Esau) not chosen- the "children of God" are the "children of promise" (Rom. 9:8) according to "God's choice" (Rom. 9:11).

Esau was not elected for a believing heart or to be the ancestor of Christ, but he was chosen for his sins to be paid, along with all mankind. #1

b. Only a "remnant" of Israel was "chosen" the rest were hardened (Rom. 11:5-6); there is coming a day when "all Israel" will be saved (Rom. 11:25-32).

Most of Abraham's physical descendants are not chosen for faith. However, the day is coming when Christ's atonement for all mankind will be believed by all. #1

c. God has chosen some not all (I Corinthians 1:26-31).

True, only some are chosen to become Christians. Nonetheless, the sins of all mankind, believing and unbelieving, are still chosen for forgiveness. #1-2

d. Those whom God chooses He predestines to adoption and redeems through Christ's blood and makes them know the mystery of His will and gives to them an inheritance and seals them with the Holy Spirit (after believing in the Gospel of salvation)- who is the pledge of the believer's inheritance (Eph. 1:3-14; also see I Peter 1:1-2; note - although "elect" is not used in Rom. 8:28-30 the teaching is similar).

The blessings highlighted in Ephesians 1:1-10 are not the result of faith nor do those versus say any such thing. Instead these are the blessings granted to all the elect before faith, but only the believing elect are able to see these blessings. Ephesians 1:11, however, transitions to a second dimension of election, namely that the Ephesian Christians were chosen for belief to the praise of God's glory. #1. It is the same today. God's decision to pay for the sins of all mankind remains the great finished work of Christ for all mankind, yet very few are chosen to believe it.

e. Only believers in God's "living stone" which is "choice and precious" in God's sight are identified as a "chosen race" (I Peter 2:4-10).

Agreed. Believers are specially chosen and elected to believe and are the 'chosen race' mentioned in this verse. The unbelieving elect are not given this title. #1

f. Only those who have a "faith of the same kind" and a "true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory" can be "diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing" (II Peter 1:1-11).

Certainly. Only believers who acknowledge their election can make their election certain. Unbelievers, however, cannot see God's eternal love for them. They are blind to the blessings they have in Christ because they refuse to believe. #1

g. The Lamb, the Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him: "the called and chosen and faithful" will defeat the "beast: who was and is not and is about to come" and "those who dwell on the earth whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world." (Rev. 17:8-14; also see Rev. 13:7-10).

Agreed. Only believers stand with Christ during this time. #1-2. More at 3.b.

2) Some other verses that indicate that not all mankind is elect:

a. John 6:37, 44, 55- "all that the Father gives Me will come to Me..." – the fact that many do not come to Jesus indicates that they are not given to Jesus by the Father.

Agreed. God the Father, for the demonstration of grace, has not chosen to bring even most of mankind to faith in Christ. Yet that does not change the fact that his eternal wrath against their sin is still propitiated by the death of Christ. And if their sin is propitiated from God's wrath, then who can possibly damn them? These unbelieving are deeply loved by Christ even though they remain unbelieving. However, only those chosen for faith come to Christ in humble repentance. #1-2

b. John 8:47- "...for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God."

Agreed. These Jews were apparently not chosen for faith, at least at that time. #1

c. John 10:26-28- "But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow me...and they will never perish..."

Agreed. These Jews were not chosen for faith, but instead unbelief. If they persist in unbelief, if God does not open their eyes, they will be punished in Hades. #1

d. Acts 13:48 (first missionary journey; at Pisidian Antioch; following the "word of the Lord" on the second Sabbath) - "When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed." – the fact that not all believed indicates that not all (in that assembly) were appointed to eternal life.

Are you saying that this verse means that if someone hears the gospel and does not believe immediately that it is proved that they are not elected to salvation from the Lake of Fire? Do you side with Calvin in saying that their sins were never paid or with Lewis in saying that they never reciprocated love for God? I heard the gospel multiple times over multiple years before my eyes were opened to the truth. A better understanding of this verse is that the Apostles and the Holy Spirit are confronting unbelief just as Hosea did in Hosea 2:23 and Jesus did in John 10:26. #4. This Scripture could also be distinguishing between the destinies of the unbelieving to the fires of Hades versus the believers to paradise, since the Greek word translated eternal is 'aionios'. #2-3

3) Is every man's name written in the Lamb's book of life? NO

This is the point upon which we disagree. #1

a. Following GWT judgment unbelievers are in the lake of fire- Rev. 21:7-8; 22:15. (Note- there is not one NT example of the Greek word "apistos" and its three variations [57 total usages] being used to describe angelic beings rather only human beings.)

Revelation 21:8 places eight sins on parallel footing. They are cowardice, unbelief, vileness, murder, fornication, sorcery, idolatry, and lying. Notice that the sin of unbelief is not even listed first by way of importance. Furthermore, because the sin of unbelief is included in the list as a peer with the sin of lying, we can legally conclude that the unbelieving truth teller and the believing liar will both be sentenced to the Lake of Fire. You and I are both liars yet the verse gives no indication that belief will exempt us from the verdict of damnation for our lying since unbelief is equal with lying on this list. Your whole emphasis seems to be that your "faith" has saved you from damnation to the Lake of Fire. However, this verse is not purposed to drive people to reach up and provide the "condition of faith" to be saved from the Lake of Fire. Impossible. Instead this verse is purposed to drive the lost sheep down on our knees to the foundation of election and trust that Christ has loved us from before the foundation of the world and paid for all our sin even though we are still liars and many of the things on this terrible list. The religious may continue to fool themselves into thinking their "faith" or self-righteousness is sufficient to exempt them from the condemnation of this verse. However, the truly believing boldly trust that only the electing grace of God will exclude us from this damnation because all mankind is guilty of these sins. You are in great error in your understanding of this verse. Your argument that "apistos" is never used to describe fallen angels is weak as an argument from the absence of evidence. I have written further about this verse in my article, [How Can You Say Revelation 21:8 Does Not Apply to Humans](#). The purpose of Revelation 21:7-8 is the final condemnation of the non-elect, fallen angels, and also as a warning to unbelieving elect humanity who persist in rejecting grace to drive them to faith. #4.

The key question that stands before us then is what is election? Months ago I mentioned the concept of the "unbelieving elect" and you seemed surprised and confused by the expression. Perhaps you think that since faith is required for salvation from the Lake of Fire that election is born the moment someone believes? However, election is clearly a reality from before the foundation of the world for each of God's chosen ones. Election is not merely God foretelling the future as to who will exercise their *free will* and make the good choice of faith. Election is his rock solid eternal decree. God's chosen ones are elect even before faith and thus are the "unbelieving elect" until faith, Romans 11:28.

b. People who dwell on the earth whose names are not in the Lamb's book of life worship the "beast of the sea" in opposition to God and His saints- Rev. 13:1-8 (also see Rev. 17:8).

Thank you for calling these verses to my attention. I can see how they lend to your interpretation. However, the Scripture and character of God's grace both support my understanding and so the clear Scripture should be used to interpret the less clear. Here are two possible explanations. First, Revelation 13:8 and 17:8 are not clear on the specific identity of those not written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Fallen angels could be in view. I understand Isaiah 66:22-24 to explain that fallen angels will live embodied upon the earth in the future. I write about this on number 8 of my article, [Ten Theological Absurdities](#). Some theologians believe that angels lived embodied upon the earth in the past, so why not the future? However, I would not hinge my conclusions on speculation about embodied angels on the earth. Second, Exodus 32:33 suggests that someone's name

can be blotted out of the Lamb's Book of Life. I understand this to be God speaking foolishness to the fool, Proverbs 26:4-5. If the names of the predestined can be blotted out then salvation is dependent upon human condition or a capricious God. Ultimately it is impossible that God's love and eternal plans for his chosen one will ever change such that names are blotted out of the Lamb's Book, or else grace would not be grace. Furthermore, it is demonstrated that God says to the unbelieving elect that they are not his sheep or acknowledged in the Lamb's Book, even though they are listed there because he later warmly calls the repentant, "*my people*." These verses could easily be explained by #4.

c. How many enter the new Jerusalem?...”but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life” in contrast to those who are “unclean...who practices abomination and lying.” Rev. 21:27

Are you saying that the elect are not impure and no longer do anything shameful or deceitful? The verse is not an exhortation to be good enough to somehow write our name in the Lamb's Book of Life through a *free will* decision of faith. You and I are both at times impure and do shameful things. This verse is purposed to encourage the believing elect that our sin cannot follow us into Heaven! That is awesome news! The verse also stands as a warning to the unbelieving elect to drive them to receive their election and forgiveness already given through faith in Jesus Christ. The verse is not intended to drive people to the work of conditional salvation. That is impossible. #1

4) Are there “unbelieving” elect upon physical death and/or at the beginning of the GWT judgment? NO

Psalms 139:8, Matthew 16:17-20, Matthew 25:31-46, Romans 3:3, Romans 11:28-32, 1 Peter 3:19, 1 Peter 4:6, and 2 Peter 2:1 all add up to show that God's love will not fail even for those who remain unbelieving at physical death and are punished in Hades. Furthermore, I think it interesting that the rich man in Hades called Abraham, "*Father*" and Abraham called him "*child*." It is not enough information to conclude that he was elect based on that alone, however, these affectionate titles are most curious if you think that the rich man is finally damned. 1 Peter 3:19 indicates also that Christ preached to those in Hades. What did he preach? 1 Peter 4:6. Furthermore, I've already mentioned that David thought he could even go to Sheol and yet not be outside of God's love, Psalm 139:8. Jesus also taught that the gates of Hades will be finally defeated by God's grace, Matthew 16:18. It is a fearful thought that those who reject grace will be punished in Hades even though their sins are completely forgiven, but better a fearful truth than the imaginary thought that religion can save us. Revelation 20:13-14 makes it clear that Hades is emptied and Matthew 25:31-46 gives the most complete account of the Great White Throne Judgment to come. Here are my thoughts on that in my article, [You Are Wrong About Matthew 25:31-46](#). Of course the majority of the Scripture is focused on calling people to repent and trust in the love of Christ so we do not have a huge window into the world of those already passed. Yet we do know some things. 2 Peter 2:1-2 also makes it clear that false teachers will be sentenced to Hades even though they are redeemed. Boice goes to great lengths to deny the truth of this verse because it does not fit into Calvinism.

a. Election is always in conjunction with God’s “salvation” call experienced through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as proclaimed in the Gospel (Ephesians 1:3-14; Romans 8:28-30; Romans 10:14-17)

Yes, I see where the confusion is. I have already explained that Ephesians 1:3-10 says absolutely nothing about faith as the cause of election. Rather Ephesians 1:11-14 explains that faith is the receiving of forgiveness and of election already given. Note that Romans 8:28-30, the great chain of grace, says nothing about faith as a component of final salvation. There is no condition or even response of man listed in this great chain, but only the unconditional love of Christ for all his chosen people. If there were even the smallest condition dependent upon us, we would all be lost! I have written further here that justification is a work already finished at the cross, yet received as each one comes to faith as explained in my article, [Justified](#). Romans 10:14-17 is our exhortation to tell the lost sheep the good news that their sins are already paid for, yet no one will believe apart from also being elected to believe. The prideful rejection of grace and unconditional love is evident in every generation. #1

b. John 6:37, 44, 55- “all that the Father gives Me will come to Me...”

Yes! If someone is a Christian, it is because he was chosen for belief. #1-2

c. Jesus’ sheep hear His voice and follow Him- John 10:27

Yes! If someone is a Christian, it is because he was chosen for belief. #1-2

5) Is salvation by grace independent of salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as proclaimed in the Gospel? NO

Yes, this summarizes our greatest difference. You proclaim either that Christ provided for the possibility of salvation for all, or the certainty of salvation for a few. You then urge people to either provide the missing condition of faith, or to simply trust that they are one of the chosen few. Which do you proclaim again? Yet Jesus proclaimed that the sins of all mankind are fully paid apart from all our works and even our response of faith, Luke 23:34. And if our sins are paid, then the wrath of God is fully satisfied against all mankind. Thus we urge both the self-righteous and the unrighteous to believe the good news, while warning those who reject grace that they will be punished in the fires of Hades. Jesus warned about Hell because of his passionate love to spare the unbelieving from the fires of Hades. Once again, certainly not everyone is saved. That is, very few are saved from unbelief to Christian faith, transformed lives, and avoiding punishment in Hades. Faith is essential for all these blessings. The vast majority are not saved from punishment in Hades. Yet, based on the atoning sacrifice of Christ alone, the sins of all mankind are already paid for and thus not even God can damn them to the Lake of Fire. His decision

has already been made.

a. The God of all grace (I Peter 5:10) is also the God of the Gospel (Romans 1:16-17) which is His power that leads the elect to saving faith (Romans 10:17).

The emphasis of Romans 1:16-17 and the arguments that follow in Romans concern salvation from sin and in particular religious hypocrisy. You will note that Romans does not mention Hades or the Lake of Fire one time! Those that believe Christ has already paid for our sin are transformed by the power and loving grace of God. #2. Now I am not saying that salvation from the Lake of Fire is not the grand conclusion of salvation or that we don't deserve to be eternally damned. However, I am saying that the main point of Romans is not fire insurance, but calling the believing elect to salvation from sin and to a transformed life. Romans 1:16-17 well notes that the power of the gospel is only for those who believe that their sins are forgiven. The remainder of mankind, who do not believe, even though their sins are also forgiven, are not saved from sin or a hardened heart toward God, and so cannot enjoy living in God's love.

b. Grace and faith are “friends” that work together in the saving operations of God- Eph. 2:8-9; Romans 9:6-10:17; Eph. 1:3-14

Absolutely. Grace does it all and Biblical faith trusts that all has been done by grace! However, when you speak, I think you are making faith to be some sort of activating ingredient in God's love toward us? Faith does not change God's heart toward us in the least nor his eternal destiny for the elect. However, faith does change our heart toward God. When you say grace and faith are friends, from your viewpoint, it sounds like you are saying grace and faith "work together" to save the individual. If that is what you are saying, then you have stepped away from Biblical faith to an understanding of faith that really is a work or condition provided by man. That is a dangerous thing to do. Paul wrote the book of Galatians to confront an entire church that had fallen away from a right understanding of grace. Galatians 3 does not highlight fine theological argument, but simply a crucified Christ. A right understanding of grace and the end of religious striving proceed from this fact. #1-5

c. It is the “word of God’s grace” (Acts 20:32) that brings “new birth” to those who hear and believe (Acts 11:15-17; I Peter 1:22-25); the “new birth” that is required for one to see/enter the kingdom of God (John 3:3,5).

Exactly. Only those chosen for faith enjoy the confidence that their sins have been already paid. Only those chosen for faith have been born again to a new heart. #1

6) Is faith a “work of man”? NO

Are you saying that faith is not "work" because it is granted only by God's grace? I agree. Or are you saying that everyone has a *free will* to meet the condition of faith, but this condition supplied by man is not considered a "work"? If so you have compromised grace. Luther's book *Bondage of the Will* is helpful reading to correct that error.

a. Faith is a necessary part of the operations of the saving grace of God- man is saved by grace through faith: both of which are part of the gift of God- Eph. 2:8-9.

Faith is evidence of the new birth and the beginning of a new and good heart towards God. There is no salvation from sin or exemption from Hades without faith. #1

b. Apart from faith man does not experience justification (Gen. 15:6; Romans 3:23-26) nor the new birth (John 1:12-13); nor does man have life/eternal life (John 5:24; I John 5:11-13).

Are you saying that faith initiates the new birth? I John 5:1 makes it clear that faith is the result of the new birth rather than vice versa. Regarding justification I understand that justification was completed at the cross such that the acquitting gavel has already pronounced our justification in Heaven. Now the Holy Spirit, God's great evangelist, is persuading individuals to receive our justification. I have written about this in my article, *Justified*. Biblical faith is not the activator of God's love for his people or else grace would not be grace. The false gospel says, "trust Christ and you can be born again and forgiven." The true gospel says, "You are already forgiven by Christ and only those born again will trust Him."

c. “Saving” faith is faith that hears the Gospel and “believes in the heart that God raised Him from the dead” and “confesses with the mouth Jesus as Lord (Romans 10:5-13); saving faith is also a “works-producing” faith (Eph. 2:10; James 2:14).

Amen! Certainly one cannot claim to have a heart changed toward God without faith that produces loving works. Salvation from sin means that real progress is made in leaving sin behind. However, once again if the doctrine of predestination is true in any sense whatsoever, then faith plays absolutely no part in adding our names to the Lamb's Book of Life or saving us from the Lake of Fire. No condition provided by man can save us from the holy wrath of God, but only the electing grace of God and the finished work of Jesus Christ. #2

7) Are fallen angels before God at the GWT judgment? NO

I believe some fallen angels will be judged there, 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6.

a. The false prophet and the beast are not there- Rev. 19:20. (Note- if the false prophet and/or the beast are men then “not all men are elect.”)

Yes, as you say, The Beast and The False Prophet are already in the Lake of Fire before the Great White Throne Judgment. However, I also believe that The Beast and The False Prophet in Revelation are demonic. Read more in my articles, [Revelation 20:10](#), [Fallen Angels at the Great White Throne Judgment](#), and [Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News! \(Part 2 with Grudem, Riddlebarger, Chilton, Summers, and Ewing\)](#).

b. The devil is not there- Rev. 20:10.

Agreed. He is already in the Lake of Fire before the Great White Throne Judgment.

c. The resurrected dead (unbelievers) are there; angelic beings do not experience “physical death” thus will never experience any kind of resurrection. (Note- the GWT judgment is the final judgment upon unbelievers; believer’s final judgment is the “Bema” seat judgment of II Cor. 5:10.)

We have a difference here. I believe that both unbelieving mankind and fallen angels are extracted from Hades and Thalassa to stand before the Great White Throne judgment. 2 Peter 2:4 makes it clear that some fallen angels are already locked up to be judged later. When are they judged? I believe they will be judged later at the Great White Throne judgment. These unredeemed angels are also the people on Jesus’ left in Matthew 25:31-46. Whether the imprisoned angels are “resurrected” or not I do not know, but Revelation 20:13 makes it clear that both Hades and Thalassa are fully emptied.

d. According to II Peter 2:4, “God did not spare angels when they sinned but cast them into hell (from the Greek word “tartaroo” which is literally translated as tartarus) and committed them to pits (from the Greek word “siros” which refers to a cave/pit) of darkness reserved for judgment.” Whether or not “tartarus” and these “pits of darkness” are one and the same as “hades” (Rev. 20:13-14) is a matter of discussion however there is no sense of these angels dying physically and thus being resurrected unto judgment at the GWT judgment. If these angels are in Hades then they remain there when Hades “gives up the dead” (Rev. 20:13) as well as when Hades is “thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:14).

To say that fallen angels will not be judged at the Great White Throne Judgment is to conclude more than is possible. The account of the Great White Throne Judgment in Matthew 25:41 makes it clear that these unredeemed fallen angels will stand before Christ for final judgment and be cast into the Lake of Fire, where Satan had already been tossed as you pointed out above. Note also that Matthew 25:41 explicitly says that the Lake of Fire is prepared for “*the devil and his angels.*” The Lake of Fire is not prepared for mankind who has been completely redeemed by the death of Christ. Instead the Lake of Fire is for the unredeemed, the fallen angels. Hebrews 2:14-16 also makes it clear that Jesus is not the helper fallen angels. They are unredeemed. However, 1 John 2:1-2 makes it doubly clear that Jesus did die for all mankind, the redeemed, whether believing or unbelieving. Please read my article, [Fallen Angels at the Great White Throne Judgment](#).

8) What is the “eternal state” of those who do not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior?

a. “Perish”- John 3:16 (note- Christ’s sheep will not perish- John 10:28).

Yes, the unbelieving will perish in the fires of Hades. Traditional interpretation assumes that the perishing is eternal. However, that is not the case for three reasons. First, the Greek word “*apollymi*” translated “*perish*” in John 3:16 is used numerous places in the New Testament to mean catastrophic loss, but not eternal loss, such as Matthew 2:13. Herod sought to kill Jesus, but even Herod knew he could not eternally destroy anyone. Second, the Greek word “*aionios*” translated “*eternal*” in John 3:16 might be referring to eternal, but could also refer to “*complete*” or “*whole*” life of Christian restored to fellowship with God. The Greek word “*aionios*” can mean “*age*,” “*epoch*,” “*duration*,” “*complete*,” and “*eternal*.” Thus believers live and reign during the Church Age and enjoy whole life, while unbelievers perish in the fires of Hades. Third, notice that a careful reading of John 3:1-21 states the positive that believers are saved from perishing, but there is no mention of Hades, the Lake of Fire, or eternal punishment for the unbelieving! This passage could even be understood to teach that believers are saved from the destruction of sin for a restored whole life, while the lives of unbelievers are destroyed by sin. Yet I do believe that the unbelieving are punished in the fires of Hades. #3

b. “Eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord”- II Thes. 1:9 (note-“destruction” is from the same word family as “perish” in the Greek- the Greek word “*apolluo*” [“*apollyon*”- Rev. 9:11]).

Again “*apollymi*” does not necessarily mean eternal destruction as just explained above. Furthermore “*aionios*” does not always mean eternal, but can mean “*age*,” “*duration*,” or even “*complete*.” Thus, those who reject their election will be punished for the *duration* of Hades and suffer *complete* loss. The contexts of the Scriptural passage, of the subject, and of grace are all required to properly interpret the meanings of “*apollymi*” and “*aionios*.” Furthermore there is strong evidence that “*from*” should be translated “*at*” in my article, [2 Thessalonians 1:6-10](#). #3

c. “Destruction”- II Peter 3:7 (note above).

Agreed. The lives of unbelievers will be destroyed by the fruit of sin and punished in the fires of Hades by the wrath of God. However, this word alone does not require eternal destruction as already explained. There are other types of destruction such as the destruction from the consequence of sin and the destruction found in Hades.

d. “Wide gate and the broad way” lead to “destruction”- Matt. 7:13 (note above).

Yes. Sadly for the purposes of his grace God only brings the few to trust that their sins are paid for while the self-righteous persist in rejecting the good news. Rather than cling to Christ, they cling to their cement life preserver. The good news is so plain and simple at times it is almost maddening to explain to unbelievers that they can trust that Christ has already paid for all their sin. Too often we cling to tradition, fear, rebellion, or ignorance instead of clinging to Christ.

e. Those who do not “receive the love of the truth so as to be saved” will “perish- II Thes. 2:10 (note above).

Yes, unbelievers will perish through the consequences of their sin as well as punishment in Hades.

f. Eternal fire and punishment- Matt. 25:41, 46.

I understand that Matthew 25:31-46 is speaking about the Great White Throne Judgment at the precipice of the Lake of Fire. Thus, I believe that the unredeemed on Christ's left are the fallen angels, while the redeemed on his right are the unbelieving humans, both just extracted from Hades. Those on Christ's right are given grace, while those on his left are damned to the Lake of Fire for The Ages of The Ages. Thus I agree with you that "*aiionios*" in this case might be eternal based on the context of the passage. Note that Hanson, whose work I referenced above, tries to interpret this judgment to be other than eternal, but as I mentioned I disagree with his understanding. Though, I have considered the possibility of "*apokatastasis*" that would include even that final salvation of the demons from the Lake of Fire. Check out the chart in my article, [Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News!](#)

Note also that the salvation of those on his right is not a second chance! Salvation was never a chance in the first place! Since Christ has already served as the vicarious substitute for all mankind, even the sins of the wicked, unbelieving humans in Hades are completely paid. The wrath of God is propitiated and it would be impossible that they could be damned to the Lake of Fire. For the same reason that I cannot go to the Lake of Fire, since Christ paid for my sin, they likewise cannot go to the Lake of Fire because their sins are paid... whether they believe it or not. Who will damn them if God himself has already paid for their sin? The salvation of the redeemed is based solely on the work of Christ at the cross. To assert otherwise is to impugn grace with a condition. To add condition to grace is to follow the path of 2 Peter 2:2.

g. Lake of fire and brimstone- Rev. 20:15; 21:8 (the “second death”); 22:15 (“outside”).

Yes, certainly the Lake of Fire is for The Ages of The Ages and the sentence of Satan and his demon following.

h. “Eternal death” (I John 5:11-13; by implication).

The phrase "*does not have life*" could easily be understood to mean "*has not yet*" believed or received their eternal life. You also would agree that an unbeliever does "*not have life*," YET. In fact this understanding is consistent with the Holy Spirit's goal to drive people to faith in Christ.

i. The “wrath of God”- Col. 3:6.

Yes, the wrath of God is upon the unbelieving, even though their sins are paid and they are deeply loved by God. This wrath is not eternal wrath, or even fatherly wrath, since the unbelieving are not yet his children. Instead this is Holy wrath against sin and the sinful nature of the unregenerate. It is the wrath that burned against me while I lived in unbelief.

j. “Die in their sins”- John 8:24.

Yes, the unbelieving die in their sins, remain unregenerate, and enter the fires of Hades as a fit punishment for creatures that hate the God of love and his grace. Some others suggested that I taught that the time in Hades was a way to "*work*" one's way back into God's grace. I have taught no such thing, but instead that the fires of Hades are a fit punishment for the unbelieving who are unregenerate and hate God by nature. Those in Hades hate grace and the truth that God loves them equally with all mankind. Jesus words "*die in their sins*" does not say anything about eternal death, but only that they remain unregenerate as they pass from this world.

9) Must a man believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior before physical death to enter into God's Kingdom? YES

Yes, most certainly. Unbelievers do not reign in Christ's Kingdom, as discussed in Revelation 20. Yet Christ's Kingdom is still not the end of this world. The final judgment at the Great White Throne Judgment is not until the commencement of eternity when the grace of God is proved finally victorious even for the unbelieving humans punished in Hades.

a. Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3, 5); one is “born again” by “receiving Him (i.e. Christ)”/”believing in His name” (John 1:12-13).

Exactly, without faith one cannot see the truth. However, just because some cannot see God's love for them does not mean that God does not love them. That would be like a child who hides his own eyes and then thinks his parents cannot see him. There is no hiding from the love of God. I've written some about that in my article, [John 3:36 Offers No Optimism](#).

b. “It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment” (Hebrews 9:27).

Yes. There is judgment and giving account to the Lord at each one's death. However, this verse or the surrounding context says absolutely nothing about the Lake of Fire or eternal judgment.

10) Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ:

a. Christ died for all sin- Isaiah 53:6

Yes!

b. Christ died for the world- John 3:16

Yes!

c. Christ died for His church- Eph. 5:25

Yes!

d. Christ died for me- Gal. 2:20

Yes!

e. Christ's death is appropriated by those who believe- Romans 3:21-26 and not appropriated by those who do not believe (I Peter 2:7-8).

Yes! Believers receive the blessings of God's love because we believe it. The unbelieving reject God's love and their election and suffer because of it. My favorite passages on this subject are Romans 5:17 and 2 Corinthians 5:15. Both passages make it clear that Christ loves all mankind and has paid for all mankind's sin, but only those who believe are able to *LIVE* for God! Just because someone rejects God's love does not mean that God stops loving them. A mere offer of love from God is totally silly. However, those who reject God's love will be punished severely. The "*appropriation*" of God's love does not cause God to love us. He loved us while we hated him. Romans 5:10 even goes further to say we were reconciled to God through Christ while we were yet his enemies, before we had faith! So the "*appropriation*" of Christ's death changes our hearts toward God, but God's heart toward us was determined long before that.

I began the paragraph with a "yes" of agreement, but I do not think we agree. It seems you are saying that we must apply the payment of Christ's death to our account ourselves through faith. If I understand properly, you are saying that salvation is grace plus the human condition of faith, an unfortunate perversion of simply trusting Christ.

f. The Bible teaches all of the above and so must we!

As already stated, above your words betray a curious confession. I am confident that Christ has paid for my sins, because he has paid for the sins of all mankind. Yet you seem confident he has paid for yours with uncertainty about all mankind. Each one must personally receive God's love to have a changed heart toward God and be saved from our terrible sinful nature. However, there is no such thing as a personal atonement. Instead, Christ gave his heart for a whole people, that is all mankind. Christ did not die for individuals, but Hebrews 10:10 says "*once for all*".

11) A few verses that indicate the fact of “assurance of salvation”:

Yes, only believers can have assurance.

a. Gal. 3:26- “For you are sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.”

Yes, only believers are given and receive the title of Sons of God.

b. Eph. 2:8- “For by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.”

Yes, salvation from a corrupted heart and punishment in Hades is realized through faith. Since the Scripture is clear that God loved us even as enemies apart from faith, we can say that faith played no part in saving us from his eternal wrath, but instead faith is the receiving of the gift already given.

c. I John 3:2- “Beloved, now we are children of God...”

Yes, only believers are children of God, though God is a prolific adopter!

d. I John 5:13- “these things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.”

Amen!

12) Basis of “assurance of salvation”:

a. witness of God’s word- I John 5:11-13

b. witness of God the Holy Spirit- Rom. 8:16

c. witness of the new creation in Christ- II Cor. 5:17

Yes, agreed with all this.

13) NT verses re: “Hades” (total of eleven; Greek word is “hades”): Matt. 11:23; 16:18; Luke 10:15; 16:23; Acts 2:24, 27, 31; Rev. 1:18; 6:8; 20:13, 14.

Yes, I think we agree that Hades and the Lake of Fire are not the same place, though you conclude that destiny to the one requires destiny to the other.

14) NT verses re: “Hell” (total of twelve; Greek word is “geenna”- most pronounce as “gehenna”): Matt. 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5; James 3:6

I am not sure if Gehenna and Hades are synonyms. Hades is definitely a location that houses souls after death. It is possible that Gehenna, the trash pile, may emphasize the destruction of sin in this life. I hope to study that further.

15) What about the following verses?

a. Romans 11:32- “...that He may show mercy to all.”

i. “All”- both Jew and Greek

ii. “All”- “all Israel” (11:26)

You once taught that this verse means that a future generation of Israelites will all be saved. You are right that the majority of Romans 11 is speaking about the salvation of the Jews. However, Romans 11:30-31 swings the conversation back to both Jew and Gentile. Thus Romans 11:32 stands as Paul’s grand conclusion of the *entire* argument of the book of Romans concerning the redemption of both Jew and Gentile. My book exegetes this verse.

b. I Timothy 4:10- “...living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers.”

i. “All men”- Jew and Greek; male and female; slave and free

ii. “All”- doesn’t always mean “all in absolute totality” (e.g. “...the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth...” in Eph. 1:10 does not apply to rebellious angels unless one wants to extend universalism to angelic beings as well)

Certainly all does not mean all in every context. However, the context of grace helps the believer to properly interpret Scripture. In the case of 1 Timothy 4:10 the Holy Spirit’s

use of "*especially*" is a very curious expression that best fits with my understanding. Believers are especially saved from sin, though all are saved from damnation! It makes no sense to say believers are especially saved from damnation while unbelievers are not saved at all.

c. I John 2:1-2- "And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world."

i. "World"- similar to usage in John 3:16

ii. Christ's atonement does satisfy the just personal wrath of the thrice holy God regarding the sin of all men; a "satisfaction" which is appropriated through faith

Your understanding as stated above would put you clearly out of even any Calvinist camp. The work of Christ is apart from any condition provided by man and to state otherwise is to add works to the grace of God. The work of Christ is completed and finished only for the elect of God. Though your biggest dispute with me is the scope or extent of election within mankind, I feel that the much greater difference between us is our understanding of Biblical grace and faith. Though I may misunderstand what you mean by "*appropriated.*" If you mean "*activated*" or "*made effective,*" then yes, you have added works to grace. If you mean "*receive grace already given to our account such that our heart is changed toward God, though God's heart is already determined,*" then we happily agree.

This question needs to be answered first before there is any fruit to be born in discussing the scope of election. Biblical grace must be understood, swallowed, and digested before anyone will be happy to learn that Christ also loves all mankind as well. Until the unconditional electing grace of God is received, all efforts to reach God or save one's self will be the mere religion of man. It has been said there are only two religions in the whole world, the "*do*" religion, and the "*done*" religion. The "*satisfaction*" of Christ is a finished work already granted to the elect with no appropriation needed whatsoever. The heart of God is decided and now he seeks to win the hearts of his lost sheep, Isaiah 30.

d. Romans 5:12-21

i. Adam is the federal head of all those who are born (in sin)

Yes.

ii. Christ is the federal head of all those who are born-again (through faith in Christ)

No. Rather, the passage says that Christ is the new federal head of all mankind as concluded in Romans 5:18-19.

e. II Corinthians 5:19- "...God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself..."

i. If all are reconciled then why the need to "be reconciled" (5:20)

This is a most excellent question! Perhaps this is the discussion point that God can use to bring us together. Many have an eastern religion worldview with good and evil pitted against each other like a Yin and Yang and the future in the balance, including the salvation of any particular individual. However, this is not a Christian worldview. The Scripture tell us of a God who has determined to show off his grace in the salvation of his particular people. Through the cross of Christ he accomplished the impossible of maintaining his perfect Holiness, Justice, and Love in the most amazing way. No device of man could have imagined it or foreseen it. Furthermore, he increased the odds against himself to further show off his grace decreeing that each of his chosen ones is born opposing him by their birth nature. He did this so that he can show off his grace, miraculously bringing us to receive his love, one by one. Every single one of his chosen ones is already reconciled to God through Christ as far as God's heart and his eternal plans for his redeemed. Meanwhile our hearts are not reconciled to him until the Holy Spirit works his miracle within each individual, one by one. Though many religions are in competition with the Holy Spirit, he will not be defeated, nor will he lose one! We need to be reconciled to God because God has determined to show off his grace in converting his enemies into loving sons. We are already reconciled to God for his part and there is no escaping his love. However, until we become a Christian, we are not reconciled to God as far as our heart is concerned. Sadly most people die physically in unbelief, not having received God's love.

ii. If we are the righteousness of God in Christ then why the need to "become the righteousness of God in Him"...(5:21)

As already explained above with Romans 5:10-11 as my proof.

f. Summation- these verses highlight that:

i. Salvation is available for all men (with no discrimination- i.e. nationality; gender; social standing; etc.).

Salvation is not a possibility or merely available, but a certainty for the elect. If salvation is a mere availability, we all are lost. There is no hope ever!

ii. Man must believe to enter into this salvation.

Faith is certainly required to be saved from a heart hardened toward God. However, faith does absolutely nothing to change God's loving heart toward the elect. God's love and grace is unchanging, unconquerable, and unending!

iii. Believers have the responsibility to appeal to men to be reconciled to God!

I appeal that you would know that God has loved you from before the foundation of the world. Your blessed eternal destiny is guaranteed apart from all conditions. Do you deny this election? Saving faith in Christ is the eye glasses enabling you to see God's eternal love for you. We must leave self-righteousness to receive his righteousness. Be reconciled to God!

CONVERSATIONS WORTH NOTING

One of my favorite questions is to ask people whether they think God forgives us before or after we ask. I believe that Christ has forgiven all mankind without anyone asking, Luke 23:34. This is the heart of grace. Grace is not mere theology, but instead history. Mankind nailed Christ to the cross and while we remained his enemies, Jesus prayed to the Father asking for our forgiveness. Praise God! The good news is that we are already forgiven! Any other answer is simply the religion of man reaching up to God. I mention all this because in casual conversation, a church attendee asserted that most certainly we are not forgiven before, but only after, we ask for forgiveness. I was stupefied. I did not argue, but this is not the gospel of grace that I received or teach.

Two others asked if I compromised truth to accommodate my unbelieving loved ones. Of course I do have a great concern about the destiny of the unbelieving. My great hope is that Christ also died for them just as he did for me and it is now impossible for the redeemed to be damned. Yet, those who reject the grace Christ will be punished in Hades, even if they are our family, friends, enemy, or even our Pastor.

Another insisted that *free will*, though not taught, is implied by Scripture as the answer to the Calvinism / Arminianism wrangle. He is right that *free will* is not taught in Scripture, but quite wrong that it is implied. Instead, the bondage of the will to sin is plainly taught. Again I did not argue, but reflected that Biblical teaching is needed on this point to properly give glory to God. Luther taught that to claim to be saved by free will was an affront to grace and confirmation of one's unbelief. Spurgeon also agreed.

Another church attendee suggested that it does not matter if one believes as I, plus what you believe, because then you just have extra insurance. However, you and I understand that this is not true. Our understandings not only differ on the scope of election, but even more primarily, we appear to differ on the definition of saving faith. I would like to understand your view more completely before saying too much because I have not been able to figure out if you are squarely Arminian or Calvinist. I am neither, but you also disagree with me. It seems to me that some of your objections compromise the grace of God and add a condition to God's unconditional love. You seem to say on one hand that Christ died for the sins of everyone, but in name only. Then you say he died effectively only for the sins of believers. I see no Biblical support for the idea that Christ's death is divided into two categories. The death of Christ was a single gracious act to give his life as an atoning sacrifice for all His chosen people. The cross of Christ is a finished work making payment for sins. One should not say we are saved by the finished work of Christ and then say we need to "*appropriate it*" or "*sign it*" or even "*believe it*" in order for his work to be finally effective. Christ's work on the cross was completed apart from anything we could possibly add. I hope to talk with you further to understand your view more fully.

Another suggested that since God only effectively died for a small subset of mankind we really cannot know who these chosen ones are until they come to faith in Christ. If that is true, then logically there is no way that anyone can say that Christ effectively died for them either. On what basis could they say it? On a condition they provide? On subjective experience? Feelings? They could claim to have special revelation beyond the Scriptures that their sins are atoned while also claiming that the sins of a majority of mankind are not atoned. But the facts from Scripture are simple. Christ became a man and died a vicarious death on the cross as the new federal head of all mankind. Why is there resistance to the good news that Christ loves and has effectively paid for the sins of all mankind? My clarification of the gospel is faithful to Scripture, logically sound, and resonates with God as the benevolent gracious Father that he claims to be.

Another church attendee said if all mankind is saved from the Lake of Fire, then there is no reason for him to stay with his wife or to be good. Unfortunately his unbelief is exposed as he does not know God as a loving Father, but only as the giant policeman in the sky.

Another also said if all are saved, then why do we invest all this effort in following Christ? This very question exposes a misunderstanding about grace and the reasons that we pursue Christ. The question implies that we are saved by what we do. I guess if we think that God is the giant judge in the sky, then we will also think that our status with him is based on our performance. If we think that our salvation is conditional, based on a condition that we have to supply, then we will think that our salvation is dependent upon the effort we invest. However, returning love to God who first loved us is the reason we serve Christ. We also respect his hand of punishment, but with no fear of damnation. This same person also claimed that the vast majority of unbelievers think everyone will be saved. My experience with evangelism is that most unbelievers are like the Jews who think

that evil people are eternally damned, but they will be saved because they have met the condition to be good enough.

Recently someone told me that they felt both Arminianism and Calvinism go further than can be Biblically supported. I feel the same. Unfortunately, debates between these two camps could be compared to two school bullies fighting about who God loves after both failed an exam about love. The dubious middle ground between these two camps offers no safe haven either. I invite you to read my book again and see that there is no compromise between these two systems. I then invite you to consider that I have reasonably and Biblically answered all your objections above, as well as glorified Christ as the God of all grace. The cross of Christ has unconditionally purchased eternal salvation for ALL his people and he will not lose one of his chosen, though many will be punished in Hades for their unbelief.

OTHER IMPORTANT POINTS WORTH NOTING

- 1) Beginning from Genesis 1:1 you will get deep into the Old Testament before there is even a possible reference to eternal damnation. There is not even one reference in Genesis which brings you to 1,806 BC. If we assume a creation date of 4,000 BC then 2,194 years of human history passed without one warning about eternal damnation. That is more than one third of human history! God did make it clear that a redeemer was coming in Genesis 3:15 to reverse the works of Satan. God revealed enough that men began to call on his name, Genesis 4:26. But the silence about eternal damnation seems very strange. You might argue that since salvation is all of grace, then God is not even obligated to warn the wicked of the great danger before them or even to tell us the means of escape. However, that does not fit well with the nature of our loving God and his mission to save mankind. The point is that God himself is not anxious or worried about the eternal destiny of mankind because our destiny lies fully in his hands and not our choices. He is not on the street selling fire insurance in a panic to change the destinies of men. Instead our destinies were written from before the foundation of the earth. He does not warn the first third of human history about eternal damnation because human beings can never go to the Lake of Fire. Praise to Jesus.
- 2) I've also wondered about your view of the unborn and infants. Many Christians believe that the unborn and infants are granted salvation apart from faith. Do you believe this is the case or do you believe people cannot be saved until they make a volitional profession of faith? If you do believe eternal salvation hangs in the balance for the unborn and infants then having children could be viewed as a form of Russian Roulette with damnation. Why risk it? Perhaps you believe in an "*age of accountability*" or a "*covenant*" to Christian parents, but then you also believe there is salvation apart from faith. Yet, you object strongly to the idea that there is any salvation from the Lake of Fire apart from a volitional choice of faith in Christ. The Bible never discusses an "*age of accountability*" or "*covenant*" to Christian parents. However, the gospel proclaims that the sins of all mankind are fully atoned, including the unborn and infants. Hopefully Christian parents tell their kids the good news!
- 3) There is at least a small irony that I agree with Arminians on one point and Calvinists on another point, yet they often divide. They are united in their opposition to the idea that Christ saves all mankind. So then is the test of orthodoxy that some human beings must go to the Lake of Fire *regardless* of the salvation recipe? Whoa! Jesus Christ is the God of all grace!
- 4) I heard someone say, "*God loves you unconditionally, but...*" I heard another say, "*Christ died for sinners, but...*" Or again, "*It is a free gift, but...*" I laughed, then I cried. There are no "*buts*" after grace. Instead, after our sin, there is "*...but God who is rich in mercy!*"
- 5) Evangelical churches boast about the "*finished work of Christ*." This is a beautiful phrase. Yet, I see that it means different things to different people. I believe that the death of Christ signed the guarantee for every one of his chosen people and it actually is a finished work. However, you say that grace is not finished until "*faith*" is added. Why not, instead, simply trust in God's truly finished work on the cross?
- 6) It is short sighted to claim that Christ loves you, while claiming that he did not die for all, or only nominally died for all, or even being uncertain about others. It is also short sighted to claim to "*appropriate*" or "*apply*" the work of Christ to yourself. The first is an offense to the atonement and the second an offense to grace.
- 7) Faith that claims to be the condition for salvation from the Lake of Fire is not Biblical faith resting in the grace of God and resulting in a transformed heart. Faith defined as a condition to God's eternal love is a human work that ultimately rejects grace, rejects God's unconditional love, and cannot save from hypocrisy. Currently I am reading the book *Hope Beyond Hell* by Gerry Beauchemin. His website is www.hopebeyondhell.net. I was not aware of his book before writing my own, but it is evidence that the message of grace is propelling many to question traditional thoughts about eternal damnation. Of course his book is simply the word of man, but then again so is tradition.

I am confident that the Lord is at work. If he happily brings us together again in the future, here is a draft statement of faith that could be a starting point for us.

WE BELIEVE...

1. In one true God, existing eternally as one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, John 14:9-21, who is in essence spirit, John 4:24, light, 1 John 1:5, and love, 1 John 4:8.

2. That the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments are the unique, inerrant, inspired Word of God in the original autographs, and the final authority in all matters of faith and conduct, 2 Tim 3:16.
3. In the sovereignty and active rule of God in creation, the fall, history, revelation, miracles, prophecy, redemption, and final judgment, Romans 8:20-21.
4. That man was created by God in His image, but that since Adam's fall, all men are sinful and by nature deserve God's wrath, Ephesians 2:3.
5. That Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, fully human and fully divine, eternally existing as God, yet born in time of a virgin, and that He lived a sinless and perfect life, 2 Timothy 2:5.
6. In the historic death of Jesus as the full and only atonement, guaranteeing loving forgiveness for the sins of all mankind, in His bodily resurrection from the dead, and in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, 1 John 2:1-2.
7. That all mankind is justified by the loving grace of God and redeemed on the basis of the death of Christ, which is received through faith, Ephesians 2:8-9.
8. That the Holy Spirit is the effective agent in regeneration, bringing individuals to faith and transformed lives, 2 Corinthians 3:18.
9. In one universal church, Christ's Body, to which all believers belong, and in particular churches accountable to God, led by elders who rule in doctrine and discipline, while acknowledging individual conscience, 1 Timothy 5:17, 1 John 2:27.
10. That believing mankind is rewarded in paradise after death, while unbelievers suffer punishment in Hades after death merited by their sinful nature and their rejection of the grace of Christ, Luke 16:19-31.
11. In the future, visible, physical return of the Lord Jesus Christ in glory, Titus 2:13.
12. In the final resurrection of redeemed mankind to the enjoyment of God forever, and the damnation of those excluded from the Book of Life to the Lake of Fire prepared for the Devil and his angels for the ages of the ages, Matthew 25:31-46 and Revelation 20:10.

ALTERNATIVELY, CONSIDER A SIMPLE OUTLINE OF CHOICES

This could help me to better understand your beliefs. Then I could either be persuaded to your understanding or persuade you to my understanding. Here are six possibilities to consider.

- 1) Victorious Gospel
 - a. Christ's death satisfied the wrath of God for all mankind.
 - b. Believers are saved from sin to paradise, unbelievers are punished in Hades.
 - c. All mankind is saved from the Lake of Fire, prepared for the Devil & his angels.
 - d. This view is faithful to Scripture and faithful to the character of God's grace.
 - e. Both feet are planted solidly on both the depth and breadth of God's love.
- 2) Calvinism
 - a. Christ's death satisfied the wrath of God for a subset of mankind.
 - b. The Holy Spirit effectively brings the chosen subset to repentance and faith.
 - c. Those punished in Hades are also damned to the Lake of Fire.
 - d. This view is like the Jews who claimed to be elect while gentiles are not elect.
 - e. One foot is planted on the depth of God's love, but the other foot on hypocrisy.
- 3) Arminianism
 - a. Christ's death potentially satisfies the wrath of God for all mankind.
 - b. Individual people exercise their *free will* to accept Christ and then are saved.
 - c. Those punished in Hades are also damned to the Lake of Fire.
 - d. This view reminds me of the graceless religions of the gentile world.
 - e. One foot is planted on the breadth of God's love, the other on human condition.
- 4) Mediation
 - a. Christ's death satisfies God's wrath effectively for some, nominally for the rest.
 - b. Two mediating methods
 - i. The Holy Spirit effectively brings the chosen subset to repentance and faith.
 - ii. Individual people exercise their free will to accept Christ and then are saved.
 - c. Those punished in Hades are also damned to the Lake of Fire.
 - d. This view is really Calvinism or Arminianism in disguise or double mindedness.

- 5) Simple faith and the Victorious Gospel is wrong
 - a. Simple faith that all people are sinners and Christ died for sinners.
 - b. Sinners are invited to trust Christ, but avoid debate and theology.
 - c. The Victorious Gospel is wrong because unbelievers are certainly damned.
 - d. This view is unfair to call the Victorious Gospel wrong without Scripture.
 - e. One foot appears to be planted on God's love, but the other on tradition.

- 6) Simple faith and the Victorious Gospel may be right
 - a. Simple faith that all people are sinners and Christ died for sinners.
 - b. Sinners are invited to trust Christ, but with ignorance of the extent of God's love.
 - c. The Victorious Gospel sounds hopeful, and they may want to learn more.
 - d. This view appears interested in Scripture and grace more than tradition.
 - e. One foot appears to be planted on grace, but no certainty of who God loves.

WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE?

I have been admonished to argue no further. So I will break fellowship with Arminianism and Calvinism in pursuit of Christ. Perhaps, openness about these differences will allow us to discuss God's grace more openly in the future. I would enjoy that very much.

Is "Free-Will" Faith Saving Faith?

And now I ask myself another hard question...

SELF>> Is "free will" faith saving faith?

ME>> I have consistently italicized the expression *free will* throughout my entire book. You may have guessed that I have no faith in our *free will*. I have written at length about the idea in my article, *A Quintessential Defense of Free Will*. Now the big remaining question: is the gospel at odds with the idea of *free will*? If someone claims to have effected their salvation from the Lake of Fire through their *free will* choice of faith, does that qualify as saving faith? Will this "*free will faith*" transform their hearts from self-righteousness as well?

Historically Calvinists have differed in their answer to this question. Consider two extremes from respected theologians in the past. Cornelius Van Til, a respected Reformed theologian, maintained a very accommodating view that Arminian Christians ought to be welcomed as brothers even though he had a radically different understanding of grace than they. He was quoted as saying, "*Arminians are good Christians and better-behaved Christians than many a Calvinist.*" Though, Van Til was not consistent in his accommodation. Read about Van Til here http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cornelius_Van_Til. However, Augustus Montague Toplady, an Anglican cleric and writer of the hymn, *Rock of Ages*, was a major Calvinist opponent of John Wesley's Arminian faith. Though Wesley is also respected by Christendom for his contribution of many hymns in our hymnals today, his *free will* understanding of salvation was rejected as thoroughly anti-gospel by Toplady. Read about Toplady here http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustus_Toplady.

So what is a Christ-like view of this? Let me offer my opinion with four propositions.

1.

No doubt the big concern that established orthodoxies have with my happy thought that Jesus is the savior of all mankind is ultimately that they do not believe he is the *effective* savior of all mankind, though each for different reasons. Perhaps, their concern is that I might cause people to miss their true salvation recipe. However, I propose that the biggest problem is a step before answering the question about the extent of salvation. There is a much bigger concern than answering the question of the percentage of humans beings actually saved by Christ. Ultimately God himself will determine the extent of his grace.

Yet each of us will individually give account to the Lord and the real concern for each of us is answering the question, what constitutes saving faith for even one person in the first place? What is the essence of saving faith? Religious people of all persuasions agree that one might *profess* faith, but what really matters is to *possess* faith. If we understand the wrath of God against sin, we must be zealous to possess saving faith to be ready stand before the judge, Jesus Christ.

2.

We can see why common religious models reduce the focus of Christian salvation to rescuing human beings from eternity in the Lake of Fire. We want to avoid eternal suffering! We may not be so concerned about the sin in our character that we have become so comfortable with, but we do want eternal bliss. So what salvation recipes can we pick from?

Arminians view the salvation of each individual as "*in the balance*" and yet to be determined by each individual's *free will* choice of faith and obedience. Limited atonement Calvinists view salvation as certain for the chosen few, but they say we cannot know who the chosen ones are until particular individuals are persuaded to have "*faith*" that Christ died for them. The reason they cannot know who is chosen is because they also believe that Christ did not make payment for the sins of all mankind, but only some. Therefore, their elect are an invisible subset not indicated with any observable sign so they cannot know who they are. Regardless, the common focus of both of these models is the provision of fire insurance.

I propose instead that the focus of the Great Commission is NOT selling fire insurance, but the radical transformation of the individual from self-righteous pride and hypocrisy to Christ-like humility and service, that is salvation from sin. The gospel declares that God has already paid for all the sins of all mankind and commands us to repent and believe it. The fate of the elect is *already* guaranteed and written in the Lamb's Book of Life from eternity past, Ephesians 1. No one's eternal destiny is "*in the balance*," but only in the hands of Christ. *Faith in Christ* is not a pen to write your own name there, but instead the eye glasses to see your name already written there by Christ. Jesus has made the ground level at the foot of his cross for all humanity.

Our Heavenly Father's purpose is to demonstrate his grace, having forgiven the sins of all mankind -- both the believing and the unbelieving. This understanding empties faith of all works and removes all conditions from grace so that the praise goes to Christ alone for the salvation of His people. Faith cannot add anyone's name to the Lamb's Book of Life, but only open our eyes to the fact. The point is that we are saved by grace which is received through faith. Faith does not effect our salvation from eternal fire, but it does effect a change in our self-righteous hearts.

Anyone who agrees with the Biblical doctrine of predestination must also agree that the names in the Lamb's Book of Life are a definite list of people already determined and penned from before the foundation of the world. Believers are those who simply trust that their name is there through faith in Christ. Unbelievers then are those who reject their election, such as Esau. Those who die without faith will be punished in Hades, even though their sins are completely paid.

These wicked unbelievers maintain their own self-righteous distinction from the remainder of sinful humanity and reject the precious blood of Christ, no matter how religious they may appear. Thus they will not escape punishment in the afterlife for their crimes against Christ. They reject their own election, yet even so I believe that their election by grace will not fail to extract them from Hades and finally save them from the Lake of Fire in the end as I have already fully explained, Romans 11:28.

You might ask why I would bother to jeopardize my respected position in religious circles to insist this point. As a Christian, I have been entrusted with an understanding that I am saved by grace alone and seek to be faithful to the message that the only difference between me and the unbelieving is that I believe our sins are already paid for and forgiven while they do not believe it. The point is that God hates religion! Why not quit "*playing church*" and be my Christian brother?

3.

In light of these facts, do the Arminian Christian and the Limited atonement Calvinist possess saving faith? If predestination has already guaranteed salvation from the Lake of Fire for the elect apart from works, then the only question remaining is: are the Arminian Christian and the Limited atonement Calvinist saved from the sin of self-righteousness and saved from punishment in Hades? Have they received the grace that exterminates self-righteousness? Or will they join the unbelieving and be punished in Hades for holding to "*forms of religion*" that miss the real deal?

It seems clear from the New Testament that all that is required is simple repentant faith in Christ to be saved. So a true Christian might sport any label provided that his heart is bowed before Jesus. Grace must allow for the fact that the heart can be true while the head is still confused.

Yet the New Testament also places a knife edge along the line of salvation by grace which IS saving and salvation by works which IS NOT saving. Those who reject their election and the grace of God in favor of straw will be punished for the duration in Hades.

Again, God hates religion! As such, the Arminian Christian cannot answer the question as to why they chose Christ and others did not without suggesting a work of man such as their *free will* choice of faith. Their definition of "*faith*" is NOT simple trust in the finished work of Christ for all His people, but instead it is a "faith" loaded with works that supplant grace as the condition of salvation. Their faith / work plus the supposed "*general*" offer of salvation to all mankind is their hope. How can their heads be bowed maintaining this view? Their theology openly confesses that they themselves made the difference in their salvation and not the precious grace of Christ. They are rejecting the grace of God in favor of religion. We are warned that Hades is a fit punishment for those who reject grace.

Perhaps the Limited atonement Calvinist definition of *"faith"* passes the bar. Limited atonement Calvinists are persuaded to have *"faith"* that Christ died for them, while they also believe that Christ did not die for all. They suggest that we cannot know who the elect are until specific individuals place faith in Christ. Stop. Read that sentence again a couple times. Ultimately by their own confession these people are logically saying that they cannot have confident knowledge that they are elect, either. What special revelation, in addition to the Scriptures, do they have to confidently claim that Christ paid for their sins and did not pay for the sins of others? Christian faith is rooted in the truth of Scripture and historic fact that Christ became a man and vicariously atoned for the sins of *ALL* mankind through his substitutionary death. Assurance must stand on this objective fact and nothing else. Calvinist *"faith"* is not faith built on the rock of Jesus Christ, but built on a hypocritical self-deception. Again, we are warned that Hades is a fit punishment for those who reject grace.

4.

Yet there is such a thing as a good Calvinist. I once shared my view of Christian faith with a friend. I explained that true faith is merely receiving what Christ has already finished for His people. True faith does not change God's heart toward us, but radically changes our heart toward God. He then said the terrible thing about my view is that everyone who believes it eventually concludes that all mankind is saved from the Lake of Fire. I've never received a better compliment in my entire life! So I'll take the label of a good Calvinist because I also believe that the atonement is *"limited."* Jesus' love is limited to all mankind, but he has not atoned for the sin of fallen angels who will be cast into the Lake of Fire.

My last proposition is that those who are born again, have truly received grace, and possess true faith must not maintain ambivalence or objection to the idea that Christ paid for the sins all mankind. Friends, mankind's salvation is also the salvation of each individual, Romans 11:16. Join me and happily embrace the salvation of all God's people!

If the first fruit is holy, so is the lump. If the root is holy, so are the branches.

Romans 11:16 (WEB)

Will you reject your election by grace to salvation in favor of religion and conditional salvation? Why not laugh and rejoice trusting that your sins are already forgiven as well as the sins of all mankind?

Is Revelation 21-22 About The Church, The Last Age, or Eternity?

SOME>> *Is Revelation 21-22 about The Church, The Last Age, or Eternity?*

ME>> Excellent question. Revelation 21 begins,

1) I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth have passed away, and the sea is no more. 2) I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband. 3) I heard a loud voice out of heaven saying, "Behold, God's dwelling is with people, and he will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4) He will wipe away from them every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; neither will there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more. The first things have passed away."

5) He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." He said, "Write, for these words of God are faithful and true." 6) He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give freely to him who is thirsty from the spring of the water of life. 7) He who overcomes, I will give him these things. I will be his God, and he will be my son. 8) But for the cowardly, unbelieving, sinners, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their part is in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

Revelation 21:1-8 (WEB)

Most Christians understand this Scripture as the commencement of eternity after the final judgment. However, some Universalist Christians understand Revelation 21-22 as instead the final age or eon before eternity. Others from a Full Preterist viewpoint even understand these chapters to be about the New Covenant Church and not about either final judgment or eternity.

Full Preterists have concluded that all Old and New Testament prophecy is already completely fulfilled. The term Preterism comes from the Latin *praeter*, meaning "past." Thankfully Preterists have observed that there are New Testament prophecies concerning the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. that are in fact past. Unfortunately Full Preterists have gone too far in concluding that all prophecy is fulfilled including the return of Christ and the resurrection. They miss the **"blessed hope"** and promise of Christ in Acts 1:11, John 14:3, and Titus 2:13. Thus they interpret the images in Revelation 21-22 as only about the Church during the present New Covenant Age.

Alternatively some Universalist Christians understand Revelation 21-22 not as the beginning of eternity, but instead as the final age of purification for mankind, after which salvation is then realized. The final judgment described in Matthew 25:31-46 and Revelation 20:11-15 is understood by some to sentence unbelieving mankind to the second death in the Lake of Fire. Yet, since 1 Corinthians 15:55 promises the end of death they conclude that there is also salvation from the second death. Thus if human beings are sentenced to the Lake of Fire, the common Universalist position must find proof that they are safely extracted from the Lake of Fire later. To accomplish this they consider Revelation 21-22 as a chronological account of an age beyond the Church Age. Revelation 22:12-17 (WEB) is then understood as further appeal for repentance after the Great White Throne Judgment to those suffering in the Lake of Fire.

12) "Behold, I come quickly. My reward is with me, to repay to each man according to his work. 13) I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. 14) Blessed are those who do his commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter in by the gates into the city. 15) Outside are the dogs, the sorcerers, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. 16) I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify these things to you for the assemblies. I am the root and the offspring of David; the Bright and Morning Star."

17) The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" He who hears, let him say, "Come!" He who is thirsty, let him come. He who desires, let him take the water of life freely.

This common Universalist understanding seems strained to me. First, there is not one other Scripture that suggests an age of fallen existence beyond the Church Age. Instead Revelation 21-22 paints a summary picture of both our glorious eternity when every tear is wiped away and our present glorious church. Thus, I join most Christians in understanding the Bible's final chapters to speak about the commencement of eternity after the Great White Throne Judgment. Consider, 1 Corinthians 15:55 (WEB) says **"Death, where is your sting? Hades, where is your victory?"** Paul is forecasting the end of Hades and death as also recorded in Revelation 20:14 and 21:4. This is the promise of the end of death and the end of punishment in Hades for mankind! However, there is no mention of the end of the second death for those not listed in the Book of Life.

So how then can I hold to the universal salvation of all mankind? What is missed by traditional Christians and also by many Universalist Christians is that the Lake of Fire is not prepared for mankind, but is prepared for the Devil and his angels as indicated in Matthew 25:41. Fallen angels are held for judgment, extracted from Tartarus / Thalassa, and are also present on that Great Day as shown in 2 Peter 2:4, Jude 6, and Revelation 20:13. The fallen angels are the goats on Jesus' left, not mankind!

Thus I agree with those who see elements of the New Covenant Church in the images of Revelation 21-22. The angel says to John, **"Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb!"** (Revelation 21:9 WEB). The angel also shows John the river of the water of life and the tree of life which is for **"the healing of the nations"** (Revelation 22:2). These things appear to be a picture of the Church and healing grace during the Church age. What healing would be needed in glory? Yet, the New Heavens and New Earth also promise in Revelation 21:4 (WEB),

He will wipe away from them every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; neither will there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more. The first things have passed away.

And I also agree that Revelation 21-22 explains our glorious eternity when every tear is wiped away. Yet, we do not need to look too far to see that tears are not yet wiped away. The Old Covenant has passed away, but the effects of the fall still remain. We are too often faced with the painful realities of death, mourning, crying, and pain. The final chapters of Revelation give us both *hope* and *help*. The description of eternal glory with every tear wiped away gives us *hope*, Revelation 21:4. The description of the New Covenant church also gives us *help* until Jesus returns, Revelation 22:7-21. God's Word concludes with hope for the *now* and the *not yet*, but *soon*. The end of Old Covenant Jerusalem and the birth of the New Covenant Jerusalem, the Church, brings hope *now* beginning in the first century. The victory of Christ reigning in every situation brings hope *now* to Christians of any time period. The promise of glory in the New Heavens and New Earth in Christ's presence when every tear is finally wiped away brings hope for the *not yet*, but Christ is coming *soon*.

Jesus himself introduces the Revelation of the past, present, and future saying, **"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty,"** (Revelation 1:8 WEB).

Maranatha!

Isaiah 65:25 says that even Satan will be restored

Another objected...

Reader> [You originally said that Satan and his angels are eternally damned. However consider] Isaiah 65:25, 11:6-10. There are several other scriptural passages indicating God will bring even the ultra-rebel dragon back into loyalty, too.

Me> Let's consider those passages.

Isaiah 65:25 (WEB),

'The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. Dust will be the serpent's food. They will not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain,' says Yahweh.

The emphasis of this verse seems to be that in the future God's people will be completely safe from all harm. On that we are agreed. However, does the verse promise happiness for the serpent? The Hebrew word for dust, [*aphar*], can also be translated "*garbage*." So what is in view here? Is this a happy restoration for the serpent or a humiliating defeat with his mouth full of garbage?

Isaiah 11:6-10 (WEB),

6) The wolf will live with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat; The calf, the young lion, and the fattened calf together; and a little child will lead them. 7) The cow and the bear will graze. Their young ones will lie down together. The lion will eat straw like the ox. 8) The nursing child will play near a cobra's hole, and the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den. 9) They will not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of Yahweh, as the waters cover the sea. 10) It will happen in that day that the nations will seek the root of Jesse, who stands as a banner of the peoples; and his resting place will be glorious.

Again here is the promise of complete peace in all God's creation, to the degree that vipers are no longer a danger, even for infants. So is this verse simply speaking about vipers or is Satan also in view? The mention of "*den*" and "*nest*" suggest that Isaiah is simply talking about vipers in the animal Kingdom rather than Satan himself.

The focus of my studies for the *Optimism Out of Control* book was and still is God's victorious grace for all mankind, created in God's image, and redeemed at the cross. The observation that the Lake of Fire is prepared for the Devil and his angels, and not prepared for mankind has also been an important point in my arguments. This understanding is critical to understand who is in fact actually sentenced to the Lake of Fire at the Matthew 25:41 Sheep and Goat Judgment.

However, after entering the larger discussion about the extent of God's grace in all creation, I was surprised to learn about the debate over the salvation of Satan himself. Thus I have pursued further study below. As for using Isaiah 11:6-10 and 65:25 for proof that even Satan himself will be saved, it seems like an awkward stretch to me. Depending on these verses to make such a case may do more harm than good concerning the main point. Such a stretched argument may undermine the credibility of the essential point: that Christ is the effective savior of mankind. Christ is explicitly victorious in the redemption of all mankind at the cross, but Isaiah 65:25 certainly is not explicit about Satan.

Please consider these related articles on my website:

[*Revelation 20:10*](#)

[*Fallen Angels at The Great White Throne Judgment?*](#)

[*How Can You Say Revelation 21:8 Does Not Apply to Humans?*](#)

[*You are Wrong About Matthew 25:31-46!*](#)

[*Hope in Jesus*](#)

For myself, with bold humility I say that Christ must finally save all mankind because he has already proven his intent to do just that at the cross. Actually it is not me saying it, but Christ has committed himself already and proclaimed the good news himself from the cross. Furthermore, he commands us to believe it and give our lives to telling others the good news! This good news is so certain that the main thing that gets him angry now is if we do not believe it and live accordingly.

As for Satan and his angels, I am also certain from God's word that they are sentenced to the Lake of Fire, which is prepared for them for *The Ages of The Ages*, that is the **"The Aion of The Aion,"** Matthew 25:41 and Revelation 20:10. Can the grace of God bring an end to Satan's damnation for *The Ages of The Ages*? Certainly! Will he? I do not know.

Isaiah 66:22-24 Cannot Include Fallen Angels

Another reader says...

READER>> You mention the end of Isaiah 66 -- this is the verse Christ quotes in Mark 9 / Matt 18 (and earlier in Matt 5's parallel warning if I recall correctly) involving Gehenna. So now you can have fun deciding whether this applies to the Lake of Fire judgment or not after all. ;) But from Isaiah's own perspective it applies to humans being slain at the coming of YHWH and the survivors being appalled by it; there's a parallel scene in Ezekiel or Jeremiah... where God gives instructions on how the survivors will have to send teams out for years to properly collect and bury and / or burn the dead, and how even after that's done some people will be assigned to check for remaining bones and flag them for proper removal and burial later. Isaiah doesn't go into anything like that detail, but he's quite explicit about them being the corpses of men (iysh) who transgressed against God.

ME>> Let's look at these passages more closely.

Isaiah 66:22-24 (WEB),

22) "For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me," says Yahweh, "so your offspring and your name shall remain. 23) It shall happen that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh will come to worship before me," says Yahweh. 24) "They will go out, and look at the dead bodies of the men [enowsh] who have transgressed against me; for their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind."

You note that the Hebrew word "*enowsh*" is used to describe those who rebelled. "*Enowsh*" means man, mankind, or mortal man, so at first glance it would seem that this passage could not be referring to the destruction of fallen angels. So what event is then in view?

The reader above believes that this passage explains the corrective hand of Christ upon his human enemies at his pre-Millennial return. The reader also apparently believes that this event is synonymous with Ezekiel 39. Is that the case? Ezekiel 39 does mention God judgments, but his presence in the flesh is not explicit. Ezekiel does not mention the New Heavens and Earth and thus also seems to point to earlier events.

It should be noted that the Hebrew word "*enowsh*" was also used to refer to the angels who visited Abraham in Genesis 18. So apparently the word does not always mean mortal man, but can also mean embodied angels. So it would not break any rules of interpretation to apply it to fallen angels in Isaiah 66:24.

Furthermore, Isaiah 65 and 66 is one of the few places the Old Testament explicitly references the New Heavens and the New Earth. So the New Testament parallel event seems to be Revelation 20 and 21 just before the commencement of eternity. I have proposed that Daniel 12:1-4, Matthew 25:31-46, and Revelation 20:11-15 are all talking about the same event: the final verdict for both mankind and fallen angels. Isaiah 66:22-24 seems to point to the same event with Satan and his demons' final rebellion against God and mankind. Satan and the demons meet their certain defeat, while all mankind looks upon the carcasses of the rebel angels with loathe, Revelation 20:7-10. Now it also seems clear that Satan does tempt humankind into battle against the camp of God at that time. However, this does not require that those humans who join the final rebellion with Satan are then finally lost to the Lake of Fire. I still hold that Satan and his demons receive the sentence to the Lake of Fire which is prepared for them while mankind, even unbelieving mankind, receive grace -- solely on the basis of Christ's vicarious atonement. Finally, I have proved in my article, [You are Wrong About Matthew 25:31-46!](#), that the "*ethnos*" gathered before Christ at the final judgment includes both humans and fallen angels, Matthew 25:32 and Revelation 20:13. It is no coincidence that Revelation 20:8 says that when Satan is released he will gather the "*ethnos*" for battle against God's people. Satan will round up both his demons and unbelieving mankind who so easily serve as his pawns.

It was objected that Mark 9:42-50 uses the same expression **"their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched"** as found in Isaiah 66:24.

Mark 9:47-50 (WEB),

47) If your eye causes you to stumble, cast it out. It is better for you to enter into God's Kingdom with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into the Gehenna of fire, 48) 'where their worm doesn't die, and the fire is not quenched.' 49) For everyone will be salted with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt. 50) Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, with what will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.

Mark 9 certainly is not a warning to demons, but to unbelieving humans. There are several possibilities. One possibility is that I am wrong about Isaiah 66 and that the prophet is speaking only about the punishment of wicked human beings. In this case perhaps Isaiah is writing about earlier events. However, the New Heavens and Earth language seems to point to the final battle just before the Great White Throne judgment. In either case, understanding "*enowsh*" to mean only wicked human beings does not necessarily undermine my primary thesis that all mankind will be finally saved. Though, my proposed model of understanding would need to be refactored.

Another possibility is that in Mark 9 Jesus is comparing the punishments of human beings in Hades with the even more severe punishments reserved for fallen angels in the Lake of Fire. Jesus may use the same language, "***their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched,***" because the punishments are similar, even though Hades is temporal.

Finally, Jesus may simply allow wicked unbelieving mankind to fear the judgment that will come upon the fallen angels, the non-elect, even though all mankind will be finally saved from the judgment reserved only for fallen angels in the Lake of Fire. This pattern is evident a number of places in Scripture. It is more than reasonable to let those who reject Christ's atonement think they have the destiny of the unredeemed. In fact it is the best wakeup call possible for the hardhearted unbelieving elect.

Regarding the salvation of fallen angels, I had proposed that Satan, The Beast, and the False Prophet are all fallen angels. These three beings are the only people explicitly mentioned by name as being thrown into the Lake of Fire. I have written further about this thesis in my article, [Revelation 20:10](#). The same reader above also objected, saying that The Beast and The False Prophet are human. However, after reading Revelation again I stumbled upon verse Revelation 16:13. This verse communicates that these three beings share of common nature of being the SOURCE of evil spirits and the spirit of demons. Humans are not the source of the demonic, but instead humans are attacked and possessed by the demonic. This seems like further evidence that these three beings are the demonic leaders of the rebellion against God with Satan as their ring leader.

I also finished reading *Terms for Eternity: Aionios and Aidios in Classical and Christian Texts* by Ilaria Ramelli and David Konstan. They defend that "*aion*" means "*age*" or "*eon*" as many would agree. However, they also note that the definitive Greek word for eternal, "*aidios*," is only used twice the Bible: once in Romans 1:20 concerning God and once in Jude 6 concerning the bonds on fallen angels. Since Ramelli and Konstan argue even for the salvation of Satan they conclude that "*aidios*" in Jude 6 must mean transcending the ages, but not finally eternal. They reason thus because these demons are being "***held for judgment***" so there must be an end to these "*aidios*" bonds after their judgment. However, it could also be that these demons with "*aidios*" bonds are held in *Thalaasa* to be extracted for sentencing at the Great White Throne Judgment and then with the "*aidios*" bonds still on they are cast into the Lake of Fire. Thus they are held for judgment, but the "*aidios*" bonds are not released as they are cast into the Lake of Fire. Further, if the Sheep and Goat Judgment is synonymous with the Great White Throne Judgment and with the Great Judgment Day for the imprisoned angels, then it is clear that the goats are held for judgment and further sentenced to the Lake of Fire after their extraction from Tartarus / Thalassa. So the "*aidios*" bonds of fallen angels do not end at the Great Day of their judgment, but continue on through *The Ages of The Ages* in the Lake of Fire.

That all said, I want to do further study concerning the Biblical arguments for an "*apokatastasis*" that could include the salvation of even the fallen angels sentenced to the Lake of Fire. Can anyone point me to further resources on the meaning of "*kolasis*" from Matthew 25:46? Some resources indicate "*punishment, torment, etc.*" However, I know others have argued that the word only means loving correction or correction with a goal to restoration. Actually the only other Biblical use in 1 John 4:18 does not mean loving correction, but merely the fruit of fear, that is torment. Perhaps the arguments for the meaning of "*kolasis*" as only corrective punishment are stretched because of the conclusion that human beings are sent to "*aion kolasis*." If we think human beings are sent to the Lake of Fire, but hope they are later saved, then we need to understand "*kolasis*" as corrective. However, if the goats on Jesus' left are fallen angels only, then the puzzle pieces fit together more easily.

Thanks for the comment above. After reflection, I continue to hold that the Lake of Fire is prepared only for the Devil and his angels. However, I may be agnostic about the duration of the torment to be endured in the Lake of Fire by the Devil and his angels. The Scriptures obviously begin with rebellious Satan tempting mankind into the fall and end with all mankind redeemed with every tear wiped away and Satan and his angels in torment in the Lake of Fire. Revelation 20:10 says Satan will be sentenced to the Lake of Fire for "*The Aions of The Aions*." So when is the end of "*The Aions of The Aions*?" If there is an end to Satan's damnation it is after the last page of Scripture.

John 3:36 Offers No Optimism!

Another thoughtful doubter suggested...

ANOTHER>> John 3:36 offers no optimism, so you are in error to suggest otherwise. Furthermore, you err in thinking that sinful man does not deserve the wrath of God. The Bible never indicates that the wrath of God will be abated for unbelievers.

ME>> That is an excellent point of discussion. John 3:36 (WEB) says,

One who believes in the Son has eternal life, but one who disobeys the Son won't see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

Let me first point out a couple of observations, then conclude with a couple of questions back to you. First, is this verse saying that unbelievers will not be *granted* eternal life because of their unbelief, or is this verse saying that unbelievers simply cannot see eternal life because of their refusal to accept forgiveness? No doubt you say the former, while I say the latter. Note that in defense of my understanding the verse says, "**won't see life.**" Secondly, consider a few observations.

Certainly you must agree that God loves the unbelieving elect before they place faith in Him. Thus faith has no transactional impact on our election. Faith changes our heart toward God, but not God's heart toward his chosen. If we agree that this is true, then this verse must be understood to mean that the unbelieving elect cannot see God's love for them, even though it is already guaranteed. After all no one is born believing. Romans 5:10 and I John 4:10 explain this concept well. So even if we disagree on the extent of election within mankind, we must still agree that the unbelieving elect move from a point of *NOT SEEING* their promised destiny, to *SEEING* their promised destiny when they trust Christ. Since transforming faith is the subject of John Chapter 3, that can be the only meaning of "**won't see life**" in John 3:36.

You might argue that earlier in Chapter 3 Jesus says that unbelievers are "**condemned already.**" So you might say that faith moves a person from a place of condemnation to a place of forgiveness. Yet elsewhere we see that sinful man's reconciliation to God has happened even before repentance and faith, Romans 5:10. So how are we to understand the unbeliever's status of condemnation? John 3:17 and Romans 8:34 make it clear that Jesus has no condemnation for his chosen people -- not ever. Therefore, the condemnation of the unbelieving elect is a condemnation of their unbelief or a condemnation of their unregenerate nature, but certainly not an eternal condemnation. Ephesians 2:3 explains that we as unbelievers were objects of wrath, "**because of our nature.**" However, the elect were never even potentially objects of eternal wrath, even during our unbelief. Of course this is not because we didn't deserve eternal wrath, but because of God's grace.

Matthew 13:11-17 quotes Isaiah, making the point that not all of God's chosen people are also chosen to see and believe. So these unbelieving elect cannot see life. They cannot see God's love. They cannot see God's grace. These lost sheep continue to reject God's grace and reject that their sins are already forgiven and instead turn to religion in an effort to add to the finished work of Christ through some action, work, or choice of their own. God is quite angry with this unbelief and his anger toward their rebellion will continue if they do not repent, even though he loves them dearly.

You say that the wrath of God is never abated for unbelievers. I agree that the eternal wrath of God is never abated or even offered to the non-elect, however, the eternal wrath of God is *already* propitiated for both the believing *and* the unbelieving elect. This is the very meaning of I John 2:2. Romans 3:3-4 also makes it clear that God's faithful salvation of his chosen people is not conditioned on our faith. These verses make it clear that Christ has chosen to pay for the sins of all mankind, period. Of course faith certainly changes our heart toward God. However, God's loving heart towards his chosen people is resolute whether we are in belief or unbelief.

Paul's concluding argument in Romans 11 also makes it clear that God's gifts and call are irrevocable and so will prove effective even for the unbelieving elect. Now to clarify, this does not rule out that God is angry with the disobedience of the unbelieving elect. These rebels certainly do not see life while they persist in unbelief and they will be punished in Hades unless they repent. In fact Hades is a fit punishment for their self-righteous unregenerate natures. However, because of election, God's wrath toward them does not conclude with the Lake of Fire. Just like Romans 11:28 beautifully explains, they are enemies on account of their rejection of the gospel, but loved on account of election.

You might also point out that Revelation 21:8 specifically says that the vile *and* the unbelieving will be consigned to the Lake of Fire. However, I will check-mate with the thought that eternal damnation can only apply to the non-elect. This is easily proved because you and I are still both vile sinners even as Christians, yet our hope is that our sinful selves are hidden safely in Christ with all the rest of the elect. Even Christians are guilty of the sins listed in Revelation 21:8 and yet we and all mankind will be spared from the Lake of Fire because Jesus has chosen to pay for our sin. The sin of the non-elect, fallen angels, however, is apparently not paid for by the sacrifice of Christ, according to Hebrews 2:16. Therefore the Lake of Fire is their certain destiny.

So you are right that John 3:36 offers no optimism... for the unbelieving. You can tell the unbelieving elect directly that God has already forgiven them until you are blue in the face and they will continue to disbelieve and labor to somehow activate their salvation. John 3:36 is a simple statement of fact to these unbelieving. As long as they continue to prefer disbelief and religion they will not be able to see their destiny as God's elect. That is, they will not see their promised, guaranteed destiny until the Holy Spirit opens their eyes.

Unfortunately, some who profess Christ often sing the hymn, "*There is a new name written in Heaven and its mine.*" These misguided people imagine that they somehow met the condition for salvation through some work of their own. However, the grace of God is unconditionally given to all his people. They miss the great joy of trusting Christ and knowing that our names were written in Heaven from before the foundation of the world! There are absolutely no new names in Heaven, but instead only the names penned with God's burning love from before the creation of the world. Yet many religious people still contrive alternate confidences for themselves without the rock of Christ as a foundation.

Hitting closer to home, you suggest that I err in thinking that sinful man does not deserve the wrath of God. Au Contraire! I wholeheartedly believe that sinful man deserves the eternal wrath of God. In fact I believe this more than you do. I would even suggest that you offend grace by saying that the death of Christ is insufficient to propitiate the wrath of God without personal faith added to sign the transaction. Christ alone is the only sufficient sacrifice to satisfy the justice of God and propitiate his holy wrath. The transaction for our salvation was a deal signed between the Father and the Son alone. Faith adds absolutely no transactional value to Christ's work. The death of Christ completely signs, seals, *and* delivers salvation to every single one of his chosen people. Thus evangelism is an invitation for the elect to believe this good news! Faith is simply the reception of this gift, already given, which happens only if the Holy Spirit softens our hardened hearts and opens our blind eyes.

Here is a good question for both you and me. Do we agree that even the sin we committed today is enough to damn us if we were outside of Christ? Do we also agree that even the continuing faith of a believer is insufficient to appease God's wrath? So when we distrust and disobey God as Christians, do we then get confidence by reminding God that we do in fact trust him and that he should continue to accept our faith (or lack of faith)? Or instead, do we remind ourselves that Christ died for the sin we commit even as Christians and continue to thank him for his finished work and promise to us? True and saving faith must be built on the solid rock of Jesus Christ and his finished work alone. This finished work is salvation already guaranteed for each of his chosen ones. The believing take great joy in this optimistic gospel! Unbelievers, however, remain under God's wrath and will continue to reject their election in favor of their religion... and thus cannot see life.

John 5:28-30 Offers No Optimism!

AGAIN>> *John 5:28-30 also offers no optimism, so you are still in error.*

ME>> That is another excellent point of discussion. John 5:28-30 (WEB) says,

28) Don't marvel at this, for the hour comes in which all who are in the tombs will hear his voice, 29) and will come out; those who have done good, to the resurrection of life; and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment. 30) I can of myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is righteous; because I don't seek my own will, but the will of my Father who sent me.

The first questions we need to ask of this Scripture is when is this judgment, who is being judged, and what is the duration of the judgment? We agree that judgment is certain, but what is the nature of the judgment? Traditional theology concludes that only the judgment of human beings is in view.

It may take you time to study and time to reconsider, yet I hope that this book has at least introduced you to three very important concepts. First, the Hebrew "*olam*" and Greek "*aion*" are best interpreted as "*age*" or the "*life*" of the noun in view. Thus, we see that God is working out his plan of redemption through the "*ages*," and not merely in one epoch. Thus the judgment of John 5 could point to a number of points in the future. Second, when interpreting passages about judgment we need to consider that fallen angels may be in view just as much as unbelieving men. John 16:11 and the judgment of Satan is a reminder of that important point. Jude 6 also reminds us that fallen angels are being held for judgment on that "**Great Day**." Third, since "*aion*" usually does not mean eternal except when referring to God and perhaps the Lake of Fire, we must consider that at least some of the after death judgments are not eternal, for example the punishments of Hades.

That said, I think this passage is speaking about the Sheep and the Goat judgment, synonymous with Great White Throne Judgment. This final judgment will save the remainder of mankind just extracted from Hades and condemn demons to the Lake of Fire for *The Ages of The Ages*. This seems clear because a resurrection to both death and life is in view. It is important to note that the confirmation of the salvation of the believing elect has already happened for Christians through faith and at the Rapture! So if there are both saved and unsaved at the Great White Throne Judgment, who else would it be except the confirmation of the salvation of the unbelieving elect and the damnation of the non-elect fallen angels?

Not Written in the Book of Life from Creation?

SOME>> *Wait! Some are not written in the Book of Life from the creation of the world!*

ME>> Good point. Consider Revelation's mention of the Book of Life.

He who overcomes will be arrayed in white garments, and I will in no way blot his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

Revelation 3:5 (WEB)

All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been killed.

Revelation 13:8 (WEB)

The beast that you saw was, and is not; and is about to come up out of the abyss and to go into destruction. Those who dwell on the earth and whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel when they see that the beast was, and is not, and shall be present.

Revelation 17:8 (WEB)

I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and they opened books. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works.

Revelation 20:12 (WEB)

If anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.

Revelation 20:15 (WEB)

There will in no way enter into it anything profane, or one who causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Revelation 21:27 (WEB)

If anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, may God take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, which are written in this book.

Revelation 22:19 (WEB)

These Scriptures could lead one to believe that one's name could be blotted out of the Book of Life and thus eternally damned... that is if one does not consider grace and Christ's strategies with the hardhearted.

Consider one of the earliest mentions of the Book of Life with Moses.

31) Moses returned to Yahweh, and said, "Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made themselves gods of gold. 32) Yet now, if you will, forgive their sin—and if not, please blot me out of your book which you have written."

33) Yahweh said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book.

Exodus 32:31-33 (WEB)

King David also sang about the Book of Life in Psalm 69:28 (WEB),

Let them be blotted out of the book of life, and not be written with the righteous.

Daniel likewise was taught about The Book in Daniel 12:1 (WEB),

At that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince who stands for the children of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who shall be found written in the book.

What do we observe about the Book of Life?

First, we observe that names must be written from the foundation of the world or you cannot be saved. Thus faith does not add one's name to the Book of Life, but instead simply trusts that it is so.

Second, it initially appears like one's name can be blotted out from the Book of Life because of sin. So can a name written in The Book from the Earth's foundation then be removed? If so then no hope remains!

Third, Moses expressed a willingness to be removed from the Book of Life himself, if God would not forgive his fellow Israelites. In this way Moses expresses a Christ-like heart and passion for the forgiveness of others or at least a frustrated fidelity to his fellow Israelites.

Fourth, only those named in the Book of Life at the Great White Throne judgment will be saved from the Lake of Fire.

What interpretive models are possible?

Model A: Every human being is listed in the Book of Life initially, but sinning can permanently remove your name. Everyone starts a winner, but most will still lose, A.K.A. pure works salvation, but reverse.

Model B: Only a sub-set of human beings are listed in the Book of Life initially and sinning can permanently remove your name. Not everyone starts a winner and even most of the winners will still lose, A.K.A. uncertain works salvation.

Model C: Only a sub-set of human beings are listed in the Book of Life, and sinning can never blot your name (the elect cannot be blotted out, but are only threatened). Not everyone starts a winner, but the subset chosen to win, will win, A.K.A. Calvinism.

Model D: The Bible never makes one mention of names being added to the Book of Life, but, predestination aside, one can still hope to add your name by trusting Christ. No one starts a winner, but a few will defeat the odds and win, A.K.A. Arminianism.

Model E: The Bible never makes one mention of names being added to the Book of Life, but, predestination aside, everyone will add their name eventually by trusting Christ. No one starts a winner, but *time* is the recipe to win everyone, A.K.A. Arminian Universalism.

Model F: Every human being is listed in the Book of Life initially, but sinning can remove your name to suffer temporarily in the Lake of Fire. Everyone starts a winner, but most will still lose, but only temporarily, A.K.A. Traditional Universalism.

Model G: Every human being is listed in the Book of Life initially and nothing will ever remove your name from the Book of Life. However, Christ is willing to preach fear to the rebellious elect even labeling them, "**not my sheep**," (John 10:26 WEB) or threatening to "**blot**" sinners from The Book. Furthermore, Christ will punish even the redeemed in Hades, albeit temporarily, 2 Peter 2:1. Thus, the Lake of Fire is prepared only for the Devil and his angels who are not listed in the Book of Life, but unbelievers also fear this destiny. All humanity starts and finishes a winner, but most do not act like winners and suffer like losers due to their rejection of grace until the glory of God's grace is finally and irresistibly revealed to all mankind at the Great White Throne judgment, A.K.A. the thesis of **Optimism Out of Control**.

Thus Model G is my choice for the best interpretive model. Further, defense can be found in my article, [Special Strategies and Interpretations?](#)

Thankfully the heart of Moses was a taste of the greater heart of Christ our Savior! Jesus does not blot our names from the Book of Life, but instead blots out our sins!

I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake; and I will not remember your sins.

Isaiah 43:25 (WEB)

Moses boldly confronted God, appealing for Israel's forgiveness, but Christ even more boldly confronted all sin and sacrificed himself for all!

For him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (WEB)

The point is that the heart of Christ is poured out for the salvation of all mankind and he has and will accomplish his goal. Even Moses understood these things under the dim light of the Old Covenant. Christ was formed in Moses enough that he had great boldness to appeal to the God of Heaven with the facts, "*You cannot forgive me, if you do not forgive them!*"

So how can we enlightened 20th century Christians under the glorious New Covenant settle for a mere "*evangelical*" fire insurance policy? Do we have Moses' and Christ's broken heart for our fellowman? Consider Paul's rebuke to the Galatian church.

My little children, of whom I am again in travail until Christ is formed in you— but I could wish to be present with you now, and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.

Galatians 4:19-20 (WEB)

One Verse a Theology Does Not Make... So 95+ THESESES!

OBJECTOR>> You make too much of one verse with Romans 11:32. One verse cannot prove that God loves all mankind!

ME>> You make an excellent point that one verse cannot build an entire system of truth. However, I would add that one verse cannot build an entire system of truth... that is at contradiction with the remainder of the Bible. HOWEVER, one verse can speak truthfully and powerfully. One verse can speak truth that cannot be compromised by any other Scripture. One verse can speak the grand conclusion of the Bible and the history of redemption just as Romans 11:32 has done.

However, to entertain your objection I join Martin Luther who posted 95 Theses to the door of the Castle Church of Wittenberg and offer you a second 95 Theses. Each of the 95 points below challenge tradition with a question or verse that cannot be answered without adding either human condition or blind hypocrisy to the grace of God.

SCRIPTURE TELLS 'ALL'

1. 1 John 2:2, "*And he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the WHOLE world.*"
2. 2 Corinthians 5:14, "*For the love of Christ constrains us; because we judge thus, that one died for ALL, therefore ALL died.*"
3. Acts 3:21, "*Whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of ALL things, which God spoke long ago by the mouth of his holy prophets.*"
4. Genesis 12:3, "*I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who treats you with contempt. ALL the families of the earth will be blessed through you.*"
5. Genesis 3:15, "*I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and HER OFFSPRING. He will bruise your head, and you will bruise his heel.*"
6. Isaiah 66:23, "*It shall happen that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, ALL flesh will come to worship before me,' says Yahweh. "*
7. Philippians 2:10, "*That at the name of Jesus EVERY knee should bow, of those in heaven, those on earth, and those under the earth.*"
8. Psalm 22:27, "*ALL the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to Yahweh. ALL the relatives of the nations shall worship before you.*"
9. Revelation 5:13, "*I heard EVERY created thing which is in heaven, on the earth, under the earth, on the sea, and EVERYTHING in them, saying, 'To him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb be the blessing, the honor, the glory, and the dominion, forever and ever! Amen!'"*
10. Romans 11:16, "*If the first fruit is holy, so is the LUMP. If the root is holy, so are the BRANCHES.*"
11. Romans 11:32, "*For God has bound ALL to disobedience, that he might have mercy on ALL.*"
12. Romans 3:23-24, "*For ALL have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus;"*
13. Romans 5:18, "*So then as through one trespass, ALL men were condemned; even so through one act of righteousness, ALL men were justified to life.*"

14. Zephaniah 2:11, "*Yahweh will be awesome to them, for he will famish all the gods of the land. Men will worship him, everyone from his place, even ALL the shores of the nations.*"
15. Zephaniah 3:8-9, "*'Therefore wait for me', says Yahweh, 'until the day that I rise up to the prey, for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour on them my indignation, even all my fierce anger, for all the earth will be devoured with the fire of my jealousy. For then I will purify the lips of the peoples, that they may ALL call on Yahweh's name, to serve him shoulder to shoulder.'*"

WORDS HAVE MEANING

16. "AGAPE", especially with respect to God, means certain, guaranteed, unconditional "Love" period!
17. "AION" and "AIONIAN" means "*Eon*" and "*Eonian*", even more precisely the "*duration*" or "*life*" of the subject in question or "*whole*" and "*complete*", Romans 16:25-26.
18. "ALL" may not always mean absolutely "All", but "All" does mean "All" if there is not a very specific reason against it!
19. "APOLLYMI" translated "*perish*" in John 3:16 means catastrophic loss, but not necessarily eternal loss, for example Matthew 2:13.
20. "FAITH" means to trust in, depend upon another and so faith itself then CANNOT be a condition to our confidante's guarantee, that would be utterly ridiculous!
21. "GRACE" is the unmerited favor of God, his unconditional love towards his chosen people.
22. "HADES" is the TEMPORARY place of punishment for unbelieving deceased humanity, Matthew 16:18, Luke 16:23, 1 Corinthians 15:55, and Revelation 20:14.
23. "TARTARUS" is the TEMPORARY place of punishment, deeper than Hades, for imprisoned fallen angels, 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6.
24. "THALAASA" in Revelation 20:13 refers to the prison "TARTARUS" of 2 Peter 2:4 or the retreat of some fallen angels as fully explained in my article, [Fallen Angels at the Great White Throne Judgment](#).
25. "THE LAKE OF FIRE" is prepared for the Devil and his Angels and NOT humanity! Matthew 25:41 and Revelation 20:10, 21:8.

TRADITION TRAPS EVEN THE BEST

26. WHY not give Scripture the trump card over tradition?
27. WHY not oppose tradition in light of the overwhelming evidence?
28. WHY not recognize the future judgment of fallen angels in 2 Peter 2:4, Jude 6, and Matthew 25:31-46?
29. WHY not reconsider the distinction between Sheol, Gehenna, Hades, Tartarus, Thalaasa, and the Lake of Fire?
30. WHY not reconsider the mistranslation of 'AION' and 'AIONIAN'?
31. WHY not trust that God's unconditional grace and love is truly without condition for all mankind?

LEARN HISTORY OR BE DOOMED TO REPEAT IT

32. Are you AWARE of the large number of Christian writers that have promoted the salvation of all mankind?
33. Are you AWARE of the significant Universalist movements in the early history of the United States?
34. Are you AWARE that hope for all mankind lost much ground when the Bible was not available in the common tongue?
35. Are you AWARE that hope for all mankind was commonly accepted before the 5th century?
36. Are you AWARE that hope for all mankind was rediscovered when the Bible became available in the common tongue after the Reformation?
37. Are you AWARE that many early church father's advocated the salvation of all mankind?
38. Are you AWARE that NO early church creed condemns the salvation of all mankind?

ARMINIANISM REDEFINES FAITH AND GRACE

39. IF God's unconditional love is conditioned on our faith, THEN why do the Scriptures emphasize that God loved us first while our hearts hated him?
40. IF mankind's sins are fully atoned and God's wrath is propitiated by Christ's blood, THEN how can anyone be held guilty for their sins eternally?
41. IF most of those who God's loves are damned eternally, THEN how good and effective can God's love really be?
42. IF my faith '*applies*' Christ's blood to my guilt, THEN how am I different than an Old Testament priest applying the blood myself?
43. IF my will is already '*free*' before Christ, THEN what does it mean that Christ sets me '*free*'?
44. IF my will is '*free*', THEN why does the Bible say that apart from grace I am '*dead*' and '*bound*' to disobedience?
45. IF you claim God also loves those in the Lake of Fire, THEN how can anyone be saved from the Lake of Fire by the same love?

CALVINISM BLINDS PEOPLE WITH HYPOCRISY

46. IF 'ALL' can mean absolutely 'ALL' in at least one use case, THEN why do you insist it does not in this particular case?
47. IF Jesus became the Second Adam, the new Federal head of ALL humanity, THEN how was Christ sacrificed on the cross for only PART of humanity?
48. IF election can speak of various appointments, THEN why not agree that all mankind is elected to forgiveness, but not all are elected to believe it?
49. IF God did not chose all mankind, THEN how is knowledge of salvation by grace objectively possible? On what basis? What is the object your faith?
50. IF God does not love all mankind, THEN how can you be objectively certain that God loves any particular person?
51. IF God does not love all mankind, THEN how can you be objectively certain that God loves you?
52. IF the redeemed can never be punished after death, THEN why are redeemed false teachers punished in Hades, 2 Peter 2:1-9?

MISUNDERSTANDINGS KILL RELATIONSHIPS

53. MISTRANSLATION of '*aion*' easily accounts for much of the confusion in Christendom.
54. The fearful voice of tradition and its MISUNDERSTANDINGS has drowned out the truth of God's love for all mankind.
55. The incredible patience of God easily allows for grave MISUNDERSTANDINGS within his church as history shows.
56. The judgments of angels are easily MISSED in Scripture because these people are hidden from our material eyesight.
57. The religious tendency of the human heart easily explains the favor of Arminian and Calvinistic MISGUIDANCE.
58. The unavailability of Scripture in the common tongues easily accounts for reliance on tradition and MISUNDERSTANDING through the Middle Ages.
59. God apparently allows these blatant MISUNDERSTANDINGS to save the Pearl of Great Price for those who earnestly seek him.

TRADITION TRADES REASON FOR IGNORANCE

60. HOW are the unborn and infants saved without your required volitional decision to trust Christ?
61. HOW can Christian conscience or reason find a gracious purpose for eternal damnation?
62. HOW can your '*faith*' be the condition to God's unconditional love, when true faith is trust that God's love is unconditional?
63. HOW can God '*love*' a person till their death, but switch gears and damn them eternally if they die before repentance?
64. HOW can Jesus be the Savior of the world if most of mankind is damned?
65. HOW can most Christians be so apathetic in evangelism if they truly believe most of mankind is damned?
66. HOW can the first mention of eternal judgment in Scripture be as late as Daniel 12:2 if God is so concerned to save us from the Lake of Fire?
67. HOW can you have confidence that Jesus forgave your sin while at the same time saying he did not forgive others?
68. HOW can you ignore and even accept the major contradictions between Arminianism and Calvinism?
69. HOW can you overlook the distinction between Gehenna, Hades, Tartarus, Thalassa, and the Lake of Fire with the use of one word, "*Hell*"?
70. HOW can you say those in Heaven suffer no pain over those you claim are lost for eternity when even the wicked rich man in Hades agonized over his lost brothers?
71. HOW can you stand on Arminianism, Calvinism, or the question mark in between?
72. HOW could the Bible possibly be clearer about God's unconditional love for all mankind?
73. HOW is Christ sovereign over salvation if the sinful will of a rebellious man is able to ruin God's desire that he be saved?
74. HOW is Christ the victor if those that Satan tempts and accuses vastly outnumber the redeemed?

ALL MANKIND IS LOVED BY GOD!

75. IF Christ paid for the sins of any man, THEN he paid for the sins of all mankind!
76. IF Christians have testified to God's love for all mankind throughout history, THEN God has provided his witness!
77. IF human conscience testifies that the fate of any individual and all mankind alike rests in the final verdict of God alone, THEN God has provided his witness.
78. IF the Atonement demonstrates that his cross is a finished work with all mankind represented in his vicarious death, THEN God has provided his witness.
79. IF the Early Church Fathers openly testified to their confidence in the salvation of all mankind, THEN God has provided his witness.
80. IF the Incarnation shows that Christ became a man and stands as the Second Adam and the new Federal Head of all humanity, THEN God has provided his witness.
81. IF the Scriptures testify plainly to God's unconditional love for all mankind, THEN God has provided his witness.

HADES GIVES UP FINALLY

82. 1 Corinthians 15:55, "*Death, where is your sting? HADES, where is your victory?*"
83. 1 Peter 3:18-20, "*Because Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring you to God, being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the Spirit, in whom he also went and PREACHED TO THE SPIRITS IN PRISON, who before were disobedient, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, while*

the ship was being built. In it, few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water."

84. 1 Peter 4:5-6, "*They will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For to this end the Good News was PREACHED EVEN TO THE DEAD, that they might be judged indeed as men in the flesh, BUT LIVE as to God in the spirit.*"
85. 2 Peter 2:1,9, "*But false prophets also arose among the people, as false teachers will also be among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, denying even the Master who BOUGHT them, bringing on themselves swift destruction... The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment.*"
86. Mathew 16:18, "*I also tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my assembly, and THE GATES OF HADES WILL NOT PREVAIL against it.*"
87. Psalm 139:8, "*If I ascend up into heaven, you are there. If I make my bed in SHEOL, behold, you are there!*"
88. Revelation 20:13-14, "*The sea gave up the dead who were in it. Death and HADES GAVE UP THE DEAD who were in them. They were judged, each one according to his works. Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.*"

MODERN WITNESSES WRITE

89. Read *Christ Victorious* by Thomas Allin
90. Read *Hope Beyond Hell* by Jerry Beauchemin
91. Read *Life Time Entirety* by Dr. Heleen Keizer
92. Read *The Evangelical Universalist* by Robin Parry
93. Read *The Gospel of God's Reconciliation of All in Christ* by Ernst Stroeter
94. Read *The Greek Word AION* by John Wesley Hanson
95. Read *All You Want to Know About Hell* by Steve Gregg

MORE THAN 95!

96. Read *The Inescapable Love of God* by Thomas Talbott
97. Read *God's Methods with Man* by G. Campbell Morgan
98. Read *Destined for Salvation, God's Promise to Save Everyone* by Kalen Fristad
99. Read *All In All* by A. E. Knoch
100. Read *Ancient History of Universalism* by Hosea Ballou
101. Read *The Modern History of Universalism* by Thomas Whittemore
102. Read online about the "Victorious Gospel" and "Larger Hope"

Pinning down the slippery Arminian and Calvinist

A Question>> I logically understand your thesis that Christ is the Savior of all Mankind and would like to believe it. However, I just cannot let go of the centuries of Christian scholars who have defended both Arminianism and Calvinism. Why would I want to change?

A Reply>> I can fully understand why it is difficult to let go of either Arminianism or Calvinism. These systems have existed for centuries and so have a long history of acceptance. These systems have also been written about over and over again. They have been discussed, debated, and refined. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of those who profess Christ as Savior have adopted the rhetoric of one of these systems, albeit with some adjustment here or there. So there may be little reason to consider a radical change that would rock the boat of your particular Christian community. There may be little reason, except for one reason. If the systems of Arminianism and Calvinism do fall short of truly accepting the grace of Christ as I have proposed, then you will meet with the wrath of God for your unrepentant self-righteousness instead of commendation as you currently suppose.

Would you be willing to walk through an outline of possible understandings? Which camp would you place yourself in below?

- 1) Victorious Gospel
 - a. Christ's death satisfied the wrath of God for all mankind.
 - b. Believers are saved from sin to paradise; unbelievers are punished in Hades.
 - c. All mankind is saved from the Lake of Fire, prepared for the Devil & his angels.
 - d. This view is faithful to Scripture and faithful to the character of God's grace.

- e. Both feet are planted solidly on both the depth and breadth of God's love.
- 2) Calvinism
 - a. Christ's death satisfied the wrath of God for a subset of mankind.
 - b. The Holy Spirit effectively brings the chosen subset to repentance and faith.
 - c. Those punished in Hades are also damned to the Lake of Fire.
 - d. This view is like the Jews who claimed to be elect while gentiles are not elect.
 - e. One foot is planted on the depth of God's love, but the other foot on hypocrisy.
 - 3) Arminianism
 - a. Christ's death potentially satisfies the wrath of God for all mankind.
 - b. Individual people exercise their *free will* to accept Christ and then are saved.
 - c. Those punished in Hades are also damned to the Lake of Fire.
 - d. This view reminds me of the graceless religions of the gentile world.
 - e. One foot is planted on the breadth of God's love, the other on human condition.
 - 4) Mediation
 - a. Christ's death satisfies God's wrath effectively for some, nominally for the rest.
 - b. Two mediating methods
 - i. The Holy Spirit effectively brings the chosen subset to repentance and faith.
 - ii. Individual people exercise their *free will* to accept Christ and then are saved.
 - c. Those punished in Hades are also damned to the Lake of Fire.
 - d. This view is really Calvinism or Arminianism in disguise or double mindedness.
 - 5) Simple faith and the Victorious Gospel is wrong
 - a. Simple faith that all people are sinners and Christ died for sinners.
 - b. Sinners are invited to trust Christ, but avoid debate and theology.
 - c. The Victorious Gospel is wrong because unbelievers are certainly damned.
 - d. This view is unfair to call the Victorious Gospel wrong without Scripture.
 - e. One foot appears to be planted on God's love, but the other on tradition.
 - 6) Simple faith and the Victorious Gospel may be right
 - a. Simple faith that all people are sinners and Christ died for sinners.
 - b. Sinners are invited to trust Christ, but with ignorance of the extent of God's love.
 - c. The Victorious Gospel sounds hopeful, and they may want to learn more.
 - d. This view appears interested in Scripture and grace more than tradition.
 - e. One foot appears to be planted on grace, but no certainty of who God loves.

May God speak to your heart and lead you to receive his grace and unconditional love toward both you and your neighbor, apart from any human condition.

Real or Apparent Paradox?

One thoughtful reader suggested that...

READER>> [Perhaps the different vantage points of those emphasizing God's sovereignty and man's free will only cause Calvinism and Arminianism to appear to be contradictory. Or perhaps in lofty matters, such as this, real paradox is allowable. For example, Skolem's Paradox in the area of mathematics or the wave-particle duality of light in physics could likewise illustrate real or apparent paradox. Or perhaps when the subject matter becomes increasingly complex theories may naturally compete because no one theory can digest the whole - jlm].

ME>> I was hopeful that the *Four Square Salvation Evaluation Model* was sufficiently simple, or atomic in logic, that it could rule out the argument of the paradoxical. Yet, the question has been raised and so it would be good to consider the possibility of real and apparent paradox.

I did suggest in my article, *Nit Picky?*, that the Bible does not reveal all truth to us, only the truth that God deems sufficient for us to live a life of faith and please him. One might argue that it is possible that the answer to the apparent contradiction between Arminianism and Calvinism is not revealed in Scripture. That is not my conclusion for two reasons.

One, the New Testament says repeatedly that the gospel has revealed, that is explained, the mystery that was kept secret, Romans 16:25. Nowhere does it say that the gospel introduced further mystery. The gospel opens the box of understanding God's grace. It does not close it!

Two, the main thesis of my clarification of the gospel is that apparent contradiction in gospel truth is not because there is real paradox in gospel truths, but because the gospel speaks truth to the believing and foolishness to the unbelieving. The truth itself is not paradoxical, but disbelieving Christ certainly is paradoxical! Consider the paradox of men looking into the sky, unable to see or be thankful for the beautiful shining sun. Yet the paradox is understood when we also observe that the men are blind and clouds of sin obscure the view. So the paradox is not with God or truth, but between our ears and in our hearts. Neither Arminian nor Calvinistic models appreciate that fact. They both make the mistake of assuming that God reasons with the unreasonable. But God is a wiser parent than that.

Is it possible that both Arminian and Calvin expressions of the gospel each have components of truth sufficient to capture a truthful, though incomplete, picture of the gospel? Since they are from different vantage points and each incomplete, perhaps there is only the appearance of contradiction. I summarized that Calvinism tells us that God performed *ALL* of salvation for *PART* of mankind. Arminianism in contrast says that God performed *PART* of salvation for *ALL* of mankind. These models do not simply appear contradictory, but they are contradictory! Perhaps the true Biblical model on this question is a third option that disagrees with both Arminianism and Calvinism. Yet what would it be?

Does the Bible teach that Christ's death on the cross is intended for *ALL* mankind or only *PART*? It seems to me that there can only be one plain answer. Mathematically it can only be the whole set and if not the whole set, then it is a subset. Does the Bible teach that salvation is *ALL* of grace or only *PART* of grace plus man's *free will* choice? Again it seems to me that there can only be one plain answer. Use a telescope or a microscope to see the active ingredient and if it is not singular, then it is plural.

In my article, *Soteriologies*, I attempted to simplify the analysis of the question. Is it possible that both Arminianism and Calvinism each see an incomplete picture of the gospel from their vantage points? I do not think that is possible since each model proposes to be a complete picture that is contradictory with the other. If one or both models would stop short of proposing a complete model giving allowance for the other model to see from its vantage point, then there might be hope. However, as it stands, Arminianism and Calvinism are a "*house divided*" that cannot stand together. Furthermore, in the body of this book I have exposed each of their individual errors so neither model can stand independently either. Though these models both hit the truth at some points, they also each fail at other points.

Second, since the subject matter of God and salvation is so lofty, is real paradox then a possibility? I've argued above that the paradox between Arminianism and Calvinism is more than an apparent paradox. After all, there are questions unanswered by the historic orthodoxies with 2,000 years of the greatest theological minds in history applied to the problem. The paradox remains and if possible we must hope for an explanation, or in the end simply wait or accept the possibility of real paradox. Now some have argued that we should be willing to accept paradox as a reasonable answer. (That could be considered a funny statement to accept para-dox as reason-able.) For example, we do see evidence of other real paradoxes such as Skolem's Paradox in the area of mathematics and the wave-particle duality of light in physics. Yet are these real paradoxes or only apparent paradoxes?

The word paradox is the combination of "*para*" meaning alongside and "*dox*" meaning "*orthodox*" or truth. The idea is that there can be contradictory truth alongside truth. So is that possible? Certainly there are paradoxes around us every day. However, most of these paradoxes are only apparent. Typically, if we gain more information the appearance of paradox is explained away. Yet some paradoxes remain. Is it because they are truly and finally inexplicable? Or is it because we yet wait for more information? I believe that ultimately there can be no paradoxes from God's vantage point for he is perfect truth and love. He knows and sees all from the loftiest vantage point. There is most certainly not contradictory truth alongside truth in the mind of God. I conclude this based on the character of God and the veracity of his revealed word. However, just as surely, none of us will ever see the universe perfectly from his vantage point, because we will never be God!

Yet God has revealed truth to us and thankfully the world around us makes more and more sense to those believing God's Word. How exciting that Jesus would call us his friends and make his Father's business known to us, John 15:15! And for the things that we do not yet understand or perhaps never will, we can also be excited and simply worship God while we wait. Finally, the perfection of God and his gospel make it plain to me that there is never paradox in the truth observed, but unfortunately there remains paradox in the unbelieving observer. Paradox in the unbeliever? Yes. How can anyone hear the good news and see the beautiful face of Jesus Christ and not fall in love immediately and offer undying commitment? Yet we turn from Christ all the time. Why? That is the paradox of unbelief that requires the special attention of gospel foolishness.

*Many claim 'truth is a paradox,'
they boast their 'God is not in a box.'
Many say 'answers one cannot see,'*

*they attempt harbor in Gospel 'mystery'.
Yet the Bible reveals, Christ chose to die for all,
He authored the Book of Life, can we reach that tall?
Very few find great hope in this truth observed,
they are happy to trust, obey, and never swerve.
Yet the many mix 'truths' with their god locked in errors,
foolishness is needed for those double-minded observers.
How to reach the rebellious chosen, lost from God's keep,
Jesus calls them home saying... you are not my sheep.*

~ Foolishness for the Foolish by a Fool for Christ ~

Roman Hell Fire?

I ask myself...

SELF>> By the way where is Hell and the Lake of Fire in the Book of Romans?

ME>> Self, that is an excellent question. The Book of Romans is Paul's premier thesis on the subject of Christian salvation. One would expect a thorough explanation of eternal destinies outlined in this work. What does Romans have to say about Hades / Hell? What does Romans have to say about the Lake of Fire? Curiously, the book of Romans does not mention Hell or the Lake of Fire explicitly even one time! However, on the positive side Romans does speak about Eternal Life. Romans does speak about God's judgment of physical death for the wicked behavior of the unbelieving in Romans 1:32. Romans also speaks about justification resulting in freedom from condemnation to eternal death. I just found it curious that Romans does not explicitly mention Hades or the Lake of Fire.

My theory on that is that the larger focus of Romans is the positive hope of the gospel, the invitation for all mankind to believe, and the power of the gospel to transform and save people from... sin. If you are looking for a fire insurance policy for protection from the Lake of Fire, do not read the book of Romans. You will not find fire insurance there. The book of Romans is written to awaken the unbelieving elect to the awesome guarantee they already have in Christ. The book of Romans is also written to save the believing from the dread effects of our sinful nature.

The key application from the gospel of grace for God's people is *"BE TRANSFORMED."*

Salvation: Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How?

FRIENDS>> You've made a big deal about the fact that Hell and the Lake of Fire are not the same place. You have also raised a lot of other questions that I never thought about before. Why?

ME>> That is an excellent question. We Christians make many mistakes. One mistake we make is failing to ask questions and working hard to seek answers. Perhaps we are afraid of the unknown and so hold even more tightly to our traditions. A second mistake is that we fail to introduce the questions to others and point them to the answers. Perhaps we are afraid of rejection. The worst case of this scenario is that the blind are leading the blind. We sell people answers, and they buy it, with neither party knowing what the truth is. We warn people about the judgment to come, but we have no practical knowledge of the invisible world around us and the future appointments and destinies explained in Scripture. So let's briefly consider the who, what, where, why, and how of salvation.

Who needs to be saved and from whom?

Transgressors need mercy from the Judge or they will continue to suffer the consequences of transgression and will reap condemnation. We sinners, that is all mankind, need mercy from Jesus or we will be ruined by our sinful choices and be condemned, Romans 6 and Revelation 22.

How can we be saved and how did Jesus do it?

How can we be saved from sin's consequences and from condemnation? Salvation for a transgressor requires repentance. A transgressor can only be saved from sin by ceasing

to sin. If our head hurts from hitting it against a wall, if we stop hitting the wall, then we will get immediate relief. The problem is we transgressors transgress because we love transgression. We must repent, but our hearts are so hard that we will only repent when God places his seed of change in our life, I John 3. More importantly pain isn't the only consequence of sin, but also condemnation and eternal death. There is no erasing our transgression. We are guilty and damnation is required without exception. The good news is that Jesus Christ became a man and took our penalty for us, dying on the cross. Now there is a new exception! There is absolutely nothing the elect of God can do through our own effort or failure to activate or deactivate this wonderful gift from God. Instead the work of Christ stands completely finished for all God's people and is already freely given to us. But only through the new birth will individuals receive this good news and find true joy.

Where are the possible habitats and destinies of living beings?

God is. He is spirit and does not live in **space time**, Exodus 3 and I Timothy 6. Created beings came into existence in the beginning of creation and we live in **space time creation**. Humans and animals live on the **earth**, Genesis 1. Angels and demons (fallen angels) are **everywhere**, though invisibly, 2 Kings 6. Jesus, God the Son, took on flesh in 4 A.D., lived and died on the **Earth**, was raised to life, and now is at God the Father's right hand in **Heaven**, Hebrews 1. Some of the fallen angels may have actually lived and sinned on the **Earth**, Genesis 6 and Jude 6, but now are imprisoned in **Tartarus (Thalassa)**, 2 Peter 4 and Revelation 20:13. Other fallen angels are also restricted from **God's presence** in Heaven at some point in history, Revelation 12. **Paradise** or **Hades** is the place people go after they die, **Hades** being a temporary place of punishment for unbelievers. The rich man and other unbelievers like him are punished in **Hades** immediately after they die, Luke 16. Abraham and other believers like him are rewarded in **Paradise (Abraham's Bosom)** immediately after they die, Luke 16. There is a **Gulf in Hades** between **Hades** and **Paradise**. The Beast and The False Prophet are the first to be thrown into the **Lake of Fire** in Revelation 19. Satan is temporarily chained in **The Abyss**, Revelation 20. Satan is then released from **The Abyss** for God's final demonstration of God's grace and then Satan is finally thrown into the **Lake of Fire** for *The Ages of The Ages*, Revelation 20. The abode of the dead has the compartments of **Paradise** and **Hades** which is eventually emptied of all humans and angels and thrown into the **Lake of Fire**, empty! **Hades** is only a temporary holding area. **Tartarus**, the temporary holding place for some fallen angels, is also emptied and will be no more, Revelation 21:1. The **New Heavens and New Earth** is then revealed as the final dwelling place for redeemed humanity and the righteous angels to fellowship eternally with God, Revelation 21. The **Lake of Fire** is the destiny of Satan and his fallen angels for The Ages of The Ages, Matthew 25:41. So the places living beings have been or will be found include:

- Outside space time - God
- Inside space time - Creation
 - Earth - here
 - Heaven - up there
 - Third heaven mentioned in 2 Corinthians 2:12
 - The Abode of the Dead - temporary holding place for deceased humanity
 - Hades / Hell - punishment for unbelieving humans
 - Paradise / Abraham's Bosom - reward for believing humans
 - Tartarus / Thalassa - temporary prison or retreat for some fallen angels
 - The Abyss - special temporary punishment for Satan
 - The Lake of Fire - destiny of the non-elect, the fallen angels
 - The New Heavens and Earth - eternal destiny of the elect, mankind

Why did sin enter the world and why did Jesus give us grace?

The key verse of my thesis answers that question easily. Romans 11:32 (WEB), "**For God has bound all to disobedience, that he might have mercy on all.**" Ephesians 2:7 (WEB), an often overlooked verse, also explains the reasons for God's decision to extend grace, "**that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.**" Simply put, God decreed the existence of sin in order to show off his grace. Boy did He hit a homer!

What is next?

You or I may be overwhelmed with the truth about God's grace. Our questions resulted in answers that resulted in even greater questions! Our minds could easily be blown away by God's amazing grace. The original disciples, no doubt, felt the same way as Jesus gave them the Great Commission and left them as he ascended into Heaven right before their eyes. So Jesus sent angels to provide simple instruction while they stood there with their mouths hanging open.

'You men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who was received up from you into the sky, will come back in the same way as you saw him going into the sky.'

Acts 1:11b (WEB)

Translation, get to work making disciples and keep an eye peeled toward the sky.

So Simply Sin Since the Savior is Sovereign?

OBJECTION>> You have made a big deal about God's sovereignty, man's free will (or lack of free will), and grace given to all mankind. So shall we simply sin since the Savior is sovereign?

ME>> That is one possible reaction to the gospel. In fact, Martyn Lloyd-Jones said,

First of all let me make a comment, to me a very important and vital comment. The true preaching of the gospel of salvation by grace alone always leads to the possibility of this charge being brought against it. There is no better test as to whether a man is really preaching the New Testament gospel of salvation than this, that some people might misunderstand it and misinterpret it to mean that it really amounts to this, that because you are saved by grace alone it does not matter at all what you do; you can go on sinning as much as you like because it will redound all the more to the glory of grace. That is a very good test of gospel preaching. If my preaching and presentation of the gospel of salvation does not expose it to that misunderstanding, then it is not the gospel.

So the reaction from the unbeliever toward the good news is that he now has the license to sin to his heart's content. And that is the heart of the problem. His heart is black and can only be made content with more sin. He is blind to the fact that sin is bad and God is good. The response of the believer, however, is to cry out to God for help to leave our love of sin. We are sick of sin's destruction and wish we could push the button to end all sin forever. However, God alone is sovereign with exclusive authority over the existence of sin. Praise the day when he pushes the button!

So, yes, grace is a license to sin, but not like the unbeliever thinks. Grace is God's promise that our sin will never separate us from the love of God and that no matter how many times we fail, we can always return to the Lord, free from condemnation. Furthermore, since God is sovereign over even the evil in this world we can trust that he has a good purpose even for painful circumstances. This is a powerful license, but since the unbeliever does not understand that sin is bad, he views grace as an *opportunity* to sin further. The believer, however, has had his fill of sin's consequences. The Psalmist understood this exactly when he said

***If you, Yahweh, kept a record of sins,
Lord, who could stand?
But there is forgiveness with you,
therefore you are feared.
I wait for Yahweh.
My soul waits.
I hope in his word.***

Psalm 130:3-5 (WEB)

The unbeliever does not understand that his own nature is bound to sin and that in fact he cannot even choose not to sin. Oh, certainly he might pause a sin or two from time to time. However, if he truly had *free will* he could decide to never sin again. Why not if his will is truly *free*? Try it yourself. Learn the perfect law of the Lord. Compare his ways with your ways until you are made aware of your flaws. Love his way in your heart. Then use your *free will* to decide to never sin again. Friends, this is not possible. Only one man in the history of the world ever exercised his free will to live a perfect life, free from all sin, the God-man, Jesus Christ.

So then since God is sovereign and our will is not free, then is God to blame for my sinful choices? No. God answers this question in Romans 9:14-24 (WEB),

14) What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? May it never be! 15) For he said to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." 16) So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who has mercy. 17) For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I caused you to be raised up, that I might show in you my power, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." 18) So then, he has mercy on whom he desires, and he hardens whom he desires. 19) You will say then to me, "Why does he still find fault? For who withstands his will?" 20) But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed ask him who formed it, "Why did you

make me like this?" 21) Or hasn't the potter a right over the clay, from the same lump to make one part a vessel for honor, and another for dishonor? 22) What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath made for destruction, 23) and that he might make known the riches of his glory on vessels of mercy, which he prepared beforehand for glory, 24) us, whom he also called, not from the Jews only, but also from the Gentiles?

Thankfully Jesus is sovereign over all, including his grace! He is sovereign over the existence of sin. He is sovereign over the final end of sin, one glorious day in the future. And he is sovereign over the grace given to mankind. He has a good purpose for everything and his loving hand holds all. Join me looking to the day when Jesus removes all sin forever and perfect loving fellowship with God and each other begins!

Special Strategies and Interpretations?

Another careful reader asked...

READER>> [You propose that a proper understanding of the gospel includes special strategy and interpretation. For example, you say that "eternal" is not always eternal. You say that Jesus calls unbelievers "not His sheep," but they really are elect, lost sheep. You say that even though the Bible says God hated Esau, that he really loved him. You say that wisdom gives one answer to the fool and another answer to the wise. Really? What is the end of re-interpreting the Bible to defend your own unbiblical views? - jlm]

ME>> This is perhaps the most important question that could be asked of my thesis. It is my singular goal to be thoroughly Biblical. To adopt a view apart from the Scripture offers no real hope. There would be absolutely no point to it. Suppose you or I received a court summons in the mail. We could try to imagine the letter to be an invitation to Disney World. However, our interpretation would make no difference when the police arrived to escort us to the judge. Likewise, hiding behind silly interpretations will not protect the remaining self-righteousness that will be stripped away when final judgment is made based solely on the righteousness of Christ. We might like to imagine Heaven to be a giant Disney World in the sky that everyone is invited to attend with *free will faith* as their ticket.

However, this fictional understanding of salvation misses the whole point of grace. Heaven is the destiny of all those predestined for salvation, and these righteous are invited to *live by faith*. Heaven is not an eternal Disney World vacation, but an eternity of worshiping Christ. If all someone has is fire insurance they definitely will not find comfort adoring Jesus for an eternity. Sure everyone hopes for a happy afterlife, but only the believing are eager to worship Christ our savior. So really what matters is not our imagination, but the truth. Thus any special or unusual interpretation about salvation is only justified if it is also justified by Scripture itself.

Does wisdom give one answer to the fool and another answer to the wise?

Yes, according to Scripture in Proverbs 26:4-5, wisdom answers the same question differently for the wise man and the fool. For example, John 1:11 begins hopefully, making it clear that all mankind belongs to Christ. However, when foolish unbelief is evident Jesus tells the unbelieving that they are ***"not His sheep"*** in John 10:26. Gently I ask on what basis do you have confidence that you are elect? Think carefully before you say you met the condition of *faith* therefore you must be elect, because Christian faith must be founded on Biblical facts. What Biblical fact do you have to confirm that you are elect, while even one other human being is not? Your answer may expose that in fact you do not have Christian faith.

Does God love Esau even though Romans 9:13 says he hated Esau?

Many verses say that God loved the world. John 3:16 is a well-known verse that you are no doubt familiar with. Arminians understand these verses to mean every individual within mankind is loved by God, though sadly they also think that salvation is only secured through God's love PLUS man's faith. Calvinists, however, properly understand that salvation is through God's loving grace alone, simply received by faith. Yet they are also convinced that God does not love all mankind because they think not all are saved. Since his saving love can never fail they conclude that those not saved are specifically not loved by God, such as Esau whom God hated. They interpret "all" to mean, not every individual, but instead every "category" of human.

Now, I have never heard a Calvinist evangelize by saying, *"God might love you OR you might be one of those hated by God."* That would be pure silliness. Yet it is a proper application of their understanding. So what is a better understanding? Scripture itself states in Romans 11:28 that the unbelieving are ***"ENEMIES as far as the gospel is concerned, but LOVED as far as election is concerned."*** This Scripture answers your question precisely. In fact the answer to your question is part of the whole concluding argument of the book of Romans! Your question is an excellent one, given complete attention in Paul's Magnum Opus.

So again the Scripture defines the boundary for our interpretations. Again gently I ask if you believe that God does hate the many and love the few, then on what basis do you

conclude that you are loved? Maybe like Esau you are hated for rejecting the gospel, but still loved on account of election. Or do you believe that he loves all, but eventually hates the people who reject him? Certainly you do not believe that God could love anyone that he damns for all eternity! How could he love them when it is within his power to save them? Yet, the elect, though deserving damnation, are shown grace, God's unmerited determination to love and forgive those who hated him! Friend, God is fishing for men and you may have just swallowed the fish hook of His grace! From personal experience I suggest you give up the fight.

Are the unbelievers Jesus calls "not His sheep" really elect?

I grew up in a congregation that avoided the subject of predestination because it was a fearful doctrine. I have since grown to love this doctrine. Anyone who understands the doctrine of predestination also understands that God's determined love has already been decided for the elect not only before they have believed, but also before we were born, and even before the world was made. The Scriptures remind us in many places that God loved us BEFORE we loved him.

However, that does not mean I was a Christian before I was born again. My heart was not regenerate. I did not have the Holy Spirit. I did not have faith. I was not yet given the right to become a child of God, even though I was elect. (Infant baptizing Christians make a grave mistake in receiving Christ on behalf of their children.) The Scriptural defense for this understanding is all over the New Testament and very clearly spelled out in Hosea 2:23.

Now God's knowledge of me and heart towards me was constant through the whole period of my unbelief. Yes, I was an object of wrath for my part because of my rebellious nature and hatred of God. But God did not eternally hate me, nor any unbelieving elect, ever, though his wrath remains on the unbelieving. However, my knowledge of God and my heart toward him radically changed when I received his forgiveness from the cross. Through repentance and faith I obtained salvation from my sin nature and from punishment in Hell for my unbelief. In time I also grew to understand the salvation of the elect from the Lake of Fire. Now you may think instead that your *free will choice of faith* adds your name to the elect. Friend, unfortunately that is not saving faith, but is instead works salvation.

How can "eternal" not always mean eternal?

I had come to the conclusion that "*forever*" and "*eternal*" in the New Testament must not always mean "*forever*" and "*eternal*" because the context of grace demanded salvation satisfaction even for the unbelieving. And so I concluded that the Holy Spirit used the word "*forever*" and "*eternal*" to describe the long, but finite time of punishment in Hades for the unbelieving. I also concluded that if Abraham's faith could reasonably trust that God could "***call things that are not, as though they were,***" then I certainly was not unreasonable to conclude that God could save people from "*eternal*" punishment in Hell. Furthermore, it is also evident and believed by all orthodox Christians that Jesus abolished the "*eternal*" Old Covenant in his flesh. So I concluded that "*eternal*" does not always mean "*forever*" when God is in the picture.

The Lord has, however, recently corrected my understanding. My logic was sound, but incomplete. Please forgive me for that. I had already shown that the Hebrew word "*olam*" does not always mean eternal, but instead it means the duration of the subject in view. Every Hebrew lexicon denotes this fact. Yet without much homework I concluded that the same must be true of the Greek word translated "*eternal*" in the New Testament, the Greek word "*aion*." I had planned to do further homework to prove this for myself.

However, recently the Lord has blessed me through a reunion with John Wesley Hanson's classic 1875 work titled, *The Greek Word Aion-Aionios translated Everlasting-Eternal in the Holy Bible Shown to Denote Limited Duration*. I was first introduced to this work in college by a good friend, but sadly my memory is largely untrustworthy and I forgot about the critical points made in this book. None-the-less, this classic work is available for free from the U.S. Library of Congress website and also [from my own website](#). This 88 page book is a must read for anyone who agrees or disagrees with my conclusions. There is little point to my adding further to this definitive work. Study this volume for yourself and your faith and understanding of the Bible will be challenged in radically positive ways, if you are willing to let go of all your self-righteousness.

Dr. Heleen Keizer has also written a dissertation proving the same titled, *Life, Time, Entirety - A Study of Aion in Greek Literature and Philosophy, the Septuagint and Philo*. You can read her [315 page dissertation online](#) or an [abstract of her conclusions from my website](#). You might think it is incredulous to claim that "*aion*" is mistranslated in many Bibles. Unless you are competent in ancient Greek you may not even know how to verify this for yourself. *The NASB-NIV Parallel New Testament in Greek in English* is an invaluable resource on my shelf. [Young's Literal Translation](#) is also a valuable resource.

Will you not at least concede the point that, if the grace of God has forgiven a rebel like you, then his forgiveness could also extend just as easily to unbelieving mankind since Christ is their Federal head and savior also? The application of grace is in fact in his power alone. The good news is that the death of Christ demands the salvation of mankind, as well as the punishment of the unbelieving who reject his grace! However, the punishment of the unbelieving is not eternal, but governed by God's loving grace.

Certainly you must agree that your faith does not add to the work of Christ which is freely given to both you and all mankind. Do you agree? Perhaps the problem is not that I lack a Biblical defense for these radical views, but I respectfully ask if you are lacking a radical Biblical faith.

There is No Punishment After Death for the Redeemed!

CALVINIST>> *There is No Punishment After Death for the Redeemed!*

ME>> I wish that were true.

I understand that the Calvinist way of thinking insists that there is no punishment after death for anyone whose sins have been paid for at the cross. This way of thinking is why you come to the conclusion that Jesus did not die for all mankind, because you know that people are punished after death. Yet, you too quickly conclude that the answer is that Jesus did not die for all mankind and that he does not love all mankind. Furthermore, to hold to your understanding, you offend many of Scriptures.

Consider these four plain Scriptures.

1 John 2:1-2 (WEB) says,

1) My little children, I write these things to you so that you may not sin. If anyone sins, we have a Counselor with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. 2) And he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.

Jesus did pay for all mankind's sin - the believing and the unbelieving. He paid for our sin whether we believe it or not! How could this verse be plainer?

2 Peter 2:1-10 (WEB) says,

1) But false prophets also arose among the people, as false teachers will also be among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, denying even the Master who bought them, bringing on themselves swift destruction. 2) Many will follow their immoral ways, and as a result, the way of the truth will be maligned. 3) In covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words: whose sentence now from of old doesn't linger, and their destruction will not slumber. 4) For if God didn't spare angels when they sinned, but cast them down to Tartarus, and committed them to pits of darkness to be reserved for judgment; 5) and didn't spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah with seven others, a preacher of righteousness, when he brought a flood on the world of the ungodly; 6) and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, having made them an example to those who would live in an ungodly way; 7) and delivered righteous Lot, who was very distressed by the lustful life of the wicked 8) (for that righteous man dwelling among them was tormented in his righteous soul from day to day with seeing and hearing lawless deeds): 9) the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment, 10) but chiefly those who walk after the flesh in the lust of defilement and despise authority. Daring, self-willed, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries.

Yet false teachers, even though they are bought, redeemed, and their sins fully paid, will be held under punishment for the Day of Judgment. How could this verse be plainer? How could this truth be worded more clearly than it already is? The answer is that it could not be worded more clearly, but instead Calvinist theology is at odds with the Scripture itself.

Jesus also said in Luke 12:47-48 (WEB),

47) That servant, who knew his lord's will, and didn't prepare, nor do what he wanted, will be beaten with many stripes, 48) but he who didn't know, and did things worthy of stripes, will be beaten with few stripes. To whomever much is given, of him will much be required; and to whom much was entrusted, of him more will be asked.

The pie in the sky thinking about God's forgiveness does not square with the Biblical picture of Jesus' wrath against sin and the punishments he has planned for the unbelieving redeemed... and perhaps even for the believing. Yes, God does forgive and has forgiven all, but he also punishes those He loves, as made clear in Psalm 130:4, Hebrews 12:10, and throughout the Scriptures! The proper posture for God's people is to brace ourselves for our interview with the Holy Righteous Creator Redeemer Judge of the entire Universe, confessing that we have sinned greatly and trusting that our sin is fully paid at the cross.

Instead of offending these Scriptures above why not simply change your mind, and agree that the unbelieving will be punished in Hades even though their sins are paid? Why not also change your mind and agree with me that the atonement of Christ will finally be effective in their salvation after they have served their sentence in Hades? Could tradition

and the influence of denominational camps be influencing your judgment?

Jesus promised in Matthew 16:17-20 (WEB),

17) Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. 18) I also tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my assembly, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. 19) I will give to you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven; and whatever you release on earth will have been released in heaven." 20) Then he commanded the disciples that they should tell no one that he was Jesus the Christ.

The gates of Hades will be defeated! Why not believe?

The Good, Bad, and Ugly of John Robinson

Objectors to my hopeful conclusions about salvation have asked me to review other books in order to win me back to traditional theology, that is that few humans are saved while most are eternally damned. I have taken up the challenge and have posted various [Book Reviews](#) on my website. I thought it was a fair suggestion to allow myself to be influenced by Christians of different conviction. However, I thought it would also be fair to review books by those also holding to the salvation of all mankind in order to compare our reasons. Perhaps error in their reason would win me back to tradition, or truth in their reason would confirm my conclusions.

I have found that there is quite a range of thought even among those confident in the final salvation of all mankind. In fact, sadly, the divisions between them in faith and fellowship might even be deeper than between those of traditional Christianity. Yet, most have observed, as I, that "*aion*" is at times wrongly translated "*eternal*" in the English New Testament. Some are silent about the salvation of fallen angels, while others have concluded that even Satan will be saved, to which I am not yet persuaded. Most have respected and protected inspiration and strove for reasonable interpretation of the given Word, but some have even violated the Holy Spirit suggesting that difficult verses are better explained as human error. Many have even further differences of various natures, no doubt influenced by the traditions and experience from which they came.

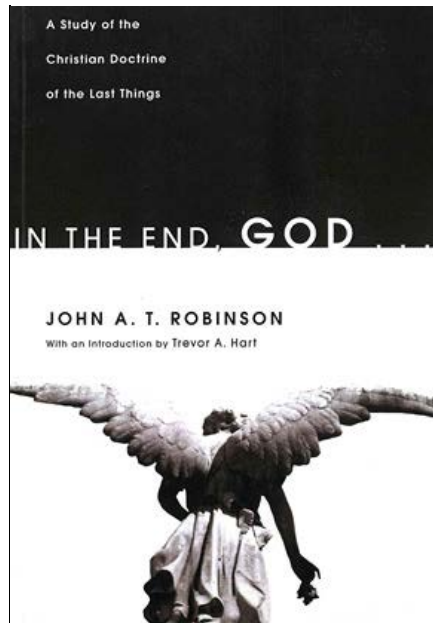
I wanted to give my review of Robinson special attention because his book includes a concept that could wrongly be considered the same as one of my own conclusions. I have said that integral to the gospel are *Special Strategies* to reach the heart of the unbelieving as mentioned in my articles, *Flying Impossible* and *Proverbs 26:4-5*. Robinson has *similarly* said that the gospel includes the *mythological reality* of eternal damnation for the unbeliever. Though I have significant points of comparison with Robinson, I want NO part of his assertion that the Holy Scripture contains *mythological reality*. Instead, the only myths that have ever existed are the myths in the mind of unbelieving man. For further explanation read my brief review of Robinson's work following.

John Robinson wrote *In the End, GOD, A Study of the Christian Doctrine of Last Things*. Robinson offends epistemology and inspiration so gravely with the invention of *eschatological myth* that many will throw the book away after Chapter 5, if they get that far. I nearly did myself! Yet he makes key points in later chapters: *The Resurrection of the Body, The End of the Lord, and All in All*. He is accused of arrogance by Trevor Hart for asserting that God must save all mankind because of Christ. On that point I join Robinson! Yet Robinson missed the aionian nature of Hades and instead violates inspiration to explain Scripture. Thomas Torrance also condemns Robinson for saying the gospel includes the *mythological reality* of eternal damnation for the unbeliever. Yet Torrance is self-condemned saying the *mystery of sin* requires the damnation of unbelievers even though their sins are atoned!

Robinson's book is terribly difficult to read as well as the essays in response by Trevor Hart and Thomas Torrance. I confess that I only understood 50% of any of it, at best. So I will keep my review to the main points in simple outline form. If I have misunderstood Robinson, Hart, or Torrance, please contact me and I will correct this article immediately. Yet as much as I understand Robinson, his theology can be outlined in the proverbial Good, Bad, and Ugly.

1. The Good

1. Robinson asserts on page 73, "*In Adam all die; but in Christ all are made alive. That is the divine 'nevertheless,' beyond all hope or merit. It rests on no condition or virtue or spirituality, but solely on the unconditional love of God.*" He is accused of arrogance for this statement. I will gladly take my place beside Robinson and assert the same! Confidence that Christ has paid for my sin and the sin of my neighbor equally is not arrogance, but humility.



2. Robinson says on page 29, "Every truth about eschatology is *ipso facto* a truth about God." He emphasizes that our conclusions about the culmination of the history of redemption reflect the very character of God. How true! Beware that when teaching about future things we proclaim either our faith in the God who IS --or-- our faith in the god who is NOT!

3. Robinson quotes Matthew 25:31-33,46 on page 94, saying the Bible speaks, "On the one hand, universal restoration; on the other a clear division between the saved and the lost." Robinson insists that we cannot deny the Scriptural truth of eternal damnation. For that he is commended. Objectors to the salvation of all mankind likewise see the clear parallel construct of Matthew 25:31-46 which saves the sheep eternally on the right and damns the goats eternally on the left. Some Christian Universalists say that since the word "eternal" is "aion" in Matthew 25:46, then this judgment cannot speak about eternal damnation, but instead age-during punishment. Robinson does not follow that reasoning, nor do I. The word "aion" can also mean eternal when the subject in view is eternal, so this line of Universalist reasoning is not strong enough. Nearly all Christian Universalists agree that the "aion" of Hades is temporal because Hades ends in Revelation 20:14. However, as far as we can conclude from the revealed word, the "aion" of the Lake of Fire is instead "The Ages of The Ages" because no end is explicitly mentioned, just as the "aion" of God and his faithful love are eternal. Many Christian Universalists further argue that the "kolasis" of Matthew 25:46 means "discipline" so this judgment is not damnation, but instead corrective. Yet the only other New Testament use of "kolasis" in 1 John 4 is not loving correction, but fearful judgment. It may be the case that even Satan's time in the Lake of Fire is corrective and ends eons past the end of Scripture. However, there is a much stronger and more important argument to be made that is missed by Robinson and many Universalists. Now to the Bad and the Ugly.

2. The Bad

1. Though Robinson uses reasoned argument in defense of his position, in order to explain the whole of Scripture he says that the truth of the gospel does not "rest on logic." I certainly agree that truth cannot rest on corrupted human logic. I also agree that salvation cannot rest on having a logical understanding. However, independent of our thoughts, the truth itself must rest on the perfect logic and reason within the Godhead, which God reveals to believing mankind to some degree. To cut out the importance that gospel truths also be reasonable opens Robinson to grave errors. There is no paradox in the mind, plans, and Word of God.

2. Furthermore, Robinson tries to bridge the gap between the certain universal salvation of all mankind and the Scriptures he understands to speak about the eternal damnation of unbelieving mankind. To do so he undermines the Holy Spirit as the author of Scripture assigning it to human authors who speak *eschatological myths*. He says on page 28, "[Eschatological statements in the Bible] are neither inerrant prophecies of the future nor pious guesswork." Though Robinson says his proofs do not rest on logic, his whole book is an effort to make *logical sense* of the Bible which appears to contradict the salvation of all and the damnation of many. He then illogically explains perceived contradictions in Scripture by saying Scripture does NOT contain inerrant prophecy. Whoa, stop the train! If the Biblical prophecies of future hope and future judgment are not inerrant, what basis remains to establish anything Christian?

3. Robinson simply needed more information to add up the facts more reasonably. Yet, he is not necessarily guiltier than me. In a similar way, in the first version of

Optimism Out of Control, I concluded that the New Testament usage of "eterna" must mean temporal when the grace of God is in view. I concluded that unbelievers are sentenced to "eterna" punishment, but the overwhelming evidence of Scripture, grace, and the character of God must somehow find a way to end this "eterna" punishment. I was further persuaded because Jesus found a way to end the "eterna" Old Covenant and replace it with the New Covenant. I was even further persuaded because Abraham, the father of faith, trusted that **"God... calls things that are not, as though they were."** Finally, I noticed that the inhabitants of Hades are extracted out in Revelation 20:14. That was enough for me... initially! Similar to Robinson, I allowed grace to interpret the word "eterna" mythologically. However, we both missed the observation made by nearly every proponent of universal salvation, that "aion" should not be translated "eterna" in many cases because it means "age" or the "life" of the subject in question. I should not have interpreted "eterna" in a mythological way, but translators also should have used the word "eon" instead! I guess my main difference with Robinson is that God allowed me to correct my error. Read more in my article [Forever is Not Forever? You Gotta Be Kidding Me!](#)

4. One last observation that Robinson and many of my contemporary Universalist friends have missed is that the Lake of Fire is **"prepared for...THE DEVIL AND HIS ANGELS."** Matthew 25:31-46 is commonly assumed to be the judgment of believing and unbelieving mankind. However, I would argue that an explanation more consistent with the rest of Scripture is that the "ethnos" standing before Christ are unbelieving mankind just extracted from Hades and the imprisoned demonic fallen angels extracted from Tartarus / Thalassa. Christians might think that we are the sheep on the right. True, we are sheep. However, the physical reunion of Christians with Christ has already happened earlier through faith and also at the rapture by sight! The incredulous response of the sheep on the right does not sound like us Christians because we have already gone through this incredulous response to become Christians in the first place! Instead, this response is from unbelieving mankind just extracted from the fires of Hades, joyful to learn that Jesus has accepted anything good they ever did by his grace alone for their salvation. These are the lost sheep reclaimed on the right. Further, 2 Peter 2:4 also makes it clear that only fallen angels are held in Tartarus, the deepest pit of Hades. The Holy Spirit does not believe Greek mythology, but he understood the word usage of his audience. Hades refers to temporary punishment while Tartarus refers to a deeper pit from which there is no escape from condemnation and further judgment. So Hades is emptied of unbelieving mankind and Tartarus is emptied of fallen angels, demons, the goats on Jesus' left at the Great White Throne judgment. The demons are then cast into the Lake of Fire... **"PREPARED FOR THE DEVIL AND HIS ANGELS."** Read more in my article, [Forever is Not Forever? You Still Gotta Be Kidding Me!](#)
5. Robinson also spends pages and pages of words trying to protect the *free will* of man using similar language as C.S. Lewis. They both conclude that God's love cannot be love unless it is freely received. I can hardly believe that someone who is born again could even say that. They both neglect the true condition of man apart from regeneration of the individual by the Holy Spirit. We are dead. We hate God and grace. The truth is that apart from grace we are not free, but instead *locked* and *bound* to sin. Robinson gives a nod toward this fact by noting the "surd" irrational nature of sin. So instead it is only the finger of God upon each individual's life that sets us free to rationally take our position as God's child. I just do not understand Robinson and the majority of Christendom's persistent defense of *free will*... unless of course their faith is upon their own supposed decision for God instead of receiving *God's* prior decision for us.

3. The Ugly

1. Robinson clings with a two finger hold to the good news that Christ has paid for, has redeemed, has absolved all mankind from the guilt of sin and thus will be finally and eternally saved. However, the witness of this good faith is nearly ruined by missed observations and his mistreatment of reason and Scripture. Furthermore, the usefulness of his hope is totally ruined by his suggested application for those who hope to minister the good news. Robinson says on page 112, *"To the man in decision -- and that means to all men, always, right up to the last hour -- [eternal] hell is every way as real a destination as heaven. Only the man who has genuinely been confronted by both alternatives can be saved. To preach Heaven alone, as it is asserted the universalist must, is to deny men the possibility of salvation. For salvation is a state of having chosen; and, in the moment of choice (and no man can ever say: 'I am safe, I have chosen'), both alternatives are existentially as real. Eternal life is only for those who have passed through the valley of decision."* This suggested application for Christian ministry, ugly as it is, is at least consistent with his belief in the *eschatological myth*. One might well ask Robinson how he can assert and hope in eternal salvation for himself and all mankind while he remains merely an existential subject himself? How did he break out of the bubble of his proposed existential model to find hope to say with certainty that all mankind is saved and that eternal damnation is really an *eschatological myth*? The point is that Robinson's recipe falls woefully short and anyone "saved" through his gospel would carry the baggage of neutered reason and a mythologized Bible. The Ugly.
2. You might accuse me of the same errors because I have said that integral to the gospel are [Special Strategies](#) to reach the heart of the unbelieving as mentioned in my articles, [Flying Impossible](#) and [Proverbs 26:4-5](#). I will agree that some difficult Scripture can only be explained through the employment of Robinson's "myth"... if you will. I do not like the term, but to highlight one common thread with Robinson, I will use the same word. Robinson is dead right that at some points theologians on all sides cannot build a systematic theology of salvation and remain true to the objective statements of Scripture. Something must budge. Some weakness is found at the extremes of Calvinistic, Arminian, and perhaps even Christian Universalism when compared objectively with Scripture. So back to the point: are the Pharisees who rejected Christ his sheep, lost sheep, or goats? The objective statement of Christ to these self-righteous rebels is that they are not sheep, not even lost sheep. So there is a perceived contradiction. Christ says these Pharisees are *not* his sheep and so apparently he did not die for them, though elsewhere the Bible plainly says Christ died for all and that all mankind are the sheep of his pasture. What is the truth? Calvinists bend one way saying Christ did not die for all mankind. Arminians

bend the other way saying Christ died for all mankind, BUT we must apply the atonement to ourselves through faith. Robinson's answer is that this perceived contradiction of Scripture is explained by *eschatological myth*, and that these unbelieving Jews are paradoxically both destined for salvation and damnation at the same time. Sorry John, I cannot go there. Instead I believe they are *lost* sheep based on Hosea 2:23. My answer, as fully explained in my article *Special Strategies and Interpretations*, is that instead it is the mind of the unbeliever that contains the *myth*. The Holy Spirit's inspired Word speaks to the believer and the unbeliever according to either the truth or *myth* that is present in their own thinking. Proverbs 26:4-5 (WEB) says, "**Don't answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.**" Jesus answers the unbelieving Jews according to the *myth* that was in their own head! However, there is no *myth* in God's head or the Scriptures! Jesus loves all the Jews and all the gentiles, all mankind, even the rebellious! We are all his sheep whether we are lost or found. However, when the unbelieving Jews persisted in their stubborn rejection of their shepherd, Jesus answered them according to the foolish myth in their own head saying, "**you are not my sheep.**" This strategy is clearly outlined in Hosea Chapter 2. Since the unbeliever has not yet trusted that his sins are already fully paid at the cross, then eternal damnation is the destiny he inwardly fears, despite how religious or boldly "*Christian*" he may appear. Yet despite their unbelief, their sins also remain fully paid. There is absolutely no paradox in the Scripture, the Gospel, or the mind of God, as explained in my article, *Real or Apparent Paradox?*, but only in the mind of the unbeliever, especially the religious unbeliever.

My clarification of the good news to mankind is instead, believe! Your sins are forgiven! Meet me in Heaven! Do you deny that Christ is your Savior? Why? He IS your Savior! Be thankful that Christ has paid for your sin because the destiny of all those not saved by Christ is the eternal Lake of Fire. Why anger the Lord and hear him say, "**You are not my sheep?**" Yet you must be warned that even if you give your life to religion, destroy your life with sin, and suffer an age in Hades resisting grace until the very threshold of damnation, even so, NOT YOU OR EVEN ONE of those for whom Christ died will ever enter the Lake of Fire which is "**prepared for... the Devil and his angels.**" Why wait? Why destroy your life with sin? Testify that Christ is your Savior! Be transformed by the Holy Spirit! However, *IF* Christ is not your Savior and the Savior of all mankind as you say, then nothing can save you from eternal damnation.

Robinson's gallant effort illustrates the true plight of sinful man. We are in utterly desperate straits: you, me, and Robinson. Apart from grace we are dead with eyes sealed shut to the truth of God's unconditional love. However, when our eyes are opened to even a ray of the shining light of truth we cling to it with all the muscle and tenacity of a desperate mountain climber. Even if we hang by a two finger hold at the last precipice of Mount Everest, we cannot let go of the truth we have seen. We are sinners in desperate need of forgiveness, and in Christ there is forgiveness for sinners! Our hands and feet may not find stable ground to answer all the questions we might have. (Not because stable ground does not exist, but thorns, thistles, and Satan's schemes obstruct the way.) So we hang on to what we know with hands and feet struggling. Such is a good description of Robinson... and perhaps even ourselves. Were we to see my mountain climber metaphor enacted on film, we would be clutching the edge of seats and the man with the two finger hold would be praised in the end! For the Lord himself will lift us to final safety, the dark glass will be removed, we will see him face to face in glory, and he himself will praise our faith in spite of our failings.

Though I feel Robinson has erred greatly, I find great kinship with his assertion that the work of God in Christ *must* bear the fruit of the salvation of all mankind. Though Robinson is accused of arrogance for this assertion, he is woefully misunderstood by his wicked unbelieving critics. For his assertion that God must save mankind is rooted in the fact that God himself determined to do it and has already accomplished the absolution of all our sin at the cross of Christ. Since God himself has already paid for the sins of all mankind, then who remains to condemn? Friends, no one. No one. On this key point Robinson clings to the very heart of Christian salvation and hope.

If we acknowledge Robinson's grave errors and commend his tenacity for God's unconditional love, we will see that the greater arrogance is not Robinson's, but in fact Hart, Torrence, the Calvinist, the Arminian, and the religious. They claim that their sins are forgiven, with at best hypocritical doubt or likely condemnation for the remainder of humanity. What is the basis for their faith? It is not founded on the bedrock of Christ! If the grace of Christ for *ALL* mankind is not the hope of these arrogant, then it can only be a human condition that they themselves have supplied. That is the arrogance of the religious. Take care! Arrogant rejection of grace of this kind is just the sin for which the fires of Hades burn.

Universalism + Free Will = One Very Strange Bird

The feedback I have received for my *Optimism Out of Control* thesis, even from objectors, has been extremely valuable. The hard questions of others have driven me to pray for God's leading and to God's word for confirmation of the good news that truly **Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind.**

THE MOST CURIOUS OBJECTION>> *However, of all the objections received the most curious is from those who also claim that all mankind is finally saved, yet who hold to man's free will, while objecting that God willed the salvation of all mankind by his gracious sovereign choice.*

ME>> Wow! I just do not get that. The great confidence we believers have that Christ will be finally victorious in the salvation of all mankind is rooted in the fact that the Godhead willed it to be -- in spite of our rebellion! God has prophesied in his Word that he will accomplish his mission to save of all his people. We can have great confidence that Jesus

Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind because GOD HAS WILLED IT TO BE! GOD'S WILL IS THE GUARANTEE THAT IT WILL HAPPEN!

I am happy to receive this good news as well as happy to part ways with traditions that place the security of salvation in the hands of human decision. There is no security in taking anything from God and putting it in the hand of man. This is the difference between mere pew sitting religion and true relationship with Christ.

Unfortunately, however, brokenness has followed us even into the fellowship of those concluding that Christ does in fact love all. As already mentioned, parting ways with tradition will likely land one in a miscellaneous bucket with some very unbiblical ideas. For example, I've encountered some holding to reincarnation as an alternative to Hades. How is this different from Hinduism which also believes Jesus is god and all will be saved? Yet Hebrews 9:27 says otherwise. I've encountered others who place more weight on human presupposition and tradition than the exegesis of Scripture. How is this different than any man-made religion? Jesus spoke directly about this in Mark 7:13. The most curious combination of all is to claim that all mankind will be finally saved... because of *time* plus the *free will* of man! God's offer of forgiveness, plus enough *time* is their winning salvation recipe. Where is the grace? Universalism plus the *free will* of man has got to be the strangest bird of all time.

Imagine a father with ten unruly children. Not one of the children wants to go to bed, yet the father has determined that it is bed time. So the father begins his work to round up the rowdy bunch. One is turned with a simple plea while another with persuasion. A third heads upstairs with a warning and yet another with a threat. Several more hold out and receive spankings and discipline of various sorts. One refuses to sleep even when forcibly placed in bed. The point is that without the father's intervention, no one wanted to go to bed. However, with degrees of intervention each eventually found himself in bed.

Alternatively, you could imagine a dad who sounded the bed time bell and all ten children neatly put themselves to bed while dad watched TV.... in your dreams!

Or if that illustration does not compute consider God as the quarterback throwing the football toward righteousness. Then Satan calls the next play, tempting Adam and Eve to intercept the football with the plan to run the ball toward the opposite goal... that is to be god themselves. Of course the whole game is all on God's sovereign football field so that He can send the Holy Spirit to tackle the rebel runners and recruit us to his own team. The point is that until the Holy Spirit tackles our deceived and unchanged hearts, we continue to run full speed away from God toward the goal line to be our own god.

The cross shows us in no uncertain terms that the unregenerate heart of mankind has no love for God. We are unruly children with no desire to rest in bed or pursue our Heavenly Father's goal line. No one who is unchanged will love God because we *cannot* love God without a changed heart. A change, that only God can effect, is needed in our hearts to enable us to begin to love the Lord. Furthermore, God has intended this by design so that he alone is praised as the savior of each individual and all mankind.

Perhaps Acts 4:27-28 (WEB) will help us

27) For truly, in this city against your holy servant, Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together 28) to do whatever your hand and your council foreordained to happen.

So yes, we make decisions. You or I may decide to go left or to go right. However, just because we make decisions does not mean that our will is free to love God! Instead our will is limited to decisions that proceed from our nature. A bear is a bear by nature and so behaves like a bear. Likewise an unregenerate sinner is a self-lover and God-hater by nature and even if filled with worlds of religion we still hate God. So in the case of Acts 4:27-28, all mankind, including ourselves by association, crucified the Lord Jesus Christ because we hate God by our nature. Our will was not free to Love God, but instead our unregenerate nature was exposed as hating God... to the death.

Furthermore, we also see that behind our will and decision to kill Christ was a more primary and powerful will. God himself ordained the crucifixion of Christ. God himself willed these terrible events! Why would the good God do such a thing? God purposed to expose our heart of sin for what it actually is: enmity toward God. He needed to do this so he could then conquer our hatred of him and heal us with his overwhelming love and grace.

Even if we consider the baseball diamond of salvation it is God's will that has won the game, not our own. On first base we see that God predestined his people to salvation from before the creation of the world. Human will was not involved at all in that decision, but only God's will. On second base we see that God chose to die on the cross, even though Peter and all our self-righteous pride refused the idea. Human will was not involved at all in that decision either, but only God's will. On third base we see that Jesus asked the Father to forgive us, even though no one was asking for forgiveness. Again human will was not involved at all in that decision, but only God's will. Finally, arriving at home-base we see that the Holy Spirit raised us from spiritual death to spiritual life. No one was willing or able to receive grace, but God makes each one willing at the time of his choosing. God hits the home run and freely wills to free our wills!

Rejoice that God has freely willed to begin, continue, and perfect our salvation!

What About the Unforgivable Sin?

ONE ASKED>> What about the unforgivable sin, the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit mentioned in Matthew 12:30-32, Mark 3:28-29, and Luke 12:8-10?

ME>> That is an excellent question. First read these verses in the WEB translation,

30) He who is not with me is against me, and he who doesn't gather with me, scatters. 31) Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. 32) Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, neither in this age, nor in that which is to come.

Matthew 12:30-32 (WEB)

28) Most certainly I tell you, all sins of the descendants of man will be forgiven, including their blasphemies with which they may blaspheme; 29) but whoever may blaspheme against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation.

Mark 3:28-29 (WEB)

8) I tell you, everyone who confesses me before men, the Son of Man will also confess before the angels of God; 9) but he who denies me in the presence of men will be denied in the presence of the angels of God. 10) Everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but those who blaspheme against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

Luke 12:8-10 (WEB)

These verses certainly communicate that there is a sin, the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, that is unforgivable. So it would seem that regardless of what someone believes about Hades being temporary or not, if this sin is not forgiven, then certainly you will not be saved from eternal damnation to the Lake of Fire if you commit the unforgivable sin.

So what is blasphemy of the Holy Spirit? One traditional answer can be found here, <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/bakers-evangelical-dictionary/blasphemy-against-the-holy-spirit.html>.

Since blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is not explicitly defined, most theologies work backwards from their conclusions about salvation. They use deductive reasoning to define blasphemy of the Holy Spirit as not satisfying their salvation formula. For example, since Calvinists understand that the elect are guaranteed final salvation, they conclude that whatever blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is, the elect of God can never commit this sin. This is a great hope for Calvinists, but only if you are also able to join them persuading yourself that you are elect while the majority of mankind is not elect.

Alternatively, Arminians conclude that since people are saved through their *free will* choice of "*faith*" in Christ, then the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit must be to resist the Spirit and not choose Christ with your *free will*. This is also a great hope for Arminians, but only if you are able to join them and have "*faith*" that your "*faith*" is truly authentic. So both Calvinist and Arminian thinkers have slightly different understandings of the blasphemy of the Spirit, but with the agreement that it is whatever does not satisfy their salvation formula.

Those holding to the Victorious Gospel view as I do could also use the same deductive reasoning as the Arminian and the Calvinist and conclude that the blasphemy of the Spirit is to be non-elect or to finally resist the Spirit and never place faith in Christ. Satan and his angels fit that description very well. So in fact I agree with both the Arminian and the Calvinist above! However, I also believe that all mankind is elect and that all mankind, thanks to the grace of God, will be transformed either sooner or later. So I could conclude in this way and at least match the reasoning of both the Arminian and the Calvinist above.

However, Young's Literal Translation of these verses offers further important insight. Young's work reveals that the proper translation of the Greek word "*aion*" is essential to understand the blasphemy of the Spirit and the resulting punishment for committing this sin. Read Young's translation...

He who is not with me is against me, and he who is not gathering with me, doth scatter. Because of this I say to you, all sin and evil speaking shall be forgiven to men, but the evil speaking of the Spirit shall not be forgiven to men. And whoever may speak a word against the Son of Man it shall be forgiven to him, but whoever may speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this age, nor in that which is coming.

Matthew 12:30-32 (YLT)

Verily I say to you, that all the sins shall be forgiven to the sons of men, and evil speakings with which they might speak evil, but whoever may speak evil in regard to the Holy Spirit hath not forgiveness -- to the age, but is in danger of age-during judgment;

Mark 3:28-29 (YLT)

And I say to you, Every one -- whoever may confess with me before men, the Son of Man also shall confess with him before the messengers of God, and he who hath denied me before men, shall be denied before the messengers of God, and every one whoever shall say a word to the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven to him, but to him who to the Holy Spirit did speak evil, it shall not be forgiven.

Luke 12:8-10 (YLT)

Consider these important observations:

1. The blasphemy of the Spirit is not explicitly defined which is why most salvation theologies work backwards from their own viewpoint to conclude that blasphemy of the Spirit is to miss their particular salvation recipe. This is not necessarily a wrong method of interpretation, but it is certainly biased.
2. The punishment for the blasphemy of the Spirit is not explained either, but only that this sin will not be forgiven. There is no explicit mention of Hades or the Lake of Fire. Many automatically think of these destinies when "*eternal sin*" is mentioned because it matches their viewpoint. However, could anything else be in view?
3. The WEB translation speaks of "*never*" being forgiven and "*eternal*" sin, while Young's translation does not! This is a very important difference that should inspire you and me to Greek study. Is blasphemy of the Spirit an eternal sin or not? Sadly we all have biases and preconceived ideas, even Bible translators. Further study of the Greek word "*aion*" may help. Please check out my article, *Forever is Not Forever? You Gotta Be Kidding Me!* The <http://www.blueletterbible.org> can also be used to examine each Greek word.
4. Jesus is teaching the same thing in all three passages, but the accounts in Matthew and Mark are the most complete, explaining that the blasphemy of the Spirit will not be forgiven in "*this age*" or the "*age to come*." When Jesus said those words what was "*this age*" and the "*age to come*?" Are there just two ages: now and eternity? If so, then blasphemy of the Spirit will land you in the Lake of Fire. However, there are not just two ages in the future when Jesus said those words. Jesus spoke during the Jewish law age ("*this age*" during his life), the church / Kingdom age follows, and eternity follows last of all.

Could it be that the popular idea that the blasphemy of the Spirit is an eternal sin is *wrong*? My conclusion based on the grace of Christ and a proper understanding of the Greek word "*aion*" as properly translated in Young's Literal Translation of the Bible is that, YES, this popular understanding is way wrong!

These verses teach that those who refuse to trust and obey Christ will not be forgiven for their unbelief in this present age, nor the age to come, meaning the Church / Kingdom Age. Their unrepentant unbelief will not be overlooked, but will be punished in the fires of Hades until the commencement of eternity at the Great White Throne Judgment. This also fits well with Revelation 20:5 (WEB), "***The rest of the dead didn't live until the thousand years were finished.***" However, since there is an age even after the "*age to come*," namely the New Heavens and the New Earth, forgiveness still can and will be realized at that time for everyone whose sins are paid for by the work of Christ. The good news is that Jesus has already paid for the sins of ALL mankind.

Hey this is awesome news because it is final salvation for you, me, and our neighbor!

What Harm is There in Believing that God Will Save All Mankind?

Another tentative reader asked...

READER>> What harm is there in believing that God will save all mankind? Why would any object? Why is this good news even questioned? Your Biblical arguments seem clear enough.

ME>> Thank you for this question. You appear to be intellectually persuaded that the Bible teaches the salvation of all mankind. You also appear to be attracted to the prospects of the good news. Yet perhaps your reluctance and uncertainty is due to the traditions that surround you?

Some Christian traditions object, or even strongly object, because they do not think the Bible teaches that God's grace will be victorious in the salvation of all mankind. Furthermore, they may be concerned that this understanding could cause people to miss their understanding of the salvation message and thus be damned forever. These are important and noble concerns and so the hard work remains to properly understand the Bible and the gospel of grace. Repentance also is needed to confess that Jesus alone is the Savior.

I urge you to build your faith on the person of Jesus Christ and the Scriptures themselves rather than the tradition that makes you feel comfortable. Examine the Scriptures and pray, asking God to give you confidence in his truth.

As for my answer to your question, certainly I do not think there is any harm at all in believing that God will save all mankind through the grace of Christ! I believe this is the Biblical message and the good news of God's grace! However, I caution you to consider another question.

What harm is there in NOT believing that God will save all mankind?

If you join the Calvinists and believe that God does not love all mankind, but in fact only loves a sub-set of human beings, can any harm come from that way of thinking? Yes, in fact great harm! This is just the type of blind hypocrisy that Christ came to defeat through confronting the Pharisees. The Pharisees believed they were God's chosen people while disregarding God's love for the gentiles. Jesus reserved his strongest rebuke for these people! I do not think you want to hear Jesus rebuke you in the same way. That is not a safe place to stand.

If you join the Arminians and believe that God has merely offered his love, conditioned on each individual's choice, can any harm come from that way of thinking? Again yes, in fact great harm! Redefining God's unconditional love to be conditioned upon the '*choice of faith*' undermines the invitation to trust that God has always loved you and your neighbor. Placing conditions on God's love perverts the Christian faith into just another pagan gentile religion of works. Jesus loved the Jews, the Greeks, and the Romans unconditionally, dying on the cross for all mankind. Trust in Jesus is confidence in his unconditional love. Trust is NOT a condition to his love! Please understand the difference. Christ was crucified once for all! Why crucify him again?

If you join those standing on the mystery in the middle of Arminianism and Calvinism, can any harm come from that way of thinking? Once again yes, in fact great harm! Mystery is hardly a safe place to stand for your own salvation or the salvation of your neighbor. Christ did not come to introduce confusion or mystery, but instead to reveal and explain the mystery of how our holy God could justify sinful man. The good and great news is that God the Son became a man, the second Adam, our vicarious substitute, to reconcile all mankind to God. The mystery is revealed in Christ. The Word of God promises confident knowledge of our salvation! Why obscure the good news with mysterious question marks?

Do you prefer the tradition that God does not love all? Do you prefer the tradition that God's love is conditional? Do you prefer mysterious question marks? The great harm of these understandings of "*faith*" is they fall short of Biblical hope in the Biblical Jesus. How can Jesus be pleased with this?

Look to Christ and his Word!

Why Do Some Go to Hell, Even if Temporarily?

Another reader asked...

READER>> Why do some go to Hell, even if temporarily? You say that only the Holy Spirit can lead people to faith and repentance. So then it is God himself who has determined to forgive all mankind from the cross in 33 A.D.. And it is the Holy Spirit who regenerates each individual at the time of his choosing to be born again and receive forgiveness. So then why would God allow any to go to Hades / Hell? Why wouldn't he end the suffering and bring everyone to faith immediately?

ME>> Thank you again for this excellent question. Confidence in God's unconditional love for all mankind defended from the Bible is a great blessing. Yet, now our questions about brokenness, pain, sin, and judgment become even more significant.

We might have stomachached these terrible things in the past, concluding that God simply does not love all, or that sinners are simply getting their just desserts, even eternal damnation. We might find comfort believing that the masses drowned in the flood were unrepentant sinners, outside of God's love, receiving their deserved judgment. Maybe there is comfort, but only if we forget that we are sinners just as they. We might think Ananias and Sapphira lost their lives because they really were not Christians in the first

place. Maybe that is comfort, but have we forgotten that God also disciplines Christians? We might try to comfort ourselves saying that Luke 16, the rich man punished in Hades, was not a true story, but a parable. Or we might comfort ourselves saying the rich man missed his last chance to repent and so God's offer of love is rescinded. Maybe there is comfort, if we ignore that fact that salvation is only possible through God's gracious choice. And how do we reconcile God's love for all mankind, considering the pain suffered by Cain and Abel, Noah's family and their generation, Pharaoh and enslaved Israel, King David and Uriah, Lazarus and the rich man, the early church and the destruction of Jerusalem, the murderer and the murdered, the rapist and the raped, the aborter and the aborted, the selfish and the starving?

Joy over God's unconditional love for all mankind seems extinguished by the reality of the world around us and the nether world beyond us.

Scripture may not answer your question directly. However, there is a solid answer concluded from our knowledge of our sinful nature apart from grace, our knowledge of God, and our knowledge of God's purpose in grace. Consider Ephesians 2:1-7 (WEB),

1) You were made alive when you were dead in transgressions and sins, 2) in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the children of disobedience. 3) We also all once lived among them in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. 4) But God, being rich in mercy, for his great love with which he loved us, 5) even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6) and raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7) that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus; 8) for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9) not of works, that no one would boast. 10) For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before that we would walk in them.

First we see that our sinful nature apart from grace is horribly described as,

you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the children of disobedience. 3) We also all once lived among them in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

Ephesians 2:2b-3 (WEB)

This horrible description is often worse than we want to admit for ourselves and others. We are tempted to ask "why do bad things happen to good people?" However, the answer is that bad things never happen to good people. There are no good people. Though of course not all pain suffered is the direct result of our own sin and there are innocent victims. Nonetheless, the description of our evil nature apart from grace still offends. We might be both offended and fearful to consider that sinful mankind and this broken world really do deserve to be thrown into the refuse heap of eternal damnation. The point is that apart from grace we are children of wrath by our birth nature. The point is that unregenerate man prefers the suffering of Hell in order to worship self rather than worship of Christ with comfort in paradise.

I challenge you to a dangerous mental exercise. Consider the sins that tempt you. Imagine committing them and taking them a step further. Take them another step further and imagine further temptations presented. Now imagine steps even further. Continue until you are able to see that your sinful nature and the sinful nature of all mankind are made of the same stuff as Hitler himself. Continue until you are able to see that your unbridled sinful nature raises its defiant high hand to malign God himself. Continue until you can confess that you would dethrone God to be your own god and the god of those around you if you could. Unless of course you claim that you are not guilty of the crucifixion of Christ along with all mankind. Before we boast that we know and love God we should be reminded that we crucified Christ.

So an accurate knowledge of our sinful nature apart from grace at least explains that sinful mankind deserves and even would prefer eternal damnation to worshipping Christ. So the pain suffered in this life or even temporary punishment in the next life is at least merited by our evil nature. So if any suffer in Hades after death, they certainly are not Christian brothers calling on God in repentance, but instead remain God haters by their birth nature. The unbelieving regret the pain, but they have no regrets for their continued unbelief and separation from God, even through Hades.

Scary as our sinful natures may be, thankfully this is only a tiny fraction of the whole equation. Yes, apart from grace the justice of God merits our eternal damnation. However, thankfully there is no "apart from grace" because the cross of Christ now demands mankind's salvation. Our Ephesians passage continues,

4) But God, being rich in mercy, for his great love with which he loved us, 5) even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6) and raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 2:4-6 (WEB)

Thankfully God is greater than our sin and he is a savior with no condemnation for sinful man. Our knowledge of God is the great hope of the gospel. The bad news of our sinful nature is only an introduction to the good and great news of the gospel. Ephesians 2:4 is the great contrast of the gospel, "**But God!**" We are terrible sinners by nature, "**But God!**" is a greater savior!

Okay, but why did God allow the brokenness, pain, sin, and judgment in the first place? Why does God allow it for another instant? Why does the Holy Spirit leave even one person unrepentant?

7) that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus;

Ephesians 2:7 (WEB)

God's purpose was and is to "**show the exceeding riches of his grace.**" God is showing off and demonstrating his grace in loving the unlovable and forgiving the unforgivable over time. He is working out our salvation and the demonstration of his patient grace over thousands of years. He could have allowed only an instant of sin, but instead he is showing off his amazing grace working with sinners over thousands of years. The unstained, perfectly pure, glorious holiness of God Almighty has determined to show off his grace muscles in the salvation of a world full and a history full of sinful mankind through the cross of Jesus Christ.

Thus we observe that God has specifically allowed every possible combination of circumstances to show off his grace. God has proved, is proving, and will prove that his grace is undefeated in every arena. Consider, that God has demonstrated grace before the law with Adam and Eve and during the law with Moses. God has demonstrated grace before the advent of Christ with Israel and after the advent of Christ with the Church. God has demonstrated grace with the believing and also with the unbelieving. Furthermore, God demonstrates grace toward both the living and the dead, even to the depth of Hades. God is exercising his grace in every square inch of this broken world so that his grace alone will be praised at the restoration of all things.

Naturally we still have questions about brokenness, pain, sin, and God's judgments in Hades. However, we also know that God's purpose is to demonstrate the victory of grace from the highest to the lowest places throughout his entire creation. For myself, my appetite and imagination are ready now for God's final display of grace and the complete erasure of the fall and the restoration of all things. Yet God still has further displays of his magnificent grace and patience with sinful man. So we glorify him, trust him, and wait patiently.

Why Evangelize?

MANY>> If all mankind is saved from the Lake of Fire why even evangelize?

ME>> That is an excellent question. We evangelize because...

1. We are commanded by Jesus to evangelize and make disciples.

Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you. Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.

Matthew 28:19-20 (WEB)

2. Paul commanded Philemon to share his faith so that he would grow in his understanding of grace.

I pray that the faith you share will make you understand every blessing we have in Christ

Philemon 6 (ESV)

3. Love for the lost ought to move us to seek the salvation of the lost sheep, the rebellious elect. Did you pour your heart into evangelism thinking you were adding names to the Lamb's Book of Life? Rather, evangelism and discipleship is purposed to save the unbelieving elect from hardened hearts and punishment in Hades.

14) For the love of Christ constrains us; because we judge thus, that one died for all, therefore all died. 15) He died for all, that those who live should no longer live to themselves, but to him who for their sakes died and rose again. 16) Therefore we know no one after the flesh from now on. Even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know him so no more. 17) Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new. 18) But all things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ, and gave to us the ministry of reconciliation; 19) namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not reckoning to them their trespasses, and having committed to us the word of reconciliation. 20) We are therefore ambassadors on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21) For him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

2 Corinthians 5:14-21 (WEB)

We appeal to the unbelieving to be reconciled to God because their self-righteous hearts are at enmity toward God and they will be punished in Hades unless they repent. Yet even though their hearts hate God, God loves both the believing and the unbelieving dearly. After all, the work of Christ has already fully atoned for their sin. The wrath of God is fully satisfied and he holds no eternal wrath toward any individual human -- ever! Again He loves both the believing and the unbelieving! Romans 5:10 also makes it very clear that the unbelieving are already reconciled to God... for God's part. The only thing remaining is for their hearts to be changed by receiving God's love.

For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we will be saved by his life.

Romans 5:10 (WEB)

Several people suggested that if all mankind is finally saved from the Lake of Fire then really there is no motivation or reason to be concerned about evangelism and discipleship. This is a sad testimony to a graceless understanding of God's love. I hope that I have answered your question and that you are motivated to tell your fellowman about the love of God.

Why Evangelize? Spiritual Warfare and Love for the Elect is Why!

Many continue to ask...

MANY>> If all mankind is saved from the Lake of Fire why even evangelize?

ME>> That is an excellent question.

Many do evangelism because they think that their efforts are adding people's names to the Lamb's Book of Life. We have already discussed that if predestination is true in any sense whatsoever, then each individual's final destiny cannot be effected in the least by even one human word or action. So then have I even talked myself out of any valid purpose for evangelism and disciple-making?

No!

Evangelism and discipleship cannot change any one's eternal destiny, *but* through God's sovereign hand, it will change one's life in this life and also during the intermediate states found in the nether world, Hades. Christians have a new heart toward their Heavenly Father and now love God. Non-Christians, however, continue with their sinful birth nature and only love themselves, while hating God and grace. Christians are promised paradise at death through sweet fellowship with God and all the deceased believers that have already left this world. Non-Christians, however, are sentenced to punishment in Hades for rejecting what is good, and in fact they have no desire for fellowship with God.

I mentioned this concept to an individual once and he remarked, *"If that is true we should just party and enjoy sin because we will all be saved eventually anyway."* That comment is very sad. Frankly, the only cure remaining for him may be to drink even more deeply of the sin he loves until he hits the floor. Friends, God is good, his commands are good, forgiveness is good, and grace is good. Sin, though it may entice with fleeting thrills, is *not* good, and will destroy our lives.

A deadly war is raging across the entire creation with Satan, the arch enemy of God, seeking to destroy God's people, mankind, through whatever means he can fabricate. Satan began with his lies to Adam and Eve in the garden and he continues to this very day with his lies everywhere.

Remember that Revelation 12:7 (WEB) says

There was war in the sky [heaven]. Michael and his angels made war on the dragon. The dragon and his angels made war.

Surprised? Heaven itself is soiled with Satan's rebellion and Satan has brought the battle to earth to enlist traitors here. Yet God commands his people to follow Christ and enlist in evangelism and discipleship to join the fight against Satan and his demons. Not convinced?

Ephesians 6:10-13 (WEB) EXPLICITLY says,

10) Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might. 11) Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12) For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world's rulers of the darkness of this age, and against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13) Therefore put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

The enemy is not flesh and blood. The enemy is not mankind. The enemy is not even unbelieving mankind. Instead our enemies are the powers of this dark world, the Devil and his demon army. So evangelism and discipleship are designed to fight the lies of Satan and teach mankind the truth about the love of God for all people. How do we fight against Satan and his lies? How do we begin? The recipe is simple.

Revelation 12:11 (WEB) says

They overcame him because of the Lamb's blood, and because of the word of their testimony. They didn't love their life, even to death.

Christ invites us to take up his cross and follow him to fight against the lies of Satan by giving our *everything* to testify that the blood of the Lamb has paid for the sins of all mankind! Will you join the fight? Or sit in your religious pew?

Why is 'Free Will' an offense to grace?

Another debater asked...

READER>> *I interpret your statement[s] to mean "That [believing in free will] is an offense to God in that it does a disservice of some sort to His grace." Why does it?*

ME>> Claiming that *free will* made a distinction between you and another rather than grace is not really a disservice to God's grace, for ultimately nothing interrupts God's service and purpose, even our unbelief. But instead it is a dishonoring of God and a prideful boast toward our fellowman.

Yet you ask a good question.

Why is belief in *free will* an offense to God? First, the Scriptures themselves specifically teach that attributing spiritual progress to anything but grace is contemptible in Romans 2:4 and boastful in 1 Corinthians 4:7. Second, I have also said that if we believe persuasion at the natural level of logic and argument is sufficient, then our evangelism will create victims rather than converts. We will neglect to pray asking God to provide the heart change that only he can provide. One might argue that we chose to pray because of our *free will* choice to obey. However, Paul gives the glory for all his effort to God in 1 Corinthians 15:10 and even our prayers as explained in Romans 8:26. Third, you have already admitted that there are no Scriptures that explicitly teach that man has a *free will*, but there are verses that teach that man is spiritually dead and must be regenerated by the Holy Spirit to be alive to God. Since this is the case, the question begs: why not humbly accept the Scriptures? Why the resistance? Stubborn pride, perhaps? Fourth, if I claim that my *free will* made the difference in my spiritual progress, I have a boast before my fellowman; but if I acknowledge that grace made the difference, I am God's servant to point others to the only hope for their healing, God himself. Furthermore, then God can answer for himself as to why he chooses to do this or that.

READER>> To my mind it is the Calvinist's perspective which does the disservice to God's grace by limiting it to a select few.

On that we totally agree, for God's love it not limited to a subset of mankind as Calvinists ignorantly teach.

READER>> or for the deterministic universalist, by rationing God's grace to a select few now and delaying His gift to a much later time for the others.

Yes, I can understand your concern. However, I have also said I do not like the negative connotation of the word "*deterministic*." The word ruins the artistry of what God is building and designing. Yet I also ask with you, why did God bring me to faith at age 18, others earlier, and even others later? Or why do many die in unbelief and suffer in Hades when God's grace could stem the tide? I do not like these facts either. However, it is what the Scriptures teach. So we could try to find an explanation that makes sense to human reason alone and helps us feel more comfortable, or we could give our lives to the Spirit's purposes and allow God to make his appeal through us as Paul did in 2 Corinthians 5:20 (WEB): **"We are therefore ambassadors on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."**

The mistake many make who reject God's sovereignty is imagining Him sitting in heaven pulling switches and using words like "*deterministic*" to describe his sovereign influence. This is a mistake that improperly characterizes the beautiful work of God's grace. God's sovereign grace is intimate and present and at work and when we obey his will then it is certain that he is at work through us for the good.

Wow! How Can You Be Ultra-Conservative and Ultra-Liberal?

Another Pastor asked

ANOTHER PASTOR>> Wow! How can you be both ultra-conservative and ultra-liberal?

ME>> You have just vindicated my entire life for Christ. Thank you!

American Christians, soaked in American culture, have adopted a simplistic two-party worldview. Just like American politics teeters between the labels of Democrat and Republican, so American Christians teeter between the labels of Liberal and Conservative. Labels can be useful. However, in this case the labels are neither sufficiently defined nor granular enough to encompass all the issues. The net result is the polarization of our nation and the polarization of the American church. In fact the current polarization could be compared to the division between the legalistic Jews and licentious gentiles of Jesus' day. The Jews could be compared with the conservative Republicans and conservative Christians of our day and the gentiles with the liberal Democrats and liberal Christians. This is a curious repetition of history.

The problem with conservatism is that it is not conservative enough, at least according to Jesus' standards. "*Conservatives*" find self-righteous pride in pointing out what is wrong and what is right. Meanwhile they do not live up to their own standards and especially not Jesus' standards. They (and we) sin daily! Read Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and you will see that his standard of right and wrong blows all of our hypocrisy out of the water and into plain view. Not one human being on the planet has met his standard of righteousness, **"Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect"** Matthew 5:48 (WEB). Jesus was ultra-conservative, with *perfect* righteousness.

Likewise the problem with liberalism is that it is not liberal enough according to Jesus' standards either. "*Liberals*" pride themselves on standing up for the minority and being the voice of all people. However, put their (and our) philosophy to the test and you will see that their altruism falls short with arbitrary lines in the sand. Read the gospels and you will see that Jesus' standard of inclusivity for the love he gave (not merely offered) is for every human being that ever lived for all time, from Cain to Abel and Hitler to Mother Theresa. Not one human being on the planet has matched his passionate love for even his enemies with the words, **"Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing"** Luke 23:34 (WEB). Jesus was ultra-liberal with grace and forgiveness, given to ALL mankind.

So with God's help I hope to praise the righteousness of Christ that exposes the utter sinfulness of all mankind, as well as praise the grace of Christ which brings salvation for all mankind. My words are nothing. Look to Jesus and you will see his righteousness and grace in perfect measure at his cross for you and all mankind!

As an aside, the message that the atonement has effectively paid for the sins of all mankind is not a "*liberal*" view, but in fact the Biblical view of the atonement. Contrary to Calvinism, Christ is glorified for his incarnation as the new federal head of ALL mankind, Romans 5:18. Contrary to Arminianism, Christ is glorified for his grace in the salvation of all mankind without any human condition, Romans 5:18. To say otherwise is to offend either the glory of his incarnation or his grace. To say otherwise is to divide the very body of Christ or to redefine faith to be a work rather than simply trust. To say otherwise is to leave the high ground of Christ, falling to the "*left*" or "*right*" with simplistic "*liberal*" or "*conservative*" thinking and debate.

Wow... so what do you really believe?

Others> Wow... so what do you really believe? If you have parted ways with contemporary orthodoxy, then what else have you parted with?

Me> Yes I have parted ways with both Arminianism and Calvinism. However, I hope that I have not unnecessarily parted ways with the thoughtful conclusions and hard-won discoveries of Christians through the ages. I seek to be a Christian, not a contrarian! Disagreement over one point, whether major or minor, is not reason to disagree carte blanche. For example, some claim that there is no punishment in Hell after death for the unbelieving because a God of love would never do such a thing. However, the Scripture plainly says otherwise in Luke 16:19-31. Others abandoned the Biblical doctrine of the Trinity to claim that God is one and only one person and became Unitarian Universalists. Sadly the Unitarian Universalist movement has lost all anchor to Scripture. They have abandoned the good conclusion that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three distinct persons, yet one God, Deuteronomy 6:4, Romans 9:5, Acts 5:3-4.

In short, I believe...

1. In one true God, existing eternally as one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, John 14:9-21, who is in essence spirit, John 4:24, light, 1 John 1:5, and love, 1 John 4:8.
2. That the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments are the unique, inerrant, inspired Word of God in the original autographs, and the final authority in all matters of faith and conduct, 2 Timothy 3:16.
3. In the sovereignty and active rule of God in creation, the fall, history, revelation, miracles, prophecy, redemption, and final judgment, Romans 8:20-21.
4. That man was created by God in His image, but that since Adam's fall, all men are sinful and by nature deserve God's wrath, Ephesians 2:3.
5. That Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, fully human and fully divine, eternally existing as God, yet born in time of a virgin, and that He lived a sinless and perfect life, 2 Timothy 2:5.
6. In the historic death of Jesus as the full and only atonement, guaranteeing loving forgiveness for the sins of all mankind, in His bodily resurrection from the dead, and in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, 1 John 2:1-2.
7. That all mankind is justified by the loving grace of God and redeemed on the basis of the death of Christ, which is received through faith, Ephesians 2:8-9.
8. That the Holy Spirit is the effective agent in regeneration, bringing individuals to faith and transformed lives, 2 Corinthians 3:18.
9. In one universal church, Christ's Body, to which all believers belong, and in particular churches accountable to God, led by elders who rule in doctrine and discipline, while acknowledging individual conscience, 1 Timothy 5:17, 1 John 2:27.
10. That believing mankind is rewarded in paradise after death, while unbelievers suffer punishment in Hades after death merited by their sinful nature and their rejection of the grace of Christ, Luke 16:19-31.
11. In the future, visible, physical return of the Lord Jesus Christ in glory, Titus 2:13.
12. In the final resurrection of redeemed mankind to the enjoyment of God forever, and the damnation of those excluded from the Book of Life to the Lake of Fire prepared for the Devil and his angels for the ages of the ages, Matthew 25:31-46 and Revelation 20:10.

Curiously it is rare to find a Christian that says they are 100% Calvinist or 100% Arminian. Most Christians find some dispute with these theologies and so find an alternative compromise. Yet will most Christians be willing to seriously consider the creed above as I have defended from the Scripture? Will you return with me to the historic faith and Biblical gospel that Christ is the Savior of all mankind?

Yes, but Even Harder Questions!

SELF>> After lengthy discussion with others and reading various books, I have found that there is quite a range of thought even among Christian Universalists. In fact, sadly, the divisions between them in faith and fellowship might even be deeper than between those of traditional Christianity. Most Christian Universalists have observed, as I, that the Greek word "aion" is at times wrongly translated "eternal" in the English Bible. Some are silent about the salvation of fallen angels, while others have concluded that even Satan will be saved, to which I am not persuaded. Most have respected and protected inspiration and strove for reasonable interpretation of the given Word, but some have even violated the Holy Spirit suggesting that difficult verses are better explained as human error. Many have even further differences of various natures, no doubt influenced by the varied traditions and experience from which they came.

Through this study a number of additional questions have come to mind. None of the questions raised have changed my certain position that Jesus is the Savior of all mankind. Yet the questions are very interesting to consider with some of them pertaining to the primary point, while others are secondary.

ME>> Questions and answers follow.

1. When did Satan and his demons fall into sin?

Did Satan and his angels begin their rebellion before Day 1, during Day 1-7, or after Day 7? Having been schooled in the 7 day creation camp I would have quickly said sometime during or after Day 1-7. However, Ernst Stroeter argues in his book *The Gospel of God's Reconciliation of All in Christ* that Genesis 1:1-2 is better interpreted to mean God first created out of nothing and then the Earth became formless. Stroeter speculates that the initial creation and rebellion of Satan took place in the first two verses of the Bible over an unspecified age. In his favor, Job 38:6-7 suggests that the angels, "*sons of God*," were an audience to creation. So perhaps Days 1 to 7 are the beginning of God creating a home for mankind from the wasteland remaining after Satan's rebellion. Stroeter's view gives us pause to recognize that God has been working his plans out over long periods of time, from age to age. Was there an age of angels and Satan's rebellion in Genesis 1:1-2? Job 38:4 (WEB) ought to keep all of us from dogmatism on this point, "***Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if you have understanding.***" Really the question is a sidebar compared to our larger question of Arminianism and Calvinism versus the Gospel.

2. Where is the place "*Tartaroo*," mentioned in 2 Peter 2:4?

Tartaroo means to "***throw down to Tartarus***," a place of punishment deeper and more severe than *Hades* in Greek mythology as explained here <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tartarus>. Does the Holy Spirit then believe in Greek mythology? Hardly. Instead, the Holy Spirit apparently is distinguishing between punishment in *Hades* versus *Tartarus* using terms familiar to his audience, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hades>. Both these locations are in the netherworld after death beyond the vision of the living. Why would the Holy Spirit reference Greek mythology? *Tartaroo* is mentioned only one time in all of Scripture with only fallen angels mentioned as being held there for future judgment. I suggest that the reason the Holy Spirit uses the terms of *Hades* and *Tartarus* is to highlight the radical differences of these two places. They differ in the severity of their punishments as well as the nature and destinies of their inhabitants.

Unbelieving humans, creatures made in God's image and redeemed by the blood of Christ, are punished in *Hades*, Luke 16:23. Yet mercy is extended to them even there, 1 Peter 4:6. And most importantly final salvation is graciously given, Matthew 25:40,46 and Revelation 20:14-15. However, some fallen angels, powerful creatures, that God does not help, Hebrews 2:16, are already held in *Tartarus* for future judgment because of the grave nature of their sin, and they will be sentenced to the Lake of Fire for *The Ages of The Ages* according to Matthew 25:41,46, Jude 6, and Revelation 20:10.

This observation, if correct, may serve to help those who are confident that all mankind is finally saved, but who wrongly conclude that even human beings are sentenced to the Lake of Fire. The Scripture is clear that the Lake of Fire is explicitly "***prepared for the devil and his angels***" Matthew 25:41 (WEB). The Lake of Fire is not prepared for human beings!

3. When is the Sheep and Goat judgment of Matthew 25:31-46?

The answer to this question is a significant component of my proposed model of understanding. I have proposed that Matthew 25:31-46, Daniel 12:1-4, and Revelation 20:11-15 are all the same event: The Great White Throne Judgment. The book of Revelation explains that The Great White Throne Judgment is just before the commencement of the New Heavens and the New Earth. Matthew 25:31 (WEB) also says, "***But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory.***" So Matthew 25:31 certainly seems parallel with Revelation 20:11. Other possible timings for Matthew 25:31 could include God's judgment on the Jews in 70 A.D. or a judgment that is working itself out through the Christian era.

If the Sheep and Goat judgment is not The Great White Throne Judgment, then it would seem that the Sheep and Goat Judgment comes first. If so that could allow one to conclude that the subjects at the Sheep and Goat Judgment are all human and that the Goats, if they are unbelieving humans, are being sent to an eon of punishment in Hades. Thus, they could still be saved at the Great White Throne Judgment afterward. However, the "***Throne of his glory***" language strongly suggests that the Sheep and Goat judgment is equal to The Great White Throne Judgment. There is a strong sense of finality to this judgment. Also Matthew 25:41 says "***aionian fire.***" This does not sound like Hades, but instead the Lake of Fire at The Great White Throne Judgment. Most Christian Universalists argue that "*aionian*" is temporal even in this case. They are motivated to make "*aion*" mean temporal even in this case because they think the "*ethnos*" is human only, therefore unbelievers must be released from the Lake of Fire sometime beyond the end of Scripture. However, I think the better understanding is that human beings never go to the Lake of Fire in the first place because it is "***prepared for the devil and his angels.***" This understanding also acknowledges many who object to Christian Universalism saying that the parallel construct of Matthew 25:46 cannot be divided into both "eternal life" and "temporal punishment." These objectors make an important point. We should all acknowledge that "*aion*" means the duration of the subject in view. When Hades is in view, the "*aion*" is an age. However, when God is in view, "*aion*" is eternal. In this case the subject in view is the Lake of Fire, which has no explicit end as far as the

revealed Word of God. But again, this better understanding is aided by the observation that fallen angels are the Goats on the left to be cast into the Lake of Fire. Furthermore, Matthew says that Christ will "sit" on his throne. This is the picture of a king who has conquered and finished his work. Hebrews 1:3 tells us that Christ "sat down" after finishing his work of redemption. Hebrews 10:13 tells us his enemies will be made a footstool. In Matthew 25 and Revelation 20 Christ will "sit" on his glorious throne to judge and complete the footstool!

Daniel 12:1b (WEB) is also noteworthy when Michael tells Daniel, **"...Your people will be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book."** Who is **"your people?"** Many think that Daniel's people are believing mankind and the unbelieving are not his people. However, since the man saying these words is Michael, the Archangel, it is much more likely that Michael is recognizing Daniel as a leader of humanity. Thus **"Your people"** is all mankind in contrast to the people of Michael, the angel kind.

Furthermore, since the Bible is God's message of hope to his people, it would seem very odd to me if human beings were still undergoing punishment at the end of the Bible, much less in the Lake of Fire which is prepared for the Devil and his angels. Instead Christian reason based on the grace of God and our Biblical evidence leans heavily on the side that punishment for all mankind, whether believing or unbelieving, ends with the emptying of Hades. Revelation 20:15 makes it clear that the fate of those standing before The Great White Throne is determined solely by the Lamb's Book of Life. Those not named are cast into the Lake of Fire, and inversely those who are named are finally saved. I proved this further in my article, [Revelation 20:11-15](#). So can human action add our names to this book? Hardly. Our names have been written there from before the creation of the world, Ephesians 1:4! Only through faith in the grace of Christ can you be persuaded of this good news. 1 Corinthians 15:55 (WEB) shouts the same hope saying, **"Death, where is your sting? Hades, where is your victory?"**

The timing of Matthew 25:31-46 is also significant because I propose that fallen angels will be judged at this event and that they are in fact the Goats on Jesus' left. So will fallen angels really be there? Let's turn to that question next.

4. When will fallen angels be judged?

I have frequently referenced 2 Peter 2:4 (WEB) which says, **"For if God didn't spare angels when they sinned, but cast them down to Tartarus, and committed them to pits of darkness to be reserved for judgment."** The key point to note is that these angels are being **"reserved for judgment."** They are in Tartarus now, but they will be escorted to stand before Christ for judgment. When will this happen? The answer is in Jude 6 (WEB), **"Angels who didn't keep their first domain, but deserted their own dwelling place, he has kept in everlasting bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day."** The imprisoned fallen angels of Tartarus will stand before the Lord for Judgment on the Great Day. When is the Great Day? Friends, everything points to The Great White Throne Judgment! On that Great Day unbelieving mankind will be safely extracted from their eon of punishment in Hades and the imprisoned fallen angels will be extracted from Tartarus to stand before King Jesus. Matthew 25:31-46, Daniel 12:1-4, and Revelation 20:11-15 tell the rest of the story.

5. Will fallen angels be finally saved?

Thus far I have shown that fallen angels, demons that is, are being held for judgment and that they will be judged on that Great Day. I have concluded that this Great Day is the Sheep and Goat Judgment also called The Great White Throne Judgment. Yet, a number of Universalists propose that Christ's reconciliation of all includes the final reconciliation of fallen angels, the demons and even Satan himself. Their conclusion is based on the "all" of Colossians 1:20. Furthermore, since some think that human beings are sentenced to the Lake of Fire and yet finally saved, then perhaps fallen angels will also be finally saved. However, there may be a better answer.

Colossians 1:20 (WEB) does say, **"and through him to reconcile ALL things to himself by him, whether things on the earth or things in the heavens, having made peace through the blood of his cross."**

However, consider a few more verses concerning the judgment of fallen angels.

Genesis 3:15b (NIV), **"...he will CRUSH your head..."**

Matthew 25:41 & 46a (WEB), **"Then he will say also to those on the left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire which is PREPARED FOR THE DEVIL AND HIS ANGELS.'" and "These will go away to eternal [aionian] punishment..."**

Hebrews 2:16 (WEB), **"For most certainly, he DOESN'T GIVE HELP TO ANGELS, but he gives help to the offspring of Abraham."**

2 Peter 2:4 (WEB), **"For if God didn't spare angels when they sinned, but cast them down to Tartarus, and committed them to pits of darkness to be RESERVED FOR**

JUDGMENT."

Jude 6 (WEB), "**Angels who didn't keep their first domain, but deserted their own dwelling place, he has kept in everlasting bonds under darkness for the JUDGMENT OF THE GREAT DAY.**"

Revelation 20:10 (WEB), "**The devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet are also. They will be tormented day and night forever and ever [THE AGES OF THE AGES].**"

Revelation 21:8 (WEB), "**But for the cowardly, unbelieving, sinners, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, THEIR part is in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.**"

Revelation 21:8 cannot be speaking of all sinners, but only those whose names are *not* in the Lamb's Book of Life. If it is speaking of all sinners then *no one* could be saved, ever, because we have all committed these sins and still commit them. Instead this verse is speaking of those who have committed these sins and whose sins are *not* redeemed, the Devil and his angels. I have explained this further in my article, [How Can You Say Revelation 21:8 Does Not Apply to Humans?](#)

First, the greatest joy of my wrestling match with grace was to learn that God is the redeemer of all mankind. Hopefully more and more people change their minds to rest fully in God's love for all human beings. There is work enough to be done to persuade our fellowman to let go of their religion and recognize the serious errors in tradition and the mistranslation of "*aion*." There is work enough to be done to persuade our fellowman that they are truly loved by God, their sins are paid, and it is now impossible for us to be eternally damned.

Paul's great hope for himself, the church, and mankind is climaxed in 1 Corinthians 15:55 (WEB), "**Death, where is your sting? Hades, where is your victory?**" This points directly to the end of death for mankind and the safe release of those punished in Hades. Unbelieving mankind then finally receives grace at The Great White Throne Judgment. The Bible rings with the message of God's love for mankind. Rejoice!!!

So are Satan and his angels finally saved? The whole force of the Bible message is the history of the redemption of mankind, those created in the image of God and redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. The pages of Scripture end with the Devil and his angels tormented in the Lake of Fire for "*The Ages of The Ages*." Satan really is an enemy quite beyond our strength. His fall was designed to serve God's purpose, the demonstration of grace to us, his people. There is a relevant parallel I have proposed between God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit versus Satan, The Beast, and The False Prophet that may further help us understand God's purpose. Read about it in my article, [Revelation 20:10](#). So does the "*all*" of Colossians 1:20 include Satan? Is there an end to "*The Ages of The Ages*?" That is in God's hands.

6. Can fallen angels be "resurrected," or enter the "second death?"

Some have argued that since angels are spirit beings and cannot die, they cannot be resurrected or enter a second death. If they did not die a first time, how can they die a second time? Good question. I have noted elsewhere that some believe that fallen angels did live embodied on the earth during the time of Noah. It is suggested that their terrible sin in Genesis 6 precipitated the flood. These may be the wicked angels under discussion in 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6. If that is the case then this objection about angel resurrection and second death is easily answered. These wicked angels did live and die in the body and they will be raised for final judgment. We should also note that that Holy Spirit says in Matthew 25:32 that all the "*ethnos*" are "*assembled*" or "*gathered*" before Him. This language certainly accommodates both the retrieval of all his subjects whether from Hades or Tartarus. Revelation 20:11-15, however, uses the language of retrieving the "*dead*" from the sea [Thalassa] and Hades. Perhaps the demons in Tartarus did live embodied on the earth and so it is fair to refer to them as the "*dead*" in Tartarus. Or perhaps the "*dead*" is only explicit mention of the human beings in Hades and the fallen angels in Tartarus are only implied. Either way, Jude 6 makes it clear that these fallen angels will be present to give account and receive their sentence to the Lake of Fire on that Great Day when they enter the "*second death*." Furthermore, you are right that the Lake of Fire is the "*second death*." However, you can see that the Bible plainly says that Satan and his angels are sent there. So whether it is fair to say that angels can die or be resurrected I cannot say. However, we can say that Satan and his angels are sent to the "*second death*." Read even more convincing proofs in my article, [Fallen Angels at the Great White Throne Judgment](#). Revelation 20:13 does in fact say that the inhabitants of Tartarus will be raised from the dead!

7. How long will unbelieving mankind suffer in Hades?

Biblical Christianity does teach that even though unbelievers are punished in Hades that in the end all mankind will be finally saved. However, we might also ask how long will unbelievers be punished in Hades? Will they all be in agony the entire time until released at The Great White Throne Judgment? That is a long time! I have suggested elsewhere that Hades is a fit punishment for the unregenerate and that there will be no early exit or any exit at all until the grace of God opens the gate. Hades should not be viewed as the

punishment of good people who love God, but instead the punishment of unregenerate people who hate God. Of course it would be very foolish to disregard Christ and make plans to suffer in Hades expecting to be saved eventually. If anyone will suffer the entire duration of Hades it would certainly be the one with a *"Who cares about Christ, send me to Hell"* attitude. However, this is enough of my speculation. Let's consider the few Scriptures that speak to the subject.

Psalm 139:8 (WEB), ***" If I ascend up into heaven, you are there. If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, you are there!"*** Foremost we see that David understood that God's caring love continues even for those punished in Hades.

Luke 16:24-26 (WEB),

24) He cried and said, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue! For I am in anguish in this flame." 25) But Abraham said, "Son, remember that you, in your lifetime, received your good things, and Lazarus, in the same way, bad things. But here he is now comforted, and you are in anguish. 26) Besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, that those who want to pass from here to you are not able, and that no one may cross over from there to us."

The agony of Hades will be great. Plus, the gulf fixed between the punishments of Hades and Paradise cannot be spanned with human effort.

Matthew 16:17-19 (WEB),

17) Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. 18) I also tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my assembly, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. 19) I will give to you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven; and whatever you release on earth will have been released in heaven."

Curiously Jesus seems to assign some role of forgiveness to the church in the realms of both Heaven and Earth.

1 Peter 3:18-19, 4:5-6 (WEB),

18) Because Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring you to God, being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the Spirit, 19) in whom he also went and preached to the spirits in prison,... 5) They will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. 6) For to this end the Good News was preached even to the dead, that they might be judged indeed as men in the flesh, but live as to God in the spirit.

Even more significantly Jesus preached the good news personally to the wicked dead so that they could ***"live as to God in the spirit."*** Wow, what does that mean?

1 Thessalonians 4:14-17 (WEB),

14) For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. 15) For this we tell you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will in no way precede those who have fallen asleep. 16) For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with God's trumpet. The dead in Christ will rise first, 17) then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. So we will be with the Lord forever. 18) Therefore comfort one another with these words.

Clearly the deceased Christians are raised to life first, but what about the deceased unbelievers, the wicked dead?

Revelation 20:5 (WEB), ***"The rest of the dead didn't live until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection."*** The deceased unbelievers are not raised to life until the Great White Throne Judgment. So are they in agony for the entire duration in Hades from now until the end? The verses above confirm that God loves and cares for mankind even in Hades and that according to 1 Peter 4:5-6 even conversion might be possible in Hades.

Matthew 25:37-40 (WEB),

37) Then the righteous will answer him, saying, "Lord, when did we see you hungry, and feed you; or thirsty, and give you a drink? 38) When did we see you as a stranger, and take you in; or naked, and clothe you? 39) When did we see you sick, or in prison, and come to you?" 40) The King will answer them, "Most certainly I tell you, because you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me."

I have suggested elsewhere that the surprise of these righteous, the sheep on Jesus' right, about their salvation does not sound like those who are already Christians. Christians have already been reigning with Christ. We would not have questions like these people! Instead these are unbelieving mankind just released from Hades, incredulous over God's grace, and now believing!

Protestants have recoiled from Catholic and other speculation about the afterlife and typically have over-simplified afterlife analysis to death, judgment, and the destiny of Heaven or Hell. Certainly I would agree that Hades is quite unlike Catholic notions of Purgatory. Catholics have speculated beyond the Scriptures. Yet Protestants have likewise overlooked some valuable Biblical data. So what can we conclude from the above verses? I am convinced that God loves all mankind, even the unbelieving punished in Hades. I am also convinced that we should avoid speculation beyond the Scriptures. We should also avoid denial of the information given to us in Scriptures. The point from even one verse of Scripture is truly spoken, no matter how small it may appear.

8. Is salvation through a "limited atonement" of Christ possible?

Alternative to the Victorious Gospel, others add up the Scripture to say that Christ's atonement is limited and purposed for only a small subset of humanity. Those humans that Christ did not die for are then sentenced with the Devil and his angels to the Lake of Fire for eternity. Friends, I have worked as hard as possible to remain faithful to the whole of Scripture to understand the things Jesus has revealed to us about the future of salvation. While error, no doubt, will be found in my reasoning and Scripture reference, to say that Christ did not die for all mankind is a blatant abuse of Scripture, the Incarnation, and the Atonement. The "L" of T.U.L.I.P. as understood by John Calvin is a heresy and corruption of the very gospel of Jesus Christ. We might possibly say, the atonement is limited, it is limited to ALL mankind, and NOT extended to fallen angels. Yet if you reject Christ through adhering to a supposed "*limited atonement*," apparently you are not elected to believe the truth and apparently are not his sheep.

9. Is salvation of a subset by 'free will' faith in Christ possible?

Again, alternative to the Victorious Gospel, others say that Christ did die for all mankind to make the *offer* of forgiveness available for everyone to receive it by their *free will* choice of faith in Christ. Now this false gospel instead strikes at the heart of the definitions of "*grace*" and "*faith*." The Bible defines God's grace as his unmerited favor, his prior love of his enemies, and his reconciliation of mankind prior to our faith. The point is that grace is not an offer, but it is *already given* to his chosen people. To say otherwise is to add human condition to the unconditional love of God. To say otherwise is to trade Christianity for religion. The Christian faith is to simply trust, to believe, that Christ has in fact paid for our sins, and be changed -- period. There is nothing potential about Christ's work on the cross, but instead it is the greatest achievement! He said "*It is finished*." The sin debt of mankind is paid! Man's will is certainly not free to determine whether or not our sins are paid. I say again, man's will is certainly not free to determine whether or not our sins are paid. Our sin debt is paid! Again if you reject Christian faith in favor of *free will*, apparently you are also not elected to simply believe and apparently are not his sheep.

10. Are there "effective" and "ineffective" parts of the Atonement?

Regular Baptist theology says that Christ died for all mankind in one dimension, but for only a subset of mankind in another dimension. The Arminian and the Calvinist above offer a simple view that either Christ died for all or that he did not die for all. The Scripture, however, makes it plain that Christ died for all mankind, yet not all are saved from punishment after death. So the Regular Baptist explains this apparent conundrum by suggesting that the atonement has both "*effective*" and "*ineffective*" components. They say that Christ died for all in one sense, but this sense is "*ineffective*" to finally save. However, in another sense he died only for believers, and this sense is "*effective*" when combined with the human condition of "*faith*." They say that God's love is unconditional for all, but the condition of faith is needed for God's love to be effective for the saved. They say that the believer's decision to trust Christ then applies the blood of Christ to their account. Stop! Consider the concept of applying the blood of sacrifice for a moment. Under the Old Covenant, the priests killed the animal of sacrifice and then applied, smeared the blood on the altar for the forgiveness of their sins. So are Christians like priests of the Old Covenant both killing Christ on the altar and then applying his blood to our own sins? God forbid! The very thought is the greatest offense to grace and the New Covenant. Christ is our great high priest who *offered himself* and *applied his own blood* to our sin for our forgiveness. The heart of the New Covenant is that Christ is the better priest who accomplished everything for us -- apart from any condition that we could ever provide.

Hebrews 10:9-14 (WEB),

9) Then he has said, "Behold, I have come to do your will." He takes away the first, that he may establish the second, 10) by which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. 11) Every priest indeed stands day by day serving and often offering the same sacrifices which can never take away sins, 12) but he, when he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God, 13) from that time waiting until his enemies are made the footstool of his feet. 14) For by one offering he has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

Friend, you can try to be your own priest or you can simply trust that Jesus Christ has accomplished the salvation of his people forever with **"one offering."**

You Are a Heretical Pope Pronouncing Salvation Without Faith!

OBJECTOR>> You Are a Heretical Pope Pronouncing Salvation Without Faith!

ME>> Just to be clear there will be no one in Heaven without faith in Christ or without love for God and mankind. Heaven is the eternal home of the glorified redeemed people of God. There will be no death, sin, mourning, crying, pain, or unbelief! Instead there will be life, perfection, joy, celebration, health, and unwavering trust. There will be unending love from God to us and from us to God and each other. There will be eternal praise and worship by every single inhabitant of Heaven for Jesus, our humble savior, King of Kings, God Almighty!

The confusion is simply this. Many have been led astray to believe that their *choice* of faith in Christ is the condition to God's unconditional love. Friends, faith is not the condition to God's love, but instead faith is trust in his unconditional love! Modern *"evangelical"* heresy has redefined *"faith"* to be the ticket to Heaven that you provide. This twisted gospel has taken the spotlight off of Christ and his gracious decision and focused it on man and our decision. The Scriptures proclaim that Christ will be exalted as the gracious savior of every individual and ALL mankind. Christ will be exalted, not human will!

Christian faith of course is a decision, but it is the decision trust that Christ loved us before we loved him, in fact while we hated God. It is the decision to believe that Christ chose to die on the cross in our place, even though we chose to crucify him. It is the decision to receive the gift of forgiveness already given, instead of begging for forgiveness. It is the decision to know that our eternal destiny is not in jeopardy or conditioned on our choices, but instead it is secure and guaranteed through the choice that Christ already made at the cross. It is the decision to know by faith that we were chosen for grace before the creation of the world. Our faith certainly did not *cause* that, but instead faith enables us to see this good news. Faith, properly defined, is our decision to live a life trusting that Christ already gave us his eternal love at the cross. Our decision does not change God's heart for us, but it certainly does change our hearts for God. Have you made the decision to believe? I pray that you have! Friends, it is a simple decision, though no one will decide without the touch from the Holy Spirit.

And if you do trust Christ, then you must also see that Jesus also loves all mankind, even those who have not yet trusted him. Just as Christ loved you and guaranteed your destiny before you believed, so he also loves all mankind and has guaranteed their happy destiny. Faith never changed anyone's eternal destiny, but instead it changes our hearts and opens our eyes to see our wonderful destiny from God. Faith is not your personal ticket to Heaven, but instead faith is eyes opened to see our Heavenly Father's love and his eternal happy home given to all his people!

You still might accuse me of saying that Heaven is guaranteed even for the unbelieving. In my defense the Scriptures do say concerning the unbelieving, ***"For what if some were without faith? Will their lack of faith nullify the faithfulness of God? May it never be! Yes, let God be found true, but every man a liar. As it is written, 'That you might be justified in your words, and might PREVAIL when you come into judgment' "*** (Romans 3:3-4 WEB) and also ***"For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable"*** (Romans 11:29 WEB). Even so, just to be clear my position properly stated is that ONLY believers will ever gain entrance to Heaven. It just happens I also believe it will be IMPOSSIBLE for even one human being to pass through the final judgment of Jesus Christ without an immediate wholehearted response of faith and worship. The Great White Throne Judgment will be the happiest surprise for the Sheep on Jesus' right. Read the account yourself in Matthew 25:31-46 and Revelation 20:11-15.

Who are the Sheep on Jesus' right? Obviously they are not Christians! Christians would not evidence the surprise of these people over their salvation! Christians already believe and have confidence in our salvation through Jesus Christ. At this point in the story we Christians already had our joyful reunion with Christ raptured in the air! Do you think we will face doubt and judgment at the Great White Throne after that? Instead, Revelation 20:11-15 and Jude 6 make it plain that the wicked dead human beings are finally extracted from Hades and the imprisoned fallen angels held for judgment are extracted from Thalaasa to stand before the Great White Throne Judgment. The Sheep on Jesus' right are the wicked dead human beings, now finally with eyes opened to see their savior and receive grace. The Goats on Jesus' left, however, are the demons now finally sentenced to the Lake of Fire for The Ages of The Ages as explicitly stated in Matthew 25:41 and Revelation 20:10,15.

Furthermore, this is not a second chance salvation! Instead the gracious God of the Universe will one day determine that the time for mankind's unbelief, pain, and punishment is

officially and finally over! Praise God! Presently, most of mankind creeps along through this life with eyes lifted no higher than the mud that we crawl through. However, on that Great Day the Lord of Glory will lay the earth bare, roll up the Universe like a tattered cloth, and empty even the depths of Hell itself. While unbelievers stumble like blind men now, there will be no veil between us and Christ on that day. Nor will there be any trace of unbelief among God's people standing in front of the Lord in all his Glory. Because of grace alone, Christ will read the roll call from the Book of Life and find the name of EVERY human being penned with the ink from his own veins and purchased from before the creation of the world. The God of all grace will be finally and fully revealed in blazing glory to ALL his chosen people, that is ALL mankind, and worshiped by ALL!

I am certainly not a Pope. However, you will have to decide whether it is heretical to believe that Jesus signed, sealed, and delivered salvation for ALL mankind at his cross when he breathed his last and said, "**It is finished.**" Friends, you can believe now or believe then for there is no escape from the love of Jesus Christ and his victory!

You Are Wrong About Matthew 25:31-46!

One unconvinced reader said...

READER>> Your understanding of [Matthew 25:31-46](#) is wrong. The passage is saying that those on the left of Jesus will be punished WITH the Devil and his angels in the Lake of Fire. Whereas you are saying that those on his left ARE the Devil and his angels.

ME>> First you correctly understand my view. Thank you for that. I do believe the passage is best understood in the context of the whole of Scripture that those on Jesus' left, those cast into the Lake of Fire, are the Devil and his angels. Now I will be the first to admit that there are some curious facets to this understanding.

1) We most naturally assume that when Jesus gathers the nations before him that he is talking about only human beings and human nations. The Greek word "*ethnos*" is used in the Bible to mean "*a multitude of individuals of the same nature or genus, for example the human family.*" Thus when he divides the people into their categories of sheep and goats, we naturally conclude that some humans are sheep while the remainder are goats. It appears that only *part* of humanity is saved from the Lake of Fire while the rest are eternally lost. Arminians and Calvinists both agree on this point, though they disagree as to *how* people are saved.

However, do not too quickly conclude that "*ethnos*" mean human "*ethnic*" groups. It should be noted that the meaning of the word "*ethnos*" is also used to mean "*the people, in contrast to their king.*" The first denotation in the Vines dictionary also indicates, "*a multitude (whether of men or of beasts) associated or living together: a company, troop, swarm.*" I would suggest that at the Sheep and Goat Judgment these alternate denotations are closer to the mark. In fact we can be certain of this because 2 Peter 2:4 makes it plain that some angels are imprisoned now being held for future judgment. Jude 6 and Revelation 20:11-15 also make it plain that angels will be extracted from Tartarus / Thalassa to stand before the Great White Throne at final judgment.

King Jesus will summon *all* his subjects before him for final judgment and this includes both human and angelic people. We humans often neglect to consider Jesus' angelic subjects because they are most often invisible to us. However, angels are also people subject to King Jesus and will likewise stand before his judgment throne. What word other than "*ethnos*" would the Holy Spirit use to identify a mixed body of his subjects that includes both human and fallen angelic people? "*Ethnos*" is the word he chooses! The bad news for fallen angels is that they do not have a vicarious substitute for the condemnation they must receive. The good news for us is that Jesus became a human and so his work of atonement applies to all humans.

2) You say that in Matthew 25:41 Jesus says to human beings about to be damned that they will be sentenced *with* the Devil and his angels to Eternal Fire. I will concede that the sentence structure is odd and lends to your view. Why would Jesus use the demonstrative pronoun first and the proper name second? Typically, for clarity, the proper noun is first and the pronoun second. Consider three possible explanations.

First, the Holy Spirit may have allowed an awkward construct to parallel the structure of verse 34. Second, perhaps the phrase "***which is prepared for the devil and his angels***" is better understood not as a quote to the unredeemed, but as an explanation to the redeemed. Third, with Satan already damned to the Lake of Fire and his demons arraigned on Jesus' left, perhaps Matthew 25:41 is not awkward at all. Read my article [Your Thoughts on Matthews Meaning of 'Aionian Fire'?](#)

If you continue to disagree, then you must provide a reasonable explanation as to why Jesus only lists the Devil and his angels as those for whom Eternal Fire is prepared. Why does the Holy Spirit say explicitly that the Lake of Fire is "***prepared for the Devil and his Angels?***" Why doesn't he say prepared for unbelieving mankind? He says the Devil and his Angels because that is who the Lake of Fire is prepared for and no one else!

3) Finally I also concede that it is odd that the Devil and his angels would say in Matthew 25:44 (WEB), "***Then they will also answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and didn't help you?'***" We might think that at this point the Devil and his angels would recognize their rebellion, concede their doom, and manifest their hatred of Christ with a violent display of malice as they are damned to the Lake of Fire. It is hard to imagine the Devil or the

demons with their awesome intelligence speaking such a lame excuse.

Yet in spite of their awesome intelligence, we must remind ourselves that Satan is not only The Great Deceiver, but also The Greatly Deceived. For Satan said, "***I will ascend into heaven! I will exalt my throne above the stars of God! I will sit on the mountain of assembly, in the far north,***" (Isaiah 14:13b WEB) and the Lord says, "***Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty. You have corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendor,***" (Ezekiel 28:17a WEB).

Though Satan was and continues to be an enemy far beyond our strength, his great pride has left him greatly deceived to the very end, along with all his demonic followers. We should note also that the demonic leaders, Satan, The Beast, and The False Prophet are already cast into the Lake of Fire before the Great White Throne Judgment. So the lame excuses are coming from their demonic underlings just arraigned from Tartarus / Thalassa.

If this explanation does not satisfy your objection, then I have a corresponding question for you. I believe the sheep on the right are the redeemed unbelieving just extracted from the end of their punishment in Hades. But, traditional understanding says that these sheep are those who believed before their death. However, the confirmation of the salvation of believers has *already* happened though faith in Christ many years earlier! Yet these people say, "***37) Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry, and feed you; or thirsty, and give you a drink? 38) When did we see you as a stranger, and take you in; or naked, and clothe you? 39) When did we see you sick, or in prison, and come to you?'***" (Matthew 25:37-39 WEB).

If these people are believers, why are they incredulous about their salvation and ignorant of these basic facts after already spending years of glorious fellowship with Christ? If you are concerned about the lame objections of the goats, you should also be concerned about the objections of these sheep. You could further argue that these sheep cannot be unbelievers because they are praised for doing good. However, these *newly* believing sheep did not yet understand, like we Christians already understand, that we actually serve Christ when serving others. Thus they are amazed that the tiniest good they did is now accepted by the grace of Christ, not that the good outweighed the bad. All these questions are easily answered when we see that these sheep are new born believers just extracted from Hades with their eyes just opened, incredulous over the love of Christ who has also accepted them by his grace.

The redeemed should take warning that our sinful nature is likewise vulnerable to equal deception. We would follow Satan to the very precipice of the Lake of Fire and over the brink if we could! Yet grace will be finally victorious for every single one of Christ's chosen ones. Not one of Christ's chosen can ever fall over the brink!

You Categorize Calvinists too Simply!

I say to myself...

SELF>> You categorize Calvinists too simply while comparing them with Arminians. For example some Calvinists prefer the language of limited atonement while others prefer the language of particular atonement.

ME>> Self, that is a very good point that could use clarification.

You are right that not all Calvinists are in agreement about salvation or numerous other Christian doctrines. Many Calvinists advocate infant baptism while others are only for believer's baptism, as an example. In this book I have used the term Calvinist to refer to a Christian who thinks that Christ's atoning sacrifice is only purposed for a subset of mankind and effectively accomplishes salvation for that subset of mankind. These Christians also believe that the remainder of mankind whose sin is not atoned for have no possibility of salvation. Thus the atonement of Christ is limited in both its saving purpose and effect. Let's refer to these guys as *Limited Atonement Calvinists*.

I have already explained in my article, *A House Divided*, that some other Calvinists have attempt to solve the salvation riddle by suggesting that Christ's atonement IS NOT LIMITED in its purpose and is offered "generally" to all. They rightly refuse to swallow the understanding of *Limited Atonement Calvinists* because of verses like 1 John 2:1-2. However, they still need to explain why they think some human beings go to eternal Hell. So they say that the atonement is general in its purpose, but it IS LIMITED in its effect. Strictly speaking these theologians are not Calvinists. First, their division of the atonement into two dimensions is not supported Biblically. Second, they miss the gospel emphasis that Christ's atonement is definite in its purpose and effect of paying only the sin debt of the people known as "*His People*." The offense of the cross highlighted through the whole New Testament is that Christ came to save his particular people only. So let's refer to these guys as the *Divided Atonement Calvinists*. In fact these guys truly are *divided* for they are further divided into two main understandings. One camp of the *Divided Atonement Calvinists* believes that Christ's atonement is made effective through an individual's *free will* choice of repentance and faith followed by the New Birth. Let's call these guys the *Dishonest Arminians*. The other camp of the *Divided Atonement Calvinists* believes that grace alone effects the New Birth and is followed by faith and repentance. This second group is very difficult to pin down. I know because I was among them! However, if you pin one of them down you will either find a *Waffling Limited Atonement Calvinist* or a *Dishonest Arminian*. Beware the wrestling match.

Okay, what about the *Particular Atonement Calvinists*? Though most Baptists in the United States descend from the Particular Baptist movement, there are very few Particular Baptists that remain theologically orthodox. Most of these groups have migrated back to the General Atonement view with the determining factor of an individual's salvation being the exercise of their *free will* choice of faith. The gospel of grace is lost from their preaching. They are plainly Arminian regardless of the label they give themselves.

So the *Limited Atonement Calvinists* unbiblically restrict the work of Christ. The *Divided Atonement Calvinists* unbiblically divide the work of Christ. And the *General Atonement Arminians* unbiblically add a human supplied condition into the salvation equation. For myself, I have said I am not a Baptist, but a Christian, in keeping with Christ's prayer for unity. Yet IF I were to assign a label to myself I would be a *Particular Atonement Calvinist Baptist*. It seems to me that a person needs to become a Christian before they should be baptized. It also seems to me that the atonement of Christ is neither limited nor divided. However, his atonement is a definite payment for the sins of a particular people. God loves all mankind in a *special* way. Now I cannot speak for all theologians who would give themselves that label, but at least some have come to the same conclusion as I that Christ's particular people is in fact... all mankind. Yet sadly most of mankind is not aware or refuses to believe that their sins are already paid. They prefer the religion of self-righteousness and man's *free will*. So there is much work to do and the Great Commission is to take this good news to the world!

You might say to me that "*particular*" atonement ultimately means "*limited*." However, that is not true. We are using the word "*particular*" to mean "*special*" and not "*limited*" or "*general*." Jesus does not love his beloved in a simple, general way, but in a very special way. Why do you insist that God's special particular love for his chosen ones requires that his love is then limited to a subset of mankind? Do you have children? Do you have a special, particular love for each of them? John called himself "***the disciple whom Jesus loved***" because Jesus loved him. But that does not mean that Jesus does not love you, me, or all mankind! John's nickname for himself confronts each of us with questions. On what basis can you know that Jesus loves you? Are you confident because of your choice to "*trust*" in Christ or because of his choice to love you from the cross? Are you also a disciple that Jesus loved?

Quit complaining about John's confidence in God's special love for him and begin to rejoice in God's special love for you and for all mankind!

You Have Compromised All...

Another responded...

READER>> Here are some of my thoughts in response. On the surface, you have answered all the questions. It seems having harmonized God's grace with man's faith without compromising His justice. But I think you have compromised all of them. You said "the non-believers will be condemned to Hades as punishment for their unbelief, but will ultimately go to the new heaven due to God's grace." First of all, it is undermining the character of God's grace.

Grace, in my understanding, is unmerited. Consider the prodigal son in Luke 15. When he came back to his father, his father received him out of grace. What if his father let him work for ten years due to his prodigality, and then restored his sonship after his hard work? Is it grace? What would be in that son's mind then? He had been working for ten years before the sonship was restored. Is there something he could boast? Say the unbelievers go to the new heaven eventually, will they have something to boast before God? "Oh yeah, I've only spent less than 100 years sinning on earth, but I have been suffering in Hades for (I don't know, maybe) thousands of years, as punishment. I've got what I deserved. Now you pull me up from Hades and expect me to be thankful?" Certainly when grace is contaminated with "works," even just a teeny tiny bit of it, it is not grace anymore. I don't think God would do this to embarrass Himself, to damage His character, or to undermine His grace.

ME>> This is an excellent question and a good point to clarify. Punishment in Hades / Hell may not be remedial. Each individual human being is born into sin according to Romans 5:12. Everyone begins with a depraved human nature that ultimately hates God and grace in favor of self-righteousness. Until the Holy Spirit specifically targets an individual for the new birth their heart remains constantly at enmity toward God. Yet, 2 Peter 2:1, 1 John 2:2, and many other verses make it clear that even these unbelievers have been bought and their sins fully paid. God loves them dearly. However, they have not been touched by the Holy Spirit and so their hearts are unchanged and they continue to be wicked men. Hell is a fit destiny for these unregenerate souls who hate God. Furthermore, even the suffering of Hell may not bring about repentance and love toward God. Hell is the home they chose and God gives it to them. Hell may not draw their hearts one inch closer to God. Given the choice between worship of Christ or going to Hell, they have chosen Hell. So time in Hell is not a "*work*" that earns grace! Instead, Hell is a home fit for the self-righteous who hate grace. Though God loves all mankind very dearly, including the human beings in Hell, no one in Hell has a heart changed to love God in return... at least not yet. So why does God awaken love in some people early in life before suffering great consequences from sin and others later in life after suffering great trials from sin? The prodigal son may have rebelled for 1 year, 10 years or even 20 years. We do not know the length of time he was separated from his father. Yet our father's love remains constant regardless of the length of time we remain in unrepentance. Furthermore, the time we spend in unrepentance (whether in this life or in Hell) is certainly not a "*work*" that earns grace. Grace cannot be earned. Jesus is Lord of salvation. It is his choice as to who he forgives, a choice he *already* made when he paid the entire sin debt of mankind on the cross. It is also his choice as to when he transforms the heart to receive his love and forgiveness. Why would God let many pass this life into Hell only to change their hearts with grace after death? Simply, God is demonstrating the great patience of his grace according to his wisdom in the lives of depraved humanity. King David had confidence that, if he wound up in Sheol, even there God's love would guide him, Psalm 139.

Of course David was a believer so he did not go to Hell. No one transformed by grace will ever say "I've got what I deserved. Now you pull me up from Hades and expect me to be thankful?" as you suggest. In fact read about the Great White Throne Judgment yourself in Matthew 25:31-46 and see that instead Jesus graciously credits righteousness to the sheep standing before him, just extracted from Hades. The sheep are both incredulous and grateful. That is the heart of a sheep.

READER>> *Revelation 20:12-15 (NASB) "And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."*

From my study and understanding, the ungodly have been kept in a place of torment and punishment in their spirits, but not joined with a final supernatural body fitted for their punishment in the eternal hell--the lake of fire. It's like a prisoner who hasn't had his trial yet, he's still incarcerated in a jail until his trial at which time he is sent to the penitentiary to serve out his life sentence. The unbelievers are incarcerated now in a place of torment away from God. They will be brought before the tribunal of God, they will be given a new, resurrected body fit for their eternal incarceration in the final hell called the lake of fire. I don't get any indication that God raises them up in order to bring them into the new heaven. This is what Jesus called "the resurrection of damnation," or "the resurrection of judgment" in John 5:29. Or "the resurrection of the wicked" in Acts 24:15.

ME>> Yes, exactly. John 5:29 and Acts 24:15 are also speaking about the Great White Throne Judgment. But where is your Scriptural support to prove that even one unbelieving human extracted from Hades will then be cast into the Lake of Fire? Matthew 25:41 says that the eternal fire is "**prepared for the Devil and his angels.**" Revelation 20:15 says that the final determination is not conditioned on man's faith, but on the ledger of the Book of Life. You seem confident that your name is there, but on what basis? I am also confident that your name is there, but only on the basis of grace. Do you think "faith" is the condition that added your name to the book? Then that would be a human work / condition and not grace. Do you think Christ paid effectively for your sins and not effectively for the sins of all mankind? Holding to either of those views puts you in jeopardy of the destiny of those in 2 Peter 2:1 who deny Jesus as Lord of our salvation. You are right that the unredeemed will be united with a body to suffer eternally in the Lake of Fire. However, Isaiah 66:22-24 makes it clear *twice* that *all* mankind will worship God and *all* mankind will look with loathe upon the bodies of the wicked. Who are the wicked unredeemed? If *all* mankind is looking upon them, then it cannot be mankind! Instead, Satan and his demons are the unredeemed cast into the Lake of Fire united with loathsome bodies. All Mankind has been redeemed through the death of Christ, but not Satan and his angels.

READER>> *God is the God of grace, love and mercy. He is also the God of wrath and justice. He has to be consistent with His judgment. God's justice does not mean He will just send those who rejected His Son into Hades for "temporary" (compared with eternal) punishments.*

ME>> Yes, exactly. I whole heartedly agree that God's character is balanced perfectly with love, justice, and grace. These excellent attributes cannot and will not be compromised in any way. In fact that is my main point! The wrath of God has been fully satisfied for the sins of both believing and unbelieving mankind. The justice of God has already been met for all mankind and thus all mankind must be saved -- not because of any condition we could meet, but because of the condition Christ already met. Since justice has been served for all mankind, all mankind must be saved! 1 John 2:2 could not be more clear that atonement has been made independently of any condition that man could ever meet for both the believing and the unbelieving. Romans 5:10 also makes it clear that we were reconciled to God while we were yet enemies. The reconciliation of men to God was accomplished by the grace of Christ alone. Many Christians talk about the "*finished*" work of Christ. I believe his work is truly finished for all mankind and evangelism is simply inviting people to believe it. Yet, 2 Peter 2:1 does make it clear that those who reject their sovereign Lord will suffer for the duration in Hell / Hades even though their sins are paid for.

READER>> *I think this might be the key question: You have asked, "What is the extent of God's grace? Or what is the extent of the atonement?" Based on my limited understanding, the extent of God's grace is unlimited. He COULD surely save everyone if He wills. But the effect of the atonement is limited. It only goes to the elect. God offers salvation to whomever he wants to please Himself for His own glory. "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." He is not doing this to please us. Neither do we have the right to question Him. And it is not done according to anyone's understanding. It is not our job to figure it out, nor do I think we can understand God's infinite mind with our tiny brains. What I have done, and what I will be praying for you also, is to be comfortable with our inability not to get it, to stop fighting it, and to be content not to get it. We are just the clay in His hands after all. He has the right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use.*

ME>> You suggest that God's grace is unlimited in potential, but limited in effect. Perhaps you have been talking to some Regular Baptists. I assert that if you believe that Christ's atonement has both potential and effective components then you have also received a salvation that waffles between potential and effective. There is nothing potential about the grace of God in any way whatsoever. God's love and grace is determined and set upon his chosen people and he will not be thwarted. I have to completely refuse your offer to allow question marks and doubt into the salvation equation. Why would I ever do that? Instead I invite you to believe that your sins and the sins of all mankind are fully paid. Why not put both your feet solidly down on the rock of Christ? You point out that God says, "**...he has mercy on whom he desires, and he hardens whom he desires,**" *Romans 9:18 (WEB)*. That statement is true. Most of mankind is not chosen to believe that their sins are already fully paid for. Their existence is to be pitied while they attempt to hide their sin with religion. One could argue with perfect reason from the Scripture that the sins of mankind are fully paid and rather than joyfully rest in the fact they will never

let go of their self-righteousness salvation. They will never let go unless the Holy Spirit gives them a heart of flesh. They are dead men clinging to life preservers made of lead. Their hearts remain unrepentant and self-righteous. God has forgiven them from the cross, but not yet given them the mercy of repentance, Romans 2:4.

READER>> *You have said, "If the atonement is limited, then you CANNOT know that the atonement applies to you." I receive it by faith. And you asked, "How can you prove it?" Salvation can be verified by works, as James taught in his epistle. Thus it proves the atonement applies to me. If you are not satisfied with this answer, then I think I CANNOT prove it. I'll just trust the Lord. It'll get me nowhere if I try to prove it. You asked, "Are the sins of a Christian forgiven before or after his/her repentance? If it happens after conversion, then faith itself is work." My answer would be: No! Faith is not work. You stated, "If it happens before repentance, then it applies to everyone." I cannot agree. I don't see any indication that they are related that way. I think "the price has been paid" is not equal to "everyone has received forgiveness." The former is God's grace; the latter is man's responsibility. This goes back to your question "Since the price has been paid, do I receive my forgiveness before or after my repentance?" I don't know. I don't think one can define WHEN it happened. It is God's miracle.*

ME>> Works are evidence of the transformed life and Christian faith, that is true. However, works can never prove that Christ atoned for you and not another. The great transaction at the cross of Christ is independent of all conditions anyone could offer and is proved to vicariously apply to all mankind because Christ became a man and thus is the new Federal head of all mankind, Romans 5:12-21. So yes, works are evidence of having received God's love, but they are not evidence that God loves you in the first place. Think carefully about that. God loved us while we were still his enemies. Biblical faith is the result of being born again, but "faith" that claims to be the condition that secures God's love is anti-grace and a work. You are right that "the price has been paid" is not equal to "everyone has received forgiveness." The price has been paid, but not everyone has received forgiveness. All Christ's chosen are forgiven, but most continue to stubbornly refuse forgiveness in favor of self-righteousness. They hold to Peter's rebellious words, "you shall never wash me." And if these rebellious continue in unbelief they will be sentenced to Hades. You say I asked "Since the price has been paid, do I receive my forgiveness before or after my repentance?" To clarify, my question to the religious is "are we forgiven before or after we ask for forgiveness?" The answer is most certainly before. Jesus prayed for our forgiveness from the cross and there was not one person asking.

You quote me saying "If it happens before repentance, then it applies to everyone." I have shown you the verses that say Christ died for all. I have also shown you that the very nature of how Christ paid for sin, that is becoming a man, demands that his death apply to all mankind. He was not a divided man on the cross paying for a division of mankind's sin. He was a whole man divided for all our sin. Are you concerned that I believe if Christ paid for one, then he must have paid for all? Consider Romans 11:16 (WEB), "**If the first fruit is holy, so is the lump. If the root is holy, so are the branches.**" The Scriptures confirm that if the part is holy, then the whole is holy as well.

READER>> *You asked, "Is your faith a pen or glasses?" Obviously it is not a pen, I didn't write my name in the book of life with my faith. It's not glasses either. I still cannot read the book, or even see the book. And you asked, "How and when were those names written into the book of life?" Based on Paul's teaching, they were written down there by God before the foundation of the world. "Why some are there and some are not?" I don't know. Let God decide. The same as the potter and clay relationship. "How do you know that your name is in the book?" If you are asking how I can physically see my name in the book. Well, I can't. But I know I have eternal life, so it's gotta be there. 1 John 5:13 "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may KNOW that you have eternal life."*

ME>> I am glad you have confidence that you have eternal life. My goal in teaching about the gospel of Jesus Christ and his grace is nothing less than to help others have rock solid confidence in God's love for them and all God's people. However, your objections to my primary thesis expose that you do not have both feet squarely on the rock of Christ.

READER>> *It seems to me that you are undermining the role of faith in salvation. The Scriptures clearly teach on God's Sovereignty (Election) and Man's Responsibility (Faith). Let me borrow John MacArthur's term and call it the "Twin Truths" here. And the Scriptures go back and forth from divine sovereignty to human responsibility. They always run parallel, and they will never intersect.*

The grace of God is sufficient for all men. But only those He chose receive salvation. In other words, the extent of the atonement is universal. It is available to all. But the effect of the atonement only goes to the elect, based on His purpose according to His choice. He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.

On one hand, God has His "irresistible grace," on the other hand He holds every one responsible for his/her own belief or unbelief. What is the role of faith then? How do we harmonize it with God's "irresistible grace?" The answer I found is there is no way to harmonize these two things without destroying one or the other, or even both. I just need to believe in both.

The fact that we don't understand how it works only proves that we're less than what we think we should be. It doesn't say anything about God. Our inability to harmonize those things is a reflection of your fallenness, and my fallenness. They can't be harmonized in our puny human mind, compared to the infinite, vast, limitless mind of God.

1 Corinthians 13:9 "For we know in part and we prophesy in part." We are limited to what God has revealed, and we are limited by the fact that a human mind cannot understand a superhuman God in fullness. Systemizing God is very difficult because we don't have all of the information, we are trying to put the pieces together and make conclusions without

fullness of revelation. Romans 11:33-34 "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor?" His ways are past finding out. We are always dealing with a part of the truth in terms of its total.

ME>> We agree on much. Faith is essential for salvation from a self-righteous heart, for salvation from sin, for salvation from Hell. Faith is essential to be a Christian. Faith is essential to be graced with the title "God's Child." Faith is essential to be reconciled to God... that is for our hearts to cease being at enmity toward God. The point that we disagree upon may be small, but it is critical. Faith does absolutely nothing to reconcile us to God... for his part. Faith does not get Jesus to die on the cross for us or get Jesus to decide to love sinners. He did that without our asking. He did that in spite of Peter's objections! God loved us first! That is the heart of grace. God's heart never had or will have condemnation toward us. And if he never condemns us then there is no judge with authority to damn us to the Lake of Fire. God loved us while we were yet sinners. That is the good news. We do not have to do anything to get God to love us. And if he loves us at all, he loves us completely.

In the end I think we have different definitions of saving faith. Unfortunately we cannot share the same joy until you let go of "faith" as a condition to God's love and instead begin to trust in Christ's unconditional love. You point out that we "know in part." That is true. However, the gospel of Jesus Christ does not reveal "part" of God's love for mankind, but the gospel reveals the full extent of God's love. The gospel does not conceal, but reveals. The willing sacrifice of God's only son proves that God loves us to the maximum! The love of God for all mankind is fully manifest in Christ's willingness to die for all mankind, while we were yet sinners. I hope that I can continue to be patient with your resistance to this good news.

READER>> *But what I do know is: if one doesn't BELIEVE, he/she is NOT BORN AGAIN, thus he/she is NOT a CHILD OF GOD, and could NOT inherit the kingdom of God. One cannot go to heaven if he/she cannot inherit the kingdom of God.*

ME>> I agree. Those who reject grace and remain unbelieving will not be in paradise when they die, but will be punished in Hades. Their hearts remain unchanged by grace and so Hades will be a fit destiny for their souls. They are not sons of God while in unrepentant unbelief. Yet, because the death of Christ has satisfied justice for their sin, the grace of God must and will prove victorious in the end, even for them. These wicked unbelieving humans will be extracted from Hades and transformed by grace to receive grace with gratitude, Matthew 25:31-46. They will be sons of God. I take sides with King David who believed that the love of God continues even for those in Hades, Psalm 139. I also take sides with Jesus who said that even **"...the gates of Hades will not prevail against it."** (Matthew 16:18b WEB).

READER>> *1 John 2:2 says "and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world." I think it can be explained in this way. The extent of the atonement is SUFFICIENT for each individual. But the effect ONLY goes to the elect. Besides, "the whole world" in 1 John 2:2 would fit the rest of the Scriptures better if it is taken as "every nation, every race," instead of "every individual in this world."*

2 Peter 2:1 "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves." In what sense are the false teachers bought? The same as in 1 John 2:2. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross was a SUFFICIENT purchase price to redeem all men. The price has been paid for all in terms of availability. In that sense they have been bought. Still, only the elect will be saved.

ME>> When you do evangelism do you tell people that Christ might love them or might have died for them? To say that the atonement is only sufficient implies that it only potentially satisfies the wrath of God against the sinner. If the atonement is only potential then what ingredient is needed to activate the atonement and make it effective? If the sacrifice of Jesus was only sufficient or potentially sufficient to pay for the sins of the false teachers, then on what basis can we say it effectively paid for our sins? The Scriptures say that we were bought and that they were bought. If one is only potential and the other effective, then on what basis can anyone claim with certainty that their sins were effectively paid? On the basis of their "faith?" Then the object of their "faith" is their "faith" and it falls on itself! Their "faith" is no longer on Christ, but "faith in faith." You must agree that a person could be deceived and not have true faith. If that is true then how can you tell if your faith is real and has reached the effective part of Jesus' atonement? This is all silly. Jesus has atoned for the sins of all mankind, period. That is where my faith rests and I invite you and everyone to confess the same.

READER>> *1 John 2:27 "As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him." I think John was rebuking "those who are trying to deceive you" in verse 26, and their human wisdom. He was not talking about pastors, teachers, or shepherds of the flocks. It doesn't make any sense to me that John, as a teacher himself, was writing to the Christians in Asia Minor to tell them they didn't need anyone, including himself, to teach them. I hope Satan did not use this verse to deceive you.*

ME>> John is warning the believers about those who are trying to deceive. Deceivers could come from anywhere. How can you say that he is not talking about a pastor or teacher? Certainly not all pastors or teachers are deceivers, but just as certainly some are both deceived and deceiving. You quoted 2 Peter 2:1 above which says exactly that! The point of this verse is that a believer should never turn off the "mind of Christ" he has been given and allow another person to serve as the authoritative interpreter of Scripture. You should not believe what I or anyone says because you trust another person's interpretation. Instead you should read the Bible, listen to the thoughts of others if the Lord leads, but most importantly pray and ask God to show you the truth. Only the Holy Spirit is the authoritative interpreter of Scripture. You may disagree with me and me

with you. Thankfully the grace of God has that covered. However, there is no human being that can ever stand as the referee to judge the match. Who would we choose? Again, the Holy Spirit is our teacher.

READER>> In addition, I think the argument that one need a statement in one verse to prove a point is weak, because there are many truths in the Bible that are indicated to us by the totality of Scripture rather than any one given statement.

ME>> That is a good point. Did I only cite one verse in my book? Here is another one that is an encouragement to believers... 1 Timothy 4:10 (WEB), **"For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we have set our trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe."** It is odd that the Holy Spirit would say "especially." He says it this way because all mankind is loved by God and already reconciled to him and guaranteed a seat in the New Heaven and Earth. Believers are especially saved because they have received God's love and love him in return *now*. However, unbelievers, though already forgiven at the cross, have not yet received forgiveness and do not yet love God. Also believers have transformed hearts and are saved from punishment in Hades, whereas unbelievers will be punished in Hades.

READER>> Salvation is by grace ALONE, through faith ALONE, in Christ ALONE, and to the glory of God ALONE. God chose to save some for His own glory. Often we think God as what we think He should be instead of "I am who I am." And we think God works in a way that we could comprehend. Instead, we should trust Him in everything, "and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed."

ME>> You echo the rally cry of the reformation to me. Those are powerful words, yet they are claimed by both Arminian and Calvinistic Christians. As for Luther and his great statements about salvation by faith alone, did he teach us whether faith is receiving God's love already guaranteed or the condition that activates God's love? I don't know what he thought, but you and I have come to different conclusions about what saving faith is, about what Hell is and who goes there, and about the Lake of Fire and who is saved from it. You say that I have compromised all, but in fact it is you who has compromised the meaning of the word "all." You add condition to the unconditional love of God and so compromise salvation that is ALL of grace. You also limit the extent and effectiveness of Christ's atonement which paid for ALL. If the Lord changes your mind you will be a most dear brother to me. By the way, you might be tempted to simply choose conventional understandings that surround you instead of my unconventional view. However, history reminds us that truth is not determined by conventions or even the majority. Perhaps if my idea was totally alone in history or even alone today I would abandon it myself. Yet a Google search of "Victorious Gospel" and "Greater Grace" will show you that many are rejoicing in this understanding.

Your Beliefs Destroy Christian Friendships!

One friend said...

READER>> Your beliefs destroy Christian friendships!

ME>> This is the most important objection of every objection raised to against my happy thesis that **Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind.** Certainly of all possible concerns, people and relationship are the most important concern. Yet the objection is raised that my beliefs have strained and even broken relationships with dear friends and churches. So how can that be good? Is my proposed thesis harmful? Shall we just conclude that this is an inevitable part of life under the sun? Shall we even conclude it is an unexplained part of Jesus' call to discipleship? After all Jesus did say...

34) Don't think that I came to send peace on the earth. I didn't come to send peace, but a sword. 35) For I came to set a man at odds against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. 36) A man's foes will be those of his own household. 37) He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me isn't worthy of me. 38) He who doesn't take his cross and follow after me, isn't worthy of me.

Matthew 10:34-38 (WEB)

Is my thesis and even Jesus himself the promoter of disregard for the importance of people and relationships? Why would Jesus say these things? Is Jesus simply a trouble maker or divisive person? With a very superficial glance some might think so. However, consider that Paul said,

Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

2 Timothy 3:12 (WEB)

So we are reminded that not all is equal in this world. There are right and wrong ideas, and right and wrong ways to live that are in conflict with one another. The decision to believe right ideas and live right ways will offend those who chose wrong ideas and wrong ways to live. But you may counter that you do not know or nobody can know what is right or wrong in these matters. Certainly there are some things that we cannot know, while there are others things that we can be very confident about through God's word.

So the facts remain that the Bible claims to speak the truth about God, man, and salvation. The fact also remains that ideas are very important because they affect our relationships with people and our understanding of the value of people. And the fact remains that people often disagree, even to the point of breaking fellowship.

So is there a reason that justifies introducing ideas that could cause conflict between people? Is it right to jeopardize fellowship with a disagreement over truth? Wouldn't it be better to navigate the waters of conflict with compromise and negotiation in order to be at peace with all people?

Regarding painful circumstance Jesus records,

1) Therefore let's also, seeing we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let's run with perseverance the race that is set before us, 2) looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3) For consider him who has endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, that you don't grow weary, fainting in your souls.

Hebrews 12:1-3 (WEB)

Jesus did not enjoy pain for the sake of pain or conflict for the sake of conflict. He "**endured the cross**," but he did not like it! Instead he chose to endure the cross because of a greater goal beyond the cross, the joy set before him. And what was the joy set before him? The great victory he would win through paying the price for all mankind's sin, the awesome prize of the salvation of all mankind. Christ gently and resolutely held to the truth, at times offending every spectrum, from pagan to Pharisee, even to the loss of his life, because he chose to love us all. So is there a reason to endure conflict, jeopardize relationships, and even destroy friendships?

Yes, most certainly!

When Satan's lies or our hypocrisy obscures or ruins the much greater goal of God's love expressed for all mankind, then there is a reason to rock the boat. When relationships exclude God and the truth, they cannot endure for very long, and then there is a reason to tear down and rebuild on a solid foundation. When relationships are not built on the foundation of God's love for all mankind, then you will find you are "*friends*" with a nest of blind hypocrites... that will be disbanded.

So yes, Jesus said his ministry would bring a sword of division, but he also promises,

39) He who seeks his life will lose it; and he who loses his life for my sake will find it. 40) He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me. 41) He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward. He who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. 42) Whoever gives one of these little ones just a cup of cold water to drink in the name of a disciple, most certainly I tell you he will in no way lose his reward.

Matthew 10:39-42 (WEB)

Broken relationships are not Christ's goal, but exactly the opposite! He is working with self-centered hypocritical unbelieving sinners to build a self-less happy loving family with himself and mankind as the main ingredients. It is too big a challenge for us, but not for him. Meanwhile, he knows that things will get messy. So he invites us to join him in showing love to others even in small ways, like simply giving a cup of cold water to another, in His name. The cup of cold water I have for you and for any that will listen is simply this...

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind.

I think you can see for yourself that this is a faithful message, the good news of the Bible. So the only relationships threatened by this truth are with those who disagree saying that God does not love all mankind. If friendships are destroyed over that good news, then of course that is sad. Thankfully, however, because of grace, God's patience, and repentance, it will not be sad forever. Forever friendship and fellowship is coming for ALL God's people, with God our Heavenly Father at the head of the table!

Find courage my friend to hold up the light!

Your Reasoning is Backwards!

AGAIN>> *You are not thinking right. Your reasoning is backwards!*

ME>> Actually, both the Arminian and the Calvinist are guilty of *reasoning from their end backward* to their conclusions about salvation. They both begin by saying that it is clear that unbelieving humans are sentenced to eternal damnation. They rightly see that many passages do speak about punishment for men after death as I also agree. Yet because of misguidance, ignorance, fear, or worse, they are quick to conclude that the punishment after death is eternal. (It is certainly a challenge because the English New Testament has mistranslated the word "*aion*." Yet not even this mistranslation should stop a believer in his pursuit of the truth!) They then reason backwards into their respective corners.

The Calvinist foolishly claims that Christ did not die for all mankind, reasoning that otherwise people would not be in eternal Hell. The Arminian similarly boasts that his *free will* made the difference in his salvation, reasoning that this must be the condition to God's unconditional love. I fully understand this way of thinking because sadly I thought it myself! Even more curious is that these two guys get along with each other well enough from their different corners and with their different salvation recipes, as long as someone else is going to eternal damnation other than them. This backwards reasoning is foolish and has left us in morally bankrupt corners filled with fear and hypocrisy, devoid of grace. Lord willing, this fight will be brought to the center of the ring so that the truth of God's unconditional love for all will be defended.

If we would be willing to *reason forward from the cross* with the knowledge we have of Jesus, then we would see with open eyes and be willing to break with graceless tradition. Reasoning forward from the cross, we know that our sins were paid *while* we were yet enemies of God. *Free will*, even if there is such a thing, has nothing to do whatsoever with our forgiveness! How could it if we were loved and forgiven while we were yet enemies? Why is *free will* praised when it is dead in the casket and six feet under? The religion of *free will* persists because of fear and self-righteousness.

However, reasoning forward from the cross, if we claim to believe that our sins are forgiven, then we already know that the sins of all mankind are forgiven by the same blood of Jesus! Reasoning forward from the cross, we know that Jesus became a man, and died in the flesh for the sins of all mankind. He did not become part of a man or even half of a man to die for part of mankind. He became a whole and perfect man to atone for the sins of all mankind.

Why is the supposed "*limited atonement*" still ruling men with fear when it plainly contradicts Scripture? The religion of "*limited atonement*" persists because of fear and hypocrisy. However, reasoning forward from the cross we have great reason to question the translation of "*eternal*" and learn from solid study that "*aion*" means "*eon*" or "*age*" or even "*entirety*" or "*whole life*." So it is true that we are warned that those who reject grace are *not* saved from spending a term in Hades, unless they repent. Yet the grace of God *will* be victorious even for those punished in Hades. Want more Biblical proof?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:55 (properly translated by WEB), "***Death, where is your sting? Hades, where is your victory?***" The victorious grace of Jesus Christ has defeated both death *and* Hades! Let's reason forward from the good news to the glorious future that awaits the redeemed people of God!

***'Come now, and let's reason together,' says Yahweh:
Though your sins be as scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow.
Though they be red like crimson,
they shall be as wool.'***

Isaiah 1:18 (WEB)

Your Thoughts on Matthews Meaning of 'Aionian Fire?'

QUESTION>> [How do you explain] the connection between the eonian fire prepared for the devil and his angels and the eonian fire of Gehenna (the same Aramaic phraseology is used in Matthew's gospel about them both, "the fire the eonian?") This essentially identifies the two.

ME>> You note that Matthew uses the exact same phrase, "***the fire the aionian***" in Matthew 18:8 and also 25:41 which appears to identify these as the same destiny. Yet

Matthew 18:8 is clearly a warning to human unbelievers; and I have proposed that Matthew 25:41 is speaking of a different destiny reserved only for the Devil and his angels. Actually it is traditional theology that attempts to read any expression containing "fire" and "aionian" as coined only to mean "eternal Hell." However, the word "fire" is used 73 times in the New Testament with meanings including judgment, purification, literal fire, and symbolic fire. Download a study guide at DGJC.ORG/OPTIMISM/PYR. Christian Universalists, have also observed that the word "aionian" has a rich meaning including "age" and also "complete" or "entire." This adjective should not be understood to coin a particular eternal destiny. For example, Thomas Talbot translates "aionian" in II Thessalonians 1:9 as "**complete destruction**" at the Lord's return which is the most faithful to the context. Thus we should learn from ourselves that just because the exact same phrase, "**the fire the aionian**," is found in both Matthew 18:8 and 25:41, this does not mean that this phrase is in fact a capitalized proper noun. Other Scripture teaches us that both Hades and the Lake of Fire include "fire" judgments, yet we know these are different places. So the addition of the qualifier "aionian" does not then require that Matthew 18:8 and 25:41 are the same place. In fact in Matthew 25:41, the additional expression, "**prepared for the Devil and his angels**," is best understood to qualify that "**the fire the aionian**" in Matthew 25:41 is in fact a different location than Matthew 18:8. See my previous article, [II Thessalonians 1:6-10](#).

QUESTION>> You allow that the Gehenna warning isn't a bluff to frighten people whom God does not even remotely intend even temporarily putting into the eonian fire of Gehenna; but you still regard the eonian fire of Gehenna as the fire in hades (for good reasons I agree) and the eonian fire for the devil and his angels as being a different punishment than the lake of fire.

ME>> Yes, that is my conclusion. I understand that Jesus does not merely threaten, but warns that if his unbelieving audience does not repent that they will suffer the complete destruction of their earthly ambitions, 2 Thessalonians 1:9, as well as suffer the fires of Hades, Luke 16:23. Hades is the "aionian fires" that are the netherworld judgment of wicked mankind. The word "Gehenna" is used twelve times in the New Testament and in each case mankind's judgment is in view. So the "Gehenna" reference is either the destruction from sin's consequences in this life or the subsequent judgment in Hades. The Lake of Fire, however, is the "aionian fires" that are prepared for the Devil and his angels.

QUESTION>> The defense that Christ switches from addressing the devil and his angels to explaining to the redeemed unbelievers (who had unknowingly been faithful) that this fire is "prepared for the devil and his angels," seems forced to me (though you acknowledge the awkwardness).

ME>> The awkwardness is no greater than the traditional understanding that the Sheep on Jesus' right are Christians. How could it even be possible that we Christians who already understand our salvation would corporately stand before his throne with these doubts? Consider that if the Sheep and Goat Judgment is synonymous with the final Great White Throne Judgment, then we Christians have already been Raptured to meet Christ in the air, have been re-united with all the deceased saints, and have been given our glorified bodies, all before the Sheep and Goat judgment. Do we think that after these tangible beginnings of eternity that we will then stand before Christ's throne with revived doubts? Hardly. So if the Sheep on the right are not us, then who are they? Revelation 20:5 makes it clear that unbelievers are raised when the thousand years are ended. Revelation 20:13 makes it clear that Hades is emptied of its inhabitants, unbelieving mankind, after the thousand years to stand before Christ's throne. Jesus already made it clear that the gates of Hades would not prevail against his work in Matthew 16:18. Paul also made it clear that Hades will not have the victory in 1 Corinthians 15:55. The Sheep on the right are the rebellious unbelieving elect, safely extracted from Hades and finally given grace to receive their salvation.

Then who are the Goats on Jesus' left? Traditional theology and even many forms of Christian Universalism understand these people to be unbelieving humanity. However, again II Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 teach us that certain fallen angels are currently being held for judgment on that Great Day. The Sheep and Goat Judgment and the Great White Throne Judgment are the excellent candidate for the Great Day of judgment for these fallen angels. In fact, even the language of Sheep and Goats fits quite naturally with a group of Christ's subjects containing both man and demon. See this article for even further proof, [Fallen Angels at The Great White Throne Judgment?](#)

You do make a good point that my earlier proposal is awkward, that the phrase "**prepared for the Devil and his angels**" was not addressed to the demons, but was commentary to the Sheep. So instead, perhaps it is not awkward at all to hear Jesus saying the entire phrase to the demons themselves. Satan is already cast into the Lake of Fire at this point and so Jesus points to the Goats on his left, the Devil's angels, the demons, and says, "**Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels**," (Matthew 25:41b WEB). My original article on this question is titled, [You Are Wrong About Matthew 25:31-46!](#)

QUESTION>> [Also your understanding of the Sheep and Goat Judgment solves one problem, but introduces another. You continue to break the parallelism, but differently. With your understanding] now the parable is contrasting the surprise that those who don't even know they are serving Christ shall be accepted, [contrasted] with what everyone everywhere already believed -- that the devil and his angels will be going into the eonian fire prepared for the Devil and his angels. Even those surprised to have been serving Christ don't need that explained to them; certainly the apostles don't, who had been warned just previously once again as often throughout Christ's ministry, including back in that other saying about "the fire the eonian" that those chosen to be chief servants of Christ might still be dreadfully punished for their rebellious abuses. What Christ thinks they need is, by all prior evidence, emphasized warnings that they had better not regard themselves as inherently safe from punishment!

ME>> We are both agreed that Christ has been warning his audience repeatedly that grave punishment awaits those who do not repent. Some of the challenge in comparing our interpretations is that you hold to a pre-Millennial return of Christ, while I hold that the thousand year epoch is the present church age. Also you hold that mankind is punished or

purified in the Lake of Fire with the final salvation of mankind beyond that, while I hold that all mankind's salvation is realized at the Great White Throne Judgment with the Lake of Fire reserved for the Devil and angels alone. I discuss these differences further in my article, [Is Revelation 21-22 About The Church, The Last Age, or Eternity?](#) Unfortunately these differences may cause us to mix apples and oranges at times in our conversation. My understanding is that Christ warns unbelieving mankind of punishment in Hades, but the believing also trust that mankind is exempt from the Lake of Fire which is prepared for the Devil and his angels. You are right that the Apostles did not need these things explained to them for I am confident that they recognized the salvation of all mankind. They also recognized that Satan is the archenemy of God and mankind, Ephesians 6:10-20. However, I do not think you are right to assume that the unbelieving acknowledge the existence of Satan. Furthermore, non-Christians certainly do not believe that our election to grace has saved all mankind, even though we have all sinned. Nor do unbelievers know that Satan, the Father of Lies, and his demons are damned to the Lake of Fire. The contrast between the destiny of the Sheep and the destiny of the Goats in Matthew 25:31-46 is an excellent education in grace for all of us.

QUESTION>> Your appeal to the lack of definite articles in Revelation 14 when speaking of human followers of the Beast, compared to later statements about the Devil and his angels being punished into the eons of the eons, is not going to carry much weight with anyone who understands that the omission of direct articles does not necessarily involve such a distinction. There is certainly nothing conceptually obvious about a difference between "into eons of eons" and "into the eons of the eons".

ME>> I beg to differ. The first obvious conceptual difference is that Hades and the Lake of Fire are different locations employed in different ages for different purposes. Revelation 20:14 (WEB) makes this clear because after Hades is emptied it is then thrown into the Lake of Fire empty of all inhabitants, **"Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire."** Again, Hades and the Lake of Fire are different places with different purposes. We have already shown that Jesus warns unbelieving mankind that they will be punished in **"the fire the aionian"** in Matthew 18:8, which I understand to be Hades. However, Jesus also teaches us that there is also a related but different place, **"the fire the aionian"** that is qualified as being **"prepared for the Devil and his angels"** which I propose is the Lake of Fire. So since there are two distinct places of punishment, it is quite reasonable to expect that there would also be a distinction in the reference to the time spent there. Apparently Hades has served as the place to punish unbelieving mankind since the beginning of Creation and will continue to serve in that capacity until it is no longer needed after the Great White Throne Judgment. So Revelation 14:11 speaks appropriately about the **"ages and ages"** of punishment suffered by mankind for their unbelief in Hades. However, Revelation 20:10, highlights a particular time frame, **"The Ages of The Ages"** of the Lake of Fire. This age is distinct as the last Biblical age and is emphasized by the Holy Spirit with the definite article, **"The."** A. E. Knoch also highlights this observation, though I part ways with a number of his conclusions. Perhaps my A-Millennial church age understanding of the thousand year epoch helps me to fit the puzzle pieces in a way that highlights the observation of the definite article in Revelation 20:10. My proposed model of understanding sees Revelation 14:11 as speaking to the first century audience warning them that those who follow Satan or worship Rome or continue to follow the Old Covenant will be punished in Hades. Of course unbelievers committing similar sins since then are in similar grave danger! Revelation 20:10 then speaks to Christians through the whole church age warning us that Satan's work is not finished, but that one day, praise God, he will be finally damned to the Lake of Fire for the last age, **"The Ages of The Ages."** Also at that time unbelieving mankind is released from Hades to finally receive grace and salvation. My original article on this point is, [Forever Is Not Forever? You Still Gotta Be Kidding Me!](#)

These observations have been building a grander storyline in my understanding. The story began so many thousands of years ago with our parents, Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden. Satan invaded our innocent landscape, leading us away from our Heavenly Father. God punished Adam, Eve, and all their children since then, for we have all eaten the forbidden fruit. However, God also promised that deliverance would come from the seed of the woman, her child Jesus, and that one day the serpent's head would be crushed. Jesus crushed Satan's work at the cross and is now finishing the job, making his enemies into a footstool. The final Revelation of Jesus Christ at the end of the New Testament is given to prophecy the fulfillment of the promise given so long ago in the Garden. We look forward to the final deliverance of mankind from sin and punishment with every tear wiped away in the City of God and with the dragon, Satan, and his demons damned to the Lake of Fire.

Come Lord Jesus!

Your Thought is that Daniel 12:1-4 is the Final Judgment?

QUESTION>> Your thought is that Daniel 12:1-4 is the final judgment?

ME>> Yes, I have proposed that Matthew 25:31-46, Daniel 12:1-4, and Revelation 20:11-15 are all the same event, the final Great White Throne judgment. I have already made a case for this in my articles [Daniel 12:1-4](#) and [Yes, but Even Harder Questions!](#)

Yet Bill Saxton's book *Daniel's Prophecies of Covenant Change* makes a strong case that the King of North in Daniel 11 is Herod the Great which places elements of Daniel 12 into the first century rather than into the future as I have proposed. Also the prophesied history of the Kings of the North and the South in Daniel 11 do not seem expansive enough to cover the entire history from Daniel's day to our future. My initial review of Saxton's thoughts can be found in my article, [Daniel 12:1-4, Further Reflection.](#)

Bible commentators and even Bible translators are divided on their understanding of many of Daniel's prophecies, especially Daniel 12. Saxton leans far toward a Preterist interpretation of Daniel arguing that most if not all of Daniel's prophecies address the First Advent of Christ and the change from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant.

However, Saxton does stop short of Full Preterism holding that the Bible does prophecy the final return of Christ yet in our future.

The challenge in understanding Daniel 12 is assigning the timing to these events. As mentioned, Saxton makes a good case that Daniel's earlier prophecies primarily address events leading up to the time of Christ and the change from the Old to the New Covenant. Daniel 12:1 then begins, "**At that time**" making a strong chronological connection between Daniel 11, speaking about Herod the Great, and Daniel 12.

1) "At that time Michael will stand up, the great prince who stands for the children of your people; and there will be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time. At that time your people will be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. 2) Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. 3) Those who are wise will shine as the brightness of the expanse. Those who turn many to righteousness will shine as the stars forever and ever. 4) But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end. Many will run back and forth, and knowledge will be increased." 5) Then I, Daniel, looked, and behold, two others stood, one on the river bank on this side, and the other on the river bank on that side. 6) One said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, "How long will it be to the end of these wonders?" 7) I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by him who lives forever that it will be for a time, times, and a half; and when they have finished breaking in pieces the power of the holy people, all these things will be finished. 8) I heard, but I didn't understand. Then I said, "My lord, what will be the outcome of these things?" 9) He said, "Go your way, Daniel; for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end. 10) Many will purify themselves, and make themselves white, and be refined; but the wicked will do wickedly; and none of the wicked will understand; but those who are wise will understand. 11) "From the time that the continual burnt offering is taken away, and the abomination that makes desolate set up, there will be one thousand two hundred ninety days. 12) Blessed is he who waits, and comes to the one thousand three hundred thirty-five days. 13) "But go your way until the end; for you will rest, and will stand in your inheritance at the end of the days."

Daniel 12:1-13 (WEB)

However, as we read Daniel 12 we see that there are elements that also seem to point beyond Christ's First Advent to the final Great White Throne judgment, still in our history future. Daniel 12:1 mentions a destiny determining "**book**" which parallels the Lamb's Book of Life in Revelation 20:15. Daniel 12:2 is most easily understood to reference the resurrection of the deceased paralleled in Matthew 25:32, 1 Corinthians 15:12-58, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, and Revelation 20:11-15. Daniel 12:4 mentions the "**time of the end**," but is this the end of the Old Covenant at Christ's First Advent or the end of this present world at Christ's Second Advent? Daniel 12:8 with Daniel's lack of understanding also parallels Matthew 24:15 and the exhortation to understand.

The Amplified Bible also inserts commentary into Daniel 12:1 saying, "**Now at that [end] time**" raising another question. Have we properly understood and translated the chronology of Daniel Chapter 12? Does the initial Hebrew phrase in Daniel 12:1 connect back to the previous subject in Chapter 11 or forward to a new subject? Perhaps the chronological connection between Daniel 11 and 12 is not immediate.

The Full Preterist interpreter tries to connect the fulfillment of all Biblical prophecy to the First Advent of Christ. They see Matthew 25:31-46, Daniel 12:1-4, and Revelation 20:11-15 as events completely fulfilled during the change from the Old to the New Covenant with no unfulfilled prophecy of Christ's future return remaining. They believe Christ's judgment on Jerusalem in 70 A.D. is the fulfillment of his prophesied coming. The Dispensational Pre-Millennial interpreter instead tries to connect the fulfillment of most Biblical prophecy to the Second Advent of Christ.

Saxton, though proposing a first century fulfillment of many prophecies, makes this conclusion about Daniel 12:1, "*The context of this deliverance suggests it may be twofold: After the Romans crushed the Jewish revolt, the Jewish leaders were no longer in a position to actively persecute those Jews who had trusted in Jesus as the Messiah. Beyond this deliverance, however, is envisioned the greater ultimate deliverance to eternal life of both Jewish and Gentile Christians,*" *Daniel's Prophecies of Covenant Change*, page 67.

The majority of Bible interpreters would agree that there are prophetic Scriptures with twofold applications or where both current and future events are interleaved in the same message. This seems to be the case in Daniel 12, Matthew 24-25, and other passages. For another example, Jesus says in John 14:3 (WEB), "**If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and will receive you to myself; that where I am, you may be there also.**" So is Jesus speaking about his coming to us individually at our deaths, or corporately at his Second Advent? Perhaps both are true. Hopefully we do not get in an argument about this good news! So our challenge remains maintaining positive fellowship even when we draw the lines in different places on matters that we do not fully understand. Our questions to the Lord are limited to what we can envision, because we never come close to seeing God's whole picture. However, when Jesus answers, his words help our immediate outlook, but also point us to the consummation of hope, well beyond our vision. God sees the end from the beginning.

So after further reflection I still understand Matthew 25:31-46, Daniel 12:1-4, and Revelation 20:11-15 to point to the same event, the final judgment of God's creation. However, even if you or I are wrong, we can rest assured because Jesus is in charge.

Your Theory about the Goats... Is it Really Possible? Matthew 25:31-46

READER>> I like what you have written, but question your theory about the goats on Jesus' left being fallen angels only. Is it really possible?

ME>> Thank you for asking and join me in reconsidering.

Who are the goats? It is a simple question with a simple answer assumed. Unbelievers of course! However, many times a simple observation is missed and we are misled by our assumptions. Consider, ever since 1492 whenever the word *Indian* is used we need to clarify whether we mean American *Indian* or Asian *Indian*. Columbus taught us long ago that accurate understanding requires an accurate knowledge of our frame of reference! Five hundred years later, even in our advanced era, NASA and Lockheed Martin lost a \$125 million satellite to outer space because unknowingly one used Metric and the other English measurements. Oops! They remind us that compatible dialogue needs a compatible use of terms and measures. Michelangelo's famous *Moses* statue wears a set of horns because in Exodus 34 the Latin Vulgate translation wrongly says *horns* instead of *glow*, two very similar Hebrew words. So truthful conclusions can only come from accurate sources. Even the atheist Friedrich Nietzsche adds a point saying, "*The text has disappeared under the interpretation.*" Thus Bible study is the hardest interpretive work there is, for one must mercilessly imprison a thousand traditions and silence a million voices to see the text of Scripture. May God give us the wisdom to consider every observation of others, but the clear sight to see his Word.

So who are the goats condemned by Jesus in Matthew 25:31-46? I propose that the goats on Jesus' left at the Sheep and Goat Judgment are the fallen angels. Matthew 25:41 (WEB) says, "**Then he will say also to those on the left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels.'**" My defense of the victory of grace for all mankind at DGJC.ORG/OPTIMISM includes this understanding. The Scriptures explicitly say that the *aeonian fire* is prepared for the Devil and his angels. Correspondingly, I understand that it is not prepared for mankind, not even unbelieving mankind. My conclusion has been challenged by Christians from various traditions, including Universalists. Yet it should give us all pause to consider that the Scripture explicitly states that these fires are prepared for the Devil and his angels. Do you and traditional theologies factor this observation into your conclusions? Perhaps I am wrong. In fact I am already corrected on one point because I may have argued in the past that human beings were never referred to as *goats* in the Christian Scripture. However, Jeremiah 50:8 and 51:40, Ezekiel 39:18, and Zechariah 10:3 all use *goats* as a metaphor for Israel and Israel's leaders. So I must reconsider the identity of the goats, and also consider whether being wrong about the identity of the goats at the Sheep and Goat Judgment undermines my larger conclusion about the victory of God's grace for all mankind.

In the following article I invite you to weigh the evidence with me as I reconsider my conclusions about the Sheep and Goat Judgment. In the following paragraphs I list the major views of eschatology, disclose my own view of prophecy, list my previous articles on the subject, note the use and meaning of the Greek word *ethnos*, consider the impact of possible time frames, identify the Sheep on the right, prove the presence of fallen angels at the final future judgment, review the significance of *Tartarus* and *Thalaasa*, compare and contrast the Sheep and Goat Judgment with the Great White Throne Judgment, consider the redemption of fallen angels, examine Revelation 20:8 again, add further thoughts about redemptive ages beyond the Great White Throne Judgment in Revelation 21 and 22, note the promised end of death and Hades, reconsider the identity of the Goats on the left, and conclude whether Biblical proof about the victory of God's grace for all mankind is made uncertain because of uncertainty about Matthew 25:31-46 or any particular view of prophecy.

Various views of eschatology include: 1) Dispensational Pre-Millennialism, future, 2) non-Dispensational Pre-Millennialism, future, 3) A-Millennialism, present, 4) realized Post-Millennialism, past, 5) Post-Millennialism, future, 6) variations of the previous, and 7) full *Preterism* which understands that all prophecy is fully realized with no future return of Christ forecast. *Preterist* is the word used to describe prophetic statements that were future at the time the prophecy was written, but the events are now are past. Most Christians recognize that some New Testament prophecy is already fulfilled, but full *Preterism* asserts that all Biblical prophecy is completely fulfilled. I more fully explain each of these views and their relevancy to mankind's salvation in my articles [Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News](#) and [Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News Part 2 with Grudem Riddlebarger Chilton Summers Ewing](#).

Further, within these views there are both common and uncommon understandings of the timing and purpose of the Sheep and Goat Judgment explained in Matthew 25:31-46. Various understandings include that the Sheep and Goat Judgment happened or happens 1) metaphorically on the cross dividing believer and unbeliever, 2) visibly when Christ judged Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and later Rome, 3) invisibly in the first century by Christ in Heaven, 4) visibly in the future at the rapture of the church before the Millennial epoch, and 5) visibly in the future at the rapture and Christ's second coming after the Millennial church age epoch, thus synonymous with the Great White Throne Judgment. So we have differences, yet I hope we can all agree gladly with the following statement;

Being right or wrong in our understanding about the Sheep and Goat Judgment and prophecy will not change the final destiny of the redeemed people of God in the least, though present understanding and joy may be impacted temporarily.

Many Christian teachers are private about their theological positions beyond the fact that Christ is the divine promised Messiah and that he is coming again for his own along with

other essentials. There is wisdom in this discretion. Secondary theology and speculation often divides rather than unites. However, disclosure of my views online has been a helpful for me to think aloud to vet ideas and grow in understanding. Even so, if we meet in person I hope that our conversation remains focused on practical Christian living and loving instead of any puffed-up theories.

Yet prophecy has attracted my attention because the study of grace and mankind's salvation must be consistent with the things the Bible reveals about the future. Developing a consistent model of understanding is no small undertaking as two thousand years of theological conflict show. My own view of prophecy is simply a variation of the traditional A-Millennial view that the 1,000 year epoch revealed in Revelation 20:1-7 is the entire church age between Christ's first and Second Advent. Thus we wait for the final battle with Satan to be followed immediately by Christ's second coming and final judgment at the Great White Throne. At that time the redemption of mankind will be finally and fully manifest with every tear wiped away, sin and brokenness removed forever, and Satan's rebellion crushed as he and his demonic followers are sentenced to the Lake of Fire which is prepared for them. This is just as God promised to Adam and Eve so long ago in the garden, Genesis 3:15 (WEB), **"I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will bruise your head, and you will bruise his heel."**

My previous articles on prophecy include:

- [Matthew 25:31-46](#)
- [You Are Wrong About Matthew 25:31-46](#)
- [Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News](#)
- [Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News Part 2 with Grudem Riddlebarger Chilton Summers Ewing](#)
- [Fallen Angels at the Great White Throne Judgment](#)
- [Hebrews 2:16 Does Not Say Fallen Angels are Damned](#)
- [How Can You Say Revelation 21:8 Does Not Apply to Humans?](#)
- [Revelation 21:22 The Last Age, the Church, or Eternity?](#)
- [Isaiah 65:25 Says that Even Satan Will Be Restored](#)
- [Hebrews 2:16 Does Not Say Fallen Angels Are Damned](#)
- [Isaiah 66:22-24 Cannot Include Fallen Angels](#)
- [Your Thoughts On Matthew's Meaning of Aionian Fire](#)
- [Daniel 12:1-4](#)
- [Your Thought is that Daniel 12:1-4 is the Final Judgment](#)
- [Revelation 20:10](#)
- [Revelation 20:11-15](#)

Now the passage under discussion, Matthew 25:31-46 (WEB), reads as follows,

31) But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. 32) Before him all the nations will be gathered, and he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33) He will set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. 34) Then the King will tell those on his right hand, "Come, blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 35) for I was hungry, and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me drink. I was a stranger, and you took me in. 36) I was naked, and you clothed me. I was sick, and you visited me. I was in prison, and you came to me." 37) Then the righteous will answer him, saying, "Lord, when did we see you hungry, and feed you; or thirsty, and give you a drink? 38) When did we see you as a stranger, and take you in; or naked, and clothe you? 39) When did we see you sick, or in prison, and come to you?" 40) The King will answer them, "Most certainly I tell you, because you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me." 41) Then he will say also to those on the left hand, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels; 42) for I was hungry, and you didn't give me food to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me no drink; 43) I was a stranger, and you didn't take me in; naked, and you didn't clothe me; sick, and in prison, and you didn't visit me." 44) Then they will also answer, saying, "Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and didn't help you?" 45) Then he will answer them, saying, "Most certainly I tell you, because you didn't do it to one of the least of these, you didn't do it to me." 46) These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

First we consider the use of the Greek word *ethnos* in verse 32, translated as *nations* above. Previously I have said that we most naturally assume that when Jesus gathers the nations before him that he is talking about only human beings and human nations. The Greek word *ethnos* could be understood to mean "a multitude of individuals of the same nature or genus, for example the human family." Thus when Jesus divides the people into their categories of sheep and goats, we naturally conclude that believing humans are sheep while the remaining unbelieving humans are the goats. So it is commonly understood that only part of humanity is saved from the Lake of Fire while the rest are lost eternally. Arminians and Calvinists Christians both agree on this point, though curiously they disagree as to how people are saved. Further, most Christian Universalists also

agree with this understanding, but conclude that all humanity is finally saved in redemptive ages beyond the Great White Throne Judgment and beyond the Lake of Fire. I understand the motivation for these views, but I still feel there is a more consistent model.

We should not conclude too quickly that *ethnos* means human *ethnic* groups. Etymology shows that the English word *ethnic* has a restricted meaning compared to its Greek origins. Perhaps the modern English meaning was wrongly influenced by the traditional understanding of this very passage. Instead note that the Greek word *ethnos* is also used to mean "*the people, in contrast to their king.*" The first denotation in the Vines dictionary also indicates, "*a multitude (whether of men or of beasts) associated or living together: a company, troop, swarm.*" These alternate denotations must also be considered as eligible when interpreting this passage. The main point is that one cannot say that fallen angels are not at this judgment based on the meaning of the word *ethnos*, particularly since *ethnos* can mean "*people in contrast to their king*" and "*a multitude of men or of beasts.*" Do not forget that angels are also God's subjects and are people with names, minds, wills, and emotion, though they are not human beings created in God's image. So the Greek *ethnos* would be the perfect word to describe a mixed gathering of humans and fallen angels arraigned before Jesus their king. That much all must agree. Also as an aside it is noted that the same Greek word *ethnos* is found in Revelation 20:8 in close proximity to the Great White Throne Judgment. Perhaps that is no coincidence.

Defense of the presence of fallen angels at The Sheep and Goat Judgment is important in my view because of my understanding that the Sheep and Goat Judgment and the Great White Throne Judgment are the same final judgment. If I understand that these judgments are the final judgment and the goats are unbelieving mankind, then they are sentenced to the Lake of Fire. However, we are considering and reconsidering the proposition that the goats are not human beings, but in fact are the fallen angels. Now those who think that the Sheep and Goat Judgment is before the Millennial epoch could alternatively still hold that all mankind avoids the Lake of Fire if unbelieving humans were sentenced to *aionian fire* in temporal Hades during the Millennial epoch and then finally saved when extracted from Hades at the Great White Throne Judgment. I initially held this view myself, combined with a non-Dispensational Pre-Millennial view of prophecy. Though, I have since moved to an A-Millennial understanding. In contrast to both of these ideas, the majority of Christian Universalists hold that unbelieving mankind is actually sentenced to the Lake of Fire at the Great White Throne Judgment, but then finally saved in yet later redemptive ages. However, I feel that this view misses the concluding nature of Revelation 21 and 22 and misses the simpler chronology taught in the Bible, Hebrews 9:27 (WEB), "***Inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once, and after this, judgment.***" I wonder if those holding to redemptive ages beyond the Great White Throne Judgment would acknowledge that their strained interpretation may be motivated by the desire to save people from the Lake of Fire when it should be reconsidered whether human beings are ever sent there in the first place.

Further debate could be encouraged to consider the plausibility of the various proposed time frames of the Sheep and Goat Judgment. For example to suggest that this judgment is the invisible judgment at the cross neglects the real dialogue portrayed between Christ and his subjects. To suggest that this judgment happened in Heaven invisibly to us might be possible, but then where does it fit on the redemptive timeline shown in the book of Revelation and elsewhere? And the grand picture of Christ gathering all his subjects before him is lost because we were not there along with many others not yet born. Finally, to suggest that this is an intermediate judgment in the future at the rapture before the Millennial Kingdom might also be possible, but requires an acceptance of the Dispensational model. Hebrews 9:27, quoted above, again points to a simpler understanding that we each die once and there will be one final judgment at the end of the church age before eternity begins. In any case, views that propose that the Sheep and Goat Judgment is not the final judgment minimize the importance of the identity of the goats to maintain a consistent Christian Universalist theology because Christ would still have opportunity to save the goats later, if they are human. After all, Christ did say that the gates of Hades will not prevail, and, as promised, we see that Hades is emptied at the Great White Throne Judgment.

Again, it is commonly assumed that the goats on the left are unbelievers to be damned for all eternity and the sheep on the right are the believers to be blessed for all eternity. However, before we consider the goats on the left, let's consider the sheep on the right. The sheep may offer further clues about the time frame of this judgment. Many times we miss the obvious by not asking the obvious question. Why do the sheep on the right seem ignorant of gospel basics such as, we serve Christ when we serve the least of his brothers? Why do they seem surprised about their salvation? For those that understand the Sheep and Goat Judgment to be synonymous with the Great White Throne Judgment, then the timing of this final judgment would be just after the rapture of the saints to meet the returning Christ in the air. Christ and his church then descend to earth and this judgment begins. That being the case it is strange to think of the believers rejoicing in the air with Christ and with each other moments before fearful judgment. Review 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18 (WEB).

14) For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. 15) For this we tell you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will in no way precede those who have fallen asleep. 16) For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with God's trumpet. The dead in Christ will rise first, 17) then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. So we will be with the Lord forever. 18) Therefore comfort one another with these words.

It is very awkward to suggest that we believers who understand the gospel and will already be rejoicing with Christ in the air at the rapture will then be arraigned with uncertainties before the Sheep and Goat Judgment. You may have guessed by now that I do not think that the sheep on the right are believers. So then who are the sheep on Jesus' right? They are unbelieving mankind just extracted from Hades! This model of understanding is a perfect match with the attitude and questions that would be expected from the unbelieving redeemed that are extracted from Hades at the final judgment. I call them *unbelieving redeemed* because Christ redeemed them at the cross and their sins are already atoned, though they remain unbelieving. Faith does not cause our redemption and atonement, but instead faith receives our redemption already made certain at the

cross. Unbelievers are punished in Hades not because they are not forgiven, but because they refuse the forgiveness already given at the cross and so reject Christ their savior and King. God loves and has already forgiven all mankind, but the hearts of unbelievers are not ready to confess their sin and receive forgiveness. They do not yet see the great gift in the gospel and the value of Christian service. Instead unbelievers will spend who knows how long in whatever sufferings Hades brings to the wicked dead. And one day they will be released from their prison in Hades to stand before Christ their King. The responses of the sheep on the right fit this scenario perfectly. They are lost sheep, then found. Meanwhile believers, whether standing on the side line or in the midst, are not asking such questions, but have already begun rejoicing that the final victory of grace is at hand.

One objected to this view asking why the Lord commends those extracted from Hades for good things they did. Did they really do good things? Did the selfish rich man do any good? Did Hitler do any good? These are good questions with Jesus answering, **"whatever you did for the least of these, you did for me."** We as believers already know that, but the unbelievers do not know that, and still will not understand until released from punishment in Hades to be judged by Christ. However, even though they do not understand these things now, there still may be many 'decent' secular humanitarians... from an earthly perspective. True, if they do not repent, they will still be sentenced to Hades for disregarding Christ. Yet even so they may have done some good for humanity. Unbelievers can do good things. Perhaps even Hitler did an act of kindness before he became enslaved to Satan's scheme. All mankind, even the unbelieving, are created in God's image, and may at times do good things to help others. Certainly no one does enough good to merit salvation. However, at the Sheep and Goat Judgment Jesus graciously accepts any good done by the unbelieving at this juncture, not because it saves them, but so that eternity begins on a positive note rather than a negative note for these prisoners just released. Another argued that this is not possible because all our righteous deeds are like **"filthy rags."** Well, that is true of both believer and non-believer alike. So Christ's kind words are undeserved no matter who is the audience! Good parents know to focus on the positive after punishing their children. Even human authorities speak a hopeful future to released prisoners. Would God then begin eternity with a begrudged welcome for those saved out of Hades? No way! God, as the originator of grace, understands better than we about the importance of starting things on a positive note!

Continuing, some have argued that fallen angels will not be present at the final judgment. However, this fact is easily proved. We read in 2 Peter 2:4 (WEB), **"For if God didn't spare angels when they sinned, but cast them down to Tartarus, and committed them to pits of darkness to be reserved for judgment."** Further, we read Jude 6 (WEB), **"Angels who didn't keep their first domain, but deserted their own dwelling place, he has kept in everlasting bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day."** So fallen angels will be present for judgment on that Great Day! This fact must be integrated into our understanding of the final judgment passages. The fallen angels will be there.

The Great White Throne Judgment recorded in Revelation 20:11-15 (WEB) offers both similar and additional detail of the final judgment when compared with Matthew 25:31-46. We read,

11) I saw a great white throne, and him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. There was found no place for them. 12) I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and they opened books. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works. 13) The sea gave up the dead who were in it. Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them. They were judged, each one according to his works. 14) Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15) If anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.

Comparing the judgment in Matthew 25:31-46 and Revelation 20:11-15 is helpful to confirm whether these are the same events. However, first note that Revelation 20:13 explains that the subjects of this judgment are extracted from both the sea, *Thalaasa* in the Greek, and also from *Hades*. This is at least a curious observation and perhaps a significant observation as it relates to the presence of fallen angels at the final judgment. I have already proved the presence of fallen angels at the final judgment from 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6. The Great White Throne Judgment is the last judgment recorded in Scripture and therefore, I believe, the final judgment. Further, we see that the subjects of this judgment are extracted from two locations, *Hades* and *Thalaasa*. We know from Luke 16:19-31 that wicked deceased humans are punished in *Hades*. However, who is located in *Thalaasa*, the sea? I propose that *Thalaasa* is either the retreat or the temporary prison of fallen angels. The sea was commonly understood to be the caustic habitat of demons in the first century. I examine this question at length in my article, [Fallen Angels at the Great White Throne Judgment](#). This article explains possible connections between *Thalaasa* and the prison for fallen angels, *Tartarus*, mentioned in 2 Peter 2:4. Thus the presence of fallen angels at the final judgment, just extracted from the sea, is even further confirmed and must be factored into our view of the final judgment.

I have proposed that the Sheep and Goat Judgment is the same event as the Great White Throne Judgment. If I am wrong about this conclusion then between the two events, the Great White Throne Judgment is the better choice for the final judgment because of its placement at the end of the book of Revelation. That being the case fallen angels would still be present then, even if they are not at the Sheep and Goat Judgment. This is safely concluded because of the reference to **"the Great Day"** in Jude 6 and the emptying of both the prison of Hades and of *Thalaasa* in Revelation 20:13. And as already stated, if the Sheep and Goat Judgment is earlier, not the final judgment, and angels are not present there, then Christ would still have opportunity to save the goats later, if they are human, and if Hades is the *aionian fires* of the Sheep and Goat judgment. This is true because we see that Hades is emptied at the Great White Throne Judgment.

Consider a detailed comparison of Matthew 25 and Revelation 20.

Comparison	Sheep and Goat	Great White Throne
Both accounts are from gospel writers.	Matthew wrote Matthew	John wrote Revelation
All four gospel writers include Jesus' final prophecies, Matthew, Mark, and Luke within their gospel accounts and John not in his gospel account, but with special attention in Revelation.	Olivet discourse in Matthew 24-25	Missing in John's gospel, but instead explained in his book of Revelation
Both answer questions about the present and future.	24:3) <i>As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? What is the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age"</i>	1:9) <i>I John, your brother and partner with you in the oppression, Kingdom, and perseverance in Christ Jesus, was on the isle that is called Patmos because of God's Word and the testimony of Jesus Christ. ... 1:19) Write therefore the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will happen hereafter.</i>
Both depict grand thrones.	25:31) <i>But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory.</i>	20:11) <i>I saw a great white throne, and him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. There was found no place for them.</i>
Both depict Christ summoning his subjects with John providing more detail from where, though without contradiction.	25:32) <i>Before him all the nations will be gathered, and he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.</i>	20:13) <i>The sea gave up the dead who were in it. Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them. They were judged, each one according to his works.</i>
Matthew notes the separation of sheep and goats. Revelation notes judgment, though there is no contradiction. Many assume no one is saved at the Great White Throne, but only forwarded to the Lake of Fire. Yet, if these events are the same, then at least some of the people extracted from Hades or <i>Thalaasa</i> are saved at the Sheep and Goat Judgment!	25:32) <i>Before him all the nations will be gathered, and he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.</i>	20:12) <i>I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and they opened books. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works.</i>
Matthew records dialogue between Christ and his subjects while Revelation does not, though again there is no contradictory detail.	25:39) <i>"When did we see you sick, or in prison, and come to you?" 40) The King will answer them, "Most certainly I tell you, because you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me."</i>	
Matthew records praise for the good deeds of the sheep while Revelation records judgment based on both works and also whether one's name is in the Lamb's Book. Again there is no contradictory detail.	25:34) <i>Then the King will tell those on his right hand, 'Come, blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 35) for I was hungry, and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me drink. I was a stranger, and you took me in.'</i>	20:12) <i>I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and they opened books. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works. ... 20:15) If anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.</i>
Matthew records both the positive destiny of the sheep and the negative destiny of the goats while Revelation records only the negative destiny of those not listed in the Lamb's Book with the positive destiny of those listed only implied. Again there is no contradictory detail.	25:46) <i>These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.</i>	20:15) <i>If anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.</i>
Matthew and John use different terms for the destiny of the wicked, though again without contradiction.	<i>aionian fire</i>	<i>Lake of Fire</i>

The Sheep and Goat Judgment and the Great White Throne Judgment have much in common and so it is both fair and commonly agreed by many to consider these events as synonymous. **Repeating one conclusion from the above chart, if the Sheep and Goat Judgment and the Great White Throne Judgment events are the same final judgment event, then at least some of the people extracted from Hades or *Thalaasa* are saved at the Great White Throne Judgment!** Since the Great White Throne Judgment only speaks explicitly about those not listed in the Book as being cast in the Lake of Fire, many argue that all the inhabitants of Hades and *Thalaasa* are simply extracted so they can be sentenced to their permanent destiny in the Lake of Fire. Unfortunately this is a hasty conclusion. So, if not clear in Revelation's Great White Throne Judgment, it is clear in Matthew's Sheep and Goat Judgment that some are saved at this juncture. It is also clear that the subjects at the Great White Throne Judgment are from Hades and *Thalaasa*. Therefore if the Sheep and Goat Judgment is synonymous with the Great White Throne Judgment, it is proved that at least some are saved from either Hades or *Thalaasa*. So if you agree that the Sheep and Goat Judgment and the Great White Throne Judgment are the same event, then you must also agree with me that some from either Hades or *Thalaasa* are saved. I would propose that Hades houses unbelieving mankind and they will all be saved because all of their names are written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, though they do not yet understand and believe this as Christians do. And I would I propose that *Thalaasa* houses the fallen angels and they are not saved because Scriptures says that the Lake of Fire is explicitly prepared for them!

A more thorough study could compare the Sheep and Goat Judgment with other Bible passages that may also refer to the final judgment. For example, Daniel 12:1-4 is a possible candidate which I discuss further in my articles [Daniel 12:1-4](#) and [Your Thought is that Daniel 12:1-4 is the Final Judgment!](#) My conclusion is that Daniel 12:1-4 corroborates with my thesis here. Another passage to review is John 5:28-30 which I have considered in my article, [John 5:28-30 Offers No Optimism](#). Likewise 2 Peter chapter 2, one of the scarier chapters in the New Testament, has grave warnings for false teachers. However, this chapter also explicitly reminds us that fallen angels will be present at the judgment. The passage also reminds us that the unbelieving will be punished and then brought to judgment. However, there is no explicit mention of eternal punishment beyond the final judgment for mankind. Note that 2 Peter 2:17 (WEB) is translated, "***These are wells without water, clouds driven by a storm; for whom the blackness of darkness has been reserved forever.***" However, the Greek word underlying "***forever***" is "***aion***" which never means infinite chronological time as has been explained numerous times at [DGJC.ORG](#) and in [Optimism Out of Control](#). Instead the meaning is either *eonian* or *entire*. Also see the article, [Aion](#), for further proof. So 2 Peter chapter 2 corroborates as well.

As mentioned, particular to my model of understanding is the proposition that fallen angels are the goats on Jesus left that are extracted from *Thalaasa* for their final judgment. These fallen angels are then sentenced to the Lake of Fire which is prepared for them while all mankind is redeemed because Christ has already atoned for the sins of all mankind at the cross, 1 John 2:2 (WEB), "***And he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.***" Naturally, however, we do not expect everyone to see things the same way. And differences may even be more pronounced among the radical minority that holds to the universal salvation of mankind. One point of debate among Christian Universalists is whether Satan himself and the fallen angels will be redeemed. I mention this because my model of understanding is different than most Universalists. I agree that the grace of Christ will be victorious in the salvation of all mankind. However, I also understand that no human being will ever enter the Lake of Fire because it is not prepared for mankind, but instead for the Devil and his angels, as explicitly stated. So my understanding may revive debate about the possibility of fallen angel redemption.

Most arguments promoting the salvation of Satan focus on passages like Romans 11:32, Colossians 1:20, and Philippians 2:10 which speak about the salvation and redemption of *all* and worship of *every* tongue. Weighty arguments can be made from these passages for the redemption of all creation, including Satan. The Holy Spirit's choice of words for the redemption of all creation should especially be noted in Romans 8:21 and 11:32. However, these passages must also be weighed against Scriptures that say God is *not* the helper of angels, Hebrews 2:16, and Matthew 25:41 which explicitly states the Lake of Fire is prepared for the Devil and his angels. I discuss this question further in my articles [Isaiah 65:25 Says that Even Satan Will Be Restored](#), [Hebrews 2:16 Does Not Say Fallen Angels Are Damned](#), and [Isaiah 66:22-24 Cannot Include Fallen Angels](#). One might also ask if the *goat* metaphor is ever used of fallen angels in the Bible beyond my proposal concerning Matthew 25:31-46. It is not to my knowledge. Further, the extra Biblical image of the goat-headed *Baphomet* offers no proof either. Those offended by the damnation of Satan and his angels to the Lake of Fire should be reminded that the bottom line argument for the redemption of all mankind should not hinge on the meaning of *all* and *every*. We all understand that these words can be used in general non-absolute ways at times. Instead the bottom line argument for the redemption of all mankind is the atoning sacrifice of the God-man, Jesus Christ. Christ's role as the second Adam and new federal head of humanity is the heart of our hope and praise. Though I do not want to speculate beyond Scripture as to Satan's eternal destiny, but simply observe that Jesus is not his helper, the Lake of Fire is prepared for him and his fallen angels, and there they remain at the last sentence of the Bible.

Suppose I am right and the judgments in Matthew 25 and Revelation 20 are the same event and fallen angels are the goats on Jesus' left, then does the warning in Revelation 21:8 really only apply to fallen angels? Actually, I would say no. This warning applies to both mankind and angel-kind alike. Revelation 21:8 says, "***But for the cowardly, unbelieving, sinners, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their part is in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.***" The Holy Spirit is consistent through the whole of Scripture giving severe warning to unbelieving mankind. This is evident in God's condemnation of Nineveh, though God did not destroy Nineveh as he promised, as explained in my article, [Jonah 3](#). This is also evident when God's calls Israel, "***not my people***", then again, "***my people***" when they repented, as explained in my article, [Hosea 2:23](#). So the warning in Revelation 21:8 applies to all, but I believe that condemnation to the Lake of Fire will only be applied to the fallen angels and not mankind, not even unbelieving mankind, who will be finally graced with repentance and open eyes on that Great Day. This is true because

God himself already determined the glorious destiny of all mankind when he made atonement for the sins of all mankind. I discuss this in more detail in my article, [How Can You Say Revelation 21:8 Does Not Apply to Humans?](#)

So if we believe the Sheep and Goat Judgment and the Great White Throne Judgment are the same event, the final judgment of men and angels, which I do, and also believe that all mankind will be finally saved, which I do, then we must either defend that the goats on Jesus' left are not human beings, but are in fact the fallen angels, or that the human beings sent to the Lake of Fire will be safely extracted later. We have reviewed the Biblical data above preparing to re-defend the proposal that the fallen angels are the goats on Jesus' left. Now if it were true that human beings were never referred to as *goats*, then that would provide even one more argument to support my case. However, Jeremiah 50:8 and 51:40, and Ezekiel 39:18 all use *goats* as a metaphor for Israel and Israel's leaders. So the argument that *goat* imagery never refers to human beings cannot be used. Yet note that these passages do not distinguish between *sheep* as good and *goats* as bad as we find in Matthew 25 and so should not be considered parallel passages. However, Zechariah 10:2-3, a closer parallel to Matthew 25, does condemn Israel's leaders, the goats, for misleading Israel's people, the sheep. So if Matthew 25 is parallel to Zechariah 10, then it draws a line of judgement between condemned leaders and misled followers. But certainly Matthew's Sheep and Goat judgment cuts deeper than a line between leaders and followers, but instead is a division determined before the foundation of creation in the Book of Life, Revelation 20:15. So Matthew 25 appears to be the only place where *sheep* and *goat* imagery is used to contrast between those saved from the Lake of Fire and those who are not saved. The final question of this study remains. Is there enough Biblical data to warrant the proposition that the *goats* on the left are the fallen angels only?

As explained, for most Christian Universalists this is not even an important question because instead most propose that unbelieving mankind, or even all mankind, are scourged of sin in the Lake of Fire and finally saved in redemptive ages beyond the Great White Throne Judgment in Revelation 21 and 22. Revelation 21 and 22 could possibly be understood to portray redemptive ages after the Great White Throne Judgment. For Revelation 20:4 (WEB) says, "**He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; neither will there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more. The first things have passed away.**" All sin and brokenness appears to be healed. But then beyond that Revelation 22:14-15 (WEB) says, "**Blessed are those who do his commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter in by the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, the sorcerers, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.**" So has sin reentered the world after the Great White Throne Judgment? No. The mistake in this interpretation is to assume that the verses after the Great White Throne Judgment are a sequential chronology of redemptive ages. Instead a better literary analysis would show that the Great White Throne Judgment is the end of the story for this fallen world followed by the commencement of blessed eternity for God's people. Revelation 21 and 22 are then the concluding statements that paint a summary picture of this promised future for mankind, as well as a picture of the New Testament church age until we reach the Great White Throne Judgment. A good conclusion will address both the present need and the future hope just as the Holy Spirit does in Revelation 21 and 22. Read more about my understanding of this question at [Revelation 21:22 The Last Age, the Church, or Eternity?](#)

Christian Universalists that propose escape from the Lake of Fire also use the argument that the end of death is promised in the New Testament and so that must mean escape from the second death in the Lake of Fire. This is a hopeful thought, but only born out of the concern that human beings are sent to the Lake of Fire in the first place. However, the thought is not as precise as needed in attention to detail. Jesus does promise that "**the gates of Hades will not prevail against it**" in Matthew 16:18 (WEB) as explained in my article, [Matthew 16:15-21 Optimism Out of Control](#). Paul also reinforces the hope in 1 Corinthians 15:55 (WEB) saying, "**Death, where is your sting? Hades, where is your victory?**" Yet both of these passages point to the good news at the Great White Throne Judgment when Hades is emptied and death is ended for mankind with the beginning of blessed eternity. However, there is no promise in Scripture concerning the end of the second death for the Devil and his angels. In fact the Holy Spirit uses the expression "**second death**" in order to make a distinction between those saved from the first death in Hades, that is unbelieving mankind, and those not saved from the second death in the Lake of Fire, that is the Devil and his angels. These are important observations again supporting the conclusions that unbelieving humans are saved out of Hades, the first death, and that fallen angels are sent to the Lake of Fire which is prepared for them, the second death.

So is there enough Biblical data to warrant the proposition that the *goats* on the left are *only* the fallen angels? After further review I continue to believe so. Even though human beings are referred to as *goats* a few times in Scripture I still think there is enough evidence to hold that fallen angels are condemned and all mankind finally saved. The fallen angels are condemned to the Lake of Fire at the final judgment while all Christians rejoice with Christ at the rapture and all non-Christians are safely extracted from Hades and surprised to learn that they are finally saved along with all God's people. The sins of unbelievers are already atoned, the same as the sins of believers, at the cross of Christ! There are many Scriptures and arguments above that point to this conclusion. I did not even mention the supra-Biblical observation that redemptive history begins with the promise of a deliverer for mankind and the forecast that Satan's head will be crushed in Genesis 3:15. Revelation 20 then finishes the story with the salvation of all mankind and the banishment of Satan and his angels to the Lake of Fire. This is an important point, so let me say it again. History begins with the fall of mankind to the schemes of Satan and with God promising future deliverance for his people and the crushing of Satan's rebellion. And the history of this fallen world will end with the sentencing of Satan to the Lake of Fire and the redemption of all God's people to blessed eternity. **These are the two perfectly matching bookends for the history of redemption! The Bible is the story of the most awesome victory of grace for mankind and the final defeat of Satan our adversary!**

Even so, for me, the essential facts remain 1) fallen angels will be at the final judgment, 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6, 2) the Lake of Fire is explicitly prepared for the Devil and his angels, Matthew 25:41, 3) Christ is not the helper of fallen angels, Hebrews 2:16, 4) Christ promised to defeat Hades, Matthew 16:18 and 1 Corinthians 15:55, 5) Hades is emptied and proven to be temporal punishment for unbelieving mankind, Revelation 20:13, and 6) Christ as the second Adam is the atoning sacrifice for the sins of all mankind, both believing and unbelieving, Romans 5:18 and 1 John 2:1. These indisputable observations must be integrated into any Biblical view of destiny for mankind and angelkind.

The arguments I propose identifying the *goats* as the fallen angels seem certain to me. What do you think? However, even so we might ask if Biblical proof of the victory of God's grace for all mankind is made uncertain because of remaining uncertainty about Matthew 25:31-46 or any particular prophecy? Certainly Biblical teaching about future things and final judgments must be compatible with any interpretation about the final destiny of mankind. However, within Christian theology, which is already divided on so many points, the subject of eschatology may be the most divided and confused of all. Biblical passages about judgments and future things can be very difficult to understand and to consistently synthesize with the whole of Scripture. So building a case for the final redemption of all mankind based on a particular view of eschatology may not be the best foundation. (Though curiously, those who oppose the idea of mankind's universal salvation are equally divided over interpretation of prophecy and even their salvation recipes, yet their common foundation is the claim that all mankind will not be saved! What a terrible foundation!). Instead the foundational argument for the salvation of all mankind is Christ himself as the second Adam and the atoning sacrifice for not only our sins, but the sins of all mankind. Confidence in this fact overrules any uncertainties we may have in interpreting Christ's prophecies. Christ's work on the cross for all mankind is the foundation of hope both for us and for our fellowman.

Finally, while I enjoy these studies, confirming and re-confirming the fact of God's love for all mankind from the Bible, I also consider a graver question. Will further proofs of Jesus' promises and prophecy help our understanding and prove God's victorious grace to the unbeliever? Will those already professing Christ be thankful that the grace that saves all mankind is the same grace that also saves them? Will those who reject the salvation of all mankind recognize their offensive blind hypocrisy in claiming their sins are forgiven at the cross, but the sins of others are not forgiven? It would be the greatest honor to be used by God to lead another to Christ and his grace for us all. And God commands us to labor with all our energy testifying to his grace. He adds our feeble efforts into his master plan. However, the praise for opening the ears of the dumb, giving sight to the blind, and raising the dead goes to Christ alone. He alone has the power to conceive born again believers. Fine arguments alone never persuaded one person to come to Christ. The Holy Spirit alone breathes life into the dead.

So if further expert defense is rejected after all our efforts, remember Paul's exhortation in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 (WEB), "***For though we walk in the flesh, we don't wage war according to the flesh; for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the throwing down of strongholds, throwing down imaginations and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.***" We wage war preaching God's word and praying to Christ while waiting patiently for the Holy Spirit to make the difference!

Thank you for joining my further research. Understanding prophecy has always been difficult for me. Lack of confidence in my position has, at times past, resulted in embarrassment and defensiveness. Helpful teachability was lost in me because confident understanding eluded me even after all my study. Further, I was lost in the dizzying array of interpretive models available. I despaired whether understanding was even possible. The winning recipe for my dilemma was instead to rest confidently in the Lord's love knowing that our promised destiny does not depend upon our understanding, but upon his grace. That is good news! Hopefully this good news lowers our defenses enough to honest that our best explanations are merely models of understanding. History future will give us the certain understanding when that Great Day reveals all. My proposed model of understanding has answered enough questions to satisfy my desire to make consistent sense of the whole. However, I pray that I, or any who agree with my conclusions above, would keep knowledge in its proper place for questions still remain. One day even the value of knowledge will be eclipsed and pass away with the commencement of glorious eternity. Though knowledge about God's love for you, me, and all mankind will certainly never pass away!

Your Thought is that Christians Have Lost the Gospel?

QUESTION>> Your thought is that Christians have lost the gospel? Really?

ME>> Certainly not all Christians have lost the gospel! However, just as certainly there are many who claim to follow Jesus and profess faith in Jesus, yet are misguided as to who Jesus is and the beauty of his unconditional love. Consider that the first century church of Galatia lost the gospel. Apostle Paul wrote the letter of Galatians to rebuke their unbelief. This church was nurtured by Paul himself. This church was only decades away from Christ himself. Yet even they were not immune from falling from grace. They were not immune and neither are we, as church history shows. Sadly our natural way of thinking prefers conditional love instead of unconditional love. Our sinful self prefers hypocrisy instead of happiness that Jesus loves all mankind. So are you thinking naturally or supernaturally? Are you hypocritical or happy? Read Galatians 3:1-5 (WEB).

1) Foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you not to obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly portrayed among you as crucified? 2) I just want to learn this from you. Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by hearing of faith? 3) Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now completed in the flesh? 4) Did you suffer so many things in vain, if it is indeed in vain? 5) He therefore who supplies the Spirit to you, and does miracles among you, does he do it by the works of the law, or by hearing of faith?

Friend, trust the good news, take the yoke that is easy.

*Learn from my mistakes, avoid the dead end that is hard.
Jesus was the perfect sacrifice, he loves mankind deeply!
Why believe Satan's lies, why run from grace scared?*

God's richest blessing to you!

Jeff Martin

Discipled by the Grace of Jesus Christ

Home Bible Optimism Articles

DGJC

Christian Perspectives on Strength and Beauty

Today I chatted with Jane, an elderly Catholic believer who often sits on a doorstep near my office. Jane volunteered the story of a young woman from her church who offends by showing cleavage, too much leg, and too little discretion with her beauty. Jane went on to say that girls shouldn't dress that way in God's house. I commented that the whole world is God's house and asked Jane if she could talk to... [read more.](#)

Christian Teaching

THE TABLE OF CONTENTS 1. Before Studying God, (prolegomena). 2. A Study of Knowing God, (revelation). 3. A Study of What God is Like and What God Does, (Theology). 4. A Study of God's Special Good Agents, (angelology). 5. A Study of God's Special Evil Agents, (demonology). 6. A Study of Humanity, (anthropology). 7. A Study of Sin, (harmartiology). 8. A Study of the Person of Christ, (Christology). 9. A Study of the Holy Spirit, ... [read more.](#)

Five Prayers from Scripture

The Prayer of Jabez Recently I was introduced to a small book titled "The Prayer Of Jabez." The book discusses a small passage of Scripture which tells us about Jabez, his mother, and a prayer that Jabez prayed. In fact the whole story of Jabez and his prayer only encompasses two verses included here for your reference, 9) Jabez was more honorable than his brothers. His mother named him Jabez, saying, "Because I bore him... [read more.](#)

He Went To Jerusalem

Jesus, in his work of atonement for the sins of mankind, did the most important thing for us... he went to Jerusalem. In this article I discuss, first, the resolute and orderly plan that Christ followed as revealed in the book of Matthew, second, how this plan demonstrates that Christ died for the sins of all mankind, and third, applications for following Christ to Jerusalem. Christ's Resolute and Orderly Plan The book of Matthew begins... [read more.](#)

Justified!

How can a sinful man be justified before a holy God? To justify someone is to declare them innocent or guiltless, to absolve or acquit. The dilemma for us is that God is our judge and he is both loving and just. He is perfect in love, but also perfect in justice so that he cannot wink at our sin or sweep it under the carpet. We must be judged and we are all convicted... [read more.](#)

Optimism Out of Control

Now in print at Amazon and Lulu! Years ago I shared a thought with a friend, an incredibly awesome thought. He responded by saying that perhaps my "optimism had just gotten out of

control." The phrase was so peculiar that it has stuck with me all these years. I am thankful for my friend's comment, which he has likely long forgotten. It served the good purpose of encouraging my deeper reflection. Also, the phrase... [read more](#).

Rescued by the Eternal Life Guard!

Does God rescue us? When I first heard the idea years ago that God does not rescue the fool or the unrighteous, Proverbs 19:19, I became quite afraid. Who is a greater fool or more unrighteous than me? Will God not rescue me? And what about you? Will he rescue you? Rather than try to find assurance from the false hope that we are not a fool or not unrighteous join me in a quick... [read more](#).

SAVED 5X

A pastor told a funny story. While walking seminary grounds musing about God, someone leaped from behind a tree startling him with the question, "Are you saved?" The frightened pastor called back, "From what?" while looking around for danger. After a moment, the pastor realized that the man was not warning him about pedestrian danger, but instead was doing evangelism in his own style and asking him if he has Christian salvation. The pastor answered... [read more](#).

Savior of the World!

They said to the woman, "Now we believe, not because of your speaking; for we have heard for ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world." John 4:42 (WEB) The adulterous woman told her town that Jesus is the Savior of the world. Imagine that. Yet is Jesus the Savior of the WHOLE world? The adulterous woman whom Jesus spoke to at Jacob's well received the good news that... [read more](#).

Should I Stay or Should I Go?

Life is filled with tough questions. Should I go to college or take this or that job? Should I marry or stay single? Should I have children or have none? Should I rent or buy a house? But by far the toughest question I have ever faced on numerous occasions is 'should I stay or should I go?' I and most of us usually find the safest easiest path toward our goals that also does... [read more](#).

Stretch Your Tent

Persevering after failure, hardship, or disappointment can be difficult if not impossible in our own strength. Even more difficult is when there is nobody to blame but ourselves for our situation. After we have kicked our own dog, shot our own foot, or burnt down our own shed, living with the outcomes of our own foolish behavior can be painful for ourselves and our loved ones to say the least. The question of the hour... [read more](#).

The Bill of No Rights

Preamble In this paper I compare man's claim of "inalienable rights" and "freedom" with the truth of Holy Scripture. This comparison is essential to keep the family of Christ from seduction to the philosophies of unbelieving mankind. Like the forbidden fruit in the garden, these philosophies are beautiful on the outside, but filled with Satan's lies about the grace

of God and nature of man. Specifically man has no "inalienable rights" before God and their... [read more](#).

The Declaration of Dependence

Preamble When in the course of spiritual events, Christians must separate from unbelief, wickedness, and man supplanting God, to retain the privileged titles of sons and daughters of God, the fearful certainty of the coming wrath of God requires that we should declare the causes impelling us to reverence Christ. These truths are self evident, all people, by birth-nature, are disobedient to the Lord Jesus Christ, and by nature reject their good creator in favor... [read more](#).

The Image of God in Man

What is the Image of God in Man? Many find the image of God in the form or function of an individual. Americans in particular emphasize individualism. Some compare form with God as Trinity and man as body, soul, and spirit. Some compare function with a man as God's vicar. These may be true, but I propose there is more. Consider, 26) God said, "Let's make man in our image, after our likeness. Let them... [read more](#)."

The Image of God in Man, Part 2

I have often heard people who are going through a trial thank others for praying by saying, "I have felt your prayers." I have never openly objected to this exchange, but as a young Christian I have often wondered if this wasn't quite Biblical. Our knowledge of what people are doing out of our sight is limited whereas only God's is unlimited. However, I never made a big deal about it because it seemed like... [read more](#).

The Image of God in Man, Part 3

Well Worth Writing about ... Again In ninth grade I savored a small taste of glory. A good friend persuaded me to join the Future Farmers of America at school. My parents were not farmers, but I lived in a farming community so I gave it a try. The FFA excels at two things in particular, creating agricultural related contests... and giving awards to the contest winners. And so it wasn't long before I found... [read more](#).

To Battle with the Sword of the Spirit and Prayer!

I have had the privilege and challenge of discipleship by Christians from several Church traditions. I am privileged because God has shown me loving correction and teaching through these brothers. Moreover God has used these brothers to introduce me to powerful doctrines that I would never have heard otherwise. For example I was directed to study Ephesians and learned that God elected to save us from before the foundation of the world apart from even... [read more](#).

Whose Name is Jealous

God has given many names to himself for our sake throughout Scripture. Perhaps one of the most powerful names given is recorded in Exodus 34:14 (WEB), "For you shall worship no other god; for Yahweh, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God." As Christians we are taught elsewhere in Scripture that jealousy is dangerous and wrong to maintain in our hearts, and

this is true. Yet here we read in Exodus that the God... [read more.](#)

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Disciplined by the Grace of Jesus Christ

Home Bible Optimism Articles

Zingers

Ephesians 1:3-4, Chosen!

Tonight I just finished reading a theological magazine that I receive every other month. I enjoy reading the magazine to learn as well as understand more about the views of other Christians. As I read the magazine I noted how easy it was for the various contributors to make many profound points as well as promote the theological jargon from a particular camp without explaining or teaching the Christian Scripture. I found myself intellectually roused... [read more.](#)

Ephesians 5:19, Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs

I thoroughly enjoy music. In fact, in my house my kids tell me to turn down the volume. Agreed we should not use music as an escape from problems or a veneer over depression, but instead to tell the tale of our victories and defeats, and express our emotions. Agreed also we shouldn't prefer music to hearing truth, but why not tell truth in our music? David did. For myself I rank a number of... [read more.](#)

Ephesians 5:25-33, Marriage Part 4 - A Cross of Self-Sacrifice

Like most of you I grew up with the fanciful notions about marriage and family described in romantic books, songs, and movies. Cinderella found her Prince Charming " And they lived happily ever after ." Song lyrics echo with the promise " I will always love you. " These books, songs, and movies often get the main point right, that marriage is a wonderful design. However, they often forget to mention, that in addition to... [read more.](#)

Ephesians 6:4 and Hebrews 12:10, The Strong Willed Parent

Much has been written about how to handle the strong willed child. Parenting has got to be one of the toughest jobs there is in the world. And parenting can be especially tough when the child you are parenting possesses a strong will. God himself knows this because he is a parent himself and we are his children. This is why he commands Christians to discipline disobedient children with the rod of correction in the... [read more.](#)

Ezekiel 23:20, Donkeys and Horses

Men, we need more frank conversation about sexual temptation. The prophets frequently compare Israel's idolatry to sexual adultery in quite graphic terms. Ezekiel chapter 23 is one such comparison. God was quite enraged at his people for turning to Egypt for help rather than calling on him. How would you feel if your son or daughter went to those that hated you for counsel rather than coming to you? Ezekiel tells us how God felt, ... [read more.](#)

Galatians 1:1-2, With and Not With

Galatians 1:1-2 (WEB), "Paul, an apostle—not from men, nor through man, but through Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead— and all the brothers who are with me , to the assemblies of Galatia:" Philippians 1:1 and 4:21 (WEB), "Paul and Timothy , servants of Jesus Christ; To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and servants . "Greet every saint in Christ Jesus... [read more](#).

Genesis 3:15 plus, Doveman Promised, Begins, Returns, Rules

While Gotham City attracts vicarious tourists of brutality and a world without rules, we with tickets to the Golden City ought to remind ourselves of an ancient promised coming and redemption from our rule breaking, "I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will bruise your head, and you will bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15 WEB). Doveman Promised! While bat men amuse about a Batman and... [read more](#).

Genesis 3:15, John 1:36, Acts 1:11, A Series of Fortunate Events

Is your glass half empty or half full? My family has enjoyed a popular best selling book series titled, A Series of Unfortunate Events . The title resonates with most because we are often faced with many trials and unfortunate events. In fact we face so many trials that we might think that the good God has checked out of our lives. For example a friend of mine in high school concluded from her experience... [read more](#).

Hebrews 11:34, Weakness Turned To Strength

The Holy Spirit says in Hebrews 11:34 (WEB) that in the past people trusted God and their "from weakness were made strong." Can you honestly confess your weaknesses to friends? To the face in the mirror? To God? Will you be honest with God or will you hide your weaknesses from him who sees all? Can you trust that God has the power to use even our weaknesses to demonstrate his grace? Will you trust... [read more](#).

Hebrews 12:14-17, SEE TO IT!

"Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. Afterward, as you know, ... [read more](#).

Hebrews 13:7-17, The Outer Circle

Recently while researching on the Internet I received an invitation to join the ' Inner Circle' of a particular group. The secrecy appealed to my curiosity. The exclusivity tempted my pride. The chance of ' esprit de corps wooed ' my loneliness. Who wouldn't want to be part of an inner circle? Yet Jesus summons us to join him in his outer circle. "Remember your leaders, men who spoke to you the word of God, ... [read more](#).

Hebrews 4:11-13, Two Double Edged Swords!!

Knives are dangerous. Several years ago I purchased new pocket knives for myself and my son. Though knives are dangerous we need to learn to use them safely. So while demonstrating to my family how to use the knife safely... I nearly cut my finger off! Though quite humbling to be raced to the emergency room, perhaps it was an even better lesson for both me and my family. Knives are dangerous, so be careful... [read more](#).

Hosea 11:3-4, The Scripture That Ripped My Proud Heart To Shreds

The summer of 1998 I had just completed my fund raising efforts to participate in a Christian ministry outreach to college students. I had been a Christian for many years serving the Lord through the counsel of my Christian leaders in Bible study, evangelism, and disciple-making. By every outward indication I was a model Christian. During my fund raising campaign I had also been working on completing a Bible Certificate Program through a well known... [read more](#).

Hosea 1:10, Optimism Out of Control, Part 2: In the Same Place!

Some Scriptures have depressed me. Consider one. Jesus answered them, 'I told you, and you don't believe. The works that I do in my Father's name, these testify about me. But you don't believe, because you are not of my sheep, as I told you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.' John 10:25-27 (WEB) You may say I should not be depressed because I am a sheep that... [read more](#).

Isaiah 19:22-25, Life aint a highway,,, at least not yet!

Last night we grabbed some family time and watched the kid movie Cars by Disney / Pixar. It is a fun full length animation about the value of humility and friendship over pride and independence. Moreover, there is little overt objectionable content that I perceived. Some have objected to the opening theme song by Rascal Flatts, Life is a Highway . The hard driving beat of this tune could rev the engine and spin the... [read more](#).

Isaiah 26:17-19, You Cannot Tell It, But,,,

At the beginning of the year I made a slight adjustment in my priorities. As a young Christian I did very little to serve in a local church family, but prided my self in being on the front lines in evangelism. And worse yet my pride blinded me to just how poor an evangelist I was anyway. But the Lord is a good father and brought correction in order to teach me to fellowship from... [read more](#).

Isaiah 30:1-18, Fifty Ways We Left Our Lover

There is a popular song from my youth still on the radio today titled, Fifty ways to leave your lover , by Paul Simon. The chorus encourages, "Just slip out the back, Jack. Make a new plan, Stan. You don't need to be coy, Roy . Just get yourself free. Hop on the bus, Gus. You don't need to discuss much. Just drop off the key, Lee and get yourself free." This is the theme... [read more](#).

Isaiah 30:1-2, An Alliance, But Not With My Spirit

The most frightening teaching to me when I first came to Christ was found in Romans Chapter 8 verse 13. But how can that be? Romans Chapter 8 is the climax of Christian encouragement! If we are afraid of any Chapter in the Scripture it is Romans Chapter 9. What is so frightening about Romans Chapter 8? It is here that we learn that if we live according to the sinful nature we will die, ... [read more](#).

Isaiah 30:31-32, Break Out the Punishing Rod AND... the Tambourines? Say What?

We are all familiar with the picture of a father disciplining his son while soberly saying, "son, this is going to hurt me more than it hurts you ." So our heart goes out to the son and the pain he will experience. Our heart goes out to the situation wishing it had never been. And our heart goes out to the father who experiences hurt as well, perhaps being reminded of his own... [read more](#).

Isaiah 48: 1-6, Would you give God an Oscar Award?

Popular thought and theology, if they acknowledge God at all, would reduce him to be a mere fore-teller of the future, a psychic in the sky, if you will. So whether it is the weather tomorrow or the giving and receiving of grace most believe that God anticipates these wonders, but he either cannot or will not interfere with nature and man's ' free will. ' So if that is your own view, please take... [read more](#).

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Zingers

Isaiah 63:17, Whoa! Whoa! Whoa! Whoa! Whoa! Whoa! Whoa!

Isaiah is my favorite Old Testament prophet. Through the Holy Spirit he saw more of the glories of Christ than many see today even after Christ has already come. Why he even saw past our present world to the inauguration of the New Heavens and the New Earth! It is a wonder that Isaiah didn't simply explode from the high octane glory that was revealed to him. Yet Isaiah didn't explode, but shared in the... [read more](#).

Isaiah 64:5, Acts 2:36, and Ephesians 2:1-22, A Study in Pronouns

Recently I read an interesting article that compared President Ronald Reagan and President Barak Obama's use of the word 'we'. The article noted that Reagan's use of the word 'we' was the populist usage, 'we' meaning everyone in the United States who is rooting for the good of United States. Reagan felt a brotherhood with his fellow Americans. Obama's use of the word 'we', however, is not populist, but instead 'we' meaning those that agree... [read more](#).

Isaiah 66:22-24, Optimism Out of Control, Part 3: All Mankind

Isaiah was a man before his time and he suffered because of it. His books can be divided into two distinct pieces: part one, judgment; and part two, mercy. The parts of his book are so distinct and so chock full of prophecy years and years beyond the end of his life, that some suggest that Isaiah did not write his entire book. Yet Jesus attributes both halves of the book to Isaiah in John... [read more](#).

Isaiah 6:8, World Record Excuses

I heard an awesome sermon today about a not so awesome fact. I am an expert at making excuses (and you too). Of course we may need to correct a wrong accusation from time to time, but that is not what we are talking about here. We are talking about our ability to shift the blame to something or someone else, to dodge the bullet, to sidestep our responsibility, to attempt to ease our conscience... [read more](#).

Isaiah 8:19-9:7, Nevertheless

nev er the less [nev-er-thuh-les], adverb Meaning : in spite of what preceded Synonyms : nonetheless, notwithstanding, however, in spite of that, yet, at least, but, still When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of... [read more](#).

James 3:1-2, The Perfect Person

I was reminded this past week that I am far from perfect even in the exercising of my spiritual gifts. We ought to be thankful that when Christ saves us he also calls us to useful service and equips us with at least one spiritual gift to serve Christ's family. However, we should also remember that even the exercising of our spiritual gifts is tainted with sin and so love itself still remains the greatest... [read more](#).

James 4:1-10, I am Grumpy Because I Cannot Be God!

Wow, way too long since I've had a chance to write. Check this thought copied from my Facebook status. The Holy Spirit says in James 4:1-10 (WEB), 1) Where do wars and fightings among you come from? Don't they come from your pleasures that war in your members? 2) You lust, and don't have. You murder and covet, and can't obtain. You fight and make war. You don't have, because you don't ask. 3) You... [read more](#).

James 4:1-4, Mad in the USA

The people of the United States ought to be thankful for the riches God has poured down upon our nation. We have been blessed in home life, education, business, research, and government like few nations in the history of the world. These blessings have served to provide a superior quality of life and comfort when compared with most people. Yet despite these superior provisions the vices tearing at the fiber of our nation are common... [read more](#).

Jeremiah 1:4-10, Ripped from the Word and Womb

Today I ripped the entire book of Jeremiah from my Bible. I read these words in Jeremiah 1:4-10 (WEB), Now Yahweh's word came to me, saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you. Before you were born, I sanctified you. I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.' Then I said, 'Ah, Lord Yahweh! Behold, I don't know how to speak; for I am a child.' But Yahweh said to me,... [read more](#).

Job 31:1, I Did Look At You

Men, we need more frank conversation about sexual temptation. Job said, "I made a covenant with my eyes, how then should I look lustfully at a young woman?" (Job 31:1 WEB). Christian men, this is our ideal. But Jesus also challenges us in the Sermon on the Mount with the words, "but I tell you that everyone who gazes at a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart."... [read more](#).

John 12:25, Relient K, Chapter 2

I enjoy hearing the salvation stories of those who come to Christ. It is nothing less than wonderful to hear how lives are changed through the power of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is truly a wonderful savior who desires to pluck us from the filth of things such as fornication, drunkenness, greed, and the like. I myself was ecstatic after coming to Christ that I had left things such as this behind. The freedom I... [read more](#).

John 14:8-21, Marriage Part XOXO - Intimate Reflections of

the Image of God

I read Divine Romance by Edwards. I heard Divine Romance by Wickham. But what is romantic about God, the cross, Scripture, repentance, faith, obedience, and eternity? Can true romance be known? I pondered. I read The Bible by Jesus, Philip said to him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us.' Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you such a long time, and do you not know me, Philip?... [read more](#).

John 1:12-13, Give Kids the World

Eleven months ago the Lord was pleased to bring a difficult trial into the life of my family. My youngest daughter was diagnosed with Wilm's Tumor kidney cancer. I say the Lord was pleased, not because he is cruel, but because every thing he ordains, including difficulties, are to fulfill and complete his marvelous works in this world and our lives. And this includes my daughter's kidney cancer as well. Through this trial my wife,... [read more](#).

John 3:16, 10:10, and 20:31 ~ Hat Trick!!!

A hat trick is the achievement of a positive feat three times in a game, or another achievement based on the number three. The term first appeared in 1858 in cricket, to describe H. H. Stephenson's taking three wickets with three consecutive deliveries. Fans held a collection for Stephenson, and presented him with a hat bought with the proceeds. The term was used in print for the first time in 1865. Other sports also adopted... [read more](#).

John 3:5-8, The Reformers, Their Stepchildren, and.... Their Grandchildren

Read Leonard Verduin's The Reformers and Their Stepchildren . This book explains the Anabaptists of the 16 th century also known as ' The Left-wing of the Reformation' or the ' Radical Reformers .' Martin Luther sparked the Reformation, dividing Catholic and Protestant over the gospel of justification by faith alone, Romans 1:17. This match lit a fire that divided not only Catholics and Protestants, but Protestants and Protestants to this very day. Never did... [read more](#).

John 7:16-20, Why do you seek to kill me? A fair question.

Jesus had an amazing way with words. For myself, all too often I am in conversations of various sorts only to think of the choice words a day later. But Jesus always had the perfect words for his audience, seeing into our hearts with the wisdom that only God has. One noteworthy record of Jesus' words is in John Chapter 7. In this passage Jesus 'cuts to the quick' like no one or nowhere else... [read more](#).

John 8:30-47, Free at Last! Free at Last! Thank God Almighty I am 2/3 Free at Last!

On August 28, 1963 Martin Luther King Jr. stood on the steps at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. and exclaimed, " I have a Dream! ", the most powerful and resounding speech in our generation with the final words still echoing through our land, " Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty we are free at last! " Jesus is also for freedom and has a dream. Consider the powerful words of... [read more](#).

John(1) 3:15 and John 14:6, Relatives and Absolutes

We should note when studying Scripture that God's word contains both relative and absolute statements. Some statements in the Bible are always true under every condition for all time. Other statements are relative or generalizations and not absolute. These statements are generally true, but not under every condition or situation. For example, the apostle John wrote, "Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life remaining in him" ... [read more](#).

Kings(1) 19:1-3, The Fear of Woman Proves to be a Snare

Consider another Zinger on the theology of women. Again I have written in my article The Image of God in Man that I am opposed to efforts to change God's Word to be gender neutral. Though again, upon further reflection, there may be another important doctrine for the politically correct to gain ground in the area of gender equality. Proverbs 29:25 (WEB) says, "The fear of man proves to be a snare, but whoever puts... [read more](#)."

Kings(2) 6:8 - 7:20, Believe in the United States Marines or Believe in Yaweh?

This fall I have the distinct honor of teaching the youth Sunday School class at my church which also includes one of my daughters. I've enjoyed getting to know each of them better. I have also been serving coffee, tea, and hot chocolate as a 'coming of age' treat. We've been learning how to balance the Bible and a cup of coffee without spilling it, something every adult ought to know how to do! The... [read more](#).

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Kings(2) 8:11-12, More Warfare, Elisha Style

Just another quick note on the awesome power of warfare with spiritual weapons. Previously we've discussed the arsenal listed in Ephesians 6. We've mentioned the armament of 'attitude' in 1 Peter 4. We've also considered the supernatural weaponry that God wielded through Elisha. To review, God helped Israel by revealing to Elisha the locations of the Syrian army and Elisha informed the king of Israel so they could better defend themselves. God also empowered Elisha... [read more.](#)

Kings(2) 8:7-15, Water Boarding 101

We missed reading the newspaper today, but read II Kings 8:7-15 (WEB) in family devotions. 7) Elisha came to Damascus; and Benhadad the king of Syria was sick. He was told, "The man of God has come here." 8) The king said to Hazael, "Take a present in your hand, and go, meet the man of God, and inquire of Yahweh by him, saying, 'Will I recover from this sickness?' " 9) So Hazael went... [read more.](#)

Luke 10:3, Braver Heart

Several years ago I saw the movie Brave Heart starring Mel Gibson cast as William Wallace who leads Scotland in revolution against the tyranny of British rule. The fervor of Wallace-Gibson is heated white hot when the British rape and murder his new bride and so he leads Scotland into bloody battle against the British. If there ever was a just war this would be it, as a husband rises to vengeance against his wife's... [read more.](#)

Luke 10:36-37, The Good Iraqi

One self-righteous philosopher said to another self-condemned partier, " We fool ourselves thinking that we love our neighbor." The sel-condemned replied, " I love my neighbor, I do not bother him, but who is my neighbor?" Yet a third in the future replied to the past, A Christian was going from Philadelphia to Baghdad to testify, and he fell among terrorists, who both stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. By... [read more.](#)

Luke 13:31-32, Go Tell That Fox

Jesus knows the heart of every man. Read the Christian Scriptures and you will see that absolutely no man gets the leg up on God. Jesus sees us coming from miles away with our evil motives, sin, selfishness, and whatever ugly baggage we may be hiding. You name it and Jesus already knows all about it, whether we are hedonistic pagans, hypocritical Pharisees, or bumbling stumbling disciples. In Luke we see a particularly spicy comment... [read more.](#)

Luke 14:26, You Can't Love If You Don't...

The volume control has broken on our car radio. Fortunately the Lord chose a new

permanent volume setting that works for both me and the kids. If we max the bass and treble controls we can hear when driving with highway wind whistling past the windows and if we lower the bass and treble the volume is perfect when sitting still. Thank you God! We do enjoy listening to Christian music and one recent hit... [read more](#).

Luke 15:3-7, The Greatest Celebration on Earth

This past February my family had the exciting opportunity to enjoy a family vacation at Disney World in Orlando, Florida. This is the fifth time I have been to Florida. My parents took my brother and I when we were 4 and 5 and again when 13 and 14. Later my wife and I celebrated our honeymoon there in 91' and a pre-children vacation in 93'. I enjoy Florida and this year enjoyed taking my... [read more](#).

Luke 16:15, On Ships and Supermodels

Today, I maintain the ship, I throw some Supermodels overboard, and I keep others. God's people have safely traveled since Christ in the vessel of the church, though she has been sorely attacked. World culture has at times torn gaping holes through the hull that have needed serious repair. When this happens we need to pull out a serious welder and rivets or sink. One seriously riveting verse is Luke 16:15 (WEB), He said to... [read more](#).

Luke 16:19-31, Charles Dickens versus The Gospel of Jesus Christ

I have on my shelf a video of Charles Dickens' famous tale, A Christmas Carol , acted out by the Muppets. You undoubtedly know Ebenezer Scrooge, the nasty old businessman visited by his deceased partner Jacob Marley who returned from the dead to warn him to repent of greed or he will suffer the judgment of death. My family and I have enjoyed the movie, but recently I was reminded that the thesis of the... [read more](#).

Luke 16:19-31, The Beautiful Woman and Laverne

While preparing to teach the book of I Timothy, I noted that the Holy Spirit makes the generalization that greed and aggression are vices common to men, I Timothy 2:8, 3:3, and 3:8. The Holy Spirit also makes the generalization that immodesty and gossip are vices common to women, I Timothy 2:9, 3:11, and 5:13. Jesus already told the non-fictional story of a rich man who burns in Hades because of his greed, Luke 16:19-31.... [read more](#).

Luke 16:8-9, Jesus Commends the Shrewd / Bill Gates for Devotions?

Someone once said, " Don't be so Heavenly minded that you are no earthly good! " Highlighting this quote might seem a bit odd in the midst of a blog that is dedicated to writing reams of Christian truth, which I am sure has bored many to tears. Yet the quote is fascinating, at least prompting this question: is that really possible? That is, is it possible to be so Heavenly minded that you are... [read more](#).

Luke 20:18, Broken or Crushed. Your choice.

Growing up as a youth my mind was filled with imaginations of the great things I would be

and the great things I would do in my life. I had numerous cousins, aunts, uncles, family, schoolmates, and friends who demonstrated the achievement of success. I lived to achieve the same. I remember one who worked hard, saved money, and bought himself a beautiful sport car. The car was loaded with a high-powered engine, a four-barrel... [read more.](#)

Luke 20:26-38, Marriage, Part 2: The Divine Marriage Amendment

The purpose of Monthly Zingers is to remind myself and my audience of the flavorful teaching of Christ. Think of it as a spiritual spice rack. Recently, I liberally salted and peppered your plate with Romans 3:20-24 & 5:20, The Federal 'Old Covenant Style' Marriage Amendment . Unsure if I served the perfect blend of spice, however, I decided to add several pounds of red hot chili peppers in order to bring the dish back... [read more.](#)

Luke 22:26, Major George Buxton Persuades Sergeant Alvin York

"York quietly went through basic training and then in the spring of 1918 spoke to an officer about his continuing objection to war. York's sincerity was obvious and he was taken to see Major George Edward Buxton, the battalion commander. Buxton and York spent a long night discussing the Bible. Buxton pointed to Jesus' instruction that the apostles should carry swords (Luke 22:36); to Jesus' statement that earthly kingdoms, unlike Jesus' spiritual kingdom, do fight... [read more.](#)

Luke 22:38, That is Enough

While challenging myself and another brother to follow Christ the other day I was reminded of curious words from our Lord. While the disciples readied to travel with Jesus to the Olive Garden after the Last Supper the disciples said, "They said, 'Lord, behold, here are two swords.' He said to them, 'That is enough'" (Luke 22:38 WEB). This is just the type of verse we might easily glide right over without much meditation. Yet... [read more.](#)

Matthew 15:7-9, Happy Holidays!

Today I hope to prepare our annual Christmas card for mailing. I am thankful for the occasion because it is one day of the year that we are able to wish our family, friends, neighbors, and colleagues a Merry Christmas without too much repercussion for actually vocalizing a Christian theme. No doubt most are aware of the tension during this time of year, should we be brave and greet others 'Merry Christmas' or should we... [read more.](#)

Matthew 16:15-21, Optimism Out of Control

Praise God, the Lord is making progress in the sanctification of even my sinful unbelieving heart. Last week I was accused of having out of control optimism. This is probably a first for me. In general I tend to be on the side of melancholy and pessimism. After growing up in a family strained by financial hardship, bankruptcy, the death of my brother to an automobile accident, and the death of my mother to cancer... [read more.](#)

Matthew 18:1-4 and more, Good to Great or to Grace?

Recently at my employ I was asked to read and report on the latest best seller titled Good to Great , by Jim Collins. The author of the book researched very successful businesses and distilled his findings into a number of axioms that have propelled good organizations to enduring greatness. I enjoyed the book and reported on the axioms that I felt to be most useful. However, in my report I also added that the... [read more.](#)

Matthew 18:7, My BODACIOUS Father

Jesus said, "Woe to the world because of occasions of stumbling! For it must be that the occasions come, but woe to that person through whom the occasion comes!" (Matthew 18:7 WEB). When I read the verse above I am initially repulsed, especially when I think about the word "must." The word "must" communicates a definite necessity, an irrevocable purpose, an unchangeable course... toward sin. Every rational fiber in my body and belief in my... [read more.](#)

Matthew 22:1-14, The Parable of the Wedding Banquet!

The Bible says scary things, but the believing, those who know the God of grace can stand confidently in his grace. Read Matthew 22:1-14 (WEB) and consider what the believing know and what the unbelieving do not know. 1) Jesus answered and spoke to them again in parables, saying, 2) "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a certain king, who made a marriage feast for his son, 3) and sent out his servants to call... [read more.](#)

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Zingers

Matthew 23:34-36, The Christian Memorial Day Proposed

Am I the only one saddened by the prayers of American Christians thanking God for the peace and safety we have to worship in the United States... while Christians across the globe suffer persecution and unimaginable trials? Consider an comparison. " A marine stationed on routine duty at headquarters thanks his commanding officer that he can serve in safety at headquarters while his fellow marines are in harms way in the battle field." That soldier's... [read more.](#)

Matthew 24:4-14, Same as the Old Boss

The rock group, The Who, screamed a provocative lyric. In their song, Won't Get Fooled Again , they conclude with a despairing truth "Meet the new boss... Same as the old boss." Their song rightly points out a sad irony of every revolution that has ever taken place on the planet. Mankind strives and struggles to take two steps forward, but ironically we close our eyes and slide back to be the same people we... [read more.](#)

Matthew 6:13, Lead us not into temptation

Unbelievers see contradiction in the Scriptures and claim this as evidence of fallibility in God or his word. The unbelieving make a grave mistake in maligning God in this way. However, we believers often make the mistake of responding defensively or superficially when a seeming contradiction is pointed out. Instead we should not be surprised when a seeming paradox, contradiction, or anomaly is pointed out to us. After all the study of God is well... [read more.](#)

Matthew 7:21-23, 24:23-25, Prophets and Miracle Workers, Yet Reprobate

God has at times through history spoken his word and words of prophecy as well as performed miracles through men of faith. Strangely, however, the Scriptures teach that there are and will be false prophets and miracle workers. Strange, because their faith and testimony is false, yet the prophecies and miracles are real! Why would God delegate super natural power to the unbelieving? Perhaps to test the faith of the saints. Perhaps to further delude... [read more.](#)

Peter(1) 2:9-12, My observations as an undercover catholic priest

I shocked a friend once by telling him that I was an undercover catholic priest. I explained that God had called me out of professional ministry to the humbler station of laity, though I maintained my catholic priesthood undercover. I could not get him to believe me, but Scripture suggests that any believer in Christ can make this claim. Peter writes, 9) But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a... [read more.](#)

Peter(1) 2:9-17, Honor the King

The desire to be accepted and at ease is so great within our natures that we often may be tempted to make the kingdoms of this earth our home. But Christian friends, Peter explains that believers in Christ are a holy nation with a citizenship in heaven. Can the kingdoms of this earth offer a meaningful identity or a lasting rest to match this? True meaning and rest can only be found in Christ. Keep... [read more](#).

Peter(1) 4:1, Armed with Attitude

I once taught a Bible class to college students with a section titled, "Spiritual Weapons." I used Ephesians 6 to explain how Scripture and prayer are key spiritual weapons in our fight against sin and Satan. Recently while reading 1 Peter, I realized that I have neglected another vital spiritual weapon. Peter writes, "Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body... [read more](#)."

Peter(1) 4:11, Take away my freedom of speech? Please!

In my country the golden calf of our ideology may very well be the freedom of speech or the right to speak freely. Perhaps the emphasis of this ideal was born out of the persecution of many Christians in Eastern and then Western Europe in times past as Christianity spread from its roots in the Middle East. This is no surprise because the gospel of the grace of Christ has always met resistance, more or... [read more](#).

Peter(1) 4:17, Daddy, what are Hooters?

We just returned from a New Year's meal with my wife's extended family. My wife and kids have enjoyed a humorous debate about which of our family reunions serves the best food. Opinions diverge, but for me I enjoy all the food and the fellowship at these gatherings. We are also blessed to have family who love Jesus and lead out with Christian prayer and song. Today I noticed that the event was even less... [read more](#).

Peter(2) 3:1-13, Global Warming is No Joke

Global warming is no joke. Read below. 3:1) This is now, beloved, the second letter that I have written to you; and in both of them I stir up your sincere mind by reminding you, 2) that you should remember the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior: 3) knowing this first, that in the last days mockers will come, walking... [read more](#).

Philippians 2:1-11, Others Magazine!

We live in an unabashedly self-centered period of world history. If there were a time past when selflessness and sacrifice was considered a virtue, it is truly gone. Just what do you say to someone who says to you, 'It is all about YOU!' What? Shall I just kill all virtue and employ all my resources in the service of... MYSELF? It is true that my 'self' is self-'ish' and truly only concerned with my-'self'.... [read more](#).

Philippians 3:10, Eureka! Likeness IS NOT Sameness!!

My wife and I home-school and we have learned that a good home-school program is not for the faint of heart. Imagine taking a job as a kindergarten teacher and being promoted to a new grade level each year through twelfth grade! You would have to learn as much or more than the kids each year just to keep your head above the water. So most any home-schooler can tell you about both the hard... [read more](#).

Proverbs 11:22, It Aint No Secret Victoria

Men, we need more frank conversation about sexual temptation. Ever since our fall into sin men have been faced with the sin of lusting after the female body treating women as chattel and women have been faced with the sin of disrespecting men using their beauty as bait. One evening while dining at the beach I saw a beautiful woman walk across the shore while a man followed her in tow a few feet behind... [read more](#).

Proverbs 12:9, A Sad Observation

A person of integrity is the same person in public and in private. Yet most know that it is very difficult to be this kind of person. In fact at times we may be the most rude and unkind to people we know the best and very kind and polite to people we do not even know at all. This is a sad observation, though perhaps we should not stop at the observation, but instead... [read more](#).

Proverbs 16:1-7 and the Art of Motorcar Repair

I usually have my personal devotions with breakfast. I am an early riser, so my family is still asleep and it is nice quiet time to meet with God and His word while eating my oatmeal, banana, eggs with mustard, and glass of water. On this particular morning I had taken a vacation day, and though healthy food was on my breakfast menu, vacation was NOT the menu for the day. A day of street... [read more](#).

Proverbs 4:23, Can You REALLY Trust Him? Can You REALLY Trust Yourself?

This received in my email recently. My comments below... This is about the saddest advertisement I have ever seen. It is sad enough that this young woman and this young man have given away their intimacy (or taken it away from the other) without the commitment of marital bonds, but now FREMYMIND.COM proposes to restore her security with a simple background check of the man she just slept with. Say what?! I guess when things... [read more](#).

Proverbs 6:27, Playing with Fire

Men, we need more frank conversation about sexual temptation. God's wonderful design in our attraction to the beauty of the female body has been prostituted like never before in the name of freedom of expression. The amazing gift of human sexuality designed for the intimacy and safety of marriage commitment is prostituted in full view on the bed of United States businesses marketing departments and teen age Brittany Spears wannabes. Billions of dollars are made... [read more](#).

Proverbs 7:10,22, Parable of the Cherry Pie

Men, we need more frank conversation about sexual temptation. I have suggested in previous articles that the heart of immodest dress in women is the disrespectful control of men and the heart of lust in men is the insensitive lack of love for women. Perhaps the extreme example of this in our times is Pamela Anderson, formerly of the popular TV series Baywatch, who has lured millions of men to her website to gaze upon... [read more](#).

Psalm 108, The Help of Man is Worthless

My heart is steadfast, God. I will sing and I will make music with my soul. Wake up, harp and lyre! I will wake up the dawn. I will give thanks to you, Yahweh, among the nations. I will sing praises to you among the peoples. For your loving kindness is great above the heavens. Your faithfulness reaches to the skies. Be exalted, God, above the heavens! Let your glory be over all the earth.... [read more](#).

Psalm 10:16-18, Davids War on Terror

Terrorism is nothing new. Ever since sin has entered the world there have been oppressors and oppressed. Ever since the kingdoms of this earth have become the kingdoms of Satan, fathers and brothers have also beaten and abandoned their children and neighbors terrorized. The ancient Hebrew, King David, knew this as well and wrote Psalm 10 to point us to the only one who can deliver us from terror. 16) Yahweh is King forever and... [read more](#).

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Psalm 16:11, The Position of Pleasure

Consider the incredible dignity of mankind, created in God's image, a reflection of his awesome character, worth, and glory, created to walk upright, think intelligently, care for creation, serve one another, and demonstrate loving kindness and compassion. Yet consider the depravity to which we have fallen. God created us for his good pleasure intending us to take pleasure in his goodness, but we have made pleasure our god and lost all goodness.

he don ism pronunciation: [heed-n-iz-uhm]... [read more](#).

Psalm 99:8, Forgiven Yet Not Unpunished

God is a perfect heavenly father and so he always forgives...and punishes as well. Consider God's fatherhood of Israel. "O LORD our God, you answered them; you were to Israel a forgiving God, though you punished their misdeeds" (Psalm 99:8 NIV). God always forgave Israel, in fact he died for all of them as well as us. However, he also punished them and sometimes quite severely. Korah rebelled against Moses and so God swallowed Korah... [read more](#).

Revelation 12:11, Not so Dear Life

We American Christians have grown soft in the pursuit of happiness. For example, I recently enjoyed chatting with a friend while at an amusement park about how to safely watch worldly movies using technologies to remove objectionable content. Later I reflected that as we strolled at the park discussing movies, Christians round the world enlist as soldiers of Christ to evangelize, disciple, and testify, even unto death. Revelation 12:11 (WEB) says, "They overcame him... [read more](#)."

Revelation 20:11-15, A.M.A.Z.I.N.G. Grace

The good news of Jesus Christ is wonderful news. This news has given new life to every believer, from the uneducated fool who knows nothing but simple faith in Christ, to the proud intellectual who knows all but still needs a savior. And the good news of Christ is superbly worded in the New Testament so that we cannot reduce salvation to mere head knowledge, but instead that our hearts would bow in submission and... [read more](#).

Revelation 20:11-15, Optimism Out of Control, Part 5: Hades Gives Up!

Good Reason for Fear 19) "Now there was a certain rich man, and he was clothed in purple and fine linen, living in luxury every day. 20) A certain beggar, named Lazarus, was taken to his gate, full of sores, 21) and desiring to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. Yes, even the dogs came and licked his sores. 22) The beggar died, and he was carried away by... [read more](#)."

Revelation 20:11-15, Optimism Out of Control, Part 6: If, If, If, If, If, If,,,

1) Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2) When he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was hungry afterward. 3) The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." 4) But he answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out...' [read more](#).

Revelation 20:13-15, Out of Control Optimism Part 8, Your Name in The Book of Life!

13) The sea gave up the dead who were in it. Death and Hades [HELL] gave up the dead who were in them. They were judged, each one according to his works. 14) Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15) If anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire. Revelation 20:13-15 (WEB) ... [read more](#).

Revelation 22:12-21, Give You Revelation? Repent of Sexual Immorality While You Have Time

Third Day is one of my favorite Christian bands. Yet even so while listening to their 'Revelation' song a discerning hear might wonder what they seek when they sing 'Give me a revelation. Show me what to do.' Do they mean give me words from the Bible, God's inspired revelation? Do they mean give me inspiration from God beyond the Bible? Do they mean something less precise and more poetic? The last nine... [read more](#).

Revelation 22:17, The Spirit and the Bride say "Come!"

Recently I had the privilege of preaching to an assembly of believers about the beautiful body of Christ from the book of Ephesians. We learned that believers in Christ are His body, the church; that the central focus of Christ's reign is his work for the church; that the Christian is a new man, neither Jew nor Gentile; that the church is the great mystery of God's redemptive plan revealed to Paul; that the church... [read more](#).

Romans 10:6-11, One Nation Under God Vs Jesus is Lord

I have on my shelf a book titled, The Pen is Mightier than the Sword . This is true. Sadly this is true because quite often fickle human nature can be lead easily from one belief to another by error without placing building blocks on the permanent foundation of truth. Consider that many Russians rallied under the Communist Manifesto to become the USSR. Believe it or not there are actually some good principles in this... [read more](#).

Romans 3:20-24 & 5:20, The Federal 'Old Covenant Style' Marriage Amendment

Christian, I am confused. What is the purpose of the proposed United States federal marriage amendment? Is the purpose to restrain the sinful tendencies of mankind? If so the Scriptures both teach and demonstrate that the law never ever was able to accomplish that purpose.

David knew the law against adultery and murder, yet sinned anyway. Romans 5:20 (WEB) also explains that the law actually promoted more sin! "The law came in that the trespass... [read more](#).

Romans 3:23, You're Not a Good Man Charlie Brown

I just finished watching an awesome play production of Charlie Brown's Snoopy at a local playhouse. The play producers and actors are good friends, and I was thoroughly entertained. I almost fell off my seat laughing to watch my normally mild-mannered friends roll out a Broadway class performance. Well done! The grand finale song brought out the whole cast as melodramatic Charlie Brown mused about the possibility of anyone ever believing in him. His friends... [read more](#).

Romans 5:12-21, Out of Control Optimism Part 7, Many = Many = All = All

Continuing our 'Out of Control Optimism' series I am reminded of a construct in Romans Chapter 5 that offers great hope for the believer in Jesus Christ, that is hope for himself and his fellow man. Paul explains a parallel comparison and contrast between the first man from God, Adam, and the second man from God, Jesus Christ. 12) Therefore as sin entered into the world through one man, and death through sin; so death... [read more](#).

Romans 7:18, Ephesians 6:15, and Philippians 2:15, Star Peace

Recently I enjoyed viewing the Star Wars movie series. I know I married a woman and have three daughters, but even so I just can't get excited about movies like Pride and Prejudice . I need a good action adventure! I just love a good sci-fi thriller and Star Wars is a classic. Consider the dramatic conclusion with the Evil Emperor pitting Luke Skywalker against his father Darth Vader with evil designs that the victor... [read more](#).

Romans 7:9-25, Intrapersonal Conflict Resolution

'I wouldn't be paranoid if so many people weren't out to get me,' I joked to myself as I threw another training flyer in the trash titled, 'Dealing with Difficult People.' There must be a cunning reason that marketers have targeted me with hundreds of flyers teaching the means to deal with difficult people. Big bucks are to be made selling strategies for dealing with the whiny, selfish, ungrateful, and difficult people in our lives.... [read more](#).

Romans 8:28-39, The Force Is Not With Us!

Have you ever been tempted to Christianize the world's stuff? For example the Star Wars story is an incredible good versus evil saga by George Lucas. Yet have you noticed that the heart of his message is that salvation from evil can be attained through democratic "freedom?" Is that true? This is the unfortunate sentiment of too many who are mesmerized by the temporal successes of the United States democracy. What about the power of... [read more](#).

Romans 9:22-28, Not my people, My people

In December of last year I mentioned that Romans 8, the great Bible chapter of encouragement, also contains words of warning. If we live according to the sinful nature we will die. This month I would like to point out that Romans 9, the great Bible chapter of fear, also contains words of incredible encouragement. We read here that God transforms those who are not his people into his people. This is hope beyond hope... [read more](#).

Samuel(1) 10:5-6 plus, Much More Than Music

King Saul's debut into public service for God's people began with a spiritual revival through a band of traveling musician prophets. 5) "After that you will come to the hill of God, where the garrison of the Philistines is; and it will happen, when you have come there to the city, that you will meet a band of prophets coming down from the high place with a lute, a tambourine, a pipe, and a harp... [read more](#).

Samuel(2) 11:1-4, Counting Davids Costs

Men, we need more frank conversation about sexual temptation. Many knew David's story before we fell into sin ourselves, so knowledge of this story alone is not enough to keep us from sin. Yet the story must be retold to teach us a healthy mistrust of ourselves and call upon God for grace, even now. Praise God for the past victories we have had in spite of defeats, but we should also be reminded that... [read more](#).

Samuel(2) 11:8-11, Viagra or Uriah?

Men, we need more frank conversation about sexual temptation. The effects of lust and the idolatry of sex destroys lives and opportunity to serve the Lord. Too many of us know that addiction to pornography and masturbation combined with worldly notions about love are a recipe for disaster. Great engines of sin have been built in our generation to pump the filth of pornography and lust at high pressure through the cracks in the defenses... [read more](#).

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Home Bible Optimism Articles

Zingers

Ten Theological Absurdities

Christians, we might be guilty of sculpting the Christian faith to appear sensible to our unbelieving neighbors. We may be tempted to massage the truth hoping to make it reasonable to those who don't believe the truth. But can the supernatural be made natural, or belief acceptable to unbelief? Will this strategy work? Jesus said in 1 Corinthians 1:25 (WEB), "because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is... [read more.](#)

Thessalonians(1) 1:6-7 - The Art of Imitation

Today I prepare to teach a class of youth how to draw cartoons and use free software such as Pencil , Creatoon , Synfig , and Blender to render animated movies. I am blessed with the opportunity to foster creative talent in others even while I am still learning myself. The invitation before us is to muster every talent, resource, and energy to build and serve the kingdom of Christ... even cartoon animation! Since I... [read more.](#)

Thessalonians(1) 2:4, Another Point of Grace

I Thessalonians 2:4 (WEB) states, "But even as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the Good News, so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, who tests our hearts." John 14:1 also states, "Don't let your heart be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me." Curiously all three underlined words above are derived from the Greek word, pisteuo , with the same Strong's reference number of 4100. We all... [read more.](#)

Three Dangerous Ways to Lose Your Religion

Following are three dangerous way to lose your religion. Reject Jesus as your personal Savior Do not add your name to Heaven by trusting Jesus Do not fear God's eternal wrath If you do these three things you will lose your religion and... ..become a confident mature Christian! What? Yes, consider... 1. Reject Jesus as your personal Savior and receive Jesus as Savior of ALL God's people! While Jesus loves each individual person, his work... [read more.](#)

Timothy(1) 2:11-15, The Total Depravity of Man... and Woman

I have written elsewhere that I am opposed to efforts to re-translate Scriptural references of man and mankind to gender neutral terms. Please read my article, The Image of God in Man , to understand my reasons why. Though recently, upon further reflection, I wondered if it wouldn't be useful for the politically correct to gain ground for gender equality in the arena of theological terms. For example, the doctrine of the depravity of man... [read more.](#)

Timothy(1) 5:24, What happens in Vegas...

The world promises, "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas." Do you want to hit the slots, but the prudes think it evil? Take a trip to Vegas, your secret will be safe there. Do you want to pamper yourself, but your spouse has the check book under lock and key? Take a trip to Vegas, they will take care of you. Do you want to savor fine dining and loosen up with... [read more.](#)

Timothy(1) 6:12, 1 Corinthians 9:24, 2 Timothy 4:7, Fight and Run!

Recently I reread the book *The Pursuit of Holiness* by Jerry Bridges. Bridges encourages us to pursue holiness. The Scriptures also remind us in Hebrews 12 that without holiness no one will see the Lord. We must pursue holiness! But how much holiness is enough to see the Lord? Libraries have been written debating this question. II Timothy 3 speaks of people who boast about knowledge of the Lord, but deny his power to change... [read more.](#)

Timothy(2) 2:10, Save the Chosen!

Unfortunately there is much confusion about Christian salvation and the Chosen Ones of Christ. I was also confused about these concepts myself for many years even as a follower of Jesus. On one hand the gospel message is that we must believe in Jesus and be saved. Yet on the other hand we also read that God has predestined us to salvation from before the foundation of the world. Unfortunately Christendom has a great fissure... [read more.](#)

Timothy(2) 3:8, Optimism Out of Control, Part 4: Concerning The Faith

Continuing our Optimism Out Of Control series consider yet another curious verse. Paul warns and instructs his protégé Timothy thus, "Even as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind, who concerning the faith are rejected" (2 Timothy 3:8 WEB). First, Paul warns Timothy that the world is and will continue to be filled with evil men of the worst kind. Paul compares these men to Jannes and... [read more.](#)

Titus 2:11-14, The Pride and The Grace

Two years ago someone said something disturbing. I had a temporary job as a waiter and was hustling some dishes back to the kitchen. While standing in the elevator I balanced my heavy load on the hand rail for support. However, since others were behind me I lifted my load and turned around to greet them. One answered me by saying, "Man you have got pride!" "Got Pride?" was a buzz-word among the staff meaning... [read more.](#)

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Who is Jesus Christ? What is grace? Why discipleship?

Jesus is introduced as our *“Counselor with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. And he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world”* (1 John 2:1-2 WEB). Jesus has already forgiven all mankind - believers and unbelievers. *“It is finished”* is the awesome news!

Paul explained, *“There is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace”* (Romans 11:5-6 WEB). Yet God has not chosen everyone for a changed heart to obey Jesus and trust they are forgiven with all mankind. Hard to understand sad news!

Jesus commands us to strive to *“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you”* (Matthew 28:19-20 WEB). Jesus is reaching the world through us. Time to share the good news!

If you are chosen to believe that Jesus has already forgiven all our sin and to follow him, then you have a lot to be excited about. Make it your greatest goal to intimately know him and make him known. He has wonderful plans to change you to become like him and to use you to show God's love to others.

Where do unbelievers go? How should we respond? When does punishment end?

Jesus comes, *“punishing those who don't know God, and to those who don't obey the Good News of our Lord Jesus, who will pay the penalty: eternal (aionios) destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might”* (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 WEB). Those who reject grace will be sentenced to destruction. Hades is their destiny even though their sins are forgiven, Luke 16:19-31. More sad news!

Paul responded, *“I have great sorrow and unceasing pain in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brothers' sake, my relatives”* (Romans 9:2-3 WEB). Paul would have given away his own salvation to go to Hades for them if he could have. More news of a good man!

Yet Jesus promised, *“I will build my assembly, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give to you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven; and whatever you release on earth will have been released in heaven”* (Matthew 16:18-19 WEB). Can unbelievers be released from Hades? The Greek word *“aionios”* means *“eon,” “duration,”* or *“complete”* and is mistranslated as *“everlasting”* in 2 Thessalonians 1:9. See the YLT Bible. Hades is proved to be temporary in Revelation 20:13-14, so *“aionios”* in Hades is for the *“eon”* of Hades. If you believe then you know even the sin of unbelievers is already forgiven, just like yours. More awesome news!

Finally Jesus says *“to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels’ ”* (Matthew 25:41 WEB). However, the *“duration”* of the Lake of Fire is not a mere age, but instead for *“The Ages of The Ages”* Revelation 20:10. And contrary to popular religion, the Lake of Fire is ONLY for... THE DEVIL AND HIS ANGELS. We deserve the same... except for grace!

Do all Christians believe this awesome news?

Paul warns, *“Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision. For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh”* (Philippians 3:2-3 WEB). Many are misled by the mistranslation above, but objectors claim Jesus loves them, but not all, or their *“faith”* is the reason Jesus loves them. Their confidence is in the flesh. Christians should instead simply trust Jesus loves all mankind, but Hades awaits those who reject grace.

Contact Jeff for further discussion about God's victorious grace at DGJC.ORG/CONTACT

Does God Limit His Love?

Calvinist Christians follow John Calvin of the 16th century and believe that God loves unconditionally and limits this love to a predestined subset of humanity. *Arminian* Christians follow Jacob Arminius, also of the 16th century, and believe that God offers conditional love to all humanity which is limited by our choice to accept or reject Christ. However, many other Christians believe that God loves all humanity unconditionally, but limits the duration of punishment in Hades for the unbelieving. Each limits something.

The final salvation of all mankind is defended from the Christian Scriptures at DGJC.ORG/OPTIMISM. The question of the character of God and his love for each individual and our neighbor is critical. Bible study, prayer, conversation with Christians, and the Holy Spirit are essential ingredients to learn about God and his love. Following are questions to guide your study as you search the Bible for the truth.

Bible Study Questions

1. Is the love of God a conditional possibility or an unconditional promise?
2. What does the character of God confirm about his love for humanity?
3. What is the significance that God loved us before we loved him?
4. From Genesis on when is the first and further mention of salvation promised?
5. From Genesis on when is the first and further mention of damnation threatened?
6. When are the events described in Dan 12, Mat 25, 1 Cor 15, 1 Thes 4, 2 Thes 2, and Rev 20?
7. What are *Sheol*, *Gehenna*, *Hades*, *Tartarus* (2 Pet 2:4), *Thalassa* (Rev 20:13), and *The Lake of Fire*?
8. What are the denotations of the Hebrew *olam* and the Greek *aion* and *aidios*?
9. Who did the death of Christ make atonement for, according to the Bible?
10. Why does Jesus call unbelieving Israel 'lost sheep' and even 'not my sheep'?
11. How is the second Adam, Jesus, similar and different than the first, Adam, Romans 5:12-21?
12. Is confidence in God's love equally feasible as a *Calvinist*, *Arminian*, or trusting all are saved?
13. Is confidence in God's love feasible while rejecting his unconditional love for all?
14. Does *faith* change God's heart toward us, or change our hearts toward God?
15. Does *obedience* gain God's love, or show gratitude for his unconditional love?

Four Square Salvation Evaluator

God's love?	Subset of Mankind	All Mankind
Conditional	Unknown?	Arminian?
		Mystery?
Unconditional	Calvinist?	ALL SAVED?

Christian faith is not a blind leap or an unknown mystery but confident reasonable trust. God himself is our evaluator, yet is your faith founded on the facts of the person of Jesus Christ? What do you believe?

Contact Jeff for further discussion about God's victorious grace at DGJC.ORG/CONTACT

Flying Impossible!

My thesis is simple. Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind. However, most of mankind does not believe this good news, even many of those who call themselves Christians. Can any special strategies be used to overcome this disbelief? Consider a history lesson from Wilbur and Orville Wright.

Suppose someone does not believe flight is possible. He tells you that flight is imaginary and we have been fooled. We would call this unbeliever insane! Airplanes are everywhere and we all know about them. However, not too long ago the opposite was true. The Wright brothers were considered insane, or at least foolhardy, to claim that they could fly an airplane.

According to *The Wright Brothers* by Fred Kelly, Wilbur and Orville proved to themselves and their neighbors that they could fly quite well. Good conscience demanded that they tell the United States government of their breakthrough. This discovery was larger than the Wright family and needed to be shared with their countrymen. So the Wright brothers wrote to the United States War Department, hoping to show off their airplane. They received only replies that no money would be granted for flight research until it was proved that fixed-wing horizontal flight was possible. It was possible! They wanted to demonstrate it! They wrote again and again, but only received the same response, unbelief every time.

Magazines likewise banished the idea to the realm of science fiction. How could the Wright brothers persuade the unbelieving? They hatched a plan to 'fly by' the 300th anniversary celebration of the colonization of Jamestown in Virginia. Many military officers would be present, and the prank would leave mouths gaping. Unfortunately, a mishap during take-off foiled their plans, but they would not give up. After further rejections the Wright brothers moved to their last plan - they turned East, in hopes of discovering a buyer in Europe. Their conscience was clear about serving their own nation first, so they turned elsewhere. This was the winning tactic. Just before a deal was closed with France, the United States came to its senses. The United States War Department learned about the deal the Wright brothers were signing and unbelief quickly dissolved. They invited the brothers to demonstrate and were shocked with the opportunity of the century.

Perhaps we should not be so hard on the disbelieving. Before the Wright brothers, flying was a crazy idea reserved for the eccentric. History is filled with stories of the adventurous trying to fly with all sorts of contraptions. Many lost their lives. Who among us would easily believe that flight was reality at the moment when the impossible became possible? Very few.

Thankfully unbelief was not the inspiration for the Wright brothers or others like them. These visionaries have shown amazing persistence in working hard, questioning tradition, seeing things as they are, humbly learning, changing, applying knowledge, and never giving up. Furthermore, the Wright brothers have taught us an important lesson about strategies for persuading the unbelieving. The invention of flight was so important that they were compelled to use creative means to persuade their audience to believe when reason alone was not enough. In their case, they planned a 'fly by' to show off the truth, and they also found a constructive use for envy.

The Wright brothers' story is the perfect introduction to this book. We face a similar problem to what Wilbur and Orville solved. Most people did not believe flight was possible, even after the Wrights had proved it. Likewise, most people do not believe that Jesus is their savior, and also the savior of all mankind, even after God has proved it. Apparently reason alone is not enough persuasion here, either. There are certainly limits to the comparison of the Wright brothers' experience and Christian faith. But there is one question

that is certainly worth asking.

Are special tactics for responding to stubborn disbelief in Christ *integral* to the gospel message?

Most explanations of the gospel have limited themselves to merely educating their audience with facts about Christ and salvation. But listing facts only teaches the teachable. The gospel is also true for the unteachable! So does Jesus employ special tactics to reach the unteachable?

As we re-examine the gospel, we will also consider the possibility of special Biblical tactics, and the implications of Proverbs 26:4-5 (WEB), which says: *"Don't answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes."*

We will also consider the implications of Romans 11:13-14 (WEB): *"For I speak to you who are Gentiles. Since then as I am an apostle to Gentiles, I glorify my ministry; if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh, and may save some of them."*

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[up](#)

[Why Read? >](#)

Why Read?

I have introduced my thesis.

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind.

I have stated that reason alone is insufficient to persuade people to believe.

Since we hide from God, special tactics beyond education are needed to defeat unbelief and reach the heart of sinners hiding from God's love.

I have asked if God uses special persuasive tactics.

Are special tactics for responding to stubborn disbelief in Christ *integral* to the gospel message?

Now I ask, why are you reading this book? I assume you are here because someone recommended it, or you stumbled upon it. However, you are now at least several pages into it, and so I ask, why you are reading? What are you searching for?

I am not asking because I need to know your reasons. You do not need my permission to read. However, it would be good for you to know your own reasons for reading. Some possible reasons might include:

- You are curious.
- You are objectively researching Christian belief.
- You seek safe haven from God's wrath.
- You seek help with doubts.
- You want to compare our thoughts.
- You want to contrast our thoughts.
- You hope to help my understanding.
- You hope to help your own understanding.
- You are looking for controversy.
- You wish to refute my ideas.
- You do not know why.

Take a moment to reflect.

It would be good for you to know your own reasons for reading this book.

Here is an encouragement to eagerly seek God, from Jeremiah 29:11-13 (WEB),

'For I know the thoughts that I think toward you,' says Yahweh, 'thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you hope and a future. You shall call on me, and you shall go and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You shall seek me, and find me, when you search for me with all your heart.'

Whatever your reasons for reading this book, I invite you now to seek God first with your whole heart. The verse above suggests that God can be found, but only if we seek him with our whole heart.

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Home Bible Optimism Articles

Previously Stated

Hopefully, you have reflected about your purpose for reading this book and have a good reason to continue. So I invite you to continue to explore my thoughts and I hope you find encouragement there. Books are a trip into the mind of another, as much as that is possible.

The ideas in this book developed their shape while I hammered them out in my previous writings. So my earlier articles may be the best introduction. Please note, however, that my understanding has grown through the decades, so I am currently revising my earlier works to be consistent with the latter.

My *Optimism Out of Control* DGJC.ORG/ZINGERS article titles include:

- *Matthew 16:15-21, Optimism Out of Control*
- *Hosea 1:10, Optimism Out of Control, Part 2: In the Same Place!*
- *Isaiah 66:22-24, Optimism Out of Control, Part 3: All Mankind*
- *Timothy(2) 3:8, Optimism Out of Control, Part 4: As Far As The Faith*
- *Revelation 20:11-15, Optimism Out of Control, Part 5: Hades Gives Up!*
- *Revelation 20:11-15, Optimism Out of Control, Part 6: If, If, If, If, If, If, If, If,,,*
- *Romans 5:12-21, Out of Control Optimism Part 7, Many = Many = All = All*
- *Revelation 20:13-15, Out of Control Optimism Part 8, Your Name in the Book of Life!*
- *Corinthians(2) 5:14-15, Out of Control Optimism Part 9, Jesus Loves All the Little Children of the World!*
- *Colossians 1:15-23, Out of Control Optimism Part 10, The Parable of the Pew!*

My other salvation-related article titles include:

- *Christian Teaching*
- *Ephesians 1:3-4, Chosen!*
- *Revelation 20:11-15, A.M.A.Z.I.N.G. Grace*
- *SAVED 5X*
- *Justified!*
- *'In' Doctrine*
- *Savior of the World!*
- *A Quintessential Defense of FREE WILL*
- *Matthew 18:7, My BODACIOUS Father*
- *Isaiah 63:17, Whoa! Whoa! Whoa! Whoa! Whoa! Whoa! Whoa!*
- *Am I Catholic, Protestant, or Christian?*
- *Matthew 25:31-46, Who are the Goats?*

My complete article list is found at DGJC.ORG/ARTICLES.

God's Word is perfect. The Holy Spirit is the master communicator of meaning with unmatched style. Even so, we often question God's wisdom. We would only ever be wrong to do so. However, you would certainly not be wrong to accuse me of error. Again, please do contact me with comments and corrections at DGJC.ORG/CONTACT.

So at this early stage of my book, I'll warn myself from Proverbs 10:19 (WEB): *"In the multitude of words there is no lack of disobedience, but he who restrains his lips does wisely."*

Job's Counselors

I have asked you to consider why you are reading this book. You should ask me why I am writing this book! What is my answer?

I am writing this book to clarify the gospel of Jesus Christ from current confusion.

The Old Testament man, Job, had big questions for God. Three people, speaking volumes, tried to counsel him. After all their words, his questions remained. Likewise, we have a great need to understand Christian salvation, yet divisions and disturbing questions remain commonplace.

Job's fourth counselor, however, was used by God to reach Job's heart. He spoke briefly and with clarity. Now, it would be too bold to suggest that I can stand in his shoes. I certainly have not written briefly. Yet I hope to add clarity and remove confusion at one particular point in the gospel, choosing Elihu as my example. Consider Job Chapter 32 (WEB).

1) So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes. 2) Then the wrath of Elihu the son of Barachel, the Buzite, of the family of Ram, was kindled against Job. His wrath was kindled because he justified himself rather than God. 3) Also his wrath was kindled against his three friends, because they had found no answer, and yet had condemned Job. 4) Now Elihu had waited to speak to Job, because they were elder than he. 5) When Elihu saw that there was no answer in the mouth of these three men, his wrath was kindled.

6) Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite answered, 'I am young, and you are very old; Therefore I held back, and didn't dare show you my opinion. 7) I said, "Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom." 8) But there is a spirit in man, and the Spirit of the Almighty gives them understanding. 9) It is not the great who are wise, nor the aged who understand justice. 10) Therefore I said, "Listen to me; I also will show my opinion."

11) Behold, I waited for your words, and I listened for your reasoning, while you searched out what to say. 12) Yes, I gave you my full attention, but there was no one who convinced Job, or who answered his words, among you. 13) Beware lest you say, "We have found wisdom, God may refute him, not man;" 14) for he has not directed his words against me; neither will I answer him with your speeches. 15) They are amazed. They answer no more. They don't have a word to say.

16) Shall I wait, because they don't speak, because they stand still, and answer no more? 17) I also will answer my part, and I also will show my opinion. 18) For I am full of words. The spirit within me constrains me. 19) Behold, my breast is as wine which has no vent; like new wineskins it is ready to burst. 20) I will speak, that I may be refreshed. I will open my lips and answer. 21) Please don't let me respect any man's person, neither will I give flattering titles to any man. 22) For I don't know how to give flattering titles; or else my Maker would soon take me away.'

Elihu was bold, humble, and understanding. He spoke the truth in love and hated flattery. That is a good goal for all of us -- and it is my specific goal in writing to you.

Disclaimer

You certainly do not need to agree with me or any particular guru to be a follower of Christ. However, to be a follower of Christ, you do need to actually *follow Christ*. Since Christ is one, then we should expect to become one in our thinking as we each grow closer to him. But today we still remain far from the perfection of Christ, and at times sadly far from each other. The Body of Christ suffers from painful dismemberment. What I am trying to say is, since I can be very wrong at times, I should include a disclaimer.

My propositions might be wrong, but I assert them because I think I am right.

Okay, there is my disclaimer. Each of us will stand before the Lord to give an account. If I or others have led you astray, we will have to give account to God for misleading the misled. Yet, each one of us will also have to give account for our own wayward decisions, and for allowing ourselves to be misled. The one who tempts others off the path is guilty, but one who steps off the path is likewise guilty.

Of course, the one who helps others *onto* the path is instead blessed and rewarded. That is the blessing and reward I seek through my clarification of the gospel. I ask you to compare my teaching with the words of the Bible for the proof of any statement that I make. We should be like the Berean people whom Paul talked to about Jesus. They did not believe Paul because he sounded good or even because he was an Apostle. Instead they compared his words to the Bible. We read in Acts 17:10-12 (WEB),

10) The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Beroea. When they arrived, they went into the Jewish synagogue. 11) Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so. 12) Many of them therefore believed; also of the prominent Greek women, and not a few men.

Check God's Word to test for truth!

Start at the End

Anyone making a point needs to consider how to begin, continue, and conclude. We could just dive in and figure it out as we go, but planning can be useful; so my plan is to tell you how I was introduced to grace theology, reveal the fiery question that burned my house down, and share with you my discovery of the Bible's grand conclusion about salvation.

While leading the Allied forces in World War II, Winston Churchill said, "*Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.*" Likewise, this is not the end of my book, but it is the end of the introduction. It is also an excellent time to show you the grand conclusion of the Bible.

FIRST

I first looked to the cross of Jesus Christ for forgiveness the summer before I entered college. I was raised in a churchgoing family, but my sinful behavior through high school drove me to begin a relationship with Christ, based on his forgiveness at the cross. I knew I was a sinner and that Jesus died for sinners, but I still knew very little.

SECOND

The Lord quickly introduced me to grace theology and discipleship. I learned that salvation is completely unmerited and that Jesus had chosen me for salvation even before my decision to trust him. Frankly, I did not want to be saved that way, and a burning question grew in my mind.

The Bible says Christ died for all mankind, but very few are born again, and apparently most are sentenced to eternal Hell. How could he choose me and not others? Am I certain he did choose me?

I did not understand. Most of my friends and the books I read seemed to slide off one side of the issue or the other. Some suggested that God's grace only predestined a small subset of mankind to eternal life. Others suggested that Christ died for all mankind, but only those choosing Christ with their *free will* were finally saved. However, *free will* proponents appeared to compromise God's grace by saying Jesus did not complete *all* of our salvation; we need to do the *part* of choosing. And the *Limited Atonement* proponents appeared to compromise Jesus' atonement by saying it was for *part* of mankind and not *all*. I tried at different times to find rest in one or the other of those answers, but my questions grew, and they darkened my relationship with Christ.

Furthermore, God's grace exposed a much bigger problem. My initial understanding of my sinfulness was incomplete. Biblical grace exposed that my self-righteousness hated God and I certainly hated my unanswered questions. Yet Christ was my only hope!

I searched for an answer. I read the Bible. I read commentaries. I read books. I listened to other Christians. I argued with God. I avoided the question. I focused on serving. Worst of all, I ignored my questions and just went to church.

THIRD

Eventually the Lord led me to discover and embrace Romans 11:32-36 as the grand conclusion of redemption, grace theology, and the gospel of Jesus Christ. God has helped me to understand this passage and receive it with joy, and through it he has helped me to be honest about my sin and eager to share the good news. My questions about salvation are fully answered, my confusion is erased, and my love for Christ is restored. It may be that you have a similar question to mine. I hope to help you as I have been helped. So I will begin at the end, at the grand conclusion of salvation in Romans 11:32, and explain this

important passage of Scripture to you. I do not claim special revelation or insight, but simply open eyes, through Christ's love, to see and accept what is plainly said.

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[Grand Conclusion >](#)

Grand Conclusion

Are you embarrassed about your spiritual questions? Are you scared of looking foolish? Are you scared of being wrong? We often try to hide our ignorance, but we should resist this. There is too much to be lost if we are wrong. There is even more to be gained when we are right with God. Ignoring the hole in our roof directly harms us and our estate. I am often secretive about my questions, but to no positive end. We should boldly ask questions of God and Christian friends. We might think our questions are humbling, but we can take heart in knowing that God thinks every one of our questions are important and provides every answer we need in his Word. For me, Romans 11:32-36 has become the million-pound anchor for my soul and the answer to my fiery question. It is the grand conclusion of Paul's treatise on Christian salvation.

Romans 11:32 answers the three biggest questions that mankind has ever had or will ever have for God our creator. How did sin enter the world? What is God's purpose in sin and salvation? Who is ultimately saved from God's wrath against sin?

One warning before we continue. These questions are answered clearly and simply, but most people refuse to accept the answers. The reasons that most reject the truth include the fear of man, the loss of investment in other answers, their imaginary god meeting the true God, or rejection of grace in favor of *free will*. Man's natural condition is to hate salvation by grace and instead to love salvation by self. We should instead be thankful that we are not saved by our *free will* choice, but by God's *free will* choice to love us unconditionally. The happy news of the gospel is that Jesus has forgiven us apart from all our choices; in fact he forgave us while we were yet his enemies. As we already discussed, when the obvious is rejected, special tactics may be needed to help unbelievers see what they do not want to see. The truth is still good and true, even for those who reject it.

Our key Scripture, Romans 11:32-36 (WEB), says,

32) For God has bound all to disobedience, that he might have mercy on all.

33) Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out! 34) 'For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?' 35) 'Or who has first given to him, and it will be repaid to him again?' 36) For of him, and through him, and to him are all things. To him be the glory for ever! Amen.

There you have it.

So what do you think? Do you see the answers to our three questions?

The remainder of this book will expand on these concepts at length.

Soteriologies

Soteriology is the study of salvation and the destinies of mankind. It is from the Greek root *soteria*, meaning *salvation*. Wikipedia defines *soteriology* as "*the study of religious doctrines of salvation.*" One can see why this is a particularly important subject. For example, it is said, "*All is well that ends well.*" Religious doctrine may touch on various subjects, but the subject of how to confirm our positive end ought to hold a special place of significance. Jesus asks us in Luke 9:25 (WEB), "*For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits his own self?*"

The major religions are different primarily because they have different understandings of God and different salvation recipes. The Christian, Jewish, and Muslim religions each have different instructions for a positive end. There are also differences within these major labels themselves. For example, there are Protestant and Catholic Christians. There are Reformed and Orthodox Jews. There are also Sunni and Shi'a Muslims. Beyond that there may even be cultural expectations as to what it means to be Christian, as well as doctrinal and practical expectations. Catholic Christians in the United States see things differently than Catholic Christians in Argentina. Also, the expectations from our contemporaries are not the same as Christians from yesteryear, nor even the same as the Bible itself.

New Christians are often surprised to learn that there are divisions over the gospel. How can one determine if a particular church or individual is close enough to the Bible to be authentic? There are too many variations of Christian salvation to highlight them all in this short book. Furthermore, you certainly do not need one more book explaining why I think I am right and others are wrong. Instead I plan to highlight the two most common views and then propose a model for evaluating and categorizing any understanding of Christian salvation that you may encounter.

In the end, the Bible itself strangely says that you do not need a teacher, but that the Holy Spirit is your teacher -- that is, if you are a Christian. We read in I John 2:27 (WEB),

As for you, the anointing which you received from him remains in you, and you don't need for anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is no lie, and even as it taught you, you will remain in him.

So ask God to give you understanding as you continue your study. If you discover errors in my thinking, please talk to me.

The two most common views of Christian salvation found in various denominations that I want to highlight are [Arminianism](#) and [Calvinism](#).

In a nutshell, Arminianism is the belief that Jesus died for *ALL* mankind, but only those individual people who provide the missing *PART* or condition of choosing faith with their *free will* are finally saved to eternal life. Arminianism is named after [Jacob Arminius](#), who supported this view.

Calvinism is the belief that Jesus died only for *PART* of mankind, but he provides *ALL* of salvation to guarantee eternal life for these chosen ones, and God also leads these chosen ones irresistibly to faith in Christ. Calvinism was named after a prominent historical proponent of this idea, [John Calvin](#). Calvinism, sometimes called [Augustinism](#) has its roots in the theology of Catholic [Saint Augustine](#).

You may be well acquainted with these different views. You may even be sick of hearing

one more word about them! However, consider one last thought. As I compared and contrasted these two views, a model for evaluating any salvation doctrine was born. The model proposes two questions, each with only two answers for a combination of only four possibilities.

Is God the savior of *ALL* or *PART* of mankind?

Does God do *ALL* or *PART* of the saving?

SALVATION EVALUATOR	PART OF MANKIND	ALL OF MANKIND
PART OF SALVATION	?	?
ALL OF SALVATION	?	?

If we use the words *ALL* or *PART* carefully, we can divide every view of Christian salvation into one of these four categories. No one could ride on the fence unless their doctrine was internally contradictory or they simply did not take a position on the subject. This exercise will be very useful to understand current Christian salvation doctrines, and also useful to explain my own view of salvation.

Please also note that Christian salvation can sometimes refer to salvation from sin and other times salvation to eternal life. In this discussion, however, my four-part matrix is used specifically to categorize the different views of salvation to eternal life.

PART for PART

In this model Christ did *PART* of salvation for *PART* of mankind.

This model assumes that when Jesus died on the cross he only paid for the sins of *PART* of mankind. Furthermore, suppose he only did *PART* of the work so that individuals must meet an additional condition to be saved.



For an extreme example, suppose that Mother Teresa is not within the *PART* of mankind that Jesus forgave. Or suppose she misses the condition needed for salvation. Then even she will not be saved from eternal damnation in the end, regardless of her great goodness. By way of contrast, suppose Hitler is within the *PART* of mankind that Jesus chose to forgive. And suppose he somehow meets the condition needed for salvation. Then he will be saved from damnation to eternal life in the end, regardless of his great evil.

Thankfully, this view *disagrees* with I John 2:1-2 (WEB) which explains that Jesus did die for *ALL* mankind.

1) My little children, I write these things to you so that you may not sin. If anyone sins, we have a Counselor with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. 2) And he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.

This view also *disagrees* with Ephesians 2:8-9 (WEB), which explains that we are saved by grace apart from any work.

8) For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9) not of works, that no one would boast.

Therefore, the *PART-for-PART* model of salvation is rejected by nearly all followers of

Christ.

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[PART for ALL >](#)

PART for ALL

In this model Christ did *PART* of salvation for *ALL* of mankind.

Some believe that when Jesus died on the cross he paid for the sins of *ALL* of mankind. Furthermore, he only did *PART* of the work so that individuals must meet an additional condition to be saved.



For example, consider that Mother Teresa and Hitler are both within the *PART* of mankind to whom Jesus *offered* forgiveness, because in this model Jesus died for *ALL* mankind. However, if Mother Teresa does not meet the particular condition required for salvation, because she has sinned even once, she cannot be saved from eternal damnation in the end. However, if Hitler meets the particular condition required for salvation, typically suggested to be man's *free will* acceptance of Jesus, even though he sinned terribly in many other ways, then he will be saved from eternal damnation to eternal life in the end. Of course, some might say that the condition is simply to be "*good enough*." Yet how would you measure that with confidence?

Thankfully, this view *agrees* with I John 2:1-2. However, it *disagrees* with Ephesians 2:8-9. Classic Arminianism fits the description of the *PART-for-ALL* salvation model.

Another verse that has been used to suggest the Arminian view is Galatians 3:2 (WEB). This verse could be understood to imply that our act or choice of faith invites the work of the Spirit. "*I just want to learn this from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by hearing of faith?*"

ALL for PART

In this model Christ did *ALL* of salvation for *PART* of mankind.

Based on this, when Jesus died on the cross he only paid for the sins of *PART* of mankind. Yet he did *ALL* of the work so that the chosen individuals simply trust that Jesus has completely saved them.



For example if Mother Teresa is not within the part of mankind that Jesus forgave, then she will not be saved from eternal damnation in the end, regardless of any condition she tries to meet. However, if Hitler is within the part of mankind that Jesus forgave, then he will be unconditionally saved from eternal damnation to eternal life in the end regardless of his great sins.

Thankfully, this view also *disagrees* with I John 2:1-2. It does *agree* with Ephesians 2:8-9, however. Classic Calvinism fits the description of the *ALL-for-PART* salvation model.

A verse that suggests this view might be Romans 9:6 (WEB), which could be understood to imply that God has only chosen a subset of mankind. *"But it is not as though the word of God has come to nothing. For they are not all Israel that are of Israel."*

One should also note that the definition of *"faith"* used by Calvinist Christians differs radically from the definition used by Arminian Christians. For Calvinists, Jesus has paid the price for salvation and applied it to your account. It is guaranteed. We are simply invited to *"trust"* in his finished work. It is like a million dollars already deposited into your bank account by your father. Believing does not deposit the million dollars into your bank account, because it is already there! Instead, believing simply changes your life and attitude toward your father.

For Arminians, Jesus has paid the price for salvation, but it is not yet deposited into your account. We must meet the condition of trusting in his work through our *free will*. It is like a million dollars offered, but not yet deposited, into your bank account. In this case, belief is the condition needed to receive the million dollars so you can deposit it in your account

yourself. Otherwise the money is not even there!

This illustration may not be perfect, but it at least illustrates the difference between Arminian and Calvinistic "*faith*."

[< PART for ALL](#)

[up](#)

['Love Wins' by Rob Bell >](#)

'Love Wins' by Rob Bell

My desire to write this book was born after I read Rob Bell's book, *Love Wins*, published in 2011. His claim that all mankind is finally saved created a stir among Christians that prompted me to investigate his ideas for comparison with my own. Since you are reading my thoughts, I would also encourage you to read his also, and then compare everything to the Bible.

Do read his book rather than base your conclusions on second hand opinions from me. I do not intend to do a detailed review of his work, quoting his propositions and then defending agreement or disagreement. Instead the purpose of this book is to share my own opinions about salvation. I would rather get into trouble myself for being *in the arena* than merely critiquing Bell from the sideline! However, here are a few quick thoughts about his book.

First, he has my salute. He has shown an enthusiasm for salvation that prompted him to write a book, speak, and preach! He believed something strongly enough to do something. He also attempted to explain the riddle of salvation that has divided Christians for millennia. Sadly, most Christians do not even share their faith. Most do not believe anything strongly enough to try to persuade others. Bell did something, at least. Moreover, he recognized a weakness in Christian orthodoxies that has resulted in divisions with no sides squaring perfectly with Scripture, at least to his satisfaction, or mine, for that matter. Our *PART and ALL Salvation Evaluator* has exposed that much about Arminianism and Calvinism. So Bell did his own homework and proposed a solution. For that he has my kudos. Frankly, we might debate just how far Bell's errors actually fall from the errors found in Arminianism and Calvinism. One thing is certain, salvation doctrines cannot be so different and all be right! So at a minimum the Arminians, the Calvinists, Bell, or even all three need to exit stage left now that *Bell* has sounded.

That said, I do agree with those concerned that Bell's theology has fallen too far away from Christianity to be accepted as orthodox. For example in Chapter 3, titled *Hell*, he concludes that Hell is not a specific place beyond earth for the punishment of unbelievers after judgment. Instead he says it is the suffering endured in this life and the next for rejecting Christ. Bell sees Hell only as the natural suffering for sinful choices, but not as the active punishment of God upon unbelievers. He is not the only Christian who holds this view, wrong as it is. Yet a careful study of Luke 16:19-31 and Revelation 20:11-15 makes it clear that Hell, called *Hades* in the Greek language, is a place distinct from Heaven and Earth, designed by God for the punishment of unbelievers after their death.

I should also note here that Hades is not the same place as the Lake of Fire, which is an important component of my own view to be explained later. Unfortunately, the English word *Hell* is commonly understood to mean the place of eternal punishment. Yet *Hell* is not consistently translated in most English Bibles, referring sometimes to Hades, other times to Gehenna, and rarely to the Lake of Fire. Please note that if I use the word *Hell* in this book I am referring to Hades and not to the Lake of Fire.

In Chapter 4, titled "*Does God Get What God Wants?*" Bell concludes that since the book of Revelation says the gates of the New Jerusalem "*never shut,*" people will be able to sin in eternity. The open gate implies that people can choose to stay inside and be holy or leave God and sin. However, since the gate remains open, they can always come back at any time throughout all eternity. Whoa! I am so looking forward to the day that God transforms my humble existence into sinless glory with all of God's people around his throne. Bell's interpretation of Heaven does not sound very Heavenly to me, nor does it square with the Biblical picture of the glorification of the redeemed. Bell has been vilified for suggesting a

type of universal salvation, but his views ultimately are not even that hopeful! He should not be vilified, but instead pitied. How does Bell reason out this conclusion? In a nutshell he argues that the heart of God's love is giving people the freedom to choose, even to the point of choosing evil in Heaven. This is an unfortunate definition of love, and strangely also held by many Christians.

A Christian friend once insisted to me that we must have *free will* because God is a gentleman that would never force his grace upon us. To be sure, God does not coerce us, but just as surely he breathed life, uninvited, into the spiritually dead! Spiritually dead people cannot be coerced, but Jesus can choose to breathe life into anyone he chooses... by his grace.

However, I did greatly appreciate Bell's chapter title, "*Does God Get What God Wants?*" While I do not agree with most of Bell's conclusions in the chapter, I am comforted that the title was headed in the right direction. His chapter title should have led us instead to Romans 9:18-21 (WEB). If there ever was a hammer-and-anvil verse in the Bible to transform rebellious men with the sovereignty of God, this is it.

18) So then, he has mercy on whom he desires, and he hardens whom he desires. 19) You will say then to me, 'Why does he still find fault? For who withstands his will?' 20) But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed ask him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?' 21) Or hasn't the potter a right over the clay, from the same lump to make one part a vessel for honor, and another for dishonor?

God does get what God wants. However, Bell falls far short of seeing the glory that God will get as the savior of all mankind, removing our every blemish in heaven by his mighty hand of grace.

Perhaps God will lead Rob to reconsider. Perhaps you will reconsider as well.

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[Three Rebuttals >](#)

Three Rebuttals

After reading Bell's book, I then read three rebuttals to his salvation theology. His ideas created enough stir for concerned Christians to quickly take up their pens against his heresy. Fair enough. Since the book gained fame among believers and unbelievers alike, his claims ought to be openly compared with the Bible. Otherwise the light of the gospel could be hidden by confusion and could lead many astray. So take a moment with me to briefly consider Bell's three counselors. Again, I do not intend to give them a thorough review, but only touch on a few points. I would recommend that you also read these books for yourself.

Larry Dixon wrote a work which he titled *Farewell, Rob Bell: A Biblical Response to Love Wins*. On page 14 Dixon says that Bell's statements "*imply that believing the gospel has no transactional effect upon the sinner, that belief is immaterial to the reality of being in the Father's love.*" Dixon understands Bell to say that faith does not activate or help to deposit Jesus' payment for our sin into our account. Bell seems to believe that Jesus' payment is applied by God before we believe. Christians, then, are those people who believe in what God has already done for them. Dixon sees this as a heretical error, because he believes that faith does play a "*transactional*" role in applying Jesus' work to each individual person's account. Dixon and Bell clearly have different definitions of faith. You may remember from our previous discussion that Arminian and Calvinist understandings of the gospel also define faith differently. Considering this point alone, it would appear that Dixon falls into the Arminian category, while Bell falls into the Calvinist category. However, as already explained, Bell is far from an orthodox Calvinist. Also, on page 14 Dixon says, "*...Bell disparages belief, arguing that the reality of forgiveness applies to all without their asking for it. How unlike human forgiveness Bell's position is.*" This is a very strange statement from Dixon. I wonder if he would actually say it again. The Bible explains that God's forgiveness is *decidedly unlike* human forgiveness. We humans typically offer conditional forgiveness. God, however, gives unconditional forgiveness and blessing. That is the evangelical definition of grace. Dixon is certain that Bell is a heretic, but what should we now think about Dixon?

Michael Wittmer wrote *Christ Alone: An Evangelical Response to Rob Bell's Love Wins*. On page 12 Wittmer explains that "*evangelicals hold that faith is an open hand, a passive receiving of God's precious gift to anyone who accepts it.*" Wittmer and Bell also appear to have different definitions of faith. Unfortunately, Wittmer did not more clearly distinguish the difference between *faith* that is trust in the finished work of Christ versus *faith* that is the condition to activate salvation. Wittmer is apparently from the Calvinist camp, but he sounds Arminian at times. His explanations suggest that we can add our own name to the Lamb's Book of Life by taking up the pen of faith, instead of using the eyeglasses of faith to see our name in the Book from before the foundation of the world. Wittmer also expressed concern over Bell's "*second chance*" theology, which offers hope that unbelievers will repent even after their death. On page 31 he says that "*those who assert there is a chance for postmortem salvation inadvertently claim to know better than God what God should have included in his Word.*" However, Wittmer should know that grace theology teaches us that our spiritual condition does not even allow for a first chance. Hopefully he is not implying that salvation is a chance. There is not one element of chance in the salvation of Jesus Christ, but instead God's determined love is set on each of his chosen ones. Wittmer shares his specific objection to second-chance salvation on page 30: "*[Bell] may not want people to use his book as an excuse not to follow Jesus now, but it is easy to see how many could logically draw this conclusion.*" I hope to discuss the idea of salvation after death, and the thought that people might use this as an excuse to not follow Christ, later in this book.

Mark Galli wrote *God Wins - Heaven, Hell, and Why the Good News is Better than Love*

Wins. Galli's book is my personal favorite. He writes on page 64 that "*what the Bible plainly teaches is that we come to faith only by the gracious intervention of God.*" Galli is clear that we are spiritually dead apart from grace and that only God's grace awakens us to faith. He says on page 72,

[W]ithout the intervention of God, we have about as much hope as a corpse. And that's the gospel. Not that we have an innate free will, but that God in his freedom came to us to rescue us from spiritual slavery. Through the work of Jesus on the cross, and through the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit, our wills are liberated. Then and only then can we actually recognize Christ, his love, his forgiveness, his grace. Then and only then can we finally respond in faith.

Well said. Galli then illustrates how Christ brings us to faith with a picture of a drowning man who reaches for help. That example is less well said. His illustration could be improved by adding the miraculous component that the man was fully drowned, completely dead, and then revived to life and pulled from the water! Galli also gives brief treatment to our key Scripture, saying,

Universalists quote many other passages with the word 'all' in them, but in context, most of those really mean 'all Israel', or 'all kinds of people' or 'both Jews and Gentiles' will be saved. One example is found in Romans: 'God has imprisoned everyone in disobedience so that he could have mercy on everyone' (Romans 11:32). Paul has been discussing the place of Jews and Gentiles in the scheme of salvation, so clearly the 'all' here means both Jews and Gentiles - not all within each group.

Galli's treatment of this key verse is too brief for the spotlight it deserves. Curiously, I have never read one Christian work that focused on this verse in detail. The grand conclusion of the book of Romans and the theology of grace certainly deserves at least a decent commentary on this amazing verse. Perhaps there is a work out there already, but I have not found it. So, Lord willing, I hope to exegete Romans 11:32 now.

It would appear that with my book I have the notable position of being Bell's *fourth counselor*. I was not as quick with my pen as the first three due to my schedule and work load, so perhaps the stir has long died down. Yet perhaps the intermediate time has been useful to you, me, and Bell for proper reflection.

Now I hope to help you by clarifying the definition of faith, the possibility of salvation "chances" during and after life, the meaning of Romans 11:32, and strategies for confronting stubborn unbelief.

Disciplined by the Grace of Jesus Christ

Home Bible Optimism Articles

Other Theologians

Before we charge ahead, let's review a longer list of notable individuals with opinions about Christian salvation. Theologians of all stripes have taken up their pens to give reasonable explanations of the gospel. Hopefully we all agree that the Bible is the source definition of the gospel. However, it is not wrong to write books that attempt to explain the meaning of the Bible. I am doing it myself right now! But, before going deeper into my thoughts, let me invite you to consider the valuable efforts of others.

We've just briefly looked at:

- *Love Wins* by Rob Bell
- *Farewell, Rob Bell* by Larry Dixon
- *Christ Alone* by Michael E. Wittmer
- *God Wins* by Mark Galli

Other books on my shelf about salvation include:

- *All of Grace* by Charles Spurgeon
- *Ashamed of the Gospel* by John MacArthur
- *Knowing God* by J.I. Packer
- *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis
- *Predestined for Hell?* By John Rice
- *The Bondage of the Will* by Martin Luther
- *The Doctrines of Grace* by James Montgomery Boice
- *The Five Points of Calvinism* by David N. Steele
- *The NICNT, The Epistle to the Romans* by Douglas Moo
- *The Sovereignty of God* by Arthur W. Pink

Since Christian Universalism is also part of our discussion, consider:

- *All in All* by A. E. Knoch
- *All You Want to Know About Hell* by Steve Gregg
- *Ancient History of Universalism* by Hosea Ballou
- *Christ Triumphant* by Thomas Allin
- *Destined for Salvation* by Kalen Fristad
- *God's Methods with Man* by G. Campbell Morgan
- *Hope Beyond Hell* by Gerry Beauchemin
- *In the End, God* by John A. T. Robinson
- *Terms for Eternity: Aionios and Aidios...* by Ramelli and Konstan
- *The Calvinist Universalist* by Stephen Campana
- *The Evangelical Universalist* by Gregory McDonald (Robin Parry)
- *The Gospel of God's Reconciliation of All in Christ* by Ernst Stroeter
- *The Greek Word Aion - Aionios...* by John Wesley Hanson
- *The Inescapable Love of God* by Thomas Talbott
- *The Modern History of Universalism* by Thomas Whittemore
- <http://AionianBible.org>
- <http://www.apocatastasis.org>
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apocatastasis>
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_Universalism
- <http://concordant.org>
- <http://evangelicaluniversalist.com>

- <https://www.facebook.com/groups/lbelieveinBiblicalChristianUniversalism>
- <http://www.hopebeyondhell.net>
- <http://www.mercyuponall.org>
- <http://www.tentmaker.org>

I have written a short review of many of these books in my article *Book Reviews* in the *Appendix* at the end of this book.

All of the above sources call themselves Christian and hopefully read the same Bible, yet they each have differences in understanding with one another. Several of these differences are great enough that a theologian with one view might label the others heretics. Read these authors for yourself and you will agree that they certainly cannot all be true. The differences are large enough that our eternal fate would be radically impacted if one or the other proves to be true. Now I am not endorsing any of these books in particular, but simply making you aware of the wide range of ideas that professing Christians have. There may be as many different ideas as there are different people in the pews!

Despite the differences, if we strictly apply our *PART* and *ALL Salvation Evaluator* to each of the above theologians, we ought to be able to place each one neatly into one of the four categories previously introduced. However, in some cases the writers do not write precisely or consistently enough for us to know for certain what they believe. Thus, they may appear to sit on the fence between opinions. This is quite common! Of course one can be a true follower of Christ and still be uncertain about many things. True Christians can still be excellent followers of Christ and yet have many unanswered questions, even concerning matters as weighty as salvation theology. However, two men who did not ride the fence and proposed definite answers are C.S. Lewis and Dr. James Boice.

C.S. Lewis is well known, with a "*coffee-table acceptance*" in Christendom. He says in *Mere Christianity*, page 52,

God created things which had free will. That means creatures which can go either wrong or right. Some people think they can imagine a creature which was free but had no possibility of going wrong; I cannot. If a thing is free to be good it is also free to be bad. And free will is what has made evil possible. Why, then, did God give them free will? Because free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having.

C.S. Lewis may be one of the most honest philosophers of all time. He openly acknowledged that God submits to defeat in order to allow for the *free will* of man. He says in *The Problem of Pain*, page 127, that "*it is objected that the ultimate loss of a single soul means the defeat of omnipotence. And so it does. In creating beings with free will, omnipotence from the outset submits to the possibility of such defeat.*" He believed that God arrested his own sovereignty to permit men to have *free will* over their own fate and eternal destiny.

Though this view seems problematic, he nonetheless became the contemporary champion of Arminian-style salvation. C.S. Lewis clearly understood that truth cannot be unreasonable, relative, or changeable. Nor does truth sit on the fence between options. So, after reflection, he chose to believe that Jesus did *PART* of salvation for *ALL* of mankind, and that the determining condition of each individual's salvation rests with their choice of faith by *free will*. Lewis does protect the good news that Christ died for *ALL* mankind. However, he does some Scripture-bending to lessen God's sovereignty and make room for man's *free will*. That is his explanation of why some are saved from eternal Hell, while most are not.

On the other hand, Dr. James Boice, perhaps less well-known, says in *The Doctrines of Grace*, page 125,

If Jesus died for all the sins of all men, unbelief included, then all are saved,

which the Bible denies. If he died for all the sins of all men, unbelief excluded, then he did not die for the sins of anybody and all must be condemned. There is no other position, save that he died for the sins of the elect people only.

Boice, like C.S. Lewis, understood that two opposing ideas cannot both be true at the same time. However, in his case he chose to believe that Jesus did *ALL* of salvation for *PART* of mankind, and that the determining condition for each individual's salvation rests with the electing grace of God. This view likewise has problems, as in 2 Peter 2:1 -- which explains that Jesus "*bought*" those who will be sentenced to Hades and also 1 John 2:2 which explains that Jesus' death atoned for the sins of the whole world, both believer and unbeliever. Boice acknowledges these problematic passages, but like Lewis he also does some Scripture-bending to account for his understanding that most are condemned to eternal damnation. Yet Boice does uphold that God's grace alone is to be praised for the salvation of his chosen people, apart from any condition supplied by man.

So how can two respected Christian theologians have such different understandings? Are the mechanics of salvation intended to remain mysterious?

[◀ Three Rebuttals](#)

[up](#)

[Streams of Thought ▶](#)

Certain Knowledge

We also need to consider the certainty of salvation. Most Christians agree that followers of Christ can have certain knowledge of their salvation. Yet how could our understanding of salvation be so radically different from one another with each claiming that they are certain? Someone is claiming to be certain, but just as certainly is confused or deceived!

The Bible confirms in I John 5:13 (WEB) that we can have certain knowledge of salvation.

These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

Let's consider our four categories of salvation, each in turn, to see if they reasonably allow for this certain knowledge of eternal life.

PART for PART: REJECTED BY ALL

This view is rejected by nearly everyone calling themselves Christian, so we have not been giving it much attention. Furthermore, it seems doubly impossible that certain knowledge of salvation can be known in this quadrant. If Christ only did PART of salvation for PART of mankind, how could you be absolutely sure that you met the condition required for salvation? You would have to rely on your own evaluation of your performance, yet on judgment day only God's evaluation will matter, not yours. Then, even if you did make the grade since Christ only died for PART of mankind, perhaps you are not even in the winning subset chosen for salvation, even if you met your condition for salvation. For example, the Jehovah Witnesses used to believe that only 144,000 were saved according to Revelation Chapter 7. However, when their own adherents exceeded 144,000, they joined the rest of Christians interpreting that number as symbolic. The point is that certain knowledge of salvation is doubly impossible with this model.

PART for ALL: ARMINIANISM

Arminian Christians claim that *free will "faith"* is the condition that secures their salvation. Jesus did PART of salvation, but left the final PART to be performed by each individual person: the condition of faith. God built the house, but the *free will* act of faith is the key that unlocks the door. However, since faith is the final condition required to unlock salvation, then true security and certainty of salvation is ultimately dependent upon the so called *free will* act of "*faith*" instead of directly and fully on finished work of Christ. Ultimately the adherents to this view must trust in their "*trust*" for certain knowledge of salvation. Rather than humbly entering Heaven saying "*Christ died for me,*" they will instead boast, "*I trusted Christ!*" They can have no true security with this foolishness because they can never be absolutely sure that their act of "*faith*" is authentic and sufficient to guarantee salvation. They will agree that some are deceived with false faith and are not saved while others have true faith and are saved. However, if salvation doctrine leaves any condition for salvation with man, then man ultimately cannot have certainty of salvation. My Calvinist friends will acknowledge this point.

ALL for PART: CALVINISM

Calvinist Christians claim to have faith fully on and directly in Christ. Their understanding of "*faith*" is radically different from the Arminian Christian. For Arminians, "*faith*" is the condition satisfied by the *free will* choice of a subset of mankind, though salvation is available to all. The question as to why some sinful people would choose faith while others

do not is left unanswered by Arminians. However, for Calvinists, "faith" is not a condition to win God's love, but instead an act of obedience commanded for all God's chosen people, enabled only by the Holy Spirit. In their understanding, "faith" does not activate salvation, but instead is the fruit of being born again. In the case of the Calvinist, salvation is only available for the chosen subset of mankind. Only those people targeted by God's grace will ever come to faith. Some Calvinists argue that possession of faith is proof that you are God's chosen. But again with this understanding, faith itself becomes the object of confidence rather than Christ himself. Either way knowledge of salvation for the Calvinist requires confidence that they are part of the chosen subset. So, according to reason, they cannot have true security either. Faith must be based on facts and the critical fact we have is that Jesus Christ died on the cross for the sins of ALL mankind. Everything we objectively know according to the Bible is that the work of Christ is equally applied to every single human being that ever lived. Christ has replaced Adam as the new federal head of humanity as explained in Romans Chapter 5. Thus, faith that Christ saved only a portion of mankind is an impossibility and totally unbiblical. Adherents of this view are in fact trusting in their imagination. Again, fear of eternal damnation inspired their imagination to hope that God loves them and the minority, because they think that God hates and damns the majority. How sad! My Arminian friends will acknowledge this point.

ALL for ALL: CHRISTIAN UNIVERSALISM

So at this point in the discussion most Christians will attempt to find middle ground to stand upon between the Arminian and Calvinist views. One man said to me that he is a four and one half point Calvinist. Others will say that they are not Calvinist, but instead "Calvinistic." I have even heard the term "Calminian" and "Arminisitic" as attempts to find the middle ground. However, when I introduced my *Four Square Salvation Evaluator*, we agreed that our two questions needed to be answered absolutely with only one of two answers possible. Did Christ do *PART* or *ALL* of salvation for those who are finally saved? If even one condition is required of mankind, no matter how small, then Jesus only did *PART*. Did Christ intend his salvation for *PART* or *ALL* of mankind? The two answers to these two questions now drive us to consider the *ALL for ALL* quadrant in our *Salvation Evaluator*.

Only the view that Christ did ALL for ALL of mankind allows for the certainty of salvation that is promised in Scripture. Only this view allows a believing person to say to their unbelieving neighbor with great confidence, "God loves you, me, and all mankind, but the only difference between you and me is that you do not believe it and are in grave danger of punishment for dishonoring Christ, God's only son who died for us!"

Nit Picky?

If you are new to the various viewpoints of Christian salvation you may be having a growing distaste for the minutia highlighted thus far. You might feel that these distinctions are simply the result of people with too much time or who are too eager to argue. Perhaps we would all be wiser to let God be God and let those who desire to follow Christ simply follow him. This is an excellent thought. The Psalmists also said in Psalm 131 (WEB),

- 1) *Yahweh, my heart isn't arrogant, nor my eyes lofty;
nor do I concern myself with great matters,
or things too wonderful for me.*
- 2) *Surely I have stilled and quieted my soul,
like a weaned child with his mother,
like a weaned child is my soul within me.*
- 3) *Israel, hope in Yahweh,
from this time forward and forever more.*

Yet, we also need to protect the gospel from false interpretations and explain the gospel to our own generation. I would encourage you to allow your mind to be captivated by the gospel and the questions we have raised. Search the Scriptures for answers to these questions. Do this to make your own election sure and to grow in your love for God and your love for all God's people.

The gospel is God's message to you, me, and all mankind concerning our eternal destiny. One cannot be too picky about getting that right.

If you are not new to this discussion you might likewise be sick of the centuries of theology and debate that has not provided a simple solution. So rather than attempt to move Mount Everest to another location on the globe, you might feel that it is wiser to let the "*secret things*" rest with God. Perhaps God does not intend us to understand some of these questions at this time. Moses likewise said in Deuteronomy 29:29 (WEB), "*The secret things belong to Yahweh our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.*"

It may be that the answers to the questions I raised have not been revealed. But if they were revealed, would you want to know them?

Turn with me to that question next.

A House Divided

Consider one more interjection before I defend the thesis of my book. When I became a Christian, I was so overjoyed about being restored to fellowship with God. I was also so excited to have the huge pack of guilt removed from my back. I literally skipped. However, it was not long before my joy was sobered with two painful realities. One, I was still a sinner. Two, other Christians were still sinners. I was ready for heavenly fellowship, but instead my eyes were opened to the struggle of rugged discipleship. Wizened believers sometimes rhyme,

*To live above with the saints we love,
Ah, that is the purest glory;
To live below with the saints we know,
Ah, that is another story.*

We have hard work to do. We must confront destructive sin in the lives of our Christian brothers, for we are our brother's keeper. However, we must also "*take the log out of our own eye*" and deal with our own sin first. Our goal should be joyful, godly fellowship with all God's people. Jesus prayed for it and so we should pursue it.

Yet great divisions remain, as I have already highlighted the division between Arminian and Calvinistic thought. This division specifically highlights just how destructive sin can be -- even within Christendom. One might hope that Christians could agree on something as basic as Salvation. Yet we are reminded that we are ultimately saved by grace and not by our understanding of grace. So it continues to be extremely sad when disagreements and misunderstandings result in division.

One historic example directly related to our theme is the division between the General and Particular Baptists. I attended Baptist churches in the past and so I have some insight into this division. (However, for the record and in keeping with Jesus' prayer for unity, I am not a Baptist, but a Christian.) The division between General and Particular Baptists falls directly on the line between Arminians and Calvinists. So a study of this historic division in the body of Christ may bring understanding to our discussion.

You can read more about Baptists here http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Particular_Baptists and here http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General_Baptists.

General Baptists believe that Christ's atonement is available "*generally*" to all mankind, but only those people exercising the *free will* choice of faith are finally saved. They are classic Arminians. In contrast, Particular Baptists, sometimes called Regular Baptists, believe that Christ's atonement only applies to a "*particular*" subset of mankind, referred to as "*the elect*," who are born again to faith. They are classic Calvinists. Of course this is a simple analysis of the division for there are many other points of agreement, disagreement, and variations of thought. Furthermore, there are way more than two camps of Baptists, but many splinter groups and sects historically related to these two larger categories. Baptist Christians suffer from the same disunity found in every other category of Christian fellowship.

Why highlight this division? This division is especially useful to show us how labels and interpretations subtly shift from generation to generation placing band aides over our painful outstanding questions. Historically, the General Baptists did not thrive as well in America; the Particular Baptists did better, giving birth to the denominations we know now as the General Association of Regular Baptists, Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America, Continental Baptist Churches, Sovereign Grace Baptist Association of Churches,

Sovereign Grace Baptists, and others. The large well known Southern Baptist Convention remains split on the Arminian / Calvinist debate.

One interesting explanation of the Arminian / Calvinist puzzle has been hammered out in the furnace of Baptist theological debate. Many Calvinist Baptists, because of their strong emphasis on proper Biblical exegesis, have acknowledged the Scriptures I highlighted earlier (Ephesians 2:8-9 and 1 John 2:1-2). They agree that Salvation is ALL by grace. They also agree that Christ's work has atoned for ALL mankind. Yet they think that SOME people are sentenced to eternal damnation while others are saved. So how can this be?

These "*Calvinists*" have proposed that Christ's atonement itself must be understood to be divided into two components. The first level of Christ's atonement is "*general*," toward ALL mankind, but does not actually reconcile anyone fully to God. We might legitimately question what "*part*" of the atonement does not atone -- if it does not atone, then what does it do? Continuing, the second level of Christ's atonement is "*particular*" toward an elect subset of mankind, and does reconcile them fully to God. They have concluded that this is the answer to why SOME within mankind are not saved, even though the Bible says the sins of ALL mankind are atoned. This view could possibly be called the *General + Particular* view of the atonement.

Wait a minute!

This is starting to sound like the General and Particular Baptists all over again! We are back where we started, except this time instead of a division between Christians, we have divided Christ himself! We are well reminded that Jesus said that a "*house divided cannot stand*" and neither can a divided atonement.

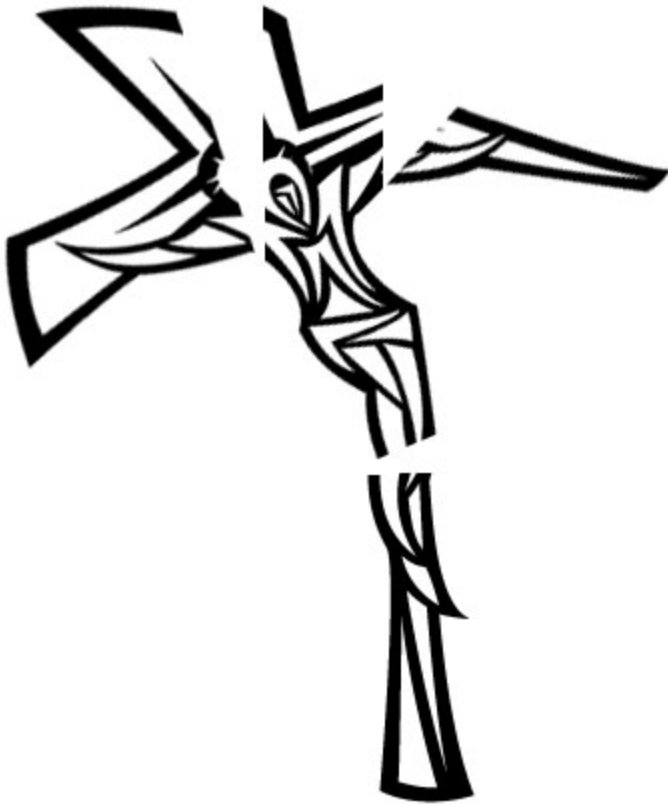
So we see that the Arminian / Calvinist puzzle is no simple matter to explain. Instead, it causes a dizzying array of logic, interpretations, and verbal gymnastics even from thoughtful theologians and has left the body of Christ in a Full Nelson on the wrestling mat with Satan on top.

[◀ Nit Picky?](#)

[up](#)

[Christ Dismembered ▶](#)

Christ Dismembered



There is confusion and division in the body of Christ. Though Satan appears to be getting the upper hand, through grace God sees us "*in Christ*" as if all God's people have perfect understanding and unity -- even though we are far from it in any practical sense. It is like God the Son is a giant safe or vault and we are hidden safely inside, protected from God the Father's holy wrath against our sin. However, God still wants us to strive to think and behave with Christ-like unity. We are hidden safely "*in Christ*," but God the Son also intends to live inside of us transforming us into Christ-like obedient sons of God with him.

Jesus prayed in John 17:20-23 (WEB),

20) Not for these only do I pray, but for those also who will believe in me through their word, 21) that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that you sent me. 22) The

glory which you have given me, I have given to them; that they may be one, even as we are one; 23) I in them, and you in me, that they may be perfected into one; that the world may know that you sent me and loved them, even as you loved me.

I pray that the hope of God's love and salvation for all mankind could serve the Body of Christ and bring understanding and unity.

ALL for ALL

In this case consider the good news that Christ did ALL of salvation for ALL of mankind. Some believe that when Jesus died on the cross he paid for the sins of ALL of mankind and that he did ALL of the work so that any individual can simply trust that Jesus has completely forgiven us ALL already.



For example, suppose Mother Teresa and Hitler are both within the part of mankind that Jesus forgave. (They are because Jesus died for ALL mankind!) Furthermore, since Christ did ALL for ALL, unconditionally, Mother Teresa and Hitler are both spared from the Lake of Fire in the end by God's grace and saved to live with God and ALL his people in eternity. This is a most curious thought, especially with you and me there as well.

This view agrees with I John 2:1-2 (WEB) which says that Jesus did die for ALL mankind.

1) My little children, I write these things to you so that you may not sin. If anyone sins, we have a Counselor with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. 2) And he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.

This view also agrees with Ephesians 2:8-9 (WEB) which explains that we are saved by grace apart from any good work.

8) for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9) not of works, that no one would boast.

Christian Universalism fits into this case. Yet, because the Bible is clear about the punishment of unbelievers after death in Hell, most Christians also reject this view. However, for a fair assessment of each quadrant let's take a closer look at the Scriptures.

Romans 11:32-36

Consider a thorough exegesis of Romans 11:32-36 (WEB).

32) For God has bound all to disobedience, that he might have mercy on all.

33) Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out! 34) 'For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?' 35) 'Or who has first given to him, and it will be repaid to him again?' 36) For of him, and through him, and to him are all things. To him be the glory for ever! Amen.

We ought to give our most serious attention and interpretive skill to these verses. I believe this paragraph of Scripture is the grand conclusion of grace theology for three reasons. First, the paragraph is squarely at the end of Apostle Paul's treatise on grace and Christian salvation, a logical place for a grand conclusion to be. These words are not a mere point or transition, but the summation of Paul's entire explanation of grace from Romans 1 through 11. Second, Romans 11:32 is followed immediately by an equally grand doxology of worship (that is Romans 11:33-36) and five concluding chapters which focus on instructions about our response to this grand conclusion, that is Romans 12-16. Third, I have already suggested that Romans 11:32 answers the three biggest questions that mankind has ever had or will ever have before God our creator. Any concluding word about grace and Christian salvation ought to answer our biggest questions. This grand conclusion does not disappoint. Again these questions are:

1) How did sin enter the world? 2) What is God's purpose in sin and salvation? 3) Who is finally saved from God's wrath against sin? Let's dissect this verse for the answers to these three questions.

For God

God is the subject of the grand conclusion of grace theology. He is the subject of the sentence, the person in focus, the actor on the stage of everything. "*For God!*" It is certainly fitting that God would take the place as subject of the grand conclusion of redemption.

has bound

How has God acted? The main verb is "to bind." So "God has *bound?*" This is curious, and in fact a bit dark and unexpected. Freedom is what we seek, honor, and exalt. Yet, "*God has bound.*"

all

Who has he bound? "*God has bound all.*" We are the direct object, that is *ALL* mankind, even *ALL* creation. But how can there be rejoicing in this dark thought? We might instead prefer to read that God has bound darkness, or bound Satan, or bound all evil. But we read that "*God has bound all.*" We are the object of his binding. What could this mean? And does "*all*" mean *ALL*? Is it only representatives from all categories of men as Mark Galli suggests in his book *God Wins*, or all men generally, or every single human that lived for all time? Perhaps we misunderstand. Perhaps we are *ALL* bound to his goodness or bound to forgiveness.

to disobedience

Darkest of dark. "*God has bound all to disobedience!*" Who is this God? Certainly this must be a mistranslation! Certainly this must be an error from an evil scribe from millennia past! Yet, this is an adverbial clause modifying the verb, "*has bound,*" by answering the question, "*has bound to what?*" But in light of the answer... who cares about grammar? Why would God do that, and how could he possibly be good to do that? Yet if we are reading and understanding correctly, then we now have the answer to our first question.

1) How did sin enter the world? All men are bound to sin by the will of God.

The Biblical answer to the origin of sin is radically different than the answer suggested by C.S. Lewis. As already discussed, Lewis believed that *free will* was required for a true expression of love. Lewis also believed that giving man *free will* then allowed for mankind's choice of evil. Though Lewis was a most excellent philosopher, he is in grave error on both of these points. God's true loving grace is instead all the greater because he saves us, not out of our *freedom*, but out of our bondage to sin. Lewis' suggestion that *free will* allows for the choice of evil is simply mistaken logic. Actually God himself is the only being that ever lived with a perfectly free will, yet there is no possibility of his choosing evil. A will that is free is truly free! I write further about *free will* in my article, [*A Quintessential Defense of FREE WILL.*](#)

Furthermore, we now also see that "*all*" means every single human that has lived for all time, for Paul is simply restating Romans 3:23. If "*all*" means *ALL* in Romans 3:23, as all Christian theologians agree, then it certainly must mean *ALL* here. Though one might object saying that "*all*" simply means representatives from all categories of men, that is Jews and Gentiles, but not necessarily every individual. At least it would be consistent to say that Romans 3:23 and Romans 11:32 both mean every category of men, but not every individual. We should be consistent because the context for both verses regarding Paul's points about Jew and Gentile being alike under sin are the same. However, Romans 3:23 is easily understood to mean every individual person, just as Romans 11:32 should be understood to mean every individual person, whether Jew or Gentile. If we say "*all*" does not mean each individual, but only each category, are we then saying that there are some people who do not sin? Are some people not bound to disobedience by God? Hardly. The point is that *ALL* who sin, and *ALL* sin, do so because God has ordained it. Plus we now see that Galli is wrong to suggest that "*all*" merely means "*all categories of men.*" "*All*" can only mean *ALL* mankind in Romans 11:32 -- that is every single individual Jew and Gentile, even all creation.

Paul did warn us in Romans 8:20 that there is an actor on the stage that subjected creation to frustration. Paul is now telling us plainly in his grand conclusion that it is God himself who has subjected creation to frustration. God is the reason that each individual human that has ever lived for all time is a sinner. This truth can also be confirmed in Isaiah 30:28. So God has bound *ALL* men to disobedience.

Why Lord? How can this be?

that

Thankfully we see the beginning of another adverbial clause to answer the question as to why "*God has bound.*" Thankfully God is willing to disclose the reason for binding us all to disobedience. The thought of God's decree being the reason that we stumble, fall, and disobey seems utterly dark. It is as if we were wickedly fooled and our only hope turned out to be trying to destroy us in the end. If God himself were proved to be evil, what hope could possibly exist? Yet now a light shines through the darkness. God offers an explanation.

But one very important question comes to mind first. The English phrase "*that*" could be heading towards "*allow*" or "*oblige.*" One offers possibility while the other states certainty. The possibility of hope is better than nothing, but certainty is better than everything. So for this phrase, let's dive into the Greek for more clarity.

The Greek word translated "that" is "iva." On page 378 of *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* by Walter Bauer, "iva" is defined as "a result which follows according to the purpose of." To further help us, "iva" is used several other times in the book of Romans.

Now we know that whatever things the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, that [iva] every mouth may be closed, and all the world may be brought under the judgment of God.

Romans 3:19 (WEB)

and if children, then heirs: heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with him, that [iva] we may also be glorified with him.

Romans 8:17 (WEB)

The dictionary definition and the prior context in Romans indicate that "that" means "for the purpose of a certain result." Just as the law certainly holds every individual accountable to God, so God's purpose and result in Romans 11:32 is certain. Just as future glory is certain for God's children that endure suffering, so God's purpose and result in Romans 11:32 is certain.

So let's read his certain purpose.

he might have mercy on

Now that sounds better, much much better. God's purpose was not to do evil, but ultimately to show mercy. In a nutshell, God could not demonstrate forgiveness if he had nothing to forgive. Now one might still reject such a god saying that binding us to sin for the purpose of forgiving our sin still seems cruel. Suppose a father chained his son to a boulder and when neighbors asked why, he said so that he could set him free one day. Such a father would be imprisoned. God, however, will not be imprisoned, but instead worshiped by all.

C.S. Lewis also rejected this scripture in *Mere Christianity* when he wrote, "God created things which had free will. That means creatures which can go either wrong or right." The truth about God's sovereignty over all creation, even evil, was difficult for Lewis to accept, as it is for all of us.

We had concluded above that the phrase "that" means "for the purpose of a certain result." However, we now have the word "might" to consider. That sounds like "possibility" again. Let's dive back into the Greek. The phrase "he might have mercy on" is from the Greek word transliterated "eleese." This special verb means "to have mercy on." This specific verb and its conjugation is used only one time in the whole Bible! The verb tense in the Greek is in the 3rd person aorist active subjunctive singular tense. The 3rd person singular indicates that Paul is writing about a single third person, namely God, the actor on the stage of mercy. The active tense indicates that the action is not passive but active. God is actively demonstrating mercy. He is not a passive forgiver! The aorist tense, sometimes called the "fairest" tense was used by the Greeks to denote a general reference to past action. In this case the aorist tense refers to the work of our "Fairest" Lord Jesus who brought mercy to ALL mankind. Christ's work on the cross forgiving ALL mankind's sin is a finished and completed work. The payment has been made and received by the Father. Finally, the subjunctive mood typically indicates action that is... possible or potential, but not certain.

Whoa! Stop the train!

At first glance, this thought seems to mean that God has made mercy possible, but it is only definite for those adding the missing PART of faith. Or maybe mercy is definite only for the PART of mankind that is chosen for forgiveness. That is the most common interpretation and fits well with either Arminian or Calvinistic theology.

So is my entire thesis unraveled?

According to www.ntgreek.org,

If the subjunctive mood is used in a 'purpose' (or in a 'result') clause, then the action should NOT be thought of as a POSSIBLE result, but should be viewed as the stated outcome that WILL HAPPEN (or HAS HAPPENED) as a result of another stated action. The use of the subjunctive is not to indicate that something 'may' or 'might' result from a given action, but it is stating the 'purpose of' or 'reason for' an action. The subjunctive mood in a purpose clause actually functions more like a verb in the indicative mood rather than in the optative mood. It is not stating the possibility or probability of an action, but instead telling the intention of the primary action.

Whew! That is good news... if you are among those bound to disobedience. Romans 11:32 is not speaking about *'possible'* mercy, but instead... certain and guaranteed mercy!!!

Yet we still may ask how can God get away with locking mankind in bondage to sin even if his goal is to set us free? Well he is God, so he will do what he pleases. He does not answer to us, but instead we answer to him. And how would we stop him anyway? In fact, Romans 11:32 is not telling us what he plans to do, but what he has already done. Further, God's wisdom in such matters is quite beyond our comprehension. Paul's response is simply to break out in worship with the concluding doxology. ***"How unsearchable are his judgments!"***

Paul also explained earlier in Romans that God's grace is such that his mercy does not merely release us from our bonds, but overwhelms and floods our lives with his goodness. His mercy will finally and totally erase all the pain of our past bondage. We may have many complaints about our trials and bondage now, but we are well advised to hold our tongue. Shortly we will have no complaints, but instead reason for over the top rejoicing and praise for our savior.

Romans 5:16-18 (WEB), says,

16) The gift is not as through one who sinned; for the judgment came by one to condemnation, but the free gift came of many trespasses to justification. 17) For if by the trespass of the one, death reigned through the one; so much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ. 18) So then as through one trespass, all men were condemned; even so through one act of righteousness, all men were justified to life.

Furthermore, the earlier picture of a father who chains his son to a boulder and then unchains him later does not capture the wonder of what God is actually doing. God does not simply reach down from Heaven with a key to unlock our bonds to set us free. Instead, his very holy and powerful presence intimately indwells undeserving sinners and empowers us to break the bonds. God shares his supernatural power with us to break the bonds that he ordained. He shares his power with us as the Holy Spirit regenerates individual people, one by one, leading us to faith and victory over sin, sooner or later, whether today or even in the depths of Hades. The bonds he created are too strong for us, but God designed these bonds to be smashed only through the demonstration of Christ's power at work in and through us! I'll take some more of that power!!!

That is the meaning of Romans 8:37 (WEB), ***"No, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."***

That is the meaning of 2 Corinthians 4:6-10 (WEB).

6) seeing it is God who said, "Light will shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 7) But we have this treasure in clay vessels, that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God, and not from ourselves. 8) We are pressed on every side, yet not crushed; perplexed, yet not to despair; 9) pursued, yet not forsaken; struck down, yet not destroyed; 10) always carrying in the body the putting to death of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.

That is the meaning of Isaiah 54:16-17 (WEB).

16) 'Behold, I have created the blacksmith who fans the coals into flame, and forges a weapon for his work; and I have created the destroyer to destroy. 17) No weapon that is formed against you will prevail; and you will condemn every tongue that rises against you in judgment. This is the heritage of Yahweh's servants, and their righteousness is of me,' says Yahweh.

People get ready! Let Jesus flex some supernatural power in your life! Live through Jesus Christ!

Ephesians 2:7 (WEB), an often overlooked but favorite verse of mine, also agrees that God acted with good purpose, *"that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."*

Now we have the answer to our second question.

2) What is God's purpose in sin and salvation? God decreed our bondage to sin in order to provide opportunity to forgive sin and demonstrate his power at work in us to conquer sin. God is showing off his grace and we happen to be the beneficiaries! He is flexing his grace muscles. He is modeling his beautiful grace on the world's runway by indwelling sinners.

Awesome! So who are the beneficiaries again?

all.

ALL? ALL who? Wait a minute! ALL mankind? The parallel construct of this verse demands that this second use of the word "all" is equal to the first use of the word "all." That is, it refers to every individual human being that ever lived for all time. That is right. Just as God has bound ALL humanity to sinful disobedience, so he has chosen ALL mankind for mercy, even ALL creation. Though ALL mankind is not presently indwelt by the Holy Spirit, ALL mankind has already been forgiven at the cross, and one by one, sooner or later, ALL mankind will reap the benefits of Christ's mercy. Sounds like the certain guaranteed universal salvation of ALL mankind to me.

Praise God for his love for us and our neighbors!

3) Who is finally saved from God's wrath against sin? ALL mankind. Looks like our favorite 'Romans Road' collection of verses from the book of Romans has a few potholes in it!

The Biblical answer to the scope of salvation is also radically different than the answer suggested by Dr. James Boice. As already discussed, Boice believed that since some men are sentenced to eternal damnation, it is an obvious conclusion that their sins are not atoned. Thus God's grace is really only extended to a subset of humanity. Yet Romans 11:32 could not be more clear, that just as ALL are locked in bondage to sin, so ALL are granted mercy.

Dr. Boice is likewise a most excellent theologian, but in the effort to tie a neat bow on his theological system he has also made a grave error. Read on to discover my explanation of this conundrum.

Of course right now the Arminian Christians may be reading back through my explanation to argue that the usage of "*might*" must mean possibility and not certainty. They may reason that salvation is only possible because each individual must exercise their *free will* to meet the condition of "*faith*" in order to be finally saved. Impossible! Faith is not the condition to God's unconditional love. Instead, Faith is trusting in God's unconditional love. The Calvinist Christians may immediately see the error in Arminian thinking, for salvation by grace is unconditional or else it would be of works. Calvinists may argue that "*all*" must mean every category and not every individual. Again impossible! The only basis for individual personal confidence in God's love is through confidence in his universal love for *ALL* mankind.

Yet both the Arminian and the Calvinist argue that since the Bible teaches that people go to eternal damnation, then it is impossible that *ALL* would be finally saved. That is an excellent point to continue our discussion. So let's turn to re-examine the question of the destinies of mankind in light of additional Scriptures.

[< ALL for ALL](#)

[up](#)

[Luke 16:19-31 >](#)

Luke 16:19-31

Consider the words of Luke 16:19-31 (WEB),

19) Now there was a certain rich man, and he was clothed in purple and fine linen, living in luxury every day. 20) A certain beggar, named Lazarus, was taken to his gate, full of sores, 21) and desiring to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. Yes, even the dogs came and licked his sores. 22) The beggar died, and he was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died, and was buried. 23) In Hades, he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far off, and Lazarus at his bosom. 24) He cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue! For I am in anguish in this flame.'

25) But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that you, in your lifetime, received your good things, and Lazarus, in the same way, bad things. But here he is now comforted, and you are in anguish. 26) Besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, that those who want to pass from here to you are not able, and that no one may cross over from there to us.'

27) He said, 'I ask you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house; 28) for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, so they won't also come into this place of torment.'

29) But Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them.'

30) He said, 'No, father Abraham, but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'

31) He said to him, 'If they don't listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if one rises from the dead.'

So we see it is certain that the wicked will be sentenced to Hades. So at least the Scriptures are clear that not all are saved from Hades. So are we back to where we started?

Some would attempt to bypass the meaning of this story. One strategy is to explain that the story is simply a parable, a fictional story told to communicate a general truth. However, the account does not have the features of a parable. None of Jesus' parables mention specific individuals by name such as this story does. This story mentions Abraham by name. Also if this were a parable, what would be the general truth taught? The main point of this story is that if the wicked do not repent, they will be sentenced to Hades after they die. The Holy Spirit is not using a parable to teach us about the certainty of Hades. Instead he gives us a real life and afterlife account.

A second strategy often used to dispel the fear of Hell is to teach that Hell is simply the trials and natural consequence of a life lived apart from God both here and in the afterlife. Unbelievers may say with all seriousness that a particular trial was "Hell." One might find consolation thinking that they are surviving now without God just fine and so perhaps Hell in the afterlife will also be fine. However, the trials of this life are nothing compared to the judgments of Hell. The Rich man was in anguish! Furthermore, the rich man *died* and was *buried*. This account is not about God's punishments in this life. In fact the account above is given to teach exactly the opposite point about the life and afterlife of the unbelieving.

The wicked man had many comforts in his lifetime upon the earth, but after life he was judged and sentenced to Hell for his sin and unbelief where every comfort was stripped away. He begged to come back to warn us!

Hell is not a parable or the natural consequence of sin, but the active punishment of God upon the wicked dead.

One point that should be noted is that the WEB Bible translation properly identifies the Rich man's place of punishment as "*Hades*" though most English translations use the more ill-defined English word "*Hell*."

[◀ Romans 11:32-36](#)

[up](#)

[Revelation 20:11-15 ▶](#)

Revelation 20:11-15

Consider also Revelation 20:11-15 (WEB),

11) I saw a great white throne, and him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. There was found no place for them. 12) I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and they opened books. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works. 13) The sea gave up the dead who were in it. Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them. They were judged, each one according to his works. 14) Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15) If anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.

This passage of Scripture, little known and even less taught, helps us understand several important points. First *Hell* or *Hades* is not the same place as the *Lake of Fire*. This is a fact never pointed out to me in a lifetime of Sunday school. Hades appears to be a temporary place of punishment for the wicked. In this passage we see that Hades is emptied of all people and then Hades is thrown into the Lake of Fire empty of all living beings. I've touched base on this subject previously in my article, [Revelation 20:11-15, Optimism Out of Control, Part 5: Hades Gives Up!](#)

The Great White Throne Judgment is instead the final judgment for all of God's creation. It is the final sentence for the redeemed and unredeemed. We certainly have no escape from God's sovereign will now. Nor will there be any escape when all of creation is laid bare before him. Man's supposed *free will* accounts for nothing, but only the free will of Holy God. All creation will stand before the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Jesus will sit on The White Throne arrayed in the brilliance of his glory. Sin and imperfection will not stand in his presence. Only those who are hidden safely in Christ will stand. Every darkness, evil, and any unredeemed will be blasted from his presence with the force of his holy omnipotence. There is no redemption for any sinner outside of the protection of Christ.

The passage above is clear and undisputed. Even if someone endured millennia in Hades for their wickedness and escapes at this point to stand before the Lord of Glory, *IF* their name is not found written in the Book of Life, they will be thrown into the Lake of Fire. There is absolutely no escape from judgment to the Lake of Fire for the unredeemed. There is absolutely no hope for the unredeemed. The Lake of Fire is their destiny.

So we return again to the definition of Christian faith. I have introduced various views of Christian salvation, many of which are in direct opposition to each other. Arminian Christians, following C.S. Lewis, hope to write their own name into the Book of Life with their *free will* act of faith. Yet I have proven that it is not possible to write your own name in the Lamb's Book. "*Faith*" is not a "*pen*" with which to write your name into Jesus' book. Instead faith is the "*glasses*" with which to see your name there from the foundation of the earth. Calvinists claim to wear the "*glasses*" and see their name in the Lamb's Book. Yet somehow they are confident that their names are written in the Lamb's Book, but equally confident that most are not. Are we still no further in understanding?

Now, consider a very important lesson in logic: the Holy Spirit's use of the word "*IF*."

If a statement is true, the contra positive is always logically true. But only when the converse is true will the inverse also logically be true. For example:

Statement: *if A then B ~ given as true.*

Contra positive: *if not B then not A ~ logically always true.*

Converse: *if B then A ~ possibly true, but not always.*

Inverse: *if not A then not B ~ true only if converse is true.*

Negation: *if not A then B ~ true if the original statement is false, a test.*

Note also in logic that an even number of nots such as "not not A" is the same as A, while an odd number of nots such as "not not not A" is the same as not A. Let's apply this logic to Revelation 20:15.

Statement: *If anyone was not found written in the Book of Life, he was cast into the Lake of Fire.* ~ given as true in Revelation 20:15.

Contra positive: *If anyone was not cast into the Lake of Fire he was found written in the Book of Life* ~ logically always true.

Converse: *If anyone was cast into the Lake of Fire he was not found written in the Book of Life* ~ obviously true in this case.

Inverse: *If anyone was found written in the Book of Life, he was not cast into the Lake of Fire* ~ logically true since the converse is true.

Negation: *There was one found written in the Book of Life, who was cast into the Lake of Fire* ~ false since God's word is trustworthy so the original statement is tested true.

Hopefully this is not too tedious a return to high school logic. However, our effort has proven the beautiful conclusion that the inverse of Revelation 20:15 is also true.

If anyone was found written in the Book of Life, he was not cast into the Lake of Fire.

I've written more about this concept in my articles [Revelation 20:11-15, Optimism Out of Control, Part 6: If, If, If, If, If, If, If,,,](#) and [Revelation 20:13-15, Out of Control Optimism Part 8, Your Name in the Book of Life!](#)

Typically when I propose this concept most people object with the question, "*You are not suggesting a second chance are you?*" Larry Dixon also expressed a valid concern that Rob Bell was proposing some sort of "*second chance*" salvation. So let me make one thing perfectly clear: I am definitely not proposing "*second chance*" salvation. Rob Bell is guilty as charged and I have the exact same concern about his theology. Because he believes that mankind has the *free will* to choose their destiny, he correspondingly believes that each individual's salvation is hanging in the balance, and subject to "*chance*" and even the possibility of "*second chances*."

However, the gospel of grace makes it perfectly clear that "*chance*" has no part in Christian salvation. There is no such thing as a "*second chance*." In fact there is also no such thing as a "*first chance!*" Curiously, it would seem that Dixon's very objection to a second chance exposes that he believes salvation has a first chance. Yet if Dixon or any other believes that salvation is by "*chance*" at all then they have a complete misunderstanding of grace. Salvation by the grace of Christ leaves absolutely nothing to chance. God's determined love is set upon all his chosen people with certainty. That is what makes the good news great news. The final salvation of elect mankind is certain and guaranteed, not because of man's will, but because God has willed it! If salvation included an element of chance, then surely your sin nature and mine would find even the smallest crack to bounce through God's safety net into perdition.

But take heart: there is no falling from the hand of our Heavenly Father as he promised in John 10:28 (WEB), "*I give eternal life to them. They will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.*"

If the grace of God cannot fail in saving his lost sheep in this life, then the grace of God will not fail to save any remaining lost sheep at The Great White Throne Judgment, even those punished severely in Hades for their rebellion. Surely someone saved by grace ought to be thankful for that!

Matthew 25:31-46

Consider Matthew 25:31-46 (WEB),

31) But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. 32) Before him all the nations will be gathered, and he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33) He will set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. 34) Then the King will tell those on his right hand, 'Come, blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 35) for I was hungry, and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me drink. I was a stranger, and you took me in. 36) I was naked, and you clothed me. I was sick, and you visited me. I was in prison, and you came to me.'

37) Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry, and feed you; or thirsty, and give you a drink? 38) When did we see you as a stranger, and take you in; or naked, and clothe you? 39) When did we see you sick, or in prison, and come to you?' 40) The King will answer them, 'Most certainly I tell you, because you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

41) Then he will say also to those on the left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels; 42) for I was hungry, and you didn't give me food to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me no drink; 43) I was a stranger, and you didn't take me in; naked, and you didn't clothe me; sick, and in prison, and you didn't visit me.'

44) Then they will also answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and didn't help you?'

45) Then he will answer them, saying, 'Most certainly I tell you, because you didn't do it to one of the least of these, you didn't do it to me.' 46) These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

Theologians debate the timing of Jesus return, whether before or after the Millennium described in Revelation 20:1-6. The timing of his various judgments is also disputed. This subject is relevant to our discussion because it would be helpful to know if the judgment described above is a judgment that sends unbelievers to Hell (that is Hades) before Revelation 20:1-6. Or, is it a judgment that sends the unredeemed to the Lake of Fire after Revelation 20:1-6? We have already explained that Hades and the Lake of Fire are not the same place. Luke 16:19-31 teaches us that unbelieving humans are currently being punished in Hades for their rebellion. So then we should ask: is the judgment described above the sentencing of unbelievers to Hades, the sentencing of the unredeemed to the Lake of Fire, or something else?

One clue is underlined in verse 41 above. Based on the underlined words, I conclude that the Sheep and Goat Judgment is the same event as the Great White Throne judgment also described in Revelation 20:11-15. This passage adds more detail and explains that the Lake of Fire is prepared for... the devil and his angels.

Again this is good news for mankind. Sadly we all have been partners with Satan and his angels in some way or another. We sin because we love our sin. We deserve Satan's destiny in the Lake of Fire. However, God has demonstrated his grace, his undeserved favor toward

mankind, by forgiving all mankind at the cross and giving us Heaven for eternity. However, the devil and his angels are sentenced to the Lake of Fire for *The Ages of The Ages*. Satan and the demons are the goats on Jesus' left, not mankind! Each of us deserve the destiny of Satan, yet by God's grace alone we are given grace and glory instead. I discuss this further in my article, [Your Theory about the Goats... Is it Really Possible? Matthew 25:31-46](#).

[< Revelation 20:11-15](#)

[up](#)

[Revelation 20:10 >](#)

Revelation 20:10

Revelation is difficult to understand, but we must consider Revelation 20:10 (WEB),

The devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet are also. They will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Only three people are explicitly named in Scripture as destined to the Lake of Fire. They are Satan, The Beast, and The False Prophet.

So how do we determine the nature of the members of this Unholy Trinity: The Devil (Satan / Dragon), The Beast (First / Sea Beast), and The False Prophet (Second / Land Beast)? Are they human beings, demonic beings, or non-being forces?

Everyone agrees that Satan is a demon, a fallen angel. Well, not everyone agrees. Mormons are confused about that, suggesting that Satan is actually Jesus' brother. A few others have defined Satan as the epitome of evil, but that he is in fact not a being, not a person. However, I easily side with the majority, that Satan is a being, a non-human spirit person with mind, will, and emotion. He is the Chief fallen angel actively leading his rebellion against God.

However, what about The Beast and The False Prophet? Revelation 13 introduces both a First Beast from the sea and Second Beast from the land. A comparison of Revelation 13:14 and 19:20 shows that the Second Beast is later referred to as The False Prophet in Revelation 16:13, 19:20, and 20:10. Thus the Second Beast and The False Prophet are the same person.

Revelation 16:13-14 also shows us that the mouths of The Dragon (Satan), The Beast, and The False Prophet are each the *source* of demonic spirits. This is initial evidence that these three beings share a common nature. This is one argument that they are not human beings, but instead demonic beings. Humans do not beget demons, but Satan, The Beast, and The False Prophet are the source of demonic activity. They are the demon chiefs!

13) I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits, something like frogs; 14) for they are spirits of demons, performing signs; which go out to the kings of the whole inhabited earth, to gather them together for the war of that great day of God, the Almighty.

Revelation 16:13-14 (WEB)

Secondly, we already know that Jesus became a human being to pay for the sins of all mankind and thus I have reasoned that all mankind is spared the Lake of Fire. Jesus did not become an angel and so apparently the sins of fallen angels are not atoned and they will suffer the Lake of Fire. Thus, those sentenced to the Lake of Fire are demons, fallen angels, and not human beings. Otherwise, if they were human, their sins would be paid for and they would not be sentenced to the Lake of Fire. Matthew 25:41, previously mentioned, also clearly states that the Lake of Fire is "*prepared for the Devil and his angels.*" Jude 6 and 2 Peter 2:4 also make it clear that fallen angels will be present at the final judgment, hence the goats on Jesus' left.

Further study could be done to confirm the identity of The First Beast as demonic. Some are

certain that The Beast of Revelation is the Roman Empire, Nero, the Pope, or someone else altogether. The image of a beast arising from the sea first appears in Scripture at Isaiah 27:1. Leviathan is also mentioned earlier in the book of Job, but that reference may simply be from the animal kingdom. However, Isaiah's reference surely points to a larger Spiritual oppressor, perhaps the very same being mentioned in Revelation 13:1. Now, I am not suggesting that demons actually abode in the sea, but this Biblical metaphor illustrates an invisible, but very real, demonic landscape. The tumultuous sea is used to picture the caustic habitat of demons.

In that day, Yahweh with his hard and great and strong sword will punish leviathan, the fleeing serpent, and leviathan the twisted serpent; and he will kill the dragon that is in the sea.

Isaiah 27:1 (WEB)

Now, consider an important concept. The Revelation drama reveals illustrations of real people and interaction between the seen and unseen worlds. I have also shown from Revelation 16:13-14, above, that demons are assigned various tasks in their great war against God and mankind. The "**frog**" demons were sent to rally the kings of earth for war on the yet future Great Day of God. Thus I propose that The First Beast is an actual demon chief alongside of Satan whose evil mission gave rise to the wicked Roman Empire. His evil mission was accomplished through the wicked Roman Empire. Thus he is portrayed with ten horns and seven heads illustrative of the Roman Emperors as explained in Revelation 13 and 17. Yet because The Beast stands alongside Satan and is literally cast into the Lake of Fire with Satan, we know that he is also a demonic being.

Likewise for an early mention of a false demonic prophet we read,

20) A spirit came out, stood before Yahweh, and said, "I will entice him." Yahweh said to him, "How?" 21) He said, "I will go, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets." He said, "You will entice him, and will prevail also. Go and do so." 22) Now therefore, behold, Yahweh has put a lying spirit in the mouth of these your prophets; and Yahweh has spoken evil concerning you.

2 Chronicles 18:20-22 (WEB)

Perhaps, this deceiving spirit mentioned in the Old Testament, or another like him, is the demon called "**The False Prophet**" in Revelation 20. Yet identifying the Second Beast with the demonic seems more problematic, at least initially. The First Beast does not seem particularly human, but instead governmental, and so perhaps my proposal that a particular demon empowered Rome does not seem unreasonable. However, the Second Beast instead seems to be more personal and human. In fact, since the Second Beast gets his power from the First Beast he then seems like a human tyrant controlled by a demon, that is by the First Beast. Common candidates for the Second Beast include Nero, Domitian, the Roman Concilia to enforce state worship, the Pope, and numerous others throughout history.

However, just like my proposal that the First Beast was a powerful demon whose work was manifest in the birth and growth of the Roman Empire, so I propose that the Second Beast was a powerful demon whose work was manifest in the wickedness of a Roman Emperor, perhaps Nero or Domitian. Countless hours of effort have been spent in the effort to determine the identity of the Second Beast, The False Prophet, with the mysterious number of "**666**" given in Revelation 13:18 (WEB).

Here is wisdom. He who has understanding, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man. His number is six hundred sixty-six.

The expression "*number of a man*" seems to indicate that "666" is the identity of a specific human being. Some efforts at gematria identify Nero as the Second Beast, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Number_of_the_Beast. While this could easily be the case I also propose that Nero, or whoever the actual Second Beast proves to be, was specifically empowered by a demon. Thus the Second Beast demon is finally damned to the Lake of Fire, not the human being he possessed. Though one might question my concern to "save Nero," I am convinced he is saved by the same blood of Christ that saved you and me. The expression above may also be better rendered "*human numbering*," meaning according to human calculation. Consider that the mysterious number "666" is referenced at the end of a chapter discussing Satan, The Beast, and the False Prophet. Certainly this triple "6" number must point to the terrible nature of demonic power that falls short of God's perfection in the Holy Trinity. Since "7" is a picture of God's perfection and completeness, the number "666" may point to the climax of evil in the Unholy Trinity. What worse scenario can you image than Satan working through a demonic government working through a demonic tyrant?

Revelation 20:10 then finally confirms that the demonic beings of Satan, The Beast, and The False Prophet are damned to the Lake of Fire for The Ages of The Ages. God is not pronouncing doom to mere movements or governments. How does one throw a movement into the Lake of Fire? How does one torment a government for The Ages of The Ages? Instead the only things ever mentioned as thrown into Hades or the Lake of Fire are people and places. Further, it would seem curious for the Holy Spirit to explicitly highlight the damnation of Satan with one government and one government leader. So, for my last point, the common destiny of the Unholy Trinity is likewise strong evidence for the common nature of these three beings. This is especially so since Matthew 25:41 explicitly says that the Lake of Fire is "*prepared for the Devil and his angels.*"

Read more about my understanding of Revelation in my articles in the [Appendix, Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News!](#) and [Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News! \(Part 2 with Grudem, Riddlebarger, Chilton, Summers, and Ewing\)](#).

Finally consider an extra-Biblical comparison. Just as there are three demon leaders (Satan, the Beast, and the False Prophet), so God himself is three persons (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit). The Bible does not highlight this parallel explicitly, but I mention it for you to ponder. You or I might be tempted to think that the salvation and fate of mankind is uncertain and in question. Too often my (and perhaps your) ministry efforts and actions reflect this uncertainty. However, take a moment and fully rest in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Actually, you are advised to rest in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ now and forever! Our eternal destiny rests fully in his hands. Our salvation is not uncertain! Through his grace he does not consider us his enemies, but his chosen family -- redeemed for all eternity.

However, if we are not born again, our birth nature opposes God because our hearts are bad. We crucified Christ, but Christ loves and forgives us. Fallen angels also hate God, but God has promised to crush the head of Satan. Satan is the true enemy of God in this cosmic spiritual war.

Thus for the demonstration of his grace, God created angels and decreed that some would fall into rebellion and become his enemies destined for the Lake of Fire. Why? Perhaps to help us better understand grace, God decreed a dark frame to contrast his glorious mercy. Apparently grace could not be fully praised and appreciated any other way. The parallels between God's good nature and the evil nature of demons are noteworthy. Consider a comparison of the Holy Trinity with the Unholy Trinity.

Role	Holy Trinity (God is good)	Unholy Trinity (Anti-God is evil)
The Head	The Father	The Devil
The Image	The Son	The Beast

Friends, the salvation of mankind is not uncertain, nor is our salvation in question. But sparks will fly until God throws his enemies (that is, Satan and the fallen angels that follow him) into the Lake of Fire for *The Ages of The Ages*.

[< Matthew 25:31-46](#)[up](#)[1 Corinthians 1:17-25 >](#)

1 Corinthians 1:17-25

Consider 1 Corinthians 1:17-25 (WEB),

17) For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the Good News—not in wisdom of words, so that the cross of Christ wouldn't be made void. 18) For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are dying, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19) For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise. I will bring the discernment of the discerning to nothing." 20) Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the lawyer of this world? Hasn't God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 21) For seeing that in the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom didn't know God, it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save those who believe. 22) For Jews ask for signs, Greeks seek after wisdom, 23) but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews, and foolishness to Greeks, 24) but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God; 25) because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

The Bible says that God is so wise that his "foolishness" is wiser than our "wisdom" and that his "weakness" is stronger than our "strength." Since this is in the Bible, Christians would all agree with the words above.

Now suppose God used his foolishness and weakness to expose our foolishness and weakness to remind us of our utter dependency upon him for salvation, and that we are saved by grace and not saved even by our understanding or our choices.

How does this relate to our current discussion? No doubt there are many that are beginning to dispute the propositions of this short book. I do not fault your reaction. It certainly is a radically different approach than the more commonly accepted views of Arminianism and Calvinism. Yet, my proposition does not fit neatly into common Universalism, either. Many Universalists wrongly teach that there is no punishment after death for the unbeliever or that unbelievers are punished temporarily in the Lake of Fire. However, I understand that unbelievers are punished after death in Hades, but that no human being will ever enter the Lake of Fire. Based on the preceding reasoning from Scripture, I believe that ALL mankind, every individual descendant of Adam and Eve, is deeply loved by God and will certainly be saved from the Lake of Fire by the electing grace of God alone.

You may ask why God did not make it clearer. Why are not more aware of this good news? God has made his love for ALL mankind quite clear, but his message is obscured by our hypocrisy and turning Christ into yet another religion. Perhaps the wisdom of God knows best how to lead us sinners from our darkness and dread fear into the glorious light of his salvation. Perhaps he does not want to cast these pearls before those whose hearts are not ready. Perhaps since he has already made eternal salvation from condemnation for all his chosen people a certainty, his focus is now transformational salvation from sin and our hatred of our God. He has won the decision in the courtroom of Heaven, but now intends to win the decision in each of our hearts. Perhaps we cannot know why God did not make it clearer.

You may also ask why God did not just settle all this earlier in history. That is an excellent question as we consider how God has given us additional pieces of revelation throughout history. Adam and Eve did not even have a Bible, but only the verbal promise that someone was coming, a deliverer. Prophets came and brought the Word of the Lord, the Old

Testament, but they were not the deliverer. One day John the Baptist came and announced that someone was here, the deliverer had arrived -- Jesus Christ. His disciples gave us the New Testament. God's word concludes with the words that someone is coming again. The Lord Jesus Christ will return in power and great might for the final salvation of all his people. Until then, we seek to understand his holy Word and obey him as we wait for his return.

Hopefully I have gently exposed the religiosity and hypocrisy that can be found in both Arminianism and Calvinism. The exposure of sin is essential for healing. Doctors cannot heal without a diagnosis, and Christ cannot remove our sin without grabbing the root and pulling it out. That is painful. Yet sin must be pulled out if we are to continue to grow in Christ-likeness and to live for him and others, fully confident in his grace for all.

[< Revelation 20:10](#)

[up](#)

[2 Corinthians 5:14-21 >](#)

2 Corinthians 5:14-21

Consider 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 (WEB),

14) For the love of Christ constrains us; because we judge thus, that one died for all, therefore all died. 15) He died for all, that those who live should no longer live to themselves, but to him who for their sakes died and rose again. 16) Therefore we know no one after the flesh from now on. Even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know him so no more. 17) Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new. 18) But all things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ, and gave to us the ministry of reconciliation; 19) namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not reckoning to them their trespasses, and having committed to us the word of reconciliation. 20) We are therefore ambassadors on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21) For him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

This passage clarifies a few things. Just because Jesus has written every human being's name in the Lamb's Book of Life does not mean everyone is saved in every dimension. Christ has died for all mankind, but not all *live!* God has reconciled all mankind to himself through Christ, but not all acknowledge their forgiveness in Christ. All are forgiven, but not all are saved from the prideful refusal to be happy about forgiveness, and others are simply ignorant of the good news. Most of those in the Lamb's Book, the elect, are still unbelieving, and unless they are graced with faith they will suffer punishment in Hades for their unbelief. The first born nature of rebellion still rules their heart.

We know this to be true for no one is born with faith. Each individual must be born again through the Holy Spirit and come to faith in Christ to know God. Even though the unbelieving elect are saved from the Lake of Fire, they are not saved from unbelief and punishment in Hades unless they repent. Even though their names are in the Lamb's Book of Life they will still suffer punishment in Hades for their rebellion. Furthermore, even many Christians who are saved from Hades are also not saved from sin and the consequences of sin. Even though Christians are blessed children of God and saved from Hades, we can still ruin our earthly lives with sin. Salvation has numerous dimensions including rescue from the Lake of Fire, from Hades, and from sin as I discuss in my article, [SAVED 5X](#). Jesus warned that broad is the road to destruction and many enter through it!

Now what if someone were persuaded that his name is in the Book of Life, yet instead of serving Christ in gratitude, he simply lived like the Devil for his selfish interests? Such a person is certainly the fool mentioned in Proverbs 26:4-5. Such a person could hardly dare to call himself a Christian or a follower of Christ. Regardless of the hope of the Good News, such a person really has no hope. Such a person lives a life of fearful expectation of the coming judgment. Furthermore, Romans 10:9 makes it clear that to be truly saved one must both confess with the mouth *and* believe with the heart. Punishment in Hades awaits everyone without a Christian heart. The Scripture has important words of warning for such a person which I will come to shortly.

Again, the Scripture above confirms that Christ has died for all. These verses even explain that all mankind is already positionally reconciled to God "*in Christ*" apart from faith. Most

would teach that each individual is placed *"into Christ"* only as he believes in him. But I understand that those predestined to salvation are never outside of God's grace because they are always positionally in Christ. However, as each individual is awakened as a new creation, he *realizes* his position in Christ and begins to live in Christ. The elect of God are in desperate need of the salvation of their hearts through the new birth. However, God's gracious purpose for his chosen ones was decreed before we believed, before we were born, and even before creation. See my article *'In' Doctrine* for further discussion.

A related thought is that most Christian theologies suggest that justification, the legal proclamation of our right standing with God, happens per individual either immediately before or after personally trusting Christ. However, I suggest that justification was pronounced for all God's people one time at the cross. Again see my article *Justified!* for more details.

Unfortunately too many professing Christians imagine or have been taught that the *free will* choice of *"faith"* is the activating ingredient in our personal salvation. They imagine *"faith"* to be like a string that reaches from their prayer to Heaven's courtroom to hammer the gavel of their justification.

However, picture this: a venomous criminal with only the courtroom floor between himself and the lawful judge that he hates. If the police were not restraining him and the judge's bench was not so high, he would simply reach out and kill the judge. We know this to be accurate imagery because there was one time in history when the judge stepped down from his bench. We know that God's holy angels were commanded to stand by. The good judge gave himself into the hands of the criminal. Mankind universally conspired to kill the Christ! When will such a venomous criminal ever exercise his *free will* to repent? He does not even want to be saved. He does not want to be at peace with the judge. He hates the judge. He wants to kill the judge! He wants to be his own judge... and the judge of everyone else. But he just cannot reach the gavel of justification across the courtroom floor. The true judge will not relinquish the gavel to the criminal because he is the good judge. The criminal cannot change his heart to begin to love the judge because he hates the judge BY HIS VERY NATURE. He is not free, but locked in bondage to sin. Even if the criminal could suddenly begin to be good, it would not be enough to mend the error of his past rebellion. Even if the criminal would magically transform into Mother Teresa, he still must pay the price for his past crimes. Claims of *free will* decisions for Christ and *"faith"* that *"writes our name in Heaven"* simply miss the heart of grace.

The crux of the matter is that Jesus Christ imputed righteousness to our account while we still hated him and while we loved only ourselves, according to Romans 5:10. The essential point is that there will never be any positive change until God himself reaches inside the individual's life to replace his heart of stone with a heart of flesh. The good news is that Christ alone has sacrificed his body and poured his blood on the Father's righteous bench to proclaim our justification. He did this while we criminals were still spitting out venom dressed in our rags of self-righteousness. But the sound of Jesus' gavel silences Satan, the prosecuting attorney, who still drones on listing our sins for an easy indictment. All of this transpires before the courtroom audience. God's holy angels are astonished that Christ could forgive us, the very partners of Satan. They never cease to marvel over God's glorious grace toward his redeemed.

Of course most of us do not appear to be venomous criminals... at least not until our self-righteous attitudes are confronted with God's glorious grace and Christ's love for ALL mankind.

If you are an evangelist consider that the purpose of evangelism is NOT to add names to the Book of Life! How can we do that anyway? Instead, consider that the purpose of evangelism is to bring the elect of God from unbelief to belief, from spiritual death to spiritual life, from disobedience to obedience, and from certain punishment with the wicked in Hades to joyful communion with Christ... to receive Christ's finished work on their behalf.

Lastly, 2 Corinthians 5:16 also tells us that we are not to view others from a worldly point of view. The world believes that some are evil, but only those who do good meet a good end. Someone once told me that all unbelievers think that everyone will be saved in the end. Friends, I have yet to meet an unbeliever who thinks that all are saved. They typically believe there are at least enough people worse than them to fill the seats in Hell so that they will not have to go there. Thus on this point, Arminianism and Calvinism both speak from a worldly point of view.

[< 1 Corinthians 1:17-25](#)

[up](#)

[John 10:25-30 >](#)

John 10:25-30

Consider John 10:25-30 (WEB),

25) Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you don't believe. The works that I do in my Father's name, these testify about me. 26) But you don't believe, because you are not of my sheep, as I told you. 27) My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28) I give eternal life to them. They will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29) My Father who has given them to me is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand. 30) I and the Father are one."

This seems to be a problematic passage for those believing that all mankind is finally saved. Here Jesus tells the unbelieving Jews that they are *"not his sheep."* The Lord's grave words at the Sheep and Goat judgment used in Matthew 25:31-46 suggest that there are only two categories of people in the whole world. There are sheep (of the lost and found variety) and goats. Doctrines like predestination and particular atonement teach us that goats do not become sheep, and sheep do not become goats. Sheep are the redeemed people of God, while goats are the unredeemed. So are these unbelieving Jews then goats with no hope of salvation?

Perhaps I have concluded too hastily and we need to drop back to the Calvinist understanding of the gospel.

In fact, this is one of the passages that led me to a Calvinistic understanding of the gospel in the past. The message seems clear enough, so what else could be concluded? The message seemed clear until I read Hosea 2:23.

Hosea 2:23

Consider Hosea 2:23 (WEB),

*I will sow her to me in the earth; and
I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy; and
I will tell those who were not my people, "You are my people;"
and they will say, "My God!"*

This passage is peculiar in that God specifically calls rebellious Israel *"not my people."* But after he has changed their hearts he reverts to calling them *"my people."* We have already said that sheep do not become goats and goats do not become sheep. Yet here those who are *"not his people"*, then become *"his people."* These words parallel Jesus' words of calling the stubborn Pharisees *"not my sheep"*, but those who repented he then calls *"my sheep."*

Why doesn't God call rebellious Israel simply *"my bad people?"* Perhaps God is willing to call a *"lost sheep"* a *"goat"* or actually *"not a sheep"* in order to get their attention. For an extreme example consider that Jesus even called Peter *"Satan"* to his face in Matthew 16:23. Was Peter then actually Satan? Certainly not! So why should we be surprised if he calls the unbelieving Jews, the rebellious elect, *"not his sheep"*, even though they are the *"lost sheep"* of his pasture? Furthermore, our wicked hearts need to be so radically changed that we become new people. We must be born again.

The story is told of a father with a rebellious son. The son rebelled further and further from family values until the father firmly and painfully told the rebel, *"You are not my son."* The ice of those words combined with time and reflection brought the father's son back to his senses and heartfelt repentance. The father received him with open arms weeping with joy over his son.

This strategy, which I call the *"Hosea Strategy"*, is an integral component of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Note also that Paul references Hosea 2:23 in Romans 9:25. Romans Chapter 9 is the most difficult and avoided chapter in the whole New Testament. The chapter is often avoided by Christians because it appears to teach that God hates people and has chosen some people for salvation and others for eternal damnation before they were even born.

However, I suggest that you re-read the Romans Chapter 9 with the insight that God does have special strategies, such as the Hosea Strategy, for confronting unbelief in mankind.

Paul threatens in Romans 9:18-24 (WEB),

18) So then, he has mercy on whom he desires, and he hardens whom he desires. 19) You will say then to me, "Why does he still find fault? For who withstands his will?" 20) But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed ask him who formed it, "Why did you make me like this?" 21) Or hasn't the potter a right over the clay, from the same lump to make one part a vessel for honor, and another for dishonor? 22) What if God, willing to show his wrath and to make his power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23) and that he might make known the riches of his glory on vessels of mercy, which he prepared beforehand for glory, 24) us, whom he also called, not from the Jews only, but also from the Gentiles?

Yet Paul promises in Romans 9:25-26 (WEB),

25) As he says also in Hosea, "I will call them 'my people,' which were not my people; and her 'beloved,' who was not beloved." 26) "It will be that in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'children of the living God.' "

I have written further on this subject in my article, [Hosea 1:10, Optimism Out of Control, Part 2: In the Same Place!](#)

[< John 10:25-30](#)

[up](#)

[Proverbs 26:4-5 >](#)

Proverbs 26:4-5

Consider Proverbs 26:4-5 (WEB), which I mentioned in the beginning of this book,

4) Don't answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him. 5) Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.

If God does have special strategies for dealing with unbelief in mankind, does he give us any explanation or instruction to do likewise ourselves? I introduced this book with a story about the Wright brothers and the special strategies they used to persuade others that flight is possible. Believing in flight does have a very practical importance. However, believing that Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of the whole world is infinitely more important. The good news should change the importance and priority of everything. If we truly know God's love, we will be filled with affection for him and love for our neighbor.

Yet sadly, just like people did not believe the Wright brothers, people also do not believe the gospel and reject Jesus and his love. Therefore, Jesus has given us an example in John Chapter 10 of how to confront unbelief as we already discussed. Solomon has also given us an instruction, cited above, for answering foolishness, a special strategy for dealing with unbelief.

Now we see that one reason the body of Christ is ridiculously divided over the gospel is because our unbelief, hypocrisy, and religiosity has blinded us. We have not seen the beautiful truth that Christ is the savior of all mankind. We have interpreted the words of Scripture as if God only ever throws straight fast balls. However, the Scripture above shows us that God also throws curve balls to the unbelieving. I suggest that God's Word is perfectly worded to answer both the foolish and the wise.

It would appear that many, including myself at times, have interpreted Jesus' answers to the foolish as wisdom and so have joined the unbelieving in their folly.

The Word of God truly has laid our hearts bare before his penetrating gaze. Thankfully, there is grace.

Jonah 3

Consider another well-known example of God's special strategies for confronting the wickedness of men. Consider the story of Jonah and the whale. Most know that Jonah was swallowed by a large fish and dramatically saved. So this '*happily ever after story*' often finds itself in Children's storybooks along with cuddly stuffed whales. However, the whole story is both more dramatic and more joyful than commonly portrayed. Find the book of Jonah in the Old Testament and read it for yourself.

Did you also know that this story reveals yet another tactic that God may employ to graciously move his people away from the destructiveness of evil?

1. God told Jonah to preach against the sin of Nineveh to help them.
2. Jonah did not want grace to come to Nineveh so he ran away.
3. So God stopped Jonah with a storm and a large fish.
4. Then Jonah had a change of heart in the belly of the fish.
5. Then God commanded the fish to vomit Jonah onto dry land...

Now let's pick up the story at Jonah Chapter 3 (WEB),

1) Yahweh's word came to Jonah the second time, saying, 2) "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I give you." 3) So Jonah arose, and went to Nineveh, according to Yahweh's word. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey across. 4) Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried out, and said, "In forty days, Nineveh will be overthrown!" 5) The people of Nineveh believed God; and they proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from their greatest even to their least. 6) The news reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and took off his royal robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. 7) He made a proclamation and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, "Let neither man nor animal, herd nor flock, taste anything; let them not feed, nor drink water; 8) but let them be covered with sackcloth, both man and animal, and let them cry mightily to God. Yes, let them turn everyone from his evil way, and from the violence that is in his hands. 9) Who knows whether God will not turn and relent, and turn away from his fierce anger, so that we might not perish?" 10) God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way. God relented of the disaster which he said he would do to them, and he didn't do it.

How are we to understand this?

God said, through Jonah, that Nineveh would be overthrown in 40 days. However, Nineveh repented and was not overthrown. So did God lie or misrepresent himself? His word to Nineveh included no condition, just a flat statement that Nineveh would be overthrown in 40 days -- period. Yet Nineveh was not overthrown in 40 days, but instead spared because of their repentance. Let's consider three possible explanations.

1. **God's threat of overthrow included an unspoken condition.** That is one possible interpretation, however, the Ninevites' words in response suggest otherwise. The Ninevites said, "Who knows whether God will not turn and relent, and turn away from his fierce anger, so that we might not perish?" So it is clear that the Ninevites were not aware of mercy conditioned on their repentance. In fact they clearly did not

know if God would relent even if they repented! From their point of view they were moved to repent for the mere possibility that God might relent and offer mercy.

2. **Jonah spoke of overthrow, but that was not the message God intended.** This is not a valid understanding either. The Holy Spirit makes it clear that Jonah's words were in fact God's words to Nineveh. The Scripture says, "*Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried out, and said, 'In forty days, Nineveh will be overthrown!' The people of Nineveh believed God;*" The message of overthrow in 40 days was from God through Jonah.
3. **God threatened powerfully for a guaranteed effect.** A final possibility is that God threatened Nineveh so powerfully that his intended effect, the Ninevites' repentance, was guaranteed. With this model of understanding we suggest that God's *sovereign* plan never intended to overthrow Nineveh in 40 days and that his words were a threat only -- guaranteed to result in Nineveh's repentance. He spoke his threat persuasively to guarantee his purpose. Though, one very very very important caveat to this understanding is that we can only conclude this in retrospect! To respond to any of God's warnings concluding that he is making a mere threat and will not follow through is not recommended. We are advised to repent hoping that God may extend mercy.

So do I propose that God employs this same tactic through the gospel of Jesus Christ?

One way he certainly does not employ this tactic is to merely threaten the unbelieving with judgment and punishment in Hades. Jesus does not simply threaten the fires of Hades; the unbelieving, wicked dead are actually sent there. Some would suggest Luke 16:19-31 is a parable, yet it has none of the elements of a parable. The rich man who refused to help poor Lazarus was sent to Hades fire, as Jesus makes quite plain. Consider also that Revelation 20:5 makes it clear that the unbelieving dead remain dead in Hades while believers live. Thus it is again clear that Hades is not empty, but filled with the unbelieving. Revelation 20:13 also says that Hades then finally gives up these wicked dead. So again Hades is not empty or how could Hades give up the dead? Jesus also preached hope by saying in Matthew 16:18 that grace would overcome the gates of Hades. Hades needs to be overcome because it is filled with wicked men who have yet to acknowledge their redemption. Why does Christ need to overcome the gates of Hades if no one is being punished there? Paul even joins the chorus in 1 Corinthians 15:55 saying that Christ will steal all victory from both death and Hades! Hades will be finally robbed of all victory when the grace of God proves victorious even for the unbelieving elect currently being punished there. The gospel warnings of punishment in Hades after death for the unbelieving disobedient are not a threat, but certain reality. Friend, take care!

However, we also see that Christ is willing to call his "*lost sheep*," "*not my sheep*" in John 10:26. He is also willing to call "*his people*," "*not my people*" and his "*loved one*," "*not my loved one*" in Hosea 2:23. Now this tactic is very similar to God's strategy with Nineveh. The strategy is also very fitting. Consider just what an unbeliever really is in the first place. An unbeliever is one of God's precious creations, deeply loved by God and redeemed by Christ, who rejects the love and forgiveness of our Heavenly Father in order to remain god of his own life. He rejects his election just as Esau rejected his birthright... for a bowl of soup. Jesus is perfectly willing to label these wicked unbelievers as non-elect, not his sheep, not his people, not his chosen. Just like God wanted the Ninevites to fear destruction, so the unbelieving elect can only fear eternal damnation. However, just like the Ninevites repented and were not destroyed, so the love of Christ has already guaranteed the final salvation of all his chosen people. Not one of Christ's elect can ever stumble into the Lake of Fire, but will be brought to repentance sooner... or later.

Though all mankind is chosen for the atonement of sins, most are not yet chosen to simply believe this good news about their redemption. Yet even so, they are loved by God from before the foundation of the world with a guaranteed home in Heaven.

The story of Jonah and Nineveh is another example of God's special, gracious strategies to care for rebellious, unbelieving mankind.

[< Proverbs 26:4-5](#)

[up](#)

[Acts 13:48 >](#)

Acts 13:48

Consider Acts 13:48 (WEB),

As the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of God. As many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

This verse is commonly cited by Calvinists to defend their view that Christ has only atoned for the sins of a subset of mankind. The verse seems to say that everyone who is appointed to eternal life will believe immediately when they hear the gospel. However, in light of our discussion we see instead that the Holy Spirit is recognizing God's election in those who believed, while at the same time offering no assurance to the unbelieving elect in their rebellion. The elect of God often remain in stubborn unbelief even after hearing the gospel. This verse does not mean that they are not elect and not loved by God, and never will believe. Instead, all the unbelieving elect will believe, sooner... or later. However, no comfort will be given to the wicked until they repent.

The Apostle John uses a similar strategy on the positive side of the equation when he refers to himself as the "disciple whom Jesus loved." Should we be offended that he singles himself out as the one whom Jesus loved? No. Instead we should wake up, smile, and say "I also am the disciple whom Jesus loves!"

God's special love does not mean that his love is therefore limited. I tell each of my children that they are my favorites. So when I focus my special love on one child, that does not mean I no longer love the others. Instead, I love each of my children in a special way. God, even more so, loves each human being with his special love.

Romans 11:1-32

Read Romans 11:1-32 (WEB), again,

1) *I ask then, did God reject his people? May it never be! For I also am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. 2) God didn't reject his people, which he foreknew. Or don't you know what the Scripture says about Elijah? How he pleads with God against Israel: 3) "Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have broken down your altars. I am left alone, and they seek my life." 4) But how does God answer him? "I have reserved for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." 5) Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. 6) And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.*

7) *What then? That which Israel seeks for, that he didn't obtain, but the chosen ones obtained it, and the rest were hardened. 8) According as it is written, "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear, to this very day."*

9) *David says, "Let their table be made a snare, a trap, a stumbling block, and a retribution to them. 10) Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see. Always keep their backs bent."*

11) *I ask then, did they stumble that they might fall? May it never be! But by their fall salvation has come to the Gentiles, to provoke them to jealousy. 12) Now if their fall is the riches of the world, and their loss the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fullness?*

13) *For I speak to you who are Gentiles. Since then as I am an apostle to Gentiles, I glorify my ministry; 14) if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh, and may save some of them. 15) For if the rejection of them is the reconciling of the world, what would their acceptance be, but life from the dead? 16) If the first fruit is holy, so is the lump. If the root is holy, so are the branches. 17) But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the root and of the richness of the olive tree, 18) don't boast over the branches. But if you boast, it is not you who support the root, but the root supports you. 19) You will say then, 'Branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in.' 20) True; by their unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by your faith. Don't be conceited, but fear; 21) for if God didn't spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you.*

22) *See then the goodness and severity of God. Toward those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in his goodness; otherwise you also will be cut off. 23) They also, if they don't continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. 24) For if you were cut out of that which is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree, how much more will these, which are the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?*

25) *For I don't desire you to be ignorant, brothers, of this mystery, so that you won't be wise in your own conceits, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, 26) and so*

all Israel will be saved. Even as it is written,

"There will come out of Zion the Deliverer, and he will turn away ungodliness from Jacob. 27) This is my covenant with them, when I will take away their sins."

28) Concerning the Good News, they are enemies for your sake. But concerning the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sake. 29) For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. 30) For as you in time past were disobedient to God, but now have obtained mercy by their disobedience, 31) even so these also have now been disobedient, that by the mercy shown to you they may also obtain mercy. 32) For God has bound all to disobedience, that he might have mercy on all.

33) Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out! 34) "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" 35) "Or who has first given to him, and it will be repaid to him again?" 36) For of him, and through him, and to him are all things. To him be the glory for ever! Amen.

Are you still God's enemy? Do you doubt? Are you ready to celebrate with God and his family? God has promised to turn away ungodliness from Jacob! God has promised that his gifts and calling are irrevocable! God's love for the unbelieving elect will not fail! Are you now ready to lay aside conditional salvation? Have you received the unconditional love of Christ?

Lord, give me boldness to make disciples through the gospel of grace!

[◀ Let's Celebrate!](#)

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[Final Analysis ▶](#)

Final Analysis

In the final analysis both Arminianism and Calvinism wittingly or unwittingly bend Scripture to fit their model of salvation. Of course everyone knows that faith must also be reasonable. Thus we might stretch our interpretations of Scripture to fit the best models available to us. Furthermore, since Arminianism and Calvinism are both considered orthodox and commonly accepted, perhaps that is why followers of Jesus Christ have not been able to find unity even on the critical doctrine of Christian salvation. Yet I am convinced the Biblical view is that Christ is the savior of all mankind. Let's take one last look at our *Salvation Evaluator* matrix.

SALVATION EVALUATOR	PART OF MANKIND	ALL OF MANKIND
PART OF SALVATION	REJECTED BY ALL	ARMINIANISM C.S. LEWIS
ALL OF SALVATION	CALVINISM JAMES BOICE	CHRIST SAVIOR OF ALL

Let's note the strengths and weakness of each view.

PART for PART: REJECTED BY ALL

The weakness in this view is seen by nearly everyone and the view is rejected.

PART for ALL: ARMINIANISM

This is the most common view found in Christendom. However, the idea that mankind has a *free will* to choose faith is simply not supported in Scripture and misses the good news that we are saved instead because of God's free will. Many proponents reason that the existence of *free will* is *implied* by the fact that we are commanded to trust Jesus. They reason that if God asks us to do something then we must have the ability to do it. Yet has anyone, except Christ, demonstrated the ability to obey God's commands without sin? Arminian reasoning also neglects the clear Bible teaching that we are spiritually dead unless we are individually made alive by the Holy Spirit. A dead person is not *free* to do anything. We must be born again for spiritual life to begin. Moreover, grace would not be grace if any condition of salvation rested with the individual person. These compromises are bad enough, but the greatest was admitted by C.S. Lewis when he said that God arrested his sovereignty to allow for the "*possibility*" that people would choose or not choose him with their *free will*. Arminianism is guilty of deposing God to make way for *free will* so that man can be god of his own salvation. Adherents of this view are guilty of exalting their *free will* over the glory of God's sovereign grace and are in fact worshiping an imaginary god. Consider the difference between two simple testimonies. One man claims he is saved because he chose Christ. Another man trusts that Christ chose him. Which testimony gives praise to God's

grace? Friends, there is no Biblical defense that God is not sovereign or that he ever momentarily ceased to be the God of our salvation. This is good news for us because God's gracious choices are trustworthy!

ALL for PART: CALVINISM

There are very few true Calvinists, but most modify their position in some way allowing for a *free will* choice of faith. Once while in an "*iron sharpening*" session with a brother, he asserted that the two great pillars of the church are God's sovereignty and man's *free will*. I am sure he is not alone in that assertion. But those are hardly the two pillars of the church. The companion truth to God's sovereignty is not man's *free will*, but instead man's *responsibility* for his sin. Some oppose the idea that God is sovereign over both good and evil, claiming that then we would no longer be responsible for our sin. Yet the Scripture is clear in Romans Chapter 9 that both are true: God is sovereign over sin and we are responsible for our sin. Those who continue to object to this truth must simply answer God's question to them in Romans 9:20. Yet, true Calvinists are commended for holding fast to the sovereignty of God. However, they also hold to the indefensible position that Christ effectively died for only a subset of mankind. As such they undermine the incarnation and the very person of Christ and his vicarious atonement. The critical heart of salvation is that the death of Christ on the cross serves as a substitute for the death we deserve. We all deserve an eternal death penalty for our rebellion against God, but Christ literally died in our place. Holy God cannot overlook justice, but justice was satisfied in our Heavenly trial by the death of Christ. So we ask: did Christ represent all mankind on the cross, or only a subset of mankind? The Scripture is clear in Romans 5 that Jesus has replaced Adam as the new federal head of mankind and so he represents ALL. I have focused on this point in my article, [Romans 5:12-21, Out of Control Optimism Part 7, Many = Many = All = All](#). There is absolutely no Biblical defense to see it any other way. The Calvinist is likewise just as misguided as the Arminian. The Arminian view ultimately deposes God from his sovereign throne, while the Calvinist view undermines the greatest work of God the Son: his incarnation and substitutionary atonement for the sins of all mankind.

ALL for ALL: CHRIST SAVIOR OF ALL

Likewise there are few who believe that Christ will save all mankind. Someone once suggested that the majority of unbelievers are Universalists. However, the truth is that the majority of unbelievers are Arminian or Calvinist in theology. If they believe God exists at all, they think he is a good guy that will save those who make the grade or those who choose God with their supposed *free will*. They believe that everyone has the ability to choose to trust Jesus and live a good life. Since they imagine themselves better than Hitler and other evil people they hope to meet the condition of being "*good enough*" and pass the test. Or if they realize that they failed the test, they somehow imagine that they are the subset of students given the gracious gift of a passing grade while the rest are flunked.

Furthermore, the few Christian Universalists that do exist are not unified, each interpreting the Scripture in different ways as summarized in the Wikipedia article [Christian Universalism](#). This article categorizes Christian Universalists as evangelical, charismatic, and liberal, each answering the difficult question of Hell and eternal damnation in different ways. For example, many Universalists explain away Hell suggesting that Luke 16:19-31 is merely a parable, which we have already concluded is unbiblical.

Three Christian Universalists that have caught my attention are [Madeleine L'Engle](#), [John Wesley Hanson](#), and [Abraham Lincoln](#). L'Engle had a simple confidence that the grace of God would somehow answer our unanswered questions in the end and be victorious for all mankind. Sadly she was rejected by mainstream Christianity for her beliefs. (As an aside, she has always made an impression on me ever since my 6th grade atheist teacher read *A Wrinkle in Time* out loud to the class.) Hanson on the other hand is a well thought out evangelical Universalist theologian, most noted for his classic work, *The Greek Word Aion - Aionios Translated Everlasting - Eternal in the Holy Bible Shown to Denote Limited Duration*. This classic work is available for free from the U.S. Library of Congress website

and also [from my website](#). He was likewise rejected by "orthodox" Christianity. Dr. Heleen Keizer has also written a dissertation proving the same titled, *Life, Time, Entirety - A Study of Aion in Greek Literature and Philosophy, the Septuagint and Philo*. You can read her [315 page dissertation online](#) or an [abstract of her conclusions from my website](#). Finally, Abraham Lincoln is known and respected by all, yet few know that he also held to Christian Universalism.

Sadly one can believe variations of Arminianism, Calvinism, or even try to stand on the mystery in the middle and be accepted in most churches today -- as long as you believe that the majority of mankind will be eternally damned to the Lake of Fire. This is a most curious and even pitiable indictment of present day orthodoxy. Arminianism and Calvinism vehemently oppose each other, yet adherents could happily attend almost any church while holding either view as long as they agree that most of mankind is eternally damned. How can Christian love of the truth withstand this terrible inconsistency yet be unwilling to consider that Jesus Christ did *ALL* for *ALL* mankind?

I have proved that Arminianism fails to worship God for his sovereignty. I have also proved that Calvinism fails to worship Christ for his incarnation and vicarious atonement. So 1) is there any solid Biblical defense for the position that Christ will save even the unbelieving men he calls "not my sheep?" 2) Is it truly possible that the unbelieving could be punished in Hades, yet be extracted safely and spared from the Lake of Fire? 3) Does Biblical Universalism properly warn the unbelieving of their certain punishment after death?

The answers to these three questions are yes, yes, and yes!

1) YES, there is ample Biblical defense to show that Jesus' label of "*not my sheep*" does not mean that these people are not elect. As already explained, Hosea 2:23 makes it clear that the same unbelieving people called "*not my people*" are then called "*my people*" when they have repented and trusted God. Another clear passage that is also connected to our Romans 11:32 interpretation is Romans 11:28 (WEB), "*Concerning the Good News, they are enemies for your sake. But concerning the election, they are beloved for the father's sake.*"

So even though the unbelieving are considered enemies for their rejection of the gospel, they are still loved on account of election. They are the rebellious elect. Isaiah 53:6 reminds us that we, all mankind that is, are sheep gone astray.

2) YES, there is ample Biblical defense to show that Hades is emptied at the Great White Throne judgment as already explained in Revelation 20:13-14. When the Sheep and Goats stand before King Jesus, redeemed mankind on the right will be finally saved, even to the surprise of the newly believing humans (Matthew 25:37-39), while the fallen angels on the left are banished to the Lake of Fire for *The Ages of The Ages*. You may say that this is impossible because the New Testament consistently warns unbelieving humans of their eternal punishment. I hope to speak to that in the pages ahead.

3) YES, Biblical Universalism certainly does warn the unbelieving. Biblical Universalism states quite plainly that the sins of both believing and unbelieving mankind are forgiven based solely on the work of Christ and that nothing can ever separate us from the unconditional love of Christ. However, if unbelievers do not repent from their self-righteousness and trust that Christ has already paid for their sins and the sins of all mankind apart from all conditions, then they will most certainly be punished for the duration in the fires of Hades.

Happy Hypocrites!

The choice is before us.

Years ago someone introduced me to the concept of being a happy sinner. We might think that until we are in Heaven that the trials of this life can serve absolutely no good purpose. We might think that until we are safely in Heaven with Jesus that our eyes should only be filled with tears for our current trials. Surely God does not want us to take sadistic pleasure in our trials. However, an engaged woman spends little time in gloom for not being married! Instead she is busy making preparations because she is soon to be married to the man of her dreams!

Jesus likewise took no joy in the suffering of his cross. But he did look beyond the suffering to the joy he would purchase. Hebrews 12:1-3 (WEB) says,

1) Therefore let's also, seeing we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let's run with perseverance the race that is set before us, 2) looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3) For consider him who has endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, that you don't grow weary, fainting in your souls.

Jesus endured the cross, but he did not enjoy it! The joy he looked forward to was the eternal fellowship he purchased with us, his chosen people, and his Heavenly Father.

Let's strive to get ready, discarding the hypocrisy in our lives as we get ready to walk down the aisle with him and all of God's chosen ones. We will not reach perfection in this life, but for his sake we strive to give him our *"utmost for his highest."* Then on that awesome day our bridegroom will snap his fingers and erase all of our remaining sin, and we will walk down that aisle with him in perfect glory!

Partying Pagans?

Perfect glory awaits all God's people in Heaven, but we are far from that now. So what should we do? Martin Luther said, *"Be a sinner and sin boldly, but believe and rejoice in Christ even more boldly."* Really? Sin boldly?

Yes!

As much as we may strive to get ready for that great wedding day, there is something even more important than making progress in righteousness. Really? Sure, we should make progress in right living. But even more importantly, we must testify to God's grace in our lives, telling the world that even the best Christian is still a sinner till the day he dies. In fact as we get closer to Christ, we are even more aware of just how far away from him we really are. Just how close do we think we are when we compare our lives with Holy God himself? Some unbelievers might have a better sense of their standing than some of us Christians! They might laugh at the idea of Christians trying to imitate God. And it is a laughable undertaking. Yet God commands us to follow him and he empowers us with his Holy Spirit.

The point is that you and I should remember to enjoy and praise Christ our savior even in the midst of our sinfulness.

Paul said in Philippians 2:17-18 (WEB),

17) Yes, and if I am poured out on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice, and rejoice with you all. 18) In the same way, you also rejoice, and rejoice with me.

While in the midst of the agony of pouring out his life to serve others, Paul invited his Christian brothers to be glad. Wise Solomon also says in Ecclesiastes 5:19 (WEB),

19) Every man also to whom God has given riches and wealth, and has given him power to eat of it, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labor—this is the gift of God.

So there is little value in seeking sadness when happiness is a gift of God. There is enough sadness from day to day without hunting for more. Yet Solomon also says in Ecclesiastes 12:12-14 (WEB),

12) Furthermore, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh. 13) This is the end of the matter. All has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. 14) For God will bring every work into judgment, with every hidden thing, whether it is good, or whether it is evil.

We are right to enjoy God and the life he has given us. God does not want us walking around on egg shells pretending that we have not sinned! There is no point in hiding our sin from the Lord. Yet we are also warned to keep God's commands. One day we will stand before him at the judgment and every hidden thing will be revealed.

However, because of grace we can be happy and enjoy God right now in the midst of our struggle with sin. Yet we should also be motivated to obey him and please him. To help you

understand this dynamic, imagine a relationship with a perfect father. The perfect father would be good and fun while caring for us in his home. He would also be fair and just in disciplining us as needed.

Now quit imagining because God is our perfect Heavenly Father!

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[RSVP Review >](#)

RSVP Review

Yes, God is our perfect Heavenly Father, but are we his good children?

While putting my thesis into words I conducted an informal interview for feedback. Talking out ideas with others can be very useful to develop one's own understanding. Good questions can also be very useful to get to the heart of the matter with others. Jesus asked his disciples questions frequently. So I asked numerous people this question:

What would be your reaction if you learned that the grace of Christ ultimately saved all mankind in the end, both believer and unbeliever?

The following answers expose serious problems in the average evangelical Christian's understanding of grace.

1. *"You have a case of optimism out of control."*

That was one response and the namesake of this book. The response offers a thumbs up for trying, but still only smiles at me as if I were insane.

2. *"That would not be fair after all our effort."*

This response indicates a serious misunderstanding of grace. Biblical grace is at least defined by most Christians as God's unmerited favor toward the redeemed, even if there is disagreement on the details. Some have used the acronym G.R.A.C.E., (God's Riches At Christ's Expense), to define salvation very simply. That being the case, then grace is already *unfair* by definition. We all deserve eternal death for our sin, yet God graciously decided to save his people. How is it then sensible that one saved person could say it is "*not fair*" that another person is also *unfairly* saved - regardless of the circumstance? If even one is saved, that is already unfair. What would be the problem with God unfairly saving a few more or all? It may be that the one quoted above has never really received grace in his heart, but has only memorized the traditional Christian lingo.

3. *"Then there would be no reason to refrain from sin."*

This response is very similar to the one above and likewise indicates a serious misunderstanding about grace. This person must believe that he is saved from condemnation by his efforts to refrain from sin. He must imagine that he has refrained from sin just enough when compared to other worse sinners. He must think that he has made the grade and is saved while the others are condemned. But just where does he draw the line? Just how good do we need to be in order to be saved? Are we saved if we are "*not terrible*?" Are we saved if we are simply a positive number on the scale? Or is it much tougher -- do we need to be almost perfect? No. None of these human scales of righteousness are sufficient. According to God's word and his perfect holiness, absolutely no sin or impurity can stand in his presence. None! Simply trying to refrain from sin is not enough for a sinner to gain Heaven. Furthermore, Christians do not obey Christ because of the threat of Hell, but because of his unconditional love! This person's argument against God's love for all mankind is instead an awkward testimony to his own unbelief and self-righteousness.

4. *"Well I guess that would be okay, whatever God decides."*

This response is deadpan apathy. Yikes! Understanding grace in one's own life seems like a reason for deep passion and empathy towards others. One would think that seeing grace in another person's life would also be a reason for great joy. The grace of God, when

understood -- even minimally -- breaks us out of our self-centered shell to know love for someone else besides ourselves. It is like welcoming a new family member into the household. It is cause for celebration! So how could someone who understands grace, even in the least, have such an apathetic response to the question? It would be like receiving a million dollar inheritance, being cured of cancer, and getting married to the girl of your dreams all on the same day. Then when you learn that the same thing happened to your brother and neighbor you respond by saying, "Whatever." Again, the one quoted above may say he is saved by grace, but deep inside, something in his heart has grown foul.

5. *"That would probably be awesome in heaven, but it is certainly not great now."*

This ambivalent response is hard for me to understand. On one hand there is an intellectual agreement that this would be awesome. Yet on the other hand there is a very bold confession of a sinful attitude. Perhaps the one quoted is just a painfully honest hypocrite. Perhaps, the question caught him off guard and there was a guarded response. Perhaps there is wishful thinking fighting with doubts. Whatever the reason, the expected high flying joy is definitely having trouble taking flight.

6. *"There must be a compromise between Arminian and Calvinistic thought."*

Another insisted that there must be a compromise between Arminian and Calvinistic thought. He felt it may not be immediately evident, but there must be ground to stand on between *ALL or PART* of God's role in redemption, or a line to stand on between *ALL or PART* of mankind. However, neither the theologian Boice, nor the philosopher Lewis thought there was ground in the middle. Realistically the only place to stand between those options is 1) do not know, 2) do not want to know, or 3) do not care. Yet most people attempt to straddle the fence, like the one quoted above. Understandably, it is a challenge to our understanding. The Bible is clear that people are punished in Hell, so the *ALL for ALL* combination does not seem like a viable option at first blush. However, are we willing to have hope that the grace of Christ will even conquer the gates of Hell as he promised in Matthew 16:18 (WEB)? *"I also tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my assembly, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it."*

7. ... [no response, silence, next subject] ...

The most curious response I received was absolutely no response, silence, and a turn to the next subject. I can at least relate to the sinful hearts expressed above because of my own sinful heart. However, to have zero response seems the oddest response of all to me. Perhaps we are so calloused and spiritually desensitized that thoughts of God, judgment, eternal bliss, and eternal damnation no longer evoke any emotion whatsoever. Then again, Jesus faced the same challenge in his own generation as recorded in Matthew 11:16-19 (WEB). His contemporaries would neither dance nor mourn when he spoke the truth.

16) But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces, who call to their companions 17) and say, "We played the flute for you, and you didn't dance. We mourned for you, and you didn't lament." 18) For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon." 19) The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!" But wisdom is justified by her children.

Jesus also told a parable relevant to the responses above. The Parable of the Wedding Banquet in Matthew 22:1-14 (WEB) gives us a picture of apathetic responses to a wedding invitation. Verse 3 says *"[the king] sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the marriage feast, but they would not come."*

Each of the Christians quoted above wants to come to the *"wedding banquet"* of Jesus. However, the banquet they imagine is not very joyful. There is no celebration of the victory of God's grace over sin for mankind. Instead it sounds more like a poo poo party.

Though, one person replied to my interview question,

8. *"That would be plain awesome."*

This response seems like the only sensible reaction for someone saved by grace.

I know my question and the responses above do not offer any additional Biblical defense for my position. However, they do reveal that the hearts of those professing to be Christians quoted in #1-7 above are not standing on ground more solid than I. In fact, those quoted are standing on very shaky ground. Moreover, the most common evangelical Christian responses were incriminatingly devoid of grace. The Bible says, *"For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks"* (Matthew 12:34 WEB). The answers from these mouths have exposed some fairly wicked hearts. I can understand each of them too well. All is not lost, however, for these ugly responses barely come close to matching my own sin.

Forgetting what is behind, let's continue learning about the grace that has covered all. Lord willing we will discover if there are solid Biblical answers to the many objections that Jesus Christ is the savior of all mankind.

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Mystery in the Middle

Hopefully I have persuaded you to consider the weaknesses of the popular traditional salvation models. Both Arminianism and Calvinism are reasonable at points, but unreasonable at other points. These facts ought to be enough cause for every Christian to consider the interpretation of Scripture that Christ is victorious in the salvation of all mankind. Yet perhaps you still do not feel comfortable with *ALL of PART*, or *PART of ALL*, or *ALL of ALL* combinations of the *Salvation Evaluator*. Perhaps the *Mystery in the Middle* feels safer than parting ways with tradition.

SALVATION EVALUATOR	PART OF MANKIND	ALL OF MANKIND
PART OF SALVATION	REJECTED BY ALL	ARMINIANISM
ALL OF SALVATION	CALVINISM	ALL SAVED

**MYSTERY IN
THE MIDDLE**

However, before you try to find rest in the mystery in the middle, please consider a few more points. First, the majority of Christian thought has always insisted that Christian faith be reasonable. Faith properly defined and understood is confident reliance and trust on factual evidence. Israel was commended for their obedient witness and walk through the sea on dry land. However, later they are rebuked for not trusting God even though they witnessed the incredible first hand fact of his power to deliver.

Christianity likewise requires no *"leap of faith,"* but instead confident trust in the facts of Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection. So Arminianism and Calvinism are at least commended for being coherent reasonable systems. They refuse to stand on mystery. Yet, even so they remain at odds with Scripture.

So please consider again the two questions posed by the *Salvation Evaluator*.

Is God the savior of *ALL* or *PART* of mankind?

Does God do *ALL* or *PART* of the saving?

Can you find any possible middle ground between God as savior of *ALL* or savior of *PART*? Any reasonable model of understanding must make one choice, *ALL* or *PART*! Can you find any middle ground between God doing *ALL* or *PART* of the saving? Is there any middle ground between *UNCONDITIONAL* and *CONDITIONAL* love? Any reasonable model of understanding must make one choice, *ALL* or *PART*!

Second, there have been some forms of Christian faith that have emphasized *Sacred Mysteries* as introduced at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sacred_mysteries. Some may argue that the Trinity and Divinity of Jesus fall into the realm of mystery and so salvation is also a mystery. Certainly the knowledge of God himself and his love extends beyond our abilities to comprehend. Paul tells us in Ephesians 3:8 (WEB), that the riches in Christ are *"unsearchable."* He says again in Ephesians 3:18 (WEB) that Christ's love *"surpasses knowledge."* And yet again in Romans 11:33 (WEB), *"How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out!"* Yet these statements are about God himself.

However, are the facts of our salvation also a mystery? Certainly not! The Bible promises that through faith we can have confident knowledge of our salvation. John writes in 1 John 5:13, *"...that you may know that you have eternal life..."* Do we have confident knowledge of our salvation? If we answer yes, then I ask, *"On what basis?"* I have already shown that the Arminian Christian adds human condition into the salvation equation, and thus insecurity. I have also shown that the Calvinist Christian adds self-deception into the salvation equation suggesting that they are loved, but not all. So then is mystery the missing ingredient in the salvation equation?

Friends, the mystery in the middle is the worst of all places to stand! Faith is confident reliance upon the facts of Jesus Christ. How could it be better to ignore the beautiful facts of Christ and his Word in order to stand on the question mark of mystery? Why choose this model of understanding? Should we explain the apparent conundrum of salvation with the appeal to mystery? We must not trust our salvation and the damnation of others to a mystery! Jesus Christ is not a mystery, but instead he is the mystery revealed! Colossians 1:26 says (WEB), *"the mystery which has been hidden for ages and generations. But now it has been revealed to his saints."* We must trust that Christ loves us and our neighbors, unconditionally! Salvation is neither a mystery nor a paradox as further discussed in my [Appendix](#) article, *Real or Apparent Paradox?*

Finally, regarding faith we are reminded,

Now faith is assurance of things hoped for, proof of things not seen.

Hebrews 11:1 (WEB)

Just because we cannot see the things we hope and trust in does not mean they are a mystery! Instead, exactly the opposite is true. Christian hope is founded on the rock solid facts of Jesus Christ!

II Thessalonians 1:6-10

Objections? Wait another minute! What about the Scriptures that say unbelievers will be sentenced to everlasting destruction and banished from the Lord for their wickedness? Good question. Consider II Thessalonians 1:6-10 (WEB),

6) Since it is a righteous thing with God to repay affliction to those who afflict you, 7) and to give relief to you who are afflicted with us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, 8) punishing those who don't know God, and to those who don't obey the Good News of our Lord Jesus, 9) who will pay the penalty: eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might, 10) when he comes in that day to be glorified in his saints and to be admired among all those who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

This passage is clear that those who do not know God will be punished with eternal destruction. So even though I suggested that the Arminian and the Calvinist bend Scripture to fit their salvation model, now it seems that I am also bending Scripture and there is no possible way that all mankind can be saved. However, before we conclude too soon, consider a few questions.

Who are those mentioned above who do not know God and do not obey the gospel? Are they unbelieving mankind or only fallen angels? We see from Luke 16:19-31 that unbelieving men are punished in Hades, but later are safely extracted in Revelation 20:13. We also see from Revelation 20:7-10 that fallen angels, demons, are sentenced to the Lake of Fire for *The Ages of The Ages*. However, this passage seems to be clearly talking about unbelieving men being punished with *eternal destruction*, not angels only.

So is the punishment described above the temporal punishment of Hades or *The Ages of The Ages* condemnation in the Lake of Fire? Which punishment is in view? If the judgment mentioned above is the Great White Throne judgment at the commencement of eternity, then the Lake of Fire must be in view. However, if it is the judgment at each individual's death or at Christ's intermediate judgments, then the verse above must be talking about unbelieving men being sentenced to Hades or even simply sentenced to the destruction of their wicked earthly lives. Yet can it possibly be Hades because this punishment is described as eternal? That is a good point which leads us to a very curious observation in the Scripture.

Are you ready for a curious observation?

Simply stated, the Hebrew and Greek words translated as '*eternal*' do not always mean forever. "*Aha*," you say, "*now Jeff is bending the Scripture!*" Yet, consider Deuteronomy 15:17 (WEB),

Then you shall take an awl, and thrust it through his ear to the door, and he shall be your servant forever. Also to your female servant you shall do likewise.

In this verse the Hebrew word for '*forever*' was used to mean the time until the death of the master or servant. Certainly the servant is not bound to his master eternally, even beyond death! This observation causes us to pull our Hebrew dictionary off the shelf. Look for yourself and you will see that there are several valid denotations for the Hebrew word '*olam*,'

including 'eternal,' 'forever,' and also 'a long time, until.' I have already written at length about this in point #9 in my article, *Ten Theological Absurdities*. This may be a new idea for you, so take the time to do your own homework before you shake your head in disbelief.

The Old Testament Hebrew word 'olam,' translated 'eternal,' and the New Testament Greek synonym word 'aion,' also translated 'eternal' have been mistranslated at times. The Greek word 'aion,' pronounced 'I - own,' is translated 'eternal' and 'forever' in the New Testament. However, the meaning of 'olam' and 'aion' is 'age' or the 'duration' of the subject in view. 'Aion' can also simply mean 'complete.' For example 'aion' can refer to the length of a man's life, the temporal time in Hades, *The Ages of The Ages* in the Lake of Fire, and the infinity of God. The subject itself determines the length of time meant by 'aion.' In fact, the etymology of the present day word 'eon' descends directly from 'aion!' This is a critical observation. Our modern New Testament translations have failed to properly communicate the duration of the punishments applied to the unbelieving.

Hebrews 9:26 (WEB) is an example where 'aion' is properly translated as 'age' because 'eternal' simply does not make sense.

or else he must have suffered often since the foundation of the world. But now once at the end of the ages [aion], he has been revealed to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

I had originally hoped to expand on these thoughts myself. However, recently the Lord has blessed me through a reunion with John Wesley Hanson's classic 1875 work titled, *The Greek Word Aion-Aionios translated Everlasting-Eternal in the Holy Bible Shown to Denote Limited Duration*. I was first introduced to this work in college by a good friend, but sadly my memory is largely untrustworthy and I forgot about the essential points made in this book. None-the-less, this classic work is available for free from the U.S. Library of Congress website and also [from my own website](#). This 88 page book is a must read for anyone who agrees or disagrees with my conclusions. There is little point to my adding further to this definitive work. Study this volume for yourself and your faith and understanding of the Bible will be challenged in radically positive ways, if you are willing to let go of tradition and all self-righteousness. Dr. Heleen Keizer has also written a dissertation proving the same, titled *Life, Time, Entirety - A Study of Aion in Greek Literature and Philosophy, the Septuagint and Philo*. You can read her [315 page dissertation online](#) or an [abstract of her conclusions on my website](#). You might think it is incredulous to claim that 'aion' is mistranslated in many Bibles. Unless you are competent in ancient Greek you may not even know how to verify this for yourself. *The NASB-NIV Parallel New Testament in Greek in English* is an invaluable resource on my shelf. [Young's Literal Translation](#) of the Bible is also a valuable resource.

Thomas Talbott also makes a critical observation in *The Inescapable Love of God*. Talbott suggests that 'apo' is also mistranslated in 2 Thessalonians 1:9 as 'from.' Talbott proposes that 'apo' should instead be translated 'at' in this case. So a proper translation would be "*who will pay the penalty: eonian [or complete] destruction at the face of the Lord and at the glory of his might.*" Talbott's proposal then makes even better sense that the unbelieving are punished at the Lord's coming judgment which is the subject in context. Unbelieving mankind will suffer the complete loss and destruction of their wicked earthly lives and ambitions unless they repent. The verse is not saying that the unbelieving are punished with eternal separation from God!

As an aside while discussing grace with a friend, he made an interesting comment to me. He said that people who believe salvation is completely unmerited eventually degenerate to believing that all mankind is saved. He mourned the thought. However, I cannot mourn, but must rejoice!

Will you rejoice with me?

Daniel 12:1-4

Wait! We must also consider Daniel 12:1-4 (WEB). Does this Scripture speak about the eternal damnation of unbelieving mankind?

1) At that time Michael will stand up, the great prince who stands for the children of your people; and there will be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time. At that time your people will be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. 2) Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. 3) Those who are wise will shine as the brightness of the expanse. Those who turn many to righteousness will shine as the stars forever and ever. 4) But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end. Many will run back and forth, and knowledge will be increased.

It would seem that there could be no other conclusion. Part of mankind is saved and the remainder is not. Period. Yet, the meanings of the underlined words above may help us more clearly understand and apply Daniel 12:1-4 and what it teaches about the extent of Christ's salvation.

Your people

The Hebrews words "*ben`am*" are translated "*your people*." A literal translation would be "*the sons of your people*" or perhaps more briefly "*sons of mankind*." The natural question is who is this group of people? Possibilities include all mankind, believing mankind only, National Israel generally, every individual Israelite particularly, or believing Israel only. Other Old Testament usage of "*am*" includes both all mankind and particular people such as the nation of Israel. We also notice that the archangel Michael protects these people, whoever they are. We know from the New Testament in Hebrews 1:14 that angels care for the redeemed and in Matthew 18:10 that children have guardian angels. So it seems clear that "*your people*" means the redeemed people of God. However, this phrase alone does not clearly indicate the extent of those elected to eternal life within mankind -- whether *PART* or *ALL*. We need to look at the larger context.

Your people

The second occurrence of "*your people*" in the English translation above is really the abbreviated "*am*" in Hebrew. The Hebrew "*ben*" is omitted, but implied as the messenger from God in Daniel's vision is still talking about the same people group. The messenger says that "*your people*" will be delivered. So we can take heart that the protection of God through Michael, his powerful agent, is effective. Yet we still look for clarity in the passage about the specific number of these people.

Everyone who is found written in the book

Does this phrase clarify or qualify who is meant by "*your people*?" We have already said that "*your people*" are those effectively protected by God, so this phrase is not qualifying, but further clarifying that protection is guaranteed for *ALL* "*your people*." It would be impossible that *ALL* "*your people*" were protected, but then only *PART* were listed in his book. God is telling us that *ALL* of "*your people*" are secured with each one's name specifically penned in his book. This is a great encouragement to believers.

Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth

This phrase is most commonly, and perhaps most easily, understood to mean deceased humanity. Old Testament patriarchs would speak about "*resting with their fathers*" and the New Testament speaks about those who "*sleep*" meaning those who have physically died. However, are these multitudes deceased humans only, or are imprisoned fallen angels also included in this group? This is a critical question. We know from 2 Peter 2:4 that the crime of some fallen angels has warranted their early imprisonment, while others remain at large. So it is at least possible that the "*multitudes*" here refers to a mixed group of people, including both humans and fallen angels. I admit it seems odd to speak of angels, who are spirit beings, as sleeping in the dust for they do not have bodies that turn to dust as do humans. Or do some angels have bodies? I have pointed out in my article, *Ten Theological Absurdities*, that one day fallen angels will be embodied. So perhaps it is not so odd that demons will also awake from the dust. Also some theologians are certain that the demons currently imprisoned in Tartarus are the angels that fell into sexual sin with mankind in Genesis 6. Because of this great sin they were specially punished immediately in Tartarus, as explained in 2 Peter 2. If this is true, then these fallen angels do have bodies; it would be impossible to have sex without a body!

Will awake

Whoever the "*multitudes*" are we see that they "*will awake*." When is the timing of this event and are the saved and unsaved raised at the same time? The answer to this question is most important to our understanding of this passage. The verse seems to indicate that the "*Many...will awake*" together at a single event in the future. Some may dispute that, but let's consider that option first. Events future from Daniel's time include A) the first coming of Christ, B) Christ's coming in judgment upon Jerusalem in 70 A.D., C) the resurrection at Christ's second coming, and D) the Great White Throne Judgment at the commencement of eternity.

The Great White Throne Judgment seems to be the best possible match for this event. In fact just prior to The Great White Throne Judgment there is the resurrection of the "wicked dead." Unbelieving mankind, now sufficiently punished for their unbelief, and the imprisoned angels are extracted out of Hades and Thalaasa, respectively, for final judgment as explained in Revelation 20:11-15. We know that all humans and angels are removed from their prisons because it is specifically noted that Hades is thrown into the Lake of Fire, empty of all beings, whether human or demonic. Most Christians do not appreciate the significance of this fact as it relates to Christ's final victory in the salvation of ALL mankind. Instead most understand Revelation 20:11-15 to be only the final sentencing of the wicked dead to the Lake of Fire, presuming the group to be humans only. However, Daniel 12:1-4 indicates a specific time in the future when "*multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.*" The Great White Throne Judgment appears to be synonymous with Daniel 12:1-4 which explains that at that time some are resurrected to eternal life and others to condemnation. So Daniel 12:1-4, rather than undermining the argument of this book, instead strongly supports the conclusion that some are saved and some are damned at The Great White Throne Judgment. Contrary to popular salvation theology, we see that grace allows for the salvation of even unbelieving mankind at The Great White Throne Judgment because they are elect. Yet the Devil and his demons are instead sentenced to the Lake of Fire.

Of course some may argue that the timing of the awakening in Daniel 12:2 is not the same for the saved group and the unsaved group. They may say that deceased believers are raised first to life earlier and that deceased unbelievers are raised later at The Great White Throne Judgment for condemnation. This model, however, does not fit well with the Lord's conversation in Matthew 25:31-46 (the Sheep and Goat Judgment), which I also understand to be synonymous with the Great White Throne Judgment. Daniel 12 and Matthew 25 are clear that the final judgment will have both redeemed and unredeemed people standing before Christ at the same time.

Thus Daniel 12:1-4, Matthew 25:31-46, and Revelation 20:11-15 are all speaking about the same event.

They are each speaking about the final salvation of unbelieving mankind after their extraction from Hades and the condemnation of the Devil and his angels to the Lake of Fire, Matthew 25:41. You may disagree and say that the saved in Matthew 25 do not include the unbelieving elect, that is human beings extracted from Hades. Yet doesn't it seem odd that believers who are already reigning with Christ would have to face the Great White Throne Judgment and question their salvation again before the Lord? Hardly. The sheep who are incredulous at the Great White Throne Judgment are the unbelieving elect extracted safely from Hades and spared from the Lake of Fire by the grace of God alone. They are incredulous that God's grace could save them even after a sentence in Hades. Of course if you are a believer now, then you could never be incredulous about such a thing. You fully understand how God's grace has saved you apart from any act of your will, solely by his electing grace. You also should know that if the grace of Christ has saved us now it certainly can save unbelieving mankind then!

So are you incredulous or do you confidently trust in Christ?

Further note that when Daniel 12:1 says "*Michael... protects your people*" the emphasis could mean "*Michael [the arch angel]... protects your people [mankind].*" Michael says "*your people*" meaning mankind, in contrast to his people, that is angel-kind.

Some to everlasting life, and
some to shame and everlasting contempt

Some of the multitudes that "*will awake*" are granted eternal life, while the remainder are sentenced to everlasting contempt as already explained above.

*Those who are wise will shine as the brightness of the expanse.
Those who turn many to righteousness
will shine as the stars forever and ever.*

Those with wisdom will lead many to righteousness. The gospel clarifies that true righteousness is from God, as explained in Romans 1:16-17. Righteousness cannot be found in man or man's will. I have argued in this book that both Arminianism and Calvinism fall short of proclaiming this righteousness. The Arminian claims that his *free will* choice of Christ makes the difference. The Calvinist rejects the Arminian claim, but also rejects Christ's atonement for all mankind.

Dear Reader, I pause to ask you which gospel have you received? Do you believe that Christ died for *ALL* mankind? Do you believe that salvation is *ALL* of grace? Have you been led to the righteousness that is from God? Are you shining with the truth?

Seal the book

Why would the messenger in Daniel's vision tell him to "*seal up the words?*" Why would God hide the truth? God has chosen to incrementally reveal his redemptive plan through history for his greater glory. I have also suggested in my article that the "*Hosea Strategy*" is a key component of God's ministry to the hardhearted. Likewise, Mark 4:11-13 explains that Jesus also uses parables for a similar purpose.

The good news is that the fullness of God's love for mankind is no longer hidden, but completely revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. Do you want rock solid hope for your salvation, as well as good news for all mankind? It can only be found through faith in Jesus Christ.

This study has proved very fruitful for me and I trust for you as well.

John 3:16

John 3:16 is the most famous verse in the entire Bible. And anyone familiar with John 3:16 would naturally say that my entire thesis is unbiblical and unfounded. John 3:16 is commonly understood by all to mean that eternal salvation has been offered, but is only granted to those believing in Jesus.

John 3:16 (WEB) says,

For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal [aionian] life.

Yet is the common translation and understanding of John 3:16 correct? I have argued elsewhere that the meaning of the Greek word '*aionian*,' is much richer than the simple translation '*eternal*.' Greek studies prove that valid denotations for the word '*aionian*' include '*age-during*,' '*entire*,' '*complete*,' '*whole*,' and '*unbroken*,' but rarely '*eternal*' time. A reading list for your own research is posted in my article, [Book Reviews](#). I also invite you to read my articles, [Forever Is Not Forever? You Gotta Be Kidding Me!](#) and [Forever Is Not Forever? You Still Gotta Be Kidding Me!](#)

Now please read John Chapter 3 (WEB) with me again, reconsidering the meaning of the Greek work '*aionian*.'

1) Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. 2) The same came to him by night, and said to him, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him.'

Nicodemus approaches Jesus at NIGHT to SEE God's Kingdom.

3) Jesus answered him, 'Most certainly, I tell you, unless one is born anew, he can't see God's Kingdom.'

Jesus says that God's Kingdom can only be SEEN by those born from above.

4) Nicodemus said to him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born?'

Nicodemus does not SEE.

5) Jesus answered, 'Most certainly I tell you, unless one is born of water and spirit, he can't enter into God's Kingdom. 6) That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7) Don't marvel that I said to you, "You must be born anew." 8) The wind blows where it wants to, and you hear its sound, but don't know where it comes from and where it is going. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.'

Jesus answers again that SPIRIT BIRTH is needed.

9) Nicodemus answered him, 'How can these things be?'

Nicodemus still does not SEE.

10) Jesus answered him, 'Are you the teacher of Israel, and don't understand these things? 11) Most certainly I tell you, we speak that which we know, and testify of that which we have seen, and you don't receive our witness. 12) If I told you earthly things and you don't believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?'

Jesus confronts Nicodemus' BLINDNESS and unbelief.

13) No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended out of heaven, the Son of Man, who is in heaven. 14) As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15) that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal [age-during, whole, unbroken] life. 16) For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal [age-during, whole, unbroken] life.

Jesus answers that trust in him is the only way to AIONIAN life.

17) For God didn't send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through him.

Jesus reminds Nicodemus that he condemns no one but instead saves!

18) He who believes in him is not judged. He who doesn't believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God. 19) This is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil. 20) For everyone who does evil hates the light, and doesn't come to the light, lest his works would be exposed.

But those hiding in DARKNESS are condemned because they do not trust Jesus.

21) But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his works may be revealed, that they have been done in God.'

Those knowing the truth will come into the LIGHT.

22) After these things, Jesus came with his disciples into the land of Judea. He stayed there with them and baptized. 23) John also was baptizing in Enon near Salim, because there was much water there. They came, and were baptized; 24) for John was not yet thrown into prison. 25) Therefore a dispute arose on the part of John's disciples with some Jews about purification. 26) They came to John and said to him, 'Rabbi, he who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified, behold, he

baptizes, and everyone is coming to him.'

Many were coming to JESUS.

27) John answered, 'A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven. 28) You yourselves testify that I said, "I am not the Christ," but, "I have been sent before him." 29) He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. This, my joy, therefore is made full. 30) He must increase, but I must decrease. 31) He who comes from above is above all. He who is from the earth belongs to the earth and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all. 32) What he has seen and heard, of that he testifies; and no one receives his witness. 33) He who has received his witness has set his seal to this, that God is true.

Jesus testifies to what he has SEEN and heard.

34) For he whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for God gives the Spirit without measure.

GOD GIVES THE SPIRIT without measure!

35) The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand. 36) One who believes in the Son has eternal [age-during, whole, unbroken] life, but one who disobeys the Son won't see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.'

The one trusting Jesus HAS aionian life. The disobedient will not SEE life... until their eyes are opened to trust in Christ.

So which valid denotation of '*aionian*' is Jesus using in his conversation with Nicodemus? Jesus condemns no one and has forgiven everyone! Jesus said, "*I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly.*" (John 10:10b WEB). Friends, Jesus is not selling fire insurance here, but teaching us the truth about the change of heart needed to trust that Christ already loves and forgives us so that we can live a whole, unbroken, completely restored life, both now and forever!

Purgatory?

So is Hades properly understood to be Catholic Purgatory? There are many views in Christendom about the afterlife. Catholic Christians believe in the existence of Purgatory, while Protestants would consider the Catholics to be in error on this point. Catholic doctrine holds to a temporary place of punishment and purification in the after-life for the redeemed. According to Catholic doctrine, all people spend more or less time in Purgatory depending upon the good and bad things they did in this life. For the Catholics, the after-life is a multi-step process until they arrive in Heaven. Protestants, however, emphasize that the afterlife is a single step with one fork in the road and two destinations: eternal Heaven or eternal Hell. Protestants reference Hebrews 9:26-28 (WEB) to prove this point,

26) or else he must have suffered often since the foundation of the world. But now once at the end of the ages, he has been revealed to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. 27) Inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once, and after this, judgment, 28) so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, without sin, to those who are eagerly waiting for him for salvation.

This verse says that people die and face judgment once at the end of their life. This was the teaching I grew up with and feel naturally comfortable with. However, from our study this far I have shown that Hebrews 9:27, while certainly true, does not explain the whole story. At a minimum we see from Revelation 20:13-14 that Hades is in fact a temporary place of punishment. One day Hades will be emptied of all people and then Hades itself will be thrown into the Lake of Fire empty of all people. The Great White Throne Judgment punctuates this present world and marks the commencement of eternity.

I am not suggesting that the Biblical doctrine of Hell, that is Hades, is like Purgatory or even similar to it. The Catholic Church has taught that one could work or pay one's way out of Purgatory with good deeds and penance. More can be learned about views on Purgatory here <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Purgatory>. However, the Bible does not teach that unbelievers will somehow escape punishment for their rejection of Christ. Certain punishment in Hades is the destiny of all unbelieving men. No one should think that they can conquer Hades, work their way out of Hades, or escape from Hades through any means whatsoever... except by the grace of God. Recently a person was pictured in front of the U.S. Supreme Court during the gay marriage debate with a shirt proclaiming, "*Hell will be fun.*" Luke 16:19-31 makes it clear that the torments of Hades will bring even the hardest heart to immediate regret. There will be no man-made escape for those punished in Hades. The only escape is the grace of God alone.

In a nutshell, Protestants (and Catholics) could benefit by expanding their understanding of afterlife events through more careful Bible study. Is your faith built on the truth of the Bible or the traditions of men?

The Bottom Line

We live in a world that is often only concerned about the bottom line. We want to know if our team won, if the business deal ended in the black, if the goal was reached. We want the headline, and perhaps the summary, but have little time to actually live it or get emotionally involved. We want the college degree now. We want to lose weight now. We want to get rich now. In a nutshell we want the facts so we can get on with our own business and retreat to the comfort of our own homes. However, we do not have the patience to live, work, and breathe for 365 days a year and still be pursuing the same goal as years turn into decades.

Why are our resumes strung with pages of job experience? Why are we so good at making new friends, but not keeping the old friends? Why are so many marriages failing? How could our grandfathers stay with the same woman, visit the same friends, and do the same work for a lifetime? Why do so many begin to follow Christ, yet either bail out or end their days warming a pew? We have been duped by the promises of unscrupulous marketers. Vain promises have drained us of our strength and perseverance for anything different or difficult.

Sadly, Christian evangelists have often done the same thing as the unscrupulous marketers that surround us, myself included. Christian salvation is marketed with the same strategy that Lou uses to sell cars. We get a customer hot for the sale with money burning a hole in his pocket, but he drives away not even knowing what he has purchased.

Warnings like *"Are you saved?"* and *"Pray this prayer"* lead you to believe that you can take action to add your own name to the Book of Life. You have entirely missed the point of grace. You think you have *"bought"* salvation, but do not even know what it is! You have bought, but you have not rested in the Father's love. You have your fire insurance policy, but you have no fire or passion for Christ. There is no heart for a life of rugged discipleship for our lover.

Instead, true faith is a longing to leave sin and a commitment to righteousness. Open the car hood of your life and check the timing and temperature of your engine! Get to a hospital for open heart surgery to see if you actually have a new heart of flesh or the same old heart of stone! Is the fire of Christ burning in your life or are you just a good (or perhaps bad) church kid?

What if instead you looked at Jesus Christ and received that you have been loved by him from before the very beginning? What if instead you confessed that your eternal destiny is fully in the hands of Christ... period? What if you truly believed that the victory was guaranteed and played for the love of the game and the love of your coach? Then you would be thankful for your eternal destiny and thankful to live for him now.

Another friend suggested that if we told people that Christ had already forgiven all their future sin, then there would be no reason to quit sinning. What an unfortunate understanding! First, this man must think that fear is a more powerful motivator than love. However, love, hands down, is the most powerful force in the universe. Secondly, this man is blind to his own sin, voting a nebulous victory for himself, but without the power of God's love in his life. My friend's heart is exposed, not as God's son, but as a slave to sin. Sin is bad and harmful and this man does not even seem to know it! Why would you prefer to know God as an angry slave master? Why not know him as he actually is, as your loving Heavenly Father?

The point is that Christian salvation is much more than salvation from a bad end, but also salvation from the harm of sin now. Read my article, [SAVED 5X](#), for a larger list of the things we all need protection from. Yes Christ finalized the TRANSACTION for our eternal

salvation at the cross. And now Christ fights for our TRANSFORMATION, opening our eyes and leading us to faith, a purposeful life, and Christ-likeness.

It is given that we want salvation for a pleasurable life after death. But do we want salvation from sin now? Do we want to be transformed into Christ-likeness? Do we want to suffer with him for opposing self-righteousness and proclaiming grace? Or, do we just like the style of the W.W.J.D. wristband?

[< Purgatory?](#)

[up](#)

[Playing Church >](#)

Playing Church

We all agree that a truthful understanding of salvation is essential for the Christian. However, if you have made it this far in my book you are now aware that those claiming to follow Christ can be categorized into at least three opposing views: the Arminian, the Calvinist, and those confident in the victory of grace for all mankind. Of course there are varieties and shades of each, as well as fence sitters. However, let's suppose by some miracle we did all come to the exact same understanding of Christian salvation.

Would we then be one as Jesus is one with the Father, as he prayed in John 17?

I fear that coming closer to agreement on one thing might increase the pressure of the differences on other things. Squaring one corner could expose misalignment on the other corners. Frankly, the unity Jesus prayed for seems like a hopeless endeavor. So we often settle for *"playing church"* rather than pursuing Christ-likeness.

I feel particularly stretched because I have sincere Christian friends in all kinds of church denominations and theological camps. All my Christian friends could not even fellowship under the same roof! And worse, sometimes we are under the same roof, but true fellowship is not happening there either. We need grace.

However, since I dared light a match to the explosive issue of Christian salvation, while the match still burns, let me light a few additional fuses. Specifically, we are commanded to follow Christ, so what should that look like? The whole subject of this book has been how to start a relationship with Christ on the right foot. A relationship with Christ must begin with the confidence that God has, in fact, paid for all of our sin -- past, present, and future -- and the sins of all of his people. However, the Christian life does not stop at the beginning! Now that we have a relationship with God through faith in Christ, we must continue by following him and imitating his words and actions. We are commanded to follow his example. We must do this, not to stay saved or to earn and keep the salvation we already have, but instead simply to please Jesus through obedience to his commands. Obedience to Christ is the mark of the Holy Spirit's transforming work in the believer's life. So, what should it look like to follow Christ?

As one example, I hold to the view of Christian non-participation in earthly war, as I learned while growing up in a dear Mennonite congregation. Instead, Christians are called to enlist in spiritual war -- the Great Commission! Christ's command for Peter to put his sword away was reserved for the last hour at the critical fulcrum between choosing the kingdoms of this world or the Kingdom of Christ. I have written at length about this in my article, *To Battle with the Sword of the Spirit and Prayer!* Yet while discussing this with a friend, we considered a curious question. Would Jesus have personally pulled the trigger to fire the nuclear bombs of World War II? One brother said, *"Most certainly yes!"*

Wow! Really? So even if we could agree on the weighty matter of Christian salvation, could we then agree on what it actually means to follow Christ? Does national patriotism and mere earthly defense trump fidelity to the mission of Christ? To be sure, God has sanctioned governments to wield the sword. To be sure Jesus Christ is also the sovereign agent behind every event in world history. For example God appointed wicked Rome to destroy Jerusalem in 70 A.D. for their rejection of Christ. Yet those who know they belong to Christ have been conscripted instead to follow the example and commission of Christ into deadly spiritual war. Guns and ammo will never accomplish peace in the Middle East. However, the Bible and prayer are powerful weapons with which to wage war. We are called to leave home, family, farm, job, and country to offer our lives as a sacrifice in making disciples of the nations. Can one do that with gun in hand? Clearly one cannot when following the pattern of Jesus. What part of the word *"not"* do you not understand in 2 Corinthians 10:3-4? Please

reconsider and read my article, [Luke 22:26, Major George Buxton Persuades Sergeant Alvin York](#).

Where are the recruitment officers for the Lord's army? Where is the passion for Christian mission? We Americans have reduced the highest Christian ideal to honoring those fallen in mere earthly battles for our supposed democratic freedom. Weak "*constitutional*" theology and weak knees have found the American church hiding behind the red, white, and blue. Where is the praise for Abel and Zechariah mentioned in Luke 11:51? Why don't we have a Memorial Day for these men? They and countless others in history past have lost their lives preaching Christ to their own family and neighbors. They demonstrated fidelity to Christ unmatched in our present generation! They carried a cross, not a cross-bow. Remember them well.

Once I suggested that I go to Afghanistan as a missionary. Another said he would not send his worst enemy to that country. Are we then followers of Uncle Sam or of Christ? Christ came to serve those who counted him their enemy. Should we not do likewise, if we claim to follow him? Who is ready to pull the trigger to drop themselves as a "*grace bomb*" into enemy lands? Jesus dropped himself into our world. Friends, we have walled ourselves into a safe game of "*American church*." However, the church is called to be the spiritual military camp to serve the nations with the weapons of God's word and prayer. My view may seem odd or radical to you. I am well aware that I am in the minority, yet certainly not alone. Consider Preston Sprinkle's book, *Fight*, for further challenge. My own articles [Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News!](#) and [Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News! \(Part 2\)](#) explain our need for Christ-likeness in battle.

As another example, while a young Christian, I favored non-denominational churches because they seemed better suited for outreach. They have a passion for reaching the lost that at least moves them to preach Christ rather than denominational distinctions. Since then I learned that every church has its issues of course, even non-denominational churches. Yet problematic denominationalism led me to write the article, [Should I Stay or Should I Go?](#) It is a good question to ask when faced with divisions in your own fellowship.

So if we cannot find a satisfactory Christian fellowship to call home, should we start yet another Christian group? Can one more denomination or sect be the source of Christian unity? Hardly! Jesus could have tried to find better men to start his new movement, but where would he find them? Instead he stuck with his weak disciples and set a resolute path to die for all mankind in Jerusalem. Christ determined to love his disciples, the Pharisees, the Romans, and the Greeks -- that is ALL mankind. So we are best advised to stick with him. It is true that Christ's work divides us into believers and unbelievers, yet his ultimate goal is not to divide, but to weld his chosen people together with love and himself at the center for all eternity. Jesus refused to start another human sect, but instead my article title highlights, [He Went To Jerusalem](#).

We near the end of my review of the various views of Christian salvation. The Protestant Reformation from the 16th century sparked a division over the doctrine of salvation that has cascaded into so many divisions that many churches no longer even hold to the views of their namesake. The body of Christ has become a divided mess! Even after reading Martin Luther I do not know if he believed that "*faith*" is the "*pen*" that writes our name in the Lamb's Book of Life or the "*glasses*" that enable us to see our name written there from before the foundation of the earth. Did Luther think that "*faith*" was the condition that activated salvation? What quadrant would he fall into in our *Salvation Evaluator*? I am not sure. But I know that it is even worse for you and me because in addition to Luther's opinion and the thousands of others since then, we now also have my opinion to consider. I cannot imagine that more words of men can possibly help untangle the mess.

So are we playing church or are we following Christ? Are we literally trying to walk in the footprints Jesus has left us?

Gospel Foolishness

The heart of the problem with Arminian and Calvinist efforts to codify the gospel is that they do not include gospel foolishness and they depend upon a mistranslation of the word "aion." These models assume that the Bible is written to educate teachable people. These models adopt a purely informational and educational strategy for winning converts that appeals only to the natural mind. Furthermore, these models assume that the gospel can be simply codified. I have written about the challenges of gospel codification in my article, [Revelation 20:11-15, A.M.A.Z.I.N.G. Grace](#).

Some Christian traditions even refuse to adopt systematic theologies. They feel that the Scripture has already codified the truth in the most perfect way. But our weak human models of the gospel attempt to interpret the words of the Bible as if the Holy Spirit only ever throws straight fast balls. Yet, we have seen that God is also willing to throw curve balls to the unbeliever's foolish swing of the bat. Just like the Wright brothers needed special tactics to confront unbelief, so we see that God himself is the author of special tactics. Solomon teaches us how in [Proverbs 26:4-5](#). Hosea lived it with stubborn Israel and his family as recorded in [Hosea 2:23](#). Jesus put it into practice in [John 10:25-30](#). Paul employs it in Romans 9:1-29. Even the great prophet had to swallow a painful pill in Jeremiah 20:7a (NASB),

O Lord, You have deceived me and I was deceived.

Now we see that the Holy Spirit has used some very crafty strategies to pitch curve balls to the Left and Right wings of Christendom. He has deceived us and we were deceived. Three quadrants of our salvation matrix have stepped up to the plate for a big swing and a miss. Fortunately God's ultimate purpose is not to strike us out and leave us losers. His purpose is to heal us with his grace! However, like a good doctor he also needs to remove the cancer of our pride and hypocrisy for true healing. That is painful. In fact we would not or could not do it ourselves, hence the curve balls.

Specifically, our *Salvation Evaluator* matrix has exposed the hypocrisy of imagining that God chose us but not all men. We are also exposed for the religiosity of thinking that we chose the grace of God with our *free will* while others did not. Friends, only the *will that has been freed* by the grace of God trusts that Jesus has paid for the sins of all mankind. Apparently just as Jesus faced the Right and Left responses of the Jew and Gentile in his day, these mistakes still are with us today.

Of course if we are Christians we may still honestly wonder why he has not opened all mankind's eyes to faith. Why does most of humanity remain unbelieving? Why have only a few believers been called to faith? Three words come to mind: work, witness, and worship. Jesus has left us with work to do, succinctly explained in 2 Corinthians 5:20. Jesus also says we are to witness like him in I John 4:17. And Jesus has left us with a grand doxology of worship found in our key verse, Romans 11:32-36.

No doubt there are true believers within both Arminian and Calvinist camps who understand their codifications of the gospel ultimately fall short. There are also good followers of Christ who still have serious questions, even about the gospel. However, there are just as many or more who claim to follow Jesus yet their hope is not based upon the truth. They have not been to the foot of the cross. Instead they stand upon lies that exalt man and debase Christ. They are Christians in name only, not in heart. Thus gospel foolishness is still needed to reach the rebellious elect. We read in I Corinthians 1:18-31 (WEB),

18) For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are dying, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19) For it is written,

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise. I will bring the discernment of the discerning to nothing." 20) Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the lawyer of this world? Hasn't God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 21) For seeing that in the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom didn't know God, it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save those who believe. 22) For Jews ask for signs, Greeks seek after wisdom, 23) but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews, and foolishness to Greeks, 24) but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God; 25) because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

26) For you see your calling, brothers, that not many are wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, and not many noble; 27) but God chose the foolish things of the world that he might put to shame those who are wise. God chose the weak things of the world that he might put to shame the things that are strong. 28) God chose the lowly things of the world, and the things that are despised, and the things that don't exist, that he might bring to nothing the things that exist, 29) that no flesh should boast before God. 30) Because of him, you are in Christ Jesus, who was made to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption: 31) that, as it is written, "He who boasts, let him boast in the Lord."

Just like an insane person cannot be reasoned with, so an unbelieving person cannot be taught the good news without gospel foolishness.

The Arminian boasts in his *free will* choice of God while the Calvinist blindly claims that he alone is chosen. However, the only testimony that will stand is the cross of Jesus Christ, his blood shed for all mankind.

Curious Combo

Since foolishness to the foolish is integral to the gospel message, this creates the possibility of a curious combination of circumstances. Specifically, the religious unbelieving could actually drive other unbelieving toward Christ through preaching pieces of the gospel. The religious unbelieving might teach some true things about Christ that could help others take steps toward Christ. Though if the leader does not know the whole path to the cross, then *"the blind lead the blind"* as Jesus warned.

Consider again Jesus' words in John 10:25-30 (WEB),

25) Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you don't believe. The works that I do in my Father's name, these testify about me. 26) But you don't believe, because you are not of my sheep, as I told you. 27) My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28) I give eternal life to them. They will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29) My Father who has given them to me is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand. 30) I and the Father are one."

Now suppose we were Jesus' disciples standing there without fully understanding Jesus' implementation of the [Proverbs 26:4-5](#) and [Hosea 2:23](#) tactics to reach the stubborn unbelieving. We would most likely conclude that those who disbelieve, such as the Jews described above, are truly not Jesus' sheep. We might also conclude that since Jesus said these people are not sheep, then they can never become his sheep and they are goats for all eternity. We might think they are non-elect, non-chosen, non-predestined. Yet, since we are very concerned about our own skin, we would also be happy to believe that we are Jesus' sheep. How convenient for us! In fact Peter may have been such an unbeliever in the Olive Garden when he drew his sword to kill the Pharisees. Peter still needed to learn that Jesus also loved the Pharisees and died for them, just as he died for Peter.

Furthermore, if we were Arminian style disciples we would conclude that we are Jesus' sheep because of our good *free will* choice to follow Christ. If we were Calvinist style disciples we would conclude that we are Jesus' sheep simply because Christ chose us and not the unbelieving Jews above. Either way we would be happy, but none-the-less big stinky hypocrites.

Now I boldly ask: if followers of Christ are this confused about God's love for all, are they actually following the Jesus who is and truly believing in him in the first place? This is a good question! Consider one of the toughest verses in the whole Bible in John 6:66 (WEB), *"At this, many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him."*

It is possible to follow Christ, to serve him, and to even be used by him, yet to be confused about his purpose and eventually turn away from him. Yet, we see that most do not openly turn away, but instead turn to the religion of a graceless Christ.

The grace of Christ forgives a lot more confusion than we might be comfortable with. In fact his grace covers *ALL* sin for *ALL* mankind for *ALL* time. We are often not even aware of just how bad we actually are. We can be offensive hypocrites yet blind to how we hurt others. Yet the fragrance of Christ takes away our offensive sins. His grace also takes away the sins of those who offend us.

Jesus always seems to have the perfect words for every occasion and even for the ideas on this page. He says in Luke 10:19-21 (WEB),

19) *"Behold, I give you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy. Nothing will in any way hurt you. 20) Nevertheless, don't rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."* 21) *In that same hour Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit, and said, "I thank you, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for so it was well-pleasing in your sight."*

Do you think you are Jesus' sheep because of something you have done? Do you think you have written your own name in Heaven by choosing "*faith?*" That is foul. Are you trying to get people to write their own names in Heaven? That is really foul.

Can you instead repent of your self-righteousness and rejoice through faith that Christ has written ALL his chosen one's names in Heaven from before the creation of the world? That is fragrant grace.

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[Constructive Envy >](#)

Constructive Envy

I have shown that special tactics are required to help those who persist in stubborn unbelief. The stubborn may have various reasons for rejecting the good news that Jesus Christ is the savior of all mankind. Foremost among them is the spiritual pride of thinking that we are *PART* of a supposed chosen subset forgiven by God, such as the Jews. Or equally crummy, we may imagine that we provided *PART* of the condition to be eternally loved by God, just like pagan religions. Since pride of this nature is bad news, when the stubborn unbelief persists, even further special tactics may be employed.

Paul explains another special tactic in Romans 11:13-15 (WEB),

13) For I speak to you who are Gentiles. Since then as I am an apostle to Gentiles, I glorify my ministry; 14) if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh, and may save some of them. 15) For if the rejection of them is the reconciling of the world, what would their acceptance be, but life from the dead?

Acts 22:1-22 (WEB) also provides an excellent demonstration of this tactic by Paul,

1) "Brothers and fathers, listen to the defense which I now make to you." 2) When they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, they were even more quiet. He said, 3) "I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, instructed according to the strict tradition of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God, even as you all are today. 4) I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. 5) As also the high priest and all the council of the elders testify, from whom also I received letters to the brothers, and traveled to Damascus to bring them also who were there to Jerusalem in bonds to be punished.

6) As I made my journey, and came close to Damascus, about noon, suddenly a great light shone around me from the sky. 7) I fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?'

8) I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?'

He said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you persecute.'

9) "Those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they didn't understand the voice of him who spoke to me. 10) I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?'

"The Lord said to me, 'Arise, and go into Damascus. There you will be told about all things which are appointed for you to do.' 11) When I couldn't see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus.

12) "One Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well reported of by all the Jews who lived in Damascus, 13) came to me, and standing by me said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' In that very hour I looked up at him. 14) He said, 'The God of our fathers has appointed you to know his will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear a voice from his mouth. 15) For you will be a witness for him to all men of what you have seen and heard. 16)

Now why do you wait? Arise, be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.'

17) "When I had returned to Jerusalem, and while I prayed in the temple, I fell into a trance, 18) and saw him saying to me, 'Hurry and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not receive testimony concerning me from you.' 19) I said, 'Lord, they themselves know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue those who believed in you. 20) When the blood of Stephen, your witness, was shed, I also was standing by, consenting to his death, and guarding the cloaks of those who killed him.'

21) "He said to me, 'Depart, for I will send you out far from here to the Gentiles.' "

22) They listened to him until he said that; then they lifted up their voice and said, "Rid the earth of this fellow, for he isn't fit to live!"

Paul -- actually the Holy Spirit through Paul -- was willing to make constructive use of envy to confront the spiritual pride of the Jews who rejected Jesus as their savior and the savior of both Jew and Gentile. The results as you see were explosive. The Jews hated the thought that both the Jews and the Gentiles were equally needy of grace. The Jews thought God's blessing was focused only on them and limited to them unless the Gentiles jumped through the hoop. However, Paul crossed the line in reaching out to both Jews and Gentiles with the good news. Though it may *appear* like Paul is giving up on the Jews, really he is playing his last, but most powerful card through the constructive use of envy.

Paul was willing to risk conflict for the greater good of helping at least some stubborn unbelievers appreciate the foolishness of their unbelief.

Paul always makes a point of giving the Jews ample opportunity to change their mind and acknowledge Jesus as Messiah. In fact Paul taught that the Jews ought to even have the first opportunity to hear the gospel. Romans 1:16-17 (WEB) says,

16) For I am not ashamed of the Good News of Christ, because it is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first, and also for the Greek. 17) For in it is revealed God's righteousness from faith to faith. As it is written, "But the righteous shall live by faith."

However, if stubborn unbelief continued, Paul became a burr under their saddle to get things kicking. You may have noticed that this Biblical strategy is strangely similar to the winning tactic employed by the Wright brothers. When the U.S. government rejected flight, the Wright brothers turned to Europe. Then the U.S. woke up.

Now let's move on to my concluding thoughts.

The Redeemed

A wonderful eternity is planned for the redeemed people of God as explained in Revelation 21:1-7 (WEB) which says,

1) I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth have passed away, and the sea is no more. 2) I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband. 3) I heard a loud voice out of heaven saying, "Behold, God's dwelling is with people, and he will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4) He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; neither will there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more. The first things have passed away." 5) He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." He said, "Write, for these words of God are faithful and true." 6) He said to me, "I have become the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give freely to him who is thirsty from the spring of the water of life. 7) He who overcomes, I will give him these things. I will be his God, and he will be my son."

I am particularly drawn to the fact that Heaven will be a new order, a new arrangement of things. The trials of this life have calloused us to our pitiful condition as we comfort one another with melodramatic words and thin encouragement such as *"no pain, no gain."* However, God is not cruel like we might be tempted to think at times. Instead he is a loving Heavenly Father and the brief trials and pain we endure in this life only serve his good purpose. It certainly is not weak to look forward to the day when all pain and mourning are finally taken away. I look forward to the day when we stand with the Lord in glory with every tear wiped away. What a glad day when our Sonship and inheritance is crowned in glory and sin and brokenness are removed forever for all God's people!

I can hardly wait to be there with you. Will you be there with me? What do you say?

The Reprobate

In contrast to the redeemed, the Lake of Fire is the sentence for the reprobate, the unredeemed who are not chosen for grace. The final words in Revelation 21:8 (WEB) say,

But for the cowardly, unbelieving, sinners, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their part is in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.

Review the list of those sentenced to the Lake of Fire. The Lord's judgment will be certain and swift. He will not punish anyone unjustly, but instead it is the unredeemed wicked who will be damned. Those who pretend to believe should not think that they will escape while they are also cowardly, vile, murdering, and sexually immoral... *if* their sins are not redeemed. Those who are brave and pure, yet who reject the grace of Jesus Christ through their unbelief and false gospels will not escape... *if* their sins are not redeemed. Those outside of Christ will be placed into the blast furnace of God's wrath for *The Ages of The Ages*.

There will be no escape from this judgment for the unredeemed.

However, those chosen by Jesus Christ for grace, those sinners hidden safely inside of Christ, are secure in the Father's love. They are commanded to repent and turn away from wickedness as we read in 2 Timothy 2:19 (WEB),

However God's firm foundation stands, having this seal, 'The Lord knows those who are his,' and, 'Let every one who names the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness.'

Are you loved by the Lord? Do you want to have no doubt that you have been chosen by Christ from before the foundation of the world? Look to Jesus Christ and his cross for the proof. Belief cannot add your name to his Book of Life, but with eyes open to the cross you can know that God has always loved you and will always love you! With the eyes of faith open you can see your name inked in the Lamb's Book of Life from before the creation of the World. Are you a descendant of Adam? The second Adam has redeemed you! Confess his name and strive to please your lover!

Revelation 22:7-21

I end my proofs with the conclusion of Scripture, Revelation 22:7-21 (WEB),

7) *"Behold, I come quickly. Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."*

8) *Now I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. When I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who had shown me these things. 9) He said to me, "See you don't do it! I am a fellow bondservant with you and with your brothers, the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God."*

10) *He said to me, "Don't seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand. 11) He who acts unjustly, let him act unjustly still. He who is filthy, let him be filthy still. He who is righteous, let him do righteousness still. He who is holy, let him be holy still."*

12) *"Behold, I come quickly. My reward is with me, to repay to each man according to his work. 13) I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.*

14) *Blessed are those who do his commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter in by the gates into the city. 15) Outside are the dogs, the sorcerers, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.*

16) *I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify these things to you for the assemblies. I am the root and the offspring of David; the Bright and Morning Star."*

17) *The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" He who hears, let him say, "Come!" He who is thirsty, let him come. He who desires, let him take the water of life freely.*

18) *I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, if anyone adds to them, may God add to him the plagues which are written in this book. 19) If anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, may God take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, which are written in this book.*

20) *He who testifies these things says, "Yes, I come quickly." Amen! Yes, come, Lord Jesus.*

21) *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with all the saints. Amen.*

Follow Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So how do we even begin to follow him?

Matthew 4:18-20 (WEB) says,

18) Walking by the sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers: Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew, his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. 19) He said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers for men." 20) They immediately left their nets and followed him.

We can begin to follow Jesus with great confidence since we know he loves all mankind. We do not have to impossibly determine if we are part of a *chosen sub-set* loved by Jesus. Rather we follow Jesus knowing that we are part of the *chosen super-set* loved by Jesus and he asks us to follow him. So we can follow Jesus with great confidence!

Matthew 16:24-27 (WEB) says,

24) Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. 25) For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, and whoever will lose his life for my sake will find it. 26) For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his life? Or what will a man give in exchange for his life? 27) For the Son of Man will come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he will render to everyone according to his deeds."

We can also be certain that if we do not follow Jesus we have traded the great purposes that God has for our life for... nothing. Since Jesus could not love us more, to turn away from his love to any other thing is a crying shame. Only complete confidence in the love of God for me and you will embolden us to give Jesus everything he asks. If we want to pretend that we are part of a chosen loved sub-set or that our choice of God's love *plus* his love cinched our destiny, then we do not truly understand God's love. Friends, we must have rock solid confidence that Jesus' love penetrates through our core to have loved us while we were yet his enemies. Without it, we will not be able to give Jesus all that he asks. Furthermore, because his arms are stretched wide his love includes all the Pharisees on his right and all the Pagans on his left. We can have unwavering confidence that he loves us as well, whether we are self-righteous Pharisees or godless Pagans or somewhere in between. His love is fully given to all. What does he ask of us? He wants our entire life -- our complete devotion.

John 6:66-71 (WEB) says,

66) At this, many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. 67) Jesus said therefore to the twelve, "You don't also want to go away, do you?" 68) Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69) We have come to believe and know that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 70) Jesus answered them, "Didn't I choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?" 71) Now he spoke of Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, for it was he who would betray him, being one of the twelve.

Following Jesus demands our complete commitment. Our weak human strength cannot provide this level of commitment. Our promises cannot maintain this commitment. Only complete dependence upon the faithfulness of God and his guaranteed love for us can provide this commitment. We may flatter or fool ourselves thinking that we are the chosen subset because we are devoted followers of Jesus. That is radical commitment of sorts, but unfortunately not a commitment to the true Jesus, the Jesus who loves all mankind. Remember it is the Pharisees who were angry with Jesus when they learned that he does in fact love all mankind, including the Gentile "*sinner*." Friends, as much as we waiver about the love of God toward all mankind, we will also waiver in our commitment to him.

Do not waiver about God's love for you and me! Following Jesus demands one hundred percent confidence in his love for us as well as his love for others. Leave your nets and follow Jesus!

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[Believe Jesus >](#)

Believe Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So what does it mean to believe in him?

Mark 9:21-24 (WEB) says,

21) He asked his father, "How long has it been since this has come to him?" He said, "From childhood. 22) Often it has cast him both into the fire and into the water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us, and help us." 23) Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." 24) Immediately the father of the child cried out with tears, "I believe. Help my unbelief!"

The boy's father highlights a problem that is common among even the most mature Christians. We ought to believe in God with rock solid confidence, yet even the strongest Christian may have doubts. One response to the thesis that Jesus is the Savior of all mankind has been *"I want to believe, but it seems too good to be true!"* We should join the man above and ask God to help us overcome our unbelief!

Furthermore, some interpret this verse to mean that through *"faith"* we can accomplish whatever we determine. If this is true we would not only have *"faith"* in God, but we would also *be* God! This verse is not saying that we can always accomplish our will, but instead that through faith we can receive and always participate in God's will. In fact this misunderstanding of the meaning of *"faith"* is the heart of this generation's misunderstanding of the very gospel. *"Faith"* is not the condition to God's unconditional love, but instead faith is trust that God already loves us unconditionally! *"Faith"* never added one person to the Lamb's Book of Life, but instead faith opens our eyes to the rock solid fact that God has always loved his people. Do you doubt it? Ask God for help to overcome your unbelief!

Jude 22-23 (WEB) says,

22) On some have compassion, making a distinction, 23) and some save, snatching them out of the fire with fear, hating even the clothing stained by the flesh.

Efforts to tell others that Jesus is their Savior and the Savior of the world are often rejected. Sadly religion, tradition, and avoidance are always more popular than grace. This verse reminds us that the doubting are to be shown mercy. Jesus commands us to believe in him, to trust him with our entire lives. It is a good thing to question the ice before trusting it with your ice skates. Test Jesus and you will find that he does not change with the seasons, because *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever"* (Hebrews 13:8 WEB). He will never crack or melt in the heat, but instead is a solid rock! Friends, Jesus is so trustworthy it is a sin to not trust him, so get your questions answered and your doubts erased! Do not let your doubts turn you away from God.

John 20:24-29 (WEB) says,

24) But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, wasn't with them when Jesus came. 25) The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails,

put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." 26) After eight days again his disciples were inside and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, the doors being locked, and stood in the middle, and said, "Peace be to you." 27) Then he said to Thomas, "Reach here your finger, and see my hands. Reach here your hand, and put it into my side. Don't be unbelieving, but believing." 28) Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29) Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen, and have believed."

Even one of the twelve disciples who walked and talked with Jesus for three years doubted. The expression "*doubting Thomas*" lives on 2,000 years later in his honor. Yet this verse highlights Jesus' patience even with the doubting. Jesus is not intentionally obscure, but wants each of us to get to know him through faith. Ask God to show himself to you. But do not ask to see him and then be lazy or sleeping when he makes himself known. Do not ask to see him and then not be willing to shout to the world with Thomas, "*My Lord and my God!*"

Faith is not the condition to God's unconditional love. Faith is trusting that God loves us unconditionally because he loves all mankind. Believe in Jesus!

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[Trust Jesus >](#)

Trust Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So what does it mean to trust in him?

In the Bible "*trust in*" is basically a synonym for "*believe in*." Since belief and trust are the vital components of receiving God's salvation, let's hit it again.

1 John 1:9-10 (WEB) says,

9) If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us the sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10) If we say that we haven't sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Getting turned on to something requires passion. So what can give us passion for Christ? How about total forgiveness of all your sins: past, present, and future? God loves us like the wonderful Heavenly Father that he says he is and so he is trustworthy. Yet some interpret 1 John 1:9 to mean that Jesus only forgives us if we ask. Is this true? I have mentioned elsewhere that Jesus asked the Father to forgive us from the cross, even though no one was asking. Is there more proof?

Romans 5:9-11 (WEB) says,

9) Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we will be saved from God's wrath through him. 10) For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we will be saved by his life. 11) Not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

Now here is good news, awesome news, that ought to get us totally turned on to Jesus. The death of Christ reconciled us to God, forgiving all our sins, while we were yet his enemies! The love of God was fully given before we were Christians or even acknowledged Christ. The heart of my thesis in this book is that there is no condition to God's unconditional love... not even our faith. In fact it is silly to suggest that "*trust*" is the condition to God's unconditional love. It is silly because God wants us instead to trust that his love for us is unconditional and already given, just like Romans 5:9-11 says! The point is that we must be fully persuaded of God's unconditional love for us to know him as he is and to make him known.

If you believe God loves you on those terms, then you will be passionate to know and make known that he loves all mankind exactly the same way. Logically, to the exact same degree you have doubts about whether mankind's sins are forgiven, you will have doubts that your own sins are forgiven. This is true unless you are hypocritically trusting in a condition to God's love that you supplied. If you are trusting in a condition that you supplied, you may appear to have confidence, but again you are standing on thin ice above the fires of Hades.

Gerry Beauchemin boldly says on page 165 of *Hope Beyond Hell*, "*The only way I [or you] can be truly assured I will be saved is if I believe that God saves all [mankind].*" Do you claim that God loves you 100%? On what basis? A Christian can be 100% confident that God loves him because God loves all mankind. Robin Parry goes as far to say in *The Evangelical Universalist* that Calvinism has in fact corrupted the morals of its adherents. The Calvinist is 100% confident that God loves him and equally confident that God does not love all

mankind. Parry boldly says that such a person has become morally corrupted from a false gospel and false understanding of the nature of God's love.

Trust is not the condition to God's unconditional love, but instead faith that God loves us unconditionally because he loves all mankind. Trust in Jesus!

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Disciplined by the Grace of Jesus Christ

Home Bible Optimism Articles

Hope in Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So what does it mean to hope in him?

Titus 2:11-14 (WEB),

11) For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, 12) instructing us to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we would live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age; 13) looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, 14) who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify for himself a people for his own possession, zealous for good works.

Christ is returning and Christians are waiting for this blessed hope. Yet most of mankind is not waiting or ready and thus has no hope!

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 (WEB) says,

13) But we don't want you to be ignorant, brothers, concerning those who have fallen asleep, so that you don't grieve like the rest, who have no hope. 14) For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.

This passage speaks of hope, yet some truths offer no hope. For example, there is no hope for the unredeemed. If sin is not paid for, sinners can have no hope of salvation, ever. There appears to be no hope for Satan and his demons because apparently their sins are not paid for according to Hebrews 2:16. However, the passage above teaches us that Christians can have great hope because we believe and know that God will resurrect the Christians who have already died.

Now this passage also says that, *"like the rest, who have no hope."* Does this mean that unbelievers will never ever have hope? Certainly not! The passage is speaking about the *"hope"* that we live by through faith. Both the believing and unbelieving redeemed have a glorious eternal destiny waiting for them. Jesus redeemed, paid the sin debt, for all mankind while we were yet his enemies! Believers have received this hope and live by it. However, unbelievers refuse to repent of their self-righteousness and believe that their sins are paid for and so they do not live by this hope. They choose the hard road even though their sins are fully paid.

Christians eagerly await the return of Christ because we know that Jesus loves mankind dearly. Unbelievers, however, shrink back at the thought of facing the Lord of the Universe. Just like Adam and Eve hid in the garden, they hide behind false religion, atheism, and agnosticism. Yet Jesus will return for his people!

Jesus promised in John 14:1-3,

1) Don't let your heart be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me. 2) In my Father's house are many homes. If it weren't so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you. 3) If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and will receive you to myself; that where I am, you may be

there also.

The angels also promised in Acts 1:10-11 (WEB),

10) While they were looking steadfastly into the sky as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white clothing, 11) who also said, "You men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who was received up from you into the sky, will come back in the same way as you saw him going into the sky."

The point is that our lover, Jesus Christ, is currently away, but he is returning and has told us many things about his future plans to "*make his enemies a footstool*" and to return for his bride, the church, and to consummate eternity with the final salvation of all mankind. Biblical Christianity offers great hope! Do not settle for anything less!

Hope in Christ is not a wish but a confidence that Jesus Christ will reveal his salvation to all mankind in time. Hope in Jesus!

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Disciplined by the Grace of Jesus Christ

Home Bible Optimism Articles

Read Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So why do we read about him and his commands?

Joshua 1:7-9 (WEB),

7) Only be strong and very courageous. Be careful to observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded you. Don't turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. 8) This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it; for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success. 9) Haven't I commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Don't be afraid. Don't be dismayed, for Yahweh your God is with you wherever you go.

The Bible is God's Word given to us so that we can learn about his love and care for us. In the verses above God spoke directly to Joshua after Moses died in order to encourage Joshua and guide him as the new leader of Israel. God urges Joshua to be strong and courageous and to meditate on the Bible. Reading the Bible and meditating on God's written message to mankind is vital for us to enjoy the successful Christian living that God desires.

Colossians 3:15-17 (WEB),

15) And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body, and be thankful. 16) Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your heart to the Lord. 17) Whatever you do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father, through him.

We need the message of Christ in our conversation so that we can teach and admonish one another. While our own words and ideas may range from useful to useless, God's words and his message are perfect and wonderfully useful. Paul encourages Jesus' followers to add the words and message of Christ into our conversation. Read the Bible, meditate on the meaning, and mention the message and words of Christ in your conversation with others.

Hebrews 4:12-13 (WEB),

12) For the word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and is able to discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13) There is no creature that is hidden from his sight, but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him to whom we must give an account.

God's word is alive and active and powerful to change our lives. We are in need of heart surgery, but what scalpel can be used to perform spiritual operations on our hearts? God's word is compared to a double-edged sword because the Bible is able to cut away the cancer of unbelief in our lives. We must read the Bible to allow the Holy Spirit to change us from

our natural love of vice to the supernatural virtue of Jesus Christ.

Read the message of Christ to enjoy the Christian prosperity that God desires for you. Share his message with others in your conversation. Allow the Holy Spirit to operate on your heart with God's Word. Read Jesus!

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[Talk to Jesus >](#)

Talk to Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So how do we talk to him?

Matthew 6:5-15 (WEB) says,

5) When you pray, you shall not be as the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Most certainly, I tell you, they have received their reward. 6) But you, when you pray, enter into your inner room, and having shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. 7) In praying, don't use vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their much speaking. 8) Therefore don't be like them, for your Father knows what things you need, before you ask him. 9) Pray like this: "Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. 10) Let your Kingdom come. Let your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. 11) Give us today our daily bread. 12) Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors. 13) Bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen." 14) For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15) But if you don't forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

God is our loving Heavenly Father and he wants us to talk with him, heart to heart. He wants no facades or religion, but person to person conversation. More than that, he knows us and our needs better than we know ourselves. The point is that we should have great confidence that our conversation with him will never be misunderstood. If there is any concern at all, the concern is that we are not being honest with ourselves. The cure for our hypocrisy is the solemn reminder that we need to forgive others and that we are fully dependent upon God for our forgiveness.

John 14:11-14 (WEB) says,

11) Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me; or else believe me for the very works' sake. 12) Most certainly I tell you, he who believes in me, the works that I do, he will do also; and he will do greater works than these, because I am going to my Father. 13) Whatever you will ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14) If you will ask anything in my name, I will do it.

Wow! God is listening to our prayers and he will answer them! While some have earthly dads with resources to buy them cars and college, we all have a Heavenly dad with infinite resources available for our care. However, we should be reminded that God's goal for our lives is that we would grow to share in his character. God does always answer our prayers, but sometimes the answer is "no", as seen in 2 Corinthians 12:8-9.

Romans 8:26-27 (WEB),

26) In the same way, the Spirit also helps our weaknesses, for we don't know

how to pray as we ought. But the Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groanings which can't be uttered. 27) He who searches the hearts knows what is on the Spirit's mind, because he makes intercession for the saints according to God.

Wow that is even more amazing! Ever felt like you do not even know how or what to pray? This is a very common problem because the truth is that we all find ourselves in situations where we have no idea what the solution could be. Sin has broken and twisted our lives beyond repair. We should keep praying nonetheless because, if we are Christians, the Holy Spirit is living inside of us and he will lead our prayers.

John 16:23-28 (WEB) says,

23) In that day you will ask me no questions. Most certainly I tell you, whatever you may ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. 24) Until now, you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be made full. 25) I have spoken these things to you in figures of speech. But the time is coming when I will no more speak to you in figures of speech, but will tell you plainly about the Father. 26) In that day you will ask in my name; and I don't say to you that I will pray to the Father for you, 27) for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me, and have believed that I came from God. 28) I came from the Father, and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world, and go to the Father.

Jesus wants to make our Heavenly Father known to us. Though the Bible may be hard to understand at times, God's purpose is not to be obscure. Instead he has revealed himself to us and plans to do so more and more. Why does he keep us in suspense and why is he taking so long? I don't know. Perhaps our finite minds can only be opened to the infinite God in small increments. Perhaps our sin and need for repentance slows down the progress to see God face to face. Take heart! Jesus is praying for us and working to reveal our good Heavenly Father to us.

Prayer to Jesus and our Heavenly Father is critical to help us get to know God and understand his good purposes for all mankind. Talk to Jesus!

[◀ Read Jesus](#)

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[Love Jesus ▶](#)

Love Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So what does it mean to love him?

John 14:23 (WEB) says,

Jesus answered him, 'If a man loves me, he will keep my word. My Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our home with him.'

Love for Jesus is not mystical or ethereal! Jesus asks us to show our love very practically by obeying his commands. While the world's notion of love is freedom to please one's self, God's definition of love is commitment to please others. Jesus demonstrated loving obedience to his Father and now asks us for the same loving obedience. Has Jesus won your willingness to give up your self-serving attitudes to instead serve others?

John 21:15-19 (WEB) says,

15) So when they had eaten their breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me more than these?"

He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I have affection for you."

He said to him, "Feed my lambs." 16) He said to him again a second time, Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me?"

He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I have affection for you."

He said to him, "Tend my sheep." 17) He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you have affection for me?"

Peter was grieved because he asked him the third time, "Do you have affection for me?" He said to him, "Lord, you know everything. You know that I have affection for you."

Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. 18) Most certainly I tell you, when you were young, you dressed yourself and walked where you wanted to. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you don't want to go." 19) Now he said this, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. When he had said this, he said to him, "Follow me."

Peter had just boasted earlier that even if all the other disciples fell away, he would never fall away. Yet all the disciples did run away and Peter denied Jesus three times! Jesus now confronts Peter about his boast to remind Peter of the value of humility and to restore him to his calling: to feed the sheep of Jesus. Do we love Jesus? Are we better than others? Are we willing to humbly feed Jesus' sheep? Are we willing to feed both the believing and the unbelieving, both the lost sheep and the found sheep? Are we willing to show love to all mankind?

1 John 4:20 (WEB) says,

If a man says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who doesn't love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has

not seen?

Jesus challenges us to show our love for him by loving our brother. God's commands are not burdensome, odd, or unreasonable. Jesus is building a loving family and he commands us to love one another. Are we with excuses like Cain asking, "*Am I my brother's keeper?*" Or are we committed to saying, "*I am my brother's keeper!*"

Jesus asks us to show our love to him by obeying him and loving others. Love Jesus!

[< Talk to Jesus](#)

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[Obey Jesus >](#)

Obey Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So what does it mean to obey him?

John 8:31-36 (WEB) says,

31) Jesus therefore said to those Jews who had believed him, "If you remain in my word, then you are truly my disciples. 32) You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." 33) They answered him, "We are Abraham's offspring, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How do you say, 'You will be made free'?" 34) Jesus answered them, "Most certainly I tell you, everyone who commits sin is the bondservant of sin. 35) A bondservant doesn't live in the house forever. A son remains forever. 36) If therefore the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."

Jesus has a great promise for his followers. He plans to show us the truth about this life and to set us free! What an awesome promise and hope! This fallen and broken world takes its toll on every person who ever lived causing us to feel burdened and in bondage to pain and trials that we want to shake off, but just cannot. However, there is great hope. Jesus promises freedom. Yet, the freedom of Christ comes with a price... we must obey his teaching. Though the world may offer freedom, true freedom only comes through obedience to Jesus Christ.

Furthermore there is an orderly recipe above. First we must simply obey, even if we do not understand all the reasons for God's commands. We must submit our will to the will of Jesus. We must honestly understand the difference between what we want to do and what God wants us to do... and then choose God's will. Second, through obedience we will come to know the truth. A master's business can only be learned through obediently serving in his workshop. The same is true with God. Third, through knowledge of the truth we will be set free from our bondage because we will know, understand, and trust in God's loving purposes. There is no other way, but to trust and obey.

1 John 5:1-5 (WEB) says,

1) Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God. Whoever loves the Father also loves the child who is born of him. 2) By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep his commandments. 3) For this is loving God, that we keep his commandments. His commandments are not grievous. 4) For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world: your faith. 5) Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Jesus wants no hypocritical claim of affection for him. If we claim to love God we must also obey his commands. In fact, obeying his commands is the only accepted expression of showing our love for God. God is our loving Heavenly Father and because he is our Father and we are his children we also need to obey him. The world understands love to be giving others license to do whatever they want, to please themselves. This is not love, but instead makes us a danger to ourselves. A good parent would not leave his children unsupervised or without direction. God knows that true love will direct his children to do only what is best

for themselves and others. Thankfully the commands of God are not burdensome, but are wholesome and good. In fact as we already learned, God's commands are the pathway to learning more and more about God and enjoying true freedom as his sons and daughters. Through obedience we take our station as the children of the King of the Universe. We receive the honorable position of princes and princesses in his kingdom. We also enjoy fellowship as brothers and sisters with one another!

Obey Jesus in order to know the truth and to find true freedom. I am convinced that obeying Jesus' commands is the recipe to help you see that Jesus does in fact love all mankind. Obey Jesus!

[< Love Jesus](#)

[up](#)

[Imitate Jesus >](#)

Imitate Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So what does it mean to imitate him?

1 John 3:1-3 (WEB) says,

1) See how great a love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God! For this cause the world doesn't know us, because it didn't know him. 2) Beloved, now we are children of God, and it is not yet revealed what we will be. But we know that when he is revealed, we will be like him; for we will see him just as he is. 3) Everyone who has this hope set on him purifies himself, even as he is pure.

Jesus began his ministry with the simple call "follow me." He wants us to learn from him and become like him. I have been baffled by the present animosity that the non-Christian world has toward Jesus. Perhaps they are getting their picture of Jesus from the poor examples of us struggling Christians! Instead, they should read the historic account of Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. If they read about Jesus there, they will see that he is The Champion of love for all. He preaches against hypocrisy and vice. He is kind to the brokenhearted. He condemns no one! Why he is the epitome of valor, the grand gentleman, the hero of heroes! The great Christian hope is that one day our very natures will be transformed so that we will be like him. No longer will we struggle with envy, anger, and hypocrisy. We will be like Jesus effortlessly! Meanwhile, because this is our hope, we strive to purify ourselves to be like him now.

1 John 4:17-18 (WEB) says,

17) In this love has been made perfect among us, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because as he is, even so are we in this world. 18) There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear has punishment. He who fears is not made perfect in love.

In fact the Bible says that if we are Christians, we are already like Jesus in this world. Even though we are terribly poor imitations of Christ, Jesus has given us the assignment to follow in his footsteps. We are like him because we have a purpose in this world to serve God and be like Jesus. Furthermore, if we are Christians we have the Holy Spirit working powerfully within us to accomplish the purposes of God. While we may be painfully aware of our inadequacies, Jesus is nonetheless marching on, working his will both in us and through us. Giving up is not an option! The work of the Holy Spirit will be effective in changing and transforming us. Though no one will ever be perfected in this life, progress will be made in learning to forgive, serve, and love others. So we submit to the Holy Spirit's work in our lives and we look forward to the end of sin and perfect Christ-likeness in glory.

Imitating Jesus is hard work because our birth nature is not like Jesus. Just as Jesus loved all mankind, we are to share his love with all mankind. Thankfully, the hard work of transformation is not ours alone, but instead it is God who changes us, and so we learn to keep in step with the Spirit. Imitate Jesus!

Share Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So what does it mean to share him with others?

Matthew 28:16-20 (WEB) says,

16) But the eleven disciples went into Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had sent them. 17) When they saw him, they bowed down to him, but some doubted. 18) Jesus came to them and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. 19) Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20) teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you. Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

This passage in the Bible is called "*The Great Commission.*" It is Jesus' last words to his followers. It is our assignment. It is The Great Commission! After giving us his own example of how to make disciples, he then commands us to continue to follow him, to imitate him, and make yet more disciples of Jesus. The Christian faith is not merely reading the Bible and understanding facts about God, but it is sharing Jesus' love with others and asking others to follow Jesus. God's intention is that the good news about Jesus' death on the cross for the sins of ALL mankind would be shared with ALL mankind. This world is filled with Satan's lies about God, suggesting that God does not love all mankind and that we are condemned. Read Zechariah 3:1-10 to see just how mean Satan can be toward Joshua and also toward us. The Great Commission is our great mission to defeat these lies and be used by the Holy Spirit to bring the good news to ALL mankind.

Acts 1:9-11 (WEB) says,

9) When he had said these things, as they were looking, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight. 10) While they were looking steadfastly into the sky as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white clothing, 11) who also said, "You men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who was received up from you into the sky, will come back in the same way as you saw him going into the sky."

Understandably after Jesus gave the Great Commission and then ascended into Heaven, the first disciples were stunned. I personally have never witnessed anyone teach with the authority of Jesus, work miracles, be raised from the dead, and ascend into Heaven. No wonder the disciples were reeling with their heads spinning. So God sent two angels to stop their spinning heads and point them back to their assignment. Friend, God's love for all mankind is proved without a doubt. Why do you stand there? Go tell your neighbor!

Matthew 22:34-40 (WEB) says,

34) But the Pharisees, when they heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, gathered themselves together. 35) One of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, testing him. 36) "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?" 37) Jesus said to him, " 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38) This is the first and great commandment. 39) A second likewise is this, 'You shall love your

neighbor as yourself.' 40) The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.' "

But we may still have questions and doubts. Answer your questions! Erase your doubts! Do whatever hard work is needed to get your feet planted on the solid rock of Jesus Christ! Pray! Read the Bible! Show your love for God by obeying his commands! And if you do not know how to begin The Great Commission, then begin (and end) with The Great Commandments above. Jesus keeps it simple for us because there are only two Great Commandments: 1) love God and 2) love your neighbor as yourself. God's commands truly are not difficult to understand or burdensome. The only challenge is that we must lay down our self-interests in order to be concerned about others.

The good news is too good to keep to ourselves. God does not just love you, but he loves all mankind! Salvation is not personal, but universal! Jesus commands us to join his forces to fight against the lies of Satan and tell our family, friends, and neighbors about God's love. Share Jesus!

[◀ Imitate Jesus](#)

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[Fellowship with Jesus ▶](#)

Fellowship with Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So how do we fellowship with Jesus now?

Jesus loves to eat, drink, talk, and laugh with us, his chosen people. He created us for this very purpose. Consider that his first miracle was to turn water into wine at a wedding! We can be so excited that we are promised eternity in the home of this man! Glorious fellowship is promised.

Don't let your heart be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me. In my Father's house are many homes. If it weren't so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and will receive you to myself; that where I am, you may be there also.

John 14:1-3 (WEB)

Okay, glorious eternal fellowship sounds great! But how can we fellowship with Jesus in this broken world now? How can we find real comfort from Christ's presence and the presence of his family when so much is ruined by sin? Furthermore, Jesus has been gone for a long time! Yes, but he has left us with the Holy Spirit, our comforter. Also we need to be reminded that because of sin we especially need the fellowship of other real live Christians. Sin often separates us and causes us to personally withdraw. This is not good and so we must fight against this to live openly with Christian friends. Hebrews 10:24-25 (WEB) warns,

Let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good works, not forsaking our own assembling together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as you see the Day approaching.

Also finding Christian fellowship can be difficult and especially difficult to find Christians who are confident that Jesus loves all mankind. However, we cannot and must not be idle or despair just because something is difficult. Hard work must be done to find and even build godly Christian fellowship. Jesus likewise warned in Matthew 8:19-20 (WEB),

A scribe came, and said to him, 'Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.' Jesus said to him, 'The foxes have holes, and the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.'

So hard work remains to find and build Christian fellowship. However, we must also remember that Jesus invites us to another kind of fellowship in this broken world. Jesus invites us to participate in the fellowship of his sufferings. We can like it or not, but this world is filled with suffering and Jesus invites us to join him in fighting the good fight against evil despite suffering. Though we may be tempted to relieve suffering by "going with the flow" Jesus set the example of swimming upstream and invites us to follow. Jesus' disciple Peter was well acquainted with suffering for wrong doing, but also for right doing.

12) *Beloved, don't be astonished at the fiery trial which has come upon you, to test you, as though a strange thing happened to you. 13) But because you are partakers of Christ's sufferings, rejoice; that at the revelation of his glory you also may rejoice with exceeding joy. 14) If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed; because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. On their part he is blasphemed, but on your part he is glorified. 15) For let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or an evil doer, or a meddler in other men's matters. 16) But if one of you suffers for being a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God in this matter.*

1 Peter 4:12-16 (WEB)

Thankfully Jesus' purpose is not eternal suffering! Jesus never enjoyed suffering, but "*endured the cross*" looking instead to the joy that the cross would achieve. What joy did the cross achieve? The redemption of mankind and glorious eternal fellowship! What joy does our suffering achieve? We can share intimate fellowship with Jesus and through suffering become like him. He suffered because of his love for all mankind and so will we! So we must look to Jesus for strength to endure the cross that he has assigned. We also look forward to that day when we raise our drink with Christ in celebration of victory!

But I tell you that I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on, until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's Kingdom.

Matthew 26:29 (WEB)

Fellowship with Jesus is the best. Fellowship with Jesus right now is comfort through the trials we share with Jesus. And fellowship with Jesus then will be eternal comfort with absolutely no more trials and celebration of the victory he has won in our lives! Fellowship with Jesus!

[< Share Jesus](#)

[up](#)

[Prove Jesus >](#)

Prove Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So what does it mean to prove Jesus?

Psalms 34:8-16 (WEB) says,

- 8) *Oh taste and see that Yahweh is good.
Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.*
- 9) *Oh fear Yahweh, you his saints,
for there is no lack with those who fear him.*
- 10) *The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger,
but those who seek Yahweh shall not lack any good thing.*
- 11) *Come, you children, listen to me.
I will teach you the fear of Yahweh.*
- 12) *Who is someone who desires life,
and loves many days, that he may see good?*
- 13) *Keep your tongue from evil,
and your lips from speaking lies.*
- 14) *Depart from evil, and do good.
Seek peace, and pursue it.*
- 15) *Yahweh's eyes are toward the righteous.
His ears listen to their cry.*
- 16) *Yahweh's face is against those who do evil,
to cut off their memory from the earth.*

Jesus commands us to trust and obey him and boasts that God is good and there is no better salvation. However, to back up his words, Jesus asks us to prove him -- to test him. He says, "*Oh taste and see that Yahweh is good.*" We are often like finicky children unwilling to eat the food that is before us. I never ate sour cream before I entered college because I did not want to eat anything sour! So then I tried sour cream on a potato and learned that sour cream is creamy! I loved it. I can no longer eat a potato without it! So what lies and misunderstandings about God's faithfulness have we believed and swallowed? Jesus invites us to prove him, to test him, to taste and see that He is good!

John 10:1-5 (WEB) says,

- 1) *Most certainly, I tell you, one who doesn't enter by the door into the sheep fold, but climbs up some other way, is a thief and a robber.*
- 2) *But one who enters in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.*
- 3) *The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out.*
- 4) *Whenever he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.*
- 5) *They will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him; for they don't know the voice of strangers.*

Do not follow the voice of a stranger! Our good Heavenly Father has proved his love for us by sending his one and only son, Jesus, to die on the cross for our sins. His love could absolutely not be greater. He challenges us to test his love and erase all of our doubts! He wants our whole heart without reserve and he is confident that he has all the love and

forgiveness that we will ever need and more. Do you still have doubts? Taste and see that the Lord is good, but do not follow a stranger!

Romans 10:10-13 (WEB) says,

10) For with the heart, one believes resulting in righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made resulting in salvation. 11) For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes in him will not be disappointed." 12) For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, and is rich to all who call on him. 13) For, "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Jesus promises that when we give our lives to him, he will protect and care for us, guaranteeing that we will never be put to shame. Of course this does not mean that we will never have trials. Instead it means that Jesus will be by our side and be our defender through even the worst of circumstances.

Jesus challenges us to test him on his promises because he is so confident that he is and has everything we will ever need and want. Jesus is the best! Prove Jesus!

[◀ Fellowship with Jesus](#)

[up](#)

[Revere Jesus ▶](#)

Revere Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So what does it mean to revere Jesus?

17) When I saw him, I fell at his feet like a dead man. He laid his right hand on me, saying, "Don't be afraid. I am the first and the last, 18) and the Living one. I was dead, and behold, I am alive forever more. Amen. I have the keys of Death and of Hades. 19) Write therefore the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will happen hereafter;

Revelation 1:17-18 (WEB)

Jesus holds the keys to death and Hades. He appoints the time our death and he raises the dead. He also locks the unbelieving in the punishments of Hades and will empty Hades on the last day. Friends, our destiny is not in the hands of our supposed *free will*, but in the hands of Jesus' will. Jesus is the God of our past, our present, and our future. So we are advised to revere Christ.

Twenty-first century sentiment emphasizes authenticity and sincerity. Pastors preach in jeans. Parishioners sport sweats. Yet, even the actors and actresses in my oldies movie collection are wearing collared shirts with ties and Sunday best dresses. The motto for today is *"get comfortable."* This is not bad in itself. However, if we remember our sin problem, letting it all hang out before Holy God is not honesty, but harlotry, not beautiful, but brazen. We should answer Joan Osborne's question, *"What if God was one of us? Just a slob like one of us?"* Friends, Jesus left Heaven to be one of us, but he was never a slob like all of us. Instead he is a perfect gentleman, the servant of all, the King of the Universe, and the coming judge. He searches our hearts with a fiery eyed love that burns through every idol to melt the hardest hearted.

Jesus' passion for mankind propelled him to warn the unrepentant that judgment is coming. He called us at our worst *"hypocrites," "blind guides," "whitewashed tombs," "murderers,"* and *"snakes!"* He warned unbelievers of sentence to *"outer darkness," "weeping and gnashing of teeth,"* suffering where the *"worm does not die,"* and *"agony!"* Spineless forms of Universalism have lost touch with the reality of human corruption and the consequences that follow without repentance. We are all summoned to stand before the almighty judge of the Universe to give account. Even the most irreverent fool will then revere Christ.

Jesus' eternal love for mankind also promises his people that *"no one can snatch [his sheep] out of his hand."* The love of Christ given to chosen mankind from even before creation is utterly inescapable! The love of God is so wide, long, high, and deep that it *"surpasses knowledge!"* In other words, God's love even partially understood *"blows our minds!"* Just consider the goodness that God has prepared for his people in eternity. *"...Scripture says: 'No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined the things that God has prepared for those who love him' "* (1 Corinthians 2:9 NOG). Just to wet our appetites, the Apostle Paul was caught up into Heaven and was not even allowed to repeat what he heard there. Even the most reverent Christian will then revere Christ even more!

Jesus spoke both words of warning and words of promise. He warned mankind about the consequences of sin in this life as well as the afterlife punishments in Hades. He also promised paradise for the believing as well as eternal glory for chosen mankind. Jesus calls the shots! Revere Jesus!

Worship Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So what does it mean to worship Jesus?

Isaiah 45:22-25 (WEB) says,

22) Look to me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. 23) I have sworn by myself. The word has gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and will not be revoked, that to me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath. 24) They will say of me, "There is righteousness and strength only in Yahweh." Even to him shall men come; and all those who raged against him shall be disappointed. 25) All the offspring of Israel will be justified in Yahweh, and will rejoice!

Though most of mankind does not know or follow Jesus, nor are they excited about him... the day is coming when every single human being will bow his knee and shout "*There is righteousness and strength only in Yahweh.*" While presently the majority of mankind knows nothing of the Lord's grace, the day is coming when all the redeemed will see the Lord face to face. Though the unbelieving will have to suffer shame for their unrepentance, they too will finally repent and join the happy crowd shouting praises to God. Note: worship sometimes gets confused with singing in church services. While singing can be a form of worship, the shouting of praises by the redeemed over Christ's final victory is more like the loud ecstatic praise at a nail biting come-from-behind victory.

Philippians 2:9-11 (WEB) says,

9) Therefore God also highly exalted him, and gave to him the name which is above every name, 10) that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, those on earth, and those under the earth, 11) and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Again every knee will happily bow in Heaven, on Earth, and under the Earth! Friends this verse is saying everyone will praise God from Heaven, to Earth, to the depths of Hades, under the Earth... that is ALL mankind!

Revelation 5:9-14 (WEB) says,

9) They sang a new song, saying, "You are worthy to take the book, and to open its seals: for you were killed, and bought us for God with your blood, out of every tribe, language, people, and nation, 10) and made us kings and priests to our God, and we will reign on the earth." 11) I saw, and I heard something like a voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousands of ten thousands, and thousands of thousands; 12) saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who has been killed to receive the power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honor, glory, and blessing!" 13) I heard every created thing which is in heaven, on the earth, under the earth, on the sea, and everything in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb be the blessing, the honor, the glory, and the dominion, forever and ever! Amen!" 14) The four

living creatures said, "Amen!" Then the elders fell down and worshiped.

Again every knee will gladly and willingly bow in ecstatic response to Christ's victory over sin and death. Get ready!

True worship of Christ is not rote or ritual. Instead, through accurate knowledge of God and persuasion about his love for ALL mankind, we throw our hats to the air in jubilation. Worship Jesus!

[< Revere Jesus](#)

[up](#)

[Optimistic Study Guide >](#)

Does God Limit His Love?

Calvinist Christians follow John Calvin of the 16th century and believe that God loves unconditionally and limits this love to a predestined subset of humanity. *Arminian* Christians follow Jacob Arminius, also of the 16th century, and believe that God offers conditional love to all humanity which is limited by our choice to accept or reject Christ. However, many other Christians believe that God loves all humanity unconditionally, but limits the duration of punishment in Hades for the unbelieving. Each limits something.

The final salvation of all mankind is defended from the Christian Scriptures at DGJC.ORG/OPTIMISM. The question of the character of God and his love for each individual and our neighbor is critical. Bible study, prayer, conversation with Christians, and the Holy Spirit are essential ingredients to learn about God and his love. Following are questions to guide your study as you search the Bible for the truth.

Bible Study Questions

1. Is the love of God a conditional possibility or an unconditional promise?
2. What does the character of God confirm about his love for humanity?
3. What is the significance that God loved us before we loved him?
4. From Genesis on when is the first and further mention of salvation promised?
5. From Genesis on when is the first and further mention of damnation threatened?
6. When are the events described in Dan 12, Mat 25, 1 Cor 15, 1 Thes 4, 2 Thes 2, and Rev 20?
7. What are *Sheol*, *Gehenna*, *Hades*, *Tartarus* (2 Pet 2:4), *Thalassa* (Rev 20:13), and *The Lake of Fire*?
8. What are the denotations of the Hebrew *olam* and the Greek *aion* and *aidios*?
9. Who did the death of Christ make atonement for, according to the Bible?
10. Why does Jesus call unbelieving Israel 'lost sheep' and even 'not my sheep'?
11. How is the second Adam, Jesus, similar and different than the first, Adam, Romans 5:12-21?
12. Is confidence in God's love equally feasible as a *Calvinist*, *Arminian*, or trusting all are saved?
13. Is confidence in God's love feasible while rejecting his unconditional love for all?
14. Does *faith* change God's heart toward us, or change our hearts toward God?
15. Does *obedience* gain God's love, or show gratitude for his unconditional love?

Four Square Salvation Evaluator

God's love?	Subset of Mankind	All Mankind
Conditional	Unknown?	Arminian?
Unconditional	Calvinist?	ALL SAVED?

Mystery?

Christian faith is not a blind leap or an unknown mystery but confident reasonable trust. God himself is our evaluator, yet is your faith founded on the facts of the person of Jesus Christ? What do you believe?

Contact Jeff for further discussion about God's victorious grace at DGJC.ORG/CONTACT

Who is Jesus Christ? What is grace? Why discipleship?

Jesus is introduced as our *“Counselor with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. And he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world”* (1 John 2:1-2 WEB). Jesus has already forgiven all mankind - believers and unbelievers. *“It is finished”* is the awesome news!

Paul explained, *“There is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace”* (Romans 11:5-6 WEB). Yet God has not chosen everyone for a changed heart to obey Jesus and trust they are forgiven with all mankind. Hard to understand sad news!

Jesus commands us to strive to *“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you”* (Matthew 28:19-20 WEB). Jesus is reaching the world through us. Time to share the good news!

If you are chosen to believe that Jesus has already forgiven all our sin and to follow him, then you have a lot to be excited about. Make it your greatest goal to intimately know him and make him known. He has wonderful plans to change you to become like him and to use you to show God's love to others.

Where do unbelievers go? How should we respond? When does punishment end?

Jesus comes, *“punishing those who don't know God, and to those who don't obey the Good News of our Lord Jesus, who will pay the penalty: eternal (aionios) destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might”* (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 WEB). Those who reject grace will be sentenced to destruction. Hades is their destiny even though their sins are forgiven, Luke 16:19-31. More sad news!

Paul responded, *“I have great sorrow and unceasing pain in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brothers' sake, my relatives”* (Romans 9:2-3 WEB). Paul would have given away his own salvation to go to Hades for them if he could have. More news of a good man!

Yet Jesus promised, *“I will build my assembly, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give to you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven; and whatever you release on earth will have been released in heaven”* (Matthew 16:18-19 WEB). Can unbelievers be released from Hades? The Greek word *“aionios”* means *“eon,” “duration,”* or *“complete”* and is mistranslated as *“everlasting”* in 2 Thessalonians 1:9. See the YLT Bible. Hades is proved to be temporary in Revelation 20:13-14, so *“aionios”* in Hades is for the *“eon”* of Hades. If you believe then you know even the sin of unbelievers is already forgiven, just like yours. More awesome news!

Finally Jesus says *“to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels’ ”* (Matthew 25:41 WEB). However, the *“duration”* of the Lake of Fire is not a mere age, but instead for *“The Ages of The Ages”* Revelation 20:10. And contrary to popular religion, the Lake of Fire is ONLY for... THE DEVIL AND HIS ANGELS. We deserve the same... except for grace!

Do all Christians believe this awesome news?

Paul warns, *“Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision. For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh”* (Philippians 3:2-3 WEB). Many are misled by the mistranslation above, but objectors claim Jesus loves them, but not all, or their *“faith”* is the reason Jesus loves them. Their confidence is in the flesh. Christians should instead simply trust Jesus loves all mankind, but Hades awaits those who reject grace.

Contact Jeff for further discussion about God's victorious grace at DGJC.ORG/CONTACT

Disciplined by the Grace of Jesus Christ

Home Bible Optimism Articles

Aion

Most Christian Universalists have observed, as I, that the Greek word "*aion*" is at times wrongly translated "*eternal*" in the English Bible when the meaning can also be "*age*", "*life*", "*entire*", "*complete*", and "*world*". To help your own study I have used the <http://www.blueletterbible.org> to find every usage of the Greek words "*aion*," "*aionios*," and "*aidios*" in the New Testament.

aion: Strong's G165 occurs 128 times in 102 verses in the Greek concordance.

aionios: Strong's G166 occurs 71 times in 69 verses in the Greek concordance.

aidios: Strong's G126 occurs 2 times in 2 verses in the Greek concordance.

My online chart lists the references to these Greek words in the World English Bible and the Young's Literal Translation along with my notes. This may help your own study of this fascinating word. Download all the New Testament 'AION' verses at...

DGJC.ORG/OPTIMISM/AION

My articles [Forever Is Not Forever? You Gotta Be Kidding Me!](#) and [Forever Is Not Forever? You Still Gotta Be Kidding Me!](#) also offer my understanding of this important subject.

< Appendix

up

Arminian & Calvin Only? >

Arminian & Calvin Only?

One thoughtful reader asked...

READER>> Why do you only compare Arminianism and Calvinism? There are many other religions and many other Christian denominations. So why do you only focus on the Arminian and Calvinist denominations?

ME>> That is an excellent question. Your question reminds me why this salvation discussion is so difficult. It is too easy to miss prerequisite concepts. First, understand that the labels "Arminianism" and "Calvinism" are not the names of particular Christian groups or denominations. Instead, these labels originated in history past to describe particular ways of thinking about salvation. There is no church of Jacob Arminius or church of John Calvin, the two men whose names have become attached to these particular views of salvation.

Instead, various Christian denominations and individual Christians throughout history have adopted one view or the other, or attempted modified views. For example, there are Baptist churches that are Arminian in their salvation doctrine and there are Baptist churches that are Calvinist in their salvation doctrine. There are also Presbyterian churches that are Arminian in their salvation doctrine and there are Presbyterian churches that are Calvinist in their salvation doctrine. There are also individual Christians within Baptist, Presbyterian, Catholic, Methodist, and all kinds of churches with an Arminian or Calvinist view of salvation, perhaps even agreeing or disagreeing with the view of their church or pastor. There are also many Christians who simply follow Jesus and are totally unaware of these distinctions.

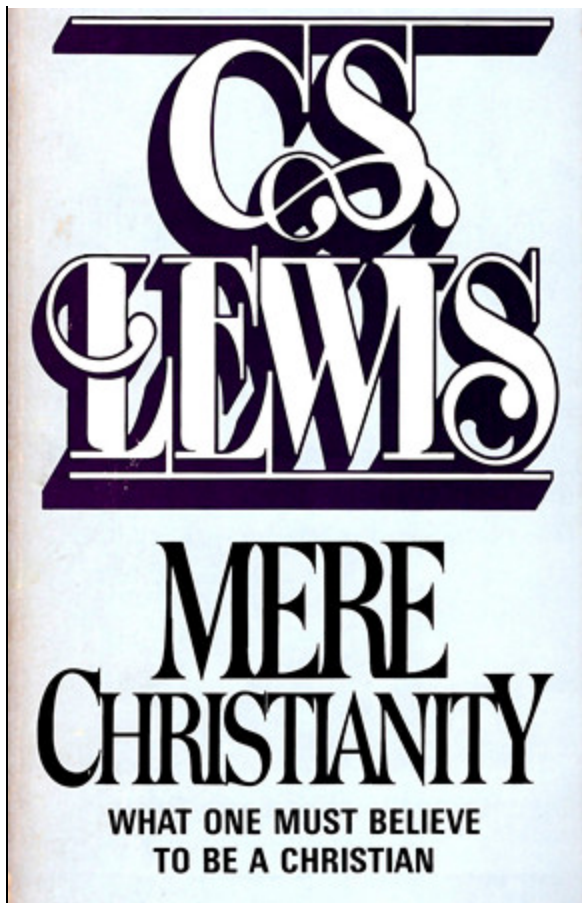
Yet even so, the salvation view of most Christian denominations and individual Christians can be categorized as either Arminian or Calvinist. Do you believe Christ paid for the sins of *ALL* mankind or only a chosen *PART*? Do you believe Christ completed *ALL* of salvation for the saved or only a *PART*? Secondly, understand that Arminianism and Calvinism are the two most common views of salvation found within Christendom. So it is fitting that any book about Christian salvation should also consider these views in the discussion. This book has simply put the magnifying glass of comparison and contrast on Arminian and Calvinist doctrine, regardless of what flavor church denomination you attend. My goal has been to help clarify the gospel of grace to you and point out the strengths and weaknesses of Arminianism and Calvinism, the most popular salvation models currently accepted.

Book Reviews

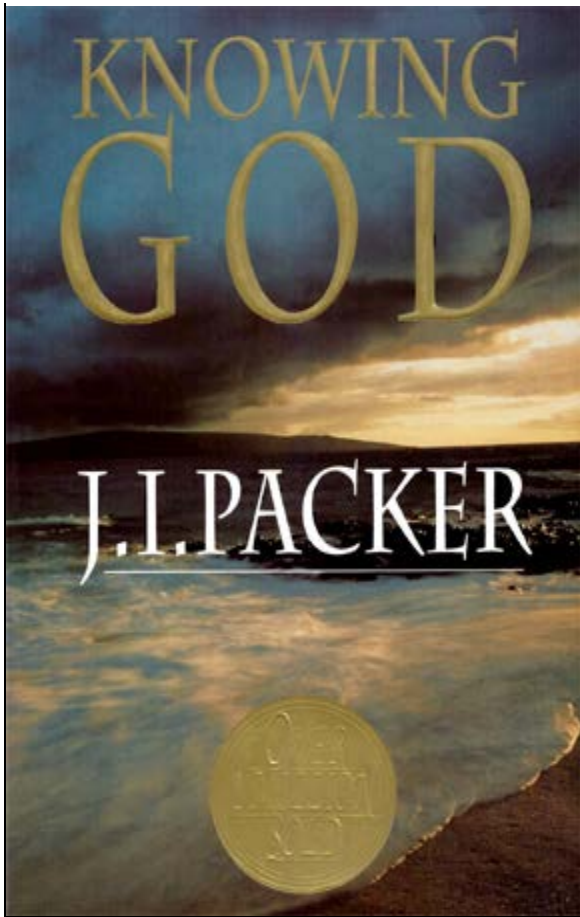
My book has mentioned other authors and their books. Friends have also asked me to read additional books to challenge my understanding. Each of the authors below has attempted to consistently and systematically answer questions about Christian salvation. The variation of conclusions is surprising and even disturbing. Read the books below ([index](#)) to learn more about the thoughts of others and of course compare them to the Bible. If you do read each book below you will see that many authors conclude that Christ will save all mankind, though each reason from their tradition. How could it be otherwise? Because of this there is still quite a range of understanding even among those that happily conclude that God saves all. Hopefully the happiness is not ruined by these differences! I have addressed some of the differences in my article, *Yes, but Even Harder Questions*.

Conventionally book writers should not write reviews of similarly themed books. The review and conclusion should be left to the audience. So please consider the notes below an introduction to books you may not be familiar with and an encouragement to read them yourself.

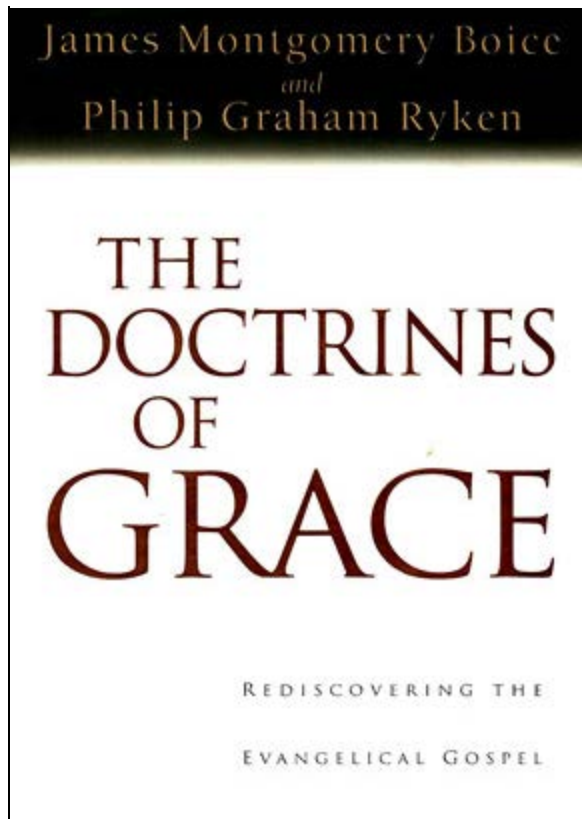
My memory is largely untrustworthy, but it is possible that this is my second time reading many of the books below. The thought occurred that a friend recommended some of these books in the past and that while reading these authors I prayed that one day, when I became a more mature Christian, that I might write my own defense of Christ's victory. I certainly have not been faithful to maintain a consistent position through the decades, and worse I have been quite hypocritical. However, I mention these things so that I can give thanks and confess... to God be the glory.



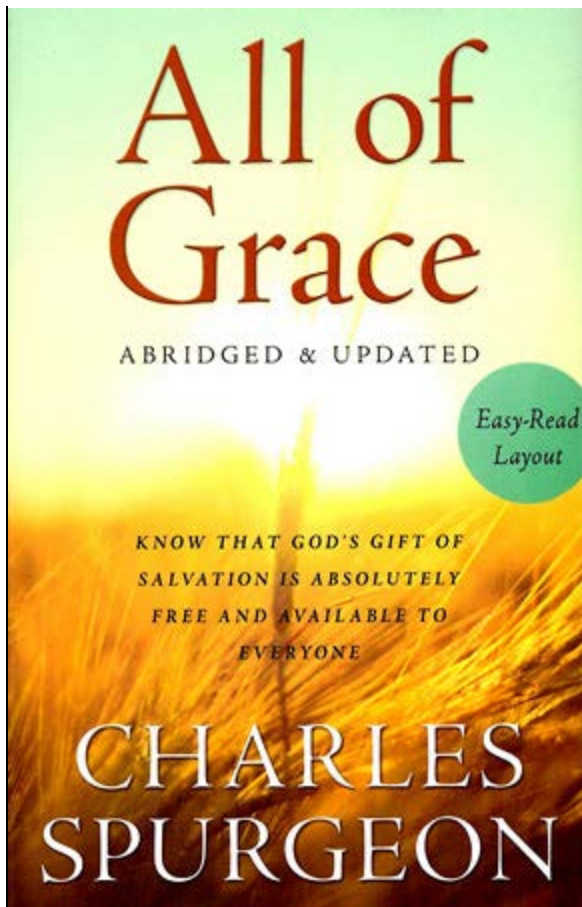
C. S. Lewis wrote *Mere Christianity*, the most popular Christian view today worldwide. He says on page 52, "God created things which had free will. That means creatures which can go either wrong or right. Some people think they can imagine a creature which was free but had no possibility of going wrong; I cannot. If a thing is free to be good it is also free to be bad. And free will is what has made evil possible. Why, then, did God give them free will? Because free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having." Lewis is the modern champion of Arminian salvation and orthodoxy, that God loves all mankind, but his "love" respects man's *free will* to reject Christ and as a result to be damned by God for all eternity. So that is one view of God's love. My article, [Other Theologians](#), offers further review of Lewis.



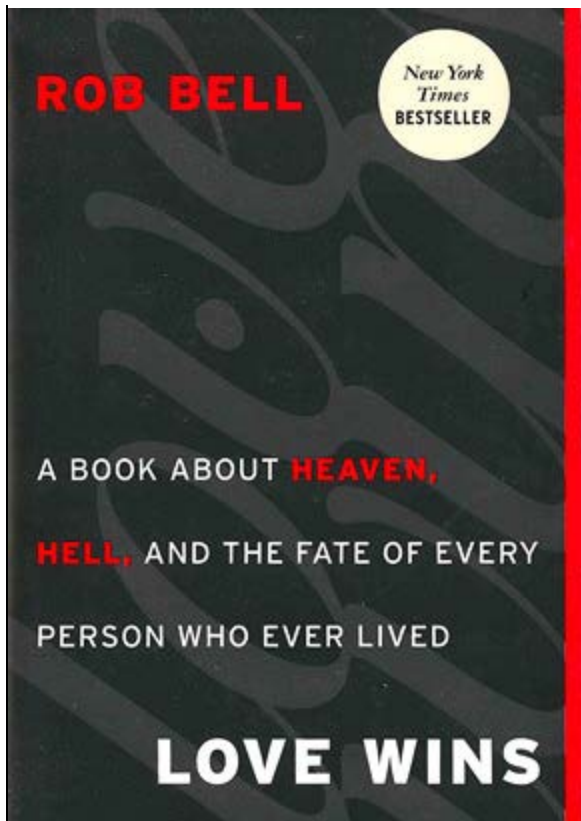
J. I. Packer wrote *Knowing God*. Packer's excellently worded volume is one of the top books that have shaped present day evangelical thought. Packer's position is classic Calvinism and he has won many to this way of thinking through his book on salvation theology. The best part about the book, however, is that strictly speaking it is not a theology book in the sense you might imagine. Instead it is simply a book about '*knowing God*' and the life changes that can be expected when one does know God. I am greatly encouraged every time I read the book... except for one point. Packer writes that God certainly does not love all mankind. He follows the traditional explanations that Christ died for all mankind, but only those also specially chosen by God's grace to be born again will place faith in Christ and be finally saved. The remainder are then instead eternally damned by God's wrath. Packer makes no mention of the eonian nature of punishment in Hades thus a haunting question remains. Can one who thinks that God does not deeply love all mankind truly know God?



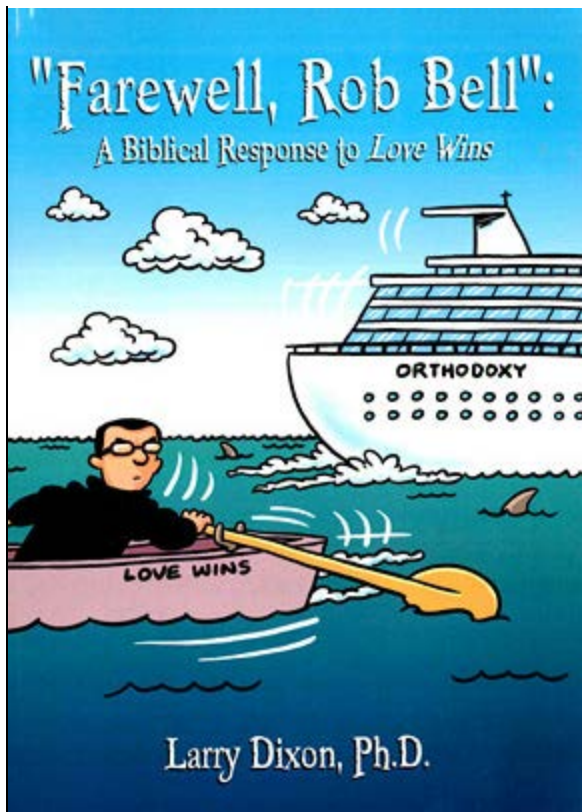
James Boice wrote *The Doctrines of Grace*, a solid defense of Calvinistic salvation. He says on page 125, *"If Jesus died for all the sins of all men, unbelief included, then all are saved, which the Bible denies. If he died for all the sins of all men, unbelief excluded, then he did not die for the sins of anybody and all must be condemned. There is no other position, save that he died for the sins of the elect people only."* Though Calvinism is not as popular as Arminianism it is a strongly held and defended orthodoxy. Calvinism concludes that God only loves a subset of mankind and his love is guaranteed to win these chosen to salvation while the majority are damned by God for all eternity. So that is another view of God's love. My article, [*Other Theologians*](#), offers further review.



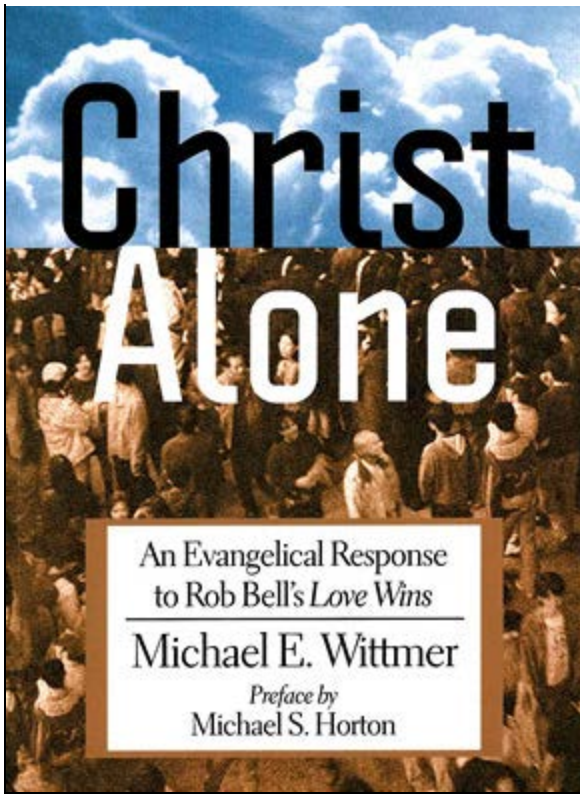
Charles Spurgeon wrote *All of Grace*. Spurgeon, called the Prince of Preachers, is one of the most respected Calvinists in history. He won many to repentance saying, "*Meet me in Heaven!*" I would easily recommend the book, yet it is not without fault. He seems to undermine grace on page 131 saying, "*The Lord does... produce new birth in all who believe,*" but instead only those who are born again can believe in the first place, 1 John 5:1. Yet he also says, "*I will go as far as Martin Luther, in that strong assertion of his, where he says, 'If any man doth ascribe aught of salvation, even the very least, to the free-will of man, he knoweth nothing of grace, and he hath not learnt Jesus Christ aright.'*" Yet sadly Spurgeon did not understand the temporal nature of punishment and that even the redeemed, if unbelieving, are punished in Hades, 2 Peter 2:1-2. But the redeemed, even if punished in Hades, will never suffer in the Lake of Fire, so his warning to escape wrath can only result in adding human conditions to God's unconditional love.



Rob Bell wrote *Love Wins*, an alternate explanation of the gospel. The desire to write my book was born after reading his book. His supposed claim that all mankind is finally saved created a national stir that prompted me to investigate his ideas to compare with my own. The spoiler is that his book is hardly definitive that all mankind is saved, but instead he thinks the saved can still choose to sin and leave God in Heaven. That is yet another view of God's love and power (or lack of power) to transform. Sadly Bell's book also lacks the precision that one might hope for in a theological treatise. My article, '[Love Wins' by Rob Bell](#), offers further review.



Larry Dixon wrote *Farewell, Rob Bell* to refute *Love Wins*. On page 14 Dixon says, "These [Bell's] statements imply that believing the gospel has no transactional effect upon the sinner, that belief is immaterial to the reality of being in the Father's love." Dixon understands Bell to say that faith does not activate or help to deposit Jesus' payment for our sin into our account. Bell understands that Jesus' payment is applied by God before we believe. Christians then are those people who believe in what God has already done for them, meanwhile the sins of unbelievers are also paid. Dixon sees this as a heretical error because he believes that "faith" plays a "transactional" role in applying Jesus' work to each individual. My article, [Three Rebuttals](#), offers further review.



Michael Wittmer wrote *Christ Alone* to refute *Love Wins*. On page 12 Wittmer explains that "...evangelicals hold that faith is an open hand, a passive receiving of God's precious gift to anyone who accepts it." Wittmer and Bell also appear to have different definitions of "faith." Unfortunately, Wittmer did not more clearly distinguish the difference between "faith" that is trust in the finished work of Christ already applied to our account versus "faith" that is the condition to activate salvation. The language of "*passive receiving*" needs further explanation. Wittmer is apparently from the Calvinist camp, but he sounds Arminian at times. My article, [Three Rebuttals](#), offers further review.

FOREWORD BY RANDY ALCORN

MARK GALLI

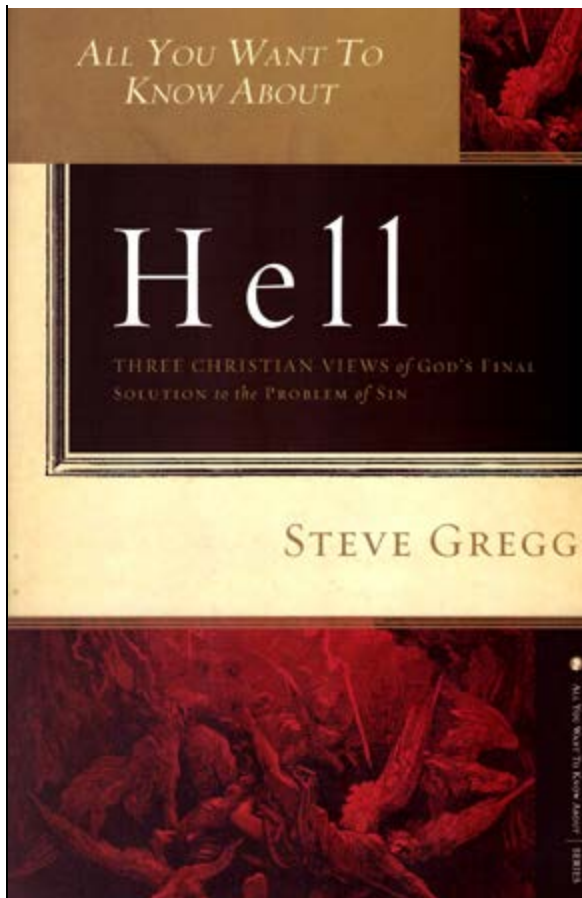
SR. MANAGING EDITOR FOR CHRISTIANITY TODAY

God wins

**Heaven, Hell, and Why
the Good News Is Better
than *Love Wins***

Discussion
Guide
Included

Mark Galli wrote *God Wins* to refute *Love Wins*. Galli says, "Universalists quote many other passages with the word 'all' in them, but in context, most of those really mean 'all Israel', or 'all kinds of people' or 'both Jews and Gentiles' will be saved. One example is found in Romans: 'God has imprisoned everyone in disobedience so that he could have mercy on everyone' (Romans 11:32). Paul has been discussing the place of Jews and Gentiles in the scheme of salvation, so clearly the 'all' here means both Jews and Gentiles - not all within each group." Galli's treatment of this important verse is too brief. The grand conclusion of grace theology deserves serious commentary. My article, [Three Rebuttals](#), offers further review.



Steve Gregg of [The Narrow Path](#), wrote *All You Want to Know About Hell*. Gregg presents an equitable description of three Christian views of Hell that have been held throughout history. Gregg does not endorse a particular view because he has not taken a position yet himself. Thus one might hope that his analysis is more balanced as a result. The three views of Hell explained in his volume are the *traditional* view that Hell is eternal punishment for the unbelieving, the *conditional* view that Hell is temporary with human immortality being conditioned upon faith, also known as annihilationism, and the *restorationist* view that Hell is temporary with the guaranteed posthumous salvation of unbelieving mankind, also known as Christian Universalism. The big surprise for today's evangelical is that all three of these views co-existed in Christian thought for the first 5 centuries! Gregg cites that of the six major schools of theology in the early centuries of the church four were *restorationist*, one was *conditional* immortality, and the last school at Rome adopted the present *traditional* view while anathematizing the *restorationists*.

LIFE TIME ENTIRETY

A Study of ΑΙΩΝ
in Greek Literature and Philosophy,
the Septuagint and Philo

Heleen M. Keizer

Dr. Heleen Keizer wrote *Life Time Entirety* to explain the meaning of the Greek word "*aion*." Her 315 page PhD dissertation shows that the Greek word "*aion*" originally denotes "*life time*," "*duration*," or "*complete life*," but not "*eternal*." This understanding is foundational for those believing that grace is victorious even for the unbelieving. Curiously Dr. Keizer completed her research and dissertation without prior knowledge of John Wesley Hanson's research. You can read her [315 page dissertation online](#) or an [abstract of her conclusions on my website](#). My article, *Forever is not Forever? You Gotta Be Kidding Me!*, offers further review.

Terms for Eternity: Aiónios and
Aídios in Classical and Christian
Texts

By
Ilaria L. E. Ramelli
David Konstan

gorgias press

Ilaria Ramelli and David Konstan wrote *Terms for Eternity: Aionios and Aidios in Classical and Christian Texts*. This highly technical volume quotes hundreds of sources from classical literature, the Septuagint, early church fathers, and church fathers after Origen to determine the meaning and usage of *Aionios* and *Aidios*. They conclude that *Aidios* nearly always means eternal in the absolute sense. *Aidios* is used twice in the Bible: Romans 1:20 concerning God and Jude 6 concerning the bonds on fallen angels. *Aionios*, however, has a range of meanings including, "life," "age," "generation," and "eon." *Aionios* can also mean "eternal," but only when God is the subject. Ramelli and Konstan concur with Keizer and Hanson and conclude saying, "Needless to say, the ethical implications of this question are profound."

THE GREEK WORD
AIÓN -- AIÓNIOS,
TRANSLATED
Everlasting -- Eternal
IN THE
HOLY BIBLE,
SHOWN TO DENOTE LIMITED DURATION.

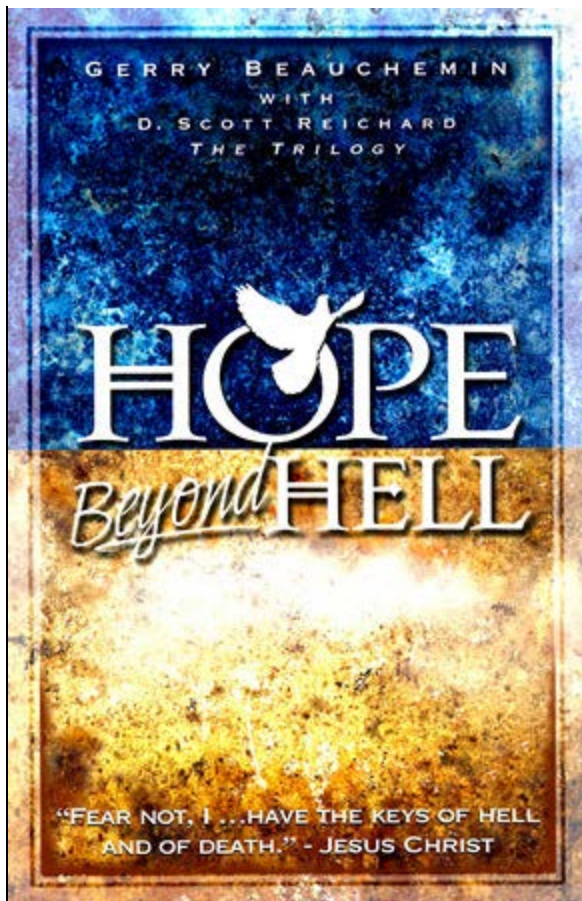
BY
REV. JOHN WESLEY HANSON, A.M.

Editor of THE NEW COVENANT

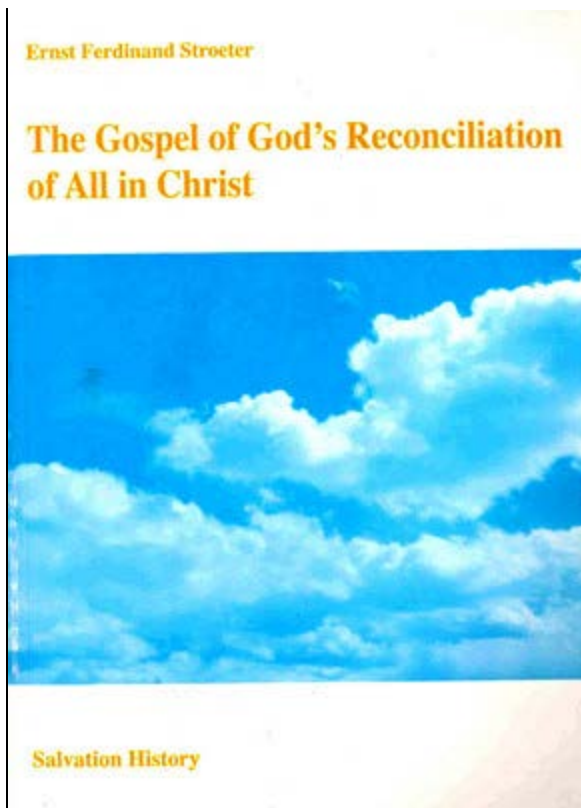
Published by:
Tentmaker Ministries and Publications, Inc.
118 Walnut Hermann, MO 65041



John Wesley Hanson wrote *The Greek Word AION - AIONIOS Translated Everlasting - Eternal in the Holy Bible Shown to Denote Limited Duration*. His classic work planted a seed of thought that gave birth to my optimistic understanding that Jesus is the savior of all mankind. I do not agree with Hanson's interpretation of every Scripture, particularly Matthew 25. Yet, Hanson cleared the way to understand that grace is completely apart from human condition and God does in fact truly love all mankind. This classic work is available for free from the U.S. Library of Congress website and also [from my own website](#). My article, [Forever is not Forever? You Gotta Be Kidding Me!](#), offers further review.



Gerry Beauchemin wrote *Hope Beyond Hell*. He offers four corrections to traditional Hell theology: the meanings of "aion," "gehenna," and "apollumi," and the error of *free will*. On page 82, he happily agrees with the Calvinists that God always accomplishes his sovereign will to save his chosen people and he also agrees with Arminians who believe that God loves all mankind. Like me he has added these two simple facts into the awesome news that Jesus is the savior of all mankind and thus there must be *Hope Beyond Hell* which he proves with Scripture. On page 165 he boldly says, "*The only way I [or you] can be truly assured I will be saved is if I believe that God saves all [mankind].*" I totally agree! Otherwise your "faith" is built on something other than grace. Beauchemin is a courageous defender of truth versus tradition.



Ernst Stroeter, a United Methodist pastor, wrote *The Gospel of God's Reconciliation of All in Christ*. He is no weak, liberal, wishful thinker with disregard for Scripture. He offers solid exegesis of Colossians 1:15-20 and the cross of Jesus Christ as proof of God's love for mankind. He says on page 168, "*we must discard the pious illusion that there is safety for us because we became believers - that we are safe because of something we did. We must shed the belief of a personal, solitary faith and learn to rest in a different way in the redeeming grace for all humankind.*" He defends the cross like no other and was persecuted for it. Stroeter does speculate further than I prefer about the salvation of fallen angels and also about eons before Genesis 1:3 and after Revelation 22:21.

The image shows the front cover of a book. The cover is a solid, dark blue color. In the upper third of the cover, the title "Christ Triumphant" is printed in a gold, serif font. The text is centered horizontally. The rest of the cover is plain blue with no other text or illustrations.

Christ Triumphant

Thomas Allin wrote *Christ Triumphant, The Larger Hope Asserted*. He argues for the final victory of Christ with Scripture, Christian reason, and the testimony of early and later church fathers. He highlights Romans 11:32 and countless other Scripture. He reasons that a god who merely offers love till the point of death followed by eternal damnation, if unbelieving, is not the gracious God of the Bible. He cites Origen, Clement, Gregory, Jerome, and many others as well as church creeds, hymns, and liturgies. Allin insists that God will salt all mankind with fire and condemn the unbeliever to Hades. However, because "*aion*" is temporal these judgments are for purification, not damnation, 1 Peter 4:6. He concludes, "*God shall be all in all!*" - Amen!

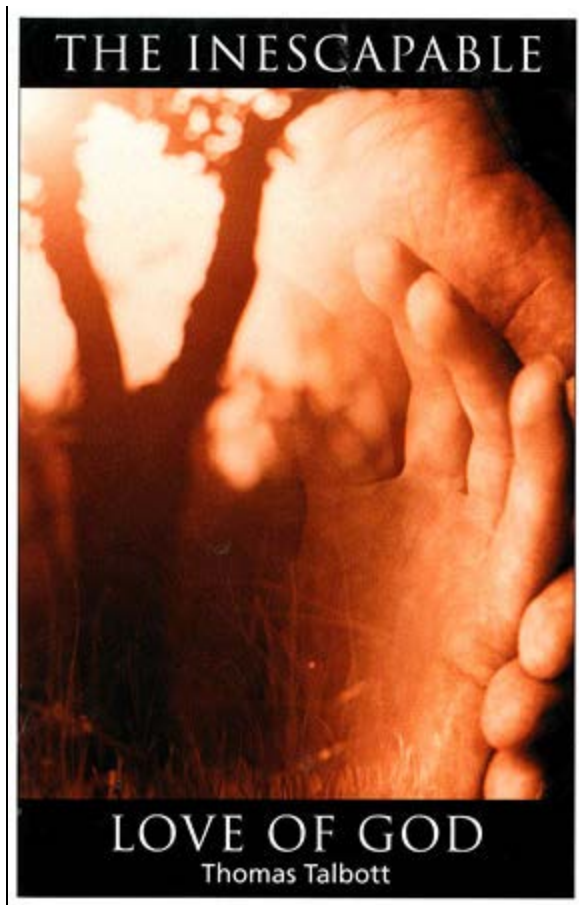
The
Evangelical
Universalist
SECOND EDITION



GREGORY MACDONALD

Foreword by PROFESSOR OLIVER CRISP

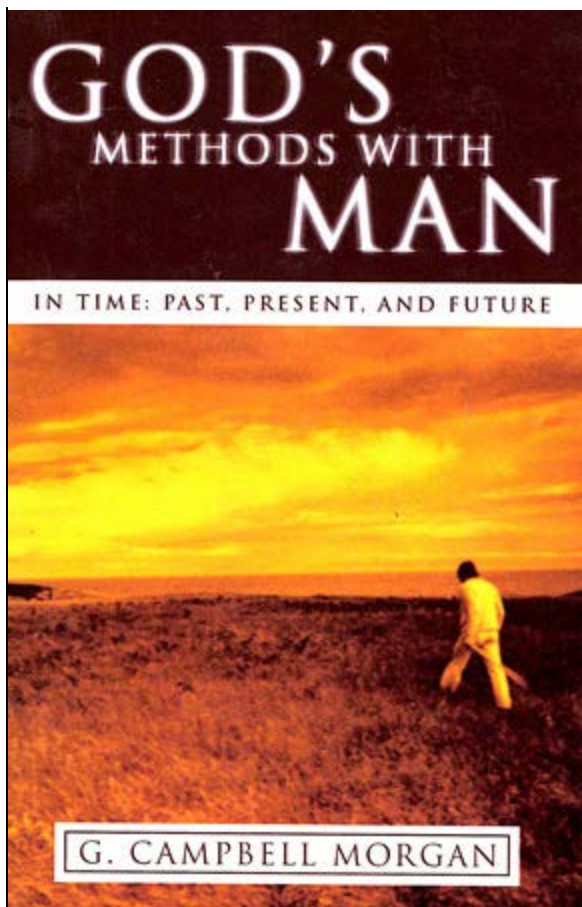
Robin Parry wrote *The Evangelical Universalist* under the pseudonym Gregory MacDonald. Parry reasons carefully as he questions traditional Hell theology. He notes that Calvinism and Arminianism are each reasonable at points, but also unreasonable. They cannot both be true and one is not preferred alone. That is why Christians are so divided over this point! Parry says on page 23, "*To my mind, Christian reason seems to lead either to Calvinist universalism, or away from Calvinism.*" So true! Also Parry and Beauchemin both agree with Hanson, that the "*aion*" of the Lake of Fire is only an age of punishment for unbelievers. Yet I still think a better explanation is that the "*aion*" of Hades is temporary punishment for unbelievers, but the Lake of Fire is for *The Ages of The Ages*, yet only for fallen angels. I highly recommend Parry.



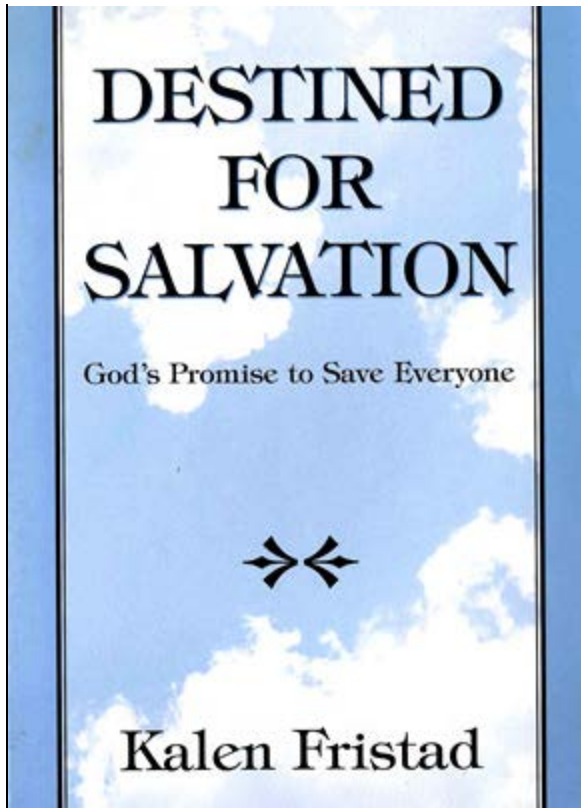
Thomas Talbott wrote *The Inescapable Love of God*. Part I & II are the most readable well stated defense of Christ as Savior of all that I have reviewed. Read it! One would have to turn off all reason and reliance on Scripture to deny his proofs. Part III, however, is more difficult to follow. He argues against a retributivist God, but he should clarify that God's holiness would hypothetically demand the eternal banishment of even the least blemished sinner... were it not for Christ. Thus the believing worship Christ for his sacrifice which now demands our salvation and transformation. This high bar is our guarantee that the redeemed will not bring even our least blemish into glory. Talbott concludes saying Christian faith is the logical wager between hope and despair. Though Christian hope is not a wager, but instead repentance from hypocrisy to confess Christ as our savior and the savior of all mankind.



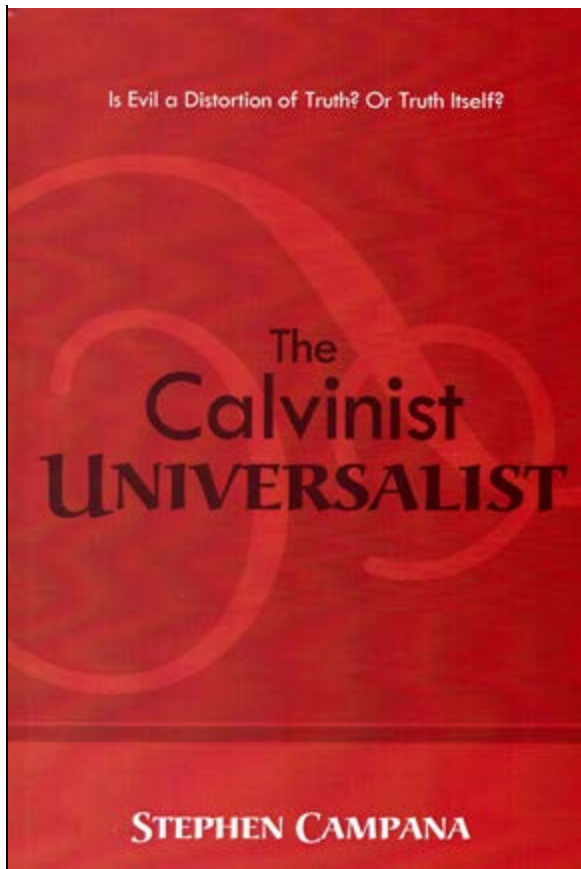
A. E. Knoch wrote *All In All*. Knoch's volume proposes a very interesting model of redemptive history with 5 distinct eons between eternity past and eternity future. I plan to study this further. Knoch's understanding of eon, eon of eons, and the eons of the eons supported his conclusion that all mankind will be finally saved. Knoch also played a key role in the compilation of the *Concordant Bible*. This Bible translates "*aion*" as "*eon*" and also consistently translates every Greek word with only one English word to help the reader observe the Holy Spirit's word choices. Knoch has much to contribute to this discussion, but unfortunately he also muddies the waters. His "*eonian*" theory is tied into the most dogmatic dispensational system I have ever seen. Knoch also parted ways with orthodoxy concerning the Trinity and the deity of Christ. Too bad. More can be learned about Knoch at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adolph_Ernst_Knoch.



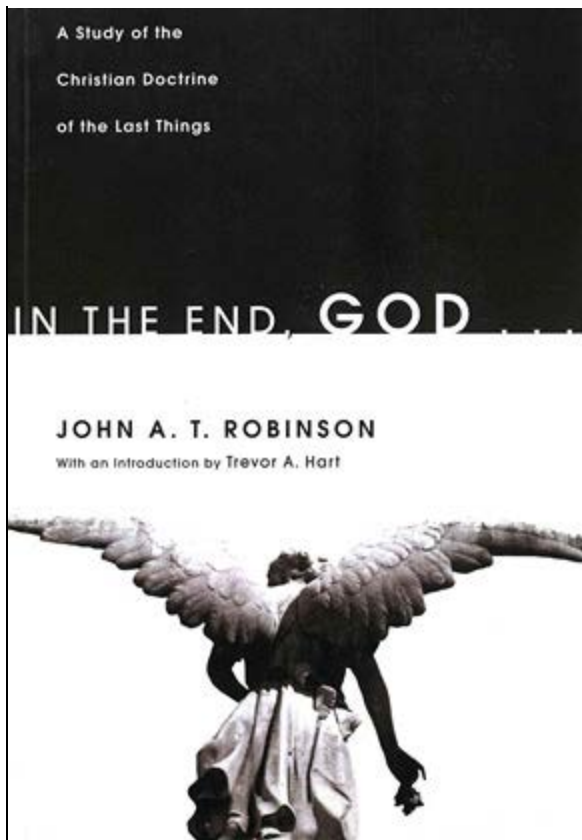
G. Campbell Morgan wrote *God's Methods with Man*, including a chart of the history of redemption. Those with a dispensational flair will be encouraged, while the remainder will be challenged. He makes critical observations of history's "aions." Morgan strongly states on page 135 that, "Names entered in the [Book of Life] are found there only by virtue of the atoning blood of Jesus Christ." This is the good news since Christ died for all mankind (+1)! He also notes that 1 Corinthians 2:7-10 says that the mystery of God's love for ALL mankind is only revealed to the church. God loves ALL, but only the church believes it (+1)! Yet somehow he also concludes that man's will can finally resist grace (-1) and oddly that there is an inner church within the church (-1). Some of Rob Bell's thoughts parallel this book. (Score: 0) My own redemptive history chart can be found in my article, [Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News!](#)



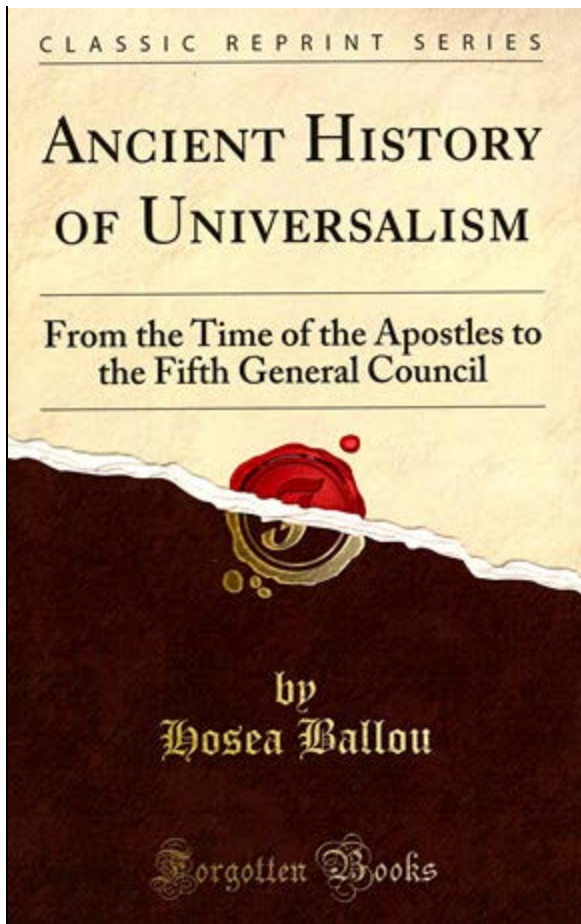
Kalen Fristad wrote *Destined for Salvation, God's Promise to Save Everyone*. Fristad argues for the salvation of all mankind with similar reasons as other evangelicals including that "*aion*" means age or a temporal duration, that man does not have *free will* to effect God's unconditional love, and that God's judgment, even in Hades, are loving acts toward his unrepentant people. On page 44 Fristad, in the gentlest way, boldly calls belief in *free will* idolatry! He also provides useful chapters on the history of Christian Universalism and strategies for sharing the good news without fear. Fristad does fail to protect the inspiration of Scripture suggesting that Luke 16:19-31 is a parable and that OT Scripture was influenced by the writer's wrong cultural views of God. However, the OT Scripture was God breathed! I recommend the book with caveats.



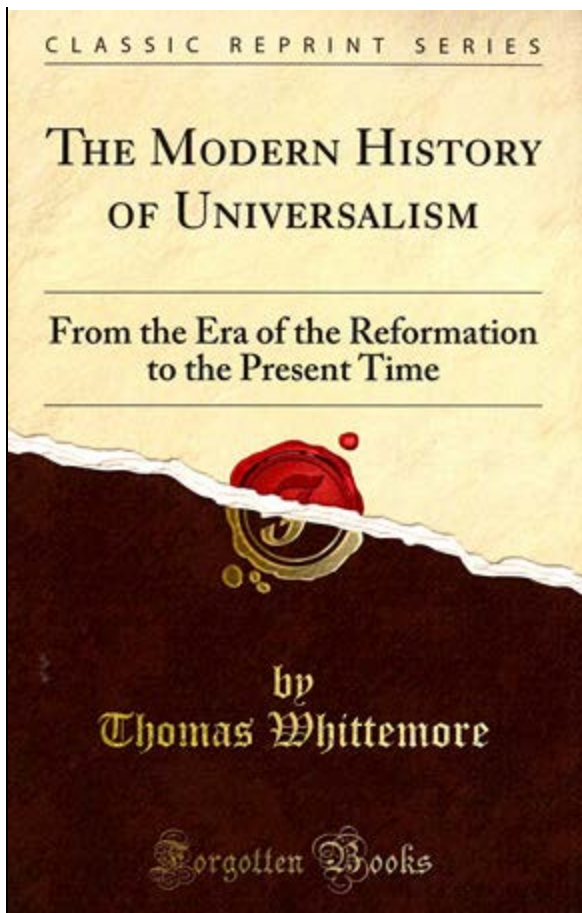
Stephen Campana wrote *The Calvinist Universalist*. He says on page 149, "...the consistent Calvinist will either embrace universal salvation or reject Calvinist election." He also considers my own conclusion that the Lake of Fire is not designed for mankind, but for fallen angels. Like me, he also asserts that mankind's fallen nature was ordained by God, NOT man's supposed *free will*. He proposes mankind was created with a sinful nature, while I propose that God subjected his sinless creation to vanity after the proclamation of 'very good', but before the rebellion of Satan and mankind. Though we agree that sin entered the world because God ordained our fallen natures which now lust to be god. Campana could more careful when describing God's sovereign and prescriptive will. Saying that God "wanted" Adam to sin does not best describe God's motives. Instead God "ordained" the existence of sin, to create the opportunity to demonstrate his grace, forgiving and leading us away from sin. While I may not agree with all Campana's arguments, he emphasizes an essential component in the defense of universal salvation, the necessity for faith to be reasonable.



John Robinson wrote *In the End, GOD, A Study of the Christian Doctrine of Last Things*. Robinson offends epistemology and inspiration so gravely with the invention of *eschatological myth* that many will throw the book away after Chapter 5, if they get that far. I nearly did myself! Yet he makes key points in chapters "*The Resurrection of the Body*," "*The End of the Lord*," and "*All in All*." He is accused of arrogance by Trevor Hart for asserting that God must save all mankind because of Christ. On that point I join Robinson! Yet Robinson missed the eonian nature of Hades and instead violates inspiration to explain Scripture. Thomas Torrance also condemns Robinson for saying the gospel includes the *mythological reality* of eternal damnation for the unbeliever. Yet Torrance is self-condemned saying the *mystery of sin* requires the damnation of unbelievers though their sins are atoned! My review continues in my article, *The Good, Bad, and Ugly of John Robinson*.



Hosea Ballou wrote *Ancient History of Universalism*. Very interesting! Today an overwhelming majority of Christians understand hope in the universal salvation of mankind to be heretical. However, this forgotten book, originally published in 1885, documents the history of Universalism from the Apostles to the Fifth General Council in 553 A.D.. Read the volume and you will be surprised to learn that many Christians held that Jesus would finally reconcile his entire creation to himself. In fact Universalism prospered until condemned by Catholic politics in 553 A.D. Origen and other early church fathers were strong voices that Christ would be "all in all" even saving Satan!



Thomas Whittmore wrote *The Modern History of Universalism*. The most surprising fact in this volume is the ample and consistent witness to Christ as savior of all mankind throughout nearly all of church history. Adherents included Calvinists, Arminians, churchmen, dissenters, Catholics, protestants, Anabaptists, Baptists, Europeans, Americans, and Internationals. Whittmore suggests that the greatest irony of the Reformation is that many protestants rejected Catholic purgatorial Hell only to embrace it again. Also a hilarious conversation is recorded between John Murray and an objector on pages 323-324 that is worth the price of the book. Murray is the Father of American Universalism. The book concludes with important theological distinctions between various Universalists.

"Other than the Bible itself, this may well be the single most life-changing book you'll ever read."

— STU WEBER —

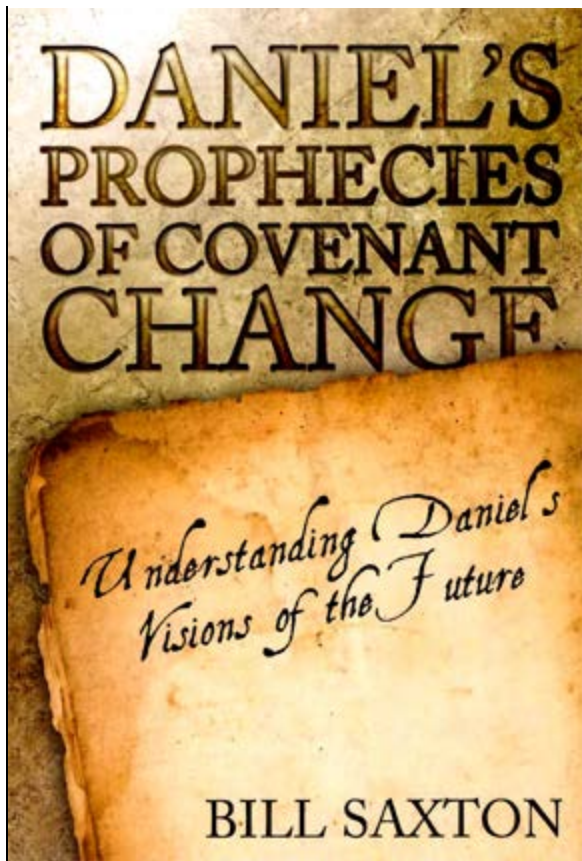
HEAVEN

OVER
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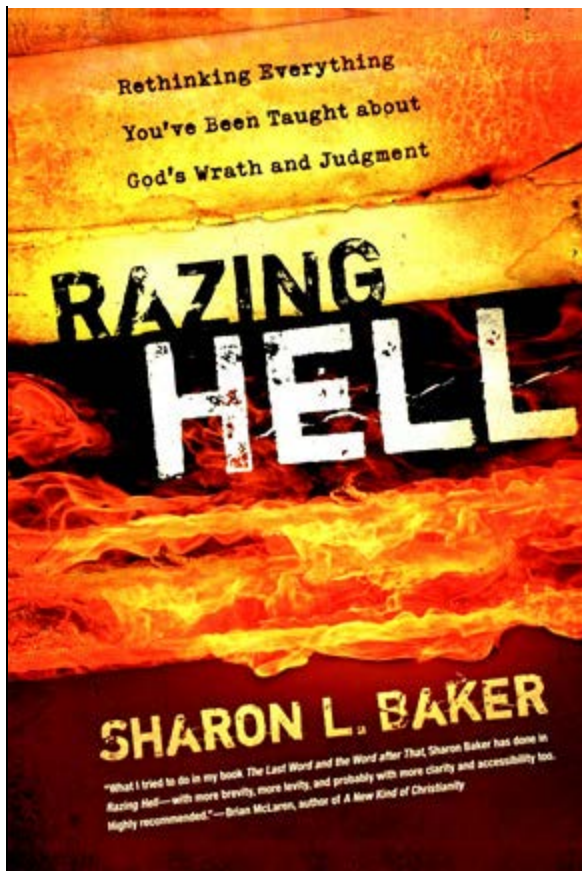


RANDY
ALCORN

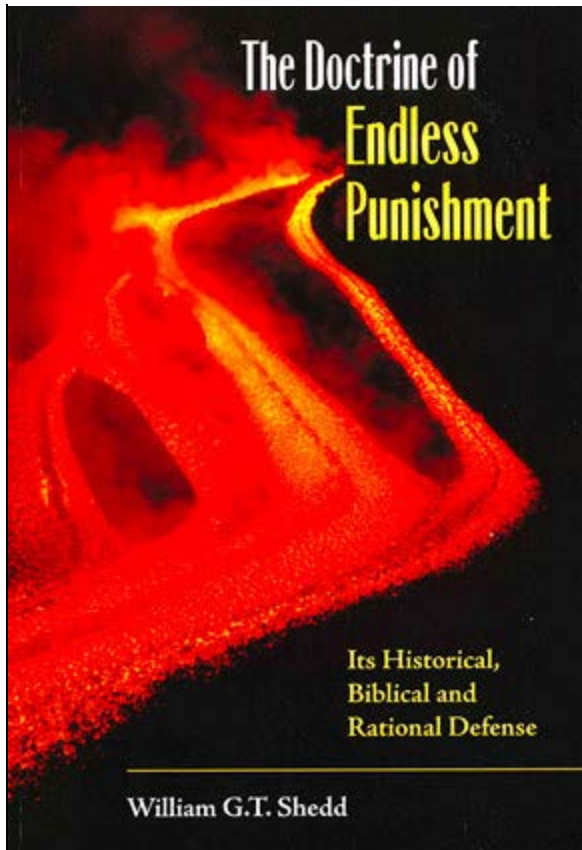
Randy Alcorn wrote *Heaven*. He rejects universal salvation siding with Arminians that "free choice" gains us Heaven. He agrees that the present Paradise and Hell are temporary. He also agrees that the Hebrew "*olam*" can mean finite duration. He uses Colossians 1:20 to assert the complete restoration of all things such as plants, animals, rocks, and stars. He even asserts the final salvation of the unborn and children because "*God in his... special love for children covers them with Christ's blood,*" page 355. If only his excitement for complete reconciliation would include unbelievers. If "*olam*" can mean finite then the Greek "*aion*" can also mean a finite time in Hell. Alcorn should trust that just like the unborn, "*God in his special love covered all mankind with Christ's blood.*" As an aside check out page 352 for speculation about sex in Heaven!



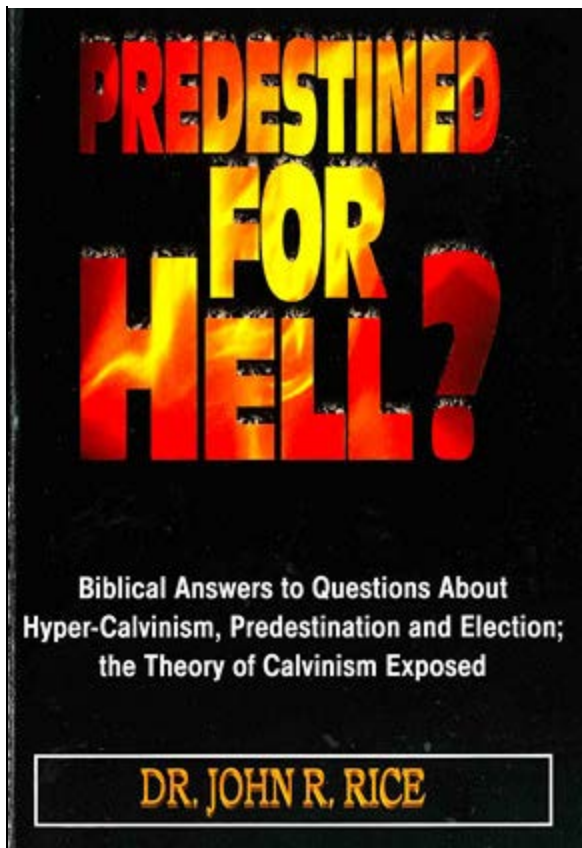
Bill Saxton wrote *Daniel's Prophecies of Covenant Change*. Saxton does not address the scope of mankind's salvation. However, he does give thorough treatment to Daniel's prophecies that relate to my proposed understanding of Daniel 12:1-4, Matthew 24-25, and Revelation. Eschatology is not my strength and so I would be glad take a wide path around these debated and divisive subjects in order to simply enjoy brotherhood trusting God with unanswered questions. Yet the grace of Christ draws me, and hopefully you as well, to search deeply into the prophesied future of mankind's redemption. Saxton does not propose a definite answer to the timing of the resurrection and judgment forecast in Daniel 12:2, but instead a possible dual meaning. Daniel 12 follows closely after Chapter 11 which he understands to detail the life of 1st century King Herod. Yet Daniel 12:1-4 also appears to speak about resurrection and final judgment. Thus Saxton has not answered all my remaining questions, but he does inspire me to strive to perfect my understanding of mankind's redemption with Biblical proofs.



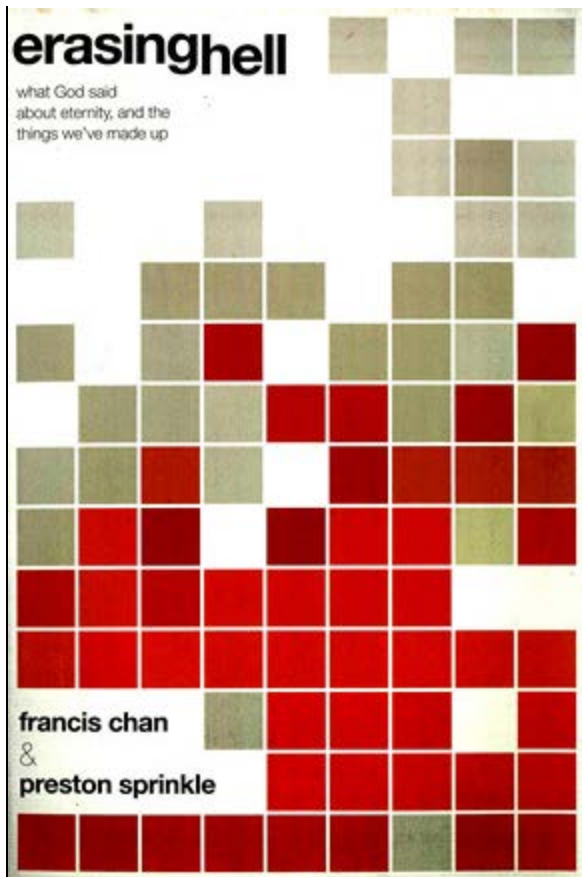
Sharon Baker wrote *Razing Hell* and is accused of Universalism. Yet, she says that people can reject Christ and chose annihilation in the Lake of Fire. She inconsistently says we are forgiven before we repent, but we must receive forgiveness to avoid condemnation. She rejects the idea that Christ's death was needed to propitiate God's wrath because that would make God evil and retributive. Since the Bible does portray God as wrathful, she concludes that these ideas are not inspired, but instead human error. Baker believes that since "*aion*" is temporal, unbelievers will get a second chance after Hell, kind of like Arminianism X 2. Her book discredits inspiration and of course "*chance*" salvation, whether first or second, denies the power of God's grace in raising the dead.



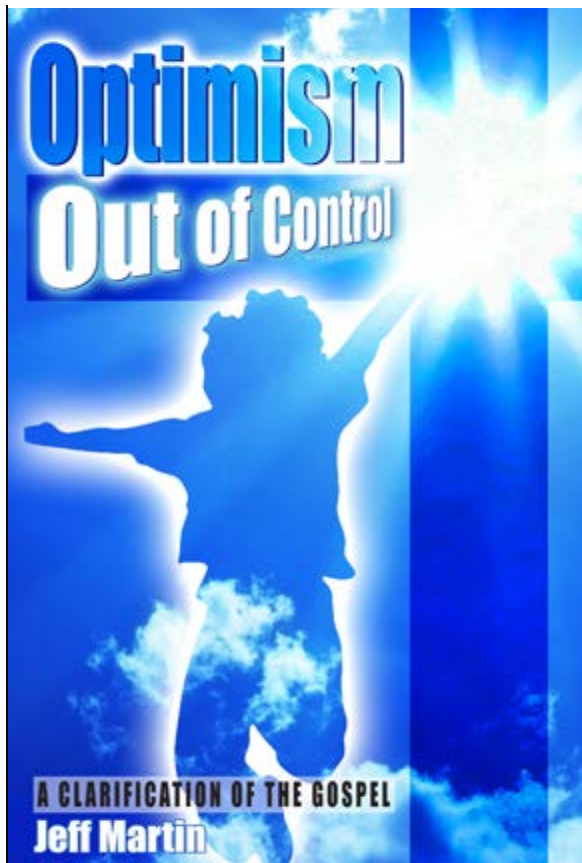
William Shedd wrote *The Doctrine of Endless Punishment*, with historical, Biblical, and rational arguments. Shedd speaks well against annihilationism and Hell as mere suffering in this life. Yet he says on page 95, "*the most dangerous [form of Universalism], is that which concedes the force of the Biblical and rational arguments respecting the guilt of sin, and its intrinsic desert of everlasting punishment, but contends that redemption from it through the vicarious atonement of Christ is extended into the next world.*" My view exactly! Shedd says there are only two "aions," the present and the next. What about the Jewish age, the church age, and the New Heavens and Earth? Shedd says if we agree mankind has *free will* then it is proved that eternal punishment is required for unbelievers. Excellent logic, but a bad premise! He also implies that we are saved or damned by our penitence or lack thereof! Mr. Shedd, where is the grace?



John Rice wrote *Predestined for Hell?* He was a well-known evangelist and founder of Sword of the Lord publishing. Rice vehemently opposed orthodox Calvinism, yet he labeled himself a Calvinist because he believed in the P of T.U.L.I.P., the perseverance of the saints. Yet he rejected the L, limited atonement. Curiously Rice also staunchly defends *free will* as the reason that any individual is saved, which is classic Arminianism. There is so much misunderstanding about these things and Dr. Rice's book simply adds to the confusion. My own thesis makes it clear that I have both a strong agreement and a strong disagreement with Dr. Rice. I wonder what he would say about the optimistic idea that Jesus really is the savior of all mankind, though unbelieving humans are punished in Hades, but not the Lake of Fire?



Francis Chan and Preston Sprinkle wrote *erasing hell*. They wrote a book of concern about modern day evangelicals who have effectively erased the warnings about Hell from their gospel. Chan does well to remind us of the need to warn the unbelieving about the punishment waiting for those who reject the grace of Christ. Yet he also disagrees with those who would hope for any kind of universal salvation of mankind. Curiously at the end of his book, Chan confesses that he cannot definitively say that Hell is eternal. I agree that a gospel that does not warn the unbeliever about punishment in Hell is not the gospel. Yet I also wonder what Chan and Sprinkle would think about the idea that unbelievers are punished in Hades, yet safely extracted out in Revelation 20:13-14?



I, Jeff Martin, wrote *Optimism Out of Control*. Like many above I have defended God's victorious grace in the final salvation of all mankind with Biblical arguments concerning 1) God's free will to save mankind, 2) mankind's lack of *free will* to save ourselves, 3) the meaning of "*aion*", 4) the temporal nature of afterlife punishment, 5) and Christ's atonement of all mankind as the Second Adam and new federal head of all humanity. These arguments are nothing new. My additional contributions to the discussion include the observation that Hades and the Lake of Fire do not the serve the same purpose. Unbelieving man is punished temporally in Hades, while the Lake of Fire is prepared to damn only Satan and his angels for The Ages of The Ages. I also observed the "*Hosea Strategy*" which is essential for a consistent Biblical hermeneutic. Jesus followed the example of Hosea as well as followed his own counsel in Proverbs to speak foolishness to the fool, calling his stubborn lost sheep, "*not my sheep.*"

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< Arminian & Calvin Only?

up

But ya gotta accept it! >

But ya gotta accept it!

OBJECTORS>> BUT YA GOTTA ACCEPT IT!

ME>> Friends, consider these questions:

WHAT "IT" DO WE HAVE TO ACCEPT?

What is the "IT" that we must accept in order to be a Christian? If I hear correctly, many are saying that we must accept Jesus' *offer* of forgiveness in order to *be* forgiven. However, there is a fundamental difference in the "IT" that must be accepted. This understanding of "IT" is not true to grace and instead is a condition to God's unconditional love. Instead, to become a believer, to become a Christian, one must accept that Jesus has already paid for our sins and has already forgiven us from the cross. What is the "IT" that we must accept? We must accept that God loved us *before* we loved him and fully paid for our sins and forgave us *while* we were yet his enemies. Are we willing to repent of *all* our self-righteousness and from every man-made condition to instead receive God's unconditional love? The history of his cross is proof of this very fact! Read the account yourself. Mankind did not accept Jesus, but crucified him, while he forgave us. But are we willing instead to accept that God loves us and *ALL* his people unconditionally and that Jesus has already forgiven all mankind from the cross before the asking? Or are we like ignorant Peter saying, "*You will never wash my feet?*" Join believing Peter and say, "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*" (1 Peter 1:3 WEB). Friend, the truth of God's forgiveness given to all mankind is plain to see. Only blindness could obscure our vision. Only a radical new birth through the Holy Spirit can open our eyes.

WHY DO WE HAVE TO ACCEPT "IT"?

When they say "*But ya gotta accept it,*" what is the *reason* that we must accept "IT"? What is the purpose, the goal, the end of this accepting? If I hear correctly they are saying that we must accept the offer of forgiveness in order to be forgiven and thus to escape the Lake of Fire. Fire insurance is their goal. Again there is a fundamental difference in the reason that we must accept Christ. Their understanding of the reason is not true to grace and instead illustrates the addition of a condition to God's unconditional love. Their understanding falls short of accepting that the elect of God have never and will never be in danger of eternal damnation. Their understanding misses God's great purpose in salvation. Though they may quickly object, asking then, what is the purpose of Christian salvation anyway? Why do we examine ourselves to see if we are of the faith? Why do we sacrifice time and money to tell others about Christ? Certainly neither time, nor money, nor all the persuasive speech in the entire world, nor any human condition, can add someone's name to the Lamb's Book of Life! Predestination teaches us that elect mankind's sin has been paid from before the foundation of the world. So then why do we have to accept that Jesus loves us and has already forgiven us if we are already forgiven?

We need to be saved from our corrupt and self-righteous hearts in order to know God as our loving Heavenly Father and begin to fellowship with him! Our hearts need to be changed toward God because God wants to be our friend. God's heart does not need to be changed toward us. He is resolute in his love! Jesus is bringing lost sheep into his fold. We also need the indwelling Holy Spirit to fight against destructive sin in our lives. Furthermore, if our hearts are not changed we will not escape punishment in Hades, nor will we even want to be in Paradise worshipping Christ until we are changed. Are we still like Adam and Eve hiding in the garden behind religion, atheism, or agnosticism? Why not hear God's voice of

forgiveness calling our names? Friends, simple confidence that God has already forgiven us and all mankind from the cross will change our hearts and prepare us for joy with Christ and ALL his people. We must accept his unconditional love to have a changed heart, to repent of our hypocrisy, to begin fellowship with Christ, and to escape punishment in Hades. Why wait? Yet unbelievers must be warned that even if they waste their lives with religion, destroy their lives with sin, and suffer an age in Hades resisting grace until the very threshold of eternal damnation, even so, not they or any human being for whom Christ died will ever enter the Lake of Fire which is prepared for... the Devil and his angels.

CONSIDER "IT"!

The religious Jews who crucified Christ did so because they hated him. Christ rejected their religion and the Jews hated him for that. Christ also befriended the Gentiles and told them they didn't need the Jewish religion and the Jews hated him for that. Friends, are we modern day "Jews" who have made a religion out of "Christ?" The gentiles likewise joined in hatred toward Christ for his claim to be the only way to God. Are we modern day "Gentiles" whose open minds are closed to the grace of God given only through his Son Jesus Christ? Yes, the name of "Jesus" is on our lips and maybe in our worship songs, but have we restricted the love of God from all mankind? Have we said God does not love all mankind along with the Calvinist? Have we added human condition to the grace of God? Have we said God only forgives those who accept Jesus along with the Arminian? If so we crucify Christ all over again no matter how much we praise Christ's name!

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[Can Such a Minority View Be True? >](#)

Can Such a Minority View Be True?

FRIEND>> *How can such a minority viewpoint be true or even worth consideration? Furthermore, Christians have translated and studied the Scriptures for 2,000 years. How can you suggest that there is a mistranslation of the word "eternal?"*

ME>> Those are excellent questions. In fact I have asked them of myself quite often over the past year. Let me give reply.

We both agree that *"narrow is the gate, and restricted is the way that leads to life! Few are those who find it"* (Matthew 7:14 WEB). However, some have complained that my understanding is not only narrow, but is the minority of an already small minority. The first point is that one should not think of my view as a minority of the minority or a sub-set of the sub-set. True believers have always been a very small minority throughout history. However, the next larger group has been the religious, and then the largest group is the a-religious. So while the repentant stand at the foot of the cross, the self-righteous and the unrighteous fall to the left and the right of true healing. So the paramount question is not how large a particular group is, but instead what is the truth? A second equally important question is whether we are believers, merely religious, or pagan? The body of religious people has always been greater than the body of true believers.

Consider Joshua and Caleb. These two men and their families were the lone believers when the scouts returned from the Promised Land in the book of Exodus. The entire family of Israelites followed the complaining and fears of the unbelieving scouts and thus were excluded from entering the Promised Land. Two people and their families are a pretty small minority out of roughly two million Israelites. In fact Hebrews 3:16 - 4:2 uses this very example to urge those that will listen to place their faith in Christ in the present generation.

You are also right to question my authority to suggest that the word *"eternal"* is mistranslated in the New Testament. I do not have formal training in Greek or Hebrew. I could not even recite the Greek alphabet in order. Yet I have been compelled by grace to answer the question of the extent of God's grace toward not only myself, but also my fellow human beings. Through study of the Greek lexicon on my shelf and critical online resources, I do not only suggest, but assert that the Greek words *"aion"* and *"aionian"* never mean simple eternal time, but instead most definitely mean *"age," "eonian," "entire,"* or *"complete."* This observation alone should be motivation for every Christian to at least reconsider the great question of the final salvation of our fellowman. Everyone in the least acquainted with saving grace and God's unconditional love ought to be driven to muster their greatest energies to learn about the extent of God's love for others. I do not find tradition a safe place to stand, especially, in light of history. Do you?

Of course if you do not find my Greek research trustworthy, I am not offended. But please check out John Wesley Hanson's classic 1875 work titled, *The Greek Word Aion-Aionios translated Everlasting-Eternal in the Holy Bible Shown to Denote Limited Duration*. This classic work is available for free from the U.S. Library of Congress website and also [from my own website](#). Dr. Heleen Keizer has also written a dissertation proving the same titled, *Life, Time, Entirety - A Study of Aion in Greek Literature and Philosophy, the Septuagint and Philo*. You can read her [315 page dissertation online](#) or an [abstract of her conclusions on my website](#). [Young's Literal Translation](#) also properly translates the Greek word *"aion"* as *"age."*

Compatibilism is the Answer? (AKA Molinism)

FRIEND>> Compatibilism is the answer! Your arguments pit God's sovereignty against man's free will. That is the error of your thinking because these ideas can co-exist and they are compatible.

ME>> So you say... and actually *compatibilism* is the majority view held by both the schooled and unschooled theologian alike. A basic explanation of compatibilism can be found at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Compatibilism>. Compatibilism really is a variation of the 16th century heresy, Molinism, explained at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Molinism>. Both attack the sovereign grace of God so that man can be god of his own salvation.

Those that hold this view should at least consider the challenge of Martin Luther in his book, *Bondage of the Will*. Frankly, most American Protestants do not even understand the heart of Luther's Reformation and the contest that was at stake for the gospel of grace at that time. Luther strongly stated, "*If any man doth ascribe aught of salvation, even the very least, to the free-will of man, he knoweth nothing of grace, and he hath not learnt Jesus Christ aright.*" Sadly many protestant churches pride themselves claiming to hold the true gospel, while thinking that Catholics fall short. The truth is, however, that both Catholicism and American Protestantism continue to make the same mistake that Luther tried to correct! I find this misguided Protestant finger pointing to be offensive and massively hypocritical. Luther's book, *Bondage of the Will*, is a must read for this generation. I have also written my own short article on the same subject, *A Quintessential Defense of FREE WILL*.

Why do Christians continue to cling to their own supposed *free will*, instead of clinging to the gracious free will of the Savior? Why would we be so motivated to invent such an odd word as "*compatibilism*" to defend the incompatible? Why not instead seek the Lord, even pound on the doors of heaven for a better answer? Why not consider the happy truth that Christ willed to pay for the sins of *ALL* mankind completely apart from our will? The cursing of Peter makes it abundantly clear that *no one* freely willed that Christ die on the cross to pay for our sin except our gracious God himself, Matthew 26:74. Perhaps you are cursing too?

Did John Calvin Originate Calvinism?

READER>> *Did Calvinism Originate with John Calvin?*

ME>> Actually, John Calvin did not originate Calvinistic thought. The roots of Calvin's theology are also evident in the theology of Saint Augustine, a most famous Catholic priest from the 4th Century. This is a very curious fact considering that the Catholic Church then condemned Calvin and some of the Reformers for holding to Augustine's theology in the 16th Century! Sadly Christians have gone back and forth from *Calvinism* to *Arminianism* through the centuries because neither theologies find complete support from the Scriptures. As far as the understanding of Augustine and Calvin, there appear to be some differences, but the essence of "*Calvinism*" is shared by both these men.

Saint Augustine

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustine_of_Hippo

<http://www.theopedia.com/Augustinianism>

John Calvin

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Calvin

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calvinism>

Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News!

READER>> *What is your view of eschatology?*

ME>> *Eschatology* is one of the most difficult and dividing sciences in Christian theology. *Eschatology* is the part of theology concerned with death, judgment, and the final destiny of the soul and of mankind. *Eschatology* is simply the study of future good news! The challenge is understanding and interpreting Biblical prophecy about the future of mankind's redemption. The bold claim of the *Optimism Out of Control* book is the complete and final salvation of all mankind. This claim, if reasonable, must then be consistent with Biblical prophecy about the future of mankind's redemption.

So how and when will Jesus return? What future hope remains for mankind's redemption? G. Campbell Morgan wrote *God's Methods with Man*. He and many others have designed various charts of the history of redemption. Motivated by these charts and studying the Bible, I propose my own chart of the history of redemption below.

Unfortunately just like other areas of discussion, not all Christians agree. So there are several main veins of thought to consider. They are each oriented around different understandings of Jesus Christ's return with respect to the 1,000 year epoch before the Great White Throne Judgment described in Revelation Chapter 20. The major views are summarized as follows:

1. **Dispensational Pre-Millennialism, Future**
 1. The literal 1,000 year epoch remains still future.
 2. Christ will return physically to inaugurate the Millennial Kingdom.
 3. Old Covenant worship will be revived to fulfill Old Testament prophecy.
 4. Commended for insisting there is future hope for ethnic Israel.
 5. Anti-Christian for reviving the Old Covenant after the glorious New Covenant.
 6. Endorsed by Darby, Scofield, Ryrie, and others.
 7. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dispensationalism>
2. **Non-Dispensational Pre-Millennialism, Future**
 1. The literal 1,000 year epoch remains still future.
 2. Christ will return physically to inaugurate the Millennial Kingdom.
 3. Christ will reign on earth as New Covenant King to further demonstrate grace.
 4. Commended for not reading external meaning into Biblical symbols.
 5. Can neglect the relevance of Old Testament symbols and first century context.
 6. Endorsed by Spurgeon, Schaeffer, Erickson, and others.
 7. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historic_premillennialism
3. **A-Millennialism, Present**
 1. The figurative 1,000 years from Christ's first to second advent, the Church Age.
 2. Christ will return after the Church Age to inaugurate the New Heavens and Earth.
 3. Christ reigns from Heaven now and will reign physically on earth then.
 4. Commended for navigating toward the simplest sensible model.
 5. Yet if Isaiah 65:20 is the final New Heavens and Earth why is there death?
 6. Endorsed by Augustine, Hoekema, Riddlebarger, and others.
 7. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amillennialism>
4. **Realized Post-Millennialism, Past**
 1. The literal 1,000 year epoch was the Church Age to the Great Schism, 1054 A.D..
 2. Christ will return in the future to inaugurate the New Heavens and Earth.
 3. Christ reigns from Heaven now and will reign physically on earth then.
 4. Commended for similar simplicity with A-Millennialism.
 5. Stretches the timing of Revelation 20:7-15 from 1054 A.D. to Christ's return.
 6. Endorsed by some Roman Catholics and others.
 7. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East-West_Schism
5. **Post-Millennialism, Future**
 1. The literal 1,000 year epoch remains still future.

2. Christ reigns through Gospel Victory to usher in the Millennial Kingdom.
3. Christ will return after the Millennium to inaugurate the New Heavens and Earth.
4. Commended for great hope and optimism in the power of the gospel.
5. Can neglect that gospel progress proceeds at the pace of God's choosing.
6. Endorsed by Calvin, Boettner, Rushdoony, and others.
7. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postmillennialism>

6. Variations of the Above Can Include

1. Partial Preterism like Christ's judgment on Jerusalem in 70 A.D., Matthew 24:15.
2. Prophecies about repentant Israel's special roles still future, Isaiah 66:12.
3. Optimistic, pessimistic, or realistic outlooks for the temporal future.
4. Ranges of Biblical interpretive methods from literal to symbolic.
5. Short and long range prophecy as well as dual fulfillment, Matthew 24:3.
6. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_eschatology
7. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_eschatological_views

7. Full Preterism (all prophecy is fully realized)

1. The 1,000 years is the figurative span from Christ's first advent to 70 A.D..
2. Christ's second coming was his judgment on Jerusalem in 70 A.D..
3. Christ reigns as king in Heaven with no future physical coming prophesied.
4. Commended for observing that prophecies may already be fulfilled.
5. "*Blessed Hopelessness*" for saying that all prophecy is already fulfilled, Titus 2:13.
6. Endorsed by Alcasar, Preston, Harden, and others.
7. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Preterism>

The views above are listed on a continuum from Old Testament promises not yet realized to New Testament promises completely realized. The Dispensational and Full Preterist views are understood to fall outside of Christian orthodoxy. Yet since eschatology is such a difficult subject matter Christendom has been more or less accommodating to each of the other views. A more thorough study and explanation could take volumes and even after studying numerous volumes myself I find it hard to determine the matter with the confidence I would prefer.

Ezekiel confronted the pride of the King of Tyre prodding that he was "*wiser than Daniel*." Yet Daniel had the wisdom to confess after receiving prophetic visions, "*I heard, but I didn't understand*," (Daniel 12:8 WEB). I confess that I hear, but do not understand as clearly as I would prefer. Yet Jesus still urges us, "*let the reader understand*," (Matthew 24:15 WEB). So we seek understanding.

In the end I am convinced that my primary thesis, that all mankind will be finally saved, can be consistently integrated with many of the proposed views above. Though one's understanding of Jesus' words "*this age*", "*the age to come*", and "*the ages to come*" will of course be different according to one's preferred framework. We also know that conflicting frameworks cannot all be right. Certainly all of the proposed models above miss the mark to some degree, some more and some less. This is unsettling. I wish I could add a more definite view of eschatology to the defense of my thesis. Yet, even so, my list of proofs in the body of *Optimism Out of Control* are more than sufficient evidence of God's love for all mankind, at least enough evidence for me.

That said, I will share my current understanding about Christ's promised return in order have greater appeal to my reader through my transparency. As a simple church goer I held the Pan-Millennial view, that is it would all "*pan out*" in the end. I still hold this view! After coming to faith I initially held to the Non-Dispensational Pre-Millennial Future understanding. Then, frankly while working on this book I moved to the A-Millennial or Church Age understanding. The good news is that the next major event anticipated for both of these views is the return of Christ. So whatever confusion remains now will certainly be cleared up then! Since my understanding has recently changed I ask your patience if you discover inconsistencies in my words.

Several observations have pointed me to the A-Millennial or Church Age model of understanding. *First*, Revelation 20:1-6 does not say anything about the Millennium being a supernatural time of peace, but simply that Satan is restricted from deceiving the nations. Since 1 Peter 5:8 warns us that Satan is prowling around seeking to devour individuals, Revelation 20:3,8 could simply be saying that Satan is restricted from rallying the nations against Christ's people. *Second*, Isaiah 65:17-25 and 66 are explicitly prophesying about the New Heavens and Earth, not a Millennial Kingdom. Admittedly Isaiah 65:20 does not appear to fit the New Heavens and Earth because of its mention of child birth and death. However, the explicit identity of this forecast is not the Millennium, but the New Heavens and Earth. *Third*, Ezekiel's temple and the river that flows from it are clearly a picture of the infinite love, grace, and mercy found in Jesus Christ. A literal display of Ezekiel's temple and river would not even fit on the planet! Models that insist in the revival of Old Covenant temple worship to satisfy Ezekiel's and other Old Testament prophecy have missed the main point of the book of Hebrews. These models also miss the Holy Spirit's use of Old Testament symbol hyperbole to point to the glory of Christ's first advent. *Fourth*, Matthew 24:3 lists two or three questions from the disciples. Thus, it is no stretch at all to see that Jesus' answer includes both partial preteristic statements about his coming judgment on Jerusalem in 70 A.D. as well as his second coming in glory as reigning king at the end of the Church Age. *Fifth*, Jesus warns that blasphemy of the Spirit in Matthew 12:30-32 will not be forgiven in "*this age*" or "*the coming*." Universalists commonly understand that unbelieving humans will suffer in the "*coming age*" of the Lake of Fire, but then eventually be saved even from there. Since, I hold that humans will never enter the Lake of Fire then what is "*the coming*" age? As a Pre-Millennialist the answer was the coming Millennial Kingdom. However, now as an A-Millennialist "*this age*" could instead refer to the end of the Jewish Age, while "*the coming*" is the Church Age.

Sixth, the living, reigning, and first resurrection of the saints in Revelation 20:4-5 is often understood to be the physical resurrection at a Pre-Millennial rapture. However, the passage is just as easily understood to be the spiritual resurrection to new life as a Christian. Also the Holy Spirit is encouraging us that Christians who are terribly martyred have not lost, but are victors in Heaven until we will meet them again in glory. *Seventh*, while Preterism makes essential points that Christ did come in judgment on Jerusalem in 70 A.D., Full Preterists make a gross error negating Christ's promise to return in the body to consummate the marriage to his bride, John 14:3 and Acts 1:11. So reasonable explanations can be found for the A-Millennial Church Age understanding while defending the universal salvation of all mankind.

Below is my proposed chart of redemptive history with twelve categories of people, eight ages of redemptive history, and the location of these people during each era. Please note that I do not list twelve and eight divisions as if they were special numerical divisions as some forms of Dispensationalism attempt. Instead these categories are simply for illustrative purposes. The chart shows the distinction between the redeemed and the unredeemed, that is mankind versus fallen angels, as explained in my article, *Revelation 20:10*. The chart below also shows the distinction between Hades, Tartarus / Thalaasa, and the Lake of Fire, that is temporal punishment versus damnation for *The Ages of The Ages*, as explained in my article, *2 Thessalonians 1:6-10*. Understanding this is a great hope for those trusting that Christ has paid for the sin of all mankind.

The chart is complex. For the best reading strategy choose a category of people and follow their location horizontally across the ages of redemptive history. Alternatively choose an age of redemptive history and consider the locations vertically down the categories of people. Do you know who you are? Where you are? What time it is?

Where?			When?						
			Innocence		Fallen			Glory	
			Eternity Past	4000 BC Creation	Fall to Sin No Law	1500 BC Moses' Law	Advent of Christ 0-33 AD	Church Age Kingdom Age	Great White Throne
Who?	God	Father	God's Perfect Fellowship	God's Perfect Fellowship with Adam in the Garden of Eden	Living in Unapproachable Light, 1 Timothy 6:16			God's Perfectly Restored Fellowship with All Mankind in the Holy City	All Restored
		Son			Pre-Incarnate, John 8:58	Incarnate, John 1:14	Paradise, Luke 23:43		
		Holy Spirit			John 10:30	Everywhere, Psalm 139:7	Indwelling Believers, John 14:17		
	Mankind	Living Mankind	No Fall No Death	Gen 1:31	Serving the Savior or Satan on Earth, Ephesians 2:1-5			No Hades No Dead	Rev 20:3
		Deceased Believing Mankind			Blessed in Paradise, Luke 16:22				
		Deceased Unbelieving Mankind			Punished in Hades until the final judgment, Luke 16:23 and Rev 20:13				
	Holy Angels	No Creation	Serving Mankind at God's Command, Hebrews 1:14						
		No people	Imprisoned in Tartarus, 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6			Fallen			

Angels	Fugitive Angels	Gen 1:1	No Fall	Rebelling Against Christ Accusing Mankind 1 Peter 5:8 and Revelation 12:10	Thalaasa, Rev 20:13	Lake of Fire Prepared for the Devil and his Angels Mat 25:41 Rev 20:10	Angels Forgiven?
	First Beast Demon		No Unholy Angels		Lake of Fire Revelation 19:20		Col 1:20 Yes?
	False Prophet Demon		Gen 1:31		Abyss Revelation 20:2		Heb 2:16 No?
	Satan						

The basis for this chart is several critical observations from Scripture. ([printable version](#))

First, Hades, Tartarus / Thalaasa, and the Lake of Fire are not the same place according to Luke 16:23, 2 Peter 2:4, Jude 6, and Revelation 20:13-14. Furthermore, both Hades and Tartarus / Thalaasa, a prison for demons being held for future judgment, are temporary locations, emptied of their unbelieving human inhabitants as well as their imprisoned demons at the Great White Throne Judgment. Punishment in Hades is distinct from condemnation in the Lake of Fire because Hades is for an *Age* whereas the Lake of Fire is for *The Ages of The Ages*. Punishment in Hades is also distinct because God cares for the unbelieving humans punished in Hades (Psalm 139:8 and 1 Peter 4:6). However, God does not appear to care for Satan (Genesis 3:15 and Hebrews 2:16), and damns fallen angels to the Lake of Fire for *The Ages of The Ages* (Matthew 25:41 and Revelation 20:7-10).

Second, Christ has redeemed all mankind, believing and unbelieving, as the second Adam, our vicarious substitute. (See Romans 5:12-21, Romans 11:32, and 1 John 2:1-2.) However, he has apparently not redeemed fallen angels (Hebrews 2:16).

Third, faith does not cause redemption, but faith receives the redemption already given at the cross by the death of Christ (Romans 5:10). Faith is repentance from self-righteousness to receive Christ's righteousness already given (Romans 1:17 and Ephesians 2:8). *Free will choice* is not the condition to God's unconditional love, but a changed heart is happy to trust in God's unconditional love (John 3:3).

Fourth, the believing redeemed will join Christ in paradise after death (Luke 23:43) and will be resurrected at Christ's return to rule with him again on Earth (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 and Revelation 20:4). The unbelieving redeemed will suffer in Hades if they do not repent from their self-righteousness and receive grace through faith (Luke 16:23 and 2 Peter 2:1), and apparently they will stay in Hades until the Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:5). Though 1 Peter 3:18-20 and 4:6 might suggest that new life can be realized even for some in Hades. Christians and perhaps all mankind will also need to stand before Christ at the Bema Seat Judgment as explained in Romans 14:10-12 and 2 Corinthians 5:10. I am not sure of the timing of this event or whether it is a personal or group interview with Christ. We should make ourselves ready.

Fifth, the Lake of Fire, the second death, is prepared for the Devil and his Angels, not Mankind, as explained in my article, [Matthew 25:31-46](#). Furthermore, it is wrongly assumed that the judgments in the Bible are for humans only and divide believer from unbelievers, when instead some of these judgments include both humans and fallen angels and divide the sheep from goats (Matthew 25:41, 2 Peter 2:4, Jude 6, and Revelation 20:7-15). Some conclude that even Satan and his Angels will be redeemed based on the "all" of Colossians 1:20. This is a small difference with my understanding. We all can see that the pages of the Bible end with those named in the Lamb's Book of Life enjoying God's presence for a blessed eternity. I and many others have also argued that those finally saved are all Mankind by means of Christ's atonement (1 John 2:1-2 and Revelation 20:15). The pages of the Bible also end with Satan's head crushed, as promised in Genesis 3:15, and with the fallen angels cast into the Lake of Fire for *The Ages of The Ages* (Revelation 20:10). If grace is ever extended to Satan, it is not explicitly stated in the Bible. Obviously the chart above is fairly comprehensive, but it does not include every concept. For example at one point in history Satan had direct access to God's throne (Job 1:6) but at another point in history he is denied this access (Revelation 12:7-12).

Sixth, Peter said in Acts 3:21 (WEB), "whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God spoke long ago by the mouth of his holy prophets." The Greek word translated as "restoration" is "apocatastasis" which Thayer's Greek Lexicon defines as, "the restoration of that perfect state of things that existed before the fall." Ilaria Ramelli and David Konstan point out in *Terms for Eternity: Aionios and Aidios in Classical and Christian Texts* that "aion," typically translated "eternal" in the English New Testament, instead generally means "age" or "eon." They also note that the definitive Greek word for eternal, "aidios" is only used twice in the Bible: once in Romans 1:20 concerning God and once in Jude 6 concerning the bonds on fallen angels. Since Ramelli and Konstan argue even for the salvation of Satan they conclude that "aidios" in Jude 6 must mean transcending the ages, but not finally eternal. They reason that these demons are being "held for judgment" and thus there must be an end to these "aidios" bonds after their judgment. However, it could also be that these demons with "aidios" bonds are held in Tartarus / Thalaasa to be extracted for sentencing at the Great White Throne Judgment and then with the "aidios" bonds still on they are cast into the Lake of Fire. Thus they are held for judgment, but the "aidios" bonds are not released as they are cast into the Lake of Fire. This is one data point for the argument that fallen angels are eternally damned.

Further, if the Sheep and Goat Judgment of Matthew 25 is synonymous with the Great White Throne Judgment of Revelation 20 and with the Great Judgment Day of Jude 6 for the imprisoned angels, then it is clear that the goats are held for judgment and further sentenced to the Lake of Fire. So the "*aidios*" bonds do not end at the Great Day of their judgment, but continue further. How much further? Is the "*apocatastasis*" fulfilled with the final salvation of mankind at the Great White Throne Judgment? Or is there further fulfillment of the "*apocatastasis*" with the salvation of the Devil and his angels sometime after *The Ages of The Ages* beyond the pages of Scripture?

The point is that our lover, Jesus Christ, is currently away, but he is returning and has told us many things about his future plans to "*make his enemies a footstool*" and to return for his bride, the church, and to consummate eternity with the final salvation of all mankind. Biblical Christianity offers great hope for mankind! Do not settle for anything less!

[< Did John Calvin Originate Calvinism?](#)

[up](#)

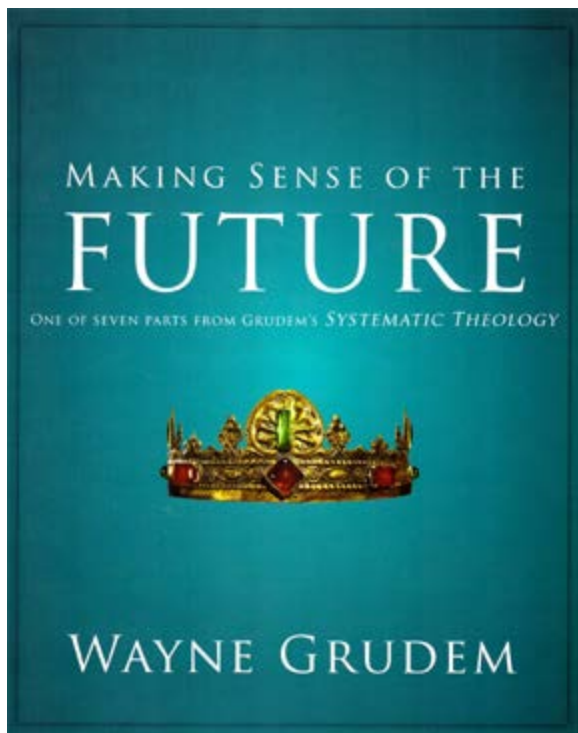
[Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News! \(Part 2 with Grudem, Riddlebarger, Chilton, Summers, and Ewing\) >](#)

Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News! (Part 2 with Grudem, Riddlebarger, Chilton, Summers, and Ewing)

READER>> *What is more of your view of eschatology?*

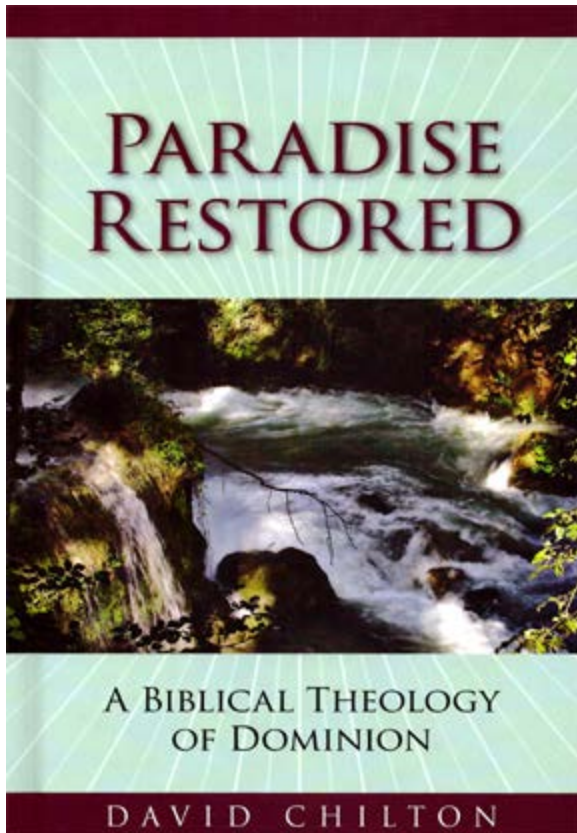
ME>> Previously I mentioned that I hold the A-Millennial understanding of future things. I believe that the present Church Age is the Millennial Kingdom of Revelation 20:1-6 and that the second coming of Christ at the Great White Throne Judgment will occur at the end of this present Church Age. The eternal New Heavens and Earth will then begin after that.

Below are a few books on my shelf from various viewpoints that I recommended for your own study. Of course the hard work of Bible study is always recommended. Yet the books below may be the next best option to inviting Grudem, Riddlebarger, Chilton, Summers, and Ewing to your own Bible study. Also, I have read books on Dispensational Pre-Millennialism and Full Preterism, but do not recommend any below because of their distance from Christian orthodoxy. The works I do list below span the Non-Dispensational Pre-Millennial, A-Millennial, and Post Millennial views. However, you will note after reading them that they do not define one another's labels consistently. Take care not to get ensnared in semantic or camp jargon debate.

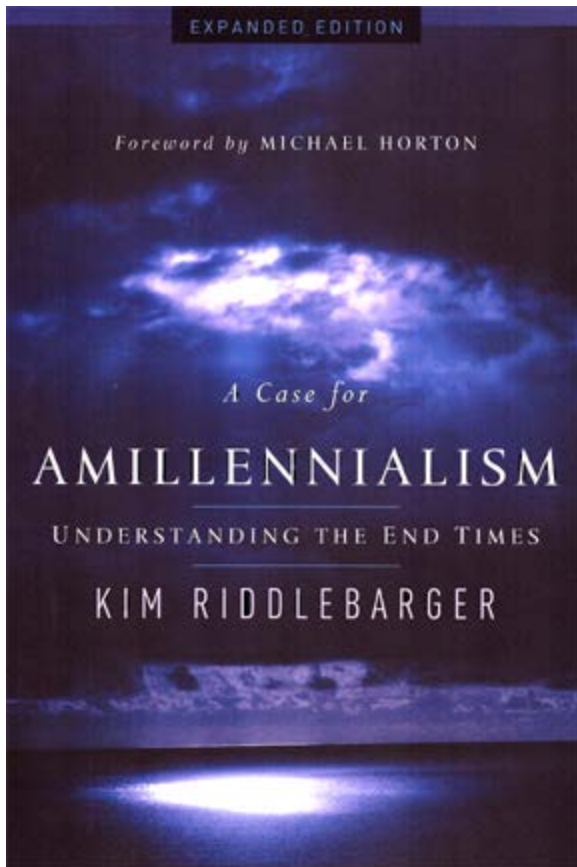


Wayne Grudem wrote *Making Sense of the Future*, a primer on Christian eschatology from a non-dispensational pre-Millennial view point. Grudem is a careful theologian listing numerous Biblical proofs for any position that he holds, including eschatology. For example, he references Psalm 72, Isaiah 11, Isaiah 65, and Zechariah 14 as pointing to a future

Millennial reign of Christ on earth. On page 72, Grudem says, "All this speaks of an age far different from the present age, but short of the eternal state in which there is no more sin or suffering." I find much value in Grudem's analysis, though I have recently stepped away from the pre-millennial understanding.



David Chilton wrote *Paradise Restored, A Biblical Theology of Dominion* just as the famed [John Milton](#) wrote *Paradise Lost* as well as *Paradise Regained*. Both Milton and Chilton have much to write about Paradise! Chilton's work represents the Post-Millennial view. Yet he explains that the length of the 1,000 years is the figurative time frame of the Church Age, similar to the A-Millennial view of Riddlebarger. So how do they differ? The nature of the Millennial Kingdom proposed by Chilton is more Kingdom-like with a call for Christians to work through civil government to "*Christianize*" the nations. Chilton emphasizes greater continuity between the Old and New Covenants even suggesting that failed Israel was excommunicated from the church. However, most Christians would instead say that unbelieving Israel has not joined the church until they bow to personal faith in Christ.



Kim Riddlebarger wrote *A Case for A-Millennialism: Understanding the End Times*. Riddlebarger defends the A-Millennial position, not that "A" means "No" Millennial Kingdom. Instead he explains that the 1,000 years of Revelation 20:1-6 is the figurative length of time for the Church Age, between Christ's first and second advent. His arguments and others persuaded me to adopt this view. For example he notes that Revelation 20:1-6 says nothing about the 1,000 years being a time a peace, but only that Satan is restricted from deceiving the nations. While I might not agree with all Riddlebarger's analysis and assignment of Revelation's symbols, I found his book to be extremely helpful to understand what is happening in the present Church Age.

*Worthy Is
the Lamb*

AN INTERPRETATION OF REVELATION

by

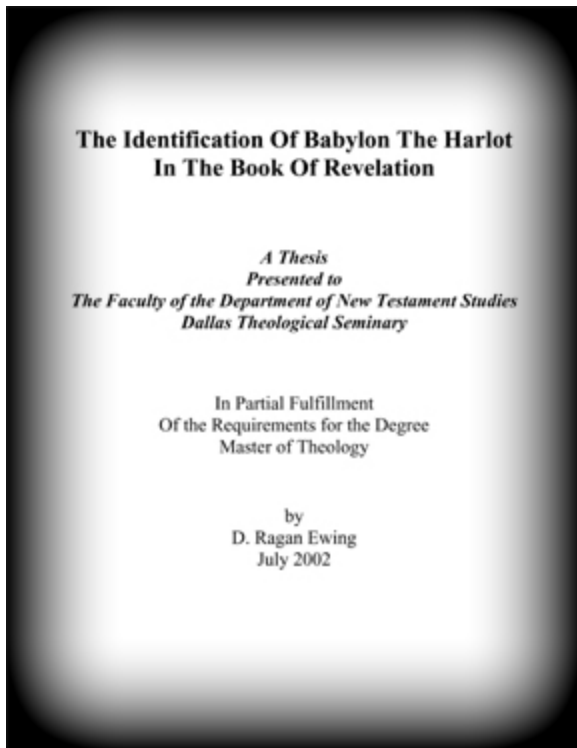
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Ray Summers wrote *Worthy is the Lamb, An Interpretation of Revelation*. Summers defends partial preterist components of Revelation such as the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.. He also defends futuristic components such as the second coming of Christ. Summers adds insight into the methods that are best used when interpreting the symbols and images found within Revelation. He reminds us of the relevance of Old Testament symbols, first century context, and styles found in apocalyptic literature. For example, in the midst of Revelation's war theme, Summers reminds us that first century Christians were especially hated by the Romans because they refused to participate in the state war function. They followed the Lamb! Summers does go further than I prefer when interpreting symbols at a few points, but he adds considerably to the discussion.



Ragan Ewing wrote *The Identification of Babylon the Harlot in the Book of Revelation*. Ewing's effort is not a book per-say, but his doctrinal defense. Ewing wrote his Master's Thesis for Dallas Theological Seminary in 2002 and argues that Babylon the Harlot in the book of Revelation is in fact first century Jerusalem. He meticulously defends both external evidence for a pre-70 A.D. authorship of Revelation as well as internal evidence that identifies Jerusalem as the adulterer that played the harlot with Rome. Ewing also points out that a pre-70 A.D. authorship is not essential to understanding Jerusalem as the Harlot. If authored after 70 A.D. Revelation could then instead be explaining the fate of Jerusalem rather than predicting it. Also Ewing did not mention but could have further noted that Revelation is John's contribution to the same subject matter as Matthew and Luke's Olivet Discourse, the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. as predicted in Matthew 24:15-16 and Luke 21:20. Ewing's complete text is available online and also [from my website](#).

Efforts and theories have been multiplied and exponentiated to make sense of John's Revelation, especially Chapter 13 and the famed number of the Beast, 666. I hope to avoid adding my ignorance to the discussion except as it relates to determining the nature of the members of the Unholy Trinity: The Dragon (Satan), The Beast (First / Sea Beast), and The False Prophet (Second / Land Beast). Are they human beings, demonic beings, or non-being forces? Several simple observations may guide our understanding of Revelation.

First, John does not invent Revelation's symbols to communicate a message with his own wisdom. Instead he records what Christ revealed to him in visions about the real interactions between the immaterial and material world, the unseen and the seen, Heaven and Earth. Thus, one would expect the images seen by John to be illustrative rather than photographic. After all, just how does one photograph the awesome glory and majesty of the unseen world? Isaiah saw Heaven's throne, only in part, and was completely undone, Isaiah 6:5. How does one videotape the war between the Archangel Michael and God's Archenemy Satan? Well, it is being fought out in the world around us, but Jesus helps us to see better with the illustrations that he painted for John to share with us. However, just because the paintings are illustrations, even cartoonish, that does not mean they represent the ethereal. Satan is not a fictional or conceptual Dragon, but a supernatural spirit being, a fallen angel, who leads real demons in a real war against God and his people.

Second, the Revelation of Jesus Christ given to John is set on a stage with many of the backstage curtains pulled aside. The drama that John saw reveals the interactions between the immaterial and material world, the unseen and the seen, Heaven and Earth. Thus the people, places, and things in view may be front stage, back stage, or moving between. Wisdom must then be used when interpreting the actors and props seen, whether they are front stage or back stage, that is earthly or Heavenly, or even a combination. Those demanding literalistic or excessive complication in the interpretation of Revelation's drama have missed the context.

Third, we should observe an important pattern shared by the Gospel of John, John's first epistle, and Revelation. Each of his books is introduced with a poetic division of *threes* that is evident as a structural framework for the book. The Gospel of John begins, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*" (John 1:1 WEB). *Three* dimensions of Christ are listed. Furthermore, John's Gospel is filled with various sets of *sevens*, just like Revelation! Likewise John's epistle begins, "*That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we saw, and our hands touched, concerning the Word of life*" (1 John 1:1 WEB). The epistle content is structured around the *three* senses of hearing, sight, and touch! Now, in Revelation 1:4 (WEB) we read "*John, to the seven assemblies that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from God, who is and who was and who is to come; and from the seven Spirits who are before his throne.*" Apparently by no coincidence we see the *three* of past, present, and future, and again *seven* spirits! Revelation 1:8 (WEB) says again, "*I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.'*" Revelation 1:19 (WEB) also agrees, "*Write therefore the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will happen hereafter.*" So while the debate in Revelation often centers on what is first century and what is future, we should also be reminded to consider what was already past! For example we might try to determine what single point in history is referred to by the *Great Tribulation*, when the drama actually on stage is the *Great Tribulation* of Satan's war against God and mankind from Genesis 3:1 to Revelation 20:10. This drama contains the *three* elements of past, present, and future for the 1st century Christians then... and for 21st century Christians now. Thus, first century Christians were encouraged to hold fast by the example of martyrs in their past as we are encouraged to hold on by their example now. Revelation contains a vital message for all Christians during the entire Church Age.

Fourth, the immaterial unseen world is real. It is substantial. It is tangible, though not through physical senses. For example, read 2 Kings Chapter 6 to learn from Elisha about the near presence of the holy angels protecting God's people. Read Daniel Chapter 10 for a rare exchange, the angel Gabriel revealing his and the Archangel Michael's battle with the Prince and Kings of Persia. The veil is briefly removed between the unseen and the seen. Paul also warns in 1 Corinthians 10:20 that the pagan sacrifices of unbelievers are in fact offered to demons! While pagans may be blind to the fact, any idolatry is in fact a victory for Satan. The unseen enemies of God actually rejoice behind the curtain in their victories as people fall to the worship of false gods, or even fall to baser materialism and sensuality.

Fifth, just as Michael and Gabriel had and have specific assignments in the war against Satan, and just as guardian angels are assigned to *their* children, Matthew 18:10, so Satan and his demons attack specifically and purposefully. Satan and his demons are not nebulous enemies, but are people (though not human) with names, minds, wills, and intent to harm mankind. They strategize, plan, act, and regroup. Just as God commands his righteous angels on the battlefield, so Satan commands his demons.

Now consider Revelation 16:13-14 (WEB),

13) I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits, something like frogs; 14) for they are spirits of demons, performing signs; which go out to the kings of the whole inhabited earth, to gather them

together for the war of that great day of God, the Almighty.

Satan knew his time was short because he lost the greatest battle in the first century. Christ conquered all at the cross and now reigns on David's throne as King of Heaven. Satan is doomed and he knows it. Understanding the present Church Age to be the Millennial Reign of Christ, in Revelation 20:1-6, we see that The Beast and the False Prophet are damned to the Lake of Fire since the first century, Revelation 19:20. The defeat and removal of the influence of these demons was the eventual death of the wicked Roman Empire. Ewing's proposal above also makes good sense as we see Revelation Chapter 17 and 18 forecast the destruction of Old Covenant unbelieving Jerusalem, illustrated as the Harlot who rode The Beast. We also see that Satan is temporarily restrained from deceiving the nations from the first century until the very end, Revelation 20:2.

However, just before this restraint happened, Revelation 16:13-14 records that the Unholy Trinity releases three demons assigned to the kings of earth to prepare for the final battle to be fought on that Great Day of the Lord at the end of the Church Age, Revelation 20:7-10. The Beast and The False Prophet are permanently locked up. Satan is temporarily locked up. However, their demon "*frog*" agents have been merking in the mire for 2,000 years in preparation for the final battle when their leader, Satan, is released for one last contest at the end of the Church Age. One does not need to look too far or even have great insight to see the influence of these demon "*frog*" sons of Satan still at work in our world. Obviously, "*frog*" is a metaphor for these demons, perhaps to describe their stealth, quick and deadly accuracy, amphibious adaptability, ability to hibernate, or ability to multiply tragedy like tadpoles. Thankfully, we know that Christ has promised victory!

7) And after the thousand years, Satan will be released from his prison, 8) and he will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to the war; the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. 9) They went up over the width of the earth, and surrounded the camp of the saints, and the beloved city. Fire came down out of heaven from God, and devoured them. 10) The devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet are also. They will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Revelation 20:7-10 (WEB)

Since the introduction of Revelation indicates subject matter that is past, present, and future some have concluded that the symbols of Revelation are not specific, but instead typify various wicked kingdoms and kings through all Church history. Certainly some of the symbols are general in nature, but we see that The Beast and The False Prophet are specifically cast into the Lake of Fire at the beginning of the Church Age Millennium. We also see that Satan is presently bound from deceiving the nations, but that he will be released in the future. These are specific accounts of victory for the first century church, not idealized illustrations. Yet they are also the *founding examples* of victory that Christians have won, and will win through the entire Church Age until the last Great Battle.

Revelation had a critical message for the first century church and has a critical message for the church today! The Christians of the first century faced incredible persecution from both the Jew and the Roman at the inauguration of the New Covenant Christian faith. Revelation guaranteed victory to the fledgling first century church in their dire contest with the adulterous harlot Jerusalem, the demonic empowered Roman government, and the demon possessed Roman Caesar. Christ himself destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and eventually the demonic Roman powers that hated the Church. He bound Satan and threw The Beast and the False Prophet into the Lake of Fire. Victory!

Now, however, the Church to this very day should be both warned and encouraged. We must be warned that Satan, The Beast, and The False Prophet released their demon "*frog*" agents into our present world to prepare for the final battle of Gog and Magog on the Great Day of the Lord which remains yet in our future! The good news is that just as victory was promised to the first century church, so victory is promised to God's people on that Great Day. Through this radical plan Christ is unifying his one Church because believers through all Church history participate in the *very same* battle! Both the Full Futurist and the Full Preterist miss this critical fact by pushing the message of Revelation fully into the future or fully into the past. Yet God will demonstrate his grace both in and through his obedient Church with the grand finale of the same contest at the end of this present Church Age.

The great contest in the first century was led by Satan using the adulterous harlot Jerusalem, the demonic empowered Roman government, and the demon possessed Roman Caesar. History proves that Satan has employed these same tactics again and again throughout the Church Age with his demon "*frog*" agents. The ongoing influence of demons is evidenced to this day by false religions such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Mormonism. These demons also build their lairs in the modern governmental infrastructures of Communism, Socialism, Fascism, and even Republics. These lairs then become homes for demon crazed political leaders like Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, and Ho Chi Minh. Of course we are each accountable for our choices, but if we do not choose Christ, then we are pawns and prey for Satan's destructive schemes of envy, selfishness, abortion, addiction, anger, genocide, greed, homosexuality, perversion, pornography, infidelity, divorce, and pride. Satan's objective is to destroy by twisting, spoiling, contaminating, perverting, ruining, and breaking everything good that God has created. The hymn writer warns that we live in a "*world with devils filled.*" I have proved in my article, [You are Wrong About Matthew 25:31-46!](#), that the "*ethnos*" gathered before Christ at the final judgment includes both humans and demons, Matthew 25:32 and Revelation 20:13. Thus it is no coincidence that Revelation 20:8 says that when Satan is released he will gather the "*ethnos*" for battle against God's people. Satan will round up both his demons and unbelieving mankind, who so easily serve as his pawns, to attack God's people.

So are we following the example of the first century church? Are we following the Lamb? Are we ready to stand in battle like Christ and with Christ? Are we battling mere flesh and blood or are we fighting the good fight against God's true enemy, that is Satan and his demons?

For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world's rulers of the darkness of this age, and against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Ephesians 6:12 (WEB)

One thing is clear, Satan's web of deception will be world-wide with a clear black and white division across the globe. While God's grace currently endures lukewarm gray spaces in our world there will only be two categories of people on that day: the attacker and the attacked, the wolf and the lamb. There will be no nations to oppose the '*Hitler*' of that day. Satan will be released to round up all the wicked to attack *both* God's beloved saints and his beloved city. Though God destroyed unbelieving Jerusalem in 70 A.D. the fact that *both* the beloved saints *and* the beloved city will be attacked by Satan on that Great Day yet to come ought to give everyone pause. God destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D., but he still loves Israel dearly! And so we return to the grand conclusion of Romans.

25) For I don't desire you to be ignorant, brothers, of this mystery, so that you won't be wise in your own conceits, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, 26) and so all Israel will be saved. Even as it is written,

"There will come out of Zion the Deliverer, and he will turn away ungodliness from Jacob.

27) This is my covenant to them, when I will take away their sins."

28) Concerning the Good News, they are enemies for your sake. But concerning the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sake. 29) For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. 30) For as you in time past were disobedient to God, but now have obtained mercy by their disobedience, 31) even so these also have now been disobedient, that by the mercy shown to you they may also obtain mercy. 32) For God has shut up all to disobedience, that he might have mercy on all.

Romans 11:25-32 (WEB)

Friend, if you fall short of trusting that Jesus does in fact love all mankind, every individual Jew and every individual gentile, you will be deceived into joining the attacker. Flee your doubts! Leave your false graceless religion! Do not join Satan in attacking Christ's beloved! God loves you and your neighbor! Fight on God's side against Satan and his lies! Stand like a lamb for God's people so the victorious Lamb can be your defender!

[◀ Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News!](#)

[up](#)

[Essential Observations ▶](#)

Essential Observations

OBJECTION>> The Optimism Out of Control book is too long and difficult to read. Can you please summarize your essential observations?

ME>> Yes, I apologize for the length of the book. While defending the truth that **Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind** I may have spent too many words answering objections. I list my essential observations below.

1. The salvation of mankind and the doom of Satan is the gospel. (Genesis 3:15)
2. Why say God loves his enemies first, if it is merely an offer? (Romans 5:8-11)
3. Grace by definition is unmerited unconditional blessing. (Romans 3:23-25)
4. Faith is not a condition to, but trust in his unconditional love! (Romans 3:3-4)
5. All mankind is atoned by Christ the God-man, the second Adam. (Romans 5:12-19)
6. God bound all to sin so that he could give mercy to all. (Romans 11:32)
7. Jesus, like Hosea, sometimes calls his lost sheep, "not my sheep." (John 10:26)
8. Unbelieving humans are punished in Hades if unrepentant. (Luke 16:19-31)
9. Hades is not the same place as the Lake of Fire. (Revelation 20:11-15)
10. Hades is temporal and emptied at the final judgment. (Revelation 20:11-15)
11. Why defeat Hades, if not to save the unbelieving dead? (Matthew 16:18)
12. Christians, with Christ, are not judged at the final judgment. (1 Thessalonians 4:17)
13. Unbelieving humans are at the final judgment. (Matthew 25:31-46, Revelation 20:13)
14. Unbelieving humans are the sheep on Jesus' right. (Matthew 25:34-40, Rev 20:13)
15. Some fallen angels are held for future judgment. (2 Peter 2:4, Jude 6)
16. Fallen angels are at the final judgment. (Jude 6, Revelation 20:13)
17. Jesus is not the helper of fallen angels. (Hebrews 2:16)
18. Fallen angels are the goats on Jesus' left. (Matthew 25:41-46, Revelation 20:10-15)
19. The Lake of Fire is prepared for Satan and his angels. (Matthew 25:41)
20. Jesus allows unbelieving humans to fear the destiny of Satan. (Revelation 21:8)
21. Christ's purpose is to show off his grace in kindness toward his chosen. (Ephesians 2:7)

I hope these points inspire valuable reflection for all Christians.

Perhaps my additional defense of the gospel of Christ's victorious grace was unneeded since there are so many already, some of which are reviewed in my article, [Book Reviews](#). However, I was well into writing *Optimism Out of Control* before realizing the ample existing witness. Yet I do highlight two significant observations, which I have not seen elsewhere. First, I note the distinct intermediate punishments of humans and fallen angels in Hades and Tartarus, and concluding destinies in Heaven and the Lake of Fire, respectively. Second, I note that accurate hermeneutics must recognize that Jesus, like Hosea, sometimes calls his lost sheep, "*not my sheep*", and is willing to allow the rebellious elect to fear the destiny of Satan. I hope these contributions to the discussion help the body of Christ grow further toward maturity.

Evangelicaluniversalist.com discussion

I joined evangelicaluniversalist.com discussion to get feedback on my book. However, the forum discussion has since been closed. The feedback was helpful, but also clouded by strange views from other contributors such as reincarnation and Unitarianism. Following are the titles of my posts archived at <http://jeff-martin-reposted.signedon.net>:

BUT YA GOTTA ACCEPT IT!

Fallen Angels are the Goats on Jesus' Left

Is 'free will' faith saving faith?

The Optimism Out of Control book now for sale

Pinning down the slippery Arminian and Calvinist

Real or Apparent Paradox?

Requesting Critical Reviews of Optimism Out of Control

The Good, Bad, and Ugly of John A. T. Robinson

There is no punishment after death for the redeemed!

Universalism + Free Will = One Very Strange Bird

Wow... so what do you really believe?

Your Reasoning is Backwards!

< Essential Observations

up

Fallen Angels at The Great White Throne Judgment? >

Fallen Angels at The Great White Throne Judgment?

OBJECTOR>> Fallen angels will not be judged at The Great White Throne Judgment or The Sheep and Goat Judgment. You are wrong about that. The Goats on Jesus' left are unbelieving mankind that will be damned to the Lake of Fire.

ME>> I certainly respect that we have a different view of these things. However, please consider one more amazing observation from the Scripture. Traditional understanding holds that The Great White Throne Judgment and The Sheep and Goat Judgment are the final judgments of human beings. Tradition maintains that believers, those who accepted Jesus, are the Sheep on the right, while unbelievers, those who die without faith, are the Goats on Jesus left. Even many Christian Universalists think that unbelieving mankind is sent to the Lake of Fire, but that they are finally released sometime beyond the last page of the Bible. However, others in church history (including myself) differ from this traditional understanding for a number of reasons and now I want to bring one more totally amazing reason to the table. Again, I am convinced that the Lake of Fire is *only* prepared for the devil and his angels and that no human being will ever enter these fires. I am convinced that the final judgment of Jesus also includes the judgment of fallen angels and they alone are the Goats on Jesus' left sent to the Lake of Fire.

First, consider a quick review of my reasons already given. If you have not already read my proof that Jesus is the Savior of all mankind, please start at the beginning of my book, *Optimism Out of Control*.

- Jesus paid for the sins of all mankind, therefore not even one human being can be eternally damned, not even unbelieving mankind, 1 John 2:1-2. If God himself has paid for our sin and his wrath is appeased, who then remains to condemn us? Furthermore, faith does not cause our election to forgiveness, but instead faith trusts that we are already chosen for forgiveness from before the creation of the world, Ephesians 1:4! But are not unbelievers punished after death?
- Jesus does punish unbelieving mankind in Hades after death. However, even in Hades his love for all mankind continues, Psalm 139:8. Contrary to tradition, even unbelievers will be finally released from their punishments to receive salvation, Matthew 16:18 and Revelation 20:13. Jesus deeply loves all mankind, yet there is still punishment in Hades for those who reject the grace of God even though they are already forgiven. Punishment for the unbelieving is promised in 2 Thessalonians 2:9. However, read the YLT Bible to see that the word "*eternal*" is mistranslated from the Greek word "*aion*" and should instead read "*eon*," "*age*," or "*complete*." So unbelievers are punished for the "*age*" of Hades. Love does not remove punishment, but instead God punishes us because he loves us! But does Jesus love the fallen angels also?
- Jesus does not help fallen angels, Hebrews 2:14-16. Therefore demons will suffer the Lake of Fire. Furthermore "*The Ages of The Ages*" of the Lake of Fire is quite different than the "*Age*" of Hades. Jesus' plan from the beginning has been to crush the head of Satan, Genesis 3:15. During the course of history, some demons have already been imprisoned in Tartarus for future judgment, 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6. Scripture then ends with the salvation of the elect, even from Hades, and the condemnation of the Devil and his rebel angels to the Lake of Fire, Revelation 20:10. So when will these fallen angels be judged?

- Jesus' Sheep and Goat Judgment in Matthew 25 strongly appears to be the same as The Great White Throne Judgment in Revelation 20. Since Scripture says that fallen angels are being "*held for judgment*" on "*The Great Day*," the most obvious timing for this judgment is the Sheep and Goat Judgment and The Great White Throne Judgment when Jesus stands all his subjects before him for final judgment. Daniel 12:1-4, Matthew 25:31-46, and Revelation 20:11-15 each appear to be talking about the same event. So the subjects that stand before Jesus at the final judgment will include both the unbelieving humans just released from Hades and the demons just extracted from Tartarus. But how can we be certain?
- Jesus says explicitly that the Lake of Fire is... "*prepared for the devil and his angels*" (Matthew 25:41 WEB). The Lake of Fire is not prepared for humans. Though we deserve the same fate as the Devil and his Angels, yet because of the grace of Jesus mankind is spared damnation. The Devil and his Angels, however, are sentenced to the Lake of Fire. Is there more proof?

Some have objected to my understanding saying that fallen angels will not be present at The Sheep and Goat Judgment or at The Great White Throne Judgment. However, the Scripture is clear that these fallen angels are presently being held for future judgment. Consider,

For if God didn't spare angels when they sinned, but cast them down to Tartarus, and committed them to pits of darkness to be reserved for judgment.

2 Peter 2:4 (WEB)

Angels who didn't keep their first domain, but deserted their own dwelling place, he has kept in everlasting bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day.

Jude 6 (WEB)

The Scripture is clear that these imprisoned fallen angels are being held for judgment at some point in the future. Jude 6 is very clear that the timing of this judgment will be on "*The Great Day*." I have proposed that this Great Day is the same day as The Sheep and Goat Judgment and The Great White Throne Judgment.

However, if that is not enough proof already (and I think it is), consider one last proof directly from Revelation 20:13 (WEB),

The sea [Thalaasa] gave up the dead who were in it. Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them. They were judged, each one according to his works.

Have you ever thought it curious that both the sea [*Thalassa*] and *Hades* gave up the dead that are in them? Why the distinction? Why both *Thalaasa* and *Hades*? Perhaps the reference to the sea and *Hades* is doubly expansive in order to communicate the certainty that all the dead will be raised. Perhaps the language is slightly poetical or apocalyptic and so should not be pressed too hard for meaning.

Alternatively, the Holy Spirit is at least noting the distinction that people are released from two separate locations to stand before Christ's Throne. Clearly one location is *Hades*, the temporary place of punishment for deceased unbelieving humanity. Could *Thalaasa* then be the place of punishment for fallen angels or perhaps the retreat for fugitive fallen angels?

Consider two possible explanations. First we note that the Holy Spirit borrows the term "*Tartaroo*" from Greek mythology in order to help the first century reader understand that

the fallen angels are held in a separate, harsher prison than unbelieving mankind, 2 Peter 2:4. There could be a connection between *Thalaasa* and *Tartarus* in that *Thalaasa* was a Greek goddess whose counterpart *Tethys* was a *Titan* imprisoned in... *Tartarus*. There is also a small parallel between the mythological *Titans* and the speculation that the *Nephilim* were rebellious angels that pro-created with humans in Genesis 6:4, perhaps the very angels imprisoned in *Tartarus*. Now I am *not* saying that the Holy Spirit believed in Greek mythology! However, it may be that the mythological idea of the *Titans* was inspired by the historic *Nephilim*. My main point is that rebels are escorted from both *Hades* and *Thalaasa* which offers further support for the presence of fallen angels at the final judgment.

Alternatively *Thalaasa* could simply refer to the sea. Certainly we should not think that some deceased humans are in *Hades* while others are in the sea! Instead, the sea could just as easily refer to the place of punishment for fallen angels or possibly the retreat for fugitive fallen angels. For example, in Matthew 8:28-34 the Lord helped two demon possessed men by casting the demons into a herd of pigs, which then promptly drowned themselves in the sea [*Thalaasa*]. Again, rebels are escorted from both *Hades* and *Thalaasa* which supports the presence of fallen angels at the final judgment.

Note also that Revelation 21:1b (WEB) says, "**and the sea [*Thalaasa*] is no more.**" This verse always seemed odd to me, that the New Heavens and Earth would not have seas. However, in the context it seems clear that the meaning is that there will no longer be any place of temporary punishment or retreat for whoever was held in *Thalaasa*, perhaps the demons. The punishing grounds of both *Hades* and *Thalassa* are to be ended! Thus, mankind will be released from *Hades* and finally saved to glory through the grace of God alone. They are the sheep at the Sheep and Goat Judgment, in Matthew 25! The demons, however, are extracted from *Thalassa* to be judged and sentenced with Satan to the Lake of Fire for *The Ages of The Ages*. They are the Goats at the Sheep and Goat Judgment! This is good news concerning the final salvation of mankind. This is also good news if you hope to enjoy the ocean on the New Earth!

So there is strong evidence for the presence of fallen angels at The Sheep and Goat Judgment, also called The Great White Throne Judgment. First, these fallen angels are being held for punishment on "**the great day**" (Jude 6). Second, the Lake of Fire is "**prepared for... the devil and his angels**" (Matthew 25:41 WEB). Third, *Thalaasa*, whether a picture from Greek mythology or simply the sea, is clearly a place distinct from *Hades* that is also emptied of rebels for judgment on that Great Day.

If you object to my proposal above you should at least answer these three questions. Why do you think the Holy Spirit distinguishes between the dead in *Thalaasa* and the dead in *Hades* as mentioned in Revelation 20:13? When do you think "**The Great Day**" is for the judgment of the fallen angels, 1 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6? Why do you think Revelation 21:1 says there is no longer any sea?

So again it is further supported that the Goats on Jesus' left at The Sheep and Goat Judgment (that is The Great White Throne Judgment) *are* the fallen angels to be summoned from *Tartarus* or *Thalassa* to stand before Christ. They are the Goats on Jesus' left sentenced to the Lake of Fire "**prepared for the devil and his angels**" (Matthew 25:41 WEB). Thus by the grace of Christ alone, no humans will ever enter The Lake of Fire! Instead the Sheep on Jesus' right are unbelieving mankind to be released from *Hades* and finally graced with understanding and joy over their Savior and ours, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Yet be warned by the gospel. Humans who reject grace will be punished in *Hades*, even though their sins are forgiven, because the God who loves also disciplines! Why test the Lord? Repent and receive the good news that *YOUR* sins are forgiven... because the sins of *ALL* mankind are forgiven!

Forever Is Not Forever? You Gotta Be Kidding Me!

Some chide...

SOME>> Forever Is Not Forever? You Gotta Be Kidding Me!

ME>> You make an excellent point. I had come to the conclusion that "*forever*" and "*eternal*" in the New Testament must not always mean "*forever*" and "*eternal*" because the context of grace demands salvation satisfaction even for the unbelieving. And so I concluded that the Holy Spirit used the word "*forever*" and "*eternal*" to describe the long, but finite time of punishment in Hades for the unbelieving. I also concluded that if Abraham's faith could reasonably trust that God could "*call things that are not, as though they were,*" then I was not unreasonable to conclude that God could save people from "*eternal*" punishment in Hell. Furthermore, it is also evident and believed by orthodox Christians that Jesus abolished the "*eternal*" Old Covenant in his flesh. So I concluded that "*eternal*" does not always mean "*forever*" when God is in the picture.

The Lord has, however, recently corrected my understanding. My logic was sound but incomplete. I had already shown that the Hebrew word "*olam*" does not always mean eternal, but instead it means the duration of the subject in view. Every Hebrew lexicon denotes this fact. Yet without much homework I concluded that the same must be true of the Greek word translated "*eternal*" in the New Testament, the Greek word "*aion*." Recently the Lord blessed me through a reunion with John Wesley Hanson's classic 1875 work titled, *The Greek Word Aion-Aionios translated Everlasting-Eternal in the Holy Bible Shown to Denote Limited Duration*. This classic work is available for free from the U.S. Library of Congress website and also [from my own website](#). This 88-page book is a must read for anyone who agrees or disagrees with my conclusions. There is little point to my adding further to this definitive work. Study this volume for yourself and your faith and understanding of the Bible will be challenged in radically positive ways, if you are willing to let go of all your self-righteousness. Dr. Heleen Keizer has also written a dissertation proving the same titled, *Life, Time, Entirety - A Study of Aion in Greek Literature and Philosophy, the Septuagint and Philo*. You can read her [315 page dissertation online](#) or an [abstract of her conclusions from my website](#). You might think it is incredulous to claim that "*aion*" is mistranslated in many Bibles. Unless you are competent in ancient Greek, you may not even know how to verify this for yourself. *The NASB-NIV Parallel New Testament in Greek in English* is an invaluable resource on my shelf. [Young's Literal Translation](#) is also a valuable resource.

Read Hanson's work for yourself, but here is my brief review:

1. Hanson and Keizer irrefutably prove that the Greek word "*aion*" is a synonym to the Hebrew word "*olam*" and that they both mean "the duration of the subject in view." Thus "*aion*" can mean the finite duration of a man's life, the finite duration of the Old Covenant, the finite duration of Hades/Hell, the infinite duration of The Lake of Fire, and the infinite duration of God himself.
2. Hanson applies this definition to his interpretation of Matthew 25:31-46 and concludes that the "*aion*" in view is the Christian age in this world and that unbelievers' lives are punished and destroyed in this life when they reject Christ. However, he concludes that these believers are saved from punishment in the afterlife through grace in spite of their unbelief. This is a common view in many Christian Universalist circles. They conclude that Hell is the pain suffered in this life by rejecting God's ways. While this view may be attractive at the level of human reason, I find it to be unbiblical and I do not agree with it.

3. I do agree with Hanson's definition of the Greek word "*aion*," but I currently disagree with his application and interpretation of Matthew 25:31-46. The "*eternal fire*" mentioned in Matthew 25:41 certainly appears to be the Lake of Fire spoken of in Revelation 20. This is clear because the Devil and his angels are sentenced to this eternal fire. Yet, I also agree with Hanson that no human beings are damned to the Lake of Fire. So what is the explanation? Hanson simply did not see that the Sheep and Goats standing before Christ at the Great White Throne judgment include both human beings and fallen angels. 2 Peter 2 makes it clear that there are both human beings and fallen angels currently imprisoned in Hades and Tartarus. Hades and Thalassa are then emptied of both unbelieving mankind and the imprisoned angels at the Great White Throne judgment as explained in Revelation 20:13 and Matthew 25:31-46. Human beings are saved on the right, while the fallen angels are sentenced to the Lake of Fire on the left. How could the Holy Spirit be more clear when he says, "...*prepared for the Devil and his angels.*" I've explained this more completely in my articles, [Matthew 25:31-46](#) and [You are Wrong About Matthew 25:31-46!](#)

4. Hanson also applies this understanding to verses like 2 Thessalonians 1:9. In this case Hanson is certainly correct that Paul is reminding the new Thessalonian believers that the wicked unbelieving humans will be punished at Christ's coming judgment. However, we also see in Revelation that those punished in Hades are eventually extracted out.

5. Hanson also makes use of the argument that a God of love would never damn human beings for eternity. This argument makes an attractive appeal, but unfortunately it weakens his primary argument about the meaning of "*aion*." He weakens his argument because the primary characteristic of God to be praised in the salvation of mankind is not his love, but his grace. If Christ had not atoned for the sins of corrupt mankind, then the justice of God could have damned the entirety of mankind without lessening God's character trait of love in the least. The perfect love of God within the Trinity would continue on eternally without flaw. We may find it hard to swallow, even as Christians, but we are utterly corrupt in sin and deserve damnation. God would be just to damn us without being unloving at all, that is if Christ had not died. In fact Satan and his demonic followers are people too, yet they will be sentenced to the Lake of Fire for *The Ages of The Ages*. However, there is a new justice in town. Christ has freely, without condition, chosen to love all mankind. Christ has atoned for the sins of all mankind; therefore, his grace now demands the salvation of those atoned. One whose sins are paid for absolutely cannot be eternally damned. Never! If the wrath of God is appeased, who then remains to condemn? Friend, who can possibly condemn? No one! That is the rock Christians stand on -- the loving grace of God. However, the unbelieving elect do not yet stand on or live by God's love. They are un-believing! But one day, sooner or later, God will touch his finger of grace to their hearts as well. Why wait? Why suffer? Why burn in Hades to the very brink of the Lake of Fire before believing that the grace of God has already made it impossible for you to be damned or ever be separated from the love of God your Heavenly Father? Believe!

6. Hanson also cites proofs that universal salvation was commonly accepted in the early centuries of the church and that it was not until A.D. 544 that this understanding was condemned and anathematized as heretical. This would be a worthy study to verify. Obviously I already believe that this was the Apostolic view.

Finally, I had suggested that understanding the Holy Spirit's use of "*eternal*" as "*limited duration*" required the faith of Abraham to "*call things that are not, as though they were.*" However, I was wrong about this and again apologize for my haste. I have corrected this in the book. Absolutely, no irrational or miraculous "*leap of faith*" is required at all because the Greek word "*aion*" is often mistranslated as "*eternal*" and "*forever*" when it should be translated as "*age*", "*eon*", or "*complete*." Hanson could have even further supported his conclusion by pointing out that the etymology of our modern word "*eon*" points directly back to "*aion*." So unbelieving humans will most certainly spend an eon in Hades, but an eon is not forever and has a beginning... and an end. Hades will be emptied of all souls and then Hades itself will be tossed into the Lake of Fire, emptied of all souls, never needed again for all eternity.

A shorter explanation of the meaning of "*aion*" can be found at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aeon>. However, it should be noted that though Hanson's work is definitive for me, it is not definitive for everyone. For example at <http://carm.org/what-do-greek-dictionaries-say-about-aion> Matt Slick argues that Christian Universalists are completely wrong to suggest that the word "*aion*" can refer to anything less than eternal. However, on his one page argument, Denotation #3 reads as follows, "*describes duration, either undefined but not endless.*"

Have those who persist in rejecting my thesis truly been to the foot of the cross? Have they seen their religious hypocrisy terribly exposed and completely cleansed by the blood of Christ? Have you received grace?

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[Forever Is Not Forever? You Still Gotta Be Kidding Me!](#) >

Forever Is Not Forever? You Still Gotta Be Kidding Me!

SOME>> Forever Is Not Forever? You Still Gotta Be Kidding Me!

ME>> This is an excellent point already briefly discussed in my previous article, *Forever Is Not Forever? You Gotta Be Kidding Me!* The main point is that I do boldly say with others that the Greek word "*aion*" and its adjective "*aionios*" are often misunderstood and mistranslated in many translations of the Christian Scriptures. This Greek noun and adjective have a much richer meaning than simple infinite duration. Now if you are not a student of the Greek language you may not know how to determine the truth of the matter.

Two quick steps into the discussion are first: the English word "*eon*" directly descends etymologically from the Greek word "*aion*." This much is plain to see and perhaps enough to motivate your further study. Friend, you and I both already know that "*eon*" does not mean "*eternal*" but is a long period of time with a beginning... and an end! This fact alone ought to give every Christian pause to reconsider the usage of "*aion*" within the New Testament. Second: the subject of salvation by grace received through faith alone ought to embolden every believer to thoroughly examine the Scriptures to understand the extent of God's grace even for the unbelieving. If God has saved anyone by grace, why would we be offended that he would save even the unbelieving by that same grace, even after an eon in Hades?

Hoping for better things however, to help your further study I have used the <http://www.blueletterbible.org> to find every usage of the Greek words "*aion*," "*aionios*," and "*aidios*" in the New Testament.

aion: Strong's G165 occurs 128 times in 102 verses in the Greek concordance.

aionios: Strong's G166 occurs 71 times in 69 verses in the Greek concordance.

aidios: Strong's G126 occurs 2 times in 2 verses in the Greek concordance.

The large chart attached at DGJC.ORG/OPTIMISM/AION lists the references to these Greek words in the World English Bible and the Young's Literal Translation along with my notes. This spread sheet could be a useful starting point for your own study.

Other resources to study also include:

- *The Greek Word Aion-Aionios translated Everlasting-Eternal in the Holy Bible Shown to Denote Limited Duration* by John Wesley Hanson, available for free from the U.S. Library of Congress website and also [on my own website](#).
- *Life, Time, Entirety - A Study of Aion in Greek Literature and Philosophy, the Septuagint and Philo* by Dr. Heleen Keizer available [online](#) or in [abstract on my website](#).
- *Terms for Eternity: Aionios and Aidios in Classical and Christian Texts* by Ilaria Ramelli and David Konstan. Ramelli and Konstan defend that '*aidios*' is the only Greek term that always means eternal, used twice in the New Testament at Romans 1:20 and Jude 6.
- *The NASB-NIV Parallel New Testament in Greek in English*
- [Young's Literal Translation](#) of the Christian Scriptures.
- [Concordant Literal New Testament](#).

- WWW.CARM.ORG contains articles in opposition to the victory of grace for all mankind. Read <http://carm.org/look-word-aionion> and <http://carm.org/what-do-greek-dictionaries-say-about-aionion> for an alternate view.
- [A longer list of books to consider is available on my website.](#)

A. E. Knoch proposes in his book *All In All* that the Holy Spirit uses the words "aion" and "aionios" in very distinct and precise ways to refer to five distinct eons between eternity past and eternity future. Knoch insists that "aion" never means eternal. Knoch preferred the term "eon" in the *Concordant Bible Translation* rather than "age" which is used in Young's Literal Translation because "eon" has the useful adjective "eonian" while Young uses the cumbersome "age-during." Knoch also argues that his five proposed "eons" correspond to five "worlds," two of which are the pre-flood and the post-flood world. Knoch also says that these "worlds" are different than the administrations within a particular "eon," such as the Old and New Covenant administrations of grace within the present "eon." Knoch offers a detailed chart of his theory on page 160 of *All In All*. He also makes the assertion that "aion" does not even have to mean "eternal" in verses like Romans 1:25. This Scripture says God is blessed unto the "ages," meaning the "eonian times." Knoch's understanding is actually very reasonable because saying that God is blessed through all the "eons" does not contradict that God is also blessed eternally beyond the "eons." Knoch makes some very acute observations worthy of every theologian's consideration. His proposed five eons are charted below in parallel with the Tabernacle.

Eternity Future - Post-Eonian			
Tabernacle		Time	
Holies of Holies	The Holy of Holies	Lake of Fire Fifth Eon	Eons of Eons
Inner two Holies	The Holy	Millennial Kingdom Fourth Eon	Last two Eons
The Court		Present Third Eon, Flood to Return	
The Camp		Second Eon - Gen 1:2 to Flood	
Outside the Camp		First Eon - Creation to Gen 1:2	
Eternity Past - Pre-Eonian			

Dr. Heleen Keizer concludes, at slight variance from Knoch, in her work *Life, Time, Entirety - A Study of Aion in Greek Literature and Philosophy, the Septuagint and Philo* that "aion" has been used to mean "eternal," but even richer than "age" or "eon" the original meaning is "life," "complete," or "entire." Wow! Reread John 3:16 with this understanding!

A thorough study of Scripture will help us understand the meaning of these words and the Holy Spirit's usage in context. The primary denotations and synonyms possible from the above resources and the Greek lexicon are summarized as:

- *eon, eonian*: an age, general or particular, with a beginning and end, not eternal.
- *entire, whole, life, complete, unbroken*: a purposeful whole unbroken life.
- *eternal*: lasting forever in the past and/or the future.
- *world*: the world and human condition during a particular age or circumstance.

Thank you for giving this your very careful attention. Again the large chart attached at DGJC.ORG/OPTIMISM/AION lists the references to these Greek words in the World English Bible and the Young's Literal Translation. This spread sheet could be a useful starting point for your own study.

Knoch's five eon chart above suggests that the last two eons are a Millennial Kingdom and the Lake of Fire Judgment. Knoch points to 1 Corinthians 15:23-28 and 15:50-55 as forecasting the end of the Lake of Fire. However, as much as I agree with Knoch's critical observations about the eons of redemptive history, his eonian model may be shifted one

notch to far into the future. I understand 1 Corinthians 15 to point instead to the end of death and Hades judgment for mankind at the Great White Throne Judgment with Satan and his demons cast into the Lake of Fire at the commencement of either the last eon or eternity. Knoch's model also includes a rigid mapping of five eons to five elements of the Tabernacle. That is certainly possible, but my proposed model below is simpler to emphasize the main point: God is demonstrating his grace through various eons within history between eternity past and future. Consider my proposed revision to Knoch's eonian chart below.

Eternity Future (Post-Eonian)	
Redemption Manifest for Mankind	
Fallen Angels Damned for the Last Eon or for all Eternity	
Tabernacle	Time
Holy of Holies	Church Eon
Outside the Holies	Eons before Christ
Eternity Past (Pre-Eonian)	

In this simplified model of understanding, the cross of Christ stands as the fulcrum point between the "ages" before Christ and the "ages" after Christ. Hebrews 9:26 points to this understanding.

Finally, two critical verses to examine are Revelation 14:11 and 20:10. The common English translation of both of these verses speak about torment "*forever and ever.*" Reference both these verses at DGJC.ORG/OPTIMISM/AION and your own Bible. You will see that Revelation 14:11 is talking about wicked men, while Revelation 20:10 is talking about wicked angels.

So after all this work is my primary thesis at variance with Scripture? Do wicked men then share the same destiny as wicked angels? Let's take a closer look at these two verses.

Comparison	Revelation 14:11	Revelation 20:10
World English Bible	The smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever . They have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.	The devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet are also. They will be tormented day and night forever and ever .
Young's Literal Translation	and the smoke of their torment doth go up to ages of ages ; and they have no rest day and night, who are bowing before the beast and his image, also if any doth receive the mark of his name.	and the Devil, who is leading them astray, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where are the beast and the false prophet, and they shall be tormented day and night -- to the ages of the ages .
Greek	καὶ ὁ καπνὸς τοῦ βασανισμοῦ αὐτῶν εἰς αἰῶνας αἰῶνων ἀναβαίνει καὶ οὐκ ἔχουσιν ἀνάπαυσιν ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτός οἱ προσκυνοῦντες τὸ θηρίον καὶ τὴν εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ καὶ εἴ τις λαμβάνει τὸ χάραγμα τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ	καὶ ὁ διάβολος ὁ πλανῶν αὐτοὺς ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν λίμνην τοῦ πυρὸς καὶ θεοῦ ὅπου καὶ τὸ θηρίον καὶ ὁ ψευδοπροφήτης καὶ βασανισθήσονται ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτός εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰῶνων
Subject of Torment	Wicked men branded with the	Wicked fallen angels; Satan, the Beast, and the False

	mark of the Beast.	Prophet.
Length of Torment	εις αιωνας αιωνων	εις τους αιωνας των αιωνων
εις	into, unto, to, towards, for, among	
τους	the	
αιωνας	ages, eons	
των	of the	
αιωνων	of ages, eonian	
Literal translation	for ages of ages	for the ages of the ages

So are the phrases above identical? The WEB Bible and most English Bibles translate the phrases identically. However, I show above that they are not identical in wording in the underlying Greek. But are they identical in meaning? No, they are not identical in meaning either! The torment promised for wicked men is for a long time, in fact *"for ages of ages."* This likely points to torment in Hades during the pre-Church Age and the Church Age. However, the torment promised to Satan and his angels is for the definite specific time period of the Lake of Fire, *"for the ages of the ages!"* Notice the absence of the definite article *"the"* in Revelation 14:11 and the presence of the definite article *"the"* in Revelation 20:10. Consider all the possible interpretations of these observations:

- Wicked men share the same eternal torment as wicked angels. Though I have refuted this understanding to my own satisfaction due to the underlying differences in the Greek between Revelation 14:11 and 20:10.
- Wicked men share the same eonian torment as wicked angels. Some Christian Universalists propose that human beings will be punished in the Lake of Fire along with Satan and the demons, and then extracted some time beyond the pages of Scripture not explicitly mentioned.
- Wicked men are punished *"for ages of ages"*, through the church age, even to the brink of the Lake of Fire, while Satan and his angels are punished *"for the ages of the ages"*, the Lake of Fire which is prepared for them, Matthew 25:41. The Lake of Fire is not prepared for human beings.

I have also proposed a more complete chart of these events in my article, [Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News!](#) Rejoice with me that wicked mankind will be punished temporally *"for ages of ages"* both now and in Hades up to the Great White Throne Judgment. Rejoice also that Satan and his demons, the enemy of God and mankind, will be damned to the Lake of Fire *"for the ages of the ages"* after the Great White Throne Judgment. Finally rejoice that Christ will rule forever.

Thank you for pursuing your own independent study of these things. The implications are incredible and so faithful handling of God's word is critical.

God is Not a Retributivist!

SEVERAL UNIVERSALISTS>> God is not a retributivist! You seem to have hope that God will be ALL in ALL and finally save ALL humanity, yet you portray God as an angry retributivist against sin and unrepentant sinners. This is a wrong view of God.

ME>> A number of authors listed in my article [Book Reviews](#) have argued that traditional theology is wrong because God is characterized as a retributivist. Their concern is that a God of love would not exact justice by getting even. That is a good point to note. In fact, Jesus himself made the Old Covenant obsolete with his New Covenant. So the "eye for an eye" theology never was the final will of God. However, care is needed in our understandings and explanations because many Christian Universalists have seriously stepped out of bounds. They say that the Old Testament depictions of God's wrath are not Holy Spirit inspired, but instead fallible human interpretation of world events based on a wrong view of God.

So then how should we understand God? Is he a retributivist?

The dictionary explains:

A retributivist advocates the punishment of criminals in retribution for the harm they have inflicted. Retributivists desire requital according to merits or deserts, especially for evil. In the realm of religion, retributivist theology teaches the distribution of rewards and punishments in a future life.

So what does the word of God say?

First, we remember that the Holy Spirit teaches us in the Old Testament that Cain was placed under a curse for murdering his brother, yet God also was merciful to him, Genesis 4. We also remember that God was grieved over the sinfulness of mankind and drowned the entire world except for eight people, yet God did not stop loving both the living and the dead, Genesis 6 and 1 Peter 3:19-4:6. We also consider that God took the life of David's child to Bathsheba because of his adultery and murder of Uriah. God then punished David even further saying the sword would never leave his household, yet David continued to be a man after God's our heart, 2 Samuel 11-12. God punished sinners severely under the Old Covenant.

Second, we might think that the removal of the "eye for an eye" penal system has taken away all punishment under the New Covenant. However, nothing could be further from the truth. In fact the demands for obedience and honor to the crucified and risen Lord are now even greater! Jesus himself warned the unbelieving Jews that Jerusalem would be leveled to the ground for their rejection of him as the Messiah, as it then was in 70 A.D., Matthew 24. Ananias and Sapphira learned the hard way that lying to the Holy Spirit in front of the body of Christ will cost you your life, Acts 5. King Herod did not give glory to God, but instead glorified himself and was struck dead instantly, Acts 12. So we see that God remains the same righteous judge presently under the New Covenant as he was under the Old Covenant. 2 Peter Chapter 2 says that God will pay back harm to those that have done harm. 2 Peter Chapter 3 continues that the God who judged the ancient world with flood waters will judge the present world with fire.

Thankfully water and fire are both used to cleanse and to purify. God's ultimate goal is not to destroy sinful humanity with death by drowning and burning. We know this because 2 Corinthians 5:21 (WEB) says, "*For him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*" God himself took the ultimate penalty for ALL mankind's sin. There will be NO eternal judgment and penalty for those for

whom Christ died, that is *ALL* mankind.

Yet, God also understands the depth of our depravity and his fiery love does not mince words or dance around our wickedness with kid gloves. God is perfectly willing to serve just desserts to teach us or even simply to protect his other children.

Consider the words of Isaiah and David,

"Tell those who have a fearful heart, 'Be strong. Don't be afraid. Behold, your God will come with vengeance, God's retribution. He will come and save you.' "

Isaiah 35:4 (WEB)

"David says, 'Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, a stumbling block, and a retribution to them.' "

Romans 11:9 (WEB)

Consider also the words of Malachi 3:1-6,

1) "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me; and the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, behold, he comes!" says Yahweh of Armies. 2) "But who can endure the day of his coming? And who will stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire, and like launderer's soap; 3) and he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi, and refine them as gold and silver; and they shall offer to Yahweh offerings in righteousness. 4) Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasant to Yahweh, as in the days of old, and as in ancient years. 5) I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against the perjurers, and against those who oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and who deprive the foreigner of justice, and don't fear me," says Yahweh of Armies. 6) "For I, Yahweh, don't change; therefore you, sons of Jacob, are not consumed.

God is the loving Father of us *ALL*. And though he may pay retribution according to his wisdom, thankfully his fiery love passionately seeks our purification always and will never condemn us eternally.

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Gotta Be Kidding Me!

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Have Other Christians Made this
Observation? >

Have Other Christians Made this Observation?

Another thoughtful reader suggested...

READER>> *I know that you want your book, [Optimism Out of Control](#), to stand on Scripture alone, but I think that it would be helpful to include citations from other Christians over the past 2,000 years who have thought what you are thinking. It would remove this objection to your book: "If you're right, then has this gone unnoticed for 2,000 years until Jeff Martin came along?"*

ME>> Excellent suggestion. Thanks. I had already pointed my reader to other sources in my articles [Other-theologians](#) and [Book Reviews](#). There are many who have held to various forms of Christian and non-Christian Universalism. Though it is not the conventional understanding, there are noteworthy groups and individuals who have held to Evangelical Universalism, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_Universalism.

This article http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_reconciliation also adds further to the discussion with this quote, "George Whitfield in a letter to John Wesley says that Peter Boehler, a bishop in the Moravian Church, had privately confessed in a letter that 'all the damned souls would hereafter be brought out of hell.'" The doctrine that people will be extracted out of Hell as explained in Revelation 20:13 is not well known, but certainly I am not the first to observe it. John Wesley Hanson's classic 1875 work titled, *The Greek Word Aion-Aionios translated Everlasting-Eternal in the Holy Bible Shown to Denote Limited Duration* also lists other notable Christian Universalists throughout history. Modern evangelical movements that identify with this understanding typically do not prefer the label *Universalist* in order to distance themselves from the Unitarian Universalist movement. Instead they may prefer the label *Restorationist* and use rally cries such as *The Victorious Gospel* and *Greater Grace*. Google those words for more information. Here is also a longer list of evangelical Universalists, though I have not researched the list personally: <http://evangelicaluniversalist.com>.

One might ask why this understanding is not conventional if it is really true. Religion is always more popular than grace. Perhaps professing Christians feel that the available orthodoxies are close enough to the mark that asking further questions about grace is now taboo. Also Protestantism is so anti-Catholic that the very suggestion that people are extracted out of Hell immediately evokes indignant cries about "*working one's way out of purgatory*." Sadly because Catholics and the majority of Protestants think they have been saved by their *free will* choice of faith, they immediately think that I am saying that those extracted from Hell have a "*second chance*" to exercise their *free will* to get back into God's grace. Hardly. How could someone who understands grace even make these comments? If anyone is extracted from punishment in Hell, it is purely by the grace of God alone, the only way that anyone is ever saved in the first place.

So in answer to your question, yes there are others who have shared similar views throughout church history and today. However, since my work is original and not simply echoing the writings of another, you may not be able to find someone who has added up all the facts exactly as I have. In fact, because I hold a minority view, my interpretation may land in a miscellaneous bucket along with some very unbiblical views.

Lastly since the gospel does speak foolishness to the unbelieving, it may be difficult to easily quantify this view in written theology. In fact historians often debate and struggle to precisely state the beliefs of Christians past. This may be one of the reasons. Like Christ himself, they proclaimed that he is the savior of all mankind, yet also like Christ they

warned the unbelieving that they are not his sheep. Historians may struggle to efficiently label these faithful ministers of the gospel. For myself, though I am confident that Jesus is the savior of all mankind, I still assert to those who reject the grace of Christ in favor of their *free will*, their "*religion*," their "*limited atonement*," and their "*tainted faith*" that they will spend the duration in Hades. Furthermore, *IF* they are not also saved by the gracious choice of Christ and listed in the Lamb's Book of Life, then they will also be eternally damned. There is no other salvation than the electing grace of Christ. So neither do I fit neatly into a Universalist camp that neglects the gospel.

So why not believe the good news? Christ *HAS* paid for your sin!

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[Hebrews 2:16 Does Not Say Fallen Angels Are Damned >](#)

Hebrews 2:16 Does Not Say Fallen Angels Are Damned

Another reader says...

READER>> *Hebrews 2:16 Does Not Say Fallen Angels Are Damned*

ME>> Let's look at the passage more closely.

The KJV translates Hebrews 2:16, "*For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham.*"

The KJV translation paraphrases this verse to emphasize the argument that Jesus became a man and not an angel and so Jesus is empathetic to the needs of mankind.

The NASB translates Hebrews 2:16, "*For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham.*"

The NASB, however, interprets the verse to mean that because Jesus became a man he is therefore the helper / redeemer of mankind and not of angels. Check out the verse for yourself at the <http://www.blueletterbible.org> for further study.

Consider the whole argument flow of Hebrews 2 (WEB) below,

1) Therefore we ought to pay greater attention to the things that were heard, lest perhaps we drift away. 2) For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, 3) how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation—which at the first having been spoken through the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard, 4) God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders, by various works of power and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will?

Point 1: Pay attention because Jesus is greater than angels.

5) For he didn't subject the world to come, of which we speak, to angels. 6) But one has somewhere testified, saying, 'What is man, that you think of him? Or the son of man, that you care for him? 7) You made him a little lower than the angels. You crowned him with glory and honor. 8) You have put all things in subjection under his feet.'

For in that he subjected all things to him, he left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we don't see all things subjected to him, yet. 9) But we see him who has been made a little lower than the angels, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God he should taste of death for everyone.

Point 2: The world to come is also subject to mankind, not to angels, with Jesus leading the charge in dominion by tasting death for us.

10) For it became him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many children to glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings. 11) For both he who sanctifies and those

who are sanctified are all from one, for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brothers, 12) saying,

'I will declare your name to my brothers. Among the congregation I will sing your praise.' 13) *Again, 'I will put my trust in him.'* Again, *'Behold, here I am with the children whom God has given me.'*

Point 3: Jesus is not ashamed to call us his brothers and sisters.

14) Since then the children have shared in flesh and blood, he also himself in the same way partook of the same, that through death he might bring to nothing him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15) and might deliver all of them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. 16) For most certainly, he doesn't give help to angels, but he gives help to the offspring of Abraham. 17) Therefore he was obligated in all things to be made like his brothers, that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make atonement for the sins of the people. 18) For in that he himself has suffered being tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted.

Point 4: Jesus broke the power of Satan because he is not the helper of sinful angels, but the helper of sinful mankind.

The literal translation of Hebrews 2:16 (WEB) from the Greek is:

English	Strong's	Greek
For	g1063	<i>gar</i>
most certainly	g1222	<i>depou</i>
He doesn't	g3756	<i>ou</i>
give help	g1949	<i>epilambanomai</i>
to angels	g32	<i>aggelos</i>
but	g235	<i>alla</i>
He gives help	g1949	<i>epilambanomai</i>
to the offspring	g4690	<i>sperma</i>
of Abraham	g11	<i>Abraam</i>

In conclusion, it would seem that the KJV is guilty of allowing a bias of understanding to wrongly influence the translation. Hebrews 2:16 is saying that Jesus is not the helper of Satan and his angels. Does the verse go as far to say that the Devil and his angels are outside of the redemption purchased at the cross? Some have interpreted the "apokatastasis" of Acts 3:21 and the "all things" of Colossians 1:20 to include fallen angels as well. The happy news is that the redemption of ALL mankind is explicitly taught in Scripture. As for Satan, the arch enemy of Christ, it is also explicitly taught that Christ is not his helper and his destiny is the Lake of Fire. Is there an end to his condemnation to the Lake of Fire? The Scriptures are silent on that question.

How Can You Say Revelation 21:8 Does Not Apply to Humans?

Another questioned...

READER>> How can you say Revelation 21:8 does not apply to humans? If you say that only fallen angels are sentenced to the Lake of Fire, since when were demons cowardly, unbelieving, vile, murderers, sexually immoral, magicians, idolaters, and liars? This is clearly speaking about human unbelievers.

ME>> This is a most excellent question.

Here is Revelation 21:8 (WEB) again,

But for the cowardly, unbelieving, sinners, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their part is in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.

The demonstration of Grace is God's purpose in creation and redemptive history and so grace should always be the interpretive lens of Scripture. The believing elect, having received grace and being led by the Holy Spirit, are well equipped to interpret the Scripture. The Holy Spirit even says boldly that, *"you don't need for anyone to teach you,"* for we have an anointing from Him, I John 2:27 (WEB).

To that end I make an observation, the passage says that *"all liars, their part is in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur."* I boldly assert through the interpretive lens of grace that in this case *"all"* does not mean *"all"* in this context. The immediate context and the whole context of Scripture is essential for rightly dividing the word of truth. In my key exegesis of Romans 11:32, I explained that *"all"* does mean all because all mankind are sinners. Reread my article, [Romans 11:32-36](#) for my complete argument. However, in the case of Revelation 20:8 *"all"* cannot mean all liars, because everyone is a liar according to Romans 3:4. If all liars are damned to the Lake of Fire then you and I are damned as well. Likewise even Christians are at times cowardly, unbelieving, vile, murderers, sexually immoral, magicians, and idolaters. Yet these sins are forgiven for all mankind through the death of Christ. No doubt even your theology agrees with my logic so far. So in light of all of Scripture, in this case *"all"* must mean all those outside of Christ, that is the non-elect. Only the non-elect sinners are consigned to the Lake of Fire. However, those predestined for grace certainly are saved from the Lake of Fire even though we are liars and sinners of various types. Do you follow this logic?

So the damned are those whose sins are not paid for, those who owe an obligation to the judge at the Great White Throne Judgment, but have nothing to pay the obligation. However, the sins of all mankind are paid for, according to I John 2:1-2. Thus the only beings remaining with a sin debt are the fallen angels. Coincidentally only fallen angels are explicitly named as cast into the Lake of Fire, that is Satan, The Beast, and The False Prophet. Furthermore, the Scriptures explicitly state that the Lake of Fire is *"prepared for... the Devil and his angels"* (Matthew 25:41 WEB).

But can Revelation 21:8 really only apply to angels? Yes, I've already proved that God's chosen people are also guilty of all these sins, but exempt from damnation due to the fact that our sins are paid! That is the good news!! Fallen angels, however, are vile, but their vileness is not atoned. Jesus became a man and is the vicarious substitute for mankind, but not the angel kind. Consider that Satan is called a murderer and the Father of Lies, John

8:44. Ezekiel 28 also highlights Satan's idolatry. He worshiped his own beauty and not the beauty of Christ. Yet can we say that angels are cowardly, sexually immoral, and magicians?

This seems odd to give these labels to the fallen angels. Yet Satan and his demons are guilty of these crimes even if only because they tempt and applaud mankind's stumbling in these areas. Consider also that some believe that embodied fallen angels are specifically guilty of sexual immorality in Genesis 6:1-4 and were punished as explained in 2 Peter 2:4. Though I am uncertain of these details, I am certain that fallen angels will be condemned at the Great White Throne Judgment as explained in Daniel 12:1-4, Matthew 25:31-46, and Revelation 20:11-15. In the end, Satan and his demonic following are the only people outside of Christ at the Great White Throne Judgment as they are sentenced the Lake of Fire for *The Ages of The Ages*. Finally, Isaiah believed that one day all mankind would bow down in worship before the Lord, Isaiah 66:22-24.

Friend, is your question really a question of Biblical exegesis? Or instead is your question really about how grace is applied to the forgiveness of your own sins for your own salvation? Are you convinced that your choice of faith has signed the deal for your salvation? Why not trade in your "*personal salvation*" to join the salvation of *ALL* God's people? Why not trust that Christ signed the deal for your salvation with his blood at Calvary, as well as the salvation of *ALL* mankind.

[< Hebrews 2:16 Does Not Say Fallen Angels Are Damned](#)

up

[How Could Anyone Not Believe This Awesome News? >](#)

How Could Anyone Not Believe This Awesome News?

READERS>> *How could anyone not believe the awesome news that Jesus is the savior of ALL mankind?*

ME>> A good question. Opponents voice reasons that they do not believe Jesus is the savior of all mankind. However, if you agree with the Biblical, rational, and historical proofs in the [Optimism Out of Control](#) book you may wonder how anyone could possibly not believe! The good news is so clear! Following are a few reasons to remind us to be merciful to those who doubt.

- Traditional *Christian* understanding, that most of humanity is eternally damned, has a majority following. It can be very difficult to break from majority opinion.
- Even adults are impacted by peer pressure. Concluding at variance with one's religious community may result in difficult social repercussions and even rejection.
- Suggesting that the Greek word "*aion*" is better translated as "*age*", "*entire*", "*life*", "*whole*", or "*unbroken*" sounds suspect. Seekers may feel unqualified for Greek studies.
- Most think that after death you go to Heaven or Hell. However, very few know that Hades is temporal, while the Lake of Fire is the final judgment for fallen angels.
- Biblical Christian Universalist fellowship can be very difficult if not impossible to find. Furthermore, few want to join a movement without a local presence.
- True Christian faith will never stand as a peer with the religions of the world. True Christian faith stands alone as radical stance by definition and so has a high cost.
- Salvation granted through the *free will* choice of Jesus Christ appeals strongly to the natural man. However, super-natural new birth is required to see otherwise.

These are just a few reasons why many find it difficult to believe that **Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind.**

Keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. And have mercy on some, who are doubting; save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh.

Jude 21-23 (NASB)

I Do Not Agree

One thoughtful reader writes...

READER>> In summary, thanks for sending your article and reading my response (below). I hope it is helpful and that you can see why I do not agree with your conclusions, based on the Scriptures.

ME>> You are welcome. Fair enough.

READER>> I don't see Scripture indicating that I need to worry "whether I am part of the elect or not." Rather, I just need to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation (Acts 16:31, Rom. 10:9-10, etc). Afterward, out of gratitude for having been saved, I ought to live in line with my new identity (Eph. 4, 5, 2Pet.1:3-11, etc). The question of "whether I am elect or not" will take care of itself. By definition, if I believe in Jesus Christ for salvation and receive His free gift of salvation, I am part of the elect. If I reject Jesus Christ, or believe for a short time and then fall away (1 John 2:19), by definition I was never part of the elect. Regarding "assurance" and "how one may know that one truly believes," 1 John and James deal with that point. Regarding whether God will in fact save those who believe in Jesus, there's no need to worry about that either.... God always keeps His promises, as shown by all of Scripture. But do you know of anywhere in Scripture where people are instructed to try to figure out if they're part of the elect or not? To my knowledge, and as you wrote, Scripture teaches BOTH that God sovereignly chooses people to be part of His elect, and that we humans are morally responsible for our actions (and must believe in Christ to be saved). These two truths are both taught (sometimes in the same verse! 2 Tim. 2:19).

*ME>> 2 Peter 1:9-11 commands us to make our election sure. This is a critical issue in order to insure that those professing Christ actually have saving faith. Many people profess faith in Christ yet revolt against his words, "**you did not choose me, but I chose you.**" Many begin to follow Jesus, but turn away when they hear more detail about the truth. Or since faith, repentance, and conversion are too painful they instead convert Jesus into a palatable American. It is important to understand that when Jesus says trust me, he is not saying "Take the action to trust me, perform the work of trusting me, and then I will add your name to the Book of Life." Rather he is saying to his elect, "Trust me, I have written your name in my book from before the foundation of the world." These are two radically different understandings of faith. One is salvation by grace, the other by works. More specifically you say that one must believe in Christ to be saved. I agree that faith is required for salvation from sin and salvation from Hades. However, since faith cannot add our name to the Lamb's Book of Life then actually not even "faith" cannot save someone from the Lake of Fire. Only the electing grace of God can pen our name in the Lamb's Book of Life, the final criterion for salvation from the Lake of Fire, Revelation 20:15. The importance of faith is that trust in Christ enables us to see our name in the Lamb's Book of Life, to see that our names are already there because God has always loved us! This is the happy news!!*

READER>> On the page [Gospel Foolishness](#), you wrote: "The Arminian boasts in his 'free will' choice of God while the Calvinist boasts that he alone is chosen." I would certainly not boast that "I alone am chosen," and I don't know of any Calvinist who would do so. Certainly our boast should be in Jesus Christ. If you ask me whether God has chosen a particular set of people for salvation, I would say 'Yes,' the scripture informs me that He has. And if you ask me whether I am part of that subset, I would say 'Yes, that seems to be the case,' because (to the best of my knowledge) I believe in Jesus Christ and I see the evidences mentioned in 1 John allowing me to "know" that I have eternal life. But is there any self-

based pride in this? Absolutely not. Rather (Romans 9:11/context, 11:6, Ephesians 1) my election is all based on God's unconditional, sovereign, loving, eternal, choice, not based on any goodness inside me. So there is nothing for me to boast about regarding myself. Hence I disagree with your phrase mentioned above, as a straw-man argument.

ME>> Thank you for this correction. You are right that I should not use the same word "boast" when addressing the error of the Arminian and the Calvinist. They are both in error, but errors of a different nature. It is the Arminians who "boasts" because their salvation is based on their own decision, their own work. But Grace teaches us that this is boastful. However, the Calvinist error is to claim that they are part of an imaginary chosen subset of humanity. This error is more properly labeled "blindness," just as Jesus labeled the Pharisees, "blind guides." I have corrected that language in my article [Gospel Foolishness](#). Above you also say it "seems to be the case" that you are part of that chosen subset. This does not sound very certain. Why the reservation? Why not great boldness? Your choice of words proves a critical point made previously in my book: that the Calvinist cannot be 100% certain that they are part of the chosen subset of saved humanity. Please read my article, [Certain Knowledge](#) again. I also write more on this subject below.

READER>>*As I understand what you are saying, you believe that after death, those who believe in Jesus will go to heaven while those who disbelieve will go to "hell"/"hades", as a place of "temporary punishment." Then at the day of final judgment, you believe that God will extend a pardon (because of Christ's sacrificial death) to every individual human who has ever lived (i.e. every human's name will be listed in the Book of Life; there will be no one whose name is not in the Book of Life), after which all the humans will go into permanent heaven and live forever with God. You base this on several passages, especially Romans 11:32 ("For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all") and Hosea 2:23 ("I will say to those called 'Not my people,' 'You are my people'"). All of the passages which are traditionally interpreted as teaching that some humans will end up in everlasting punishment you reinterpret in the following 2 ways: either (1) they are only talking about 'temporary hell', (2) they only apply to demons, not humans. Some of this I agreed with, and some I disagreed with, on Scriptural grounds.*

ME>> Yes I do believe Romans 11:32 is the grand conclusion of Christian salvation and yes I believe all mankind will be finally saved from the Lake of Fire, though most are not saved from sin, unbelief, and punishment in Hades. However, please note that there is one critical gospel caveat: The foolishness of the gospel warns the unbelieving that those who reject this good news and the grace of Christ that they are not "his sheep" and they will spend the duration in Hades. This sentence still stands for unbelieving mankind whether Jew or gentile.

READER>> *...I disagree with your fundamental premise in the book, that all humans will end up being saved and entering into eternal life. I disagree not for emotional or tradition-based reasons, but for Scriptural reasons, as follows. First, I think that your "four square salvation evaluator" is too simplistic. "Save" (greek sozo) does not always mean save from sin... (1 Tim 2:15) "All" (greek pantas) does not always mean "all (individual people in the world)"... sometimes it means "all (people in a particular group which is being discussed in a context)" or "all (types of people...)" or both (types of people)" (Mark 1:5, 4:31, John 3:26, 4:29, 8:2, 12:32, Acts 2:45, 22:15, 26:4, Romans 3:9, 16:26, 1 Cor 10:33, Gal 2:14, Col 3:11, etc) "Have mercy" does not look exactly the same for all people... God's mercy on some involves giving food/water/rain/family/etc, but God's mercy upon others involves far more, to the point of opening our eyes to believe in Him for eternal life. (Acts 14:17) Being the "savior of all men" does not necessarily mean that they are always "saved" from Hell or from the lake of fire, or saved to the same destiny, or in the same way, or to the same extent (1 Tim 4:10) It seems that when you read in Romans 11 "...that He may have mercy upon all", you infer that this means that God will eventually redeem all humans and bring them into heaven... but this conclusion is not required by this verse in its context, and does not fit other passages of Scripture. I agree with Galli's point that "all" here in context is referring to "both Jews and Gentiles." (For example, verses 25-31 are comparing these two groups).*

ME>> I am sorry that you think my *Four Square Salvation Evaluator* is too simplistic. In fact I thought the simplicity of this model actually helped the reader to understand the simple errors and difficulties evident in the historic Arminian and Calvinistic debate. Regarding the question of "saved from what?", I address the various dangers we need to be saved from in my articles, *2 Corinthians 5:14-21* and *Saved 5x*. However, the focus of the salvation question in my *Four Square Salvation Evaluator* is only the question of eternal salvation, that is salvation from the Lake of Fire. Since you were confused about that I added further clarification in my article, *Soteriologies*. Likewise, I also address the different possible meanings of the word "all," but as you say we come to a different conclusion.

READER>> You wrote in [your article] *Romans 11:32-36* "We should be consistent because the context for both verses regarding Paul's points about Jew and Gentile being alike under sin are the same. However, Romans 3:23 is easily understood to mean every individual person, just as Romans 11:32 should be understood to mean every individual person, whether Jew or Gentile." "easily understood to mean"? On the contrary, the context of Romans 3 is more in favor of a meaning of "both Jews and Gentiles" than "each individual". I agree with you that each individual has sinned, but that is not the primary contextual point of Rom 3:23. Therefore, Rom 3:23 cannot be used to infer that Romans 11:32 is talking about every individual person.

ME>> I am surprised that you say this. The larger context of Romans 3:23 begins by quoting Psalm 14:3 saying, "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God." The meaning of the Psalm and Romans 3:9-23 is commonly understood by all Christians to say that each individual human being is guilty of sin, not merely all types of people. I am merely pointing out that the larger context of Romans allows me to conclude that Romans 11:32 can also be interpreted to mean every individual human being without doing any violence to the rules of interpretation. However, the definitive proof is the means Jesus used to make payment for mankind's sin. He became a man and is identified as the new federal head of all humanity in Romans Chapter 5. He does not represent part of humanity, but the entirety of humanity. By the very nature of how he paid for sin, the sin payment must apply to all mankind -- that is every individual human being that ever lived or will live. He did not pay for the sins of some with cash or a mere token, but he became a man and thus the vicarious substitute for all! One cannot simply apply his death to part of mankind because he became the substitute for all mankind. To do so would be to somehow divide Jesus' body into a part that died for some, and a part that did not die for others. How could we do that when instead his body was broken for all his people?

READER>> A related verse is I John 2:1-2, "the whole world" in context being "not only Jews... also people from every tribe and nation... but not necessarily EVERY person from every tribe and nation". For example, John 12:19, etc.

ME>> That is curious. I understand John to be saying that Christ is the atoning sacrifice for not only our sins, meaning not only believers, but that Christ is also the atoning sacrifice for unbelievers as well. The "us" and "them" under the New Covenant is no longer Jew and gentile, but instead believer and unbeliever.

READER>> (Also, God's "binding us to sin" does not mean that He "caused" us to sin... rather that He "ordained"/"allowed" such... There are multiple levels of causality, not only a single level. (Genesis 50:20, etc). I'd highly recommend reading Bruce Ware's two books on this: "God's Lesser Glory" and "God's Greater Glory.")

ME>> I am not sure if your debate is with me or with the Bible on this point. I also agree that God has not soiled his holy hands with the works of Satan. It was Satan who tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden, certainly not God. Yet the Bible clearly says that God himself is finally responsible for both the origin and the purpose of sin as explained in Isaiah 30:28, Romans 8:20, and Romans 11:32. God is not a tempter, but Satan none-the-less, evil though he is, still serves God's sovereign purposes. Specifically, God decreed the existence of sin in order to demonstrate his grace. Though admittedly if you reject this you are on the side of

the majority for most are unwilling to swallow this truth. However, at least take note that I stand with the great theologians Martin Luther, Jonathon Edwards, and many others concerning God's sovereignty over sin.

READER>> On Hosea 2:23, this is a very important verse. It is important to recognize the historical context. God had made an eternal covenant / promise to Abraham and his descendants in Genesis 12 and following. In Deuteronomy 27-30, God told His people that even if they were punished to the point of diaspora (28:63ff, 30:1-6), eventually He would bring them back... because God's covenant with them was permanent. He would never permanently let them go. Then when Israel sinned and was eventually sent into exile, many of the prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc.) still foretold (based on the promises in Genesis-Deuteronomy) that God would bring them back. So when Hosea presented his prophecy, this was not a general case... it was not saying that "in general, God always relents and allows evildoers back into his presence, after a temporary of punishment." Instead, it was a very special "not-my-people"... God had temporarily "disowned" them (in the sense of ceasing to bless them physically as a nation) because they had disowned Him... but He had never forgotten about them or about His promise (Hosea 11:8). Paul then quotes this in Romans 9:25-26 to show that the Gentiles were now included as promised... but again, the fact that the Gentiles would be included was LONG foretold... even back to Genesis 3:15, 12:3, etc, and certainly Isaiah 42:4/Matt 12:21. So again, Hosea 2:23 / Romans 9:26 / inclusion-of-the-Gentiles is not a general "principle" (so I think your "Hosea Principle" is incorrect), but a specific prophecy and fulfillment about certain people / groups that God had predestined for salvation. In your book, you take Hosea 2:23 out of context and apply it to the unbelievers, in your hope that God will call them "My people" in the end... but this directly contradicts the other Scriptures (see below) that explain exactly what God will do with those unbelievers: consign them to the lake of fire forever. Thus your application of the "Hosea principle" leads you to contradict the clear teaching of other scriptures, and I respectfully and earnestly appeal to warn you that this is very wrong.

ME>> Romans 4:16 explains that the promise to Abraham does not follow the physical lineage of Abraham, but instead the spiritual lineage of Abraham, to all those who share the faith of Abraham. Of course we would need further conversation to outline the impact of this promise as it relates to this life, to Hades, and to the Lake of Fire. Furthermore the gospel makes it clear that the doctrine of predestination guarantees God's faithfulness to both chosen Jews and chosen Gentiles. Romans 11 also explains a relationship between the belief and unbelief of the Jews and Gentiles that results in a curious dynamic of envy that propels all people to Christian faith. The conclusion of redemptive history is not further distinction between Jew and Gentile, but in fact the tearing down of the dividing wall. The Jews were merely the starting point of God's plan to bring salvation to the entire world as explained in Isaiah Chapter 49. Thus the Gentile world has much to learn about both the character and methods of God through his dealings with Israel.

Regarding your disagreement with the "*Hosea principle*" you may have a point to make in that my language could be more precise. It is certain there is particular Biblical language to explain the special relationship that God had with Israel under the Old Covenant. There is also particular language to describe the special relationship he has with believers under the New Covenant. However, I do not want the fact that I am neither a "*Dispensational Theologian*" nor a "*Covenant Theologian*" to detract from my main point. My main point is that God uses strong language that appears to rule out any possibility of salvation for both unbelieving Jews and unbelieving Gentiles. Then when evidence of repentance is found, God warmly calls both believing Jews and Gentiles his children. This is seen in the language of Hosea toward the Jews when God calls them, "*not my people,*" then calls these same people, "*my people*" after they repent. This is also seen in the language of Jesus toward the Syrian Phoenicia Greek woman in Mark 7:24-30. Jesus pitched a hard fast ball saying that his help was unavailable to her. He even joined the hypocritical Jews in referring to her as a gentile "*dog.*" It is hard for me to believe that Jesus even said that! Perhaps he only said it ironically as a rebuke to the Pharisees. Regardless, she understood him to call her a gentile "*dog*" and his words caused the woman to humble herself even further. As a result of her

acknowledgement that she did not deserve his help, Jesus then poured out his grace healing her daughter. The point is that the "*Hosea principle*" is most certainly a "*modus operandi*" that Jesus employs with both the Jews and Gentiles to test our hearts and bring our hard hearts to repentance when needed. Romans 11:29 certainly guarantees God's faithfulness even to the unbelieving Jews mentioned in Romans 11:28. The verse also explains the reason for God's faithfulness to unbelieving gentiles in Romans 11:30. God is the faithful savior of both the unbelieving Jews and gentiles.

READER>> Regarding your page 2 Thessalonians 1:9... Here you say that 2 Thess 1:9 "everlasting destruction" refers to temporary punishment, because of Deut 15:17. It does not make sense to me that you are using an argument about the Hebrew word ("olam") to interpret 2 Thess 1:9 (written in Greek, not Hebrew), a completely different language and culture... and especially that there are no contextual clues that this "everlasting destruction" in 2 Thess 1:9 is "temporary." Something to consider -- How could God have possibly made it any more clear about the "everlasting/eternal destruction" that is coming for unbelievers? If you seek to use the argument that from Deut 15:17 "everlasting" means "temporary," how then could God ever make clear to you or other people that this really does mean everlasting/eternal/forever? In fact, if you persist in this line of reasoning, what prevents someone from taking other (Greek) words meaning "everlasting" in the NT (such as John 3:16!) and applying your Deut 15:17 Hebrew 'olam' argument to it, and coming to the conclusion that our eternal life is also only temporary? Or that the devil's eternal torment in the lake of fire is also temporary? In the case of certain Old Testament usages of "olam" indicating "for a long time" rather than truly "forever/everlasting," the reason we know that such is the correct meaning of "olam" is that we see other verses which indicate the "end" of the time period in question. (e.g. Jer. 25:9 uses "olam" about an "everlasting desolation," and then verse 12 clarifies that this period is only 70 years). But 2 Thess 1:9 has no such qualifiers.

ME>> Good point. Hebrew and Greek are different languages and the Old Testament and New Testament are from different times and cultures. Yet consider these three good points.

FIRST) there is Old Testament Biblical precedent for the grace of God abolishing / fulfilling / satisfying the "*everlasting*" as he did with the Sabbath command and numerous Old Testament everlastings including the Old Covenant itself. When God satisfied / fulfilled / abolished the eternal commands of the Old Covenant he truly accomplished the impossible (impossible for us, but possible for him). Thus it is not so radical to consider that God could do the same in the New Testament time period.

SECOND) the New Testament does say that the "*gates of Hades*" will not overcome the work of the church in Matthew 16:18. This statement is more than wishful thinking. This is a promise. The promise is even prominently linked to the first public acknowledgement of Jesus as Messiah. The promise specifically offers hope beyond Hades. So if God has achieved the impossible in nailing the Old Covenant to the cross in public spectacle as explained in Colossians 2:13-15, then why are you so incredulous that the grace of God can bring an end to Hades? In my book I simply proposed a Biblical interpretive model that explains how this is possible. Furthermore, Jesus says in Matthew 10:28 that body and soul are destroyed in Hades. Yet Revelation 20:13 says unbelievers are extracted alive, out of Hades. By "*destroyed*" Jesus must not mean ruined beyond hope of his grace, but that the potential to live for Christ, hear the words "*well done my faithful servant*", or avoid great punishment is missed.

THIRD) both the Arminian and Calvinist models of salvation fall short of reason at different points. Because they fall short and because faith must also be reasonable, we must be willing to consider alternate models. The model I have proposed certainly does not have any more weaknesses and I think has greater strengths. Furthermore, the model I propose remains faithful to two critical gospel facts, 1) Jesus became a man and through his death he became the substitutionary atonement for ALL mankind, and 2) salvation is ALL of grace with

no work of man even remotely accepted. Calvinism fails at point 1 and Arminianism fails at point 2. As for your argument that "everlasting" cannot have multiple meanings in the New Testament without also allowing for the end of Satan's doom, the end of Heaven, or confusion, consider the Old Testament use of "olam" which also has multiple usages in the Old Testament. Context is needed to determine the meanings of words. In fact it is proven through John Wesley Hanson's scholarly work that the Hebrew "olam" and the Greek "aion" are synonyms and mean the "duration of the subject in view." I have added a brief review and copy of Hanson's work [on my website](#). Dr. Heleen Keizer has also written a dissertation proving the same titled, *Life, Time, Entirety - A Study of Aion in Greek Literature and Philosophy, the Septuagint and Philo*. Read her [315 page dissertation online](#) or an [abstract of her conclusions on my website](#).

READER>> You wrote in *Certain Knowledge* "Some Calvinists argue that possession of faith is proof that you are God's chosen. But again with this understanding faith itself becomes the object of confidence rather than Christ himself. Either way knowledge of salvation for the Calvinist requires confidence that they are part of the chosen subset. So, according to reason, they cannot have true security either." I disagree... Calvinists can have security, exactly as 1 John describes. When a Calvinist looks back at his life and notices the various changes that 1 John describes, he realizes that his "faith" is real and he can know that he has eternal life. His faith is placed in Christ and His promises, not in these life changes. But the life changes give him 'assurance' and show him that his faith is genuine.

ME>> Confidence in Christian salvation can never be gained by "looking back at our life!" This is the reason the Gospel of John typically uses "believe" in the present active tense. One might easily fool oneself into such confidence by referencing some transcendental experience from the past. Yet life experience can only ever offer subjective proofs. Even if we could look back and testify to miracles, a changed life, or angel sightings, even these are totally insufficient for confidence in salvation. Grand as they may appear, they are mere tokens that can also be possessed by the unbelieving. Jannes and Jambres performed real miracles in rebellion against Moses, II Timothy 3:8, and they thought they were in the right. Bill's Story in Alcoholics Anonymous has truly helped many reform and leave a life of alcoholism, even though acknowledging a higher power, but still without saving faith in Jesus Christ. And as for angel sightings, both Mohammed and Joseph Smith lay claim to that, yet without saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Christian assurance can only and must only come through confidence in the gospel facts and promises found in the person of Jesus Christ. So again I say that anyone who believes that the atonement is limited in scope will correspondingly be limited in assurance of salvation. However, they may have deceived themselves into such assurance. Consider, if I tell you that I paid for all the oranges in a basket and that you can have one for free, then you can pick any orange with great confidence knowing that it is already paid for. If you have faith in my promise, then you will happily pick an orange, any orange. If you do not have faith you are still free to pick an orange because they are still paid, but you refuse. Now suppose I tell you that I paid for particular oranges in the basket, but not others, and only I know which oranges I paid for, then how will you determine which orange to pick out of the basket for free? What objective fact do you have to lay claim to a particular orange? In this case, claim of "faith" can only be a pretense because it cannot be founded on an objective fact. Calvinistic orange picking can only be a form of Russian Roulette.

READER>> Regarding your page *Matthew 25:31-46* I didn't understand your argument on verse 46. Were you saying that this "eternal punishment" is the same thing as the temporary punishment of Luke 16? It seems that you did not finish explaining on this page how this "eternal punishment" fits with your theory that no one will end up in the lake of fire.

ME>> I never said no one ends up in the Lake of Fire. In fact I said quite the opposite. All the unredeemed are sentenced to the Lake of Fire with no escape from this judgment. Matthew 25:31-46 makes it perfectly clear that the Devil and his angels will be sentenced there for *The Ages of The Ages*. I was merely pointing out that this passage does not say

anything about *humans* being damned to the Lake of Fire, but only the goats on his left, which I have proved to be the Devil and his angels. Yet, for the extreme demonstration of his grace, God apparently allows the unbelieving elect to follow Satan to the very precipice of the Lake of Fire. But will the rebel elect succeed in their mission of self-destruction? Not a chance with the grace of God on watch!

READER>> You wrote in [2 Corinthians 5:14-21](#) "These verses even explain that all mankind is ALREADY positionally reconciled to God 'in Christ' apart from faith. Most would teach that each individual is placed 'into Christ' only as they believe in him. But I understand that those predestined to salvation are never outside of God's grace, because they are always positionally 'in Christ.' However, as each individual is awakened as a new creation, then they realize their position 'in Christ' and 'live in Christ.'" I disagree. The phrase "the world" here (in context and in the light of other scriptures) could mean "men and women from every nation"...the phrase and context does not require it to mean "every individual". As to which of these two are in view, although the local context might allow both meanings, I think that if you look at the context of other Scriptures (such as listed below), it is more accurate to take it as "men and women from every nation."

ME>> I will double check my statement that all the elect are positionally "in Christ" before they place faith in Christ. I know that this understanding is not standard. However, if anyone agrees to the doctrine of predestination in the least then there must be an acknowledgement of some sort that the elect are ultimately protected from the wrath of God from before the creation of the world. As for whether "all" means every individual human being, 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 makes it clear that it is in fact the entirety of humanity. It does not make sense to say that God died for "all types of people," and therefore "all types of people died." The "all" in this verse is parallel proving that because Christ died for every individual human, therefore every individual human is proved to be spiritually dead apart from spiritual rebirth. I expand on this point in my article, ['In' Doctrine](#).

READER>> You wrote in [Let's Celebrate](#) "As I explained questions about the extent of God's grace in salvation grew like a dark cloud in my life, clouding my relationship with Christ. I was not sure I would be able to rejoice in Heaven. I needed to agree that Christ had done the right thing in saving some while damning others. Yet I could not and continued to search the Bible." I have likewise struggled emotionally with this, but have "solved my problem" in a different way than you. I have to admit that God knows better than I do... and if (for example) my dear friend for whose salvation I pray every day is eventually sentenced by God to eternal destruction in the lake of fire, I have to trust that God knows best and that I will be able to rejoice in His wisdom and goodness when I get to heaven, even if God doesn't grant my request for my friend's salvation... and even if I cannot now imagine how I will be able to rejoice if my friend is not saved.

ME>> That is a possible conclusion as well, but it is lacking the passion demonstrated by Paul in Romans 9:3. Salvation by grace, when truly received, emboldens one to stand before his maker and say, "How could you save a disgusting, wicked, wretch like me and leave even one other person unsaved?" And then wait for the answer.

READER>> Regarding your page [RSVP Review](#). Here you seem to be arguing that because God saving everyone would be a cause for celebration, therefore it must be true. This is an appeal to an emotion, not scripture. If someone responded without enthusiasm for your incorrect Scriptural interpretations, you here describe their lack of enthusiasm as "callousness" and "standing on shaky ground" and "devoid of grace," simply because they were not expressing happy emotions when you presented your view to them. This is a very dangerous line of reasoning. Instead, we ought to go with the Scripture, not with what makes us happy or emotionally satisfied. I realize that in your other pages you give arguments from Scripture. But here on this page, you give an emotional argument, and one that I think is very dangerous.

ME>> My concluding paragraph on that page makes it clear that I am not saying something is

true because the thought results in a celebration. However, I am saying that my question did expose that the majority of professing Christians interviewed turned to works salvation as a defense of their belief and attitude. That is not good. Rather than coming to terms with pure grace, they have comfortably taken credit for a portion of their salvation adding condition to God's unconditional love. That is not good at all. The majority found peace concerning the damned by claiming to merit their own salvation in some way. Thus I agree that my interview question is very dangerous. I could get in a lot of trouble for exposing that kind of hypocrisy.

READER>> Here are some more verses which indicate to me that many humans will end up in the lake of fire in the end. It seems you did not discuss these verses: [Daniel 12:1-2, Matthew 7:13-14, John 3:36, John 5:28-29, Rev 14:9-12, and Revelation 21:8ff.] Also, I realize that you consider many of the "judgment verses" below as applying only to the "temporary hell," not the final/permanent lake-of-fire judgment. However I see no Scriptural evidence that people who are in the temporary hell will be spared from going into the final/permanent lake-of-fire judgment, so I think these verses below about Hell also contradict your view (that all humans will eventually be saved), [Matthew 5:29-30, Matthew 7:21-23, Matthew 8:11-12, Matthew 13:41-42, Matthew 22:11-14, Matthew 25:30, John 15:6, and Luke 13:22-28.]

ME>> Thank you for highlighting these verses. You are right that I do not think that all these verses are speaking about condemnation to the Lake of Fire. Plus we must consider that Jesus warns and threatens the unbelieving elect even though they are never in danger of the Lake of Fire. However, Jesus does damn the non-elect reprobate to the Lake of Fire. Jesus may speak the same careful words to one group, the other, or even simultaneously to both. You must at least concede that much to me. You say, "*First, I think that your "four square salvation evaluator" is too simplistic. "Save" (greek sozo) does not always mean save from sin*". Let me clarify about salvation: I understand there are at least five things the Bible tells us we need to be saved from. The short list is salvation from 1) harm, 2) sin, 3) a fruitless life, 4) Hell (Hades), and 5) the Lake of Fire. I write at length about this in my article, *Saved 5x*. Now, you accused me of being too simplistic, but when you list all these verses above and suggest they are only talking about salvation from number 5, the Lake of Fire, you are the one being too simplistic. You have inspired me, however, to add a comprehensive study of the various afterlife destinies referenced in your verses and the remainder of the New Testament. Lord willing I will make progress in my article, *Salvation: Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How* and my article, *Forever is Not Forever? You Still Gotta Be Kidding Me!* The most troubling passage that you highlighted to me is Daniel 12:1-4.

1) 'At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. 2) Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. 3) Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever. 4) But you, Daniel, roll up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge.

I have found fault with both the Arminian and Calvinistic system of Christian salvation, others may find fault with me as you have done. Certainly I am not the Holy Spirit, so my interpretations can also be wrong. I keep my hope in the grace of Christ alone. I also openly appeal for help from the grace of Christ and interpretive wisdom from the Holy Spirit. With their help I also hope to add a page about Daniel 12:1-4 in this book as well. Lord willing I will do so. I do thank you for reminding me about it and for praying for me. This passage could be interpreted to unravel my thesis. Or perhaps the passage speaks of

the salvation of man and the condemnation of Satan and his followers. It is important to note that 2 Peter 2:4 makes it clear that the present nether world, Hades, also has a compartment called Tartarus. Tartarus currently contains particular fallen angels who were punished in a special way, whereas other demons still roam freely. The point is that demons will also be among those extracted from Hades / Tartarus at the end of time to face their final judgment as explained in Revelation 20:13. This fact may be relevant to interpreting Daniel 12:1-4 which I hope to do in my article, [Daniel 12:1-4](#).

Dear reader, I do thank you for taking the time to give me all your valuable feedback. It was an essential exercise to put my beliefs to a real life test. I hope we can continue the dialogue. Currently I just finished reading *Erasing Hell* by Francis Chan. Chan glosses over the distinction between Hell / Hades and the Lake of Fire, a vital component to my salvation model. He also improperly makes Hell to be synonymous with The Lake of Fire at times when he does mention it. It is true that the common understanding of Hell is final damnation. However, Biblically, Hell is the temporal punishment in Hades. The Lake of Fire, however, is condemnation for *The Ages of The Ages* after the Great White Throne Judgment. Chan also says something very interesting on page 86 of his book, *"The debate about Hell's duration is much more complex than I first assumed. While I lean heavily on the side that says it is everlasting, I am not ready to claim that with complete certainty."* This is a curious statement by someone writing a book with the main point that people have erred greatly saying that Hell is temporal or punishment in this life. I think I should write Mr. Chan a note pointing him to the good news in Revelation 20:14. Hell is a real and certain punishment for the unbelieving. However, the good news is that Hell / Hades is finally tossed into the Lake of Fire, *empty*, never to be needed again, forever. Then those extracted from Hell / Hades, both humans and fallen angels, will stand before the Lord of glory for their final judgment. If anyone's name is not found in the Book of Life they will be cast into the Lake of Fire for The Ages of The Ages.

Friend, do you want to know with certainty that your name is in the Book of Life? Do you want more confidence than *"it seems to be the case?"* You cannot add your name yourself. You cannot gain confidence through your own decisions. Instead, through faith in Christ, through eyes opened by the Holy Spirit, you can see your name printed in the Lamb's Book from before the foundations of the world, though of course only if you are one of Jesus' chosen.

So I guess the pertinent question is who has the unbiblical optimism? Can your choice of *"faith"* add your name to the Book of Life? There is no optimistic future through that means. Grace teaches us that we did not choose Jesus, but that instead he chose us. Your definition of *"faith"* falls short of the true confidence we can have trusting that Christ loved all his chosen ones before we loved him.

[< How Could Anyone Not Believe This
Awesome News?](#)

[up](#)

[Is all mankind elect? NO! >](#)

Is all mankind elect? NO!

One Pastor strongly objected...

READER>> *Is all mankind elect? NO!*

ME>> Dear Pastor,

Thank you for your study of election that you emailed to me. Thank you also for taking the time to fully understand my view. I have no desire to break with tradition unnecessarily. When one does break with tradition, there are often misunderstandings. Yet you have not misunderstood. Second, thank you for not ignoring this difference. I was short sighted in thinking that the difference did not matter or could be overlooked. Third, thank you for your faithfulness to Regular Baptist tradition which has many good components. Fourth, thank you for humbly praying that if I am wrong the Lord would correct me, but also that if you are wrong that the Lord would correct you. We both need the Lord and stand by his grace alone.

Sadly after reading your study below, I continue to disagree with your interpretation. Yet happily, I still understand the Scripture to teach that all humankind is elect and will be finally saved from the Lake of Fire. I am also compelled to be the Lord's servant and warn those who reject grace that they will be punished for the duration in Hades. Again, I do not have any desire to break with tradition unnecessarily. Yet after studying your objections I have become even more certain that Jesus is the savior of all mankind. There have been others in history that have held this view as well as contemporaries with whom I am initiating fellowship. However, we are a fellowship with "*no place to lay our heads.*"

I have written at length in my book, *Optimism Out of Control*, to defend my understanding. Of course you have read this already and disagree. I would invite you to invest the effort to read it one more time. It would also be important for you to read my answers to other objections in the *Appendix* of my book. I hope to answer your important objections below. My first goal in doing so is to hold myself accountable to be faithful to the Scriptures. My second goal is to invite you to join my understanding and re-forge partnership in making disciples. What a wonderful mission calling lost sheep to trust that Jesus loves them, has forgiven them, and wants to transform them into his image.

Since the minority has broken with tradition on this point, the majority could easily dismiss this view as suspect without any research or reconsideration needed whatsoever. Yet I hope to defend that Christ is the savior of all mankind with Scripture. To that end, I begin by saying that your misunderstanding of Scripture and grace are easily repaired with five corrections.

FIVE CORRECTIONS TO TRADITION

1) Hopefully we agree that only the elect, those chosen by God's grace without any condition satisfied by man, are *predestined* to His good purposes. Yet you reduce election to only or primarily address our eternal state. Consider that Jesus elects nations, groups, and individuals to *various* good stations, some temporal and others eternal. One could be elect or not elect in one dimension while being elect or not elect in another dimension. For example, Israel was specially chosen as the ancestry of Christ and the guardian of the Old Testament Scripture, Romans 9:4-5. Yet God has also specially chosen to love other nations, Isaiah 19:24. The Twelve were specially chosen as Apostles, John 6:70. Yet God has also specially chosen to work in the lives of all believers, 1 Peter 2:4-5. Christians are alone chosen for repentance and receiving forgiveness, Romans 2:4. Yet Christ also chose to forgive all mankind, even the unbelieving unrepentant, from the cross, Luke 23:34 and 1 John 2:1-2. The Scriptures do not speak of only one "*election*," but numerous. Ephesians also makes this plain when the Holy Spirit says in Ephesians 1:11, "*we were also chosen.*" If

we were "*also*" chosen, then there is more than one dimension to election. The context of grace enables believers to interpret rightly and boldly. Christ elected to forgive *ALL* mankind from the cross from before the creation of the world, Ephesians 1:3-10. However, *NOT ALL*, but only some are elected to receive and believe the fact that they are forgiven apart from all conditions before they die, Ephesians 1:11-14. Christ's death has already reconciled God's heart to all mankind, past tense! Since we are reconciled (past tense), how much more will those who live be saved from sin by his life, Romans 5:10.

2) Hopefully we both agree that only the elect, those chosen by God's grace without any condition satisfied by man, are *saved* from a bad end. Yet you make salvation to be primarily single-dimensional so that salvation from Hades is equal to salvation from the Lake of Fire. Consider that if Jesus elects nations, groups, and individuals to various good stations, then he also saves nations, groups, and individuals from various bad stations, again both temporal and eternal. One could be saved or not saved in one dimension while being saved or not saved in another dimension. One generation of Israelites was saved from slavery in Egypt, Micah 6:4. Yet, many Israelite generations were not saved from slavery, but died as slaves in Egypt over 400 years, even though they also were loved by God, Genesis 15:13. Even those Israelites that God did save from slavery were saved only due to His gracious choice and no merit of theirs, Deuteronomy 9:6. Noah and his family were saved from the flood, 1 Peter 3: 20. Yet, the remainder of mankind was not saved from the flood, even though they also were loved by God, Genesis 6:6 and 1 Peter 3:18-20. David asked for salvation from lying lips, Psalm 120:2. Yet, Ananias and Sapphira were not saved from lying to the Holy Spirit, or from punishment, even to the loss of their lives, though they were Christians and saved from Hell, Acts 5:1-11.

Christians, because we have received forgiveness, now have reconciled hearts to God and are saved from the power of sin, Romans 6:1-4, from fruitless lives, 2 Peter 1:4, and from punishment after death, Luke 23:43. Yet those who reject grace are not saved from the 'aion' (duration) of punishment in Hades, Luke 16:19-31. The fire of Hades is a fit punishment for their hardened hearts. So though there is one faith, Ephesians 4:4-6, there are many dimensions to salvation. Again, the context of grace enables believers to interpret rightly and boldly. No doubt we agree that Christian salvation is a package deal that saves from both sin and judgment. Yet we disagree about how the Lake of Fire fits into the package. David said he could even go to Sheol and not be outside of God's love, Psalm 139:8. Jesus taught that the gates of Hades will be finally defeated by God's grace, Matthew 16:18. So even the redeemed will be punished in Hades if they continue to reject grace, 2 Peter 2:1. Yet the redeemed will not go to the Lake of Fire, Romans 11:32, Revelation 20:15. The gates of Hades will be defeated!

3) Hopefully we agree that Greek studies are helpful and a word can have several valid denotations and different applications. As just proved above, the same Greek word translated "*salvation*" can be applied to salvation from sin, futile purpose, harm, Hades, and the Lake of Fire. Likewise the Greek word "*aion*" is used to describe the duration of different epochs. For example "*aion*" in Romans 16:25 indicates the "*duration*" of the earth to the present time, while "*aion*" in Romans 16:26, one verse later, indicates the "*eternal*" God. Matthew 28:20 likewise speaks of the end of "*aion*," this "*age*." Other non-eternal uses of "*aion*" include Matthew 24:3, Luke 16:8, Luke 20:34-35, John 9:32, Acts 3:21, Romans 12:2, 1 Corinthians 1:20, 2:6-8, 3:18, 10:11, 2 Corinthians 4:4, Galatians 1:4, Ephesians 1:21, 2:2, 2:7, 3:9, Colossians 1:26, 2 Timothy 4:10, Hebrews 6:5, 9:26, and Hebrews 11:3. John Wesley Hanson's classic work proves that "*aion*" means the duration of the object in question whether finite or eternal. Septuagint usage proves that "*aion*" is synonymous with Hebrew "*olam*" which can mean temporal or eternal. [Read Hanson's work from my website.](#) (Though I do not agree with Hanson's application in Matthew 25:31-46.) Dr. Helena Keizer's dissertation proves the same: *Life, Time, Entirety - A Study of Aion in Greek Literature and Philosophy, the Septuagint and Philo*. Read her [315 page dissertation online](#) or read an [abstract of her conclusions from my website](#). The English word "*eon*" even descends etymologically from "*aion*!" Yet you and tradition chose "*aion*" to mean

"eternal" in 2 Thessalonians 1:9. Why?

The context of grace is a better interpretive tool than tradition when choosing between valid denotations. If you are convinced that you are saved from eternity in the Lake of Fire because of your *free will* choice of Christ, then you have little need to answer the question as to why you chose Christ while the majority did not. You give your *free will* the credit. Or if you are persuaded that Jesus set his special love on you and paid for your sin while also not loving others and not paying for their sin, then again there is little need for Greek studies. You have missed the beauty of the cross that paid for the sins of all, as highlighted in particular by the Pharisees' hatred of Christ for extending grace to the Gentiles. Yet Jesus loved both the Pharisees and the pagans. He forgave us all from the cross even though *no one asked* for forgiveness.

4) Hopefully we both agree that Jesus identified the unbelieving Jews as, "***not his sheep,***" in John 10:26. Yet you interpret Jesus' words to mean they were not elect and never would be elect. You conclude that they are not sheep, or even lost sheep, but instead goats. You conclude that these Jews whom Jesus spoke to are eternally passed over by God's love and damned with hatred by God for eternity. Yet, consider from point #1 in this list that election is not a single dimensional concept. Just because these particular Jews were apparently not elected to believe (at least as evidenced at that moment) does not mean that Jesus did not elect to pay for their sin, or that they did not believe later. And if you agree that they could believe later, then you must also agree that they were predestined from before they were even born and thus ultimately always God's sheep, albeit, lost. Simply, Jesus is willing to confront stubborn lost sheep by saying they are "***not his sheep.***" Jesus is employing the pattern of Hosea 2:23 to confront the stubborn unbelief of these Jews. Certainly you do not interpret Hosea 2:23 to mean that God's love for his people is "*off again*" and then "*on again!*" God's eternal love for his people is eternally constant according to Jeremiah 31:3. Yet God clearly says in Hosea 2:23 that the unbelieving are, "***not my loved one,***" and then again after their repentance they are, "***my loved one.***" How is this to be understood? Romans 9:13 likewise quotes Malachi 1:1-3 saying that God hated Esau. So does God only love a small subset of mankind while allowing his hatred and wrath to damn the majority for all eternity? Or does God simply offer love to mankind, but only those who reciprocate are spared from damnation? There is a better answer as explained in Romans 11:28. Jewish unbelievers and all unbelievers are enemies of the gospel because of their rejection of Christ, yet they are loved on account of election. *ALL* mankind is loved by Christ because they are *ALL* elect, yet they remain enemies of the gospel until they are converted and place faith in Christ.

5) Hopefully we both agree that true Biblical faith must be reasonable and maintain integrity with both the Scriptures and logic. The *Four Square Salvation Evaluator* was designed to help people think through the Biblical and logical questions needed to properly understand salvation by grace. Yet after reading your objections below I am having trouble figuring out just what your view is, whether Arminian or Calvinist. I am very clear that you object with my understanding. Yet, both Boice and Lewis concluded that there is no middle ground between Arminianism and Calvinism. Could I ask you to explain your specific view in more detail? For example, Boice boldly believed that if God loves you at all then there is absolutely no escape from his love and determination to bring you safely to final salvation. I believe exactly the same. However, since he neglected the distinction between Hades and the Lake of Fire and the meaning of "*aion,*" he then concluded that God does not love, nor

will ever love the majority of mankind who are damned. This is an unfortunate error.

On the other hand Lewis boldly believed that God makes an offer of love to every individual, but for love to be true love, God must allow each individual's *free will* choice of faith to be the determining factor in their final salvation. He has my respect for being clear on this point, though I strongly disagree with his view of the character of God's love. He also did not appreciate the distinction between Hades and the Lake of Fire and so concluded that most of mankind is damned because they do not accept Christ with their *free will*. Lewis also offers no Biblical explanation as to why a few repent and most do not because his view is not Biblical. Lewis missed the point of grace: God loved us first while we still hated him. I can also respect a third person who has doubts and is struggling to understand how all these things add up. He has simple faith in Christ and knows that Christ is the judge of the whole Universe and he trusts God's judgment without telling God he cannot extend saving grace to all mankind. This person also has my respect. However, you have objected strongly to my understanding that all mankind is elected to salvation from the Lake of Fire. You have said that God simply cannot save all mankind! Yet I am struggling to completely understand how you yourself have answered the important questions raised in my book.

Please consider these five points and my request for further explanation of your view of grace. In the meantime, I am concerned that your view does not have both feet planted on the bedrock of God's grace. I began to be aware of this when you said, *"surely you believe in free will"* and also, *"but God uses means in salvation."* Do you then believe that our *free will* is the deciding factor in our final salvation as Lewis did? Perhaps I misheard. You did use the metaphor, *"it is a free gift, but you have to write your name on it."* With a proper understanding of grace we should instead say, *"God has written our names all over his free gift, but we must repent of all self-righteousness before we will be willing to receive it."* We are rebellious children with terrible attitudes, yet with a Father who has written our names all over his gifts to us. However, until we repent we will not receive his gift! In your objections below you observe that Isaiah 53:6 says that Christ died for all sin and that according to John 3:16, Christ died for the world. You conclude that since *"the Bible teaches all of the above and so must we!"* Your words betray a curious confession. You are certain that some are saved including yourself, yet the most you can say about Christ's death for *ALL* is that *"the Bible teaches it and so must we?"* It sounds like you are saying, *"I trust that Christ paid for my sin and so I am spared damnation, and even though I do not understand how it works, Christ also paid for the sins of all mankind, but most of them are going to be damned."* That is not good. You gravely urge your own audience to take action to escape the Lake of Fire. Yet your tone could only result in persuading fearful people to *"pray a prayer"* or meet a *"condition"* to *"write their name on the gift."* Instead, we are calling lost sheep not to reach up, but to fall down on their knees and repent of all self-righteousness to receive the gift already given. It would seem we really do have two different gospels and partnership with this difference would be difficult as you already know.

Your points are listed in gray below and my comments follow, referencing my points 1 through 5 above.

PASTOR'S POINTS HIGHLIGHTED WITH MY ANSWER FOLLOWING EACH POINT

1) Is all mankind elect? NO (Note- "elect" is from the Greek word "eklektos" which has four variations in the NT and is used a total of 55 times; the below is an exegetical summation of the above answer)

All mankind is not elect in every dimension. For example most of mankind is not elected to trust in Christ, but the wrath of God is still appeased for all mankind through the death of Christ. #1

a. Specific individuals (e.g. Ishmael; Esau) not chosen- the "children of God" are the "children of promise" (Rom. 9:8) according to "God's choice" (Rom. 9:11).

Esau was not elected for a believing heart or to be the ancestor of Christ, but he was chosen

for his sins to be paid, along with all mankind. #1

b. Only a “remnant” of Israel was “chosen” the rest were hardened (Rom. 11:5-6); there is coming a day when “all Israel” will be saved (Rom. 11:25-32).

Most of Abraham’s physical descendants are not chosen for faith. However, the day is coming when Christ’s atonement for all mankind will be believed by all. #1

c. God has chosen some not all (I Corinthians 1:26-31).

True, only some are chosen to become Christians. Nonetheless, the sins of all mankind, believing and unbelieving, are still chosen for forgiveness. #1-2

d. Those whom God chooses He predestines to adoption and redeems through Christ’s blood and makes them know the mystery of His will and gives to them an inheritance and seals them with the Holy Spirit (after believing in the Gospel of salvation)- who is the pledge of the believer’s inheritance (Eph. 1:3-14; also see I Peter 1:1-2; note - although “elect” is not used in Rom. 8:28-30 the teaching is similar).

The blessings highlighted in Ephesians 1:1-10 are not the result of faith nor do those versus say any such thing. Instead these are the blessings granted to all the elect before faith, but only the believing elect are able to see these blessings. Ephesians 1:11, however, transitions to a second dimension of election, namely that the Ephesian Christians were chosen for belief to the praise of God’s glory. #1. It is the same today. God’s decision to pay for the sins of all mankind remains the great finished work of Christ for all mankind, yet very few are chosen to believe it.

e. Only believers in God’s “living stone” which is “choice and precious” in God’s sight are identified as a “chosen race” (I Peter 2:4-10).

Agreed. Believers are specially chosen and elected to believe and are the 'chosen race' mentioned in this verse. The unbelieving elect are not given this title. #1

f. Only those who have a “faith of the same kind” and a “true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory” can be “diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing” (II Peter 1:1-11).

Certainly. Only believers who acknowledge their election can make their election certain. Unbelievers, however, cannot see God’s eternal love for them. They are blind to the blessings they have in Christ because they refuse to believe. #1

g. The Lamb, the Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him: “the called and chosen and faithful” will defeat the “beast: who was and is not and is about to come” and “those who dwell on the earth whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world.” (Rev. 17:8-14; also see Rev. 13:7-10).

Agreed. Only believers stand with Christ during this time. #1-2. More at 3.b.

2) Some other verses that indicate that not all mankind is elect:

a. John 6:37, 44, 55- “all that the Father gives Me will come to Me...” - the fact that many do not come to Jesus indicates that they are not given to Jesus by the Father.

Agreed. God the Father, for the demonstration of grace, has not chosen to bring even most of mankind to faith in Christ. Yet that does not change the fact that his eternal wrath against their sin is still propitiated by the death of Christ. And if their sin is propitiated from God’s wrath, then who can possibly damn them? These unbelieving are deeply loved by Christ even though they remain unbelieving. However, only those chosen for faith come to Christ in humble repentance. #1-2

b. John 8:47- “...for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God.”

Agreed. These Jews were apparently not chosen for faith, at least at that time. #1

c. John 10:26-28- “But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. My sheep

hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow me...and they will never perish..."

Agreed. These Jews were not chosen for faith, but instead unbelief. If they persist in unbelief, if God does not open their eyes, they will be punished in Hades. #1

d. Acts 13:48 (first missionary journey; at Pisidian Antioch; following the "word of the Lord" on the second Sabbath) - "When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed." - the fact that not all believed indicates that not all (in that assembly) were appointed to eternal life.

Are you saying that this verse means that if someone hears the gospel and does not believe immediately that it is proved that they are not elected to salvation from the Lake of Fire? Do you side with Calvin in saying that their sins were never paid or with Lewis in saying that they never reciprocated love for God? I heard the gospel multiple times over multiple years before my eyes were opened to the truth. A better understanding of this verse is that the Apostles and the Holy Spirit are confronting unbelief just as Hosea did in Hosea 2:23 and Jesus did in John 10:26. #4. This Scripture could also be distinguishing between the destinies of the unbelieving to the fires of Hades versus the believers to paradise, since the Greek word translated eternal is 'aionios'. #2-3

3) Is every man's name written in the Lamb's book of life? NO

This is the point upon which we disagree. #1

a. Following GWT judgment unbelievers are in the lake of fire- Rev. 21:7-8; 22:15. (Note- there is not one NT example of the Greek word "apistos" and its three variations [57 total usages] being used to describe angelic beings rather only human beings.)

Revelation 21:8 places eight sins on parallel footing. They are cowardice, unbelief, vileness, murder, fornication, sorcery, idolatry, and lying. Notice that the sin of unbelief is not even listed first by way of importance. Furthermore, because the sin of unbelief is included in the list as a peer with the sin of lying, we can legally conclude that the unbelieving truth teller and the believing liar will both be sentenced to the Lake of Fire. You and I are both liars yet the verse gives no indication that belief will exempt us from the verdict of damnation for our lying since unbelief is equal with lying on this list. Your whole emphasis seems to be that your "faith" has saved you from damnation to the Lake of Fire. However, this verse is not purposed to drive people to reach up and provide the "condition of faith" to be saved from the Lake of Fire. Impossible. Instead this verse is purposed to drive the lost sheep down on our knees to the foundation of election and trust that Christ has loved us from before the foundation of the world and paid for all our sin even though we are still liars and many of the things on this terrible list. The religious may continue to fool themselves into thinking their "faith" or self-righteousness is sufficient to exempt them from the condemnation of this verse. However, the truly believing boldly trust that only the electing grace of God will exclude us from this damnation because all mankind is guilty of these sins. You are in great error in your understanding of this verse. Your argument that "apistos" is never used to describe fallen angels is weak as an argument from the absence of evidence. I have written further about this verse in my article, [How Can You Say Revelation 21:8 Does Not Apply to Humans](#). The purpose of Revelation 21:7-8 is the final condemnation of the non-elect, fallen angels, and also as a warning to unbelieving elect humanity who persist in rejecting grace to drive them to faith. #4.

The key question that stands before us then is what is election? Months ago I mentioned the concept of the "unbelieving elect" and you seemed surprised and confused by the expression. Perhaps you think that since faith is required for salvation from the Lake of Fire that election is born the moment someone believes? However, election is clearly a reality from before the foundation of the world for each of God's chosen ones. Election is not merely God foretelling the future as to who will exercise their *free will* and make the good choice of faith. Election is his rock solid eternal decree. God's chosen ones are elect even before faith and thus are the "unbelieving elect" until faith, Romans 11:28.

b. People who dwell on the earth whose names are not in the Lamb's book of life worship the "beast of the sea" in opposition to God and His saints- Rev. 13:1-8 (also see Rev. 17:8).

Thank you for calling these verses to my attention. I can see how they lend to your interpretation. However, the Scripture and character of God's grace both support my understanding and so the clear Scripture should be used to interpret the less clear. Here are two possible explanations. First, Revelation 13:8 and 17:8 are not clear on the specific identity of those not written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Fallen angels could be in view. I understand Isaiah 66:22-24 to explain that fallen angels will live embodied upon the earth in the future. I write about this on number 8 of my article, *Ten Theological Absurdities*. Some theologians believe that angels lived embodied upon the earth in the past, so why not the future? However, I would not hinge my conclusions on speculation about embodied angels on the earth. Second, Exodus 32:33 suggests that someone's name can be blotted out of the Lamb's Book of Life. I understand this to be God speaking foolishness to the fool, Proverbs 26:4-5. If the names of the predestined can be blotted out then salvation is dependent upon human condition or a capricious God. Ultimately it is impossible that God's love and eternal plans for his chosen one will ever change such that names are blotted out of the Lamb's Book, or else grace would not be grace. Furthermore, it is demonstrated that God says to the unbelieving elect that they are not his sheep or acknowledged in the Lamb's Book, even though they are listed there because he later warmly calls the repentant, "my people." These verses could easily be explained by #4.

c. How many enter the new Jerusalem?... "but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life" in contrast to those who are "unclean...who practices abomination and lying." Rev. 21:27

Are you saying that the elect are not impure and no longer do anything shameful or deceitful? The verse is not an exhortation to be good enough to somehow write our name in the Lamb's Book of Life through a *free will* decision of faith. You and I are both at times impure and do shameful things. This verse is purposed to encourage the believing elect that our sin cannot follow us into Heaven! That is awesome news! The verse also stands as a warning to the unbelieving elect to drive them to receive their election and forgiveness already given through faith in Jesus Christ. The verse is not intended to drive people to the work of conditional salvation. That is impossible. #1

4) Are there "unbelieving" elect upon physical death and/or at the beginning of the GWT judgment? NO

Psalms 139:8, Matthew 16:17-20, Matthew 25:31-46, Romans 3:3, Romans 11:28-32, 1 Peter 3:19, 1 Peter 4:6, and 2 Peter 2:1 all add up to show that God's love will not fail even for those who remain unbelieving at physical death and are punished in Hades. Furthermore, I think it interesting that the rich man in Hades called Abraham, "Father" and Abraham called him "child." It is not enough information to conclude that he was elect based on that alone, however, these affectionate titles are most curious if you think that the rich man is finally damned. 1 Peter 3:19 indicates also that Christ preached to those in Hades. What did he preach? 1 Peter 4:6. Furthermore, I've already mentioned that David thought he could even go to Sheol and yet not be outside of God's love, Psalm 139:8. Jesus also taught that the gates of Hades will be finally defeated by God's grace, Matthew 16:18. It is a fearful thought that those who reject grace will be punished in Hades even though their sins are completely forgiven, but better a fearful truth than the imaginary thought that religion can save us. Revelation 20:13-14 makes it clear that Hades is emptied and Matthew 25:31-46 gives the most complete account of the Great White Throne Judgment to come. Here are my thoughts on that in my article, *You Are Wrong About Matthew 25:31-46*. Of course the majority of the Scripture is focused on calling people to repent and trust in the love of Christ so we do not have a huge window into the world of those already passed. Yet we do know some things. 2 Peter 2:1-2 also makes it clear that false teachers will be sentenced to Hades even though they are redeemed. Boice goes to great lengths to deny the truth of this verse because it does not fit into Calvinism.

a. Election is always in conjunction with God's "salvation" call experienced through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as proclaimed in the Gospel (Ephesians 1:3-14; Romans 8:28-30; Romans 10:14-17)

Yes, I see where the confusion is. I have already explained that Ephesians 1:3-10 says absolutely nothing about faith as the cause of election. Rather Ephesians 1:11-14 explains that faith is the receiving of forgiveness and of election already given. Note that Romans 8:28-30, the great chain of grace, says nothing about faith as a component of final salvation. There is no condition or even response of man listed in this great chain, but only the unconditional love of Christ for all his chosen people. If there were even the smallest condition dependent upon us, we would all be lost! I have written further here that justification is a work already finished at the cross, yet received as each one comes to faith as explained in my article, *Justified*. Romans 10:14-17 is our exhortation to tell the lost sheep the good news that their sins are already paid for, yet no one will believe apart from also being elected to believe. The prideful rejection of grace and unconditional love is evident in every generation. #1

b. John 6:37, 44, 55- "all that the Father gives Me will come to Me..."

Yes! If someone is a Christian, it is because he was chosen for belief. #1-2

c. Jesus' sheep hear His voice and follow Him- John 10:27

Yes! If someone is a Christian, it is because he was chosen for belief. #1-2

5) Is salvation by grace independent of salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as proclaimed in the Gospel? NO

Yes, this summarizes our greatest difference. You proclaim either that Christ provided for the possibility of salvation for all, or the certainty of salvation for a few. You then urge people to either provide the missing condition of faith, or to simply trust that they are one of the chosen few. Which do you proclaim again? Yet Jesus proclaimed that the sins of all mankind are fully paid apart from all our works and even our response of faith, Luke 23:34. And if our sins are paid, then the wrath of God is fully satisfied against all mankind. Thus we urge both the self-righteous and the unrighteous to believe the good news, while warning those who reject grace that they will be punished in the fires of Hades. Jesus warned about Hell because of his passionate love to spare the unbelieving from the fires of Hades. Once again, certainly not everyone is saved. That is, very few are saved from unbelief to Christian faith, transformed lives, and avoiding punishment in Hades. Faith is essential for all these blessings. The vast majority are not saved from punishment in Hades. Yet, based on the atoning sacrifice of Christ alone, the sins of all mankind are already paid for and thus not even God can damn them to the Lake of Fire. His decision has already been made.

a. The God of all grace (I Peter 5:10) is also the God of the Gospel (Romans 1:16-17) which is His power that leads the elect to saving faith (Romans 10:17).

The emphasis of Romans 1:16-17 and the arguments that follow in Romans concern salvation from sin and in particular religious hypocrisy. You will note that Romans does not mention Hades or the Lake of Fire one time! Those that believe Christ has already paid for our sin are transformed by the power and loving grace of God. #2. Now I am not saying that salvation from the Lake of Fire is not the grand conclusion of salvation or that we don't deserve to be eternally damned. However, I am saying that the main point of Romans is not fire insurance, but calling the believing elect to salvation from sin and to a transformed life. Romans 1:16-17 well notes that the power of the gospel is only for those who believe that their sins are forgiven. The remainder of mankind, who do not believe, even though their sins are also forgiven, are not saved from sin or a hardened heart toward God, and so cannot enjoy living in God's love.

b. Grace and faith are "friends" that work together in the saving operations of God- Eph. 2:8-9; Romans 9:6-10:17; Eph. 1:3-14

Absolutely. Grace does it all and Biblical faith trusts that all has been done by grace! However, when you speak, I think you are making faith to be some sort of activating ingredient in God's love toward us? Faith does not change God's heart toward us in the least nor his eternal destiny for the elect. However, faith does change our heart toward God. When you say grace and faith are friends, from your viewpoint, it sounds like you are saying grace and faith "work together" to save the individual. If that is what you are saying, then you have stepped away from Biblical faith to an understanding of faith that really is a work or condition provided by man. That is a dangerous thing to do. Paul wrote the book of Galatians to confront an entire church that had fallen away from a right understanding of grace. Galatians 3 does not highlight fine theological argument, but simply a crucified Christ. A right understanding of grace and the end of religious striving proceed from this fact. #1-5

c. It is the "word of God's grace" (Acts 20:32) that brings "new birth" to those who hear and believe (Acts 11:15-17; I Peter 1:22-25); the "new birth" that is required for one to see/enter the kingdom of God (John 3:3,5).

Exactly. Only those chosen for faith enjoy the confidence that their sins have been already paid. Only those chosen for faith have been born again to a new heart. #1

6) Is faith a "work of man"? NO

Are you saying that faith is not "work" because it is granted only by God's grace? I agree. Or are you saying that everyone has a *free will* to meet the condition of faith, but this condition supplied by man is not considered a "work"? If so you have compromised grace. Luther's book *Bondage of the Will* is helpful reading to correct that error.

a. Faith is a necessary part of the operations of the saving grace of God- man is saved by grace through faith: both of which are part of the gift of God- Eph. 2:8-9.

Faith is evidence of the new birth and the beginning of a new and good heart towards God. There is no salvation from sin or exemption from Hades without faith. #1

b. Apart from faith man does not experience justification (Gen. 15:6; Romans 3:23-26) nor the new birth (John 1:12-13); nor does man have life/eternal life (John 5:24; I John 5:11-13).

Are you saying that faith initiates the new birth? I John 5:1 makes it clear that faith is the result of the new birth rather than vice versa. Regarding justification I understand that justification was completed at the cross such that the acquitting gavel has already pronounced our justification in Heaven. Now the Holy Spirit, God's great evangelist, is persuading individuals to receive our justification. I have written about this in my article, *Justified*. Biblical faith is not the activator of God's love for his people or else grace would not be grace. The false gospel says, "trust Christ and you can be born again and forgiven." The true gospel says, "You are already forgiven by Christ and only those born again will trust Him."

c. "Saving" faith is faith that hears the Gospel and "believes in the heart that God raised Him from the dead" and "confesses with the mouth Jesus as Lord (Romans 10:5-13); saving faith is also a "works-producing" faith (Eph. 2:10; James 2:14).

Amen! Certainly one cannot claim to have a heart changed toward God without faith that produces loving works. Salvation from sin means that real progress is made in leaving sin behind. However, once again if the doctrine of predestination is true in any sense whatsoever, then faith plays absolutely no part in adding our names to the Lamb's Book of Life or saving us from the Lake of Fire. No condition provided by man can save us from the holy wrath of God, but only the electing grace of God and the finished work of Jesus Christ. #2

7) Are fallen angels before God at the GWT judgment? NO

I believe some fallen angels will be judged there, 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6.

a. The false prophet and the beast are not there- Rev. 19:20. (Note- if the false prophet and/or the beast are men then "not all men are elect.")

Yes, as you say, The Beast and The False Prophet are already in the Lake of Fire before the Great White Throne Judgment. However, I also believe that The Beast and The False Prophet in Revelation are demonic. Read more in my articles, [Revelation 20:10](#), [Fallen Angels at the Great White Throne Judgment](#), and [Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News! \(Part 2 with Grudem, Riddlebarger, Chilton, Summers, and Ewing\)](#).

b. The devil is not there- Rev. 20:10.

Agreed. He is already in the Lake of Fire before the Great White Throne Judgment.

c. The resurrected dead (unbelievers) are there; angelic beings do not experience "physical death" thus will never experience any kind of resurrection. (Note- the GWT judgment is the final judgment upon unbelievers; believer's final judgment is the "Bema" seat judgment of II Cor. 5:10.)

We have a difference here. I believe that both unbelieving mankind and fallen angels are extracted from Hades and Thalassa to stand before the Great White Throne judgment. 2 Peter 2:4 makes it clear that some fallen angels are already locked up to be judged later. When are they judged? I believe they will be judged later at the Great White Throne judgment. These unredeemed angels are also the people on Jesus' left in Matthew 25:31-46. Whether the imprisoned angels are "resurrected" or not I do not know, but Revelation 20:13 makes it clear that both Hades and Thalassa are fully emptied.

d. According to II Peter 2:4, "God did not spare angels when they sinned but cast them into hell (from the Greek word "tartaroo" which is literally translated as tartarus) and committed them to pits (from the Greek word "siros" which refers to a cave/pit) of darkness reserved for judgment." Whether or not "tartarus" and these "pits of darkness" are one and the same as "hades" (Rev. 20:13-14) is a matter of discussion however there is no sense of these angels dying physically and thus being resurrected unto judgment at the GWT judgment. If these angels are in Hades then they remain there when Hades "gives up the dead" (Rev. 20:13) as well as when Hades is "thrown into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:14).

To say that fallen angels will not be judged at the Great White Throne Judgment is to conclude more than is possible. The account of the Great White Throne Judgment in Matthew 25:41 makes it clear that these unredeemed fallen angels will stand before Christ for final judgment and be cast into the Lake of Fire, where Satan had already been tossed as you pointed out above. Note also that Matthew 25:41 explicitly says that the Lake of Fire is prepared for "*the devil and his angels.*" The Lake of Fire is not prepared for mankind who has been completely redeemed by the death of Christ. Instead the Lake of Fire is for the unredeemed, the fallen angels. Hebrews 2:14-16 also makes it clear that Jesus is not the helper fallen angels. They are unredeemed. However, 1 John 2:1-2 makes it doubly clear that Jesus did die for all mankind, the redeemed, whether believing or unbelieving. Please read my article, [Fallen Angels at the Great White Throne Judgment](#).

8) What is the "eternal state" of those who do not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior?

a. "Perish"- John 3:16 (note- Christ's sheep will not perish- John 10:28).

Yes, the unbelieving will perish in the fires of Hades. Traditional interpretation assumes that the perishing is eternal. However, that is not the case for three reasons. First, the Greek word "*apollymi*" translated "*perish*" in John 3:16 is used numerous places in the New Testament to mean catastrophic loss, but not eternal loss, such as Matthew 2:13. Herod sought to kill Jesus, but even Herod knew he could not eternally destroy anyone. Second, the Greek word "*aionios*" translated "*eternal*" in John 3:16 might be referring to eternal, but could also refer to "*complete*" or "*whole*" life of Christian restored to fellowship with God. The Greek word "*aionios*" can mean "*age*," "*epoch*," "*duration*," "*complete*," and "*eternal*."

Thus believers live and reign during the Church Age and enjoy whole life, while unbelievers perish in the fires of Hades. Third, notice that a careful reading of John 3:1-21 states the positive that believers are saved from perishing, but there is no mention of Hades, the Lake of Fire, or eternal punishment for the unbelieving! This passage could even be understood to teach that believers are saved from the destruction of sin for a restored whole life, while the lives of unbelievers are destroyed by sin. Yet I do believe that the unbelieving are punished in the fires of Hades. #3

b. "Eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord" - II Thes. 1:9 (note-
destruction" is from the same word family as "perish" in the Greek- the Greek word
"apolluo" ["apollyon"- Rev. 9:11]).

Again "*apollymi*" does not necessarily mean eternal destruction as just explained above. Furthermore "*aionios*" does not always mean eternal, but can mean "age," "duration," or even "complete." Thus, those who reject their election will be punished for the *duration* of Hades and suffer *complete* loss. The contexts of the Scriptural passage, of the subject, and of grace are all required to properly interpret the meanings of "*apollymi*" and "*aionios*." Furthermore there is strong evidence that "*from*" should be translated "*at*" in my article, [2 Thessalonians 1:6-10](#). #3

c. "Destruction" - II Peter 3:7 (note above).

Agreed. The lives of unbelievers will be destroyed by the fruit of sin and punished in the fires of Hades by the wrath of God. However, this word alone does not require eternal destruction as already explained. There are other types of destruction such as the destruction from the consequence of sin and the destruction found in Hades.

d. "Wide gate and the broad way" lead to "destruction" - Matt. 7:13 (note above).

Yes. Sadly for the purposes of his grace God only brings the few to trust that their sins are paid for while the self-righteous persist in rejecting the good news. Rather than cling to Christ, they cling to their cement life preserver. The good news is so plain and simple at times it is almost maddening to explain to unbelievers that they can trust that Christ has already paid for all their sin. Too often we cling to tradition, fear, rebellion, or ignorance instead of clinging to Christ.

e. Those who do not "receive the love of the truth so as to be saved" will "perish- II Thes. 2:10 (note above).

Yes, unbelievers will perish through the consequences of their sin as well as punishment in Hades.

f. Eternal fire and punishment- Matt. 25:41, 46.

I understand that Matthew 25:31-46 is speaking about the Great White Throne Judgment at the precipice of the Lake of Fire. Thus, I believe that the unredeemed on Christ's left are the fallen angels, while the redeemed on his right are the unbelieving humans, both just extracted from Hades. Those on Christ's right are given grace, while those on his left are damned to the Lake of Fire for The Ages of The Ages. Thus I agree with you that "*aionios*" in this case might be eternal based on the context of the passage. Note that Hanson, whose work I referenced above, tries to interpret this judgment to be other than eternal, but as I mentioned I disagree with his understanding. Though, I have considered the possibility of "*apokatastasis*" that would include even that final salvation of the demons from the Lake of Fire. Check out the chart in my article, [Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News!](#)

Note also that the salvation of those on his right is not a second chance! Salvation was never a chance in the first place! Since Christ has already served as the vicarious substitute for all mankind, even the sins of the wicked, unbelieving humans in Hades are completely paid. The wrath of God is propitiated and it would be impossible that they could be damned to the Lake of Fire. For the same reason that I cannot go to the Lake of Fire, since Christ paid for my sin, they likewise cannot go to the Lake of Fire because their sins are paid... whether they believe it or not. Who will damn them if God himself has already paid for their sin? The

salvation of the redeemed is based solely on the work of Christ at the cross. To assert otherwise is to impugn grace with a condition. To add condition to grace is to follow the path of 2 Peter 2:2.

g. Lake of fire and brimstone- Rev. 20:15; 21:8 (the "second death"); 22:15 ("outside").

Yes, certainly the Lake of Fire is for The Ages of The Ages and the sentence of Satan and his demon following.

h. "Eternal death" (1 John 5:11-13; by implication).

The phrase "*does not have life*" could easily be understood to mean "*has not yet*" believed or received their eternal life. You also would agree that an unbeliever does "*not have life,*" YET. In fact this understanding is consistent with the Holy Spirit's goal to drive people to faith in Christ.

i. The "wrath of God"- Col. 3:6.

Yes, the wrath of God is upon the unbelieving, even though their sins are paid and they are deeply loved by God. This wrath is not eternal wrath, or even fatherly wrath, since the unbelieving are not yet his children. Instead this is Holy wrath against sin and the sinful nature of the unregenerate. It is the wrath that burned against me while I lived in unbelief.

j. "Die in their sins"- John 8:24.

Yes, the unbelieving die in their sins, remain unregenerate, and enter the fires of Hades as a fit punishment for creatures that hate the God of love and his grace. Some others suggested that I taught that the time in Hades was a way to "*work*" one's way back into God's grace. I have taught no such thing, but instead that the fires of Hades are a fit punishment for the unbelieving who are unregenerate and hate God by nature. Those in Hades hate grace and the truth that God loves them equally with all mankind. Jesus words "*die in their sins*" does not say anything about eternal death, but only that they remain unregenerate as they pass from this world.

9) Must a man believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior before physical death to enter into God's Kingdom? YES

Yes, most certainly. Unbelievers do not reign in Christ's Kingdom, as discussed in Revelation 20. Yet Christ's Kingdom is still not the end of this world. The final judgment at the Great White Throne Judgment is not until the commencement of eternity when the grace of God is proved finally victorious even for the unbelieving humans punished in Hades.

a. "Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3, 5); one is "born again" by "receiving Him (i.e. Christ)"/"believing in His name" (John 1:12-13).

Exactly, without faith one cannot see the truth. However, just because some cannot see God's love for them does not mean that God does not love them. That would be like a child who hides his own eyes and then thinks his parents cannot see him. There is no hiding from the love of God. I've written some about that in my article, [*John 3:36 Offers No Optimism*](#).

b. "It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).

Yes. There is judgment and giving account to the Lord at each one's death. However, this verse or the surrounding context says absolutely nothing about the Lake of Fire or eternal judgment.

10) Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ:

a. Christ died for all sin- Isaiah 53:6

Yes!

b. Christ died for the world- John 3:16

Yes!

c. Christ died for His church- Eph. 5:25

Yes!

d. Christ died for me- Gal. 2:20

Yes!

e. Christ's death is appropriated by those who believe- Romans 3:21-26 and not appropriated by those who do not believe (1 Peter 2:7-8).

Yes! Believers receive the blessings of God's love because we believe it. The unbelieving reject God's love and their election and suffer because of it. My favorite passages on this subject are Romans 5:17 and 2 Corinthians 5:15. Both passages make it clear that Christ loves all mankind and has paid for all mankind's sin, but only those who believe are able to *LIVE* for God! Just because someone rejects God's love does not mean that God stops loving them. A mere offer of love from God is totally silly. However, those who reject God's love will be punished severely. The "*appropriation*" of God's love does not cause God to love us. He loved us while we hated him. Romans 5:10 even goes further to say we were reconciled to God through Christ while we were yet his enemies, before we had faith! So the "*appropriation*" of Christ's death changes our hearts toward God, but God's heart toward us was determined long before that.

I began the paragraph with a "yes" of agreement, but I do not think we agree. It seems you are saying that we must apply the payment of Christ's death to our account ourselves through faith. If I understand properly, you are saying that salvation is grace plus the human condition of faith, an unfortunate perversion of simply trusting Christ.

f. The Bible teaches all of the above and so must we!

As already stated, above your words betray a curious confession. I am confident that Christ has paid for my sins, because he has paid for the sins of all mankind. Yet you seem confident he has paid for yours with uncertainty about all mankind. Each one must personally receive God's love to have a changed heart toward God and be saved from our terrible sinful nature. However, there is no such thing as a personal atonement. Instead, Christ gave his heart for a whole people, that is all mankind. Christ did not die for individuals, but Hebrews 10:10 says "*once for all*".

11) A few verses that indicate the fact of "assurance of salvation":

Yes, only believers can have assurance.

a. Gal. 3:26- "For you are sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus."

Yes, only believers are given and receive the title of Sons of God.

b. Eph. 2:8- "For by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."

Yes, salvation from a corrupted heart and punishment in Hades is realized through faith. Since the Scripture is clear that God loved us even as enemies apart from faith, we can say that faith played no part in saving us from his eternal wrath, but instead faith is the receiving of the gift already given.

c. 1 John 3:2- "Beloved, now we are children of God..."

Yes, only believers are children of God, though God is a prolific adopter!

d. 1 John 5:13- "these things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life."

Amen!

12) Basis of "assurance of salvation":

- a. witness of God's word- I John 5:11-13
- b. witness of God the Holy Spirit- Rom. 8:16
- c. witness of the new creation in Christ- II Cor. 5:17

Yes, agreed with all this.

13) NT verses re: "Hades" (total of eleven; Greek word is "hades"): Matt. 11:23; 16:18; Luke 10:15; 16:23; Acts 2:24, 27, 31; Rev. 1:18; 6:8; 20:13, 14.

Yes, I think we agree that Hades and the Lake of Fire are not the same place, though you conclude that destiny to the one requires destiny to the other.

14) NT verses re: "Hell" (total of twelve; Greek word is "geenna" - most pronounce as "gehenna"): Matt. 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5; James 3:6

I am not sure if Gehenna and Hades are synonyms. Hades is definitely a location that houses souls after death. It is possible that Gehenna, the trash pile, may emphasize the destruction of sin in this life. I hope to study that further.

15) What about the following verses?

- a. Romans 11:32- "...that He may show mercy to all."
 - i. "All" - both Jew and Greek
 - ii. "All" - "all Israel" (11:26)

You once taught that this verse means that a future generation of Israelites will all be saved. You are right that the majority of Romans 11 is speaking about the salvation of the Jews. However, Romans 11:30-31 swings the conversation back to both Jew and Gentile. Thus Romans 11:32 stands as Paul's grand conclusion of the *entire* argument of the book of Romans concerning the redemption of both Jew and Gentile. My book exegetes this verse.

- b. I Timothy 4:10- "...living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers."
 - i. "All men" - Jew and Greek; male and female; slave and free
 - ii. "All" - doesn't always mean "all in absolute totality" (e.g. "...the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth..." in Eph. 1:10 does not apply to rebellious angels unless one wants to extend universalism to angelic beings as well)

Certainly all does not mean all in every context. However, the context of grace helps the believer to properly interpret Scripture. In the case of 1 Timothy 4:10 the Holy Spirit's use of "*especially*" is a very curious expression that best fits with my understanding. Believers are especially saved from sin, though all are saved from damnation! It makes no sense to say believers are especially saved from damnation while unbelievers are not saved at all.

- c. I John 2:1-2- "And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world."
 - i. "World" - similar to usage in John 3:16
 - ii. Christ's atonement does satisfy the just personal wrath of the thrice holy God regarding the sin of all men; a "satisfaction" which is appropriated through faith

Your understanding as stated above would put you clearly out of even any Calvinist camp. The work of Christ is apart from any condition provided by man and to state otherwise is to add works to the grace of God. The work of Christ is completed and finished only for the elect of God. Though your biggest dispute with me is the scope or extent of election within mankind, I feel that the much greater difference between us is our understanding of Biblical grace and faith. Though I may misunderstand what you mean by "*appropriated*." If you mean "*activated*" or "*made effective*," then yes, you have added works to grace. If you mean "*receive grace already given to our account such that our heart is changed toward God, though God's heart is already determined*," then we happily agree.

This question needs to be answered first before there is any fruit to be born in discussing the

scope of election. Biblical grace must be understood, swallowed, and digested before anyone will be happy to learn that Christ also loves all mankind as well. Until the unconditional electing grace of God is received, all efforts to reach God or save one's self will be the mere religion of man. It has been said there are only two religions in the whole world, the "do" religion, and the "done" religion. The "satisfaction" of Christ is a finished work already granted to the elect with no appropriation needed whatsoever. The heart of God is decided and now he seeks to win the hearts of his lost sheep, Isaiah 30.

d. Romans 5:12-21

i. Adam is the federal head of all those who are born (in sin)

Yes.

ii. Christ is the federal head of all those who are born-again (through faith in Christ)

No. Rather, the passage says that Christ is the new federal head of all mankind as concluded in Romans 5:18-19.

e. II Corinthians 5:19- "...God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself..."

i. If all are reconciled then why the need to "be reconciled" (5:20)

This is a most excellent question! Perhaps this is the discussion point that God can use to bring us together. Many have an eastern religion worldview with good and evil pitted against each other like a Yin and Yang and the future in the balance, including the salvation of any particular individual. However, this is not a Christian worldview. The Scripture tell us of a God who has determined to show off his grace in the salvation of his particular people. Through the cross of Christ he accomplished the impossible of maintaining his perfect Holiness, Justice, and Love in the most amazing way. No device of man could have imagined it or foreseen it. Furthermore, he increased the odds against himself to further show off his grace decreeing that each of his chosen ones is born opposing him by their birth nature. He did this so that he can show off his grace, miraculously bringing us to receive his love, one by one. Every single one of his chosen ones is already reconciled to God through Christ as far as God's heart and his eternal plans for his redeemed. Meanwhile our hearts are not reconciled to him until the Holy Spirit works his miracle within each individual, one by one. Though many religions are in competition with the Holy Spirit, he will not be defeated, nor will he lose one! We need to be reconciled to God because God has determined to show off his grace in converting his enemies into loving sons. We are already reconciled to God for his part and there is no escaping his love. However, until we become a Christian, we are not reconciled to God as far as our heart is concerned. Sadly most people die physically in unbelief, not having received God's love.

ii. If we are the righteousness of God in Christ then why the need to "become the righteousness of God in Him"...(5:21)

As already explained above with Romans 5:10-11 as my proof.

f. Summation- these verses highlight that:

i. Salvation is available for all men (with no discrimination- i.e. nationality; gender; social standing; etc.).

Salvation is not a possibility or merely available, but a certainty for the elect. If salvation is a mere availability, we all are lost. There is no hope ever!

ii. Man must believe to enter into this salvation.

Faith is certainly required to be saved from a heart hardened toward God. However, faith does absolutely nothing to change God's loving heart toward the elect. God's love and grace is unchanging, unconquerable, and unending!

iii. Believers have the responsibility to appeal to men to be reconciled to God!

I appeal that you would know that God has loved you from before the foundation of the world. Your blessed eternal destiny is guaranteed apart from all conditions. Do you deny

this election? Saving faith in Christ is the eye glasses enabling you to see God's eternal love for you. We must leave self-righteousness to receive his righteousness. Be reconciled to God!

CONVERSATIONS WORTH NOTING

One of my favorite questions is to ask people whether they think God forgives us before or after we ask. I believe that Christ has forgiven all mankind without anyone asking, Luke 23:34. This is the heart of grace. Grace is not mere theology, but instead history. Mankind nailed Christ to the cross and while we remained his enemies, Jesus prayed to the Father asking for our forgiveness. Praise God! The good news is that we are already forgiven! Any other answer is simply the religion of man reaching up to God. I mention all this because in casual conversation, a church attendee asserted that most certainly we are not forgiven before, but only after, we ask for forgiveness. I was stupefied. I did not argue, but this is not the gospel of grace that I received or teach.

Two others asked if I compromised truth to accommodate my unbelieving loved ones. Of course I do have a great concern about the destiny of the unbelieving. My great hope is that Christ also died for them just as he did for me and it is now impossible for the redeemed to be damned. Yet, those who reject the grace Christ will be punished in Hades, even if they are our family, friends, enemy, or even our Pastor.

Another insisted that *free will*, though not taught, is implied by Scripture as the answer to the Calvinism / Arminianism wrangle. He is right that *free will* is not taught in Scripture, but quite wrong that it is implied. Instead, the bondage of the will to sin is plainly taught. Again I did not argue, but reflected that Biblical teaching is needed on this point to properly give glory to God. Luther taught that to claim to be saved by free will was an affront to grace and confirmation of one's unbelief. Spurgeon also agreed.

Another church attendee suggested that it does not matter if one believes as I, plus what you believe, because then you just have extra insurance. However, you and I understand that this is not true. Our understandings not only differ on the scope of election, but even more primarily, we appear to differ on the definition of saving faith. I would like to understand your view more completely before saying too much because I have not been able to figure out if you are squarely Arminian or Calvinist. I am neither, but you also disagree with me. It seems to me that some of your objections compromise the grace of God and add a condition to God's unconditional love. You seem to say on one hand that Christ died for the sins of everyone, but in name only. Then you say he died effectively only for the sins of believers. I see no Biblical support for the idea that Christ's death is divided into two categories. The death of Christ was a single gracious act to give his life as an atoning sacrifice for all His chosen people. The cross of Christ is a finished work making payment for sins. One should not say we are saved by the finished work of Christ and then say we need to "*appropriate it*" or "*sign it*" or even "*believe it*" in order for his work to be finally effective. Christ's work on the cross was completed apart from anything we could possibly add. I hope to talk with you further to understand your view more fully.

Another suggested that since God only effectively died for a small subset of mankind we really cannot know who these chosen ones are until they come to faith in Christ. If that is true, then logically there is no way that anyone can say that Christ effectively died for them either. On what basis could they say it? On a condition they provide? On subjective experience? Feelings? They could claim to have special revelation beyond the Scriptures that their sins are atoned while also claiming that the sins of a majority of mankind are not atoned. But the facts from Scripture are simple. Christ became a man and died a vicarious death on the cross as the new federal head of all mankind. Why is there resistance to the good news that Christ loves and has effectively paid for the sins of all mankind? My clarification of the gospel is faithful to Scripture, logically sound, and resonates with God as the benevolent gracious Father that he claims to be.

Another church attendee said if all mankind is saved from the Lake of Fire, then there is no reason for him to stay with his wife or to be good. Unfortunately his unbelief is exposed as he does not know God as a loving Father, but only as the giant policeman in the sky.

Another also said if all are saved, then why do we invest all this effort in following Christ? This very question exposes a misunderstanding about grace and the reasons that we pursue Christ. The question implies that we are saved by what we do. I guess if we think that God is the giant judge in the sky, then we will also think that our status with him is based on our performance. If we think that our salvation is conditional, based on a condition that we have to supply, then we will think that our salvation is dependent upon the effort we invest. However, returning love to God who first loved us is the reason we serve Christ. We also respect his hand of punishment, but with no fear of damnation. This same person also claimed that the vast majority of unbelievers think everyone will be saved. My experience with evangelism is that most unbelievers are like the Jews who think that evil people are eternally damned, but they will be saved because they have met the condition to be good enough.

Recently someone told me that they felt both Arminianism and Calvinism go further than can be Biblically supported. I feel the same. Unfortunately, debates between these two camps could be compared to two school bullies fighting about who God loves after both failed an exam about love. The dubious middle ground between these two camps offers no safe haven either. I invite you to read my book again and see that there is no compromise between these two systems. I then invite you to consider that I have reasonably and Biblically answered all your objections above, as well as glorified Christ as the God of all grace. The cross of Christ has unconditionally purchased eternal salvation for *ALL* his people and he will not lose one of his chosen, though many will be punished in Hades for their unbelief.

OTHER IMPORTANT POINTS WORTH NOTING

1) Beginning from Genesis 1:1 you will get deep into the Old Testament before there is even a possible reference to eternal damnation. There is not even one reference in Genesis which brings you to 1,806 BC. If we assume a creation date of 4,000 BC then 2,194 years of human history passed without one warning about eternal damnation. That is more than one third of human history! God did make it clear that a redeemer was coming in Genesis 3:15 to reverse the works of Satan. God revealed enough that men began to call on his name, Genesis 4:26. But the silence about eternal damnation seems very strange. You might argue that since salvation is all of grace, then God is not even obligated to warn the wicked of the great danger before them or even to tell us the means of escape. However, that does not fit well with the nature of our loving God and his mission to save mankind. The point is that God himself is not anxious or worried about the eternal destiny of mankind because our destiny lies fully in his hands and not our choices. He is not on the street selling fire insurance in a panic to change the destinies of men. Instead our destinies were written from before the foundation of the earth. He does not warn the first third of human history about eternal damnation because human beings can never go to the Lake of Fire. Praise to Jesus.

2) I've also wondered about your view of the unborn and infants. Many Christians believe that the unborn and infants are granted salvation apart from faith. Do you believe this is the case or do you believe people cannot be saved until they make a volitional profession of faith? If you do believe eternal salvation hangs in the balance for the unborn and infants then having children could be viewed as a form of Russian Roulette with damnation. Why risk it? Perhaps you believe in an *"age of accountability"* or a *"covenant"* to Christian parents, but then you also believe there is salvation apart from faith. Yet, you object strongly to the idea that there is any salvation from the Lake of Fire apart from a volitional choice of faith in Christ. The Bible never discusses an *"age of accountability"* or *"covenant"* to Christian parents. However, the gospel proclaims that the sins of all mankind are fully atoned, including the unborn and infants. Hopefully Christian parents tell their kids the good news!

3) There is at least a small irony that I agree with Arminians on one point and Calvinists on

another point, yet they often divide. They are united in their opposition to the idea that Christ saves all mankind. So then is the test of orthodoxy that some human beings must go to the Lake of Fire *regardless* of the salvation recipe? Whoa! Jesus Christ is the God of all grace!

4) I heard someone say, "*God loves you unconditionally, but...*" I heard another say, "*Christ died for sinners, but...*" Or again, "*It is a free gift, but...*" I laughed, then I cried. There are no "*buts*" after grace. Instead, after our sin, there is "*...but God who is rich in mercy!*"

5) Evangelical churches boast about the "*finished work of Christ.*" This is a beautiful phrase. Yet, I see that it means different things to different people. I believe that the death of Christ signed the guarantee for every one of his chosen people and it actually is a finished work. However, you say that grace is not finished until "*faith*" is added. Why not, instead, simply trust in God's truly finished work on the cross?

6) It is short sighted to claim that Christ loves you, while claiming that he did not die for all, or only nominally died for all, or even being uncertain about others. It is also short sighted to claim to "*appropriate*" or "*apply*" the work of Christ to yourself. The first is an offense to the atonement and the second an offense to grace.

7) Faith that claims to be the condition for salvation from the Lake of Fire is not Biblical faith resting in the grace of God and resulting in a transformed heart. Faith defined as a condition to God's eternal love is a human work that ultimately rejects grace, rejects God's unconditional love, and cannot save from hypocrisy. Currently I am reading the book *Hope Beyond Hell* by Gerry Beauchemin. His website is www.hopebeyondhell.net. I was not aware of his book before writing my own, but it is evidence that the message of grace is propelling many to question traditional thoughts about eternal damnation. Of course his book is simply the word of man, but then again so is tradition.

I am confident that the Lord is at work. If he happily brings us together again in the future, here is a draft statement of faith that could be a starting point for us.

WE BELIEVE...

1. In one true God, existing eternally as one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, John 14:9-21, who is in essence spirit, John 4:24, light, 1 John 1:5, and love, 1 John 4:8.
2. That the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments are the unique, inerrant, inspired Word of God in the original autographs, and the final authority in all matters of faith and conduct, 2 Tim 3:16.
3. In the sovereignty and active rule of God in creation, the fall, history, revelation, miracles, prophecy, redemption, and final judgment, Romans 8:20-21.
4. That man was created by God in His image, but that since Adam's fall, all men are sinful and by nature deserve God's wrath, Ephesians 2:3.
5. That Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, fully human and fully divine, eternally existing as God, yet born in time of a virgin, and that He lived a sinless and perfect life, 2 Timothy 2:5.
6. In the historic death of Jesus as the full and only atonement, guaranteeing loving forgiveness for the sins of all mankind, in His bodily resurrection from the dead, and in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, 1 John 2:1-2.
7. That all mankind is justified by the loving grace of God and redeemed on the basis of the death of Christ, which is received through faith, Ephesians 2:8-9.
8. That the Holy Spirit is the effective agent in regeneration, bringing individuals to faith and transformed lives, 2 Corinthians 3:18.
9. In one universal church, Christ's Body, to which all believers belong, and in particular churches accountable to God, led by elders who rule in doctrine and discipline, while acknowledging individual conscience, 1 Timothy 5:17, 1 John 2:27.
10. That believing mankind is rewarded in paradise after death, while unbelievers suffer

punishment in Hades after death merited by their sinful nature and their rejection of the grace of Christ, Luke 16:19-31.

11. In the future, visible, physical return of the Lord Jesus Christ in glory, Titus 2:13.
12. In the final resurrection of redeemed mankind to the enjoyment of God forever, and the damnation of those excluded from the Book of Life to the Lake of Fire prepared for the Devil and his angels for the ages of the ages, Matthew 25:31-46 and Revelation 20:10.

ALTERNATIVELY, CONSIDER A SIMPLE OUTLINE OF CHOICES

This could help me to better understand your beliefs. Then I could either be persuaded to your understanding or persuade you to my understanding. Here are six possibilities to consider.

- 1) Victorious Gospel
 - a. Christ's death satisfied the wrath of God for all mankind.
 - b. Believers are saved from sin to paradise, unbelievers are punished in Hades.
 - c. All mankind is saved from the Lake of Fire, prepared for the Devil & his angels.
 - d. This view is faithful to Scripture and faithful to the character of God's grace.
 - e. Both feet are planted solidly on both the depth and breadth of God's love.
- 2) Calvinism
 - a. Christ's death satisfied the wrath of God for a subset of mankind.
 - b. The Holy Spirit effectively brings the chosen subset to repentance and faith.
 - c. Those punished in Hades are also damned to the Lake of Fire.
 - d. This view is like the Jews who claimed to be elect while gentiles are not elect.
 - e. One foot is planted on the depth of God's love, but the other foot on hypocrisy.
- 3) Arminianism
 - a. Christ's death potentially satisfies the wrath of God for all mankind.
 - b. Individual people exercise their *free will* to accept Christ and then are saved.
 - c. Those punished in Hades are also damned to the Lake of Fire.
 - d. This view reminds me of the graceless religions of the gentile world.
 - e. One foot is planted on the breadth of God's love, the other on human condition.
- 4) Mediation
 - a. Christ's death satisfies God's wrath effectively for some, nominally for the rest.
 - b. Two mediating methods
 - i. The Holy Spirit effectively brings the chosen subset to repentance and faith.
 - ii. Individual people exercise their free will to accept Christ and then are saved.
 - c. Those punished in Hades are also damned to the Lake of Fire.
 - d. This view is really Calvinism or Arminianism in disguise or double mindedness.
- 5) Simple faith and the Victorious Gospel is wrong
 - a. Simple faith that all people are sinners and Christ died for sinners.
 - b. Sinners are invited to trust Christ, but avoid debate and theology.
 - c. The Victorious Gospel is wrong because unbelievers are certainly damned.
 - d. This view is unfair to call the Victorious Gospel wrong without Scripture.
 - e. One foot appears to be planted on God's love, but the other on tradition.
- 6) Simple faith and the Victorious Gospel may be right
 - a. Simple faith that all people are sinners and Christ died for sinners.
 - b. Sinners are invited to trust Christ, but with ignorance of the extent of God's love.
 - c. The Victorious Gospel sounds hopeful, and they may want to learn more.
 - d. This view appears interested in Scripture and grace more than tradition.
 - e. One foot appears to be planted on grace, but no certainty of who God loves.

WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE?

I have been admonished to argue no further. So I will break fellowship with Arminianism and Calvinism in pursuit of Christ. Perhaps, openness about these differences will allow us to

discuss God's grace more openly in the future. I would enjoy that very much.

[< I Do Not Agree](#)

[up](#)

[Is "Free-Will" Faith Saving Faith? >](#)

Is "Free-Will" Faith Saving Faith?

And now I ask myself another hard question...

SELF>> Is "free will" faith saving faith?

ME>> I have consistently italicized the expression *free will* throughout my entire book. You may have guessed that I have no faith in our *free will*. I have written at length about the idea in my article, *A Quintessential Defense of Free Will*. Now the big remaining question: is the gospel at odds with the idea of *free will*? If someone claims to have effected their salvation from the Lake of Fire through their *free will* choice of faith, does that qualify as saving faith? Will this "*free will faith*" transform their hearts from self-righteousness as well?

Historically Calvinists have differed in their answer to this question. Consider two extremes from respected theologians in the past. Cornelius Van Til, a respected Reformed theologian, maintained a very accommodating view that Arminian Christians ought to be welcomed as brothers even though he had a radically different understanding of grace than they. He was quoted as saying, "*Arminians are good Christians and better-behaved Christians than many a Calvinist.*" Though, Van Til was not consistent in his accommodation. Read about Van Til here http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cornelius_Van_Til. However, Augustus Montague Toplady, an Anglican cleric and writer of the hymn, *Rock of Ages*, was a major Calvinist opponent of John Wesley's Arminian faith. Though Wesley is also respected by Christendom for his contribution of many hymns in our hymnals today, his *free will* understanding of salvation was rejected as thoroughly anti-gospel by Toplady. Read about Toplady here http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustus_Toplady.

So what is a Christ-like view of this? Let me offer my opinion with four propositions.

1.

No doubt the big concern that established orthodoxies have with my happy thought that Jesus is the savior of all mankind is ultimately that they do not believe he is the *effective* savior of all mankind, though each for different reasons. Perhaps, their concern is that I might cause people to miss their true salvation recipe. However, I propose that the biggest problem is a step before answering the question about the extent of salvation. There is a much bigger concern than answering the question of the percentage of humans beings actually saved by Christ. Ultimately God himself will determine the extent of his grace.

Yet each of us will individually give account to the Lord and the real concern for each of us is answering the question, **what constitutes saving faith for even one person in the first place?** What is the essence of saving faith? Religious people of all persuasions agree that one might *profess* faith, but what really matters is to *possess* faith. If we understand the wrath of God against sin, we must be zealous to possess saving faith to be ready stand before the judge, Jesus Christ.

2.

We can see why common religious models reduce the focus of Christian salvation to rescuing human beings from eternity in the Lake of Fire. We want to avoid eternal suffering! We may not be so concerned about the sin in our character that we have become so comfortable with, but we do want eternal bliss. So what salvation recipes can we pick from?

Arminians view the salvation of each individual as "*in the balance*" and yet to be determined by each individual's *free will* choice of faith and obedience. Limited atonement Calvinists view salvation as certain for the chosen few, but they say we cannot know who the chosen ones are until particular individuals are persuaded to have "*faith*" that Christ died for them. The reason they cannot know who is chosen is because they also believe that Christ did not

make payment for the sins of all mankind, but only some. Therefore, their elect are an invisible subset not indicated with any observable sign so they cannot know who they are. Regardless, the common focus of both of these models is the provision of fire insurance.

I propose instead that the focus of the Great Commission is NOT selling fire insurance, but the radical transformation of the individual from self-righteous pride and hypocrisy to Christ-like humility and service, that is salvation from sin. The gospel declares that God has already paid for all the sins of all mankind and commands us to repent and believe it. The fate of the elect is *already* guaranteed and written in the Lamb's Book of Life from eternity past, Ephesians 1. No one's eternal destiny is "*in the balance*," but only in the hands of Christ. *Faith in Christ* is not a pen to write your own name there, but instead the eye glasses to see your name already written there by Christ. Jesus has made the ground level at the foot of his cross for all humanity.

Our Heavenly Father's purpose is to demonstrate his grace, having forgiven the sins of all mankind -- both the believing and the unbelieving. This understanding empties faith of all works and removes all conditions from grace so that the praise goes to Christ alone for the salvation of His people. Faith cannot add anyone's name to the Lamb's Book of Life, but only open our eyes to the fact. The point is that we are saved by grace which is received through faith. Faith does not effect our salvation from eternal fire, but it does effect a change in our self-righteous hearts.

Anyone who agrees with the Biblical doctrine of predestination must also agree that the names in the Lamb's Book of Life are a definite list of people already determined and penned from before the foundation of the world. Believers are those who simply trust that their name is there through faith in Christ. Unbelievers then are those who reject their election, such as Esau. Those who die without faith will be punished in Hades, even though their sins are completely paid.

These wicked unbelievers maintain their own self-righteous distinction from the remainder of sinful humanity and reject the precious blood of Christ, no matter how religious they may appear. Thus they will not escape punishment in the afterlife for their crimes against Christ. They reject their own election, yet even so I believe that their election by grace will not fail to extract them from Hades and finally save them from the Lake of Fire in the end as I have already fully explained, Romans 11:28.

You might ask why I would bother to jeopardize my respected position in religious circles to insist this point. As a Christian, I have been entrusted with an understanding that I am saved by grace alone and seek to be faithful to the message that the only difference between me and the unbelieving is that I believe our sins are already paid for and forgiven while they do not believe it. The point is that God hates religion! Why not quit "*playing church*" and be my Christian brother?

3.

In light of these facts, do the Arminian Christian and the Limited atonement Calvinist possess saving faith? If predestination has already guaranteed salvation from the Lake of Fire for the elect apart from works, then the only question remaining is: are the Arminian Christian and the Limited atonement Calvinist saved from the sin of self-righteousness and saved from punishment in Hades? Have they received the grace that exterminates self-righteousness? Or will they join the unbelieving and be punished in Hades for holding to "*forms of religion*" that miss the real deal?

It seems clear from the New Testament that all that is required is simple repentant faith in Christ to be saved. So a true Christian might sport any label provided that his heart is bowed before Jesus. Grace must allow for the fact that the heart can be true while the head is still confused.

Yet the New Testament also places a knife edge along the line of salvation by grace which IS saving and salvation by works which IS NOT saving. Those who reject their election and the grace of God in favor of straw will be punished for the duration in

Hades.

Again, God hates religion! As such, the Arminian Christian cannot answer the question as to why they chose Christ and others did not without suggesting a work of man such as their *free will* choice of faith. Their definition of "*faith*" is NOT simple trust in the finished work of Christ for all His people, but instead it is a "faith" loaded with works that supplant grace as the condition of salvation. Their faith / work plus the supposed "*general*" offer of salvation to all mankind is their hope. How can their heads be bowed maintaining this view? Their theology openly confesses that they themselves made the difference in their salvation and not the precious grace of Christ. They are rejecting the grace of God in favor of religion. We are warned that Hades is a fit punishment for those who reject grace.

Perhaps the Limited atonement Calvinist definition of "*faith*" passes the bar. Limited atonement Calvinists are persuaded to have "*faith*" that Christ died for them, while they also believe that Christ did not die for all. They suggest that we cannot know who the elect are until specific individuals place faith in Christ. Stop. Read that sentence again a couple times. Ultimately by their own confession these people are logically saying that they cannot have confident knowledge that they are elect, either. What special revelation, in addition to the Scriptures, do they have to confidently claim that Christ paid for their sins and did not pay for the sins of others? Christian faith is rooted in the truth of Scripture and historic fact that Christ became a man and vicariously atoned for the sins of *ALL* mankind through his substitutionary death. Assurance must stand on this objective fact and nothing else. Calvinist "*faith*" is not faith built on the rock of Jesus Christ, but built on a hypocritical self-deception. Again, we are warned that Hades is a fit punishment for those who reject grace.

4.

Yet there is such a thing as a good Calvinist. I once shared my view of Christian faith with a friend. I explained that true faith is merely receiving what Christ has already finished for His people. True faith does not change God's heart toward us, but radically changes our heart toward God. He then said the terrible thing about my view is that everyone who believes it eventually concludes that all mankind is saved from the Lake of Fire. I've never received a better compliment in my entire life! So I'll take the label of a good Calvinist because I also believe that the atonement is "*limited*." Jesus' love is limited to all mankind, but he has not atoned for the sin of fallen angels who will be cast into the Lake of Fire.

My last proposition is that those who are born again, have truly received grace, and possess true faith must not maintain ambivalence or objection to the idea that Christ paid for the sins all mankind. Friends, mankind's salvation is also the salvation of each individual, Romans 11:16. Join me and happily embrace the salvation of all God's people!

If the first fruit is holy, so is the lump. If the root is holy, so are the branches.

Romans 11:16 (WEB)

Will you reject your election by grace to salvation in favor of religion and conditional salvation? Why not laugh and rejoice trusting that your sins are already forgiven as well as the sins of all mankind?

< [Is all mankind elect? NO!](#)

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[Is Revelation 21-22 About The Church, The Last Age, or Eternity? >](#)

Is Revelation 21-22 About The Church, The Last Age, or Eternity?

SOME>> *Is Revelation 21-22 about The Church, The Last Age, or Eternity?*

ME>> Excellent question. Revelation 21 begins,

1) I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth have passed away, and the sea is no more. 2) I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband. 3) I heard a loud voice out of heaven saying, "Behold, God's dwelling is with people, and he will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4) He will wipe away from them every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; neither will there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more. The first things have passed away."

5) He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." He said, "Write, for these words of God are faithful and true." 6) He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give freely to him who is thirsty from the spring of the water of life. 7) He who overcomes, I will give him these things. I will be his God, and he will be my son. 8) But for the cowardly, unbelieving, sinners, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their part is in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

Revelation 21:1-8 (WEB)

Most Christians understand this Scripture as the commencement of eternity after the final judgment. However, some Universalist Christians understand Revelation 21-22 as instead the final age or eon before eternity. Others from a Full Preterist viewpoint even understand these chapters to be about the New Covenant Church and not about either final judgment or eternity.

Full Preterists have concluded that all Old and New Testament prophecy is already completely fulfilled. The term Preterism comes from the Latin *praeter*, meaning "past." Thankfully Preterists have observed that there are New Testament prophecies concerning the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. that are in fact past. Unfortunately Full Preterists have gone too far in concluding that all prophecy is fulfilled including the return of Christ and the resurrection. They miss the "*blessed hope*" and promise of Christ in Acts 1:11, John 14:3, and Titus 2:13. Thus they interpret the images in Revelation 21-22 as only about the Church during the present New Covenant Age.

Alternatively some Universalist Christians understand Revelation 21-22 not as the beginning of eternity, but instead as the final age of purification for mankind, after which salvation is then realized. The final judgment described in Matthew 25:31-46 and Revelation 20:11-15 is understood by some to sentence unbelieving mankind to the second death in the Lake of Fire. Yet, since 1 Corinthians 15:55 promises the end of death they conclude that there is also salvation from the second death. Thus if human beings are sentenced to the Lake of Fire, the common Universalist position must find proof that they are safely extracted from the Lake of Fire later. To accomplish this they consider Revelation 21-22 as a chronological account of an age beyond the Church Age. Revelation 22:12-17 (WEB) is then understood as

further appeal for repentance after the Great White Throne Judgment to those suffering in the Lake of Fire.

12) "Behold, I come quickly. My reward is with me, to repay to each man according to his work. 13) I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. 14) Blessed are those who do his commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter in by the gates into the city. 15) Outside are the dogs, the sorcerers, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. 16) I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify these things to you for the assemblies. I am the root and the offspring of David; the Bright and Morning Star."

17) The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" He who hears, let him say, "Come!" He who is thirsty, let him come. He who desires, let him take the water of life freely.

This common Universalist understanding seems strained to me. First, there is not one other Scripture that suggests an age of fallen existence beyond the Church Age. Instead Revelation 21-22 paints a summary picture of both our glorious eternity when every tear is wiped away and our present glorious church. Thus, I join most Christians in understanding the Bible's final chapters to speak about the commencement of eternity after the Great White Throne Judgment. Consider, I Corinthians 15:55 (WEB) says "*Death, where is your sting? Hades, where is your victory?*" Paul is forecasting the end of Hades and death as also recorded in Revelation 20:14 and 21:4. This is the promise of the end of death and the end of punishment in Hades for mankind! However, there is no mention of the end of the second death for those not listed in the Book of Life.

So how then can I hold to the universal salvation of all mankind? What is missed by traditional Christians and also by many Universalist Christians is that the Lake of Fire is not prepared for mankind, but is prepared for the Devil and his angels as indicated in Matthew 25:41. Fallen angels are held for judgment, extracted from Tartarus / Thalassa, and are also present on that Great Day as shown in 2 Peter 2:4, Jude 6, and Revelation 20:13. The fallen angels are the goats on Jesus' left, not mankind!

Thus I agree with those who see elements of the New Covenant Church in the images of Revelation 21-22. The angel says to John, "*Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb!*" (Revelation 21:9 WEB). The angel also shows John the river of the water of life and the tree of life which is for "*the healing of the nations*" (Revelation 22:2). These things appear to be a picture of the Church and healing grace during the Church age. What healing would be needed in glory? Yet, the New Heavens and New Earth also promise in Revelation 21:4 (WEB),

He will wipe away from them every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; neither will there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more. The first things have passed away.

And I also agree that Revelation 21-22 explains our glorious eternity when every tear is wiped away. Yet, we do not need to look too far to see that tears are not yet wiped away. The Old Covenant has passed away, but the effects of the fall still remain. We are too often faced with the painful realities of death, mourning, crying, and pain. The final chapters of Revelation give us both *hope* and *help*. The description of eternal glory with every tear wiped away gives us *hope*, Revelation 21:4. The description of the New Covenant church also gives us *help* until Jesus returns, Revelation 22:7-21. God's Word concludes with hope for the *now* and the *not yet*, but *soon*. The end of Old Covenant Jerusalem and the birth of the New Covenant Jerusalem, the Church, brings hope *now* beginning in the first century.

The victory of Christ reigning in every situation brings hope *now* to Christians of any time period. The promise of glory in the New Heavens and New Earth in Christ's presence when every tear is finally wiped away brings hope for the *not yet*, but Christ is coming *soon*.

Jesus himself introduces the Revelation of the past, present, and future saying, "***I am the Alpha and the Omega,***" says ***the Lord God,*** "***who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty,***" (Revelation 1:8 WEB).

Maranatha!

< [Is "Free-Will" Faith Saving Faith?](#) [up](#) [Isaiah 65:25 says that even Satan will be restored](#) >

Isaiah 65:25 says that even Satan will be restored

Another objected...

Reader> [You originally said that Satan and his angels are eternally damned. However consider] Isaiah 65:25, 11:6-10. There are several other scriptural passages indicating God will bring even the ultra-rebel dragon back into loyalty, too.

Me> Let's consider those passages.

Isaiah 65:25 (WEB),

'The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. Dust will be the serpent's food. They will not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain,' says Yahweh.

The emphasis of this verse seems to be that in the future God's people will be completely safe from all harm. On that we are agreed. However, does the verse promise happiness for the serpent? The Hebrew word for dust, [aphar], can also be translated "garbage." So what is in view here? Is this a happy restoration for the serpent or a humiliating defeat with his mouth full of garbage?

Isaiah 11:6-10 (WEB),

6) The wolf will live with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat; The calf, the young lion, and the fattened calf together; and a little child will lead them. 7) The cow and the bear will graze. Their young ones will lie down together. The lion will eat straw like the ox. 8) The nursing child will play near a cobra's hole, and the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den. 9) They will not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of Yahweh, as the waters cover the sea. 10) It will happen in that day that the nations will seek the root of Jesse, who stands as a banner of the peoples; and his resting place will be glorious.

Again here is the promise of complete peace in all God's creation, to the degree that vipers are no longer a danger, even for infants. So is this verse simply speaking about vipers or is Satan also in view? The mention of "den" and "nest" suggest that Isaiah is simply talking about vipers in the animal Kingdom rather than Satan himself.

The focus of my studies for the *Optimism Out of Control* book was and still is God's victorious grace for all mankind, created in God's image, and redeemed at the cross. The observation that the Lake of Fire is prepared for the Devil and his angels, and not prepared for mankind has also been an important point in my arguments. This understanding is critical to understand who is in fact actually sentenced to the Lake of Fire at the Matthew 25:41 Sheep and Goat Judgment.

However, after entering the larger discussion about the extent of God's grace in all creation, I was surprised to learn about the debate over the salvation of Satan himself. Thus I have pursued further study below. As for using Isaiah 11:6-10 and 65:25 for proof that even Satan himself will be saved, it seems like an awkward stretch to me. Depending on these verses to

make such a case may do more harm than good concerning the main point. Such a stretched argument may undermine the credibility of the essential point: that Christ is the effective savior of mankind. Christ is explicitly victorious in the redemption of all mankind at the cross, but Isaiah 65:25 certainly is not explicit about Satan.

Please consider these related articles on my website:

[*Revelation 20:10*](#)

[*Fallen Angels at The Great White Throne Judgment?*](#)

[*How Can You Say Revelation 21:8 Does Not Apply to Humans?*](#)

[*You are Wrong About Matthew 25:31-46!*](#)

[*Hope in Jesus*](#)

For myself, with bold humility I say that Christ must finally save all mankind because he has already proven his intent to do just that at the cross. Actually it is not me saying it, but Christ has committed himself already and proclaimed the good news himself from the cross. Furthermore, he commands us to believe it and give our lives to telling others the good news! This good news is so certain that the main thing that gets him angry now is if we do not believe it and live accordingly.

As for Satan and his angels, I am also certain from God's word that they are sentenced to the Lake of Fire, which is prepared for them for *The Ages of The Ages*, that is the "*The Aion of The Aion*," Matthew 25:41 and Revelation 20:10. Can the grace of God bring an end to Satan's damnation for *The Ages of The Ages*? Certainly! Will he? I do not know.

[< Is Revelation 21-22 About The Church, The Last Age, or Eternity?](#)

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[Isaiah 66:22-24 Cannot Include Fallen Angels >](#)

Isaiah 66:22-24 Cannot Include Fallen Angels

Another reader says...

READER>> You mention the end of Isaiah 66 -- this is the verse Christ quotes in Mark 9 / Matt 18 (and earlier in Matt 5's parallel warning if I recall correctly) involving Gehenna. So now you can have fun deciding whether this applies to the Lake of Fire judgment or not after all. ;) But from Isaiah's own perspective it applies to humans being slain at the coming of YHWH and the survivors being appalled by it; there's a parallel scene in Ezekiel or Jeremiah... where God gives instructions on how the survivors will have to send teams out for years to properly collect and bury and / or burn the dead, and how even after that's done some people will be assigned to check for remaining bones and flag them for proper removal and burial later. Isaiah doesn't go into anything like that detail, but he's quite explicit about them being the corpses of men (iysh) who transgressed against God.

ME>> Let's look at these passages more closely.

Isaiah 66:22-24 (WEB),

22) "For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me," says Yahweh, "so your offspring and your name shall remain. 23) It shall happen that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh will come to worship before me," says Yahweh. 24) "They will go out, and look at the dead bodies of the men [enowsh] who have transgressed against me; for their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind."

You note that the Hebrew word "enowsh" is used to describe those who rebelled. "Enowsh" means man, mankind, or mortal man, so at first glance it would seem that this passage could not be referring to the destruction of fallen angels. So what event is then in view?

The reader above believes that this passage explains the corrective hand of Christ upon his human enemies at his pre-Millennial return. The reader also apparently believes that this event is synonymous with Ezekiel 39. Is that the case? Ezekiel 39 does mention God judgments, but his presence in the flesh is not explicit. Ezekiel does not mention the New Heavens and Earth and thus also seems to point to earlier events.

It should be noted that the Hebrew word "enowsh" was also used to refer to the angels who visited Abraham in Genesis 18. So apparently the word does not always mean mortal man, but can also mean embodied angels. So it would not break any rules of interpretation to apply it to fallen angels in Isaiah 66:24.

Furthermore, Isaiah 65 and 66 is one of the few places the Old Testament explicitly references the New Heavens and the New Earth. So the New Testament parallel event seems to be Revelation 20 and 21 just before the commencement of eternity. I have proposed that Daniel 12:1-4, Matthew 25:31-46, and Revelation 20:11-15 are all talking about the same event: the final verdict for both mankind and fallen angels. Isaiah 66:22-24 seems to point to the same event with Satan and his demons' final rebellion against God and mankind. Satan and the demons meet their certain defeat, while all mankind looks upon the carcasses of the rebel angels with loathe, Revelation 20:7-10. Now it also seems clear that Satan does tempt humankind into battle against the camp of God at that time. However, this does not require that those humans who join the final rebellion with Satan are then finally lost to the Lake of Fire. I still hold that Satan and his demons receive the sentence to the Lake of Fire which is prepared for them while mankind, even unbelieving mankind, receive grace -- solely

on the basis of Christ's vicarious atonement. Finally, I have proved in my article, *You are Wrong About Matthew 25:31-46!*, that the "ethnos" gathered before Christ at the final judgment includes both humans and fallen angels, Matthew 25:32 and Revelation 20:13. It is no coincidence that Revelation 20:8 says that when Satan is released he will gather the "ethnos" for battle against God's people. Satan will round up both his demons and unbelieving mankind who so easily serve as his pawns.

It was objected that Mark 9:42-50 uses the same expression "*their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched*" as found in Isaiah 66:24.

Mark 9:47-50 (WEB),

47) If your eye causes you to stumble, cast it out. It is better for you to enter into God's Kingdom with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into the Gehenna of fire, 48) 'where their worm doesn't die, and the fire is not quenched.' 49) For everyone will be salted with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt. 50) Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, with what will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.

Mark 9 certainly is not a warning to demons, but to unbelieving humans. There are several possibilities. One possibility is that I am wrong about Isaiah 66 and that the prophet is speaking only about the punishment of wicked human beings. In this case perhaps Isaiah is writing about earlier events. However, the New Heavens and Earth language seems to point to the final battle just before the Great White Throne judgment. In either case, understanding "enowsh" to mean only wicked human beings does not necessarily undermine my primary thesis that all mankind will be finally saved. Though, my proposed model of understanding would need to be refactored.

Another possibility is that in Mark 9 Jesus is comparing the punishments of human beings in Hades with the even more severe punishments reserved for fallen angels in the Lake of Fire. Jesus may use the same language, "*their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched*," because the punishments are similar, even though Hades is temporal.

Finally, Jesus may simply allow wicked unbelieving mankind to fear the judgment that will come upon the fallen angels, the non-elect, even though all mankind will be finally saved from the judgment reserved only for fallen angels in the Lake of Fire. This pattern is evident a number of places in Scripture. It is more than reasonable to let those who reject Christ's atonement think they have the destiny of the unredeemed. In fact it is the best wakeup call possible for the hardhearted unbelieving elect.

Regarding the salvation of fallen angels, I had proposed that Satan, The Beast, and the False Prophet are all fallen angels. These three beings are the only people explicitly mentioned by name as being thrown into the Lake of Fire. I have written further about this thesis in my article, *Revelation 20:10*. The same reader above also objected, saying that The Beast and The False Prophet are human. However, after reading Revelation again I stumbled upon verse Revelation 16:13. This verse communicates that these three beings share of common nature of being the SOURCE of evil spirits and the spirit of demons. Humans are not the source of the demonic, but instead humans are attacked and possessed by the demonic. This seems like further evidence that these three beings are the demonic leaders of the rebellion against God with Satan as their ring leader.

I also finished reading *Terms for Eternity: Aionios and Aidios in Classical and Christian Texts* by Ilaria Ramelli and David Konstan. They defend that "aion" means "age" or "eon" as many would agree. However, they also note that the definitive Greek word for eternal, "aidios," is only used twice the Bible: once in Romans 1:20 concerning God and once in Jude 6 concerning the bonds on fallen angels. Since Ramelli and Konstan argue even for the salvation of Satan they conclude that "aidios" in Jude 6 must mean transcending the ages,

but not finally eternal. They reason thus because these demons are being "*held for judgment*" so there must be an end to these "*aidios*" bonds after their judgment. However, it could also be that these demons with "*aidios*" bonds are held in *Thalaasa* to be extracted for sentencing at the Great White Throne Judgment and then with the "*aidios*" bonds still on they are cast into the Lake of Fire. Thus they are held for judgment, but the "*aidios*" bonds are not released as they are cast into the Lake of Fire. Further, if the Sheep and Goat Judgment is synonymous with the Great White Throne Judgment and with the Great Judgment Day for the imprisoned angels, then it is clear that the goats are held for judgment and further sentenced to the Lake of Fire after their extraction from Tartarus / Thalaasa. So the "*aidios*" bonds of fallen angels do not end at the Great Day of their judgment, but continue on through *The Ages of The Ages* in the Lake of Fire.

That all said, I want to do further study concerning the Biblical arguments for an "*apokatastasis*" that could include the salvation of even the fallen angels sentenced to the Lake of Fire. Can anyone point me to further resources on the meaning of "*kolasis*" from Matthew 25:46? Some resources indicate "*punishment, torment, etc.*" However, I know others have argued that the word only means loving correction or correction with a goal to restoration. Actually the only other Biblical use in 1 John 4:18 does not mean loving correction, but merely the fruit of fear, that is torment. Perhaps the arguments for the meaning of "*kolasis*" as only corrective punishment are stretched because of the conclusion that human beings are sent to "*aion kolasis*." If we think human beings are sent to the Lake of Fire, but hope they are later saved, then we need to understand "*kolasis*" as corrective. However, if the goats on Jesus' left are fallen angels only, then the puzzle pieces fit together more easily.

Thanks for the comment above. After reflection, I continue to hold that the Lake of Fire is prepared only for the Devil and his angels. However, I may be agnostic about the duration of the torment to be endured in the Lake of Fire by the Devil and his angels. The Scriptures obviously begin with rebellious Satan tempting mankind into the fall and end with all mankind redeemed with every tear wiped away and Satan and his angels in torment in the Lake of Fire. Revelation 20:10 says Satan will be sentenced to the Lake of Fire for "*The Aions of The Aions*." So when is the end of "*The Aions of The Aions*?" If there is an end to Satan's damnation it is after the last page of Scripture.

< [Isaiah 65:25 says that even Satan will be restored](#)

up

[John 3:36 Offers No Optimism!](#) >

John 3:36 Offers No Optimism!

Another thoughtful doubter suggested...

ANOTHER>> John 3:36 offers no optimism, so you are in error to suggest otherwise. Furthermore, you err in thinking that sinful man does not deserve the wrath of God. The Bible never indicates that the wrath of God will be abated for unbelievers.

ME>> That is an excellent point of discussion. John 3:36 (WEB) says,

One who believes in the Son has eternal life, but one who disobeys the Son won't see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

Let me first point out a couple of observations, then conclude with a couple of questions back to you. First, is this verse saying that unbelievers will not be *granted* eternal life because of their unbelief, or is this verse saying that unbelievers simply cannot see eternal life because of their refusal to accept forgiveness? No doubt you say the former, while I say the latter. Note that in defense of my understanding the verse says, "*won't see life.*" Secondly, consider a few observations.

Certainly you must agree that God loves the unbelieving elect before they place faith in Him. Thus faith has no transactional impact on our election. Faith changes our heart toward God, but not God's heart toward his chosen. If we agree that this is true, then this verse must be understood to mean that the unbelieving elect cannot see God's love for them, even though it is already guaranteed. After all no one is born believing. Romans 5:10 and I John 4:10 explain this concept well. So even if we disagree on the extent of election within mankind, we must still agree that the unbelieving elect move from a point of *NOT SEEING* their promised destiny, to *SEEING* their promised destiny when they trust Christ. Since transforming faith is the subject of John Chapter 3, that can be the only meaning of "*won't see life*" in John 3:36.

You might argue that earlier in Chapter 3 Jesus says that unbelievers are "*condemned already.*" So you might say that faith moves a person from a place of condemnation to a place of forgiveness. Yet elsewhere we see that sinful man's reconciliation to God has happened even before repentance and faith, Romans 5:10. So how are we to understand the unbeliever's status of condemnation? John 3:17 and Romans 8:34 make it clear that Jesus has no condemnation for his chosen people -- not ever. Therefore, the condemnation of the unbelieving elect is a condemnation of their unbelief or a condemnation of their unregenerate nature, but certainly not an eternal condemnation. Ephesians 2:3 explains that we as unbelievers were objects of wrath, "*because of our nature.*" However, the elect were never even potentially objects of eternal wrath, even during our unbelief. Of course this is not because we didn't deserve eternal wrath, but because of God's grace.

Matthew 13:11-17 quotes Isaiah, making the point that not all of God's chosen people are also chosen to see and believe. So these unbelieving elect cannot see life. They cannot see God's love. They cannot see God's grace. These lost sheep continue to reject God's grace and reject that their sins are already forgiven and instead turn to religion in an effort to add to the finished work of Christ through some action, work, or choice of their own. God is quite angry with this unbelief and his anger toward their rebellion will continue if they do not repent, even though he loves them dearly.

You say that the wrath of God is never abated for unbelievers. I agree that the eternal wrath of God is never abated or even offered to the non-elect, however, the eternal wrath of God is *already* propitiated for both the believing *and* the unbelieving elect. This is the

very meaning of I John 2:2. Romans 3:3-4 also makes it clear that God's faithful salvation of his chosen people is not conditioned on our faith. These verses make it clear that Christ has chosen to pay for the sins of all mankind, period. Of course faith certainly changes our heart toward God. However, God's loving heart towards his chosen people is resolute whether we are in belief or unbelief.

Paul's concluding argument in Romans 11 also makes it clear that God's gifts and call are irrevocable and so will prove effective even for the unbelieving elect. Now to clarify, this does not rule out that God is angry with the disobedience of the unbelieving elect. These rebels certainly do not see life while they persist in unbelief and they will be punished in Hades unless they repent. In fact Hades is a fit punishment for their self-righteous unregenerate natures. However, because of election, God's wrath toward them does not conclude with the Lake of Fire. Just like Romans 11:28 beautifully explains, they are enemies on account of their rejection of the gospel, but loved on account of election.

You might also point out that Revelation 21:8 specifically says that the vile *and* the unbelieving will be consigned to the Lake of Fire. However, I will check-mate with the thought that eternal damnation can only apply to the non-elect. This is easily proved because you and I are still both vile sinners even as Christians, yet our hope is that our sinful selves are hidden safely in Christ with all the rest of the elect. Even Christians are guilty of the sins listed in Revelation 21:8 and yet we and all mankind will be spared from the Lake of Fire because Jesus has chosen to pay for our sin. The sin of the non-elect, fallen angels, however, is apparently not paid for by the sacrifice of Christ, according to Hebrews 2:16. Therefore the Lake of Fire is their certain destiny.

So you are right that John 3:36 offers no optimism... for the unbelieving. You can tell the unbelieving elect directly that God has already forgiven them until you are blue in the face and they will continue to disbelieve and labor to somehow activate their salvation. John 3:36 is a simple statement of fact to these unbelieving. As long as they continue to prefer disbelief and religion they will not be able to see their destiny as God's elect. That is, they will not see their promised, guaranteed destiny until the Holy Spirit opens their eyes.

Unfortunately, some who profess Christ often sing the hymn, "*There is a new name written in Heaven and its mine.*" These misguided people imagine that they somehow met the condition for salvation through some work of their own. However, the grace of God is unconditionally given to all his people. They miss the great joy of trusting Christ and knowing that our names were written in Heaven from before the foundation of the world! There are absolutely no new names in Heaven, but instead only the names penned with God's burning love from before the creation of the world. Yet many religious people still contrive alternate confidences for themselves without the rock of Christ as a foundation.

Hitting closer to home, you suggest that I err in thinking that sinful man does not deserve the wrath of God. Au Contraire! I wholeheartedly believe that sinful man deserves the eternal wrath of God. In fact I believe this more than you do. I would even suggest that you offend grace by saying that the death of Christ is insufficient to propitiate the wrath of God without personal faith added to sign the transaction. Christ alone is the only sufficient sacrifice to satisfy the justice of God and propitiate his holy wrath. The transaction for our salvation was a deal signed between the Father and the Son alone. Faith adds absolutely no transactional value to Christ's work. The death of Christ completely signs, seals, *and* delivers salvation to every single one of his chosen people. Thus evangelism is an invitation for the elect to believe this good news! Faith is simply the reception of this gift, already given, which happens only if the Holy Spirit softens our hardened hearts and opens our blind eyes.

Here is a good question for both you and me. Do we agree that even the sin we committed today is enough to damn us if we were outside of Christ? Do we also agree that even the continuing faith of a believer is insufficient to appease God's wrath? So when we distrust and disobey God as Christians, do we then get confidence by reminding God that we do in fact trust him and that he should continue to accept our faith (or lack of faith)? Or instead, do we remind ourselves that Christ died for the sin we commit even as Christians and

continue to thank him for his finished work and promise to us? True and saving faith must be built on the solid rock of Jesus Christ and his finished work alone. This finished work is salvation already guaranteed for each of his chosen ones. The believing take great joy in this optimistic gospel! Unbelievers, however, remain under God's wrath and will continue to reject their election in favor of their religion... and thus cannot see life.

[< Isaiah 66:22-24 Cannot Include Fallen Angels](#)

[up](#)

[John 5:28-30 Offers No Optimism! >](#)

John 5:28-30 Offers No Optimism!

AGAIN>> John 5:28-30 also offers no optimism, so you are still in error.

ME>> That is another excellent point of discussion. John 5:28-30 (WEB) says,

28) Don't marvel at this, for the hour comes in which all who are in the tombs will hear his voice, 29) and will come out; those who have done good, to the resurrection of life; and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment. 30) I can of myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is righteous; because I don't seek my own will, but the will of my Father who sent me.

The first questions we need to ask of this Scripture is when is this judgment, who is being judged, and what is the duration of the judgment? We agree that judgment is certain, but what is the nature of the judgment? Traditional theology concludes that only the judgment of human beings is in view.

It may take you time to study and time to reconsider, yet I hope that this book has at least introduced you to three very important concepts. First, the Hebrew "*olam*" and Greek "*aion*" are best interpreted as "*age*" or the "*life*" of the noun in view. Thus, we see that God is working out his plan of redemption through the "*ages*," and not merely in one epoch. Thus the judgment of John 5 could point to a number of points in the future. Second, when interpreting passages about judgment we need to consider that fallen angels may be in view just as much as unbelieving men. John 16:11 and the judgment of Satan is a reminder of that important point. Jude 6 also reminds us that fallen angels are being held for judgment on that "*Great Day*." Third, since "*aion*" usually does not mean eternal except when referring to God and perhaps the Lake of Fire, we must consider that at least some of the after death judgments are not eternal, for example the punishments of Hades.

That said, I think this passage is speaking about the Sheep and the Goat judgment, synonymous with Great White Throne Judgment. This final judgment will save the remainder of mankind just extracted from Hades and condemn demons to the Lake of Fire for *The Ages of The Ages*. This seems clear because a resurrection to both death and life is in view. It is important to note that the confirmation of the salvation of the believing elect has already happened for Christians through faith and at the Rapture! So if there are both saved and unsaved at the Great White Throne Judgment, who else would it be except the confirmation of the salvation of the unbelieving elect and the damnation of the non-elect fallen angels?

[< John 3:36 Offers No Optimism!](#)

[up](#)

[Not Written in the Book of Life from Creation? >](#)

Not Written in the Book of Life from Creation?

SOME>> Wait! Some are not written in the Book of Life from the creation of the world!

ME>> Good point. Consider Revelation's mention of the Book of Life.

He who overcomes will be arrayed in white garments, and I will in no way blot his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

Revelation 3:5 (WEB)

All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been killed.

Revelation 13:8 (WEB)

The beast that you saw was, and is not; and is about to come up out of the abyss and to go into destruction. Those who dwell on the earth and whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel when they see that the beast was, and is not, and shall be present.

Revelation 17:8 (WEB)

I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and they opened books. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works.

Revelation 20:12 (WEB)

If anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.

Revelation 20:15 (WEB)

There will in no way enter into it anything profane, or one who causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Revelation 21:27 (WEB)

If anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, may God take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, which are written in this book.

Revelation 22:19 (WEB)

These Scriptures could lead one to believe that one's name could be blotted out of the Book of Life and thus eternally damned... that is if one does not consider grace and Christ's strategies with the hardhearted.

Consider one of the earliest mentions of the Book of Life with Moses.

31) Moses returned to Yahweh, and said, "Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made themselves gods of gold. 32) Yet now, if you will, forgive their sin—and if not, please blot me out of your book which you have written."

33) Yahweh said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book."

Exodus 32:31-33 (WEB)

King David also sang about the Book of Life in Psalm 69:28 (WEB),

Let them be blotted out of the book of life, and not be written with the righteous.

Daniel likewise was taught about The Book in Daniel 12:1 (WEB),

At that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince who stands for the children of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who shall be found written in the book.

What do we observe about the Book of Life?

First, we observe that names must be written from the foundation of the world or you cannot be saved. Thus faith does not add one's name to the Book of Life, but instead simply trusts that it is so.

Second, it initially appears like one's name can be blotted out from the Book of Life because of sin. So can a name written in The Book from the Earth's foundation then be removed? If so then no hope remains!

Third, Moses expressed a willingness to be removed from the Book of Life himself, if God would not forgive his fellow Israelites. In this way Moses expresses a Christ-like heart and passion for the forgiveness of others or at least a frustrated fidelity to his fellow Israelites.

Fourth, only those named in the Book of Life at the Great White Throne judgment will be saved from the Lake of Fire.

What interpretive models are possible?

Model A: Every human being is listed in the Book of Life initially, but sinning can permanently remove your name. Everyone starts a winner, but most will still lose, A.K.A. pure works salvation, but reverse.

Model B: Only a sub-set of human beings are listed in the Book of Life initially and sinning can permanently remove your name. Not everyone starts a winner and even most of the winners will still lose, A.K.A. uncertain works salvation.

Model C: Only a sub-set of human beings are listed in the Book of Life, and sinning can never blot your name (the elect cannot be blotted out, but are only threatened). Not everyone starts a winner, but the subset chosen to win, will win, A.K.A. Calvinism.

Model D: The Bible never makes one mention of names being added to the Book of Life, but, predestination aside, one can still hope to add your name by trusting Christ. No one starts a winner, but a few will defeat the odds and win, A.K.A. Arminianism.

Model E: The Bible never makes one mention of names being added to the Book of Life, but,

predestination aside, everyone will add their name eventually by trusting Christ. No one starts a winner, but *time* is the recipe to win everyone, A.K.A. Arminian Universalism.

Model F: Every human being is listed in the Book of Life initially, but sinning can remove your name to suffer temporarily in the Lake of Fire. Everyone starts a winner, but most will still lose, but only temporarily, A.K.A. Traditional Universalism.

Model G: Every human being is listed in the Book of Life initially and nothing will ever remove your name from the Book of Life. However, Christ is willing to preach fear to the rebellious elect even labeling them, "*not my sheep*," (John 10:26 WEB) or threatening to "*blot*" sinners from The Book. Furthermore, Christ will punish even the redeemed in Hades, albeit temporarily, 2 Peter 2:1. Thus, the Lake of Fire is prepared only for the Devil and his angels who are not listed in the Book of Life, but unbelievers also fear this destiny. All humanity starts and finishes a winner, but most do not act like winners and suffer like losers due to their rejection of grace until the glory of God's grace is finally and irresistibly revealed to all mankind at the Great White Throne judgment, A.K.A. the thesis of **Optimism Out of Control**.

Thus Model G is my choice for the best interpretive model. Further, defense can be found in my article, **Special Strategies and Interpretations?**

Thankfully the heart of Moses was a taste of the greater heart of Christ our Savior! Jesus does not blot our names from the Book of Life, but instead blots out our sins!

I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake; and I will not remember your sins.

Isaiah 43:25 (WEB)

Moses boldly confronted God, appealing for Israel's forgiveness, but Christ even more boldly confronted all sin and sacrificed himself for all!

For him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (WEB)

The point is that the heart of Christ is poured out for the salvation of all mankind and he has and will accomplish his goal. Even Moses understood these things under the dim light of the Old Covenant. Christ was formed in Moses enough that he had great boldness to appeal to the God of Heaven with the facts, "*You cannot forgive me, if you do not forgive them!*"

So how can we enlightened 20th century Christians under the glorious New Covenant settle for a mere "*evangelical*" fire insurance policy? Do we have Moses' and Christ's broken heart for our fellowman? Consider Paul's rebuke to the Galatian church.

My little children, of whom I am again in travail until Christ is formed in you – but I could wish to be present with you now, and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.

Galatians 4:19-20 (WEB)

One Verse a Theology Does Not Make... So 95+ THESES!

OBJECTOR>> You make too much of one verse with Romans 11:32. One verse cannot prove that God loves all mankind!

ME>> You make an excellent point that one verse cannot build an entire system of truth. However, I would add that one verse cannot build an entire system of truth... that is at contradiction with the remainder of the Bible. HOWEVER, one verse can speak truthfully and powerfully. One verse can speak truth that cannot be compromised by any other Scripture. One verse can speak the grand conclusion of the Bible and the history of redemption just as Romans 11:32 has done.

However, to entertain your objection I join Martin Luther who posted 95 Theses to the door of the Castle Church of Wittenberg and offer you a second 95 Theses. Each of the 95 points below challenge tradition with a question or verse that cannot be answered without adding either human condition or blind hypocrisy to the grace of God.

SCRIPTURE TELLS 'ALL'

1. 1 John 2:2, *"And he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the WHOLE world."*
2. 2 Corinthians 5:14, *"For the love of Christ constrains us; because we judge thus, that one died for ALL, therefore ALL died."*
3. Acts 3:21, *"Whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of ALL things, which God spoke long ago by the mouth of his holy prophets."*
4. Genesis 12:3, *"I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who treats you with contempt. ALL the families of the earth will be blessed through you."*
5. Genesis 3:15, *"I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and HER OFFSPRING. He will bruise your head, and you will bruise his heel."*
6. Isaiah 66:23, *"'It shall happen that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, ALL flesh will come to worship before me,' says Yahweh. "*
7. Philippians 2:10, *"That at the name of Jesus EVERY knee should bow, of those in heaven, those on earth, and those under the earth."*
8. Psalm 22:27, *"ALL the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to Yahweh. ALL the relatives of the nations shall worship before you."*
9. Revelation 5:13, *"I heard EVERY created thing which is in heaven, on the earth, under the earth, on the sea, and EVERYTHING in them, saying, 'To him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb be the blessing, the honor, the glory, and the dominion, forever and ever! Amen!'"*
10. Romans 11:16, *"If the first fruit is holy, so is the LUMP. If the root is holy, so are the BRANCHES."*
11. Romans 11:32, *"For God has bound ALL to disobedience, that he might have mercy on ALL."*
12. Romans 3:23-24, *"For ALL have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus;"*
13. Romans 5:18, *"So then as through one trespass, ALL men were condemned; even so through one act of righteousness, ALL men were justified to life."*
14. Zephaniah 2:11, *"Yahweh will be awesome to them, for he will famish all the gods of the land. Men will worship him, everyone from his place, even ALL the shores of the nations."*
15. Zephaniah 3:8-9, *" 'Therefore wait for me', says Yahweh, 'until the day that I rise up to*

the prey, for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour on them my indignation, even all my fierce anger, for all the earth will be devoured with the fire of my jealousy. For then I will purify the lips of the peoples, that they may ALL call on Yahweh's name, to serve him shoulder to shoulder.'

WORDS HAVE MEANING

16. "AGAPE", especially with respect to God, means certain, guaranteed, unconditional "Love" period!
17. "AION" and "AIONIAN" means "Eon" and "Eonian", even more precisely the "duration" or "life" of the subject in question or "whole" and "complete", Romans 16:25-26.
18. "ALL" may not always mean absolutely "All", but "All" does mean "All" if there is not a very specific reason against it!
19. "APOLLYMI" translated "perish" in John 3:16 means catastrophic loss, but not necessarily eternal loss, for example Matthew 2:13.
20. "FAITH" means to trust in, depend upon another and so faith itself then CANNOT be a condition to our confidante's guarantee, that would be utterly ridiculous!
21. "GRACE" is the unmerited favor of God, his unconditional love towards his chosen people.
22. "HADES" is the TEMPORARY place of punishment for unbelieving deceased humanity, Matthew 16:18, Luke 16:23, 1 Corinthians 15:55, and Revelation 20:14.
23. "TARTARUS" is the TEMPORARY place of punishment, deeper than Hades, for imprisoned fallen angels, 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6.
24. "THALAASA" in Revelation 20:13 refers to the prison "TARTARUS" of 2 Peter 2:4 or the retreat of some fallen angels as fully explained in my article, [Fallen Angels at the Great White Throne Judgment](#).
25. "THE LAKE OF FIRE" is prepared for the Devil and his Angels and NOT humanity! Matthew 25:41 and Revelation 20:10, 21:8.

TRADITION TRAPS EVEN THE BEST

26. WHY not give Scripture the trump card over tradition?
27. WHY not oppose tradition in light of the overwhelming evidence?
28. WHY not recognize the future judgment of fallen angels in 2 Peter 2:4, Jude 6, and Matthew 25:31-46?
29. WHY not reconsider the distinction between Sheol, Gehenna, Hades, Tartarus, Thalaasa, and the Lake of Fire?
30. WHY not reconsider the mistranslation of 'AION' and 'AIONIAN'?
31. WHY not trust that God's unconditional grace and love is truly without condition for all mankind?

LEARN HISTORY OR BE DOOMED TO REPEAT IT

32. Are you AWARE of the large number of Christian writers that have promoted the salvation of all mankind?
33. Are you AWARE of the significant Universalist movements in the early history of the United States?
34. Are you AWARE that hope for all mankind lost much ground when the Bible was not available in the common tongue?
35. Are you AWARE that hope for all mankind was commonly accepted before the 5th century?
36. Are you AWARE that hope for all mankind was rediscovered when the Bible became available in the common tongue after the Reformation?
37. Are you AWARE that many early church father's advocated the salvation of all mankind?
38. Are you AWARE that NO early church creed condemns the salvation of all mankind?

ARMINIANISM REDEFINES FAITH AND GRACE

39. IF God's unconditional love is conditioned on our faith, THEN why do the Scriptures emphasize that God loved us first while our hearts hated him?
40. IF mankind's sins are fully atoned and God's wrath is propitiated by Christ's blood, THEN how can anyone be held guilty for their sins eternally?
41. IF most of those who God's loves are damned eternally, THEN how good and effective can God's love really be?
42. IF my faith '*applies*' Christ's blood to my guilt, THEN how am I different than an Old Testament priest applying the blood myself?
43. IF my will is already '*free*' before Christ, THEN what does it mean that Christ sets me '*free*'?
44. IF my will is '*free*', THEN why does the Bible say that apart from grace I am '*dead*' and '*bound*' to disobedience?
45. IF you claim God also loves those in the Lake of Fire, THEN how can anyone be saved from the Lake of Fire by the same love?

CALVINISM BLINDS PEOPLE WITH HYPOCRISY

46. IF 'ALL' can mean absolutely 'ALL' in at least one use case, THEN why do you insist it does not in this particular case?
47. IF Jesus became the Second Adam, the new Federal head of ALL humanity, THEN how was Christ sacrificed on the cross for only PART of humanity?
48. IF election can speak of various appointments, THEN why not agree that all mankind is elected to forgiveness, but not all are elected to believe it?
49. IF God did not chose all mankind, THEN how is knowledge of salvation by grace objectively possible? On what basis? What is the object your faith?
50. IF God does not love all mankind, THEN how can you be objectively certain that God loves any particular person?
51. IF God does not love all mankind, THEN how can you be objectively certain that God loves you?
52. IF the redeemed can never be punished after death, THEN why are redeemed false teachers punished in Hades, 2 Peter 2:1-9?

MISUNDERSTANDINGS KILL RELATIONSHIPS

53. MISTRANSLATION of '*aion*' easily accounts for much of the confusion in Christendom.
54. The fearful voice of tradition and its MISUNDERSTANDINGS has drowned out the truth of God's love for all mankind.
55. The incredible patience of God easily allows for grave MISUNDERSTANDINGS within his church as history shows.
56. The judgments of angels are easily MISSED in Scripture because these people are hidden from our material eyesight.
57. The religious tendency of the human heart easily explains the favor of Arminian and Calvinistic MISGUIDANCE.
58. The unavailability of Scripture in the common tongues easily accounts for reliance on tradition and MISUNDERSTANDING through the Middle Ages.
59. God apparently allows these blatant MISUNDERSTANDINGS to save the Pearl of Great Price for those who earnestly seek him.

TRADITION TRADES REASON FOR IGNORANCE

60. HOW are the unborn and infants saved without your required volitional decision to trust Christ?
61. HOW can Christian conscience or reason find a gracious purpose for eternal damnation?

62. HOW can your *'faith'* be the condition to God's unconditional love, when true faith is trust that God's love is unconditional?
63. HOW can God *'love'* a person till their death, but switch gears and damn them eternally if they die before repentance?
64. HOW can Jesus be the Savior of the world if most of mankind is damned?
65. HOW can most Christians be so apathetic in evangelism if they truly believe most of mankind is damned?
66. HOW can the first mention of eternal judgment in Scripture be as late as Daniel 12:2 if God is so concerned to save us from the Lake of Fire?
67. HOW can you have confidence that Jesus forgave your sin while at the same time saying he did not forgive others?
68. HOW can you ignore and even accept the major contradictions between Arminianism and Calvinism?
69. HOW can you overlook the distinction between Gehenna, Hades, Tartarus, Thalassa, and the Lake of Fire with the use of one word, *"Hell"*?
70. HOW can you say those in Heaven suffer no pain over those you claim are lost for eternity when even the wicked rich man in Hades agonized over his lost brothers?
71. HOW can you stand on Arminianism, Calvinism, or the question mark in between?
72. HOW could the Bible possibly be clearer about God's unconditional love for all mankind?
73. HOW is Christ sovereign over salvation if the sinful will of a rebellious man is able to ruin God's desire that he be saved?
74. HOW is Christ the victor if those that Satan tempts and accuses vastly outnumber the redeemed?

ALL MANKIND IS LOVED BY GOD!

75. IF Christ paid for the sins of any man, THEN he paid for the sins of all mankind!
76. IF Christians have testified to God's love for all mankind throughout history, THEN God has provided his witness!
77. IF human conscience testifies that the fate of any individual and all mankind alike rests in the final verdict of God alone, THEN God has provided his witness.
78. IF the Atonement demonstrates that his cross is a finished work with all mankind represented in his vicarious death, THEN God has provided his witness.
79. IF the Early Church Fathers openly testified to their confidence in the salvation of all mankind, THEN God has provided his witness.
80. IF the Incarnation shows that Christ became a man and stands as the Second Adam and the new Federal Head of all humanity, THEN God has provided his witness.
81. IF the Scriptures testify plainly to God's unconditional love for all mankind, THEN God has provided his witness.

HADES GIVES UP FINALLY

82. 1 Corinthians 15:55, *"Death, where is your sting? HADES, where is your victory?"*
83. 1 Peter 3:18-20, *"Because Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring you to God, being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the Spirit, in whom he also went and PREACHED TO THE SPIRITS IN PRISON, who before were disobedient, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, while the ship was being built. In it, few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water."*
84. 1 Peter 4:5-6, *"They will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For to this end the Good News was PREACHED EVEN TO THE DEAD, that they might be judged indeed as men in the flesh, BUT LIVE as to God in the spirit."*
85. 2 Peter 2:1,9, *"But false prophets also arose among the people, as false teachers will also be among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, denying even the Master who BOUGHT them, bringing on themselves swift destruction... The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation and to keep the unrighteous under*

punishment for the day of judgment."

86. Mathew 16:18, "I also tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my assembly, and THE GATES OF HADES WILL NOT PREVAIL against it."
87. Psalm 139:8, "If I ascend up into heaven, you are there. If I make my bed in SHEOL, behold, you are there!"
88. Revelation 20:13-14, "The sea gave up the dead who were in it. Death and HADES GAVE UP THE DEAD who were in them. They were judged, each one according to his works. Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire."

MODERN WITNESSES WRITE

89. Read *Christ Victorious* by Thomas Allin
90. Read *Hope Beyond Hell* by Jerry Beauchemin
91. Read *Life Time Entirety* by Dr. Heleen Keizer
92. Read *The Evangelical Universalist* by Robin Parry
93. Read *The Gospel of God's Reconciliation of All in Christ* by Ernst Stroeter
94. Read *The Greek Word AION* by John Wesley Hanson
95. Read *All You Want to Know About Hell* by Steve Gregg

MORE THAN 95!

96. Read *The Inescapable Love of God* by Thomas Talbott
97. Read *God's Methods with Man* by G. Campbell Morgan
98. Read *Destined for Salvation, God's Promise to Save Everyone* by Kalen Fristad
99. Read *All In All* by A. E. Knoch
100. Read *Ancient History of Universalism* by Hosea Ballou
101. Read *The Modern History of Universalism* by Thomas Whittemore
102. Read online about the "Victorious Gospel" and "Larger Hope"

< Not Written in the Book of Life from
Creation?

up

Pinning down the slippery Arminian
and Calvinist >

Pinning down the slippery Arminian and Calvinist

A Question>> I logically understand your thesis that Christ is the Savior of all Mankind and would like to believe it. However, I just cannot let go of the centuries of Christian scholars who have defended both Arminianism and Calvinism. Why would I want to change?

A Reply>> I can fully understand why it is difficult to let go of either Arminianism or Calvinism. These systems have existed for centuries and so have a long history of acceptance. These systems have also been written about over and over again. They have been discussed, debated, and refined. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of those who profess Christ as Savior have adopted the rhetoric of one of these systems, albeit with some adjustment here or there. So there may be little reason to consider a radical change that would rock the boat of your particular Christian community. There may be little reason, except for one reason. If the systems of Arminianism and Calvinism do fall short of truly accepting the grace of Christ as I have proposed, then you will meet with the wrath of God for your unrepentant self-righteousness instead of commendation as you currently suppose.

Would you be willing to walk through an outline of possible understandings? Which camp would you place yourself in below?

- 1) Victorious Gospel
 - a. Christ's death satisfied the wrath of God for all mankind.
 - b. Believers are saved from sin to paradise; unbelievers are punished in Hades.
 - c. All mankind is saved from the Lake of Fire, prepared for the Devil & his angels.
 - d. This view is faithful to Scripture and faithful to the character of God's grace.
 - e. Both feet are planted solidly on both the depth and breadth of God's love.
- 2) Calvinism
 - a. Christ's death satisfied the wrath of God for a subset of mankind.
 - b. The Holy Spirit effectively brings the chosen subset to repentance and faith.
 - c. Those punished in Hades are also damned to the Lake of Fire.
 - d. This view is like the Jews who claimed to be elect while gentiles are not elect.
 - e. One foot is planted on the depth of God's love, but the other foot on hypocrisy.
- 3) Arminianism
 - a. Christ's death potentially satisfies the wrath of God for all mankind.
 - b. Individual people exercise their *free will* to accept Christ and then are saved.
 - c. Those punished in Hades are also damned to the Lake of Fire.
 - d. This view reminds me of the graceless religions of the gentile world.
 - e. One foot is planted on the breadth of God's love, the other on human condition.
- 4) Mediation
 - a. Christ's death satisfies God's wrath effectively for some, nominally for the rest.
 - b. Two mediating methods
 - i. The Holy Spirit effectively brings the chosen subset to repentance and faith.
 - ii. Individual people exercise their *free will* to accept Christ and then are saved.
 - c. Those punished in Hades are also damned to the Lake of Fire.
 - d. This view is really Calvinism or Arminianism in disguise or double mindedness.
- 5) Simple faith and the Victorious Gospel is wrong
 - a. Simple faith that all people are sinners and Christ died for sinners.
 - b. Sinners are invited to trust Christ, but avoid debate and theology.
 - c. The Victorious Gospel is wrong because unbelievers are certainly damned.

- d. This view is unfair to call the Victorious Gospel wrong without Scripture.
 - e. One foot appears to be planted on God's love, but the other on tradition.
- 6) Simple faith and the Victorious Gospel may be right
- a. Simple faith that all people are sinners and Christ died for sinners.
 - b. Sinners are invited to trust Christ, but with ignorance of the extent of God's love.
 - c. The Victorious Gospel sounds hopeful, and they may want to learn more.
 - d. This view appears interested in Scripture and grace more than tradition.
 - e. One foot appears to be planted on grace, but no certainty of who God loves.

May God speak to your heart and lead you to receive his grace and unconditional love toward both you and your neighbor, apart from any human condition.

< One Verse a Theology Does Not
Make... So 95+ THESES!

up

Real or Apparent Paradox? >

Real or Apparent Paradox?

One thoughtful reader suggested that...

READER>> [Perhaps the different vantage points of those emphasizing God's sovereignty and man's free will only cause Calvinism and Arminianism to appear to be contradictory. Or perhaps in lofty matters, such as this, real paradox is allowable. For example, Skolem's Paradox in the area of mathematics or the wave-particle duality of light in physics could likewise illustrate real or apparent paradox. Or perhaps when the subject matter becomes increasingly complex theories may naturally compete because no one theory can digest the whole - jim].

ME>> I was hopeful that the *Four Square Salvation Evaluation Model* was sufficiently simple, or atomic in logic, that it could rule out the argument of the paradoxical. Yet, the question has been raised and so it would be good to consider the possibility of real and apparent paradox.

I did suggest in my article, *Nit Picky?*, that the Bible does not reveal all truth to us, only the truth that God deems sufficient for us to live a life of faith and please him. One might argue that it is possible that the answer to the apparent contradiction between Arminianism and Calvinism is not revealed in Scripture. That is not my conclusion for two reasons.

One, the New Testament says repeatedly that the gospel has revealed, that is explained, the mystery that was kept secret, Romans 16:25. Nowhere does it say that the gospel introduced further mystery. The gospel opens the box of understanding God's grace. It does not close it!

Two, the main thesis of my clarification of the gospel is that apparent contradiction in gospel truth is not because there is real paradox in gospel truths, but because the gospel speaks truth to the believing and foolishness to the unbelieving. The truth itself is not paradoxical, but disbelieving Christ certainly is paradoxical! Consider the paradox of men looking into the sky, unable to see or be thankful for the beautiful shining sun. Yet the paradox is understood when we also observe that the men are blind and clouds of sin obscure the view. So the paradox is not with God or truth, but between our ears and in our hearts. Neither Arminian nor Calvinistic models appreciate that fact. They both make the mistake of assuming that God reasons with the unreasonable. But God is a wiser parent than that.

Is it possible that both Arminian and Calvin expressions of the gospel each have components of truth sufficient to capture a truthful, though incomplete, picture of the gospel? Since they are from different vantage points and each incomplete, perhaps there is only the appearance of contradiction. I summarized that Calvinism tells us that God performed *ALL* of salvation for *PART* of mankind. Arminianism in contrast says that God performed *PART* of salvation for *ALL* of mankind. These models do not simply appear contradictory, but they are contradictory! Perhaps the true Biblical model on this question is a third option that disagrees with both Arminianism and Calvinism. Yet what would it be?

Does the Bible teach that Christ's death on the cross is intended for *ALL* mankind or only *PART*? It seems to me that there can only be one plain answer. Mathematically it can only be the whole set and if not the whole set, then it is a subset. Does the Bible teach that salvation is *ALL* of grace or only *PART* of grace plus man's *free will* choice? Again it seems to me that there can only be one plain answer. Use a telescope or a microscope to see the active ingredient and if it is not singular, then it is plural.

In my article, *Soteriologies*, I attempted to simplify the analysis of the question. Is it possible that both Arminianism and Calvinism each see an incomplete picture of the gospel from their vantage points? I do not think that is possible since each model proposes to be a

complete picture that is contradictory with the other. If one or both models would stop short of proposing a complete model giving allowance for the other model to see from its vantage point, then there might be hope. However, as it stands, Arminianism and Calvinism are a "house divided" that cannot stand together. Furthermore, in the body of this book I have exposed each of their individual errors so neither model can stand independently either. Though these models both hit the truth at some points, they also each fail at other points.

Second, since the subject matter of God and salvation is so lofty, is real paradox then a possibility? I've argued above that the paradox between Arminianism and Calvinism is more than an apparent paradox. After all, there are questions unanswered by the historic orthodoxies with 2,000 years of the greatest theological minds in history applied to the problem. The paradox remains and if possible we must hope for an explanation, or in the end simply wait or accept the possibility of real paradox. Now some have argued that we should be willing to accept paradox as a reasonable answer. (That could be considered a funny statement to accept para-dox as reason-able.) For example, we do see evidence of other real paradoxes such as Skolem's Paradox in the area of mathematics and the wave-particle duality of light in physics. Yet are these real paradoxes or only apparent paradoxes?

The word paradox is the combination of "para" meaning alongside and "dox" meaning "orthodox" or truth. The idea is that there can be contradictory truth alongside truth. So is that possible? Certainly there are paradoxes around us every day. However, most of these paradoxes are only apparent. Typically, if we gain more information the appearance of paradox is explained away. Yet some paradoxes remain. Is it because they are truly and finally inexplicable? Or is it because we yet wait for more information? I believe that ultimately there can be no paradoxes from God's vantage point for he is perfect truth and love. He knows and sees all from the loftiest vantage point. There is most certainly not contradictory truth alongside truth in the mind of God. I conclude this based on the character of God and the veracity of his revealed word. However, just as surely, none of us will ever see the universe perfectly from his vantage point, because we will never be God!

Yet God has revealed truth to us and thankfully the world around us makes more and more sense to those believing God's Word. How exciting that Jesus would call us his friends and make his Father's business known to us, John 15:15! And for the things that we do not yet understand or perhaps never will, we can also be excited and simply worship God while we wait. Finally, the perfection of God and his gospel make it plain to me that there is never paradox in the truth observed, but unfortunately there remains paradox in the unbelieving observer. Paradox in the unbeliever? Yes. How can anyone hear the good news and see the beautiful face of Jesus Christ and not fall in love immediately and offer undying commitment? Yet we turn from Christ all the time. Why? That is the paradox of unbelief that requires the special attention of gospel foolishness.

*Many claim 'truth is a paradox,'
they boast their 'God is not in a box.'
Many say 'answers one cannot see,'
they attempt harbor in Gospel 'mystery'.
Yet the Bible reveals, Christ chose to die for all,
He authored the Book of Life, can we reach that tall?
Very few find great hope in this truth observed,
they are happy to trust, obey, and never swerve.
Yet the many mix 'truths' with their god locked in errors,
foolishness is needed for those double-minded observers.
How to reach the rebellious chosen, lost from God's keep,
Jesus calls them home saying... you are not my sheep.*

~ Foolishness for the Foolish by a Fool for Christ ~

Roman Hell Fire?

I ask myself...

SELF>> By the way where is Hell and the Lake of Fire in the Book of Romans?

ME>> Self, that is an excellent question. The Book of Romans is Paul's premier thesis on the subject of Christian salvation. One would expect a thorough explanation of eternal destinies outlined in this work. What does Romans have to say about Hades / Hell? What does Romans have to say about the Lake of Fire? Curiously, the book of Romans does not mention Hell or the Lake of Fire explicitly even one time! However, on the positive side Romans does speak about Eternal Life. Romans does speak about God's judgment of physical death for the wicked behavior of the unbelieving in Romans 1:32. Romans also speaks about justification resulting in freedom from condemnation to eternal death. I just found it curious that Romans does not explicitly mention Hades or the Lake of Fire.

My theory on that is that the larger focus of Romans is the positive hope of the gospel, the invitation for all mankind to believe, and the power of the gospel to transform and save people from... sin. If you are looking for a fire insurance policy for protection from the Lake of Fire, do not read the book of Romans. You will not find fire insurance there. The book of Romans is written to awaken the unbelieving elect to the awesome guarantee they already have in Christ. The book of Romans is also written to save the believing from the dread effects of our sinful nature.

The key application from the gospel of grace for God's people is "*BE TRANSFORMED.*"

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[Salvation: Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How? >](#)

Salvation: Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How?

FRIENDS>> You've made a big deal about the fact that Hell and the Lake of Fire are not the same place. You have also raised a lot of other questions that I never thought about before. Why?

ME>> That is an excellent question. We Christians make many mistakes. One mistake we make is failing to ask questions and working hard to seek answers. Perhaps we are afraid of the unknown and so hold even more tightly to our traditions. A second mistake is that we fail to introduce the questions to others and point them to the answers. Perhaps we are afraid of rejection. The worst case of this scenario is that the blind are leading the blind. We sell people answers, and they buy it, with neither party knowing what the truth is. We warn people about the judgment to come, but we have no practical knowledge of the invisible world around us and the future appointments and destinies explained in Scripture. So let's briefly consider the who, what, where, why, and how of salvation.

Who needs to be saved and from whom?

Transgressors need mercy from the Judge or they will continue to suffer the consequences of transgression and will reap condemnation. We sinners, that is all mankind, need mercy from Jesus or we will be ruined by our sinful choices and be condemned, Romans 6 and Revelation 22.

How can we be saved and how did Jesus do it?

How can we be saved from sin's consequences and from condemnation? Salvation for a transgressor requires repentance. A transgressor can only be saved from sin by ceasing to sin. If our head hurts from hitting it against a wall, if we stop hitting the wall, then we will get immediate relief. The problem is we transgressors transgress because we love transgression. We must repent, but our hearts are so hard that we will only repent when God places his seed of change in our life, I John 3. More importantly pain isn't the only consequence of sin, but also condemnation and eternal death. There is no erasing our transgression. We are guilty and damnation is required without exception. The good news is that Jesus Christ became a man and took our penalty for us, dying on the cross. Now there is a new exception! There is absolutely nothing the elect of God can do through our own effort or failure to activate or deactivate this wonderful gift from God. Instead the work of Christ stands completely finished for all God's people and is already freely given to us. But only through the new birth will individuals receive this good news and find true joy.

Where are the possible habitats and destinies of living beings?

God is. He is spirit and does not live in *space time*, Exodus 3 and I Timothy 6. Created beings came into existence in the beginning of creation and we live in *space time creation*. Humans and animals live on the *earth*, Genesis 1. Angels and demons (fallen angels) are *everywhere*, though invisibly, 2 Kings 6. Jesus, God the Son, took on flesh in 4 A.D., lived and died on the *Earth*, was raised to life, and now is at God the Father's right hand in *Heaven*, Hebrews 1. Some of the fallen angels may have actually lived and sinned on the *Earth*, Genesis 6 and Jude 6, but now are imprisoned in *Tartarus (Thalassa)*, 2 Peter 4 and Revelation 20:13. Other fallen angels are also restricted from *God's presence* in Heaven at some point in history, Revelation 12. *Paradise* or *Hades* is the place people go after they die, *Hades* being a temporary place of punishment for unbelievers. The rich man and other unbelievers like him are punished in *Hades* immediately after they die, Luke 16. Abraham and other believers like him are rewarded in *Paradise (Abraham's Bosom)* immediately

after they die, Luke 16. There is a *Gulf in Hades* between *Hades* and *Paradise*. The Beast and The False Prophet are the first to be thrown into the *Lake of Fire* in Revelation 19. Satan is temporarily chained in *The Abyss*, Revelation 20. Satan is then released from *The Abyss* for God's final demonstration of God's grace and then Satan is finally thrown into the *Lake of Fire* for *The Ages of The Ages*, Revelation 20. The abode of the dead has the compartments of *Paradise* and *Hades* which is eventually emptied of all humans and angels and thrown into the *Lake of Fire*, empty! *Hades* is only a temporary holding area.

Tartarus, the temporary holding place for some fallen angels, is also emptied and will be no more, Revelation 21:1. The *New Heavens and New Earth* is then revealed as the final dwelling place for redeemed humanity and the righteous angels to fellowship eternally with God, Revelation 21. The *Lake of Fire* is the destiny of Satan and his fallen angels for The Ages of The Ages, Matthew 25:41. So the places living beings have been or will be found include:

- Outside space time - God
- Inside space time - Creation
 - Earth - here
 - Heaven - up there
 - Third heaven mentioned in 2 Corinthians 2:12
 - The Abode of the Dead - temporary holding place for deceased humanity
 - Hades / Hell - punishment for unbelieving humans
 - Paradise / Abraham's Bosom - reward for believing humans
 - Tartarus / Thalassa - temporary prison or retreat for some fallen angels
 - The Abyss - special temporary punishment for Satan
 - The Lake of Fire - destiny of the non-elect, the fallen angels
 - The New Heavens and Earth - eternal destiny of the elect, mankind

Why did sin enter the world and why did Jesus give us grace?

The key verse of my thesis answers that question easily. Romans 11:32 (WEB), *"For God has bound all to disobedience, that he might have mercy on all."* Ephesians 2:7 (WEB), an often overlooked verse, also explains the reasons for God's decision to extend grace, *"that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."* Simply put, God decreed the existence of sin in order to show off his grace. Boy did He hit a homer!

What is next?

You or I may be overwhelmed with the truth about God's grace. Our questions resulted in answers that resulted in even greater questions! Our minds could easily be blown away by God's amazing grace. The original disciples, no doubt, felt the same way as Jesus gave them the Great Commission and left them as he ascended into Heaven right before their eyes. So Jesus sent angels to provide simple instruction while they stood there with their mouths hanging open.

'You men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who was received up from you into the sky, will come back in the same way as you saw him going into the sky.'

Acts 1:11b (WEB)

Translation, get to work making disciples and keep an eye peeled toward the sky.

So Simply Sin Since the Savior is Sovereign?

OBJECTION>> You have made a big deal about God's sovereignty, man's free will (or lack of free will), and grace given to all mankind. So shall we simply sin since the Savior is sovereign?

ME>> That is one possible reaction to the gospel. In fact, Martyn Lloyd-Jones said,

First of all let me make a comment, to me a very important and vital comment. The true preaching of the gospel of salvation by grace alone always leads to the possibility of this charge being brought against it. There is no better test as to whether a man is really preaching the New Testament gospel of salvation than this, that some people might misunderstand it and misinterpret it to mean that it really amounts to this, that because you are saved by grace alone it does not matter at all what you do; you can go on sinning as much as you like because it will redound all the more to the glory of grace. That is a very good test of gospel preaching. If my preaching and presentation of the gospel of salvation does not expose it to that misunderstanding, then it is not the gospel.

So the reaction from the unbeliever toward the good news is that he now has the license to sin to his heart's content. And that is the heart of the problem. His heart is black and can only be made content with more sin. He is blind to the fact that sin is bad and God is good. The response of the believer, however, is to cry out to God for help to leave our love of sin. We are sick of sin's destruction and wish we could push the button to end all sin forever. However, God alone is sovereign with exclusive authority over the existence of sin. Praise the day when he pushes the button!

So, yes, grace is a license to sin, but not like the unbeliever thinks. Grace is God's promise that our sin will never separate us from the love of God and that no matter how many times we fail, we can always return to the Lord, free from condemnation. Furthermore, since God is sovereign over even the evil in this world we can trust that he has a good purpose even for painful circumstances. This is a powerful license, but since the unbeliever does not understand that sin is bad, he views grace as an *opportunity* to sin further. The believer, however, has had his fill of sin's consequences. The Psalmist understood this exactly when he said

*If you, Yahweh, kept a record of sins,
Lord, who could stand?
But there is forgiveness with you,
therefore you are feared.
I wait for Yahweh.
My soul waits.
I hope in his word.*

Psalm 130:3-5 (WEB)

The unbeliever does not understand that his own nature is bound to sin and that in fact he cannot even choose not to sin. Oh, certainly he might pause a sin or two from time to time. However, if he truly had *free will* he could decide to never sin again. Why not if his will is truly *free*? Try it yourself. Learn the perfect law of the Lord. Compare his ways with your ways until you are made aware of your flaws. Love his way in your heart. Then use your

free will to decide to never sin again. Friends, this is not possible. Only one man in the history of the world ever exercised his free will to live a perfect life, free from all sin, the God-man, Jesus Christ.

So then since God is sovereign and our will is not free, then is God to blame for my sinful choices? No. God answers this question in Romans 9:14-24 (WEB),

14) What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? May it never be! 15) For he said to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." 16) So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who has mercy. 17) For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I caused you to be raised up, that I might show in you my power, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." 18) So then, he has mercy on whom he desires, and he hardens whom he desires. 19) You will say then to me, "Why does he still find fault? For who withstands his will?" 20) But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed ask him who formed it, "Why did you make me like this?" 21) Or hasn't the potter a right over the clay, from the same lump to make one part a vessel for honor, and another for dishonor? 22) What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath made for destruction, 23) and that he might make known the riches of his glory on vessels of mercy, which he prepared beforehand for glory, 24) us, whom he also called, not from the Jews only, but also from the Gentiles?

Thankfully Jesus is sovereign over all, including his grace! He is sovereign over the existence of sin. He is sovereign over the final end of sin, one glorious day in the future. And he is sovereign over the grace given to mankind. He has a good purpose for everything and his loving hand holds all. Join me looking to the day when Jesus removes all sin forever and perfect loving fellowship with God and each other begins!

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[Special Strategies and Interpretations?](#)

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Special Strategies and Interpretations?

Another careful reader asked...

READER>> [You propose that a proper understanding of the gospel includes special strategy and interpretation. For example, you say that "eternal" is not always eternal. You say that Jesus calls unbelievers "not His sheep," but they really are elect, lost sheep. You say that even though the Bible says God hated Esau, that he really loved him. You say that wisdom gives one answer to the fool and another answer to the wise. Really? What is the end of re-interpreting the Bible to defend your own unbiblical views? - jlm]

ME>> This is perhaps the most important question that could be asked of my thesis. It is my singular goal to be thoroughly Biblical. To adopt a view apart from the Scripture offers no real hope. There would be absolutely no point to it. Suppose you or I received a court summons in the mail. We could try to imagine the letter to be an invitation to Disney World. However, our interpretation would make no difference when the police arrived to escort us to the judge. Likewise, hiding behind silly interpretations will not protect the remaining self-righteousness that will be stripped away when final judgment is made based solely on the righteousness of Christ. We might like to imagine Heaven to be a giant Disney World in the sky that everyone is invited to attend with *free will faith* as their ticket.

However, this fictional understanding of salvation misses the whole point of grace. Heaven is the destiny of all those predestined for salvation, and these righteous are invited to *live by faith*. Heaven is not an eternal Disney World vacation, but an eternity of worshiping Christ. If all someone has is fire insurance they definitely will not find comfort adoring Jesus for an eternity. Sure everyone hopes for a happy afterlife, but only the believing are eager to worship Christ our savior. So really what matters is not our imagination, but the truth. Thus any special or unusual interpretation about salvation is only justified if it is also justified by Scripture itself.

Does wisdom give one answer to the fool and another answer to the wise?

Yes, according to Scripture in Proverbs 26:4-5, wisdom answers the same question differently for the wise man and the fool. For example, John 1:11 begins hopefully, making it clear that all mankind belongs to Christ. However, when foolish unbelief is evident Jesus tells the unbelieving that they are *"not His sheep"* in John 10:26. Gently I ask on what basis do you have confidence that you are elect? Think carefully before you say you met the condition of *faith* therefore you must be elect, because Christian faith must be founded on Biblical facts. What Biblical fact do you have to confirm that you are elect, while even one other human being is not? Your answer may expose that in fact you do not have Christian faith.

Does God love Esau even though Romans 9:13 says he hated Esau?

Many verses say that God loved the world. John 3:16 is a well-known verse that you are no doubt familiar with. Arminians understand these verses to mean every individual within mankind is loved by God, though sadly they also think that salvation is only secured through God's love PLUS man's faith. Calvinists, however, properly understand that salvation is through God's loving grace alone, simply received by faith. Yet they are also convinced that God does not love all mankind because they think not all are saved. Since his saving love can never fail they conclude that those not saved are specifically not loved by God, such as Esau whom God hated. They interpret "all" to mean, not every individual, but instead every "category" of human.

Now, I have never heard a Calvinist evangelize by saying, *"God might love you OR you might be one of those hated by God."* That would be pure silliness. Yet it is a proper application of their understanding. So what is a better understanding? Scripture itself states in Romans

11:28 that the unbelieving are "***ENEMIES as far as the gospel is concerned, but LOVED as far as election is concerned.***" This Scripture answers your question precisely. In fact the answer to your question is part of the whole concluding argument of the book of Romans! Your question is an excellent one, given complete attention in Paul's Magnum Opus.

So again the Scripture defines the boundary for our interpretations. Again gently I ask if you believe that God does hate the many and love the few, then on what basis do you conclude that you are loved? Maybe like Esau you are hated for rejecting the gospel, but still loved on account of election. Or do you believe that he loves all, but eventually hates the people who reject him? Certainly you do not believe that God could love anyone that he damns for all eternity! How could he love them when it is within his power to save them? Yet, the elect, though deserving damnation, are shown grace, God's unmerited determination to love and forgive those who hated him! Friend, God is fishing for men and you may have just swallowed the fish hook of His grace! From personal experience I suggest you give up the fight.

Are the unbelievers Jesus calls "not His sheep" really elect?

I grew up in a congregation that avoided the subject of predestination because it was a fearful doctrine. I have since grown to love this doctrine. Anyone who understands the doctrine of predestination also understands that God's determined love has already been decided for the elect not only before they have believed, but also before we were born, and even before the world was made. The Scriptures remind us in many places that God loved us BEFORE we loved him.

However, that does not mean I was a Christian before I was born again. My heart was not regenerate. I did not have the Holy Spirit. I did not have faith. I was not yet given the right to become a child of God, even though I was elect. (Infant baptizing Christians make a grave mistake in receiving Christ on behalf of their children.) The Scriptural defense for this understanding is all over the New Testament and very clearly spelled out in Hosea 2:23.

Now God's knowledge of me and heart towards me was constant through the whole period of my unbelief. Yes, I was an object of wrath for my part because of my rebellious nature and hatred of God. But God did not eternally hate me, nor any unbelieving elect, ever, though his wrath remains on the unbelieving. However, my knowledge of God and my heart toward him radically changed when I received his forgiveness from the cross. Through repentance and faith I obtained salvation from my sin nature and from punishment in Hell for my unbelief. In time I also grew to understand the salvation of the elect from the Lake of Fire. Now you may think instead that your *free will choice of faith* adds your name to the elect. Friend, unfortunately that is not saving faith, but is instead works salvation.

How can "eternal" not always mean eternal?

I had come to the conclusion that "*forever*" and "*eternal*" in the New Testament must not always mean "*forever*" and "*eternal*" because the context of grace demanded salvation satisfaction even for the unbelieving. And so I concluded that the Holy Spirit used the word "*forever*" and "*eternal*" to describe the long, but finite time of punishment in Hades for the unbelieving. I also concluded that if Abraham's faith could reasonably trust that God could "*call things that are not, as though they were,*" then I certainly was not unreasonable to conclude that God could save people from "*eternal*" punishment in Hell. Furthermore, it is also evident and believed by all orthodox Christians that Jesus abolished the "*eternal*" Old Covenant in his flesh. So I concluded that "*eternal*" does not always mean "*forever*" when God is in the picture.

The Lord has, however, recently corrected my understanding. My logic was sound, but incomplete. Please forgive me for that. I had already shown that the Hebrew word "*olam*" does not always mean eternal, but instead it means the duration of the subject in view. Every Hebrew lexicon denotes this fact. Yet without much homework I concluded that the same must be true of the Greek word translated "*eternal*" in the New Testament, the Greek word "*aion*." I had planned to do further homework to prove this for myself.

However, recently the Lord has blessed me through a reunion with John Wesley Hanson's classic 1875 work titled, *The Greek Word Aion-Aionios translated Everlasting-Eternal in the Holy Bible Shown to Denote Limited Duration*. I was first introduced to this work in college by a good friend, but sadly my memory is largely untrustworthy and I forgot about the critical points made in this book. None-the-less, this classic work is available for free from the U.S. Library of Congress website and also [from my own website](#). This 88 page book is a must read for anyone who agrees or disagrees with my conclusions. There is little point to my adding further to this definitive work. Study this volume for yourself and your faith and understanding of the Bible will be challenged in radically positive ways, if you are willing to let go of all your self-righteousness.

Dr. Heleen Keizer has also written a dissertation proving the same titled, *Life, Time, Entirety - A Study of Aion in Greek Literature and Philosophy, the Septuagint and Philo*. You can read her [315 page dissertation online](#) or an [abstract of her conclusions from my website](#). You might think it is incredulous to claim that "*aion*" is mistranslated in many Bibles. Unless you are competent in ancient Greek you may not even know how to verify this for yourself. *The NASB-NIV Parallel New Testament in Greek in English* is an invaluable resource on my shelf. [Young's Literal Translation](#) is also a valuable resource.

Will you not at least concede the point that, if the grace of God has forgiven a rebel like you, then his forgiveness could also extend just as easily to unbelieving mankind since Christ is their Federal head and savior also? The application of grace is in fact in his power alone. The good news is that the death of Christ demands the salvation of mankind, as well as the punishment of the unbelieving who reject his grace! However, the punishment of the unbelieving is not eternal, but governed by God's loving grace.

Certainly you must agree that your faith does not add to the work of Christ which is freely given to both you and all mankind. Do you agree? Perhaps the problem is not that I lack a Biblical defense for these radical views, but I respectfully ask if you are lacking a radical Biblical faith.

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[There is No Punishment After Death for the Redeemed! >](#)

There is No Punishment After Death for the Redeemed!

CALVINIST>> *There is No Punishment After Death for the Redeemed!*

ME>> I wish that were true.

I understand that the Calvinist way of thinking insists that there is no punishment after death for anyone whose sins have been paid for at the cross. This way of thinking is why you come to the conclusion that Jesus did not die for all mankind, because you know that people are punished after death. Yet, you too quickly conclude that the answer is that Jesus did not die for all mankind and that he does not love all mankind. Furthermore, to hold to your understanding, you offend many of Scriptures.

Consider these four plain Scriptures.

1 John 2:1-2 (WEB) says,

1) My little children, I write these things to you so that you may not sin. If anyone sins, we have a Counselor with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. 2) And he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.

Jesus did pay for all mankind's sin - the believing and the unbelieving. He paid for our sin whether we believe it or not! How could this verse be plainer?

2 Peter 2:1-10 (WEB) says,

1) But false prophets also arose among the people, as false teachers will also be among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, denying even the Master who bought them, bringing on themselves swift destruction. 2) Many will follow their immoral ways, and as a result, the way of the truth will be maligned. 3) In covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words: whose sentence now from of old doesn't linger, and their destruction will not slumber. 4) For if God didn't spare angels when they sinned, but cast them down to Tartarus, and committed them to pits of darkness to be reserved for judgment; 5) and didn't spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah with seven others, a preacher of righteousness, when he brought a flood on the world of the ungodly; 6) and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, having made them an example to those who would live in an ungodly way; 7) and delivered righteous Lot, who was very distressed by the lustful life of the wicked 8) (for that righteous man dwelling among them was tormented in his righteous soul from day to day with seeing and hearing lawless deeds): 9) the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment, 10) but chiefly those who walk after the flesh in the lust of defilement and despise authority. Daring, self-willed, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries.

Yet false teachers, even though they are bought, redeemed, and their sins fully paid, will be held under punishment for the Day of Judgment. How could this verse be plainer? How

could this truth be worded more clearly than it already is? The answer is that it could not be worded more clearly, but instead Calvinist theology is at odds with the Scripture itself.

Jesus also said in Luke 12:47-48 (WEB),

47) That servant, who knew his lord's will, and didn't prepare, nor do what he wanted, will be beaten with many stripes, 48) but he who didn't know, and did things worthy of stripes, will be beaten with few stripes. To whomever much is given, of him will much be required; and to whom much was entrusted, of him more will be asked.

The pie in the sky thinking about God's forgiveness does not square with the Biblical picture of Jesus' wrath against sin and the punishments he has planned for the unbelieving redeemed... and perhaps even for the believing. Yes, God does forgive and has forgiven all, but he also punishes those He loves, as made clear in Psalm 130:4, Hebrews 12:10, and throughout the Scriptures! The proper posture for God's people is to brace ourselves for our interview with the Holy Righteous Creator Redeemer Judge of the entire Universe, confessing that we have sinned greatly and trusting that our sin is fully paid at the cross.

Instead of offending these Scriptures above why not simply change your mind, and agree that the unbelieving will be punished in Hades even though their sins are paid? Why not also change your mind and agree with me that the atonement of Christ will finally be effective in their salvation after they have served their sentence in Hades? Could tradition and the influence of denominational camps be influencing your judgment?

Jesus promised in Matthew 16:17-20 (WEB),

17) Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. 18) I also tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my assembly, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. 19) I will give to you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven; and whatever you release on earth will have been released in heaven." 20) Then he commanded the disciples that they should tell no one that he was Jesus the Christ.

The gates of Hades will be defeated! Why not believe?

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The Good, Bad, and Ugly of John Robinson >

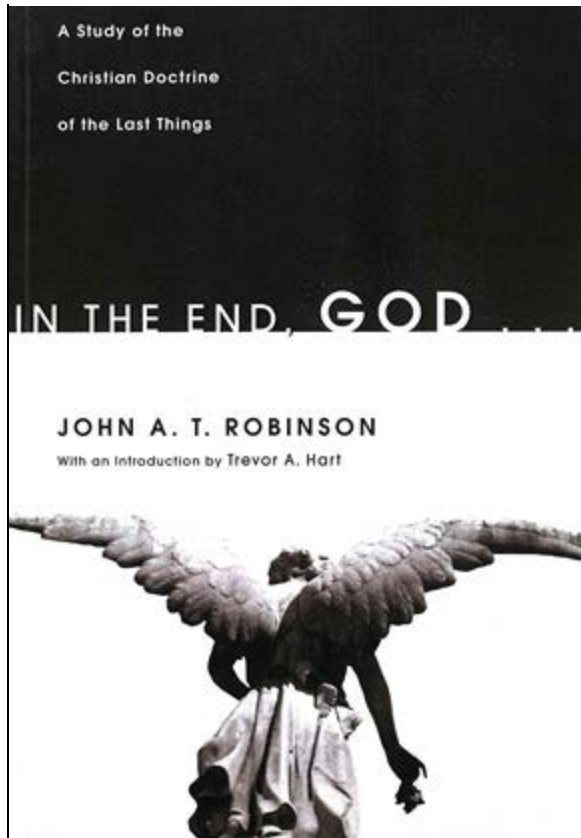
The Good, Bad, and Ugly of John Robinson

Objectors to my hopeful conclusions about salvation have asked me to review other books in order to win me back to traditional theology, that is that few humans are saved while most are eternally damned. I have taken up the challenge and have posted various [Book Reviews](#) on my website. I thought it was a fair suggestion to allow myself to be influenced by Christians of different conviction. However, I thought it would also be fair to review books by those also holding to the salvation of all mankind in order to compare our reasons. Perhaps error in their reason would win me back to tradition, or truth in their reason would confirm my conclusions.

I have found that there is quite a range of thought even among those confident in the final salvation of all mankind. In fact, sadly, the divisions between them in faith and fellowship might even be deeper than between those of traditional Christianity. Yet, most have observed, as I, that "*aion*" is at times wrongly translated "*eternal*" in the English New Testament. Some are silent about the salvation of fallen angels, while others have concluded that even Satan will be saved, to which I am not yet persuaded. Most have respected and protected inspiration and strove for reasonable interpretation of the given Word, but some have even violated the Holy Spirit suggesting that difficult verses are better explained as human error. Many have even further differences of various natures, no doubt influenced by the traditions and experience from which they came.

I wanted to give my review of Robinson special attention because his book includes a concept that could wrongly be considered the same as one of my own conclusions. I have said that integral to the gospel are [Special Strategies](#) to reach the heart of the unbelieving as mentioned in my articles, [Flying Impossible](#) and [Proverbs 26:4-5](#). Robinson has *similarly* said that the gospel includes the *mythological reality* of eternal damnation for the unbeliever. Though I have significant points of comparison with Robinson, I want NO part of his assertion that the Holy Scripture contains *mythological reality*. Instead, the only myths that have ever existed are the myths in the mind of unbelieving man. For further explanation read my brief review of Robinson's work following.

John Robinson wrote *In the End, GOD, A Study of the Christian Doctrine of Last Things*. Robinson offends epistemology and inspiration so gravely with the invention of *eschatological myth* that many will throw the book away after Chapter 5, if they get that far. I nearly did myself! Yet he makes key points in later chapters: *The Resurrection of the Body*, *The End of the Lord*, and *All in All*. He is accused of arrogance by Trevor Hart for asserting that God must save all mankind because of Christ. On that point I join Robinson! Yet Robinson missed the aionian nature of Hades and instead violates inspiration to explain Scripture. Thomas Torrance also condemns Robinson for saying the gospel includes the *mythological reality* of eternal damnation for the unbeliever. Yet Torrance is self-condemned saying the *mystery of sin* requires the damnation of unbelievers even though their sins are atoned! Robinson's book is terribly difficult to read as



well as the essays in response by Trevor Hart and Thomas Torrance. I confess that I only understood 50% of any of it, at best. So I will keep my review to the main points in simple outline form. If I have misunderstood Robinson, Hart, or Torrance, please contact me and I will correct this article immediately. Yet as much as I understand Robinson, his theology can be outlined in the proverbial Good, Bad, and Ugly.

1. The Good

1. Robinson asserts on page 73, *"In Adam all die; but in Christ all are made alive. That is the divine 'nevertheless,' beyond all hope or merit. It rests on no condition or virtue or spirituality, but solely on the unconditional love of God."* He is accused of arrogance for this statement. I will gladly take my place beside Robinson and assert the same! Confidence that Christ has paid for my sin and the sin of my neighbor equally is not arrogance, but humility.
2. Robinson says on page 29, *"Every truth about eschatology is ipso facto a truth about God."* He emphasizes that our conclusions about the culmination of the history of redemption reflect the very character of God. How true! Beware that when teaching about future things we proclaim either our faith in the God who IS --or-- our faith in the god who is NOT!
3. Robinson quotes Matthew 25:31-33,46 on page 94, saying the Bible speaks, *"On the one hand, universal restoration; on the other a clear division between the saved and the lost."* Robinson insists that we cannot deny the Scriptural truth of eternal damnation. For that he is commended. Objectors to the salvation of all mankind likewise see the clear parallel construct of Matthew 25:31-46 which saves the sheep eternally on the right and damns the goats eternally on the left. Some Christian Universalists say that since the word "eternal" is "aion" in Matthew 25:46, then this judgment cannot speak about eternal damnation, but instead age-during punishment. Robinson does not follow that reasoning, nor do I. The word "aion" can also mean eternal when the subject in view is eternal, so this line of Universalist reasoning is not strong enough. Nearly all Christian Universalists agree that the "aion" of Hades is temporal because Hades ends in Revelation

20:14. However, as far as we can conclude from the revealed word, the "*aion*" of the Lake of Fire is instead "*The Ages of The Ages*" because no end is explicitly mentioned, just as the "*aion*" of God and his faithful love are eternal. Many Christian Universalists further argue that the "*kolasis*" of Matthew 25:46 means "*discipline*" so this judgment is not damnation, but instead corrective. Yet the only other New Testament use of "*kolasis*" in 1 John 4 is not loving correction, but fearful judgment. It may be the case that even Satan's time in the Lake of Fire is corrective and ends eons past the end of Scripture. However, there is a much stronger and more important argument to be made that is missed by Robinson and many Universalists. Now to the Bad and the Ugly.

2. The Bad

1. Though Robinson uses reasoned argument in defense of his position, in order to explain the whole of Scripture he says that the truth of the gospel does not "*rest on logic*." I certainly agree that truth cannot rest on corrupted human logic. I also agree that salvation cannot rest on having a logical understanding. However, independent of our thoughts, the truth itself must rest on the perfect logic and reason within the Godhead, which God reveals to believing mankind to some degree. To cut out the importance that gospel truths also be reasonable opens Robinson to grave errors. There is no paradox in the mind, plans, and Word of God.
2. Furthermore, Robinson tries to bridge the gap between the certain universal salvation of all mankind and the Scriptures he understands to speak about the eternal damnation of unbelieving mankind. To do so he undermines the Holy Spirit as the author of Scripture assigning it to human authors who speak *eschatological myths*. He says on page 28, "*[Eschatological statements in the Bible] are neither inerrant prophecies of the future nor pious guesswork.*" Though Robinson says his proofs do not rest on logic, his whole book is an effort to make *logical sense* of the Bible which appears to contradict the salvation of all and the damnation of many. He then illogically explains perceived contradictions in Scripture by saying Scripture does NOT contain inerrant prophecy. Whoa, stop the train! If the Biblical prophecies of future hope and future judgment are not inerrant, what basis remains to establish anything Christian?
3. Robinson simply needed more information to add up the facts more reasonably. Yet, he is not necessarily guiltier than me. In a similar way, in the first version of [Optimism Out of Control](#), I concluded that the New Testament usage of "*eternal*" must mean temporal when the grace of God is in view. I concluded that unbelievers are sentenced to "*eternal*" punishment, but the overwhelming evidence of Scripture, grace, and the character of God must somehow find a way to end this "*eternal*" punishment. I was further persuaded because Jesus found a way to end the "*eternal*" Old Covenant and replace it with the New Covenant. I was even further persuaded because Abraham, the father of faith, trusted that "*God... calls things that are not, as though they were.*" Finally, I noticed that the inhabitants of Hades are extracted out in Revelation 20:14. That was enough for me... initially! Similar to Robinson, I allowed grace to interpret the word "*eternal*" mythologically. However, we both missed the observation made by nearly every proponent of universal salvation, that "*aion*" should not be translated "*eternal*" in many cases because it means "*age*" or the "*life*" of the subject in question. I should not have interpreted "*eternal*" in a mythological way, but translators also should have used the word "*eon*" instead! I guess my main difference with Robinson is that God allowed me to correct my error. Read more in my article [Forever is Not Forever? You Gotta Be Kidding Me!](#)
4. One last observation that Robinson and many of my contemporary Universalist

friends have missed is that the Lake of Fire is "*prepared for... THE DEVIL AND HIS ANGELS.*" Matthew 25:31-46 is commonly assumed to be the judgment of believing and unbelieving mankind. However, I would argue that an explanation more consistent with the rest of Scripture is that the "*ethnos*" standing before Christ are unbelieving mankind just extracted from Hades and the imprisoned demonic fallen angels extracted from Tartarus / Thalassa. Christians might think that we are the sheep on the right. True, we are sheep. However, the physical reunion of Christians with Christ has already happened earlier through faith and also at the rapture by sight! The incredulous response of the sheep on the right does not sound like us Christians because we have already gone through this incredulous response to become Christians in the first place! Instead, this response is from unbelieving mankind just extracted from the fires of Hades, joyful to learn that Jesus has accepted anything good they ever did by his grace alone for their salvation. These are the lost sheep reclaimed on the right. Further, 2 Peter 2:4 also makes it clear that only fallen angels are held in Tartarus, the deepest pit of Hades. The Holy Spirit does not believe Greek mythology, but he understood the word usage of his audience. Hades refers to temporary punishment while Tartarus refers to a deeper pit from which there is no escape from condemnation and further judgment. So Hades is emptied of unbelieving mankind and Tartarus is emptied of fallen angels, demons, the goats on Jesus' left at the Great White Throne judgment. The demons are then cast into the Lake of Fire... "*PREPARED FOR THE DEVIL AND HIS ANGELS.*" Read more in my article, *Forever is Not Forever? You Still Gotta Be Kidding Me!*

5. Robinson also spends pages and pages of words trying to protect the *free will* of man using similar language as C.S. Lewis. They both conclude that God's love cannot be love unless it is freely received. I can hardly believe that someone who is born again could even say that. They both neglect the true condition of man apart from regeneration of the individual by the Holy Spirit. We are dead. We hate God and grace. The truth is that apart from grace we are not free, but instead *locked* and *bound* to sin. Robinson gives a nod toward this fact by noting the "*surd*" irrational nature of sin. So instead it is only the finger of God upon each individual's life that sets us free to rationally take our position as God's child. I just do not understand Robinson and the majority of Christendom's persistent defense of *free will*... unless of course their faith is upon their own supposed decision for God instead of receiving *God's* prior decision for us.

3. The Ugly

1. Robinson clings with a two finger hold to the good news that Christ has paid for, has redeemed, has absolved all mankind from the guilt of sin and thus will be finally and eternally saved. However, the witness of this good faith is nearly ruined by missed observations and his mistreatment of reason and Scripture. Furthermore, the usefulness of his hope is totally ruined by his suggested application for those who hope to minister the good news. Robinson says on page 112, "*To the man in decision -- and that means to all men, always, right up to the last hour -- [eternal] hell is every way as real a destination as heaven. Only the man who has genuinely been confronted by both alternatives can be saved. To preach Heaven alone, as it is asserted the universalist must, is to deny men the possibility of salvation. For salvation is a state of having chosen; and, in the moment of choice (and no man can ever say: 'I am safe, I have chosen'), both alternatives are existentially as real. Eternal life is only for those who have passed through the valley of decision.*" This suggested application for Christian ministry, ugly as it is, is at least consistent with his belief in the *eschatological myth*. One might well ask Robinson how he can assert and hope in eternal salvation for himself and all mankind while he remains merely an existential

subject himself? How did he break out of the bubble of his proposed existential model to find hope to say with certainty that all mankind is saved and that eternal damnation is really an *eschatological myth*? The point is that Robinson's recipe falls woefully short and anyone "saved" through his gospel would carry the baggage of neutered reason and a mythologized Bible. The Ugly.

2. You might accuse me of the same errors because I have said that integral to the gospel are *Special Strategies* to reach the heart of the unbelieving as mentioned in my articles, *Flying Impossible* and *Proverbs 26:4-5*. I will agree that some difficult Scripture can only be explained through the employment of Robinson's "myth"... if you will. I do not like the term, but to highlight one common thread with Robinson, I will use the same word. Robinson is dead right that at some points theologians on all sides cannot build a systematic theology of salvation and remain true to the objective statements of Scripture. Something must budge. Some weakness is found at the extremes of Calvinistic, Arminian, and perhaps even Christian Universalism when compared objectively with Scripture. So back to the point: are the Pharisees who rejected Christ his sheep, lost sheep, or goats? The objective statement of Christ to these self-righteous rebels is that they are not sheep, not even lost sheep. So there is a perceived contradiction. Christ says these Pharisees are *not* his sheep and so apparently he did not die for them, though elsewhere the Bible plainly says Christ died for all and that all mankind are the sheep of his pasture. What is the truth? Calvinists bend one way saying Christ did not die for all mankind. Arminians bend the other way saying Christ died for all mankind, BUT we must apply the atonement to ourselves through faith. Robinson's answer is that this perceived contradiction of Scripture is explained by *eschatological myth*, and that these unbelieving Jews are paradoxically both destined for salvation and damnation at the same time. Sorry John, I cannot go there. Instead I believe they are *lost* sheep based on Hosea 2:23. My answer, as fully explained in my article *Special Strategies and Interpretations*, is that instead it is the mind of the unbeliever that contains the *myth*. The Holy Spirit's inspired Word speaks to the believer and the unbeliever according to either the truth or *myth* that is present in their own thinking. Proverbs 26:4-5 (WEB) says, "*Don't answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.*" Jesus answers the unbelieving Jews according to the *myth* that was in their own head! However, there is no *myth* in God's head or the Scriptures! Jesus loves all the Jews and all the gentiles, all mankind, even the rebellious! We are all his sheep whether we are lost or found. However, when the unbelieving Jews persisted in their stubborn rejection of their shepherd, Jesus answered them according to the foolish myth in their own head saying, "*you are not my sheep.*" This strategy is clearly outlined in Hosea Chapter 2. Since the unbeliever has not yet trusted that his sins are already fully paid at the cross, then eternal damnation is the destiny he inwardly fears, despite how religious or boldly "*Christian*" he may appear. Yet despite their unbelief, their sins also remain fully paid. There is absolutely no paradox in the Scripture, the Gospel, or the mind of God, as explained in my article, *Real or Apparent Paradox?*, but only in the mind of the unbeliever, especially the religious unbeliever.

My clarification of the good news to mankind is instead, believe! Your sins are forgiven! Meet me in Heaven! Do you deny that Christ is your Savior? Why? He IS your Savior! Be thankful that Christ has paid for your sin because the destiny of all those not saved by Christ is the eternal Lake of Fire. Why anger the Lord and hear him say, "*You are not my sheep?*" Yet you must be warned that even if you give your life to religion, destroy your life with sin, and suffer an age in Hades resisting grace until the very threshold of damnation, even so, NOT YOU OR EVEN ONE of those for whom Christ died will ever enter the Lake of Fire which is "*prepared for... the Devil and his angels.*" Why wait? Why destroy your life with sin?

Testify that Christ is your Savior! Be transformed by the Holy Spirit! However, *IF* Christ is not your Savior and the Savior of all mankind as you say, then nothing can save you from eternal damnation.

Robinson's gallant effort illustrates the true plight of sinful man. We are in utterly desperate straits: you, me, and Robinson. Apart from grace we are dead with eyes sealed shut to the truth of God's unconditional love. However, when our eyes are opened to even a ray of the shining light of truth we cling to it with all the muscle and tenacity of a desperate mountain climber. Even if we hang by a two finger hold at the last precipice of Mount Everest, we cannot let go of the truth we have seen. We are sinners in desperate need of forgiveness, and in Christ there is forgiveness for sinners! Our hands and feet may not find stable ground to answer all the questions we might have. (Not because stable ground does not exist, but thorns, thistles, and Satan's schemes obstruct the way.) So we hang on to what we know with hands and feet struggling. Such is a good description of Robinson... and perhaps even ourselves. Were we to see my mountain climber metaphor enacted on film, we would be clutching the edge of seats and the man with the two finger hold would be praised in the end! For the Lord himself will lift us to final safety, the dark glass will be removed, we will see him face to face in glory, and he himself will praise our faith in spite of our failings.

Though I feel Robinson has erred greatly, I find great kinship with his assertion that the work of God in Christ *must* bear the fruit of the salvation of all mankind. Though Robinson is accused of arrogance for this assertion, he is woefully misunderstood by his wicked unbelieving critics. For his assertion that God must save mankind is rooted in the fact that God himself determined to do it and has already accomplished the absolution of all our sin at the cross of Christ. Since God himself has already paid for the sins of all mankind, then who remains to condemn? Friends, no one. No one. On this key point Robinson clings to the very heart of Christian salvation and hope.

If we acknowledge Robinson's grave errors and commend his tenacity for God's unconditional love, we will see that the greater arrogance is not Robinson's, but in fact Hart, Torrence, the Calvinist, the Arminian, and the religious. They claim that their sins are forgiven, with at best hypocritical doubt or likely condemnation for the remainder of humanity. What is the basis for their faith? It is not founded on the bedrock of Christ! If the grace of Christ for *ALL* mankind is not the hope of these arrogant, then it can only be a human condition that they themselves have supplied. That is the arrogance of the religious. Take care! Arrogant rejection of grace of this kind is just the sin for which the fires of Hades burn.

< There is No Punishment After Death
for the Redeemed!

up

Universalism + Free Will = One Very
Strange Bird >

Universalism + Free Will = One Very Strange Bird

The feedback I have received for my *Optimism Out of Control* thesis, even from objectors, has been extremely valuable. The hard questions of others have driven me to pray for God's leading and to God's word for confirmation of the good news that truly Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind.

THE MOST CURIOUS OBJECTION>> *However, of all the objections received the most curious is from those who also claim that all mankind is finally saved, yet who hold to man's free will, while objecting that God willed the salvation of all mankind by his gracious sovereign choice.*

ME>> Wow! I just do not get that. The great confidence we believers have that Christ will be finally victorious in the salvation of all mankind is rooted in the fact that the Godhead willed it to be -- in spite of our rebellion! God has prophesied in his Word that he will accomplish his mission to save of all his people. We can have great confidence that Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind because GOD HAS WILLED IT TO BE! GOD'S WILL IS THE GUARANTEE THAT IT WILL HAPPEN!

I am happy to receive this good news as well as happy to part ways with traditions that place the security of salvation in the hands of human decision. There is no security in taking anything from God and putting it in the hand of man. This is the difference between mere pew sitting religion and true relationship with Christ.

Unfortunately, however, brokenness has followed us even into the fellowship of those concluding that Christ does in fact love all. As already mentioned, parting ways with tradition will likely land one in a miscellaneous bucket with some very unbiblical ideas. For example, I've encountered some holding to reincarnation as an alternative to Hades. How is this different from Hinduism which also believes Jesus is god and all will be saved? Yet Hebrews 9:27 says otherwise. I've encountered others who place more weight on human presupposition and tradition than the exegesis of Scripture. How is this different than any man-made religion? Jesus spoke directly about this in Mark 7:13. The most curious combination of all is to claim that all mankind will be finally saved... because of *time* plus the *free will* of man! God's offer of forgiveness, plus enough *time* is their winning salvation recipe. Where is the grace? Universalism plus the *free will* of man has got to be the strangest bird of all time.

Imagine a father with ten unruly children. Not one of the children wants to go to bed, yet the father has determined that it is bed time. So the father begins his work to round up the rowdy bunch. One is turned with a simple plea while another with persuasion. A third heads upstairs with a warning and yet another with a threat. Several more hold out and receive spankings and discipline of various sorts. One refuses to sleep even when forcibly placed in bed. The point is that without the father's intervention, no one wanted to go to bed. However, with degrees of intervention each eventually found himself in bed.

Alternatively, you could imagine a dad who sounded the bed time bell and all ten children neatly put themselves to bed while dad watched TV... in your dreams!

Or if that illustration does not compute consider God as the quarterback throwing the football toward righteousness. Then Satan calls the next play, tempting Adam and Eve to intercept the football with the plan to run the ball toward the opposite goal... that is to be god themselves. Of course the whole game is all on God's sovereign football field so that He can send the Holy Spirit to tackle the rebel runners and recruit us to his own team. The

point is that until the Holy Spirit tackles our deceived and unchanged hearts, we continue to run full speed away from God toward the goal line to be our own god.

The cross shows us in no uncertain terms that the unregenerate heart of mankind has no love for God. We are unruly children with no desire to rest in bed or pursue our Heavenly Father's goal line. No one who is unchanged will love God because we *cannot* love God without a changed heart. A change, that only God can effect, is needed in our hearts to enable us to begin to love the Lord. Furthermore, God has intended this by design so that he alone is praised as the savior of each individual and all mankind.

Perhaps Acts 4:27-28 (WEB) will help us

27) For truly, in this city against your holy servant, Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together 28) to do whatever your hand and your council foreordained to happen.

So yes, we make decisions. You or I may decide to go left or to go right. However, just because we make decisions does not mean that our will is free to love God! Instead our will is limited to decisions that proceed from our nature. A bear is a bear by nature and so behaves like a bear. Likewise an unregenerate sinner is a self-lover and God-hater by nature and even if filled with worlds of religion we still hate God. So in the case of Acts 4:27-28, all mankind, including ourselves by association, crucified the Lord Jesus Christ because we hate God by our nature. Our will was not free to Love God, but instead our unregenerate nature was exposed as hating God... to the death.

Furthermore, we also see that behind our will and decision to kill Christ was a more primary and powerful will. God himself ordained the crucifixion of Christ. God himself willed these terrible events! Why would the good God do such a thing? God purposed to expose our heart of sin for what it actually is: enmity toward God. He needed to do this so he could then conquer our hatred of him and heal us with his overwhelming love and grace.

Even if we consider the baseball diamond of salvation it is God's will that has won the game, not our own. On first base we see that God predestined his people to salvation from before the creation of the world. Human will was not involved at all in that decision, but only God's will. On second base we see that God chose to die on the cross, even though Peter and all our self-righteous pride refused the idea. Human will was not involved at all in that decision either, but only God's will. On third base we see that Jesus asked the Father to forgive us, even though no one was asking for forgiveness. Again human will was not involved at all in that decision, but only God's will. Finally, arriving at home-base we see that the Holy Spirit raised us from spiritual death to spiritual life. No one was willing or able to receive grace, but God makes each one willing at the time of his choosing. God hits the home run and freely wills to free our wills!

Rejoice that God has freely willed to begin, continue, and perfect our salvation!

What About the Unforgivable Sin?

ONE ASKED>> *What about the unforgivable sin, the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit mentioned in Matthew 12:30-32, Mark 3:28-29, and Luke 12:8-10?*

ME>> That is an excellent question. First read these verses in the WEB translation,

30) He who is not with me is against me, and he who doesn't gather with me, scatters. 31) Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. 32) Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, neither in this age, nor in that which is to come.

Matthew 12:30-32 (WEB)

28) Most certainly I tell you, all sins of the descendants of man will be forgiven, including their blasphemies with which they may blaspheme; 29) but whoever may blaspheme against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation.

Mark 3:28-29 (WEB)

8) I tell you, everyone who confesses me before men, the Son of Man will also confess before the angels of God; 9) but he who denies me in the presence of men will be denied in the presence of the angels of God. 10) Everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but those who blaspheme against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

Luke 12:8-10 (WEB)

These verses certainly communicate that there is a sin, the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, that is unforgivable. So it would seem that regardless of what someone believes about Hades being temporary or not, if this sin is not forgiven, then certainly you will not be saved from eternal damnation to the Lake of Fire if you commit the unforgivable sin.

So what is blasphemy of the Holy Spirit? One traditional answer can be found here, <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/bakers-evangelical-dictionary/blasphemy-against-the-holy-spirit.html>.

Since blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is not explicitly defined, most theologies work backwards from their conclusions about salvation. They use deductive reasoning to define blasphemy of the Holy Spirit as not satisfying their salvation formula. For example, since Calvinists understand that the elect are guaranteed final salvation, they conclude that whatever blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is, the elect of God can never commit this sin. This is a great hope for Calvinists, but only if you are also able to join them persuading yourself that you are elect while the majority of mankind is not elect.

Alternatively, Arminians conclude that since people are saved through their *free will* choice of "*faith*" in Christ, then the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit must be to resist the Spirit and not choose Christ with your *free will*. This is also a great hope for Arminians, but only if you are able to join them and have "*faith*" that your "*faith*" is truly authentic. So both Calvinist and Arminian thinkers have slightly different understandings of the blasphemy of the Spirit, but with the agreement that it is whatever does not satisfy their salvation formula.

Those holding to the Victorious Gospel view as I do could also use the same deductive

reasoning as the Arminian and the Calvinist and conclude that the blasphemy of the Spirit is to be non-elect or to finally resist the Spirit and never place faith in Christ. Satan and his angels fit that description very well. So in fact I agree with both the Arminian and the Calvinist above! However, I also believe that all mankind is elect and that all mankind, thanks to the grace of God, will be transformed either sooner or later. So I could conclude in this way and at least match the reasoning of both the Arminian and the Calvinist above.

However, Young's Literal Translation of these verses offers further important insight. Young's work reveals that the proper translation of the Greek word "*aion*" is essential to understand the blasphemy of the Spirit and the resulting punishment for committing this sin. Read Young's translation...

He who is not with me is against me, and he who is not gathering with me, doth scatter. Because of this I say to you, all sin and evil speaking shall be forgiven to men, but the evil speaking of the Spirit shall not be forgiven to men. And whoever may speak a word against the Son of Man it shall be forgiven to him, but whoever may speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this age, nor in that which is coming.

Matthew 12:30-32 (YLT)

Verily I say to you, that all the sins shall be forgiven to the sons of men, and evil speakings with which they might speak evil, but whoever may speak evil in regard to the Holy Spirit hath not forgiveness -- to the age, but is in danger of age-during judgment;

Mark 3:28-29 (YLT)

And I say to you, Every one -- whoever may confess with me before men, the Son of Man also shall confess with him before the messengers of God, and he who hath denied me before men, shall be denied before the messengers of God, and every one whoever shall say a word to the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven to him, but to him who to the Holy Spirit did speak evil, it shall not be forgiven.

Luke 12:8-10 (YLT)

Consider these important observations:

1. The blasphemy of the Spirit is not explicitly defined which is why most salvation theologies work backwards from their own viewpoint to conclude that blasphemy of the Spirit is to miss their particular salvation recipe. This is not necessarily a wrong method of interpretation, but it is certainly biased.
2. The punishment for the blasphemy of the Spirit is not explained either, but only that this sin will not be forgiven. There is no explicit mention of Hades or the Lake of Fire. Many automatically think of these destinies when "*eternal sin*" is mentioned because it matches their viewpoint. However, could anything else be in view?
3. The WEB translation speaks of "*never*" being forgiven and "*eternal*" sin, while Young's translation does not! This is a very important difference that should inspire you and me to Greek study. Is blasphemy of the Spirit an eternal sin or not? Sadly we all have biases and preconceived ideas, even Bible translators. Further study of the Greek word "*aion*" may help. Please check out my article, *Forever is Not Forever? You Gotta Be Kidding Me!* The <http://www.blueletterbible.org> can also be used to examine each Greek word.
4. Jesus is teaching the same thing in all three passages, but the accounts in Matthew and Mark are the most complete, explaining that the blasphemy of the Spirit will not be forgiven in "*this age*" or the "*age to come*." When Jesus said those words what was "*this age*" and the "*age to come*?" Are there just two ages: now and eternity? If so, then blasphemy of the

Spirit will land you in the Lake of Fire. However, there are not just two ages in the future when Jesus said those words. Jesus spoke during the Jewish law age ("*this age*" during his life), the church / Kingdom age follows, and eternity follows last of all.

Could it be that the popular idea that the blasphemy of the Spirit is an eternal sin is *wrong*? My conclusion based on the grace of Christ and a proper understanding of the Greek word "*aiōn*" as properly translated in Young's Literal Translation of the Bible is that, YES, this popular understanding is way wrong!

These verses teach that those who refuse to trust and obey Christ will not be forgiven for their unbelief in this present age, nor the age to come, meaning the Church / Kingdom Age. Their unrepentant unbelief will not be overlooked, but will be punished in the fires of Hades until the commencement of eternity at the Great White Throne Judgment. This also fits well with Revelation 20:5 (WEB), "*The rest of the dead didn't live until the thousand years were finished.*" However, since there is an age even after the "*age to come*," namely the New Heavens and the New Earth, forgiveness still can and will be realized at that time for everyone whose sins are paid for by the work of Christ. The good news is that Jesus has already paid for the sins of ALL mankind.

Hey this is awesome news because it is final salvation for you, me, and our neighbor!

< Universalism + Free Will = One Very
Strange Bird

up

What Harm is There in Believing that
God Will Save All Mankind? >

What Harm is There in Believing that God Will Save All Mankind?

Another tentative reader asked...

READER>> What harm is there in believing that God will save all mankind? Why would any object? Why is this good news even questioned? Your Biblical arguments seem clear enough.

ME>> Thank you for this question. You appear to be intellectually persuaded that the Bible teaches the salvation of all mankind. You also appear to be attracted to the prospects of the good news. Yet perhaps your reluctance and uncertainty is due to the traditions that surround you?

Some Christian traditions object, or even strongly object, because they do not think the Bible teaches that God's grace will be victorious in the salvation of all mankind. Furthermore, they may be concerned that this understanding could cause people to miss their understanding of the salvation message and thus be damned forever. These are important and noble concerns and so the hard work remains to properly understand the Bible and the gospel of grace. Repentance also is needed to confess that Jesus alone is the Savior.

I urge you to build your faith on the person of Jesus Christ and the Scriptures themselves rather than the tradition that makes you feel comfortable. Examine the Scriptures and pray, asking God to give you confidence in his truth.

As for my answer to your question, certainly I do not think there is any harm at all in believing that God will save all mankind through the grace of Christ! I believe this is the Biblical message and the good news of God's grace! However, I caution you to consider another question.

What harm is there in NOT believing that God will save all mankind?

If you join the Calvinists and believe that God does not love all mankind, but in fact only loves a sub-set of human beings, can any harm come from that way of thinking? Yes, in fact great harm! This is just the type of blind hypocrisy that Christ came to defeat through confronting the Pharisees. The Pharisees believed they were God's chosen people while disregarding God's love for the gentiles. Jesus reserved his strongest rebuke for these people! I do not think you want to hear Jesus rebuke you in the same way. That is not a safe place to stand.

If you join the Arminians and believe that God has merely offered his love, conditioned on each individual's choice, can any harm come from that way of thinking? Again yes, in fact great harm! Redefining God's unconditional love to be conditioned upon the '*choice of faith*' undermines the invitation to trust that God has always loved you and your neighbor. Placing conditions on God's love perverts the Christian faith into just another pagan gentile religion of works. Jesus loved the Jews, the Greeks, and the Romans unconditionally, dying on the cross for all mankind. Trust in Jesus is confidence in his unconditional love. Trust is NOT a condition to his love! Please understand the difference. Christ was crucified once for all! Why crucify him again?

If you join those standing on the mystery in the middle of Arminianism and Calvinism, can any harm come from that way of thinking? Once again yes, in fact great harm! Mystery is hardly a safe place to stand for your own salvation or the salvation of your neighbor. Christ did not come to introduce confusion or mystery, but instead to reveal and explain the mystery of how our holy God could justify sinful man. The good and great news is that God the Son became a man, the second Adam, our vicarious substitute, to reconcile all mankind to God. The mystery is revealed in Christ. The Word of God promises confident knowledge of our salvation! Why obscure the good news with mysterious question marks?

Do you prefer the tradition that God does not love all? Do you prefer the tradition that God's love is conditional? Do you prefer mysterious question marks? The great harm of these understandings of "*faith*" is they fall short of Biblical hope in the Biblical Jesus. How can Jesus be pleased with this?

Look to Christ and his Word!

[◀ What About the Unforgivable Sin?](#)

up

[Why Do Some Go to Hell, Even if Temporarily? ▶](#)

Why Do Some Go to Hell, Even if Temporarily?

Another reader asked...

READER>> Why do some go to Hell, even if temporarily? You say that only the Holy Spirit can lead people to faith and repentance. So then it is God himself who has determined to forgive all mankind from the cross in 33 A.D.. And it is the Holy Spirit who regenerates each individual at the time of his choosing to be born again and receive forgiveness. So then why would God allow any to go to Hades / Hell? Why wouldn't he end the suffering and bring everyone to faith immediately?

ME>> Thank you again for this excellent question. Confidence in God's unconditional love for all mankind defended from the Bible is a great blessing. Yet, now our questions about brokenness, pain, sin, and judgment become even more significant.

We might have stomached these terrible things in the past, concluding that God simply does not love all, or that sinners are simply getting their just desserts, even eternal damnation. We might find comfort believing that the masses drowned in the flood were unrepentant sinners, outside of God's love, receiving their deserved judgment. Maybe there is comfort, but only if we forget that we are sinners just as they. We might think Ananias and Sapphira lost their lives because they really were not Christians in the first place. Maybe that is comfort, but have we forgotten that God also disciplines Christians? We might try to comfort ourselves saying that Luke 16, the rich man punished in Hades, was not a true story, but a parable. Or we might comfort ourselves saying the rich man missed his last chance to repent and so God's offer of love is rescinded. Maybe there is comfort, if we ignore that fact that salvation is only possible through God's gracious choice. And how do we reconcile God's love for all mankind, considering the pain suffered by Cain and Abel, Noah's family and their generation, Pharaoh and enslaved Israel, King David and Uriah, Lazarus and the rich man, the early church and the destruction of Jerusalem, the murderer and the murdered, the rapist and the raped, the aborter and the aborted, the selfish and the starving?

Joy over God's unconditional love for all mankind seems extinguished by the reality of the world around us and the nether world beyond us.

Scripture may not answer your question directly. However, there is a solid answer concluded from our knowledge of our sinful nature apart from grace, our knowledge of God, and our knowledge of God's purpose in grace. Consider Ephesians 2:1-7 (WEB),

1) You were made alive when you were dead in transgressions and sins, 2) in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the children of disobedience. 3) We also all once lived among them in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. 4) But God, being rich in mercy, for his great love with which he loved us, 5) even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6) and raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7) that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus; 8) for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9) not of works, that no one would boast. 10) For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before that we

would walk in them.

First we see that our sinful nature apart from grace is horribly described as,

you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the children of disobedience. 3) We also all once lived among them in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

Ephesians 2:2b-3 (WEB)

This horrible description is often worse than we want to admit for ourselves and others. We are tempted to ask "*why do bad things happen to good people?*" However, the answer is that bad things never happen to good people. There are no good people. Though of course not all pain suffered is the direct result of our own sin and there are innocent victims. Nonetheless, the description of our evil nature apart from grace still offends. We might be both offended and fearful to consider that sinful mankind and this broken world really do deserve to be thrown into the refuse heap of eternal damnation. The point is that apart from grace we are children of wrath by our birth nature. The point is that unregenerate man prefers the suffering of Hell in order to worship self rather than worship of Christ with comfort in paradise.

I challenge you to a dangerous mental exercise. Consider the sins that tempt you. Imagine committing them and taking them a step further. Take them another step further and imagine further temptations presented. Now imagine steps even further. Continue until you are able to see that your sinful nature and the sinful nature of all mankind are made of the same stuff as Hitler himself. Continue until you are able to see that your unbridled sinful nature raises its defiant high hand to malign God himself. Continue until you can confess that you would dethrone God to be your own god and the god of those around you if you could. Unless of course you claim that you are not guilty of the crucifixion of Christ along with all mankind. Before we boast that we know and love God we should be reminded that we crucified Christ.

So an accurate knowledge of our sinful nature apart from grace at least explains that sinful mankind deserves and even would prefer eternal damnation to worshiping Christ. So the pain suffered in this life or even temporary punishment in the next life is at least merited by our evil nature. So if any suffer in Hades after death, they certainly are not Christian brothers calling on God in repentance, but instead remain God haters by their birth nature. The unbelieving regret the pain, but they have no regrets for their continued unbelief and separation from God, even through Hades.

Scary as our sinful natures may be, thankfully this is only a tiny fraction of the whole equation. Yes, apart from grace the justice of God merits our eternal damnation. However, thankfully there is no "*apart from grace*" because the cross of Christ now demands mankind's salvation. Our Ephesians passage continues,

4) But God, being rich in mercy, for his great love with which he loved us, 5) even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6) and raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 2:4-6 (WEB)

Thankfully God is greater than our sin and he is a savior with no condemnation for sinful man. Our knowledge of God is the great hope of the gospel. The bad news of our sinful

nature is only an introduction to the good and great news of the gospel. Ephesians 2:4 is the great contrast of the gospel, "***But God!***" We are terrible sinners by nature, "***But God***" is a greater savior!

Okay, but why did God allow the brokenness, pain, sin, and judgment in the first place? Why does God allow it for another instant? Why does the Holy Spirit leave even one person unrepentant?

7) that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus;

Ephesians 2:7 (WEB)

God's purpose was and is to "***show the exceeding riches of his grace.***" God is showing off and demonstrating his grace in loving the unlovable and forgiving the unforgivable over time. He is working out our salvation and the demonstration of his patient grace over thousands of years. He could have allowed only an instant of sin, but instead he is showing off his amazing grace working with sinners over thousands of years. The unstained, perfectly pure, glorious holiness of God Almighty has determined to show off his grace muscles in the salvation of a world full and a history full of sinful mankind through the cross of Jesus Christ.

Thus we observe that God has specifically allowed every possible combination of circumstances to show off his grace. God has proved, is proving, and will prove that his grace is undefeated in every arena. Consider, that God has demonstrated grace before the law with Adam and Eve and during the law with Moses. God has demonstrated grace before the advent of Christ with Israel and after the advent of Christ with the Church. God has demonstrated grace with the believing and also with the unbelieving. Furthermore, God demonstrates grace toward both the living and the dead, even to the depth of Hades. God is exercising his grace in every square inch of this broken world so that his grace alone will be praised at the restoration of all things.

Naturally we still have questions about brokenness, pain, sin, and God's judgments in Hades. However, we also know that God's purpose is to demonstrate the victory of grace from the highest to the lowest places throughout his entire creation. For myself, my appetite and imagination are ready now for God's final display of grace and the complete erasure of the fall and the restoration of all things. Yet God still has further displays of his magnificent grace and patience with sinful man. So we glorify him, trust him, and wait patiently.

[◀ What Harm is There in Believing that God Will Save All Mankind?](#)

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[Why Evangelize? ▶](#)

Why Evangelize?

MANY>> *If all mankind is saved from the Lake of Fire why even evangelize?*

ME>> That is an excellent question. We evangelize because...

1. We are commanded by Jesus to evangelize and make disciples.

Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you. Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.

Matthew 28:19-20 (WEB)

2. Paul commanded Philemon to share his faith so that he would grow in his understanding of grace.

I pray that the faith you share will make you understand every blessing we have in Christ

Philemon 6 (ESV)

3. Love for the lost ought to move us to seek the salvation of the lost sheep, the rebellious elect. Did you pour your heart into evangelism thinking you were adding names to the Lamb's Book of Life? Rather, evangelism and discipleship is purposed to save the unbelieving elect from hardened hearts and punishment in Hades.

14) For the love of Christ constrains us; because we judge thus, that one died for all, therefore all died. 15) He died for all, that those who live should no longer live to themselves, but to him who for their sakes died and rose again. 16) Therefore we know no one after the flesh from now on. Even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know him so no more. 17) Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new. 18) But all things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ, and gave to us the ministry of reconciliation; 19) namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not reckoning to them their trespasses, and having committed to us the word of reconciliation. 20) We are therefore ambassadors on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21) For him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

2 Corinthians 5:14-21 (WEB)

We appeal to the unbelieving to be reconciled to God because their self-righteous hearts are at enmity toward God and they will be punished in Hades unless they repent. Yet even though their hearts hate God, God loves both the believing and the unbelieving dearly. After all, the work of Christ has already fully atoned for their sin. The wrath of God is fully satisfied and he holds no eternal wrath toward any individual human -- ever! Again He loves both the believing and the unbelieving! Romans 5:10 also makes it very clear that the

unbelieving are already reconciled to God... for God's part. The only thing remaining is for their hearts to be changed by receiving God's love.

For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we will be saved by his life.

Romans 5:10 (WEB)

Several people suggested that if all mankind is finally saved from the Lake of Fire then really there is no motivation or reason to be concerned about evangelism and discipleship. This is a sad testimony to a graceless understanding of God's love. I hope that I have answered your question and that you are motivated to tell your fellowman about the love of God.

[< Why Do Some Go to Hell, Even if Temporarily?](#)

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[Why Evangelize? Spiritual Warfare and Love for the Elect is Why! >](#)

Why Evangelize? Spiritual Warfare and Love for the Elect is Why!

Many continue to ask...

MANY>> *If all mankind is saved from the Lake of Fire why even evangelize?*

ME>> That is an excellent question.

Many do evangelism because they think that their efforts are adding people's names to the Lamb's Book of Life. We have already discussed that if predestination is true in any sense whatsoever, then each individual's final destiny cannot be effected in the least by even one human word or action. So then have I even talked myself out of any valid purpose for evangelism and disciple-making?

No!

Evangelism and discipleship cannot change any one's eternal destiny, *but* through God's sovereign hand, it will change one's life in this life and also during the intermediate states found in the nether world, Hades. Christians have a new heart toward their Heavenly Father and now love God. Non-Christians, however, continue with their sinful birth nature and only love themselves, while hating God and grace. Christians are promised paradise at death through sweet fellowship with God and all the deceased believers that have already left this world. Non-Christians, however, are sentenced to punishment in Hades for rejecting what is good, and in fact they have no desire for fellowship with God.

I mentioned this concept to an individual once and he remarked, *"If that is true we should just party and enjoy sin because we will all be saved eventually anyway."* That comment is very sad. Frankly, the only cure remaining for him may be to drink even more deeply of the sin he loves until he hits the floor. Friends, God is good, his commands are good, forgiveness is good, and grace is good. Sin, though it may entice with fleeting thrills, is *not* good, and will destroy our lives.

A deadly war is raging across the entire creation with Satan, the arch enemy of God, seeking to destroy God's people, mankind, through whatever means he can fabricate. Satan began with his lies to Adam and Eve in the garden and he continues to this very day with his lies everywhere.

Remember that Revelation 12:7 (WEB) says

There was war in the sky [heaven]. Michael and his angels made war on the dragon. The dragon and his angels made war.

Surprised? Heaven itself is soiled with Satan's rebellion and Satan has brought the battle to earth to enlist traitors here. Yet God commands his people to follow Christ and enlist in evangelism and discipleship to join the fight against Satan and his demons. Not convinced?

Ephesians 6:10-13 (WEB) EXPLICITLY says,

10) Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might. 11) Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12) For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world's rulers of the darkness of this age, and against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the

heavenly places. 13) Therefore put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

The enemy is not flesh and blood. The enemy is not mankind. The enemy is not even unbelieving mankind. Instead our enemies are the powers of this dark world, the Devil and his demon army. So evangelism and discipleship are designed to fight the lies of Satan and teach mankind the truth about the love of God for all people. How do we fight against Satan and his lies? How do we begin? The recipe is simple.

Revelation 12:11 (WEB) says

They overcame him because of the Lamb's blood, and because of the word of their testimony. They didn't love their life, even to death.

Christ invites us to take up his cross and follow him to fight against the lies of Satan by giving our *everything* to testify that the blood of the Lamb has paid for the sins of all mankind! Will you join the fight? Or sit in your religious pew?

[< Why Evangelize?](#)

up

[Why is 'Free Will' an offense to grace?](#)

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Why is 'Free Will' an offense to grace?

Another debater asked...

READER>> I interpret your statement[s] to mean "That [believing in free will] is an offense to God in that it does a disservice of some sort to His grace." Why does it?

ME>> Claiming that *free will* made a distinction between you and another rather than grace is not really a disservice to God's grace, for ultimately nothing interrupts God's service and purpose, even our unbelief. But instead it is a dishonoring of God and a prideful boast toward our fellowman.

Yet you ask a good question.

Why is belief in *free will* an offense to God? First, the Scriptures themselves specifically teach that attributing spiritual progress to anything but grace is contemptible in Romans 2:4 and boastful in 1 Corinthians 4:7. Second, I have also said that if we believe persuasion at the natural level of logic and argument is sufficient, then our evangelism will create victims rather than converts. We will neglect to pray asking God to provide the heart change that only he can provide. One might argue that we chose to pray because of our *free will* choice to obey. However, Paul gives the glory for all his effort to God in 1 Corinthians 15:10 and even our prayers as explained in Romans 8:26. Third, you have already admitted that there are no Scriptures that explicitly teach that man has a *free will*, but there are verses that teach that man is spiritually dead and must be regenerated by the Holy Spirit to be alive to God. Since this is the case, the question begs: why not humbly accept the Scriptures? Why the resistance? Stubborn pride, perhaps? Fourth, if I claim that my *free will* made the difference in my spiritual progress, I have a boast before my fellowman; but if I acknowledge that grace made the difference, I am God's servant to point others to the only hope for their healing, God himself. Furthermore, then God can answer for himself as to why he chooses to do this or that.

READER>> To my mind it is the Calvinist's perspective which does the disservice to God's grace by limiting it to a select few.

On that we totally agree, for God's love is not limited to a subset of mankind as Calvinists ignorantly teach.

READER>> or for the deterministic universalist, by rationing God's grace to a select few now and delaying His gift to a much later time for the others.

Yes, I can understand your concern. However, I have also said I do not like the negative connotation of the word "*deterministic*." The word ruins the artistry of what God is building and designing. Yet I also ask with you, why did God bring me to faith at age 18, others earlier, and even others later? Or why do many die in unbelief and suffer in Hades when God's grace could stem the tide? I do not like these facts either. However, it is what the Scriptures teach. So we could try to find an explanation that makes sense to human reason alone and helps us feel more comfortable, or we could give our lives to the Spirit's purposes and allow God to make his appeal through us as Paul did in 2 Corinthians 5:20 (WEB): "***We are therefore ambassadors on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.***"

The mistake many make who reject God's sovereignty is imagining Him sitting in heaven pulling switches and using words like "*deterministic*" to describe his sovereign influence.

This is a mistake that improperly characterizes the beautiful work of God's grace. God's sovereign grace is intimate and present and at work and when we obey his will then it is certain that he is at work through us for the good.

[< Why Evangelize? Spiritual Warfare and Love for the Elect is Why!](#)

[up](#)

[Wow! How Can You Be Ultra-Conservative and Ultra-Liberal? >](#)

Wow! How Can You Be Ultra-Conservative and Ultra-Liberal?

Another Pastor asked

ANOTHER PASTOR>> Wow! How can you be both ultra-conservative and ultra-liberal?

ME>> You have just vindicated my entire life for Christ. Thank you!

American Christians, soaked in American culture, have adopted a simplistic two-party worldview. Just like American politics teeters between the labels of Democrat and Republican, so American Christians teeter between the labels of Liberal and Conservative. Labels can be useful. However, in this case the labels are neither sufficiently defined nor granular enough to encompass all the issues. The net result is the polarization of our nation and the polarization of the American church. In fact the current polarization could be compared to the division between the legalistic Jews and licentious gentiles of Jesus' day. The Jews could be compared with the conservative Republicans and conservative Christians of our day and the gentiles with the liberal Democrats and liberal Christians. This is a curious repetition of history.

The problem with conservatism is that it is not conservative enough, at least according to Jesus' standards. *"Conservatives"* find self-righteous pride in pointing out what is wrong and what is right. Meanwhile they do not live up to their own standards and especially not Jesus' standards. They (and we) sin daily! Read Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and you will see that his standard of right and wrong blows all of our hypocrisy out of the water and into plain view. Not one human being on the planet has met his standard of righteousness, *"Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect"* Matthew 5:48 (WEB). Jesus was ultra-conservative, with *perfect* righteousness.

Likewise the problem with liberalism is that it is not liberal enough according to Jesus' standards either. *"Liberals"* pride themselves on standing up for the minority and being the voice of all people. However, put their (and our) philosophy to the test and you will see that their altruism falls short with arbitrary lines in the sand. Read the gospels and you will see that Jesus' standard of inclusivity for the love he gave (not merely offered) is for every human being that ever lived for all time, from Cain to Abel and Hitler to Mother Theresa. Not one human being on the planet has matched his passionate love for even his enemies with the words, *"Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing"* Luke 23:34 (WEB). Jesus was ultra-liberal with grace and forgiveness, given to *ALL* mankind.

So with God's help I hope to praise the righteousness of Christ that exposes the utter sinfulness of all mankind, as well as praise the grace of Christ which brings salvation for all mankind. My words are nothing. Look to Jesus and you will see his righteousness and grace in perfect measure at his cross for you and all mankind!

As an aside, the message that the atonement has effectively paid for the sins of all mankind is not a *"liberal"* view, but in fact the Biblical view of the atonement. Contrary to Calvinism, Christ is glorified for his incarnation as the new federal head of *ALL* mankind, Romans 5:18. Contrary to Arminianism, Christ is glorified for his grace in the salvation of all mankind without any human condition, Romans 5:18. To say otherwise is to offend either the glory of his incarnation or his grace. To say otherwise is to divide the very body of Christ or to redefine faith to be a work rather than simply trust. To say otherwise is to leave the high ground of Christ, falling to the *"left"* or *"right"* with simplistic *"liberal"* or *"conservative"* thinking and debate.

< Why is 'Free Will' an offense to
grace?

up

Wow... so what do you really believe?

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Wow... so what do you really believe?

Others> Wow... so what do you really believe? If you have parted ways with contemporary orthodoxy, then what else have you parted with?

Me> Yes I have parted ways with both Arminianism and Calvinism. However, I hope that I have not unnecessarily parted ways with the thoughtful conclusions and hard-won discoveries of Christians through the ages. I seek to be a Christian, not a contrarian! Disagreement over one point, whether major or minor, is not reason to disagree *carte blanche*. For example, some claim that there is no punishment in Hell after death for the unbelieving because a God of love would never do such a thing. However, the Scripture plainly says otherwise in Luke 16:19-31. Others abandoned the Biblical doctrine of the Trinity to claim that God is one and only one person and became Unitarian Universalists. Sadly the Unitarian Universalist movement has lost all anchor to Scripture. They have abandoned the good conclusion that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three distinct persons, yet one God, Deuteronomy 6:4, Romans 9:5, Acts 5:3-4.

In short, I believe...

1. In one true God, existing eternally as one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, John 14:9-21, who is in essence spirit, John 4:24, light, 1 John 1:5, and love, 1 John 4:8.
2. That the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments are the unique, inerrant, inspired Word of God in the original autographs, and the final authority in all matters of faith and conduct, 2 Timothy 3:16.
3. In the sovereignty and active rule of God in creation, the fall, history, revelation, miracles, prophecy, redemption, and final judgment, Romans 8:20-21.
4. That man was created by God in His image, but that since Adam's fall, all men are sinful and by nature deserve God's wrath, Ephesians 2:3.
5. That Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, fully human and fully divine, eternally existing as God, yet born in time of a virgin, and that He lived a sinless and perfect life, 2 Timothy 2:5.
6. In the historic death of Jesus as the full and only atonement, guaranteeing loving forgiveness for the sins of all mankind, in His bodily resurrection from the dead, and in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, 1 John 2:1-2.
7. That all mankind is justified by the loving grace of God and redeemed on the basis of the death of Christ, which is received through faith, Ephesians 2:8-9.
8. That the Holy Spirit is the effective agent in regeneration, bringing individuals to faith and transformed lives, 2 Corinthians 3:18.
9. In one universal church, Christ's Body, to which all believers belong, and in particular churches accountable to God, led by elders who rule in doctrine and discipline, while acknowledging individual conscience, 1 Timothy 5:17, 1 John 2:27.
10. That believing mankind is rewarded in paradise after death, while unbelievers suffer punishment in Hades after death merited by their sinful nature and their rejection of the grace of Christ, Luke 16:19-31.
11. In the future, visible, physical return of the Lord Jesus Christ in glory, Titus 2:13.
12. In the final resurrection of redeemed mankind to the enjoyment of God forever, and the damnation of those excluded from the Book of Life to the Lake of Fire prepared for the Devil and his angels for the ages of the ages, Matthew 25:31-46 and Revelation 20:10.

Curiously it is rare to find a Christian that says they are 100% Calvinist or 100% Arminian. Most Christians find some dispute with these theologies and so find an alternative

compromise. Yet will most Christians be willing to seriously consider the creed above as I have defended from the Scripture? Will you return with me to the historic faith and Biblical gospel that Christ is the Savior of all mankind?

< Wow! How Can You Be Ultra-Conservative and Ultra-Liberal?

up

Yes, but Even Harder Questions! >

Yes, but Even Harder Questions!

SELF>> After lengthy discussion with others and reading various books, I have found that there is quite a range of thought even among Christian Universalists. In fact, sadly, the divisions between them in faith and fellowship might even be deeper than between those of traditional Christianity. Most Christian Universalists have observed, as I, that the Greek word "aion" is at times wrongly translated "eternal" in the English Bible. Some are silent about the salvation of fallen angels, while others have concluded that even Satan will be saved, to which I am not persuaded. Most have respected and protected inspiration and strove for reasonable interpretation of the given Word, but some have even violated the Holy Spirit suggesting that difficult verses are better explained as human error. Many have even further differences of various natures, no doubt influenced by the varied traditions and experience from which they came.

Through this study a number of additional questions have come to mind. None of the questions raised have changed my certain position that Jesus is the Savior of all mankind. Yet the questions are very interesting to consider with some of them pertaining to the primary point, while others are secondary.

ME>> Questions and answers follow.

1. When did Satan and his demons fall into sin?

Did Satan and his angels begin their rebellion before Day 1, during Day 1-7, or after Day 7? Having been schooled in the 7 day creation camp I would have quickly said sometime during or after Day 1-7. However, Ernst Stroeter argues in his book *The Gospel of God's Reconciliation of All in Christ* that Genesis 1:1-2 is better interpreted to mean God first created out of nothing and then the Earth became formless. Stroeter speculates that the initial creation and rebellion of Satan took place in the first two verses of the Bible over an unspecified age. In his favor, Job 38:6-7 suggests that the angels, "sons of God," were an audience to creation. So perhaps Days 1 to 7 are the beginning of God creating a home for mankind from the wasteland remaining after Satan's rebellion. Stroeter's view gives us pause to recognize that God has been working his plans out over long periods of time, from age to age. Was there an age of angels and Satan's rebellion in Genesis 1:1-2? Job 38:4 (WEB) ought to keep all of us from dogmatism on this point, "*Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if you have understanding.*" Really the question is a sidebar compared to our larger question of Arminianism and Calvinism versus the Gospel.

2. Where is the place "Tartaroo," mentioned in 2 Peter 2:4?

Tartaroo means to "*throw down to Tartarus,*" a place of punishment deeper and more severe than *Hades* in Greek mythology as explained here

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tartarus>. Does the Holy Spirit then believe in Greek mythology? Hardly. Instead, the Holy Spirit apparently is distinguishing between punishment in *Hades* versus *Tartarus* using terms familiar to his audience,

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hades>. Both these locations are in the netherworld after death beyond the vision of the living. Why would the Holy Spirit reference Greek mythology?

Tartaroo is mentioned only one time in all of Scripture with only fallen angels mentioned as being held there for future judgment. I suggest that the reason the Holy Spirit uses the terms of *Hades* and *Tartarus* is to highlight the radical differences of these two places. They differ in the severity of their punishments as well as the nature and destinies of their inhabitants.

Unbelieving humans, creatures made in God's image and redeemed by the blood of Christ,

are punished in *Hades*, Luke 16:23. Yet mercy is extended to them even there, 1 Peter 4:6. And most importantly final salvation is graciously given, Matthew 25:40,46 and Revelation 20:14-15. However, some fallen angels, powerful creatures, that God does not help, Hebrews 2:16, are already held in *Tartarus* for future judgment because of the grave nature of their sin, and they will be sentenced to the Lake of Fire for *The Ages of The Ages* according to Matthew 25:41,46, Jude 6, and Revelation 20:10.

This observation, if correct, may serve to help those who are confident that all mankind is finally saved, but who wrongly conclude that even human beings are sentenced to the Lake of Fire. The Scripture is clear that the Lake of Fire is explicitly "***prepared for the devil and his angels***" Matthew 25:41 (WEB). The Lake of Fire is not prepared for human beings!

3. When is the Sheep and Goat judgment of Matthew 25:31-46?

The answer to this question is a significant component of my proposed model of understanding. I have proposed that Matthew 25:31-46, Daniel 12:1-4, and Revelation 20:11-15 are all the same event: The Great White Throne Judgment. The book of Revelation explains that The Great White Throne Judgment is just before the commencement of the New Heavens and the New Earth. Matthew 25:31 (WEB) also says, "***But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory.***" So Matthew 25:31 certainly seems parallel with Revelation 20:11. Other possible timings for Matthew 25:31 could include God's judgment on the Jews in 70 A.D. or a judgment that is working itself out through the Christian era.

If the Sheep and Goat judgment is not The Great White Throne Judgment, then it would seem that the Sheep and Goat Judgment comes first. If so that could allow one to conclude that the subjects at the Sheep and Goat Judgment are all human and that the Goats, if they are unbelieving humans, are being sent to an eon of punishment in Hades. Thus, they could still be saved at the Great White Throne Judgment afterward. However, the "***Throne of his glory***" language strongly suggests that the Sheep and Goat judgment is equal to The Great White Throne Judgment. There is a strong sense of finality to this judgment. Also Matthew 25:41 says "***aionian fire.***" This does not sound like Hades, but instead the Lake of Fire at The Great White Throne Judgment. Most Christian Universalists argue that "*aionian*" is temporal even in this case. They are motivated to make "*aion*" mean temporal even in this case because they think the "*ethnos*" is human only, therefore unbelievers must be released from the Lake of Fire sometime beyond the end of Scripture. However, I think the better understanding is that human beings never go to the Lake of Fire in the first place because it is "***prepared for the devil and his angels.***" This understanding also acknowledges many who object to Christian Universalism saying that the parallel construct of Matthew 25:46 cannot be divided into both "eternal life" and "temporal punishment." These objectors make an important point. We should all acknowledge that "*aion*" means the duration of the subject in view. When Hades is in view, the "*aion*" is an age. However, when God is in view, "*aion*" is eternal. In this case the subject in view is the Lake of Fire, which has no explicit end as far as the revealed Word of God. But again, this better understanding is aided by the observation that fallen angels are the Goats on the left to be cast into the Lake of Fire. Furthermore, Matthew says that Christ will "*sit*" on his throne. This is the picture of a king who has conquered and finished his work. Hebrews 1:3 tells us that Christ "*sat down*" after finishing his work of redemption. Hebrews 10:13 tells us his enemies will be made a footstool. In Matthew 25 and Revelation 20 Christ will "*sit*" on his glorious throne to judge and complete the footstool!

Daniel 12:1b (WEB) is also noteworthy when Michael tells Daniel, "***...Your people will be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book.***" Who is "*your people*?" Many think that Daniel's people are believing mankind and the unbelieving are not his people. However, since the man saying these words is Michael, the Archangel, it is much more likely that Michael is recognizing Daniel as a leader of humanity. Thus "***Your people***" is all mankind in contrast to the people of Michael, the angel kind.

Furthermore, since the Bible is God's message of hope to his people, it would seem very odd to me if human beings were still undergoing punishment at the end of the Bible, much less in the Lake of Fire which is prepared for the Devil and his angels. Instead Christian reason based on the grace of God and our Biblical evidence leans heavily on the side that punishment for all mankind, whether believing or unbelieving, ends with the emptying of Hades. Revelation 20:15 makes it clear that the fate of those standing before The Great White Throne is determined solely by the Lamb's Book of Life. Those not named are cast into the Lake of Fire, and inversely those who are named are finally saved. I proved this further in my article, *Revelation 20:11-15*. So can human action add our names to this book?

Hardly. Our names have been written there from before the creation of the world, Ephesians 1:4! Only through faith in the grace of Christ can you be persuaded of this good news. 1 Corinthians 15:55 (WEB) shouts the same hope saying, *"Death, where is your sting? Hades, where is your victory?"*

The timing of Matthew 25:31-46 is also significant because I propose that fallen angels will be judged at this event and that they are in fact the Goats on Jesus' left. So will fallen angels really be there? Let's turn to that question next.

4. When will fallen angels be judged?

I have frequently referenced 2 Peter 2:4 (WEB) which says, *"For if God didn't spare angels when they sinned, but cast them down to Tartarus, and committed them to pits of darkness to be reserved for judgment."* The key point to note is that these angels are being *"reserved for judgment."* They are in Tartarus now, but they will be escorted to stand before Christ for judgment. When will this happen? The answer is in Jude 6 (WEB), *"Angels who didn't keep their first domain, but deserted their own dwelling place, he has kept in everlasting bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day."* The imprisoned fallen angels of Tartarus will stand before the Lord for Judgment on the Great Day. When is the Great Day? Friends, everything points to The Great White Throne Judgment! On that Great Day unbelieving mankind will be safely extracted from their eon of punishment in Hades and the imprisoned fallen angels will be extracted from Tartarus to stand before King Jesus. Matthew 25:31-46, Daniel 12:1-4, and Revelation 20:11-15 tell the rest of the story.

5. Will fallen angels be finally saved?

Thus far I have shown that fallen angels, demons that is, are being held for judgment and that they will be judged on that Great Day. I have concluded that this Great Day is the Sheep and Goat Judgment also called The Great White Throne Judgment. Yet, a number of Universalists propose that Christ's reconciliation of all includes the final reconciliation of fallen angels, the demons and even Satan himself. Their conclusion is based on the "all" of Colossians 1:20. Furthermore, since some think that human beings are sentenced to the Lake of Fire and yet finally saved, then perhaps fallen angels will also be finally saved. However, there may be a better answer.

Colossians 1:20 (WEB) does say, *"and through him to reconcile ALL things to himself by him, whether things on the earth or things in the heavens, having made peace through the blood of his cross."*

However, consider a few more verses concerning the judgment of fallen angels.

Genesis 3:15b (NIV), *"...he will CRUSH your head..."*

Matthew 25:41 & 46a (WEB), *"Then he will say also to those on the left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire which is PREPARED FOR THE DEVIL AND HIS ANGELS.'" and "These will go away to eternal [aionian] punishment..."*

Hebrews 2:16 (WEB), *"For most certainly, he DOESN'T GIVE HELP TO ANGELS, but he gives help to the offspring of Abraham."*

2 Peter 2:4 (WEB), *"For if God didn't spare angels when they sinned, but cast them down to Tartarus, and committed them to pits of darkness to be RESERVED FOR JUDGMENT."*

Jude 6 (WEB), *"Angels who didn't keep their first domain, but deserted their own dwelling place, he has kept in everlasting bonds under darkness for the JUDGMENT OF THE GREAT DAY."*

Revelation 20:10 (WEB), *"The devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet are also. They will be tormented day and night forever and ever [THE AGES OF THE AGES]."*

Revelation 21:8 (WEB), *"But for the cowardly, unbelieving, sinners, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, THEIR part is in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."*

Revelation 21:8 cannot be speaking of all sinners, but only those whose names are *not* in the Lamb's Book of Life. If it is speaking of all sinners then *no one* could be saved, ever, because we have all committed these sins and still commit them. Instead this verse is speaking of those who have committed these sins and whose sins are *not* redeemed, the Devil and his angels. I have explained this further in my article, [How Can You Say Revelation 21:8 Does Not Apply to Humans?](#)

First, the greatest joy of my wrestling match with grace was to learn that God is the redeemer of all mankind. Hopefully more and more people change their minds to rest fully in God's love for all human beings. There is work enough to be done to persuade our fellowman to let go of their religion and recognize the serious errors in tradition and the mistranslation of "*aion*." There is work enough to be done to persuade our fellowman that they are truly loved by God, their sins are paid, and it is now impossible for us to be eternally damned.

Paul's great hope for himself, the church, and mankind is climaxed in 1 Corinthians 15:55 (WEB), *"Death, where is your sting? Hades, where is your victory?"* This points directly to the end of death for mankind and the safe release of those punished in Hades. Unbelieving mankind then finally receives grace at The Great White Throne Judgment. The Bible rings with the message of God's love for mankind. Rejoice!!!

So are Satan and his angels finally saved? The whole force of the Bible message is the history of the redemption of mankind, those created in the image of God and redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. The pages of Scripture end with the Devil and his angels tormented in the Lake of Fire for "*The Ages of The Ages*." Satan really is an enemy quite beyond our strength. His fall was designed to serve God's purpose, the demonstration of grace to us, his people. There is a relevant parallel I have proposed between God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit versus Satan, The Beast, and The False Prophet that may further help us understand God's purpose. Read about it in my article, [Revelation 20:10](#). So does the "*all*" of Colossians 1:20 include Satan? Is there an end to "*The Ages of The Ages*?" That is in God's hands.

6. Can fallen angels be "resurrected," or enter the "second death?"

Some have argued that since angels are spirit beings and cannot die, they cannot be resurrected or enter a second death. If they did not die a first time, how can they die a second time? Good question. I have noted elsewhere that some believe that fallen angels did live embodied on the earth during the time of Noah. It is suggested that their terrible sin in Genesis 6 precipitated the flood. These may be the wicked angels under discussion in 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6. If that is the case then this objection about angel resurrection and second death is easily answered. These wicked angels did live and die in the body and they will be raised for final judgment. We should also note that that Holy Spirit says in Matthew 25:32 that all the "*ethnos*" are "*assembled*" or "*gathered*" before Him. This language certainly accommodates both the retrieval of all his subjects whether from Hades or

Tartarus. Revelation 20:11-15, however, uses the language of retrieving the "dead" from the sea [Thalassa] and Hades. Perhaps the demons in Tartarus did live embodied on the earth and so it is fair to refer to them as the "dead" in Tartarus. Or perhaps the "dead" is only explicit mention of the human beings in Hades and the fallen angels in Tartarus are only implied. Either way, Jude 6 makes it clear that these fallen angels will be present to give account and receive their sentence to the Lake of Fire on that Great Day when they enter the "second death." Furthermore, you are right that the Lake of Fire is the "second death." However, you can see that the Bible plainly says that Satan and his angels are sent there. So whether it is fair to say that angels can die or be resurrected I cannot say. However, we can say that Satan and his angels are sent to the "second death." Read even more convincing proofs in my article, *Fallen Angels at the Great White Throne Judgment*. Revelation 20:13 does in fact say that the inhabitants of Tartarus will be raised from the dead!

7. How long will unbelieving mankind suffer in Hades?

Biblical Christianity does teach that even though unbelievers are punished in Hades that in the end all mankind will be finally saved. However, we might also ask how long will unbelievers be punished in Hades? Will they all be in agony the entire time until released at The Great White Throne Judgment? That is a long time! I have suggested elsewhere that Hades is a fit punishment for the unregenerate and that there will be no early exit or any exit at all until the grace of God opens the gate. Hades should not be viewed as the punishment of good people who love God, but instead the punishment of unregenerate people who hate God. Of course it would be very foolish to disregard Christ and make plans to suffer in Hades expecting to be saved eventually. If anyone will suffer the entire duration of Hades it would certainly be the one with a "Who cares about Christ, send me to Hell" attitude. However, this is enough of my speculation. Let's consider the few Scriptures that speak to the subject.

Psalms 139:8 (WEB), "*If I ascend up into heaven, you are there. If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, you are there!*" Foremost we see that David understood that God's caring love continues even for those punished in Hades.

Luke 16:24-26 (WEB),

24) He cried and said, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue! For I am in anguish in this flame." 25) But Abraham said, "Son, remember that you, in your lifetime, received your good things, and Lazarus, in the same way, bad things. But here he is now comforted, and you are in anguish. 26) Besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, that those who want to pass from here to you are not able, and that no one may cross over from there to us."

The agony of Hades will be great. Plus, the gulf fixed between the punishments of Hades and Paradise cannot be spanned with human effort.

Matthew 16:17-19 (WEB),

17) Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. 18) I also tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my assembly, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. 19) I will give to you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven; and whatever you release on earth will have been released in heaven."

Curiously Jesus seems to assign some role of forgiveness to the church in the realms of both Heaven and Earth.

1 Peter 3:18-19, 4:5-6 (WEB),

18) Because Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring you to God, being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the Spirit, 19) in whom he also went and preached to the spirits in prison,... 5) They will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. 6) For to this end the Good News was preached even to the dead, that they might be judged indeed as men in the flesh, but live as to God in the spirit.

Even more significantly Jesus preached the good news personally to the wicked dead so that they could *"live as to God in the spirit."* Wow, what does that mean?

1 Thessalonians 4:14-17 (WEB),

14) For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. 15) For this we tell you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will in no way precede those who have fallen asleep. 16) For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with God's trumpet. The dead in Christ will rise first, 17) then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. So we will be with the Lord forever. 18) Therefore comfort one another with these words.

Clearly the deceased Christians are raised to life first, but what about the deceased unbelievers, the wicked dead?

Revelation 20:5 (WEB), *"The rest of the dead didn't live until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection."* The deceased unbelievers are not raised to life until the Great White Throne Judgment. So are they in agony for the entire duration in Hades from now until the end? The verses above confirm that God loves and cares for mankind even in Hades and that according to 1 Peter 4:5-6 even conversion might be possible in Hades.

Matthew 25:37-40 (WEB),

37) Then the righteous will answer him, saying, "Lord, when did we see you hungry, and feed you; or thirsty, and give you a drink? 38) When did we see you as a stranger, and take you in; or naked, and clothe you? 39) When did we see you sick, or in prison, and come to you?" 40) The King will answer them, "Most certainly I tell you, because you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me."

I have suggested elsewhere that the surprise of these righteous, the sheep on Jesus' right, about their salvation does not sound like those who are already Christians. Christians have already been reigning with Christ. We would not have questions like these people! Instead these are unbelieving mankind just released from Hades, incredulous over God's grace, and now believing!

Protestants have recoiled from Catholic and other speculation about the afterlife and typically have over-simplified afterlife analysis to death, judgment, and the destiny of Heaven or Hell. Certainly I would agree that Hades is quite unlike Catholic notions of

Purgatory. Catholics have speculated beyond the Scriptures. Yet Protestants have likewise overlooked some valuable Biblical data. So what can we conclude from the above verses? I am convinced that God loves all mankind, even the unbelieving punished in Hades. I am also convinced that we should avoid speculation beyond the Scriptures. We should also avoid denial of the information given to us in Scriptures. The point from even one verse of Scripture is truly spoken, no matter how small it may appear.

8. Is salvation through a "limited atonement" of Christ possible?

Alternative to the Victorious Gospel, others add up the Scripture to say that Christ's atonement is limited and purposed for only a small subset of humanity. Those humans that Christ did not die for are then sentenced with the Devil and his angels to the Lake of Fire for eternity. Friends, I have worked as hard as possible to remain faithful to the whole of Scripture to understand the things Jesus has revealed to us about the future of salvation. While error, no doubt, will be found in my reasoning and Scripture reference, to say that Christ did not die for all mankind is a blatant abuse of Scripture, the Incarnation, and the Atonement. The "L" of T.U.L.I.P. as understood by John Calvin is a heresy and corruption of the very gospel of Jesus Christ. We might possibly say, the atonement is limited, it is limited to ALL mankind, and NOT extended to fallen angels. Yet if you reject Christ through adhering to a supposed "*limited atonement*," apparently you are not elected to believe the truth and apparently are not his sheep.

9. Is salvation of a subset by 'free will' faith in Christ possible?

Again, alternative to the Victorious Gospel, others say that Christ did die for all mankind to make the *offer* of forgiveness available for everyone to receive it by their *free will* choice of faith in Christ. Now this false gospel instead strikes at the heart of the definitions of "*grace*" and "*faith*." The Bible defines God's grace as his unmerited favor, his prior love of his enemies, and his reconciliation of mankind prior to our faith. The point is that grace is not an offer, but it is *already given* to his chosen people. To say otherwise is to add human condition to the unconditional love of God. To say otherwise is to trade Christianity for religion. The Christian faith is to simply trust, to believe, that Christ has in fact paid for our sins, and be changed -- period. There is nothing potential about Christ's work on the cross, but instead it is the greatest achievement! He said "*It is finished*." The sin debt of mankind is paid! Man's will is certainly not free to determine whether or not our sins are paid. I say again, man's will is certainly not free to determine whether or not our sins are paid. Our sin debt is paid! Again if you reject Christian faith in favor of *free will*, apparently you are also not elected to simply believe and apparently are not his sheep.

10. Are there "effective" and "ineffective" parts of the Atonement?

Regular Baptist theology says that Christ died for all mankind in one dimension, but for only a subset of mankind in another dimension. The Arminian and the Calvinist above offer a simple view that either Christ died for all or that he did not die for all. The Scripture, however, makes it plain that Christ died for all mankind, yet not all are saved from punishment after death. So the Regular Baptist explains this apparent conundrum by suggesting that the atonement has both "*effective*" and "*ineffective*" components. They say that Christ died for all in one sense, but this sense is "*ineffective*" to finally save. However, in another sense he died only for believers, and this sense is "*effective*" when combined with the human condition of "*faith*." They say that God's love is unconditional for all, but the condition of faith is needed for God's love to be effective for the saved. They say that the believer's decision to trust Christ then applies the blood of Christ to their account. Stop! Consider the concept of applying the blood of sacrifice for a moment. Under the Old Covenant, the priests killed the animal of sacrifice and then applied, smeared the blood on the altar for the forgiveness of their sins. So are Christians like priests of the Old Covenant both killing Christ on the altar and then applying his blood to our own sins? God forbid! The

very thought is the greatest offense to grace and the New Covenant. Christ is our great high priest who *offered himself* and *applied his own blood* to our sin for our forgiveness. The heart of the New Covenant is that Christ is the better priest who accomplished everything for us -- apart from any condition that we could ever provide.

Hebrews 10:9-14 (WEB),

9) Then he has said, "Behold, I have come to do your will." He takes away the first, that he may establish the second, 10) by which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. 11) Every priest indeed stands day by day serving and often offering the same sacrifices which can never take away sins, 12) but he, when he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God, 13) from that time waiting until his enemies are made the footstool of his feet. 14) For by one offering he has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

Friend, you can try to be your own priest or you can simply trust that Jesus Christ has accomplished the salvation of his people forever with "*one offering.*"

< Wow... so what do you really believe?

up

You Are a Heretical Pope Pronouncing Salvation Without Faith! >

You Are a Heretical Pope Pronouncing Salvation Without Faith!

OBJECTOR>> You Are a Heretical Pope Pronouncing Salvation Without Faith!

ME>> Just to be clear there will be no one in Heaven without faith in Christ or without love for God and mankind. Heaven is the eternal home of the glorified redeemed people of God. There will be no death, sin, mourning, crying, pain, or unbelief! Instead there will be life, perfection, joy, celebration, health, and unwavering trust. There will be unending love from God to us and from us to God and each other. There will be eternal praise and worship by every single inhabitant of Heaven for Jesus, our humble savior, King of Kings, God Almighty!

The confusion is simply this. Many have been led astray to believe that their *choice* of faith in Christ is the condition to God's unconditional love. Friends, faith is not the condition to God's love, but instead faith is trust in his unconditional love! Modern "*evangelical*" heresy has redefined "*faith*" to be the ticket to Heaven that you provide. This twisted gospel has taken the spotlight off of Christ and his gracious decision and focused it on man and our decision. The Scriptures proclaim that Christ will be exalted as the gracious savior of every individual and ALL mankind. Christ will be exalted, not human will!

Christian faith of course is a decision, but it is the decision trust that Christ loved us before we loved him, in fact while we hated God. It is the decision to believe that Christ chose to die on the cross in our place, even though we chose to crucify him. It is the decision to receive the gift of forgiveness already given, instead of begging for forgiveness. It is the decision to know that our eternal destiny is not in jeopardy or conditioned on our choices, but instead it is secure and guaranteed through the choice that Christ already made at the cross. It is the decision to know by faith that we were chosen for grace before the creation of the world. Our faith certainly did not *cause* that, but instead faith enables us to see this good news. Faith, properly defined, is our decision to live a life trusting that Christ already gave us his eternal love at the cross. Our decision does not change God's heart for us, but it certainly does change our hearts for God. Have you made the decision to believe? I pray that you have! Friends, it is a simple decision, though no one will decide without the touch from the Holy Spirit.

And if you do trust Christ, then you must also see that Jesus also loves all mankind, even those who have not yet trusted him. Just as Christ loved you and guaranteed your destiny before you believed, so he also loves all mankind and has guaranteed their happy destiny. Faith never changed anyone's eternal destiny, but instead it changes our hearts and opens our eyes to see our wonderful destiny from God. Faith is not your personal ticket to Heaven, but instead faith is eyes opened to see our Heavenly Father's love and his eternal happy home given to all his people!

You still might accuse me of saying that Heaven is guaranteed even for the unbelieving. In my defense the Scriptures do say concerning the unbelieving, "*For what if some were without faith? Will their lack of faith nullify the faithfulness of God? May it never be! Yes, let God be found true, but every man a liar. As it is written, 'That you might be justified in your words, and might PREVAIL when you come into judgment' "* (Romans 3:3-4 WEB) and also "*For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable*" (Romans 11:29 WEB). Even so, just to be clear my position properly stated is that ONLY believers will ever gain entrance to Heaven. It just happens I also believe it will be IMPOSSIBLE for even one human being to pass through the final judgment of Jesus Christ without an immediate wholehearted response of faith and worship. The Great White Throne Judgment will be the happiest surprise for the Sheep on Jesus' right. Read the account yourself in Matthew 25:31-

46 and Revelation 20:11-15.

Who are the Sheep on Jesus' right? Obviously they are not Christians! Christians would not evidence the surprise of these people over their salvation! Christians already believe and have confidence in our salvation through Jesus Christ. At this point in the story we Christians already had our joyful reunion with Christ raptured in the air! Do you think we will face doubt and judgment at the Great White Throne after that? Instead, Revelation 20:11-15 and Jude 6 make it plain that the wicked dead human beings are finally extracted from Hades and the imprisoned fallen angels held for judgment are extracted from Thalaasa to stand before the Great White Throne Judgment. The Sheep on Jesus' right are the wicked dead human beings, now finally with eyes opened to see their savior and receive grace. The Goats on Jesus' left, however, are the demons now finally sentenced to the Lake of Fire for The Ages of The Ages as explicitly stated in Matthew 25:41 and Revelation 20:10,15.

Furthermore, this is not a second chance salvation! Instead the gracious God of the Universe will one day determine that the time for mankind's unbelief, pain, and punishment is officially and finally over! Praise God! Presently, most of mankind creeps along through this life with eyes lifted no higher than the mud that we crawl through. However, on that Great Day the Lord of Glory will lay the earth bare, roll up the Universe like a tattered cloth, and empty even the depths of Hell itself. While unbelievers stumble like blind men now, there will be no veil between us and Christ on that day. Nor will there be any trace of unbelief among God's people standing in front of the Lord in all his Glory. Because of grace alone, Christ will read the roll call from the Book of Life and find the name of EVERY human being penned with the ink from his own veins and purchased from before the creation of the world. The God of all grace will be finally and fully revealed in blazing glory to ALL his chosen people, that is ALL mankind, and worshiped by ALL!

I am certainly not a Pope. However, you will have to decide whether it is heretical to believe that Jesus signed, sealed, and delivered salvation for ALL mankind at his cross when he breathed his last and said, "*It is finished.*" Friends, you can believe now or believe then for there is no escape from the love of Jesus Christ and his victory!

[< Yes, but Even Harder Questions!](#)

[up](#)

[You Are Wrong About Matthew 25:31-46! >](#)

You Are Wrong About Matthew 25:31-46!

One unconvinced reader said...

READER>> Your understanding of [Matthew 25:31-46](#) is wrong. The passage is saying that those on the left of Jesus will be punished WITH the Devil and his angels in the Lake of Fire. Whereas you are saying that those on his left ARE the Devil and his angels.

ME>> First you correctly understand my view. Thank you for that. I do believe the passage is best understood in the context of the whole of Scripture that those on Jesus' left, those cast into the Lake of Fire, are the Devil and his angels. Now I will be the first to admit that there are some curious facets to this understanding.

1) We most naturally assume that when Jesus gathers the nations before him that he is talking about only human beings and human nations. The Greek word "*ethnos*" is used in the Bible to mean "*a multitude of individuals of the same nature or genus, for example the human family.*" Thus when he divides the people into their categories of sheep and goats, we naturally conclude that some humans are sheep while the remainder are goats. It appears that only *part* of humanity is saved from the Lake of Fire while the rest are eternally lost. Arminians and Calvinists both agree on this point, though they disagree as to *how* people are saved.

However, do not too quickly conclude that "*ethnos*" mean human "*ethnic*" groups. It should be noted that the meaning of the word "*ethnos*" is also used to mean "*the people, in contrast to their king.*" The first denotation in the Vines dictionary also indicates, "*a multitude (whether of men or of beasts) associated or living together: a company, troop, swarm.*" I would suggest that at the Sheep and Goat Judgment these alternate denotations are closer to the mark. In fact we can be certain of this because 2 Peter 2:4 makes it plain that some angels are imprisoned now being held for future judgment. Jude 6 and Revelation 20:11-15 also make it plain that angels will be extracted from Tartarus / Thalassa to stand before the Great White Throne at final judgment.

King Jesus will summon *all* his subjects before him for final judgment and this includes both human and angelic people. We humans often neglect to consider Jesus' angelic subjects because they are most often invisible to us. However, angels are also people subject to King Jesus and will likewise stand before his judgment throne. What word other than "*ethnos*" would the Holy Spirit use to identify a mixed body of his subjects that includes both human and fallen angelic people? "*Ethnos*" is the word he chooses! The bad news for fallen angels is that they do not have a vicarious substitute for the condemnation they must receive. The good news for us is that Jesus became a human and so his work of atonement applies to all humans.

2) You say that in Matthew 25:41 Jesus says to human beings about to be damned that they will be sentenced *with* the Devil and his angels to Eternal Fire. I will concede that the sentence structure is odd and lends to your view. Why would Jesus use the demonstrative pronoun first and the proper name second? Typically, for clarity, the proper noun is first and the pronoun second. Consider three possible explanations.

First, the Holy Spirit may have allowed an awkward construct to parallel the structure of verse 34. Second, perhaps the phrase "*which is prepared for the devil and his angels*" is better understood not as a quote to the unredeemed, but as an explanation to the redeemed. Third, with Satan already damned to the Lake of Fire and his demons arraigned on Jesus' left, perhaps Matthew 25:41 is not awkward at all. Read my article [Your Thoughts on Matthews Meaning of 'Aionian Fire'?](#)

If you continue to disagree, then you must provide a reasonable explanation as to why Jesus

only lists the Devil and his angels as those for whom Eternal Fire is prepared. Why does the Holy Spirit say explicitly that the Lake of Fire is *"prepared for the Devil and his Angels?"* Why doesn't he say prepared for unbelieving mankind? He says the Devil and his Angels because that is who the Lake of Fire is prepared for and no one else!

3) Finally I also concede that it is odd that the Devil and his angels would say in Matthew 25:44 (WEB), *"Then they will also answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and didn't help you?'"* We might think that at this point the Devil and his angels would recognize their rebellion, concede their doom, and manifest their hatred of Christ with a violent display of malice as they are damned to the Lake of Fire. It is hard to imagine the Devil or the demons with their awesome intelligence speaking such a lame excuse.

Yet in spite of their awesome intelligence, we must remind ourselves that Satan is not only The Great Deceiver, but also The Greatly Deceived. For Satan said, *"I will ascend into heaven! I will exalt my throne above the stars of God! I will sit on the mountain of assembly, in the far north,"* (Isaiah 14:13b WEB) and the Lord says, *"Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty. You have corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendor,"* (Ezekiel 28:17a WEB).

Though Satan was and continues to be an enemy far beyond our strength, his great pride has left him greatly deceived to the very end, along with all his demonic followers. We should note also that the demonic leaders, Satan, The Beast, and The False Prophet are already cast into the Lake of Fire before the Great White Throne Judgment. So the lame excuses are coming from their demonic underlings just arraigned from Tartarus / Thalassa.

If this explanation does not satisfy your objection, then I have a corresponding question for you. I believe the sheep on the right are the redeemed unbelieving just extracted from the end of their punishment in Hades. But, traditional understanding says that these sheep are those who believed before their death. However, the confirmation of the salvation of believers has *already* happened though faith in Christ many years earlier! Yet these people say, *"37) Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry, and feed you; or thirsty, and give you a drink? 38) When did we see you as a stranger, and take you in; or naked, and clothe you? 39) When did we see you sick, or in prison, and come to you?'"* (Matthew 25:37-39 WEB).

If these people are believers, why are they incredulous about their salvation and ignorant of these basic facts after already spending years of glorious fellowship with Christ? If you are concerned about the lame objections of the goats, you should also be concerned about the objections of these sheep. You could further argue that these sheep cannot be unbelievers because they are praised for doing good. However, these *newly* believing sheep did not yet understand, like we Christians already understand, that we actually serve Christ when serving others. Thus they are amazed that the tiniest good they did is now accepted by the grace of Christ, not that the good outweighed the bad. All these questions are easily answered when we see that these sheep are new born believers just extracted from Hades with their eyes just opened, incredulous over the love of Christ who has also accepted them by his grace.

The redeemed should take warning that our sinful nature is likewise vulnerable to equal deception. We would follow Satan to the very precipice of the Lake of Fire and over the brink if we could! Yet grace will be finally victorious for every single one of Christ's chosen ones. Not one of Christ's chosen can ever fall over the brink!

You Categorize Calvinists too Simply!

I say to myself...

SELF>> *You categorize Calvinists too simply while comparing them with Arminians. For example some Calvinists prefer the language of limited atonement while others prefer the language of particular atonement.*

ME>> Self, that is a very good point that could use clarification.

You are right that not all Calvinists are in agreement about salvation or numerous other Christian doctrines. Many Calvinists advocate infant baptism while others are only for believer's baptism, as an example. In this book I have used the term Calvinist to refer to a Christian who thinks that Christ's atoning sacrifice is only purposed for a subset of mankind and effectively accomplishes salvation for that subset of mankind. These Christians also believe that the remainder of mankind whose sin is not atoned for have no possibility of salvation. Thus the atonement of Christ is limited in both its saving purpose and effect. Let's refer to these guys as *Limited Atonement Calvinists*.

I have already explained in my article, *A House Divided*, that some other Calvinists have attempt to solve the salvation riddle by suggesting that Christ's atonement IS NOT LIMITED in its purpose and is offered "generally" to all. They rightly refuse to swallow the understanding of *Limited Atonement Calvinists* because of verses like I John 2:1-2. However, they still need to explain why they think some human beings go to eternal Hell. So they say that the atonement is general in its purpose, but it IS LIMITED in its effect. Strictly speaking these theologians are not Calvinists. First, their division of the atonement into two dimensions is not supported Biblically. Second, they miss the gospel emphasis that Christ's atonement is definite in its purpose and effect of paying only the sin debt of the people known as "*His People*." The offense of the cross highlighted through the whole New Testament is that Christ came to save his particular people only. So let's refer to these guys as the *Divided Atonement Calvinists*. In fact these guys truly are *divided* for they are further divided into two main understandings. One camp of the *Divided Atonement Calvinists* believes that Christ's atonement is made effective through an individual's *free will* choice of repentance and faith followed by the New Birth. Let's call these guys the *Dishonest Arminians*. The other camp of the *Divided Atonement Calvinists* believes that grace alone effects the New Birth and is followed by faith and repentance. This second group is very difficult to pin down. I know because I was among them! However, if you pin one of them down you will either find a *Waffling Limited Atonement Calvinist* or a *Dishonest Arminian*. Beware the wrestling match.

Okay, what about the *Particular Atonement Calvinists*? Though most Baptists in the United States descend from the Particular Baptist movement, there are very few Particular Baptists that remain theologically orthodox. Most of these groups have migrated back to the General Atonement view with the determining factor of an individual's salvation being the exercise of their *free will* choice of faith. The gospel of grace is lost from their preaching. They are plainly Arminian regardless of the label they give themselves.

So the *Limited Atonement Calvinists* unbiblically restrict the work of Christ. The *Divided Atonement Calvinists* unbiblically divide the work of Christ. And the *General Atonement Arminians* unbiblically add a human supplied condition into the salvation equation. For myself, I have said I am not a Baptist, but a Christian, in keeping with Christ's prayer for unity. Yet IF I were to assign a label to myself I would be a *Particular Atonement Calvinist Baptist*. It seems to me that a person needs to become a Christian before they should be baptized. It also seems to me that the atonement of Christ is neither limited nor divided. However, his atonement is a definite payment for the sins of a particular people. God loves

all mankind in a *special* way. Now I cannot speak for all theologians who would give themselves that label, but at least some have come to the same conclusion as I that Christ's particular people is in fact... all mankind. Yet sadly most of mankind is not aware or refuses to believe that their sins are already paid. They prefer the religion of self-righteousness and man's *free will*. So there is much work to do and the Great Commission is to take this good news to the world!

You might say to me that "*particular*" atonement ultimately means "*limited*." However, that is not true. We are using the word "*particular*" to mean "*special*" and not "*limited*" or "*general*." Jesus does not love his beloved in a simple, general way, but in a very special way. Why do you insist that God's special particular love for his chosen ones requires that his love is then limited to a subset of mankind? Do you have children? Do you have a special, particular love for each of them? John called himself "*the disciple whom Jesus loved*" because Jesus loved him. But that does not mean that Jesus does not love you, me, or all mankind! John's nickname for himself confronts each of us with questions. On what basis can you know that Jesus loves you? Are you confident because of your choice to "*trust*" in Christ or because of his choice to love you from the cross? Are you also a disciple that Jesus loved?

Quit complaining about John's confidence in God's special love for him and begin to rejoice in God's special love for you and for all mankind!

[< You Are Wrong About Matthew 25:31-46!](#)

up

[You Have Compromised All... >](#)

You Have Compromised All...

Another responded...

READER>> Here are some of my thoughts in response. On the surface, you have answered all the questions. It seems having harmonized God's grace with man's faith without compromising His justice. But I think you have compromised all of them. You said "the non-believers will be condemned to Hades as punishment for their unbelief, but will ultimately go to the new heaven due to God's grace." First of all, it is undermining the character of God's grace.

Grace, in my understanding, is unmerited. Consider the prodigal son in Luke 15. When he came back to his father, his father received him out of grace. What if his father let him work for ten years due to his prodigality, and then restored his sonship after his hard work? Is it grace? What would be in that son's mind then? He had been working for ten years before the sonship was restored. Is there something he could boast? Say the unbelievers go to the new heaven eventually, will they have something to boast before God? "Oh yeah, I've only spent less than 100 years sinning on earth, but I have been suffering in Hades for (I don't know, maybe) thousands of years, as punishment. I've got what I deserved. Now you pull me up from Hades and expect me to be thankful?" Certainly when grace is contaminated with "works," even just a teeny tiny bit of it, it is not grace anymore. I don't think God would do this to embarrass Himself, to damage His character, or to undermine His grace.

*ME>> This is an excellent question and a good point to clarify. Punishment in Hades / Hell may not be remedial. Each individual human being is born into sin according to Romans 5:12. Everyone begins with a depraved human nature that ultimately hates God and grace in favor of self-righteousness. Until the Holy Spirit specifically targets an individual for the new birth their heart remains constantly at enmity toward God. Yet, 2 Peter 2:1, 1 John 2:2, and many other verses make it clear that even these unbelievers have been bought and their sins fully paid. God loves them dearly. However, they have not been touched by the Holy Spirit and so their hearts are unchanged and they continue to be wicked men. Hell is a fit destiny for these unregenerate souls who hate God. Furthermore, even the suffering of Hell may not bring about repentance and love toward God. Hell is the home they chose and God gives it to them. Hell may not draw their hearts one inch closer to God. Given the choice between worship of Christ or going to Hell, they have chosen Hell. So time in Hell is not a "work" that earns grace! Instead, Hell is a home fit for the self-righteous who hate grace. Though God loves all mankind very dearly, including the human beings in Hell, no one in Hell has a heart changed to love God in return... at least not yet. So why does God awaken love in some people early in life before suffering great consequences from sin and others later in life after suffering great trials from sin? The prodigal son may have rebelled for 1 year, 10 years or even 20 years. We do not know the length of time he was separated from his father. Yet our father's love remains constant regardless of the length of time we remain in unrepentance. Furthermore, the time we spend in unrepentance (whether in this life or in Hell) is certainly not a "work" that earns grace. Grace cannot be earned. Jesus is Lord of salvation. It is his choice as to who he forgives, a choice he *already* made when he paid the entire sin debt of mankind on the cross. It is also his choice as to when he transforms the heart to receive his love and forgiveness. Why would God let many pass this life into Hell only to change their hearts with grace after death? Simply, God is demonstrating the great patience of his grace according to his wisdom in the lives of depraved humanity. King David had confidence that, if he wound up in Sheol, even there God's love would guide him, Psalm 139. Of course David was a believer so he did not go to Hell. No one transformed by grace will ever say "I've got what I deserved. Now you pull me up from Hades and expect me to*

be thankful?" as you suggest. In fact read about the Great White Throne Judgment yourself in Matthew 25:31-46 and see that instead Jesus graciously credits righteousness to the sheep standing before him, just extracted from Hades. The sheep are both incredulous and grateful. That is the heart of a sheep.

READER>> Revelation 20:12-15 (NASB) "And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

From my study and understanding, the ungodly have been kept in a place of torment and punishment in their spirits, but not joined with a final supernatural body fitted for their punishment in the eternal hell--the lake of fire. It's like a prisoner who hasn't had his trial yet, he's still incarcerated in a jail until his trial at which time he is sent to the penitentiary to serve out his life sentence. The unbelievers are incarcerated now in a place of torment away from God. They will be brought before the tribunal of God, they will be given a new, resurrected body fit for their eternal incarceration in the final hell called the lake of fire. I don't get any indication that God raises them up in order to bring them into the new heaven. This is what Jesus called "the resurrection of damnation," or "the resurrection of judgment" in John 5:29. Or "the resurrection of the wicked" in Acts 24:15.

ME>> Yes, exactly. John 5:29 and Acts 24:15 are also speaking about the Great White Throne Judgment. But where is your Scriptural support to prove that even one unbelieving human extracted from Hades will then be cast into the Lake of Fire? Matthew 25:41 says that the eternal fire is "prepared for the Devil and his angels." Revelation 20:15 says that the final determination is not conditioned on man's faith, but on the ledger of the Book of Life. You seem confident that your name is there, but on what basis? I am also confident that your name is there, but only on the basis of grace. Do you think "faith" is the condition that added your name to the book? Then that would be a human work / condition and not grace. Do you think Christ paid effectively for your sins and not effectively for the sins of all mankind? Holding to either of those views puts you in jeopardy of the destiny of those in 2 Peter 2:1 who deny Jesus as Lord of our salvation. You are right that the unredeemed will be united with a body to suffer eternally in the Lake of Fire. However, Isaiah 66:22-24 makes it clear twice that all mankind will worship God and all mankind will look with loathe upon the bodies of the wicked. Who are the wicked unredeemed? If all mankind is looking upon them, then it cannot be mankind! Instead, Satan and his demons are the unredeemed cast into the Lake of Fire united with loathsome bodies. All Mankind has been redeemed through the death of Christ, but not Satan and his angels.

READER>> God is the God of grace, love and mercy. He is also the God of wrath and justice. He has to be consistent with His judgment. God's justice does not mean He will just send those who rejected His Son into Hades for "temporary" (compared with eternal) punishments.

ME>> Yes, exactly. I whole heartedly agree that God's character is balanced perfectly with love, justice, and grace. These excellent attributes cannot and will not be compromised in any way. In fact that is my main point! The wrath of God has been fully satisfied for the sins of both believing and unbelieving mankind. The justice of God has already been met for all mankind and thus all mankind must be saved -- not because of any condition we could meet, but because of the condition Christ already met. Since justice has been served for all mankind, all mankind must be saved! 1 John 2:2 could not be more clear that atonement has been made independently of any condition that man could ever meet for both the believing and the unbelieving. Romans 5:10 also makes it clear that we were reconciled to God while we were yet enemies. The reconciliation of men to God was accomplished by the grace of

Christ alone. Many Christians talk about the "finished" work of Christ. I believe his work is truly finished for all mankind and evangelism is simply inviting people to believe it. Yet, 2 Peter 2:1 does make it clear that those who reject their sovereign Lord will suffer for the duration in Hell / Hades even though their sins are paid for.

READER>> I think this might be the key question: You have asked, "What is the extent of God's grace? Or what is the extent of the atonement?" Based on my limited understanding, the extent of God's grace is unlimited. He COULD surely save everyone if He wills. But the effect of the atonement is limited. It only goes to the elect. God offers salvation to whomever he wants to please Himself for His own glory. "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." He is not doing this to please us. Neither do we have the right to question Him. And it is not done according to anyone's understanding. It is not our job to figure it out, nor do I think we can understand God's infinite mind with our tiny brains. What I have done, and what I will be praying for you also, is to be comfortable with our inability not to get it, to stop fighting it, and to be content not to get it. We are just the clay in His hands after all. He has the right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use.

ME>> You suggest that God's grace is unlimited in potential, but limited in effect. Perhaps you have been talking to some Regular Baptists. I assert that if you believe that Christ's atonement has both potential and effective components then you have also received a salvation that waffles between potential and effective. There is nothing potential about the grace of God in any way whatsoever. God's love and grace is determined and set upon his chosen people and he will not be thwarted. I have to completely refuse your offer to allow question marks and doubt into the salvation equation. Why would I ever do that? Instead I invite you to believe that your sins and the sins of all mankind are fully paid. Why not put both your feet solidly down on the rock of Christ? You point out that God says, "...he has mercy on whom he desires, and he hardens whom he desires," Romans 9:18 (WEB). That statement is true. Most of mankind is not chosen to believe that their sins are already fully paid for. Their existence is to be pitied while they attempt to hide their sin with religion. One could argue with perfect reason from the Scripture that the sins of mankind are fully paid and rather than joyfully rest in the fact they will never let go of their self-righteousness salvation. They will never let go unless the Holy Spirit gives them a heart of flesh. They are dead men clinging to life preservers made of lead. Their hearts remain unrepentant and self-righteous. God has forgiven them from the cross, but not yet given them the mercy of repentance, Romans 2:4.

READER>> You have said, "If the atonement is limited, then you CANNOT know that the atonement applies to you." I receive it by faith. And you asked, "How can you prove it?" Salvation can be verified by works, as James taught in his epistle. Thus it proves the atonement applies to me. If you are not satisfied with this answer, then I think I CANNOT prove it. I'll just trust the Lord. It'll get me nowhere if I try to prove it. You asked, "Are the sins of a Christian forgiven before or after his/her repentance? If it happens after conversion, then faith itself is work." My answer would be: No! Faith is not work. You stated, "If it happens before repentance, then it applies to everyone." I cannot agree. I don't see any indication that they are related that way. I think "the price has been paid" is not equal to "everyone has received forgiveness." The former is God's grace; the latter is man's responsibility. This goes back to your question "Since the price has been paid, do I receive my forgiveness before or after my repentance?" I don't know. I don't think one can define WHEN it happened. It is God's miracle.

ME>> Works are evidence of the transformed life and Christian faith, that is true. However, works can never prove that Christ atoned for you and not another. The great transaction at the cross of Christ is independent of all conditions anyone could offer and is proved to vicariously apply to all mankind because Christ became a man and thus is the new Federal head of all mankind, Romans 5:12-21. So yes, works are evidence of having received God's love, but they are not evidence that God loves you in the first place. Think carefully about

that. God loved us while we were still his enemies. Biblical faith is the result of being born again, but *"faith"* that claims to be the condition that secures God's love is anti-grace and a work. You are right that *"the price has been paid"* is not equal to *"everyone has received forgiveness."* The price has been paid, but not everyone has received forgiveness. All Christ's chosen are forgiven, but most continue to stubbornly refuse forgiveness in favor of self-righteousness. They hold to Peter's rebellious words, *"you shall never wash me."* And if these rebellious continue in unbelief they will be sentenced to Hades. You say I asked *"Since the price has been paid, do I receive my forgiveness before or after my repentance?"* To clarify, my question to the religious is *"are we forgiven before or after we ask for forgiveness?"* The answer is most certainly before. Jesus prayed for our forgiveness from the cross and there was not one person asking.

You quote me saying *"If it happens before repentance, then it applies to everyone."* I have shown you the verses that say Christ died for all. I have also shown you that the very nature of how Christ paid for sin, that is becoming a man, demands that his death apply to all mankind. He was not a divided man on the cross paying for a division of mankind's sin. He was a whole man divided for all our sin. Are you concerned that I believe if Christ paid for one, then he must have paid for all? Consider Romans 11:16 (WEB), *"If the first fruit is holy, so is the lump. If the root is holy, so are the branches."* The Scriptures confirm that if the part is holy, then the whole is holy as well.

READER>> You asked, *"Is your faith a pen or glasses?"* Obviously it is not a pen, I didn't write my name in the book of life with my faith. It's not glasses either. I still cannot read the book, or even see the book. And you asked, *"How and when were those names written into the book of life?"* Based on Paul's teaching, they were written down there by God before the foundation of the world. *"Why some are there and some are not?"* I don't know. Let God decide. The same as the potter and clay relationship. *"How do you know that your name is in the book?"* If you are asking how I can physically see my name in the book. Well, I can't. But I know I have eternal life, so it's gotta be there. 1 John 5:13 *"These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may KNOW that you have eternal life."*

ME>> I am glad you have confidence that you have eternal life. My goal in teaching about the gospel of Jesus Christ and his grace is nothing less than to help others have rock solid confidence in God's love for them and all God's people. However, your objections to my primary thesis expose that you do not have both feet squarely on the rock of Christ.

READER>> *It seems to me that you are undermining the role of faith in salvation. The Scriptures clearly teach on God's Sovereignty (Election) and Man's Responsibility (Faith). Let me borrow John MacArthur's term and call it the "Twin Truths" here. And the Scriptures go back and forth from divine sovereignty to human responsibility. They always run parallel, and they will never intersect.*

The grace of God is sufficient for all men. But only those He chose receive salvation. In other words, the extent of the atonement is universal. It is available to all. But the effect of the atonement only goes to the elect, based on His purpose according to His choice. He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.

On one hand, God has His "irresistible grace," on the other hand He holds every one responsible for his/her own belief or unbelief. What is the role of faith then? How do we harmonize it with God's "irresistible grace?" The answer I found is there is no way to harmonize these two things without destroying one or the other, or even both. I just need to believe in both.

The fact that we don't understand how it works only proves that we're less than what we think we should be. It doesn't say anything about God. Our inability to harmonize those things is a reflection of your fallenness, and my fallenness. They can't be harmonized in our puny human mind, compared to the infinite, vast, limitless mind of God.

1 Corinthians 13:9 "For we know in part and we prophesy in part." We are limited to what God has revealed, and we are limited by the fact that a human mind cannot understand a superhuman God in fullness. Systemizing God is very difficult because we don't have all of the information, we are trying to put the pieces together and make conclusions without fullness of revelation. Romans 11:33-34 "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor?" His ways are past finding out. We are always dealing with a part of the truth in terms of its total.

ME>> We agree on much. Faith is essential for salvation from a self-righteous heart, for salvation from sin, for salvation from Hell. Faith is essential to be a Christian. Faith is essential to be graced with the title "God's Child." Faith is essential to be reconciled to God... that is for our hearts to cease being at enmity toward God. The point that we disagree upon may be small, but it is critical. Faith does absolutely nothing to reconcile us to God... for his part. Faith does not get Jesus to die on the cross for us or get Jesus to decide to love sinners. He did that without our asking. He did that in spite of Peter's objections! God loved us first! That is the heart of grace. God's heart never had or will have condemnation toward us. And if he never condemns us then there is no judge with authority to damn us to the Lake of Fire. God loved us while we were yet sinners. That is the good news. We do not have to do anything to get God to love us. And if he loves us at all, he loves us completely.

In the end I think we have different definitions of saving faith. Unfortunately we cannot share the same joy until you let go of "faith" as a condition to God's love and instead begin to trust in Christ's unconditional love. You point out that we "know in part." That is true. However, the gospel of Jesus Christ does not reveal "part" of God's love for mankind, but the gospel reveals the full extent of God's love. The gospel does not conceal, but reveals. The willing sacrifice of God's only son proves that God loves us to the maximum! The love of God for all mankind is fully manifest in Christ's willingness to die for all mankind, while we were yet sinners. I hope that I can continue to be patient with your resistance to this good news.

READER>> *But what I do know is: if one doesn't BELIEVE, he/she is NOT BORN AGAIN, thus he/she is NOT a CHILD OF GOD, and could NOT inherit the kingdom of God. One cannot go to heaven if he/she cannot inherit the kingdom of God.*

ME>> I agree. Those who reject grace and remain unbelieving will not be in paradise when they die, but will be punished in Hades. Their hearts remain unchanged by grace and so Hades will be a fit destiny for their souls. They are not sons of God while in unrepentant unbelief. Yet, because the death of Christ has satisfied justice for their sin, the grace of God must and will prove victorious in the end, even for them. These wicked unbelieving humans will be extracted from Hades and transformed by grace to receive grace with gratitude, Matthew 25:31-46. They will be sons of God. I take sides with King David who believed that the love of God continues even for those in Hades, Psalm 139. I also take sides with Jesus who said that even "...the gates of Hades will not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18b WEB).

READER>> *1 John 2:2 says "and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world." I think it can be explained in this way. The extent of the atonement is SUFFICIENT for each individual. But the effect ONLY goes to the elect. Besides, "the whole world" in 1 John 2:2 would fit the rest of the Scriptures better if it is taken as "every nation, every race," instead of "every individual in this world."*

2 Peter 2:1 "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves." In what sense are the false teachers bought? The same as in 1 John 2:2. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross was a SUFFICIENT purchase price to redeem all men. The price has been paid for all in

terms of availability. In that sense they have been bought. Still, only the elect will be saved.

ME>> When you do evangelism do you tell people that Christ might love them or might have died for them? To say that the atonement is only sufficient implies that it only potentially satisfies the wrath of God against the sinner. If the atonement is only potential then what ingredient is needed to activate the atonement and make it effective? If the sacrifice of Jesus was only sufficient or potentially sufficient to pay for the sins of the false teachers, then on what basis can we say it effectively paid for our sins? The Scriptures say that we were bought and that they were bought. If one is only potential and the other effective, then on what basis can anyone claim with certainty that their sins were effectively paid? On the basis of their "faith?" Then the object of their "faith" is their "faith" and it falls on itself! Their "faith" is no longer on Christ, but "faith in faith." You must agree that a person could be deceived and not have true faith. If that is true then how can you tell if your faith is real and has reached the effective part of Jesus' atonement? This is all silly. Jesus has atoned for the sins of all mankind, period. That is where my faith rests and I invite you and everyone to confess the same.

READER>> *1 John 2:27 "As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him." I think John was rebuking "those who are trying to deceive you" in verse 26, and their human wisdom. He was not talking about pastors, teachers, or shepherds of the flocks. It doesn't make any sense to me that John, as a teacher himself, was writing to the Christians in Asia Minor to tell them they didn't need anyone, including himself, to teach them. I hope Satan did not use this verse to deceive you.*

ME>> John is warning the believers about those who are trying to deceive. Deceivers could come from anywhere. How can you say that he is not talking about a pastor or teacher? Certainly not all pastors or teachers are deceivers, but just as certainly some are both deceived and deceiving. You quoted 2 Peter 2:1 above which says exactly that! The point of this verse is that a believer should never turn off the "mind of Christ" he has been given and allow another person to serve as the authoritative interpreter of Scripture. You should not believe what I or anyone says because you trust another person's interpretation. Instead you should read the Bible, listen to the thoughts of others if the Lord leads, but most importantly pray and ask God to show you the truth. Only the Holy Spirit is the authoritative interpreter of Scripture. You may disagree with me and me with you. Thankfully the grace of God has that covered. However, there is no human being that can ever stand as the referee to judge the match. Who would we choose? Again, the Holy Spirit is our teacher.

READER>> *In addition, I think the argument that one need a statement in one verse to prove a point is weak, because there are many truths in the Bible that are indicated to us by the totality of Scripture rather than any one given statement.*

ME>> That is a good point. Did I only cite one verse in my book? Here is another one that is an encouragement to believers... 1 Timothy 4:10 (WEB), *"For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we have set our trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe."* It is odd that the Holy Spirit would say "especially." He says it this way because all mankind is loved by God and already reconciled to him and guaranteed a seat in the New Heaven and Earth. Believers are especially saved because they have received God's love and love him in return *now*. However, unbelievers, though already forgiven at the cross, have not yet received forgiveness and do not yet love God. Also believers have transformed hearts and are saved from punishment in Hades, whereas unbelievers will be punished in Hades.

READER>> *Salvation is by grace ALONE, through faith ALONE, in Christ ALONE, and to the glory of God ALONE. God chose to save some for His own glory. Often we think God as what we think He should be instead of "I am who I am." And we think God works in a way that*

we could comprehend. Instead, we should trust Him in everything, "and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed."

ME>> You echo the rally cry of the reformation to me. Those are powerful words, yet they are claimed by both Arminian and Calvinistic Christians. As for Luther and his great statements about salvation by faith alone, did he teach us whether faith is receiving God's love already guaranteed or the condition that activates God's love? I don't know what he thought, but you and I have come to different conclusions about what saving faith is, about what Hell is and who goes there, and about the Lake of Fire and who is saved from it. You say that I have compromised all, but in fact it is you who has compromised the meaning of the word "all." You add condition to the unconditional love of God and so compromise salvation that is ALL of grace. You also limit the extent and effectiveness of Christ's atonement which paid for ALL. If the Lord changes your mind you will be a most dear brother to me. By the way, you might be tempted to simply choose conventional understandings that surround you instead of my unconventional view. However, history reminds us that truth is not determined by conventions or even the majority. Perhaps if my idea was totally alone in history or even alone today I would abandon it myself. Yet a Google search of "*Victorious Gospel*" and "*Greater Grace*" will show you that many are rejoicing in this understanding.

[< You Categorize Calvinists too Simply!](#)

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[Your Beliefs Destroy Christian Friendships! >](#)

Your Beliefs Destroy Christian Friendships!

One friend said...

READER>> Your beliefs destroy Christian friendships!

ME>> This is the most important objection of every objection raised to against my happy thesis that **Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind**. Certainly of all possible concerns, people and relationship are the most important concern. Yet the objection is raised that my beliefs have strained and even broken relationships with dear friends and churches. So how can that be good? Is my proposed thesis harmful? Shall we just conclude that this is an inevitable part of life under the sun? Shall we even conclude it is an unexplained part of Jesus' call to discipleship? After all Jesus did say...

34) Don't think that I came to send peace on the earth. I didn't come to send peace, but a sword. 35) For I came to set a man at odds against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. 36) A man's foes will be those of his own household. 37) He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me isn't worthy of me. 38) He who doesn't take his cross and follow after me, isn't worthy of me.

Matthew 10:34-38 (WEB)

Is my thesis and even Jesus himself the promoter of disregard for the importance of people and relationships? Why would Jesus say these things? Is Jesus simply a trouble maker or divisive person? With a very superficial glance some might think so. However, consider that Paul said,

Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

2 Timothy 3:12 (WEB)

So we are reminded that not all is equal in this world. There are right and wrong ideas, and right and wrong ways to live that are in conflict with one another. The decision to believe right ideas and live right ways will offend those who chose wrong ideas and wrong ways to live. But you may counter that you do not know or nobody can know what is right or wrong in these matters. Certainly there are some things that we cannot know, while there are others things that we can be very confident about through God's word.

So the facts remain that the Bible claims to speak the truth about God, man, and salvation. The fact also remains that ideas are very important because they affect our relationships with people and our understanding of the value of people. And the fact remains that people often disagree, even to the point of breaking fellowship.

So is there a reason that justifies introducing ideas that could cause conflict between people? Is it right to jeopardize fellowship with a disagreement over truth? Wouldn't it be better to navigate the waters of conflict with compromise and negotiation in order to be at peace with all people?

Regarding painful circumstance Jesus records,

1) Therefore let's also, seeing we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily entangles us,

and let's run with perseverance the race that is set before us, 2) looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3) For consider him who has endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, that you don't grow weary, fainting in your souls.

Hebrews 12:1-3 (WEB)

Jesus did not enjoy pain for the sake of pain or conflict for the sake of conflict. He "*endured the cross*," but he did not like it! Instead he chose to endure the cross because of a greater goal beyond the cross, the joy set before him. And what was the joy set before him? The great victory he would win through paying the price for all mankind's sin, the awesome prize of the salvation of all mankind. Christ gently and resolutely held to the truth, at times offending every spectrum, from pagan to Pharisee, even to the loss of his life, because he chose to love us all. So is there a reason to endure conflict, jeopardize relationships, and even destroy friendships?

Yes, most certainly!

When Satan's lies or our hypocrisy obscures or ruins the much greater goal of God's love expressed for all mankind, then there is a reason to rock the boat. When relationships exclude God and the truth, they cannot endure for very long, and then there is a reason to tear down and rebuild on a solid foundation. When relationships are not built on the foundation of God's love for all mankind, then you will find you are "*friends*" with a nest of blind hypocrites... that will be disbanded.

So yes, Jesus said his ministry would bring a sword of division, but he also promises,

39) He who seeks his life will lose it; and he who loses his life for my sake will find it. 40) He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me. 41) He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward. He who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. 42) Whoever gives one of these little ones just a cup of cold water to drink in the name of a disciple, most certainly I tell you he will in no way lose his reward.

Matthew 10:39-42 (WEB)

Broken relationships are not Christ's goal, but exactly the opposite! He is working with self-centered hypocritical unbelieving sinners to build a self-less happy loving family with himself and mankind as the main ingredients. It is too big a challenge for us, but not for him. Meanwhile, he knows that things will get messy. So he invites us to join him in showing love to others even in small ways, like simply giving a cup of cold water to another, in His name. The cup of cold water I have for you and for any that will listen is simply this...

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind.

I think you can see for yourself that this is a faithful message, the good news of the Bible. So the only relationships threatened by this truth are with those who disagree saying that God does not love all mankind. If friendships are destroyed over that good news, then of course that is sad. Thankfully, however, because of grace, God's patience, and repentance, it will not be sad forever. Forever friendship and fellowship is coming for *ALL* God's people, with God our Heavenly Father at the head of the table!

Find courage my friend to hold up the light!

Your Reasoning is Backwards!

AGAIN>> *You are not thinking right. Your reasoning is backwards!*

ME>> Actually, both the Arminian and the Calvinist are guilty of *reasoning from their end backward* to their conclusions about salvation. They both begin by saying that it is clear that unbelieving humans are sentenced to eternal damnation. They rightly see that many passages do speak about punishment for men after death as I also agree. Yet because of misguidance, ignorance, fear, or worse, they are quick to conclude that the punishment after death is eternal. (It is certainly a challenge because the English New Testament has mistranslated the word "*aion*." Yet not even this mistranslation should stop a believer in his pursuit of the truth!) They then reason backwards into their respective corners.

The Calvinist foolishly claims that Christ did not die for all mankind, reasoning that otherwise people would not be in eternal Hell. The Arminian similarly boasts that his *free will* made the difference in his salvation, reasoning that this must be the condition to God's unconditional love. I fully understand this way of thinking because sadly I thought it myself! Even more curious is that these two guys get along with each other well enough from their different corners and with their different salvation recipes, as long as someone else is going to eternal damnation other than them. This backwards reasoning is foolish and has left us in morally bankrupt corners filled with fear and hypocrisy, devoid of grace. Lord willing, this fight will be brought to the center of the ring so that the truth of God's unconditional love for all will be defended.

If we would be willing to *reason forward from the cross* with the knowledge we have of Jesus, then we would see with open eyes and be willing to break with graceless tradition. Reasoning forward from the cross, we know that our sins were paid *while* we were yet enemies of God. *Free will*, even if there is such a thing, has nothing to do whatsoever with our forgiveness! How could it if we were loved and forgiven while we were yet enemies? Why is *free will* praised when it is dead in the casket and six feet under? The religion of *free will* persists because of fear and self-righteousness.

However, reasoning forward from the cross, if we claim to believe that our sins are forgiven, then we already know that the sins of all mankind are forgiven by the same blood of Jesus! Reasoning forward from the cross, we know that Jesus became a man, and died in the flesh for the sins of all mankind. He did not become part of a man or even half of a man to die for part of mankind. He became a whole and perfect man to atone for the sins of all mankind.

Why is the supposed "*limited atonement*" still ruling men with fear when it plainly contradicts Scripture? The religion of "*limited atonement*" persists because of fear and hypocrisy. However, reasoning forward from the cross we have great reason to question the translation of "*eternal*" and learn from solid study that "*aion*" means "*eon*" or "*age*" or even "*entirety*" or "*whole life*." So it is true that we are warned that those who reject grace are *not* saved from spending a term in Hades, unless they repent. Yet the grace of God *will* be victorious even for those punished in Hades. Want more Biblical proof?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:55 (properly translated by WEB), "*Death, where is your sting? Hades, where is your victory?*" The victorious grace of Jesus Christ has defeated both death *and* Hades! Let's reason forward from the good news to the glorious future that awaits the redeemed people of God!

*'Come now, and let's reason together,' says Yahweh:
'Though your sins be as scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow.*

*Though they be red like crimson,
they shall be as wool.'*

Isaiah 1:18 (WEB)

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[Your Thoughts on Matthews Meaning of 'Aionian Fire?'](#) >

Your Thoughts on Matthews Meaning of 'Aionian Fire?'

QUESTION>> [How do you explain] the connection between the eonian fire prepared for the devil and his angels and the eonian fire of Gehenna (the same Aramaic phraseology is used in Matthew's gospel about them both, "the fire the eonian?" This essentially identifies the two.

ME>> You note that Matthew uses the exact same phrase, "*the fire the aionian*" in Matthew 18:8 and also 25:41 which appears to identify these as the same destiny. Yet Matthew 18:8 is clearly a warning to human unbelievers; and I have proposed that Matthew 25:41 is speaking of a different destiny reserved only for the Devil and his angels. Actually it is traditional theology that attempts to read any expression containing "*fire*" and "*aionian*" as coined only to mean "*eternal Hell*." However, the word "*fire*" is used 73 times in the New Testament with meanings including judgment, purification, literal fire, and symbolic fire. Download a study guide at DGJC.ORG/OPTIMISM/PYR. Christian Universalists, have also observed that the word "*aionian*" has a rich meaning including "*age*" and also "*complete*" or "*entire*." This adjective should not be understood to coin a particular eternal destiny. For example, Thomas Talbott translates "*aionian*" in II Thessalonians 1:9 as "*complete destruction*" at the Lord's return which is the most faithful to the context. Thus we should learn from ourselves that just because the exact same phrase, "*the fire the aionian*," is found in both Matthew 18:8 and 25:41, this does not mean that this phrase is in fact a capitalized proper noun. Other Scripture teaches us that both Hades and the Lake of Fire include "*fire*" judgments, yet we know these are different places. So the addition of the qualifier "*aionian*" does not then require that Matthew 18:8 and 25:41 are the same place. In fact in Matthew 25:41, the additional expression, "*prepared for the Devil and his angels*," is best understood to qualify that "*the fire the aionian*" in Matthew 25:41 is in fact a different location than Matthew 18:8. See my previous article, [II Thessalonians 1:6-10](#).

QUESTION>> You allow that the Gehenna warning isn't a bluff to frighten people whom God does not even remotely intend even temporarily putting into the eonian fire of Gehenna; but you still regard the eonian fire of Gehenna as the fire in hades (for good reasons I agree) and the eonian fire for the devil and his angels as being a different punishment than the lake of fire.

ME>> Yes, that is my conclusion. I understand that Jesus does not merely threaten, but warns that if his unbelieving audience does not repent that they will suffer the complete destruction of their earthly ambitions, 2 Thessalonians 1:9, as well as suffer the fires of Hades, Luke 16:23. Hades is the "*aionian fires*" that are the netherworld judgment of wicked mankind. The word "*Gehenna*" is used twelve times in the New Testament and in each case mankind's judgment is in view. So the "*Gehenna*" reference is either the destruction from sin's consequences in this life or the subsequent judgment in Hades. The Lake of Fire, however, is the "*aionian fires*" that are prepared for the Devil and his angels.

QUESTION>> The defense that Christ switches from addressing the devil and his angels to explaining to the redeemed unbelievers (who had unknowingly been faithful) that this fire is "prepared for the devil and his angels," seems forced to me (though you acknowledge the awkwardness).

ME>> The awkwardness is no greater than the traditional understanding that the Sheep on Jesus' right are Christians. How could it even be possible that we Christians who already understand our salvation would corporately stand before his throne with these doubts? Consider that if the Sheep and Goat Judgment is synonymous with the final Great White

Throne Judgment, then we Christians have already been Raptured to meet Christ in the air, have been re-united with all the deceased saints, and have been given our glorified bodies, all before the Sheep and Goat judgment. Do we think that after these tangible beginnings of eternity that we will then stand before Christ's throne with revived doubts? Hardly. So if the Sheep on the right are not us, then who are they? Revelation 20:5 makes it clear that unbelievers are raised when the thousand years are ended. Revelation 20:13 makes it clear that Hades is emptied of its inhabitants, unbelieving mankind, after the thousand years to stand before Christ's throne. Jesus already made it clear that the gates of Hades would not prevail against his work in Matthew 16:18. Paul also made it clear that Hades will not have the victory in 1 Corinthians 15:55. The Sheep on the right are the rebellious unbelieving elect, safely extracted from Hades and finally given grace to receive their salvation.

Then who are the Goats on Jesus' left? Traditional theology and even many forms of Christian Universalism understand these people to be unbelieving humanity. However, again II Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 teach us that certain fallen angels are currently being held for judgment on that Great Day. The Sheep and Goat Judgment and the Great White Throne Judgment are the excellent candidate for the Great Day of judgment for these fallen angels. In fact, even the language of Sheep and Goats fits quite naturally with a group of Christ's subjects containing both man and demon. See this article for even further proof, [Fallen Angels at The Great White Throne Judgment?](#)

You do make a good point that my earlier proposal is awkward, that the phrase "*prepared for the Devil and his angels*" was not addressed to the demons, but was commentary to the Sheep. So instead, perhaps it is not awkward at all to hear Jesus saying the entire phrase to the demons themselves. Satan is already cast into the Lake of Fire at this point and so Jesus points to the Goats on his left, the Devil's angels, the demons, and says, "*Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels,*" (Matthew 25:41b WEB). My original article on this question is titled, [You Are Wrong About Matthew 25:31-46!](#)

QUESTION>> [Also your understanding of the Sheep and Goat Judgment solves one problem, but introduces another. You continue to break the parallelism, but differently. With your understanding] now the parable is contrasting the surprise that those who don't even know they are serving Christ shall be accepted, [contrasted] with what everyone everywhere already believed -- that the devil and his angels will be going into the eonian fire prepared for the Devil and his angels. Even those surprised to have been serving Christ don't need that explained to them; certainly the apostles don't, who had been warned just previously once again as often throughout Christ's ministry, including back in that other saying about "the fire the eonian" that those chosen to be chief servants of Christ might still be dreadfully punished for their rebellious abuses. What Christ thinks they need is, by all prior evidence, emphasized warnings that they had better not regard themselves as inherently safe from punishment!

ME>> We are both agreed that Christ has been warning his audience repeatedly that grave punishment awaits those who do not repent. Some of the challenge in comparing our interpretations is that you hold to a pre-Millennial return of Christ, while I hold that the thousand year epoch is the present church age. Also you hold that mankind is punished or purified in the Lake of Fire with the final salvation of mankind beyond that, while I hold that all mankind's salvation is realized at the Great White Throne Judgment with the Lake of Fire reserved for the Devil and angels alone. I discuss these differences further in my article, [Is Revelation 21-22 About The Church, The Last Age, or Eternity?](#) Unfortunately these differences may cause us to mix apples and oranges at times in our conversation. My understanding is that Christ warns unbelieving mankind of punishment in Hades, but the believing also trust that mankind is exempt from the Lake of Fire which is prepared for the Devil and his angels. You are right that the Apostles did not need these things explained to them for I am confident that they recognized the salvation of all mankind. They also recognized that Satan is the archenemy of God and mankind, Ephesians 6:10-20. However, I do not think you are right to assume that the unbelieving acknowledge the existence of

Satan. Furthermore, non-Christians certainly do not believe that our election to grace has saved all mankind, even though we have all sinned. Nor do unbelievers know that Satan, the Father of Lies, and his demons are damned to the Lake of Fire. The contrast between the destiny of the Sheep and the destiny of the Goats in Matthew 25:31-46 is an excellent education in grace for all of us.

QUESTION>> Your appeal to the lack of definite articles in Revelation 14 when speaking of human followers of the Beast, compared to later statements about the Devil and his angels being punished into the eons of the eons, is not going to carry much weight with anyone who understands that the omission of direct articles does not necessarily involve such a distinction. There is certainly nothing conceptually obvious about a difference between "into eons of eons" and "into the eons of the eons".

ME>> I beg to differ. The first obvious conceptual difference is that Hades and the Lake of Fire are different locations employed in different ages for different purposes. Revelation 20:14 (WEB) makes this clear because after Hades is emptied it is then thrown into the Lake of Fire empty of all inhabitants, ***"Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire."*** Again, Hades and the Lake of Fire are different places with different purposes. We have already shown that Jesus warns unbelieving mankind that they will be punished in ***"the fire the aionian"*** in Matthew 18:8, which I understand to be Hades. However, Jesus also teaches us that there is also a related but different place, ***"the fire the aionian"*** that is qualified as being ***"prepared for the Devil and his angels"*** which I propose is the Lake of Fire. So since there are two distinct places of punishment, it is quite reasonable to expect that there would also be a distinction in the reference to the time spent there. Apparently Hades has served as the place to punish unbelieving mankind since the beginning of Creation and will continue to serve in that capacity until it is no longer needed after the Great White Throne Judgment. So Revelation 14:11 speaks appropriately about the ***"ages and ages"*** of punishment suffered by mankind for their unbelief in Hades. However, Revelation 20:10, highlights a particular time frame, ***"The Ages of The Ages"*** of the Lake of Fire. This age is distinct as the last Biblical age and is emphasized by the Holy Spirit with the definite article, ***"The."*** A. E. Knoch also highlights this observation, though I part ways with a number of his conclusions. Perhaps my A-Millennial church age understanding of the thousand year epoch helps me to fit the puzzle pieces in a way that highlights the observation of the definite article in Revelation 20:10. My proposed model of understanding sees Revelation 14:11 as speaking to the first century audience warning them that those who follow Satan or worship Rome or continue to follow the Old Covenant will be punished in Hades. Of course unbelievers committing similar sins since then are in similar grave danger! Revelation 20:10 then speaks to Christians through the whole church age warning us that Satan's work is not finished, but that one day, praise God, he will be finally damned to the Lake of Fire for the last age, ***"The Ages of The Ages."*** Also at that time unbelieving mankind is released from Hades to finally receive grace and salvation. My original article on this point is, [Forever Is Not Forever? You Still Gotta Be Kidding Me!](#)

These observations have been building a grander storyline in my understanding. The story began so many thousands of years ago with our parents, Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden. Satan invaded our innocent landscape, leading us away from our Heavenly Father. God punished Adam, Eve, and all their children since then, for we have all eaten the forbidden fruit. However, God also promised that deliverance would come from the seed of the woman, her child Jesus, and that one day the serpent's head would be crushed. Jesus crushed Satan's work at the cross and is now finishing the job, making his enemies into a footstool. The final Revelation of Jesus Christ at the end of the New Testament is given to prophecy the fulfillment of the promise given so long ago in the Garden. We look forward to the final deliverance of mankind from sin and punishment with every tear wiped away in the City of God and with the dragon, Satan, and his demons damned to the Lake of Fire.

Come Lord Jesus!

< Your Reasoning is Backwards!

up

Your Thought is that Daniel 12:1-4 is
the Final Judgment? >

Your Thought is that Daniel 12:1-4 is the Final Judgment?

QUESTION>> *Your thought is that Daniel 12:1-4 is the final judgment?*

ME>> Yes, I have proposed that Matthew 25:31-46, Daniel 12:1-4, and Revelation 20:11-15 are all the same event, the final Great White Throne judgment. I have already made a case for this in my articles [Daniel 12:1-4](#) and [Yes, but Even Harder Questions!](#)

Yet Bill Saxton's book *Daniel's Prophecies of Covenant Change* makes a strong case that the King of North in Daniel 11 is Herod the Great which places elements of Daniel 12 into the first century rather than into the future as I have proposed. Also the prophesied history of the Kings of the North and the South in Daniel 11 do not seem expansive enough to cover the entire history from Daniel's day to our future. My initial review of Saxton's thoughts can be found in my article, [Daniel 12:1-4, Further Reflection](#).

Bible commentators and even Bible translators are divided on their understanding of many of Daniel's prophecies, especially Daniel 12. Saxton leans far toward a Preterist interpretation of Daniel arguing that most if not all of Daniel's prophecies address the First Advent of Christ and the change from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. However, Saxton does stop short of Full Preterism holding that the Bible does prophecy the final return of Christ yet in our future.

The challenge in understanding Daniel 12 is assigning the timing to these events. As mentioned, Saxton makes a good case that Daniel's earlier prophecies primarily address events leading up to the time of Christ and the change from the Old to the New Covenant. Daniel 12:1 then begins, "*At that time*" making a strong chronological connection between Daniel 11, speaking about Herod the Great, and Daniel 12.

1) "At that time Michael will stand up, the great prince who stands for the children of your people; and there will be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time. At that time your people will be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. 2) Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. 3) Those who are wise will shine as the brightness of the expanse. Those who turn many to righteousness will shine as the stars forever and ever. 4) But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end. Many will run back and forth, and knowledge will be increased." 5) Then I, Daniel, looked, and behold, two others stood, one on the river bank on this side, and the other on the river bank on that side. 6) One said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, "How long will it be to the end of these wonders?" 7) I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by him who lives forever that it will be for a time, times, and a half; and when they have finished breaking in pieces the power of the holy people, all these things will be finished. 8) I heard, but I didn't understand. Then I said, "My lord, what will be the outcome of these things?" 9) He said, "Go your way, Daniel; for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end. 10) Many will purify themselves, and make themselves white, and be refined; but the wicked will do wickedly; and none of the wicked will understand; but those who are wise will understand. 11) "From the time that the continual burnt offering is taken away, and the abomination that makes

desolate set up, there will be one thousand two hundred ninety days. 12) Blessed is he who waits, and comes to the one thousand three hundred thirty-five days. 13) "But go your way until the end; for you will rest, and will stand in your inheritance at the end of the days."

Daniel 12:1-13 (WEB)

However, as we read Daniel 12 we see that there are elements that also seem to point beyond Christ's First Advent to the final Great White Throne judgment, still in our history future. Daniel 12:1 mentions a destiny determining "**book**" which parallels the Lamb's Book of Life in Revelation 20:15. Daniel 12:2 is most easily understood to reference the resurrection of the deceased paralleled in Matthew 25:32, 1 Corinthians 15:12-58, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, and Revelation 20:11-15. Daniel 12:4 mentions the "**time of the end**," but is this the end of the Old Covenant at Christ's First Advent or the end of this present world at Christ's Second Advent? Daniel 12:8 with Daniel's lack of understanding also parallels Matthew 24:15 and the exhortation to understand.

The Amplified Bible also inserts commentary into Daniel 12:1 saying, "**Now at that [end] time**" raising another question. Have we properly understood and translated the chronology of Daniel Chapter 12? Does the initial Hebrew phrase in Daniel 12:1 connect back to the previous subject in Chapter 11 or forward to a new subject? Perhaps the chronological connection between Daniel 11 and 12 is not immediate.

The Full Preterist interpreter tries to connect the fulfillment of all Biblical prophecy to the First Advent of Christ. They see Matthew 25:31-46, Daniel 12:1-4, and Revelation 20:11-15 as events completely fulfilled during the change from the Old to the New Covenant with no unfulfilled prophecy of Christ's future return remaining. They believe Christ's judgment on Jerusalem in 70 A.D. is the fulfillment of his prophesied coming. The Dispensational Pre-Millennial interpreter instead tries to connect the fulfillment of most Biblical prophecy to the Second Advent of Christ.

Saxton, though proposing a first century fulfillment of many prophecies, makes this conclusion about Daniel 12:1, "*The context of this deliverance suggests it may be twofold: After the Romans crushed the Jewish revolt, the Jewish leaders were no longer in a position to actively persecute those Jews who had trusted in Jesus as the Messiah. Beyond this deliverance, however, is envisioned the greater ultimate deliverance to eternal life of both Jewish and Gentile Christians,*" *Daniel's Prophecies of Covenant Change*, page 67.

The majority of Bible interpreters would agree that there are prophetic Scriptures with twofold applications or where both current and future events are interleaved in the same message. This seems to be the case in Daniel 12, Matthew 24-25, and other passages. For another example, Jesus says in John 14:3 (WEB), "**If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and will receive you to myself; that where I am, you may be there also.**" So is Jesus speaking about his coming to us individually at our deaths, or corporately at his Second Advent? Perhaps both are true. Hopefully we do not get in an argument about this good news! So our challenge remains maintaining positive fellowship even when we draw the lines in different places on matters that we do not fully understand. Our questions to the Lord are limited to what we can envision, because we never come close to seeing God's whole picture. However, when Jesus answers, his words help our immediate outlook, but also point us to the consummation of hope, well beyond our vision. God sees the end from the beginning.

So after further reflection I still understand Matthew 25:31-46, Daniel 12:1-4, and Revelation 20:11-15 to point to the same event, the final judgment of God's creation. However, even if you or I are wrong, we can rest assured because Jesus is in charge.

Your Theory about the Goats... Is it Really Possible? Matthew 25:31-46

READER>> I like what you have written, but question your theory about the goats on Jesus' left being fallen angels only. Is it really possible?

ME>> Thank you for asking and join me in reconsidering.

Who are the goats? It is a simple question with a simple answer assumed. Unbelievers of course! However, many times a simple observation is missed and we are misled by our assumptions. Consider, ever since 1492 whenever the word *Indian* is used we need to clarify whether we mean American *Indian* or Asian *Indian*. Columbus taught us long ago that accurate understanding requires an accurate knowledge of our frame of reference! Five hundred years later, even in our advanced era, NASA and Lockheed Martin lost a \$125 million satellite to outer space because unknowingly one used Metric and the other English measurements. Oops! They remind us that compatible dialogue needs a compatible use of terms and measures. Michelangelo's famous *Moses* statue wears a set of horns because in Exodus 34 the Latin Vulgate translation wrongly says *horns* instead of *glow*, two very similar Hebrew words. So truthful conclusions can only come from accurate sources. Even the atheist Friedrich Nietzsche adds a point saying, "*The text has disappeared under the interpretation.*" Thus Bible study is the hardest interpretive work there is, for one must mercilessly imprison a thousand traditions and silence a million voices to see the text of Scripture. May God give us the wisdom to consider every observation of others, but the clear sight to see his Word.

So who are the goats condemned by Jesus in Matthew 25:31-46? I propose that the goats on Jesus' left at the Sheep and Goat Judgment are the fallen angels. Matthew 25:41 (WEB) says, "*Then he will say also to those on the left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels.'*" My defense of the victory of grace for all mankind at DGJC.ORG/OPTIMISM includes this understanding. The Scriptures explicitly say that the *aionian fire* is prepared for the Devil and his angels. Correspondingly, I understand that it is not prepared for mankind, not even unbelieving mankind. My conclusion has been challenged by Christians from various traditions, including Universalists. Yet it should give us all pause to consider that the Scripture explicitly states that these fires are prepared for the Devil and his angels. Do you and traditional theologies factor this observation into your conclusions? Perhaps I am wrong. In fact I am already corrected on one point because I may have argued in the past that human beings were never referred to as *goats* in the Christian Scripture. However, Jeremiah 50:8 and 51:40, Ezekiel 39:18, and Zechariah 10:3 all use *goats* as a metaphor for Israel and Israel's leaders. So I must reconsider the identity of the goats, and also consider whether being wrong about the identity of the goats at the Sheep and Goat Judgment undermines my larger conclusion about the victory of God's grace for all mankind.

In the following article I invite you to weigh the evidence with me as I reconsider my conclusions about the Sheep and Goat Judgment. In the following paragraphs I list the major views of eschatology, disclose my own view of prophecy, list my previous articles on the subject, note the use and meaning of the Greek word *ethnos*, consider the impact of possible time frames, identify the Sheep on the right, prove the presence of fallen angels at the final future judgment, review the significance of *Tartarus* and *Thalaasa*, compare and contrast the Sheep and Goat Judgment with the Great White Throne Judgment, consider the redemption of fallen angels, examine Revelation 20:8 again, add further thoughts about redemptive ages beyond the Great White Throne Judgment in Revelation 21 and 22, note the promised end of death and Hades, reconsider the identity of the Goats on the left, and conclude whether Biblical proof about the victory of God's grace for all mankind is made

uncertain because of uncertainty about Matthew 25:31-46 or any particular view of prophecy.

Various views of eschatology include: 1) Dispensational Pre-Millennialism, future, 2) non-Dispensational Pre-Millennialism, future, 3) A-Millennialism, present, 4) realized Post-Millennialism, past, 5) Post-Millennialism, future, 6) variations of the previous, and 7) full *Preterism* which understands that all prophecy is fully realized with no future return of Christ forecast. *Preterist* is the word used to describe prophetic statements that were future at the time the prophecy was written, but the events are now are past. Most Christians recognize that some New Testament prophecy is already fulfilled, but full *Preterism* asserts that all Biblical prophecy is completely fulfilled. I more fully explain each of these views and their relevancy to mankind's salvation in my articles [Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News](#) and [Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News Part 2 with Grudem Riddlebarger Chilton Summers Ewing](#).

Further, within these views there are both common and uncommon understandings of the timing and purpose of the Sheep and Goat Judgment explained in Matthew 25:31-46. Various understandings include that the Sheep and Goat Judgment happened or happens 1) metaphorically on the cross dividing believer and unbeliever, 2) visibly when Christ judged Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and later Rome, 3) invisibly in the first century by Christ in Heaven, 4) visibly in the future at the rapture of the church before the Millennial epoch, and 5) visibly in the future at the rapture and Christ's second coming after the Millennial church age epoch, thus synonymous with the Great White Throne Judgment. So we have differences, yet I hope we can all agree gladly with the following statement:

Being right or wrong in our understanding about the Sheep and Goat Judgment and prophecy will not change the final destiny of the redeemed people of God in the least, though present understanding and joy may be impacted temporarily.

Many Christian teachers are private about their theological positions beyond the fact that Christ is the divine promised Messiah and that he is coming again for his own along with other essentials. There is wisdom in this discretion. Secondary theology and speculation often divides rather than unites. However, disclosure of my views online has been a helpful for me to think aloud to vet ideas and grow in understanding. Even so, if we meet in person I hope that our conversation remains focused on practical Christian living and loving instead of any puffed-up theories.

Yet prophecy has attracted my attention because the study of grace and mankind's salvation must be consistent with the things the Bible reveals about the future. Developing a consistent model of understanding is no small undertaking as two thousand years of theological conflict show. My own view of prophecy is simply a variation of the traditional A-Millennial view that the 1,000 year epoch revealed in Revelation 20:1-7 is the entire church age between Christ's first and Second Advent. Thus we wait for the final battle with Satan to be followed immediately by Christ's second coming and final judgment at the Great White Throne. At that time the redemption of mankind will be finally and fully manifest with every tear wiped away, sin and brokenness removed forever, and Satan's rebellion crushed as he and his demonic followers are sentenced to the Lake of Fire which is prepared for them. This is just as God promised to Adam and Eve so long ago in the garden, Genesis 3:15 (WEB), *"I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will bruise your head, and you will bruise his heel."*

My previous articles on prophecy include:

- [Matthew 25:31-46](#)
- [You Are Wrong About Matthew 25:31-46](#)
- [Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News](#)
- [Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News Part 2 with Grudem Riddlebarger Chilton Summers Ewing](#)
- [Fallen Angels at the Great White Throne Judgment](#)

- Hebrews 2:16 Does Not Say Fallen Angels are Damned
- How Can You Say Revelation 21:8 Does Not Apply to Humans?
- Revelation 21:22 The Last Age, the Church, or Eternity?
- Isaiah 65:25 Says that Even Satan Will Be Restored
- Hebrews 2:16 Does Not Say Fallen Angels Are Damned
- Isaiah 66:22-24 Cannot Include Fallen Angels
- Your Thoughts On Matthew's Meaning of Aionian Fire
- Daniel 12:1-4
- Your Thought is that Daniel 12:1-4 is the Final Judgment
- Revelation 20:10
- Revelation 20:11-15

Now the passage under discussion, Matthew 25:31-46 (WEB), reads as follows,

31) But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. 32) Before him all the nations will be gathered, and he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33) He will set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. 34) Then the King will tell those on his right hand, "Come, blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 35) for I was hungry, and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me drink. I was a stranger, and you took me in. 36) I was naked, and you clothed me. I was sick, and you visited me. I was in prison, and you came to me." 37) Then the righteous will answer him, saying, "Lord, when did we see you hungry, and feed you; or thirsty, and give you a drink? 38) When did we see you as a stranger, and take you in; or naked, and clothe you? 39) When did we see you sick, or in prison, and come to you?" 40) The King will answer them, "Most certainly I tell you, because you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me." 41) Then he will say also to those on the left hand, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels; 42) for I was hungry, and you didn't give me food to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me no drink; 43) I was a stranger, and you didn't take me in; naked, and you didn't clothe me; sick, and in prison, and you didn't visit me." 44) Then they will also answer, saying, "Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and didn't help you?" 45) Then he will answer them, saying, "Most certainly I tell you, because you didn't do it to one of the least of these, you didn't do it to me." 46) These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

First we consider the use of the Greek word *ethnos* in verse 32, translated as *nations* above. Previously I have said that we most naturally assume that when Jesus gathers the nations before him that he is talking about only human beings and human nations. The Greek word *ethnos* could be understood to mean "a multitude of individuals of the same nature or genus, for example the human family." Thus when Jesus divides the people into their categories of sheep and goats, we naturally conclude that believing humans are sheep while the remaining unbelieving humans are the goats. So it is commonly understood that only part of humanity is saved from the Lake of Fire while the rest are lost eternally. Arminians and Calvinists Christians both agree on this point, though curiously they disagree as to how people are saved. Further, most Christian Universalists also agree with this understanding, but conclude that all humanity is finally saved in redemptive ages beyond the Great White Throne Judgment and beyond the Lake of Fire. I understand the motivation for these views, but I still feel there is a more consistent model.

We should not conclude too quickly that *ethnos* means human *ethnic* groups. Etymology shows that the English word *ethnic* has a restricted meaning compared to its Greek origins. Perhaps the modern English meaning was wrongly influenced by the traditional understanding

of this very passage. Instead note that the Greek word *ethnos* is also used to mean "*the people, in contrast to their king.*" The first denotation in the Vines dictionary also indicates, "*a multitude (whether of men or of beasts) associated or living together: a company, troop, swarm.*" These alternate denotations must also be considered as eligible when interpreting this passage. The main point is that one cannot say that fallen angels are not at this judgment based on the meaning of the word *ethnos*, particularly since *ethnos* can mean "*people in contrast to their king*" and "*a multitude of men or of beasts.*" Do not forget that angels are also God's subjects and are people with names, minds, wills, and emotion, though they are not human beings created in God's image. So the Greek *ethnos* would be the perfect word to describe a mixed gathering of humans and fallen angels arraigned before Jesus their king. That much all must agree. Also as an aside it is noted that the same Greek word *ethnos* is found in Revelation 20:8 in close proximity to the Great White Throne Judgment. Perhaps that is no coincidence.

Defense of the presence of fallen angels at The Sheep and Goat Judgment is important in my view because of my understanding that the Sheep and Goat Judgment and the Great White Throne Judgment are the same final judgment. If I understand that these judgments are the final judgment and the goats are unbelieving mankind, then they are sentenced to the Lake of Fire. However, we are considering and reconsidering the proposition that the goats are not human beings, but in fact are the fallen angels. Now those who think that the Sheep and Goat Judgment is before the Millennial epoch could alternatively still hold that all mankind avoids the Lake of Fire if unbelieving humans were sentenced to *aionian fire* in temporal Hades during the Millennial epoch and then finally saved when extracted from Hades at the Great White Throne Judgment. I initially held this view myself, combined with a non-Dispensational Pre-Millennial view of prophecy. Though, I have since moved to an A-Millennial understanding. In contrast to both of these ideas, the majority of Christian Universalists hold that unbelieving mankind is actually sentenced to the Lake of Fire at the Great White Throne Judgment, but then finally saved in yet later redemptive ages. However, I feel that this view misses the concluding nature of Revelation 21 and 22 and misses the simpler chronology taught in the Bible, Hebrews 9:27 (WEB), "*Inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once, and after this, judgment.*" I wonder if those holding to redemptive ages beyond the Great White Throne Judgment would acknowledge that their strained interpretation may be motivated by the desire to save people from the Lake of Fire when it should be reconsidered whether human beings are ever sent there in the first place.

Further debate could be encouraged to consider the plausibility of the various proposed time frames of the Sheep and Goat Judgment. For example to suggest that this judgment is the invisible judgment at the cross neglects the real dialogue portrayed between Christ and his subjects. To suggest that this judgment happened in Heaven invisibly to us might be possible, but then where does it fit on the redemptive timeline shown in the book of Revelation and elsewhere? And the grand picture of Christ gathering all his subjects before him is lost because we were not there along with many others not yet born. Finally, to suggest that this is an intermediate judgment in the future at the rapture before the Millennial Kingdom might also be possible, but requires an acceptance of the Dispensational model. Hebrews 9:27, quoted above, again points to a simpler understanding that we each die once and there will be one final judgment at the end of the church age before eternity begins. In any case, views that propose that the Sheep and Goat Judgment is not the final judgment minimize the importance of the identity of the goats to maintain a consistent Christian Universalist theology because Christ would still have opportunity to save the goats later, if they are human. After all, Christ did say that the gates of Hades will not prevail, and, as promised, we see that Hades is emptied at the Great White Throne Judgment.

Again, it is commonly assumed that the goats on the left are unbelievers to be damned for all eternity and the sheep on the right are the believers to be blessed for all eternity. However, before we consider the goats on the left, let's consider the sheep on the right. The sheep may offer further clues about the time frame of this judgment. Many times we miss the obvious by not asking the obvious question. Why do the sheep on the right seem ignorant of gospel basics such as, we serve Christ when we serve the least of his brothers? Why do

they seem surprised about their salvation? For those that understand the Sheep and Goat Judgment to be synonymous with the Great White Throne Judgment, then the timing of this final judgment would be just after the rapture of the saints to meet the returning Christ in the air. Christ and his church then descend to earth and this judgment begins. That being the case it is strange to think of the believers rejoicing in the air with Christ and with each other moments before fearful judgment. Review 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18 (WEB).

14) For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. 15) For this we tell you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will in no way precede those who have fallen asleep. 16) For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with God's trumpet. The dead in Christ will rise first, 17) then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. So we will be with the Lord forever. 18) Therefore comfort one another with these words.

It is very awkward to suggest that we believers who understand the gospel and will already be rejoicing with Christ in the air at the rapture will then be arraigned with uncertainties before the Sheep and Goat Judgment. You may have guessed by now that I do not think that the sheep on the right are believers. So then who are the sheep on Jesus' right? They are unbelieving mankind just extracted from Hades! This model of understanding is a perfect match with the attitude and questions that would be expected from the unbelieving redeemed that are extracted from Hades at the final judgment. I call them *unbelieving redeemed* because Christ redeemed them at the cross and their sins are already atoned, though they remain unbelieving. Faith does not cause our redemption and atonement, but instead faith receives our redemption already made certain at the cross. Unbelievers are punished in Hades not because they are not forgiven, but because they refuse the forgiveness already given at the cross and so reject Christ their savior and King. God loves and has already forgiven all mankind, but the hearts of unbelievers are not ready to confess their sin and receive forgiveness. They do not yet see the great gift in the gospel and the value of Christian service. Instead unbelievers will spend who knows how long in whatever sufferings Hades brings to the wicked dead. And one day they will be released from their prison in Hades to stand before Christ their King. The responses of the sheep on the right fit this scenario perfectly. They are lost sheep, then found. Meanwhile believers, whether standing on the side line or in the midst, are not asking such questions, but have already begun rejoicing that the final victory of grace is at hand.

One objected to this view asking why the Lord commends those extracted from Hades for good things they did. Did they really do good things? Did the selfish rich man do any good? Did Hitler do any good? These are good questions with Jesus answering, *"whatever you did for the least of these, you did for me."* We as believers already know that, but the unbelievers do not know that, and still will not understand until released from punishment in Hades to be judged by Christ. However, even though they do not understand these things now, there still may be many 'decent' secular humanitarians... from an earthly perspective. True, if they do not repent, they will still be sentenced to Hades for disregarding Christ. Yet even so they may have done some good for humanity. Unbelievers can do good things. Perhaps even Hitler did an act of kindness before he became enslaved to Satan's scheme. All mankind, even the unbelieving, are created in God's image, and may at times do good things to help others. Certainly no one does enough good to merit salvation. However, at the Sheep and Goat Judgment Jesus graciously accepts any good done by the unbelieving at this juncture, not because it saves them, but so that eternity begins on a positive note rather than a negative note for these prisoners just released. Another argued that this is not possible because all our righteous deeds are like *"filthy rags."* Well, that is true of both believer and non-believer alike. So Christ's kind words are undeserved no matter who is the audience! Good parents know to focus on the positive after punishing their children. Even human authorities speak a hopeful future to released prisoners. Would God then begin

eternity with a begrudged welcome for those saved out of Hades? No way! God, as the originator of grace, understands better than we about the importance of starting things on a positive note!

Continuing, some have argued that fallen angels will not be present at the final judgment. However, this fact is easily proved. We read in 2 Peter 2:4 (WEB), "*For if God didn't spare angels when they sinned, but cast them down to Tartarus, and committed them to pits of darkness to be reserved for judgment.*" Further, we read Jude 6 (WEB), "*Angels who didn't keep their first domain, but deserted their own dwelling place, he has kept in everlasting bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day.*" So fallen angels will be present for judgment on that Great Day! This fact must be integrated into our understanding of the final judgment passages. The fallen angels will be there.

The Great White Throne Judgment recorded in Revelation 20:11-15 (WEB) offers both similar and additional detail of the final judgment when compared with Matthew 25:31-46. We read,

11) I saw a great white throne, and him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. There was found no place for them. 12) I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and they opened books. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works. 13) The sea gave up the dead who were in it. Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them. They were judged, each one according to his works. 14) Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15) If anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.

Comparing the judgment in Matthew 25:31-46 and Revelation 20:11-15 is helpful to confirm whether these are the same events. However, first note that Revelation 20:13 explains that the subjects of this judgment are extracted from both the sea, *Thalaasa* in the Greek, and also from *Hades*. This is at least a curious observation and perhaps a significant observation as it relates to the presence of fallen angels at the final judgment. I have already proved the presence of fallen angels at the final judgment from 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6. The Great White Throne Judgment is the last judgment recorded in Scripture and therefore, I believe, the final judgment. Further, we see that the subjects of this judgment are extracted from two locations, *Hades* and *Thalaasa*. We know from Luke 16:19-31 that wicked deceased humans are punished in *Hades*. However, who is located in *Thalaasa*, the sea? I propose that *Thalaasa* is either the retreat or the temporary prison of fallen angels. The sea was commonly understood to be the caustic habitat of demons in the first century. I examine this question at length in my article, [Fallen Angels at the Great White Throne Judgment](#). This article explains possible connections between *Thalaasa* and the prison for fallen angels, *Tartarus*, mentioned in 2 Peter 2:4. Thus the presence of fallen angels at the final judgment, just extracted from the sea, is even further confirmed and must be factored into our view of the final judgment.

I have proposed that the Sheep and Goat Judgment is the same event as the Great White Throne Judgment. If I am wrong about this conclusion then between the two events, the Great White Throne Judgment is the better choice for the final judgment because of its placement at the end of the book of Revelation. That being the case fallen angels would still be present then, even if they are not at the Sheep and Goat Judgment. This is safely concluded because of the reference to "*the Great Day*" in Jude 6 and the emptying of both the prison of Hades and of *Thalaasa* in Revelation 20:13. And as already stated, if the Sheep and Goat Judgment is earlier, not the final judgment, and angels are not present there, then Christ would still have opportunity to save the goats later, if they are human, and if Hades is the *aionian fires* of the Sheep and Goat judgment. This is true because we see that Hades is emptied at the Great White Throne Judgment.

Consider a detailed comparison of Matthew 25 and Revelation 20.

Comparison	Sheep and Goat	Great White Throne
Both accounts are from gospel writers.	Matthew wrote Matthew	John wrote Revelation
All four gospel writers include Jesus' final prophecies, Matthew, Mark, and Luke within their gospel accounts and John not in his gospel account, but with special attention in Revelation.	Olivet discourse in Matthew 24-25	Missing in John's gospel, but instead explained in his book of Revelation
Both answer questions about the present and future.	24:3) <i>As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? What is the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age"</i>	1:9) <i>I John, your brother and partner with you in the oppression, Kingdom, and perseverance in Christ Jesus, was on the isle that is called Patmos because of God's Word and the testimony of Jesus Christ. ... 1:19) Write therefore the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will happen hereafter.</i>
Both depict grand thrones.	25:31) <i>But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory.</i>	20:11) <i>I saw a great white throne, and him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. There was found no place for them.</i>
Both depict Christ summoning his subjects with John providing more detail from where, though without contradiction.	25:32) <i>Before him all the nations will be gathered, and he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.</i>	20:13) <i>The sea gave up the dead who were in it. Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them. They were judged, each one according to his works.</i>
Matthew notes the separation of sheep and goats. Revelation notes judgment, though there is no contradiction. Many assume no one is saved at the Great White Throne, but only forwarded to the Lake of Fire. Yet, if these events are the same, then at least some of the people extracted from Hades or <i>Thalaasa</i> are saved at the Sheep and Goat Judgment!	25:32) <i>Before him all the nations will be gathered, and he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.</i>	20:12) <i>I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and they opened books. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works.</i>
Matthew records dialogue between Christ and his subjects while Revelation does not, though again there	25:39) <i>"When did we see you sick, or in prison, and come to you?" 40) The King will answer them, "Most certainly I tell you, because you did it to one of the least of these</i>	

is no contradictory detail.	<i>my brothers, you did it to me."</i>	
Matthew records praise for the good deeds of the sheep while Revelation records judgment based on both works and also whether one's name is in the Lamb's Book. Again there is no contradictory detail.	<i>25:34) Then the King will tell those on his right hand, 'Come, blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 35) for I was hungry, and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me drink. I was a stranger, and you took me in.'</i>	<i>20:12) I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and they opened books. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works. ... 20:15) If anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.</i>
Matthew records both the positive destiny of the sheep and the negative destiny of the goats while Revelation records only the negative destiny of those not listed in the Lamb's Book with the positive destiny of those listed only implied. Again there is no contradictory detail.	<i>25:46) These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.</i>	<i>20:15) If anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.</i>
Matthew and John use different terms for the destiny of the wicked, though again without contradiction.	<i>aionian fire</i>	<i>Lake of Fire</i>

The Sheep and Goat Judgment and the Great White Throne Judgment have much in common and so it is both fair and commonly agreed by many to consider these events as synonymous. Repeating one conclusion from the above chart, if the Sheep and Goat Judgment and the Great White Throne Judgment events are the same final judgment event, then at least some of the people extracted from Hades or *Thalaasa* are saved at the Great White Throne Judgment! Since the Great White Throne Judgment only speaks explicitly about those not listed in the Book as being cast in the Lake of Fire, many argue that all the inhabitants of Hades and *Thalaasa* are simply extracted so they can be sentenced to their permanent destiny in the Lake of Fire. Unfortunately this is a hasty conclusion. So, if not clear in Revelation's Great White Throne Judgment, it is clear in Matthew's Sheep and Goat Judgment that some are saved at this juncture. It is also clear that the subjects at the Great White Throne Judgment are from Hades and *Thalaasa*. Therefore if the Sheep and Goat Judgment is synonymous with the Great White Throne Judgment, it is proved that at least some are saved from either Hades or *Thalaasa*. So if you agree that the Sheep and Goat Judgment and the Great White Throne Judgment are the same event, then you must also agree with me that some from either Hades or *Thalaasa* are saved. I would propose that Hades houses unbelieving mankind and they will all be saved because all of their names are written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, though they do not yet understand and believe this as Christians do. And I would I propose that *Thalaasa* houses the fallen angels and they are not saved because Scriptures says that the Lake of Fire is explicitly prepared for them!

A more thorough study could compare the Sheep and Goat Judgment with other Bible

passages that may also refer to the final judgment. For example, Daniel 12:1-4 is a possible candidate which I discuss further in my articles [Daniel 12:1-4](#) and [Your Thought is that Daniel 12:1-4 is the Final Judgment!](#) My conclusion is that Daniel 12:1-4 corroborates with my thesis here. Another passage to review is John 5:28-30 which I have considered in my article, [John 5:28-30 Offers No Optimism](#). Likewise 2 Peter chapter 2, one of the scariest chapters in the New Testament, has grave warnings for false teachers. However, this chapter also explicitly reminds us that fallen angels will be present at the judgment. The passage also reminds us that the unbelieving will be punished and then brought to judgment. However, there is no explicit mention of eternal punishment beyond the final judgment for mankind. Note that 2 Peter 2:17 (WEB) is translated, *"These are wells without water, clouds driven by a storm; for whom the blackness of darkness has been reserved forever."* However, the Greek word underlying "forever" is "aion" which never means infinite chronological time as has been explained numerous times at [DGJC.ORG](#) and in [Optimism Out of Control](#). Instead the meaning is either *eonian* or *entire*. Also see the article, [Aion](#), for further proof. So 2 Peter chapter 2 corroborates as well.

As mentioned, particular to my model of understanding is the proposition that fallen angels are the goats on Jesus left that are extracted from *Thalaasa* for their final judgment. These fallen angels are then sentenced to the Lake of Fire which is prepared for them while all mankind is redeemed because Christ has already atoned for the sins of all mankind at the cross, 1 John 2:2 (WEB), *"And he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world."* Naturally, however, we do not expect everyone to see things the same way. And differences may even be more pronounced among the radical minority that holds to the universal salvation of mankind. One point of debate among Christian Universalists is whether Satan himself and the fallen angels will be redeemed. I mention this because my model of understanding is different than most Universalists. I agree that the grace of Christ will be victorious in the salvation of all mankind. However, I also understand that no human being will ever enter the Lake of Fire because it is not prepared for mankind, but instead for the Devil and his angels, as explicitly stated. So my understanding may revive debate about the possibility of fallen angel redemption.

Most arguments promoting the salvation of Satan focus on passages like Romans 11:32, Colossians 1:20, and Philippians 2:10 which speak about the salvation and redemption of *all* and worship of *every* tongue. Weighty arguments can be made from these passages for the redemption of all creation, including Satan. The Holy Spirit's choice of words for the redemption of all creation should especially be noted in Romans 8:21 and 11:32. However, these passages must also be weighed against Scriptures that say God is *not* the helper of angels, Hebrews 2:16, and Matthew 25:41 which explicitly states the Lake of Fire is prepared for the Devil and his angels. I discuss this question further in my articles [Isaiah 65:25 Says that Even Satan Will Be Restored](#), [Hebrews 2:16 Does Not Say Fallen Angels Are Damned](#), and [Isaiah 66:22-24 Cannot Include Fallen Angels](#). One might also ask if the *goat* metaphor is ever used of fallen angels in the Bible beyond my proposal concerning Matthew 25:31-46. It is not to my knowledge. Further, the extra Biblical image of the goat-headed *Baphomet* offers no proof either. Those offended by the damnation of Satan and his angels to the Lake of Fire should be reminded that the bottom line argument for the redemption of all mankind should not hinge on the meaning of *all* and *every*. We all understand that these words can be used in general non-absolute ways at times. Instead the bottom line argument for the redemption of all mankind is the atoning sacrifice of the God-man, Jesus Christ. Christ's role as the second Adam and new federal head of humanity is the heart of our hope and praise. Though I do not want to speculate beyond Scripture as to Satan's eternal destiny, but simply observe that Jesus is not his helper, the Lake of Fire is prepared for him and his fallen angels, and there they remain at the last sentence of the Bible.

Suppose I am right and the judgments in Matthew 25 and Revelation 20 are the same event and fallen angels are the goats on Jesus' left, then does the warning in Revelation 21:8 really only apply to fallen angels? Actually, I would say no. This warning applies to both mankind and angel-kind alike. Revelation 21:8 says, *"But for the cowardly, unbelieving, sinners, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their part*

is in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death." The Holy Spirit is consistent through the whole of Scripture giving severe warning to unbelieving mankind. This is evident in God's condemnation of Nineveh, though God did not destroy Nineveh as he promised, as explained in my article, [Jonah 3](#). This is also evident when God calls Israel, "*not my people*", then again, "*my people*" when they repented, as explained in my article, [Hosea 2:23](#). So the warning in Revelation 21:8 applies to all, but I believe that condemnation to the Lake of Fire will only be applied to the fallen angels and not mankind, not even unbelieving mankind, who will be finally graced with repentance and open eyes on that Great Day. This is true because God himself already determined the glorious destiny of all mankind when he made atonement for the sins of all mankind. I discuss this in more detail in my article, [How Can You Say Revelation 21:8 Does Not Apply to Humans?](#)

So if we believe the Sheep and Goat Judgment and the Great White Throne Judgment are the same event, the final judgment of men and angels, which I do, and also believe that all mankind will be finally saved, which I do, then we must either defend that the goats on Jesus' left are not human beings, but are in fact the fallen angels, or that the human beings sent to the Lake of Fire will be safely extracted later. We have reviewed the Biblical data above preparing to re-defend the proposal that the fallen angels are the goats on Jesus' left. Now if it were true that human beings were never referred to as *goats*, then that would provide even one more argument to support my case. However, Jeremiah 50:8 and 51:40, and Ezekiel 39:18 all use *goats* as a metaphor for Israel and Israel's leaders. So the argument that *goat* imagery never refers to human beings cannot be used. Yet note that these passages do not distinguish between *sheep* as good and *goats* as bad as we find in Matthew 25 and so should not be considered parallel passages. However, Zechariah 10:2-3, a closer parallel to Matthew 25, does condemn Israel's leaders, the goats, for misleading Israel's people, the sheep. So if Matthew 25 is parallel to Zechariah 10, then it draws a line of judgement between condemned leaders and misled followers. But certainly Matthew's Sheep and Goat judgment cuts deeper than a line between leaders and followers, but instead is a division determined before the foundation of creation in the Book of Life, Revelation 20:15. So Matthew 25 appears to be the only place where *sheep* and *goat* imagery is used to contrast between those saved from the Lake of Fire and those who are not saved. The final question of this study remains. Is there enough Biblical data to warrant the proposition that the *goats* on the left are the fallen angels only?

As explained, for most Christian Universalists this is not even an important question because instead most propose that unbelieving mankind, or even all mankind, are scourged of sin in the Lake of Fire and finally saved in redemptive ages beyond the Great White Throne Judgment in Revelation 21 and 22. Revelation 21 and 22 could possibly be understood to portray redemptive ages after the Great White Throne Judgment. For Revelation 20:4 (WEB) says, "*He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; neither will there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more. The first things have passed away.*" All sin and brokenness appears to be healed. But then beyond that Revelation 22:14-15 (WEB) says, "*Blessed are those who do his commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter in by the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, the sorcerers, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.*" So has sin reentered the world after the Great White Throne Judgment? No. The mistake in this interpretation is to assume that the verses after the Great White Throne Judgment are a sequential chronology of redemptive ages. Instead a better literary analysis would show that the Great White Throne Judgment is the end of the story for this fallen world followed by the commencement of blessed eternity for God's people. Revelation 21 and 22 are then the concluding statements that paint a summary picture of this promised future for mankind, as well as a picture of the New Testament church age until we reach the Great White Throne Judgment. A good conclusion will address both the present need and the future hope just as the Holy Spirit does in Revelation 21 and 22. Read more about my understanding of this question at [Revelation 21:22 The Last Age, the Church, or Eternity?](#)

Christian Universalists that propose escape from the Lake of Fire also use the argument that

the end of death is promised in the New Testament and so that must mean escape from the second death in the Lake of Fire. This is a hopeful thought, but only born out of the concern that human beings are sent to the Lake of Fire in the first place. However, the thought is not as precise as needed in attention to detail. Jesus does promise that *"the gates of Hades will not prevail against it"* in Matthew 16:18 (WEB) as explained in my article, [Matthew 16:15-21 Optimism Out of Control](#). Paul also reinforces the hope in 1 Corinthians 15:55 (WEB) saying, *"Death, where is your sting? Hades, where is your victory?"* Yet both of these passages point to the good news at the Great White Throne Judgment when Hades is emptied and death is ended for mankind with the beginning of blessed eternity. However, there is no promise in Scripture concerning the end of the second death for the Devil and his angels. In fact the Holy Spirit uses the expression *"second death"* in order to make a distinction between those saved from the first death in Hades, that is unbelieving mankind, and those not saved from the second death in the Lake of Fire, that is the Devil and his angels. These are important observations again supporting the conclusions that unbelieving humans are saved out of Hades, the first death, and that fallen angels are sent to the Lake of Fire which is prepared for them, the second death.

So is there enough Biblical data to warrant the proposition that the *goats* on the left are *only* the fallen angels? After further review I continue to believe so. Even though human beings are referred to as *goats* a few times in Scripture I still think there is enough evidence to hold that fallen angels are condemned and all mankind finally saved. The fallen angels are condemned to the Lake of Fire at the final judgment while all Christians rejoice with Christ at the rapture and all non-Christians are safely extracted from Hades and surprised to learn that they are finally saved along with all God's people. The sins of unbelievers are already atoned, the same as the sins of believers, at the cross of Christ! There are many Scriptures and arguments above that point to this conclusion. I did not even mention the supra-Biblical observation that redemptive history begins with the promise of a deliverer for mankind and the forecast that Satan's head will be crushed in Genesis 3:15. Revelation 20 then finishes the story with the salvation of all mankind and the banishment of Satan and his angels to the Lake of Fire. This is an important point, so let me say it again. History begins with the fall of mankind to the schemes of Satan and with God promising future deliverance for his people and the crushing of Satan's rebellion. And the history of this fallen world will end with the sentencing of Satan to the Lake of Fire and the redemption of all God's people to blessed eternity. **These are the two perfectly matching bookends for the history of redemption! The Bible is the story of the most awesome victory of grace for mankind and the final defeat of Satan our adversary!**

Even so, for me, the essential facts remain 1) fallen angels will be at the final judgment, 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6, 2) the Lake of Fire is explicitly prepared for the Devil and his angels, Matthew 25:41, 3) Christ is not the helper of fallen angels, Hebrews 2:16, 4) Christ promised to defeat Hades, Matthew 16:18 and 1 Corinthians 15:55, 5) Hades is emptied and proven to be temporal punishment for unbelieving mankind, Revelation 20:13, and 6) Christ as the second Adam is the atoning sacrifice for the sins of all mankind, both believing and unbelieving, Romans 5:18 and 1 John 2:1. These indisputable observations must be integrated into any Biblical view of destiny for mankind and angelkind.

The arguments I propose identifying the *goats* as the fallen angels seem certain to me. What do you think? However, even so we might ask if Biblical proof of the victory of God's grace for all mankind is made uncertain because of remaining uncertainty about Matthew 25:31-46 or any particular prophecy? Certainly Biblical teaching about future things and final judgments must be compatible with any interpretation about the final destiny of mankind. However, within Christian theology, which is already divided on so many points, the subject of eschatology may be the most divided and confused of all. Biblical passages about judgments and future things can be very difficult to understand and to consistently synthesize with the whole of Scripture. So building a case for the final redemption of all mankind based on a particular view of eschatology may not be the best foundation. (Though curiously, those who oppose the idea of mankind's universal salvation are equally divided over interpretation of prophecy and even their salvation recipes, yet their common

foundation is the claim that all mankind will not be saved! What a terrible foundation!). Instead the foundational argument for the salvation of all mankind is Christ himself as the second Adam and the atoning sacrifice for not only our sins, but the sins of all mankind. Confidence in this fact overrules any uncertainties we may have in interpreting Christ's prophecies. Christ's work on the cross for all mankind is the foundation of hope both for us and for our fellowman.

Finally, while I enjoy these studies, confirming and re-confirming the fact of God's love for all mankind from the Bible, I also consider a graver question. Will further proofs of Jesus' promises and prophecy help our understanding and prove God's victorious grace to the unbeliever? Will those already professing Christ be thankful that the grace that saves all mankind is the same grace that also saves them? Will those who reject the salvation of all mankind recognize their offensive blind hypocrisy in claiming their sins are forgiven at the cross, but the sins of others are not forgiven? It would be the greatest honor to be used by God to lead another to Christ and his grace for us all. And God commands us to labor with all our energy testifying to his grace. He adds our feeble efforts into his master plan. However, the praise for opening the ears of the dumb, giving sight to the blind, and raising the dead goes to Christ alone. He alone has the power to conceive born again believers. Fine arguments alone never persuaded one person to come to Christ. The Holy Spirit alone breathes life into the dead.

So if further expert defense is rejected after all our efforts, remember Paul's exhortation in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 (WEB), *"For though we walk in the flesh, we don't wage war according to the flesh; for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the throwing down of strongholds, throwing down imaginations and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."* We wage war preaching God's word and praying to Christ while waiting patiently for the Holy Spirit to make the difference!

Thank you for joining my further research. Understanding prophecy has always been difficult for me. Lack of confidence in my position has, at times past, resulted in embarrassment and defensiveness. Helpful teachability was lost in me because confident understanding eluded me even after all my study. Further, I was lost in the dizzying array of interpretive models available. I despaired whether understanding was even possible. The winning recipe for my dilemma was instead to rest confidently in the Lord's love knowing that our promised destiny does not depend upon our understanding, but upon his grace. That is good news! Hopefully this good news lowers our defenses enough to honest that our best explanations are merely models of understanding. History future will give us the certain understanding when that Great Day reveals all. My proposed model of understanding has answered enough questions to satisfy my desire to make consistent sense of the whole. However, I pray that I, or any who agree with my conclusions above, would keep knowledge in its proper place for questions still remain. One day even the value of knowledge will be eclipsed and pass away with the commencement of glorious eternity. Though knowledge about God's love for you, me, and all mankind will certainly never pass away!

< [Your Thought is that Daniel 12:1-4 is](#)

[up](#)

[Your Thought is that Christians Have
Lost the Gospel? >](#)

Your Thought is that Christians Have Lost the Gospel?

QUESTION>> Your thought is that Christians have lost the gospel? Really?

ME>> Certainly not all Christians have lost the gospel! However, just as certainly there are many who claim to follow Jesus and profess faith in Jesus, yet are misguided as to who Jesus is and the beauty of his unconditional love. Consider that the first century church of Galatia lost the gospel. Apostle Paul wrote the letter of Galatians to rebuke their unbelief. This church was nurtured by Paul himself. This church was only decades away from Christ himself. Yet even they were not immune from falling from grace. They were not immune and neither are we, as church history shows. Sadly our natural way of thinking prefers conditional love instead of unconditional love. Our sinful self prefers hypocrisy instead of happiness that Jesus loves all mankind. So are you thinking naturally or supernaturally? Are you hypocritical or happy? Read Galatians 3:1-5 (WEB).

1) Foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you not to obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly portrayed among you as crucified? 2) I just want to learn this from you. Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by hearing of faith? 3) Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now completed in the flesh? 4) Did you suffer so many things in vain, if it is indeed in vain? 5) He therefore who supplies the Spirit to you, and does miracles among you, does he do it by the works of the law, or by hearing of faith?

*Friend, trust the good news, take the yoke that is easy.
Learn from my mistakes, avoid the dead end that is hard.
Jesus was the perfect sacrifice, he loves mankind deeply!
Why believe Satan's lies, why run from grace scared?*

God's richest blessing to you!

Jeff Martin

Discipled by the Grace of Jesus Christ

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A Look at the Body in Ephesians	DGJC	12/12/2015
A Brief Theology of...Something Better Than Wine	DGJC	12/12/2015
A Brief Theology of Work	DGJC	12/12/2015
A Brief Theology of Wine	DGJC	12/12/2015
A Brief Theology of Rest	DGJC	12/12/2015
A Brief Theology of Name Calling	DGJC	12/12/2015
A Brief Theology of Houses	DGJC	12/12/2015
A Brief Theology of Food and Clothing	DGJC	12/12/2015
Titus 2:11-14, The Pride and The Grace	Zingers	12/04/2015
Timothy(2) 2:10, Save the Chosen!	Zingers	12/04/2015
Timothy(1) 6:12, 1 Corinthians 9:24, 2 Timothy 4:7, Fight and Run!	Zingers	12/04/2015
Timothy(1) 5:24, What happens in Vegas...	Zingers	12/04/2015
Timothy(1) 2:11-15, The Total Depravity of Man... and Woman	Zingers	12/04/2015
Thessalonians(1) 2:4, Another Point of Grace	Zingers	12/04/2015
Thessalonians(1) 1:6-7 - The Art of Imitation	Zingers	12/04/2015
Samuel(1) 10:5-6 plus, Much More Than Music	Zingers	12/04/2015
Romans 9:22-28, Not my people, My people	Zingers	12/04/2015
Romans 8:28-39, The Force Is Not With Us!	Zingers	12/04/2015
Romans 7:9-25, Intrapersonal Conflict Resolution	Zingers	12/04/2015
Romans 3:23, You're Not a Good Man Charlie Brown	Zingers	12/04/2015
Romans 3:20-24 & 5:20, The Federal 'Old Covenant Style' Marriage		

Amendment	Zingers	12/04/2015
Romans 10:6-11, One Nation Under God Vs Jesus is Lord	Zingers	12/04/2015
Revelation 22:17, The Spirit and the Bride say "Come!"	Zingers	12/04/2015
Revelation 22:12-21, Give You Revelation? Repent of Sexual Immorality While You Have Time	Zingers	12/04/2015
Revelation 20:11-15, Optimism Out of Control, Part 5: Hades Gives Up!	Zingers	12/04/2015
Revelation 20:11-15, A.M.A.Z.I.N.G. Grace	Zingers	12/04/2015
Revelation 12:11, Not so Dear Life	Zingers	12/04/2015
Blue Sky	Wallpaper	12/01/2015
Colossians 2:20-23 and 3:5-7, Interpreting and Sanctifying Style	Zingers	12/01/2015
Psalms 99:8, Forgiven Yet Not Unpunished	Zingers	11/30/2015
Psalms 16:11, The Position of Pleasure	Zingers	11/30/2015
Psalms 10:16-18, Davids War on Terror	Zingers	11/30/2015
Psalms 108, The Help of Man is Worthless	Zingers	11/30/2015
Proverbs 4:23, Can You REALLY Trust Him? Can You REALLY Trust Yourself?	Zingers	11/29/2015
Proverbs 16:1-7 and the Art of Motorcar Repair	Zingers	11/29/2015
Proverbs 12:9, A Sad Observation	Zingers	11/29/2015
Philippians 3:10, Eureka! Likeness IS NOT Sameness!!	Zingers	11/29/2015
Philippians 2:1-11, Others Magazine!	Zingers	11/29/2015
Peter(2) 3:1-13, Global Warming is No Joke	Zingers	11/29/2015
Peter(1) 4:11, Take away my freedom of speech? Please!	Zingers	11/29/2015
Peter(1) 4:1, Armed with Attitude	Zingers	11/29/2015
Peter(1) 2:9-17, Honor the King	Zingers	11/29/2015
Peter(1) 2:9-12, My observations as an undercover catholic priest	Zingers	11/29/2015
Samuel(2) 11:8-11, Viagra or Uriah?	Zingers	11/29/2015
Samuel(2) 11:1-4, Counting Davids Costs	Zingers	11/29/2015
Matthew 7:21-23, 24:23-25, Prophets and Miracle Workers, Yet Reprobate	Zingers	11/28/2015
Matthew 6:13, Lead us not into temptation	Zingers	11/28/2015
Matthew 18:1-4 and more, Good to Great or to Grace?	Zingers	11/28/2015
Matthew 16:15-21, Optimism Out of Control	Zingers	11/28/2015
Matthew 15:7-9, Happy Holidays!	Zingers	11/28/2015
Luke 22:38, That is Enough	Zingers	11/28/2015
Luke 22:26, Major George Buxton Persuades Sergeant Alvin York	Zingers	11/28/2015
Luke 20:26-38, Marriage, Part 2: The Divine Marriage Amendment	Zingers	11/28/2015
Luke 20:18, Broken or Crushed. Your choice.	Zingers	11/27/2015
Luke 16:8-9, Jesus Commends the Shrewd / Bill Gates for Devotions?	Zingers	11/27/2015
Luke 16:19-31, The Beautiful Woman and Laverne	Zingers	11/27/2015
Luke 16:19-31, Charles Dickens versus The Gospel of Jesus Christ	Zingers	11/26/2015
Luke 16:15, On Ships and Supermodels	Zingers	11/26/2015
Luke 15:3-7, The Greatest Celebration on Earth	Zingers	11/26/2015
Luke 13:31-32, Go Tell That Fox	Zingers	11/26/2015
Luke 10:36-37, The Good Iraqi	Zingers	11/26/2015
Luke 10:3, Braver Heart	Zingers	11/26/2015
Kings(2) 8:7-15, Water Boarding 101	Zingers	11/26/2015
Kings(2) 8:11-12, More Warfare, Elisha Style	Zingers	11/26/2015

Kings(2) 6:8 - 7:20, Believe in the United States Marines or Believe in Yaweh?	Zingers	11/26/2015
Kings(1) 19:1-3, The Fear of Woman Proves to be a Snare	Zingers	11/26/2015
John(1) 3:15 and John 14:6, Relatives and Absolutes	Zingers	11/25/2015
John 8:30-47, Free at Last! Free at Last! Thank God Almighty I am 2/3 Free at Last!	Zingers	11/25/2015
John 7:16-20, Why do you seek to kill me? A fair question.	Zingers	11/25/2015
John 3:5-8, The Reformers, Their Stepchildren, and.... Their Grandchildren	Zingers	11/25/2015
John 1:12-13, Give Kids the World	Zingers	11/25/2015
John 12:25, Relient K, Chapter 2	Zingers	11/25/2015
Jeremiah 1:4-10, Ripped from the Word and Womb	Zingers	11/25/2015
James 4:1-4, Mad in the USA	Zingers	11/25/2015
James 4:1-10, I am Grumpy Because I Cannot Be God!	Zingers	11/25/2015
James 3:1-2, The Perfect Person	Zingers	11/25/2015
Isaiah 8:19-9:7, Nevertheless	Zingers	11/25/2015
Isaiah 6:8, World Record Excuses	Zingers	11/25/2015
Isaiah 64:5, Acts 2:36, and Ephesians 2:1-22, A Study in Pronouns	Zingers	11/25/2015
Isaiah 48: 1-6, Would you give God an Oscar Award?	Zingers	11/25/2015
Isaiah 30:31-32, Break Out the Punishing Rod AND... the Tambourines? Say What?	Zingers	11/25/2015
Isaiah 30:1-2, An Alliance, But Not With My Spirit	Zingers	11/25/2015
Isaiah 30:1-18, Fifty Ways We Left Our Lover	Zingers	11/25/2015
Isaiah 26:17-19, You Cannot Tell It, But,,,	Zingers	11/25/2015
Hosea 11:3-4, The Scripture That Ripped My Proud Heart To Shreds	Zingers	11/24/2015
Hebrews 4:11-13, Two Double Edged Swords!!	Zingers	11/24/2015
Hebrews 12:14-17, SEE TO IT!	Zingers	11/24/2015
Hebrews 13:7-17, The Outer Circle	Zingers	11/24/2015
Hebrews 11:34, Weakness Turned To Strength	Zingers	11/24/2015
Genesis 3:15, John 1:36, Acts 1:11, A Series of Fortunate Events	Zingers	11/24/2015
Good Books	Top Tens	11/14/2015
Isaiah 19:22-25, Life aint a highway,,, at least not yet!	Zingers	10/31/2015
Lions Roar	Wallpaper	10/24/2015
Baby Lamb	Wallpaper	10/24/2015
Snowy Summit	Wallpaper	10/24/2015
Cliffhanger	Wallpaper	10/24/2015
Backroad Biking	Wallpaper	10/24/2015
Sailing Sunset	Wallpaper	10/24/2015
Breakaway Basketball	Wallpaper	10/24/2015
Mountain Hike	Wallpaper	10/24/2015
Genesis 3:15 plus, Doveman Promised, Begins, Returns, Rules	Zingers	10/22/2015
Galatians 1:1-2, With and Not With	Zingers	10/03/2015
Ephesians 6:4 and Hebrews 12:10, The Strong Willed Parent	Zingers	10/01/2015
Ephesians 5:25-33, Marriage Part 4 - A Cross of Self-Sacrifice	Zingers	10/01/2015
Ephesians 5:19, Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs	Zingers	10/01/2015
Ephesians 1:3-4, Chosen!	Zingers	10/01/2015
Ephesians 1:11-14, Archie Bunker and The Praise of God's Glory	Zingers	10/01/2015
Corinthians(2) 5:21, Jesus Took My Wheel	Zingers	09/28/2015

Corinthians(2) 5:16, The Matrix	Zingers	09/28/2015
Corinthians(2) 5:13, Insane Faith	Zingers	09/28/2015
Corinthians(1) 7:29, Marriage, Part 3: As Not Married	Zingers	09/28/2015
Corinthians(1) 7:20-21, Romans 11:36, Nation of Slaves Be Free!	Zingers	09/27/2015
Corinthians(1) 7:10-14, Marriage Part 5, Union with the Defiled?	Zingers	09/27/2015
Corinthians(1) 4:7, Butterfly Kisses Misses	Zingers	09/27/2015
Corinthians(1) 13:12, Fully Known!	Zingers	09/27/2015
Corinthians(1) 10:12 plus, Paul, John, Luke, and Jesus: Can Sin! Do Sin! May Sin! Hate Sin!	Zingers	09/27/2015
Corinthians(1) 10:1-11, The Baptism of Moses Compared and Contrasted with the Baptism of Jesus	Zingers	09/27/2015
Acts 9:15-16, Suffering	Zingers	09/23/2015
Acts 21:35-39, Search > Bible > Terrorist = Apostle Paul???	Zingers	09/23/2015
Acts 17:22-31, A Coherent Worldview Test	Zingers	09/23/2015
Examine Yourself	Musings	09/20/2015
Proverbs 30:07-09	Wisecracks	09/20/2015
Proverbs 25:21	Wisecracks	09/20/2015
Proverbs 21:30	Wisecracks	09/20/2015
Proverbs 21:09	Wisecracks	09/20/2015
Proverbs 21:02	Wisecracks	09/20/2015
Proverbs 20:18	Wisecracks	09/20/2015
Proverbs 20:06	Wisecracks	09/20/2015
Proverbs 17:14	Wisecracks	09/20/2015
Proverbs 15:17	Wisecracks	09/20/2015
Proverbs 11:22	Wisecracks	09/20/2015
Proverbs 05:15	Wisecracks	09/20/2015
Proverbs 04:05	Wisecracks	09/20/2015
Proverbs 03:31	Wisecracks	09/20/2015
Proverbs 01:08	Wisecracks	09/20/2015
Proverbs 01:05	Wisecracks	09/20/2015
Good Websites	Top Tens	02/17/2015
How Did You Die by Edmund Vance Cook (take 1)	Media	01/24/2015
How Did You Die by Edmund Vance Cook (take 2)	Media	01/24/2015
How Did You Die by Edmund Vance Cook (take 3)	Media	01/24/2015
Unlikely Preachers	Musings	11/22/2014
The Chocolate Soldier by C.T. Studd	Musings	11/22/2014
I am Catholic, Protestant, or Christian?	Musings	11/22/2014
Are You Ready to Campaign?	Musings	11/22/2014
Good Movies	Top Tens	11/21/2014
I Pledge Allegiance To The Cross	Musings	11/21/2014
Desperado, by Kenny Rogers: For those lost in the Country among us	Musings	11/21/2014
All You Zombies, by The Hooters: For the living dead in the nation	Musings	11/21/2014
Carry On My Wayward Son, by Kerry Livgren: For the Rock hearted among us	Musings	11/21/2014

The Iraqi flag is red, white, and black with “God is the Greatest” written in green. The United States flag is red, white, and blue with 50 white stars. This campaign slogan is red for Christ’s shed blood, white for his mercy given, blue/black for his honor, with a Jewish and gentile star to include all mankind, and “Jesus is the Greatest” written in green because He is God our savior. This is not a political statement and not shrewdly made in the midst of earthly war. But, it is a spiritual statement very shrewdly made in the midst of spiritual war. If the cross of Jesus Christ was powerful enough to destroy the dividing wall between the hypocritical Jews and the hedonistic gentiles, Ephesians 2:14-15, then his cross has also destroyed the dividing wall between hypocritical Moslems and hedonistic Americans, and any dividing wall between any hypocrite or hedonist, or those on the right or left. You cannot be saved by McCain, Obama, or the Taliban! Join the Christian campaign and war against unbelief through prayer and obedience to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the greatest for he gave his life as an atoning sacrifice for Iraqis, Americans, and all mankind. Praise Him!

★ TRUST ★

Jesus Christ is the Greatest

Yesterday / Today / Forever

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Jesus Christ is the Greatest

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Jesus Christ is the Greatest

Yesterday / Today / Forever

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Jesus Christ is the Greatest

Yesterday / Today / Forever

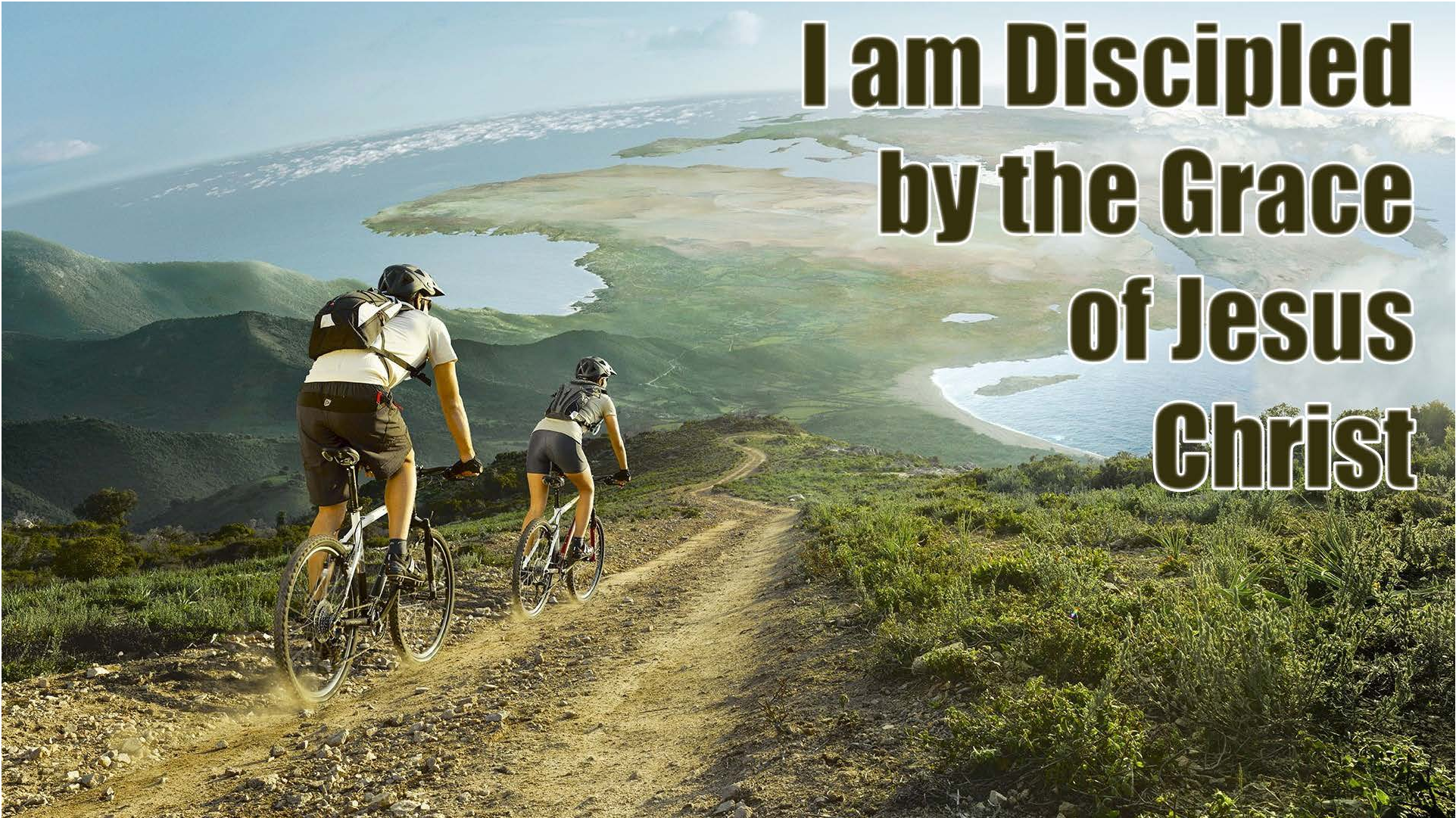
★ TRUST ★

Jesus Christ is the Greatest

Yesterday / Today / Forever



**I am Discipled
by the Grace of Jesus Christ**

A photograph of two cyclists riding away on a dirt trail. The lead cyclist is wearing a white shirt, dark shorts, and a backpack. The second cyclist is wearing a grey shirt and dark shorts. They are riding on a dirt path that winds through a green, hilly landscape. In the background, there is a large body of water, possibly a bay or a lake, surrounded by green hills and mountains under a clear blue sky. The text "I am Discipled by the Grace of Jesus Christ" is overlaid on the right side of the image in a large, bold, black font with a white outline.

**I am Discipled
by the Grace
of Jesus
Christ**



**I am disciplined by
the grace of Jesus Christ**

**I am Disciplined
by the Grace
of Jesus
Christ**



Christian Discipleship 365 Boot Camp

Matthew 22: 34-40

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Will you wholly love God and love others as yourself?

Matthew 28:18-20

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Will you obey Christ and also teach others to obey Christ?

Regimen

The *Christian Discipleship 365 Boot Camp* is a one year regimen estimated to take 365 hours, one hour a day. The goal is to disciple new Christians and train your faith. The program can also challenge mature Christians if you have lapsed. The objectives are outlined below and detailed in the following pages. You will need about \$300 to purchase books, which will then be the beginning of your own resource library. The program is rigorous, but can be adjusted as you need. If you cannot make progress for a few days, that is understood. You simply need to commit to catch up and continue. You will need to prioritize and cut the fluff out of your schedule. Accomplish the boot camp objectives while you are working, waiting, and living. Do not waste the time waiting at the doctor's office? Pray, read, or share your faith while you wait. Make the most of every opportunity. You will also need downtime. Recreation and rest are essential. However, no soldier ever watched three movies a week while going through boot camp. The positive gains of this program will require commitment, discipline, perseverance, and sacrifice.

365 Day Objective	Hours
Read twenty-five books	175
Read the entire Bible	70
Meet weekly with an accountability partner or group	50
Meet weekly with a non-Christian to read Gospel of John	22
Share the gospel twice a month with new people	24
Serve others twice a month with their needs	24
Work through the <i>Examine Yourself</i> questionnaire	X
Walk to pray, listen to God, reflect, and exercise	X
TOTAL	365

Book Checklist

Buy and read each book, write a one page summary, and discuss with your accountability partner. Swap in similar books for those already read.

- Pilgrim's Progress*** by John Bunyan
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/1512396486> - \$6
- Battle of the Gods*** by Robert Morey
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B001ISXKA0> - \$5
- Mere Christianity*** by C.S. Lewis
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/0060652926> - \$11
- The Doctrines of Grace*** by James Boice / Philip Ryken
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B01FIYTLZW> - \$27
- Optimism Out of Control*** by Jeff Martin
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/151523990X> - \$10
- The Inescapable Love of God*** by Thomas Talbot
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/1625646909> - \$24
- All You Want to Know About Hell*** by Steve Greg
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/1401678300> - \$18
- A Tale of Three Kings*** by Gene Edwards
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/0842369082> - \$11
- Bondage of the Will*** by Martin Luther / J.I. Packer
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/0801048931> - \$22
- How to Study the Bible*** by Robert West
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/159789706X> - \$3
- Know What You Believe*** by Paul Little
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/0830834230> - \$12
- Abraham's Four Seeds*** by John Reisinger
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B009R49HYA> - \$11
- The Kingdom of the Cults*** by Walter Martin
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/0764228218> - \$17
- The Greatest Salesman in the World*** by Og Mandino
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/055327757X> - \$6
- Daws - A Man Who Trusted God*** by Betty Skinner
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/0891097961> - \$17
- Found God's Will*** by John MacArthur
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0087OWH2U> - \$6
- The Master Plan of Evangelism*** by Robert Coleman
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/0800788087> - \$10
- Disciples are Made - Not Born*** by Walter Henrichsen
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/0781438837> - \$13
- Lead Out: A Guide for Leading Bible Discussion Groups*** by NavPress
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/0891091254> - \$5
- Love Must be Tough*** by James Dobson
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/141431745X> - \$9
- The Pursuit of Holiness*** by Jerry Bridges
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/1631466399> - \$11
- Why Government Can't Save You*** by John MacArthur
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/0849955556> - \$15
- Fight - A Christian Case for Non-Violence*** by Preston Sprinkle
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/1434704920> - \$5
- Tactics, A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions*** by Gregory Koukl
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B07JG482BW> - \$20
- A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*** by Eugene Peterson
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/0830822577> - \$17

Bible Checklist

Read the Bible alternating between old and new testament books.
Read entire books in one sitting. Discuss with your partner.

OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus
Numbers
Deuteronomy
Joshua
Judges
Ruth
1 Samuel
2 Samuel
1 Kings
2 Kings
1 Chronicles
2 Chronicles
Ezra
Nehemiah
Esther
Job
Psalms
Proverbs
Ecclesiastes
Song of Solomon
Isaiah
Jeremiah
Lamentations
Ezekiel
Daniel
Hosea
Joel
Amos
Obadiah
Jonah
Micah
Nahum
Habakkuk
Zephaniah
Haggai
Zechariah
Malachi

NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew
Mark
Luke
John
Acts
Romans
1 Corinthians
2 Corinthians
Galatians
Ephesians
Philippians
Colossians
1 Thessalonians
2 Thessalonians
1 Timothy
2 Timothy
Titus
Philemon
Hebrews
James
1 Peter
2 Peter
1 John
2 John
3 John
Jude
Revelation

Accountability Checklist

Meet with your partner for 50 weeks. The plan below should be re-ordered and modified according to what is best for you.

1. Plan your time together and pray
2. Read and discuss **1 John 1**
3. Read and discuss **1 John 2**
4. Read and discuss **1 John 3**
5. Read and discuss **1 John 4**
6. Read and discuss **1 John 5**
7. Evaluate your time together and pray
8. Read and discuss **Romans 1**
9. Read and discuss **Romans 2**
10. Read and discuss **Romans 3**
11. Read and discuss **Romans 4**
12. Read and discuss **Romans 5**
13. Read and discuss **Romans 6**
14. Read and discuss **Romans 7**
15. Read and discuss **Romans 8**
16. Read and discuss **Romans 9**
17. Read and discuss **Romans 10**
18. Read and discuss **Romans 11**
19. Read and discuss **Romans 12**
20. Read and discuss **Romans 13**
21. Read and discuss **Romans 14**
22. Read and discuss **Romans 15**
23. Read and discuss **Romans 16**
24. Evaluate your time together and pray
25. Discuss ***A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*** by Eugene Peterson
26. Discuss ***A Tale of Three Kings*** by Gene Edwards
27. Discuss ***Abraham's Four Seeds*** by John Reisinger
28. Discuss ***All You Want to Know About Hell*** by Steve Greg
29. Discuss ***Battle of the Gods*** by Robert Morey
30. Discuss ***Bondage of the Will*** by Martin Luther / J.I. Packer
31. Discuss ***Daws - A Man Who Trusted God*** by Betty Skinner
32. Discuss ***Disciples are Made - Not Born*** by Walter Henrichsen
33. Discuss ***Fight - A Christian Case for Non-Violence*** by Preston Sprinkle
34. Discuss ***Found God's Will*** by John MacArthur
35. Discuss ***How to Study the Bible*** by Robert West
36. Discuss ***Know What You Believe*** by Paul Little
37. Discuss ***Lead Out: A Guide for Leading Bible Discussion Groups*** by NavPress
38. Discuss ***Love Must be Tough*** by James Dobson
39. Discuss ***Mere Christianity*** by C.S. Lewis
40. Discuss ***Optimism Out of Control*** by Jeff Martin
41. Discuss ***Pilgrim's Progress*** by John Bunyan
42. Discuss ***Tactics, A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions*** by Koukl
43. Discuss ***The Doctrines of Grace*** by James Boice / Philip Ryken
44. Discuss ***The Greatest Salesman in the World*** by Og Mandino
45. Discuss ***The Inescapable Love of God*** by Thomas Talbot
46. Discuss ***The Kingdom of the Cults*** by Walter Martin
47. Discuss ***The Master Plan of Evangelism*** by Robert Coleman
48. Discuss ***The Pursuit of Holiness*** by Jerry Bridges
49. Discuss ***Why Government Can't Save You*** by John MacArthur
50. Evaluate your time together, pray, and plan for the future

Gospel of John Checklist

Read the Gospel of John weekly with a non-Christian friend.
Include your accountability partner if possible.

1. Read and discuss ***John 1***
2. Read and discuss ***John 2***
3. Read and discuss ***John 3***
4. Read and discuss ***John 4***
5. Read and discuss ***John 5***
6. Read and discuss ***John 6***
7. Read and discuss ***John 7***
8. Read and discuss ***John 8***
9. Read and discuss ***John 9***
10. Read and discuss ***John 10***
11. Read and discuss ***John 11***
12. Read and discuss ***John 12***
13. Read and discuss ***John 13***
14. Read and discuss ***John 14***
15. Read and discuss ***John 15***
16. Read and discuss ***John 16***
17. Read and discuss ***John 17***
18. Read and discuss ***John 18***
19. Read and discuss ***John 19***
20. Read and discuss ***John 20***
21. Read and discuss ***John 21***
22. Invite your friend to trust and obey Jesus

Share and Serve Checklist

Share the gospel twice a month with new people. Serve others twice a month with their needs. Note your experience below.

Share the Gospel

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____
- 6. _____
- 7. _____
- 8. _____
- 9. _____
- 10. _____
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- 21. _____
- 22. _____
- 23. _____
- 24. _____

Serve Others

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
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- 17. _____
- 18. _____
- 19. _____
- 20. _____
- 21. _____
- 22. _____
- 23. _____
- 24. _____

Motivation

Ask God to provide motivation, commitment, discipline, and perseverance.

Ephesians 6:10-20

10) *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.* 11) *Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.* 12) *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.* 13) *Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.* 14) *Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place,* 15) *and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.* 16) *In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.* 17) *Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.* 18) *And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.* 19) *Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel,* 20) *for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.*

Galatians 5

13) *You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.* 14) *For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."* 15) *If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.* 16) *So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.* 17) *For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.* 18) *But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.* 19) *The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery;* 20) *idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions* 21) *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.* 22) *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,* 23) *gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.* 24) *Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.* 25) *Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.* 26) *Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.*

2 Timothy 2

1) *You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.* 2) *And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.* 3) *Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.* 4) *No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer.* 5) *Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules.* 6) *The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops.* 7) *Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.*

Examine Yourself

"Examine your own selves, whether you are in the faith. Test your own selves. Or don't you know about your own selves, that Jesus Christ is in you? Unless indeed you are disqualified."
2 Corinthians 13:5

"But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread, and drink of the cup."
1 Corinthians 11:28

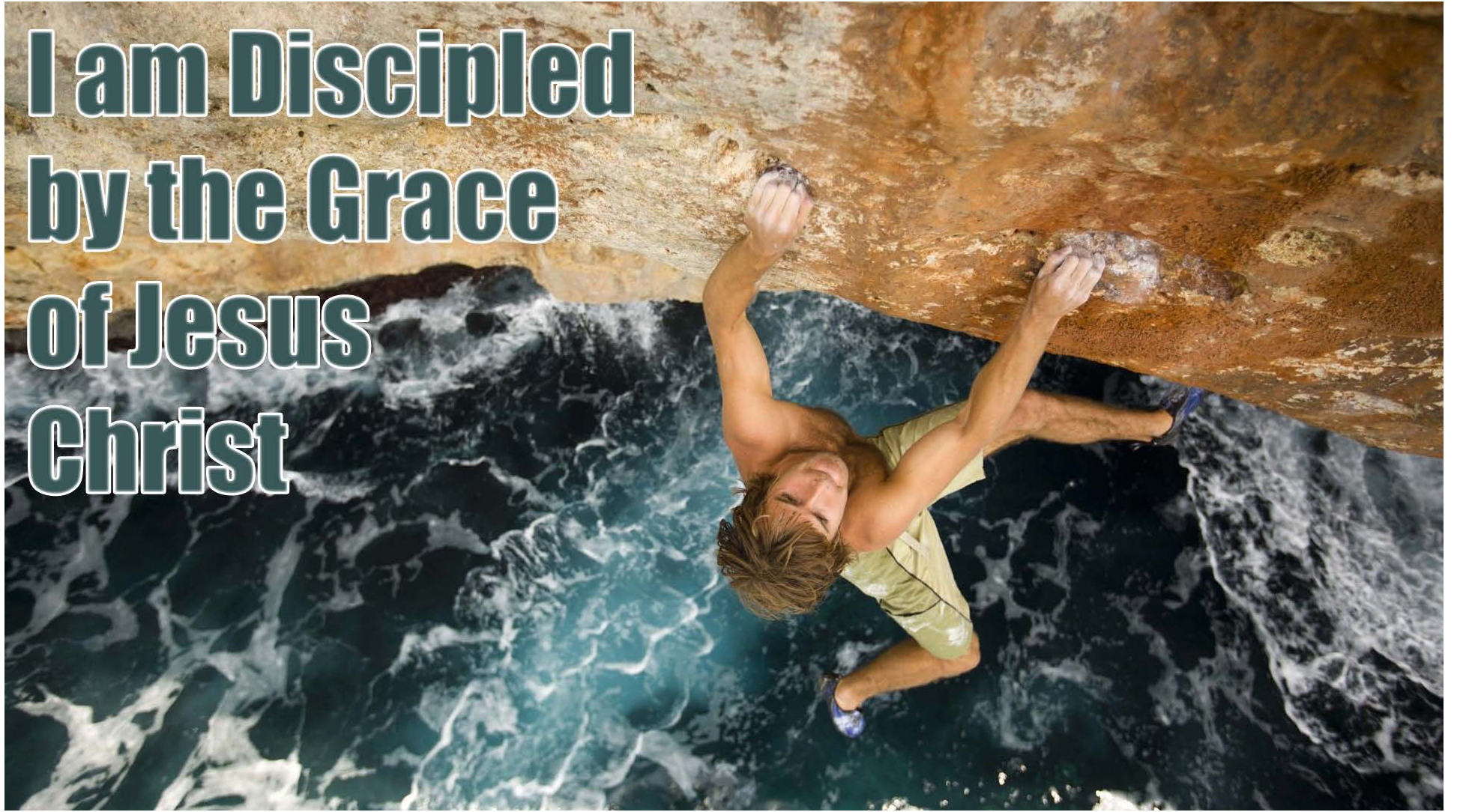
"Be diligent in these things. Give yourself wholly to them, that your progress may be revealed to all. Pay attention to yourself and to your teaching. Continue in these things, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you."
1 Timothy 4:15-16

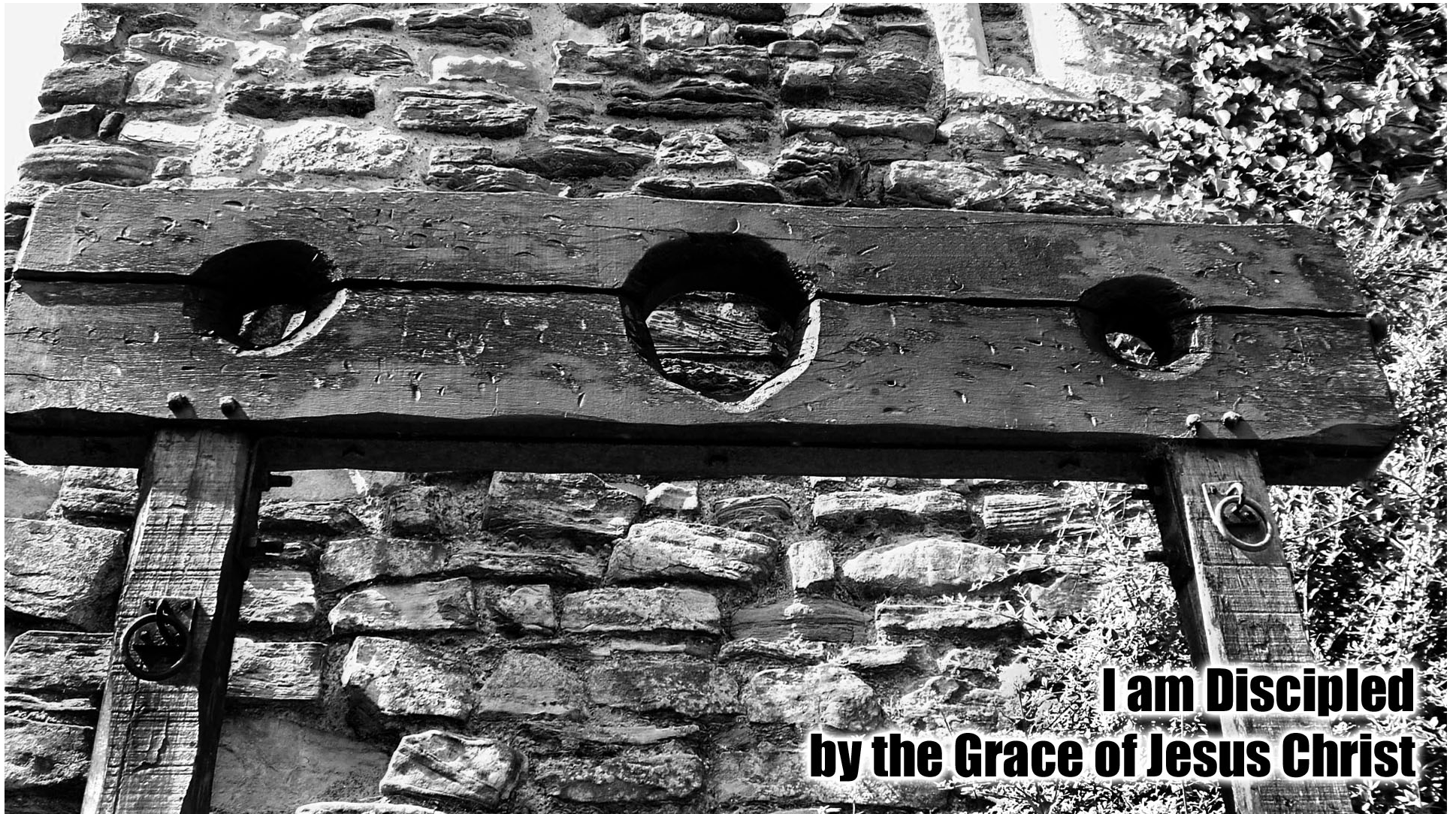
1. Spirit – your relationship to God
 - a. Do you confess that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised him from the dead?
 - b. Do you have love for God and gratefulness for his grace toward you?
 - c. Are you reading God's word regularly? What have you read?
 - d. Are you talking to God regularly? What have you said?
 - e. Are you fellowshiping with other Christians regularly? Open fellowship?
 - f. Are you confessing your sins to a close friend in the Lord? Do you have secret sin?
 - g. Are you looking toward heaven or lusting for this world's things? What things?
 - h. Are you an ambassador for Christ? Do your friends know you are a Christian?
 - i. Are you making disciples? Who are you helping to trust and obey?
 - j. Are you evangelizing? Who have you explained the gospel to?
 - k. Are impure movies, books, or music in your life? Would godly friends agree?
 - l. We are all tempted...how are you being tempted now? Who is praying for you?

2. Soul – your relationship to your fellowman
 - a. Do you have love for your fellowman and thankfulness for God's grace to them?
 - b. Do you have un-reconciled conflict with others? With who specifically?
 - c. Have you lied, cheated, or stolen from your fellowman? What specifically?
 - d. Are you working to provide for yourself and your family? Working hard?
 - e. Are you submitted to your authorities? Parent? Husband? Employer? Government?
 - f. Are you avoiding any people in your life? Why?
 - g. Are you growing in your mind through good books? Are you reading junk?
 - h. Are you growing through good hobbies and endeavors? Are you being lazy?
 - i. Do you have friends that know you well? Do they have any concerns about you?
 - j. Are you godly with money? Do you owe others? Do you give? Are you hoarding?

3. Body – your care of your physical body
 - a. Do you see a doctor for checkups? When was the last time?
 - b. Do you see a dentist for checkups? When was the last time?
 - c. Do you see an optometrist for checkups? When was the last time?
 - d. Are you avoiding the help or prescriptions of medical professionals? Why?
 - e. Are you eating good foods and the right amount? Would a nutritionist agree?
 - f. Are you exercising regularly? Enough or too much?
 - g. Do you have any physical pains or problems that you are avoiding? Why?
 - h. Are you getting enough sleep? How much?
 - i. Do you feel encouraged, thankful, and positive? Why or why not?
 - j. Are you properly groomed and clothed to mirror Christ? Would godly friends agree?

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"But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread, and drink of the cup."

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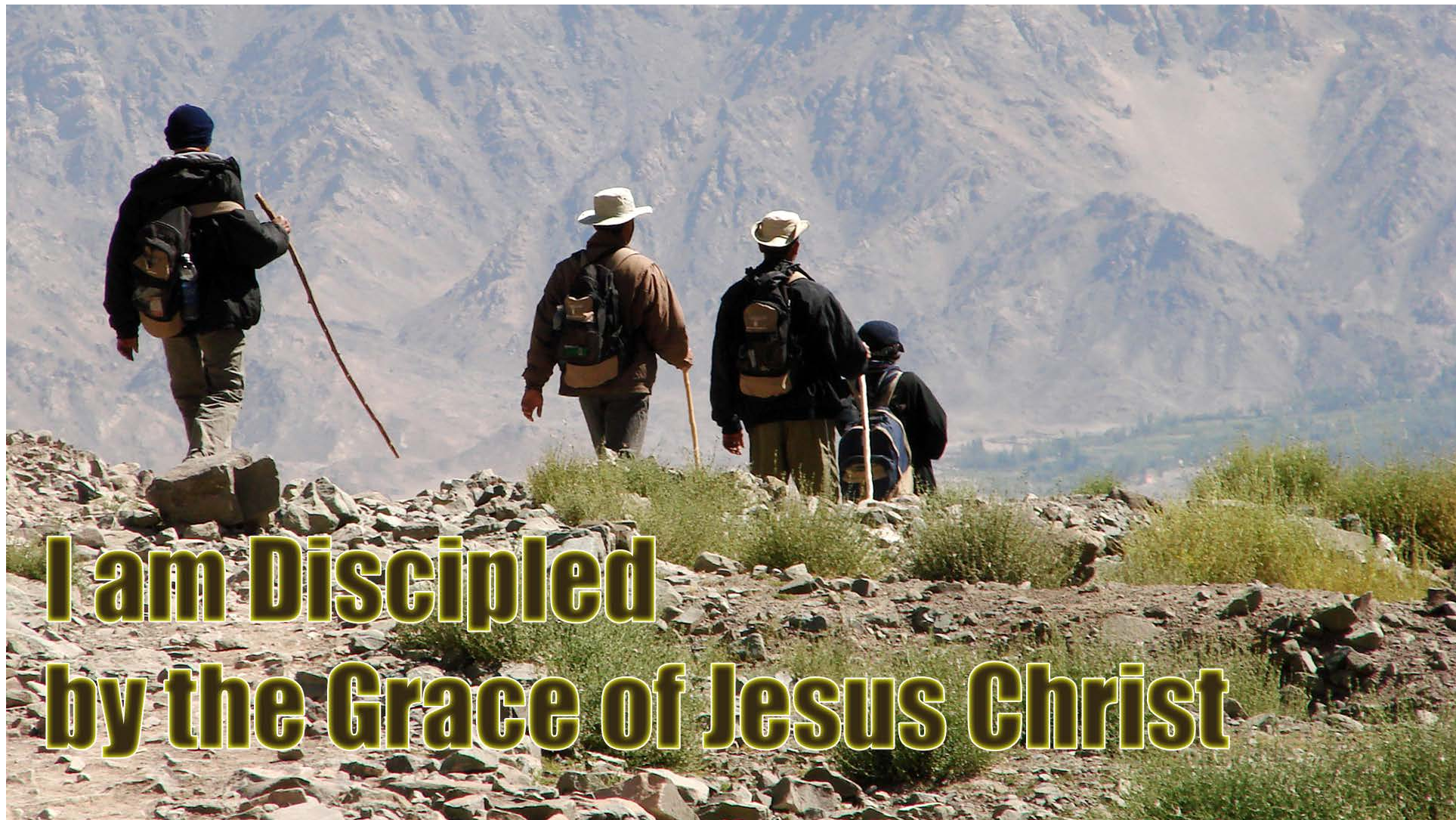
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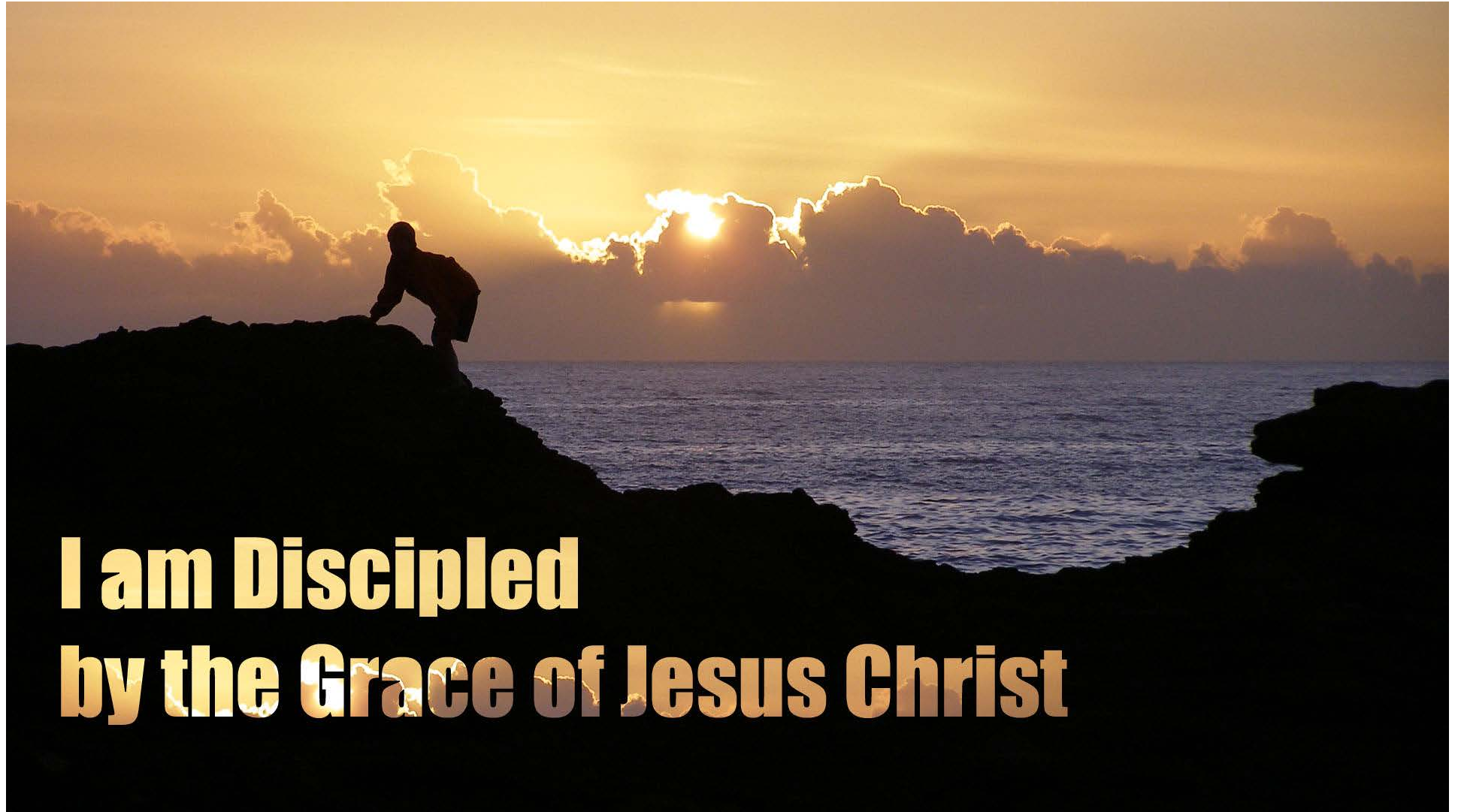
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WISE Crack

The wise listen
and add to their learning

Hey! I'm listening, but
I keep losing brain cells

Jeff Martin - Proverbs 1:5

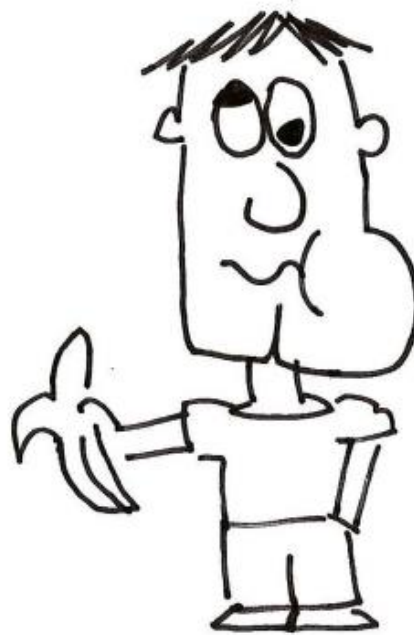
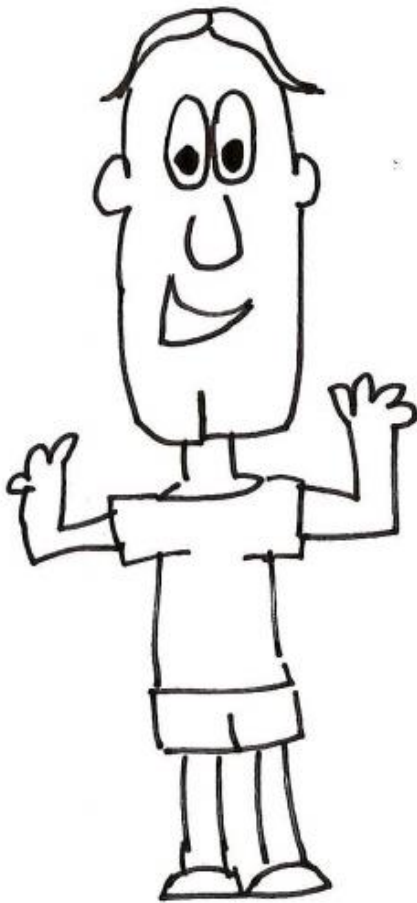


WISE Crack

Listen, my son, to your father's instruction!

Problem is my dad is an ape !!

Jeff Martin - Proverbs 1:8



Evolution 101

WISE Crack

Do not envy a tyrant,
and choose none of his ways!



I have heard of
green with envy,
but this is a jungle!



Jeff Martin - Proverbs 3:31

WISE Crack

Get wisdom! Get understanding!
Do not forget my words or
swerve from them.

Jeff Martin - Proverbs 4:5



Hey Got Milk!
who needs wisdom?



WISE Crack

Drink water out of your own tank and
running water out of your own well.

Jeff Martin - Proverbs 5:15



Water pistol...
Water tank?
Water war!

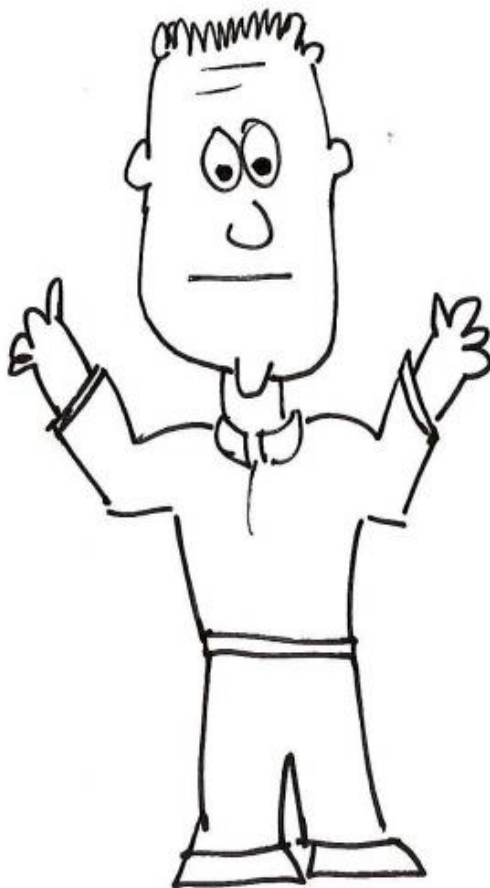


WISE Crack

Like a gold ring in a pig's snout
is a beautiful woman who
shows no discretion.

Show discretion?
I'm trying to
show some skin!

Jeff Martin - Proverbs 11:22



WISE Crack

Better a meal of vegetables
with love than a tender steak
with hatred.

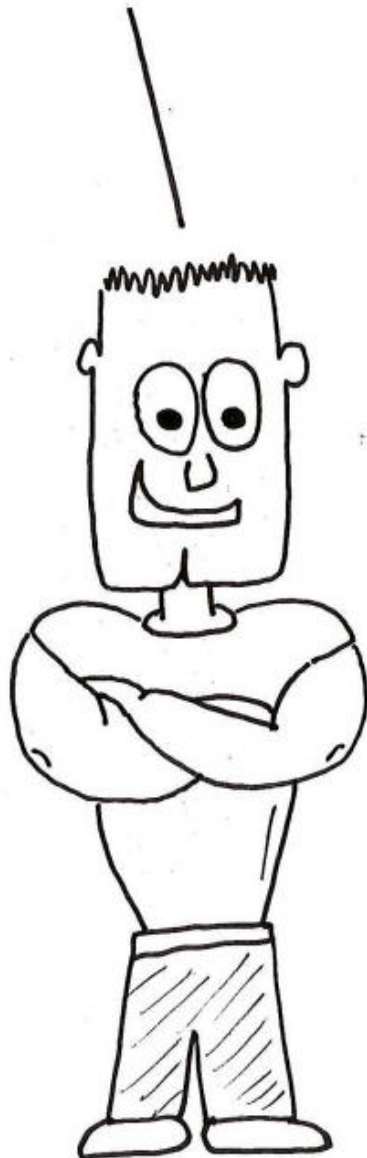
So what about the
poor and hungry?
Let them eat steak!

Jeff Martin - Proverbs 15:17



WISE Crack

The beginning of an argument is like a dam burst, so stop before you start!



I guess a flood is a water table with serious legs...



Jeff Martin - Prov. 17:14

WISE Crack

Many a man claims to have unfailing love,
but a faithful man who can find?

Hey baby, I'm a faithful
man! Just ask Suzy,
Donna, Tina, Lynn...

Jeff Martin - Proverbs 20:6



WISE Crack

Make plans by seeking advice

Jeff Martin + Jacob, Proverbs 20:18



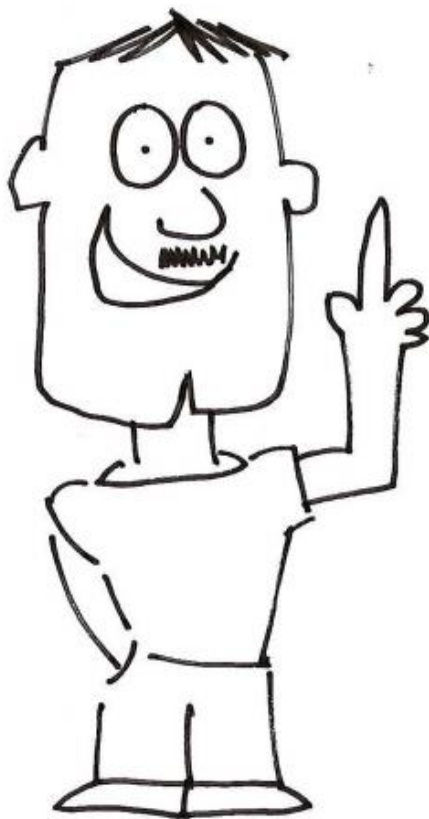
who needs more vice?
I've got a truckload



WISE Crack

All a man's ways seem right to him, but the Lord weighs the heart.

Jeff Martin - Proverbs 21:2



Hey if I'm right why ask the Lord?

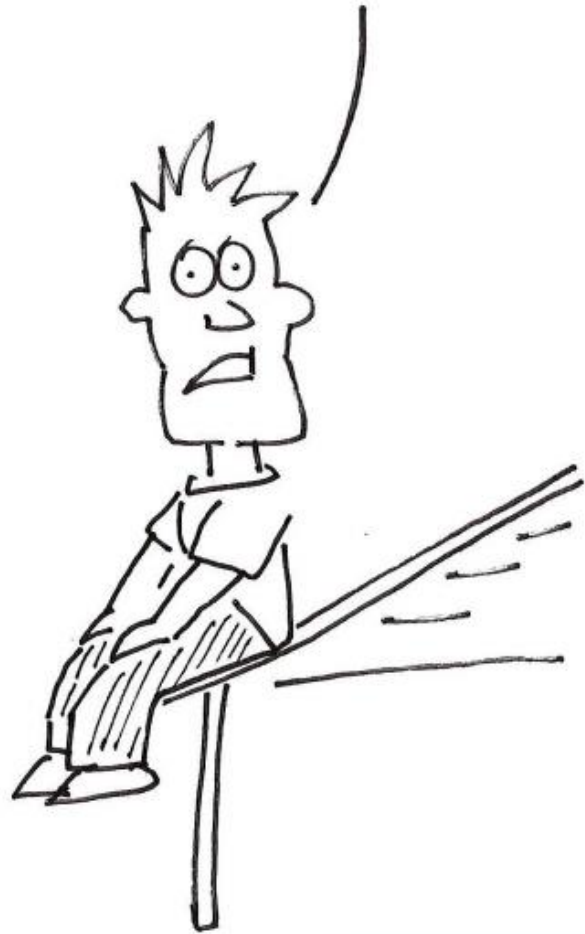


WISE Crack

Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife.

Now you tell me!

Jeff Martin - Proverbs 21:9



WISE Crack

There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the Lord.

Listen chief, I've got a bachelor's from ole state, a masters from new state, and a phd from gaseous state



Jeff Martin - Proverbs 21:30

WISE Crack

If your enemy is hungry give him food, and if thirsty give him drink.

What does drinking water drink? Does non-drinking water get thirsty?



Jeff Martin - Proverbs 25:21

WISE Crack

Hmmm
Check your math

GET RICH
give rich o!

Jeff Martin - Proverbs 30:7-9



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THE CHOCOLATE SOLDIER

by C. T. Studd

Read a short biography at the bottom of this article

Heroism is the lost chord, the missing note of present day Christianity! Every true soldier is a hero! A Soldier without heroism is a Chocolate Soldier! Who has not been stirred to scorn and mirth at the very thought of a Chocolate Soldier? In peace true soldiers are captive lions, fretting in their cages. War gives them their liberty and sends them, like boys bounding out of school, to obtain their hearts desire or perish in the attempt. Battle is the soldiers vital breath! Peace turns him into a stooping asthmatic. War makes a whole man again, and gives him the heart, strength and vigor of a hero. Every true Christian is a soldier of Christ a hero par excellence! Braver than the bravest, scorning the soft seductions of peace and her oft-repeated warnings against hardship, disease, danger and death, whom he counts among his bosom friends.

The otherwise Christian is a chocolate Christian! Dissolving in water and melting at the smell of fire. Sweet they are! Bonbons, lollipops! Living their lives on a glass dish or in a cardboard box, each clad in his soft clothing, a little frilled white paper to preserve his dear little delicate constitution. Here are some portraits of Chocolate Soldiers taken by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself:

He said, I go sir, and went not; he said he would go to the heathen, but stuck fast to Christendom instead.

They say and do not they tell others to go, and yet do not go themselves. Never, said General Gordon to a corporal in the midst of a battle, tell another man to do what you are afraid to do yourself.

To the Chocolate Soldier the very thought of war brings a violent attack of sickness, while the call to battle always finds him paralyzed. I really cannot move, he says. I only wish I could, but I can sing, and here are some of my favorite lines:

I must be carried to the skies
On a flowery bed of ease
Let others fight to win the prize,
Or sail thro bloody seas
Mark time, Christian heroes,
Never go to war;
Stop and mind the babies
Playing on the floor.
Wash and dress and feed them
Forty times a week.
Till they're roly poly
Puddings so to speak.
Round and round the nursery
Let us ambulate
Sugar and spice and all that's nice
Must be on our slate.

Thank the good Lord, said a very fragile, white-haired lady, God never meant me to be a jelly-fish! She wasn't! God never was a Chocolate manufacturer, and never will be. Gods men are always heroes. In Scripture you can trace their giant foot-tracks down the sands of time.

Noah walked with God, he didn't only preach righteousness, he acted it. He went through water and didn't melt. He breasted the current of the popular opinion of his day, scorning alike the hatred and ridicule of the scoffers who mocked at the thought of there being but one way of salvation. He warned the unbelieving and, entering the ark himself, didn't open the door an inch when once God and shut it. A real hero untainted by the fear of man!

Learn to scorn the praise of men, Learn to lose with God;
Jesus won the world thro shame!
And beckons us His road.

Abraham, a simple farmer, at a word from the Invisible God, marched, with family and stock, through the terrible desert to a distant land to live among a people whose language he could neither speak nor understand! Not bad that! But later he did even better, rushing out against the combined armies of five kings, flushed with recent victory, to rescue one man! His Army? Just 318 odd fellows, armed like a circus crowd. And he won too. He always wins who sides with God. What courage! Only a farmer! No war training! Yet what hero has eclipsed his feat? His open secret? He was the friend of God!

Moses the man of God was a species of human chameleon: scholar, general, law-giver, leader, etc. Brought up as the Emperors grandson with more than a good chance of coming to the throne, one thing only between him and it Truth what a choice! What a temptation! A throne for a lie! Ignominy, banishment, or likely enough death for the truth! He played the man! Refusing to be called the son of Pharaohs daughter, he chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin and success for a season, accounting the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.

Again I see him. Now and old man and alone, marching stolidly back to Egypt, after forty years of exile, to beard the lion in his den, to liberate Pharaohs slaves right under his very nose, and to lead them across that great and terrible wilderness. A wild-cat affair, if ever there was one! When were Gods schemes otherwise?! Look at Jordon, Jericho, Gideon, Goliath, and scores of others. Tame tabby-cat schemes are stamped with another hallmark that of the Chocolate Brigade! How dearly they love their tabbies yet think themselves wise men! Real Christians revel in desperate ventures for Christ, expecting from God great things and attempting the same with exhirliration. History cannot match these feats of Moses. How was it done? He consulted not with flesh and blood, he obeyed not men but God.

Once again I see the old grey-beard, this time descending the Mount with giant strides and rushing into camp, his eyes blazing like burning coals. One man against three million dancing dervishes drunk with debauchery. Bravo! Well done, old man! First class! His cheek pales not, but his mouth moves, and I think I catch his words, If God be for me who can be against me? I will not be afraid of 10,000 of the people that have set themselves against me. Though a host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear. And he didn't. He wins again. Whence this desperate courage? Listen! Now the man Moses was very meek above all the men which were upon the face of the earth...the Lord spake unto Moses face to face as a man speaketh unto his friend. My servant, Moses, said his Master, is faithful in all Mine house, with him will I speak mouth to mouth. Such is the explanation of Moses the chameleon, the man and friend of God and consequently a first-class hero.

David the man after Gods own heart was a man of war and a mighty man of valor. When all Israel were on the run, David faced Goliath alone...with God and he but a stripling, and well scolded too by his brother for having come to see the battle. What a splendid fool Eliab must have been! As though David would go to see a battle and not stay to fight. They are Chocolate Soldiers who merely go to see battles, and coolly urge others to fight them. They had better save their journey money and use it to send out real fighters instead. Soldiers don't need dry nurses, and if they did the Holy Ghost is always on the spot and ready to undertake any case on simple application. No! David went to the battle and stayed to fight, and won! Wise beyond his years, he had no use for Saul's armor. It cramped his freedom of action. He tried it on and took it off quick. And, besides, it made such a ghastly rattle, even when he walked, that he could not hear the still small voice of God, and would never have heard Him saying afterwards, This is the way to the brook, David! and there are the five smooth stones! Trust only in Me and them. Your own home-made sling will do first class, and there! that's the shortest cut to Goliath. The Chocolates ran away they were all Chocolates but David ran upon Goliath. One smooth stone was enough.

David's secret was that he had but one Director, and He the Infallible One. He directed the stone, as He directed the youth. Too many directors spoil the sport, and two are too many, just the One. Thus Christ said to His soldiers: He shall teach you all things, He shall guide you into all the truth. This is My beloved Son: Hear Him. One Mediator only, between God and Man, the man Christ Jesus. One director of Christian Man God the Holy Ghost. Whose directions indeed require instant obedience, but not the endorsement of any man.

The devil needs red-hot shot, fresh from the foundry of the Holy Ghost. He laughs at sold shot or tepid, and as for that made of half-iron and half-clay, half-divine and half-human, why you might just as well pelt him with snowballs.

Whence did this raw youth derive his courage and skill? Not from military camps, nor theological schools, nor religious retreats. To know The only True God and Jesus Christ is enough. Paul determined to know only Jesus Christ, and look at the grand result! While others were learning pretty theories, David, like John, had been alone with God in the wilds, practicing on bears and lions. The result? He knew God and did exploits. He knew God only. He obeyed God only. That's the secret. God alone gives strength. God adulterated with men entails the weakness of iron and clay Chocolate brittleness!

Yet, hero as he was, even David, alas!, once played the role of Chocolate Soldier. He stayed at home when he should have gone to war. His army, far off, in danger fighting the enemy, won. David, at home, secure, within sight of Gods house and often going there, suffered the one great defeat of his life, entailing such a bitter, life-long reaping as might deter others from the folly of sowing wild oats. David's sin is a terrific sermon (like Lots preaching in Sodom must have been), its theme don't be a Chocolate Soldier!

In his simple, quick and full confession, David proved himself a man again. It takes a real man to make a true confession _ a Chocolate Soldier will excuse or cloak his sin. He tumbles in the mud, flounders on, wipes his mouth to try to get the bad taste of his acted lie out of it, and then goes on his way saying, I have done no wickedness. A self-murdering fool! Killing his conscience to save his face, like Balaam beating the ass who sought to save his masters life. Being a Chocolate Soldier nearly did in David. Beware!

Nathan was another real Christian Soldier. He went to his king and rebuked him to his face, like Peters dealing with Ananias (only David embraced his opportunity and confessed), and unlike the Chocolate Soldiers of today who go whispering about and refusing to either judge, rebuke, or put away evil because of the entailed scandal. Veritable Soapy Sams. They say It is nothing!

Nothing at all! A mere misunderstanding! As though Gods cause would suffer more through a bold declaration and defense of the truth and the use of the knife, than by the hiding of sin, and the certain development of mortification in the member, involving death to the whole body. He that doeth righteousness is righteous, and he that doeth sin is of the devil, and ought to be told so. He that is a second time led captive by the devil needs neither salve nor medicine, but the vigorous rebuke and summons to repentance of a righteous man to effect his salvation. We are badly in need of Nathans today, who fear God and naught else, no, not even a scandal!

Daniel was another hero. Of course he was! Was he not the man greatly beloved of God who sent an angel to tell him so? I love to watch him as he walks, with firm step and radiant face, to the lions den, stopping but once like his Master en route to Calvary to comfort his weeping and agonized emperor. God shut the mouths of the lions against Daniel, but opened them wide against those who had opened their mouths against His servant. A man is known by his works, and the works of Daniel were his three friends, who, rather than bow down to men or gold, braved the fiery furnace. Again we see him going to the banquet hall, and hear his conductor whisper in his ear, Be careful, Daniel, be statesmanlike. Position and power again for you if you are tactful and wise especially tactful! And Daniel's simple reply, Get thee behind me, Satan! There he stands before the king, braving torture or instant death but its the king, not Daniel who tells him to his face the whole hot truth of God, diminishing not a jot.

John the Baptist a man taught and made and sent of God good old John! Who doesn't love and admire him? Why, even Herod did. A genuine deficiency of oil and salve in his composition. He always told the bang flat truth, with emphasis. As he loved, so he warned. He knew not how to fawn. He wooed with the sword, and men loved him the better for it. They always do. The leaders of religion sent to John to ask him the dearly loved question of every Pharisee, By what authority doest thou these (good) things? They asked that of Christ Himself, and crucified Him for the doing of them. Johns answer was plain and pungent, I will tell you what you ask and more. (John was always liberal) I? I am nobody, but ye and your masters are a generation of vipers. A good hot curry, that! John never served his curries with butter sauce, but he was always very liberal with chutney a man of God no sugar plum nor Chocolate Soldier he!

Thus he faced Herod after six months in an underground dungeon, and he a man of Gods Open-air Mission. Brought straight in before the king; surrounded with all the might and majesty of camp and court, blinking at the unaccustomed sight of light, but by no means putting blinders on the truth, he blurted out his hot and thunderous rebuke, Thou shalt not have that woman to be thy wife. A whole sermon in one sentence, as easy to remember as impossible to forget. John had preached like that before; like Hugh Latimer, he was not above repeating a good sermon to a king, word for word, when the king had not given sufficient heed to it.

John received the unique distinction of a first-class character from both God and the agent of the devil. Hark to the Savior indulging in an outburst of exquisite sarcasm, What think ye of John? A reed shaken by the wind? A man clothed in soft raiment? A Chocolate Soldier? (How delicious! The Chocolates were right in front of Jesus at the time Pharisees, Sadducees, priests, scribes, lawyers, and other hypocrites. How the crowd must have enjoyed it!) A prophet! Nay, much more than a prophet! Of men born of women there is none greater than John. And what did the devils agent say when, after Johns death, he heard of Jesus? This I tell you, is John risen from the dead. What a character! Fancy Jesus being mistaken for anyone! He could have been mistaken only for John. Nobody envies him the well-deserved honor, great though it was, for John was a man pure granite right through, with not a grain of chocolate in him.

Had John but heard Jesus say, Ye shall be My witnesses unto the uttermost parts of the earth, I very much doubt if Herods dungeons, or his soldiers, could have detained him. He surely would

have found some means of escape, and run off to preach Christ's Gospel. If not in the very heart of Africa, then in some more difficult and dangerous place. Yet Christ said, referring to His subsequent gifts of the Holy Ghost to every believer, He that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he, intimating that even greater powers than those of John are at the disposal of every Christian, and that what John was each one of us can be a good, straight, bold, unconquerable, heroic.

But here are other foot-tracks outrageous ones: they can belong only to one man, that grandest of Christian paradoxes, the little giant Paul whose head was as big as his body, and his heart greater than both. Once he thought and treated every Christian as a combination of knave and fool. Then he became one himself. He was called fool because his acts were so far beyond the dictates of human reason, and mad because of his irrepressible fiery zeal for Christ and men. A first-class scholar, but one who knew how to use scholarship properly; for he put it on the shelf, declaring the wisdom of men to be but folly, and determined to know nothing else save Jesus Christ and Him crucified. The result he made the world turn somersault. His life was a perpetual gamble for God. Daily he faced death for Christ. Again and again he stood fearless before crowds thirsting for his blood. He stood before kings and governors and turned not a hair. He didn't so much as flinch before Nero, that vice-president of hell. His sufferings were appalling; read them. He walked in his Masters footsteps, and so received (God is always just in His favors) the same splendid compliment that Jesus did. All forsook him. So there were some Chocolate Christians in those days too. Anyone who forsook Paul must have been made of Chocolate. Doubtless the Chocolates excused themselves as they do today. Who could abide such a fanatical, fiery fool? Such an uncompromising character? Nobody could work with him, or he with them! (What a lie! Jesus did, and they got on well together.) A tactless enthusiast, who considered it his business to tell every man the unvarnished truth regardless of consequences. He won his degree hands down, and without touch of the spur. A first-class one, too that of the headman's ax next best to that of the cross.

And so the tale goes on. Go where you will through the Scriptures or history, you find that men who really knew God, and didn't merely say they did, were invariably Paragons of Pluck; Dare-devil Desperadoes for Jesus; Gamblers for God. Fools and Madmen, shout the world and the Chocolates. Yes, for Christ's sake, add the Angels!

Nobly they fought to win their prize,
Climbing the steep ascents of heaven,
Thro peril, toil, and pain
O God, to us let grace be given,
to follow in their train.

The Chocolate Christians of today can at least boast of having ancient pedigrees. There are Chocolates a la Reuben, who have great searchings of heart, and make great resolves of heart too. But somehow they still sit among the sheepfolds, listening to the pipings of their much-loved organs and church choirs. Its good to have a great heart searching. Its better to make a great heart resolve. But, if instead of obeying, we sit among the sheep, leaving our few hard-pressed brethren to tackle the wolves by themselves, verily we are but Chocolate Christians. You made a great resolve to go to Africa for Christ a year or two ago. Where are you now? In England? Yes! Yes! Lollipop! (Judges 5:16)

There are Chocolate Meroz, who earned the curse of the angel of the Lord. War was declared; the battle about to begin; the odds were outrageous, and Meroz remained in England attending conventions until the battle was over, then he went, in comfort and security, as a tourist! Doubtless they said, They couldn't fight till they had been properly ordained, and besides, there

was so very much to be done in fat, overfed Meroz, and surely to feed a flock of fat sheep in a safe place had always been considered the ideal training of war; as though the best training for the soldier was to become a nurse-maid!!! (Judges 5:23)

Chocolates du Balaam begin first-class, and earn the name of prophets. They develop a squint, melt, and finally run out of the frying pan into the fire, this Balaam. One day he couldn't get his left eye to look at God. It would look at earth and mammon and that chit of a girl, Miss Popularity. He ought to have done as God told him, and plucked it out. But he said that was too much to ask any man, and besides he wanted the best of both worlds. He had a hearty desire to die the death of the righteous, but he wasn't willing to pay the price of a righteous life. He hadn't the courage to curse Gods people, so he made plans for others to make them sin. But one day, while his dupes were putting his chestnuts into the fire, they fell in themselves, and Balaam with them. (Numbers 22-24)

I counsel thee to buy of me eyesalve, that thou mayest once again have a single eye, and be enabled to see the folly of flirting with the world.

Chocolate Demas, who left old fiery hard-hitting Paul for an easier path. He said he though Paul should wink at, or slobber over sin, instead of rebuking it. He was so very fond of the knife, you know; and he never would use sticking-plaster, because he said it never healed the sore but made it burrow underneath and become bigger, worse, and dangerous. (2 Timothy 4:10)

Mark joined the Chocolate Brigade once. He left Paul and Barnabas in the lurch, and went back to Jerusalem for a rest cure _ a religious retreat. Thank God he got sick of it ere long, resigned his commission, and re-enlisted in Gods army and became a useful soldier. (Acts 13:13)

Many fine youngsters are tuned into Chocolate Soldiers by old prophets. Old prophets who have lost their fire, or fire off words instead of deeds, usually become Great Chocolate Manufacturers. That poor young prophet. He did so well when he obeyed God only, but it was all over with him when he listened to another voice, even though that of an old prophet. Didn't the old prophet say he was a prophet? What a damnable lie! The floor of Christendom and elsewhere is littered with wrecks made by old prophets. God wont stand nonsense from any man. Every man has to choose between Christ and Barabas, and every Christian between God and some old prophet. Better be a silly donkey in the estimation of an old prophet than listen to his soft talk and flatter, and afterwards become a wreck. This is My beloved Son, hear HIM. No! Not even Moses, nor Elijah, nor both. Hear Him. You have an appointment from God, and you have no need that any man teach you. You say you believe the Bible! Do your deeds give the lie to your words? (1 Kings 13)

The ten spies were chocolates. They melted and ran over the whole congregation of Israel, turning them into chocolate creams softies, afraid to face the fire and water before them. God put them all into the saucepan again and boiled them for forty years in the desert, and left them there. He has no use for Chocolates. Its not small things He despises, but Chocolates; for He said, Your little ones shall inherit the promise land which you have forfeited through listening to men and despising Me. (Numbers 13)

Jonah became a Chocolate Soldier once. Told to go to Africa, he went to Liverpool and took ship for America. Luckily he met a storm and a whale which, after three days instruction, taught him how to pray and obey, and set him once again on the right track. (Jonah 1)

There's nothing that shows up Chocolates so much as a bit of a breeze among Gods people. Paul and Barnabas had one once. Judging from experience, I guess there were some Chocolates about

then who got into a fog right away! Before that, they had vowed they would go to the heathen; but this breeze between P and B put them off. If they hadn't been made of chocolate they would have said, This affair between Paul and Barnabas only makes it more necessary for me to keep close to God, and do what He told me to do more exactly and punctually; so I shall go a bit sooner to Africa that's all! Difficulties, dangers, disease, death, or divisions don't deter any but Chocolates from executing Gods will. When someone says there's a lion in the way, the real Christian promptly replies, That's hardly enough inducement for me; I want a bear or two besides to make it worth my while to go.

Chocolates are very fond of talking loud and long against some whom they call fanatics, as though there were any danger of Christians being fanatics nowadays! Why, fanatics among Christians are as rare as the dodo. Now, if they spoke out against lukewarmness, they would talk sense. Gods real people have always been called fanatics. Jesus was called mad; so was Paul; so was Whitfield, Wesley, Moody, Spurgeon. No one has graduated far in Gods School who has not been paid the compliment of being called a fanatic. We Christians of today are indeed a tepid bunch. Had we but half the fire and enthusiasm of the Suffragettes in the past, we would have the world evangelized and Christ back among us in no time. Had we the courage and heroism of the Flyers, or the men who volunteered for the North or South Polar Expeditions, or for the Great War, or for any ordinary dare-devil enterprise, we could have every soul on earth knowing the salvation of Jesus Christ in less than ten years.

Alas! What stirs ordinary men's blood and turns them into heroes, makes most Christians run like a flock of frightened sheep. The Militants daily risked their lives in furtherance of their cause, and contributed of their means in a way that cried shame on us Christians, who generally brand the braving of risks and fighting against odds as tempting God. These are Chocolate Caramels stick-jaw, boys call them jawing, I go sir, and sticking fast in Christendom. No conquest is made in assured safety, and conquest for Christ certainly cannot so be made.

We Christians too often substitute prayer for playing the game. Prayer is good, but when used as a substitute for obedience, it is naught but a blatant hypocrisy, a despicable Pharisaim. We need as many meetings for action as for prayer perhaps more. Every orthodox prayer meeting is opened by God saying to His people, Go work today; pray that laborers be sent into My vineyard. It is continued by the Christians response, I go, Lord, withersoever Thou sendest me, that Thy Name may be hallowed everywhere, that Thy Kingdom may come speedily, that Thy Will may be come on earth as in heaven. But if it ends in nobody going anywhere, it had better never been held at all. Like faith, prayer without works is dead. That is why many prayer meetings might well be styled much cry, little wool. Zerrubbable didn't only hold prayer meetings, he went and cut down trees, and started to build. Hence God said, From this day will I bless thee.

Report says that someone has re-discovered the secret of the old masters. Cannot we Christians re-discover, and put into practice, that of our Great Master and His former pupils, Heroism? He and they saved not themselves; they loved not their lives to death, and so kept on saving them by losing them for Christ's sake.

We are frittering away time and money in a multiplicity of conventions, conferences and retreats, when the real need is to go straight and full steam into battle, with the signal for close action flying.

The Vox Humana plays too important a part in our Christian organs and organization today. The music, whoever plays, is bound to be thin when the tops of Instant Obedience and Firey Valor are missing or unused, and without them to play the Lost Chord of Heroism is an impossibility.

Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it, said the Blessed Virgin. Do what? Not put oil and spice into the soft holy vessels inside the house, but pour the Water of Life into those empty stone ones outside. Canas marriage feast would have ended in shame had the wine run short. Christ's marriage feast begins only when the wine is sufficient a blend from every tongue and kindred and tribe and nation. The supply is assured, as soon as the water is poured out as Christ directed, into the uttermost parts of the earth. The mischief today is the reluctance of the servants to do the outside work. They all want to serve indoors, wear smart clothes, listen to the conversations, and make a terrible lot of themselves in the butlers pantry.

Let us make a real start now at once! For years, like Mr. Winkle, we've declared we were just about to begin, and then never began at all. We must divorce Chocolate and Disobedience, and marry Faith and Heroism. Who shall begin the battle? asked the king. Thou, replied the prophet, and when the king and the young prince led the way, the odds against them were terrific, they won with ridiculous ease. So, too, the Apostles led in the war of God to the uttermost parts of the earth. Likewise in the Crusades, the kings and prince of State and Church led; then why not today in the Crusade of Christ to Evangelize the World?

Gods summons today is to the young men and women of Great Britain and America and Christendom, who call themselves by the name of Christ. New wine, said Christ, must be placed in new bottles. Those superfluously labeled and patched up old fashioned ones are as hopeless as the New Theology. They cant be moved lest they burst with pride and spill the wine in the wrong place. Listen: And it shall be in the last days, I will pour forth of My Spirit, and they shall prophesy; and I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs in the earth beneath; and it shall be that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. But how can they call on him of whom they have not even heard? Must you stay, young man? Cant you go, young woman, and tell them? Verily we are in the last, the Laodicean stage that of the Lukewarm Church.

Will you be to Christ the partner of His throne or an emetic [a medicine which induces vomiting. ed.s note] (Rev. 3:21); a Militant or a Chocolate Christian? Will you fear or will you fight? Shall your brethren go to war and shall you sit here? When He comes, shall He find faith on earth?

A thousand times you have admitted Christ's
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands your life, your soul, your all.

Will you be a miser and withhold what honor demands of you? Will you give like Ananias and Sapphira, who pretending to give all, gave only a part? Possessing and enjoying the vineyard, will you, like the husbandman, refuse the agreed rent? Will you fear death, or devil, or men? And will you not fear shame? Some shall rise to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Shall we refuse to emulate the heroes of old, or shall we accomplish the double fulfillment of those glorious words?

All these being men of war came with a perfect heart to make Jesus King over all the world. They were all mighty men of valor for the war! He that was least was equal to a hundred, and the greatest to a thousand! They were not of double heart! Their faces were like the faces of lions! They were as swift as the roes upon the mountains (to do their Lords commands!). Ye sought in time past, for Jesus to be King over you. Now, then, do it! (Compare 1 Chron. 12:8, 33, 38 and 2 Sam. 3:17, 18)

Shall we not reply: Thine are we, Jesus, and on Thy side, God do so to me, and more also, if as God has sworn unto Him, I do not even so to Jesus to translate the kingdom from the house of

Satan, and set up the throne of Jesus Christ over all the world. (Compare 1 Chron 12:18 and 2 Sam. 3:10)

Come, then, let us restore the lost chord of Christianity heroism to the world, and the crown of the world to Christ. Christ Himself asks the question, Will you be a Malingerer or a Militant?

To your knees, man! And to your Bible! Decide at once! Don't hedge! Time flies! Cease your insults to God, quit consulting flesh and blood. Stop your lame, lying, and cowardly excuses.

- C. T. Studd

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in the 1860s into English high society, C. T. Studd was the epitome of the young English Victorian gentleman. Perhaps the finest cricketer of his time, C. T. met his match after his father was converted at a D. L. Moody campaign in 1877, and came home to press the cause of Christ to his three sons. C. T. gave his heart to Jesus and afterwards rose to prominence in the world of cricket. C. T. called this his unhappy backslidden state. After six years C. T. went to a Moody campaign himself and, as he put it, had the joy of my salvation restored. As great as he had gone after cricket, C. T. went after Christ! C. T. was burdened for the lost of the world and felt drawn to China. He became part of Hudson Taylor's Inland China Mission and spent ten years in China preaching the Gospel. There he met and married his wife, Priscilla and they had four daughters. The Studds then spent six years as missionaries and pastors in India. Upon return to England, C. T. still felt the pull of God to the mission field, but was told by Doctors he would never last, due to his asthmatic condition. Nevertheless, C. T. felt he had to obey God rather than man, and so launched out to Africa against all advice and reason. He declared, no craze so great as that of the gambler, and no gambler for Jesus was ever cured, thank God! C. T. spent over 20 years in Africa before his death in 1931, time and again proving God and His word till his wife's favorite term for God was God of the Impossible. During that time, he and his wife founded the Worldwide Evangelization Crusade, instrumental in opening up many areas of the world to the gospel in the middle part of the 20th century. C. T. Studd's burning passion was for souls, and for heroic Christians to reach them. In a study on that great faith hall of fame in Hebrews 11, C. T. wrote:

But shall we, can it be possible that such as we shall march up the Golden Street with such as these? It shall be for such as are found worthy! Then there is a chance for us yet! Glory! Hallelujah! Hearts begin to burn! The glory of the deeds of these heroes of old seems to scorch hearts and souls. What noble and utter sacrifices they made! How God honored and blessed them, and made them a blessing to others then, in their lifetime, yes, and no here tonight! What was the spirit which caused these mortals so to triumph and to die? The Holy Spirit of God, one of Whose chief characteristics is courage, a bravery, a lust for sacrifice for God, and a joy in it which crucifies all human weakness and the natural desires of the flesh. This is our need tonight! Will God give to us as He gave to them: Yes! What are the conditions? They are ever the same, Sell out! Gods price is one. There is no discount. He gives all to such as give all. All! All! Death to all the world, to all the flesh, to the devil, and to perhaps the worst enemy of all yourself.

C. T. Studd not only believed Gods Word, he lived it and so helped shape a generation of missionaries and ministers for God!

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Worthy Is the Lamb

by

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AN INTERPRETATION OF REVELATION

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF REVELATION

When it became known that Christianity was not just a new patch on the old garment of Judaism, the Christians found themselves in difficulty with the government as well as with their fellow men. There are several reasons⁴⁹ for the antagonism directed against the Christians.

(1) Christianity was an illegal religion—*religio illicita*. The Roman Government tolerated the religions of conquered provinces. They gave to the conquered people the right to place an image of their deity in the Hall of the Gods if they so desired. So long as the religion did not try to proselyte, it was thus legal. But the Christian religion could not thus be bound down. Its very purpose is that of making Christians of other people. For this reason it was outlawed.

(2) Christianity aspired to universality. With the Romans the State was the main thing; with the Christians the kingdom of God throughout the whole earth was the main thing. Christians had no sympathy with the idea that religion was to be promoted only as an aid to the State. Their position set them up as dangerous rivals of the best interest of the State.

(3) Christianity was an exclusive religion. Its adherents refused to mingle freely with heathen social life and customs. It was necessary for them to refuse intercourse with the pagan world because of the idolatrous practices in which the Romans engaged. Their refusal to go to idol temples and their refusal to have idols in their homes caused them to be looked upon as enemies to the gods. Nothing was too bad to be believed of such people.

(4) They were accused of all manner of evils. They were known to hold secret services at night, and they were observed to be very fond of one another. The Romans put these facts together and decided that these meetings were for the gratification of lust on a large scale. When they heard Christians speak of "eating flesh and drinking blood" (references to the Lord's

⁴⁹These reasons are condensed from Allen, *op. cit.*, pp. 59-63, and A. H. Newman, *A Manual of Church History* (Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication Society, 1899), I, 148-150.

WORTHY IS THE LAMB

Supper), they accused them of cannibalism—eating the bodies and drinking the blood of the offspring of their orgies. Most of the persecution which the Christians received grew out of this popular hatred and misunderstanding.

(5) The Christians refused to go to war.⁵⁰ There were two reasons for this according to Tertullian. First, a part of the oath and initiation of the soldiers included service to the idols of the State and the wearing of idolatrous insignia on their uniforms. Second, Christ had taken their sword from them and had given them the ways of peace. But whatever their reason, the populace hated them and accused them of being traitors.

(6) Christians were recruited chiefly from the poor and the outcast. This caused Christianity to be looked down upon by those who regarded themselves as the "respectable."

(7) Christians shared with the Jews the contempt which the Romans held for this people; because of their refusal to compromise, they were regarded as worse than the Jews.

(8) Christians were looked upon as wild fanatics because of their enthusiasm. They shocked the sensibilities of the passive philosophers of the day.

(9) Christianity came in conflict with the temporal interest of many of the Romans—priests, makers, and venders of sacrificial animals.

(10) Christians refused to worship the emperor. If they had been content to worship the emperor as the chief deity of the empire, they would have been tolerated. But they could not say that the Kurios Caesar was superior to their Kurios Christ. Therefore, persecution and martyrdom became their lot. Domitian tried to annihilate altogether this recalcitrant and traitorous faith. Because of their attitude toward the Roman gods, the Christians were blamed with all the calamities which befell the empire. If there was no rain, the Christians were blamed for offending the deities. If there was a flood on the Tiber, the Christians were blamed. A famine, an earthquake, military reversals—all were blamed on the Christians.

⁵⁰*Ante-Nicene Church Fathers*, III, pp. 98 f.

Dear Friend,

Following are a few songs and poems that have been an encouragement to me or a reason for reflection. The songs and poems are from a broad range of artists and styles. The purpose of the collection was two fold. First I was simply collecting some songs that appealed to my taste. Second I was also collecting songs that I felt contained a message that could be used to promote the good news of Jesus Christ in a unique way. In some cases I have followed the song or poem with a few of my own reflections or relevant Bible verses. All the songs were culled from musical groups that are not Christian at all or are not typically Christian. I am certainly not endorsing anyone's sinful lifestyle or testimony by including their music in this project. Nor is this a blanket endorsement of American Pop music. However, I am using selected music to make a point about Christ. I hope that this collection may be used of God to demonstrate to you that if God can use these people to make at least one positive point that he can also use you as well to testify to the goodness of Christ. God bless and I adjure you to be saved by the grace of Jesus Christ alone from your own sinful condition, to become an unlikely preacher yourself, and to prepare to join the joyful fellowship of Christ's family in heaven. This is my copy of copyrighted material so please return it after you have been sufficiently encouraged or challenged.

Your friend because of Jesus Christ,

Jeff Martin

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Songs

A01. Show Me The Way

by Styx

Every night I say a prayer
in the hope that there's a heaven
And every day I'm more confused
as the saints turn into sinners
All the heroes and legends I knew as a child
have fallen to idols of clay
And I feel this empty place inside
so afraid that I've lost my faith

Show me the way, show me the way
Take me tonight to the river
And wash my illusions away
Show me the way

And as I slowly drift to sleep,
for a moment dreams are sacred
I close my eyes and know there's peace
in a world so filled with hatred
That I wake up each morning and turn on the news
to find we've so far to go
And I keep on hoping for a sign,
so afraid that I just won't know

Show me the way, Show me the way
Take me tonight to the mountain
And wash my confusion away

And if I see a light, should I believe
Tell me how will I know

Show me the way, show me the way
Take me tonight to the river
And wash my illusions away
Show me the way, show me the way
Give me the strength and the courage
To believe that I'll get there someday
Show me the way

Every night I say a prayer
In the hope that there's a heaven...

Friend there is a heaven. And Jesus said this to his disciples, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God ; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." John 14:1-3.

A02. Something To Believe In

by Poison

Will I see him on the TV
Preachin' 'bout the promised land
He tells me to believe in Jesus
And steals the money from my hand

Some say he was a good man
But Lord I think he sinned, yeah

Twenty-two years of mental tears
Cries a suicidal Vietnam vet
Who fought a losing war on a foreign shore
To find his country didn't want him back

Their bullets took his best friend in Saigon
Our lawyers took his wife and kids, no regrets
In a time I don't remember

In a war he can't forget

He cried "Forgive me for what I've done there
Cause I never meant the things I did"

Chorus:
And give me something to believe in
If there's a Lord above
And give me something to believe in
Oh, Lord arise

My best friend died a lonely man
In some Palm Springs hotel room
I got the call last Christmas Eve
And they told me the news

I tried all night not to break down and cry
As the tears rolled down my face
I felt so cold and empty
Like a lost soul out of place

And the mirror, mirror on the wall
Sees my smile it fades again

Chorus

Sometimes I wish to God I didn't know now
The things I didn't know then
Road you gotta take me home

Solo

I drive by the homeless sleeping on a cold dark street
Like bodies in an open grave
Underneath the broken old neon sign
That used to read JESUS SAVES

A mile away live the rich folks
And I see how they're living it up
While the poor they eat from hand to mouth
The rich is drinkin' from a golden cup

And it just makes me wonder
Why so many lose, so few win

Chorus

You take the high road
And I'll take the low road

Sometimes I wish to God I didn't know now
The things I didn't know then

And give me something to believe in

Do you want something to believe in? Many have trusted in the best of leaders, even Christian leaders, but God himself warns, "Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save." Psalm 146:3 Instead Jesus said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me," John 14:1

A03. Youth Of The Nation

by P.O.D.

Last day of the rest of my life
I wish I would've known
Cause I didn't kiss my mama goodbye

I didn't tell her that I loved her and how much I care
Or thank my pops for all the talks
And all the wisdom he shared

Unaware, I just did what I always do
Everyday, the same routine
Before I skate off to school

But who knew that this day wasn't like the rest
Instead of taking a test
I took two to the chest

Call me blind, but I didn't see it coming
Everybody was running
But I couldn't hear nothing

Except gun blasts, it happened so fast
I don't really know this kid
Even though I sit by him in class

Maybe this kid was reaching out for love
Or maybe for a moment
He forgot who he was
Or maybe this kid just wanted to be hugged
Whatever it was
I know it's because

chorus: We are, We are, the youth of the nation

Little Suzy, she was only twelve
She was given the world
With every chance to excel

Hang with the boys and hear the stories they tell
She might act kind of proud
But no respect for herself

She finds love in all the wrong places
The same situations
Just different faces

Changed up her pace since her daddy left her
Too bad he never told her
She deserved much better

Johnny boy always played the fool
He broke all the rules
So you would think he was cool

He was never really one of the guys
No matter how hard he tried
Often thought of suicide

It's kind of hard when you ain't got no friends
He put his life to an end
They might remember him then

You cross the line and there's no turning back
Told the world how he felt
With the sound of a gat

chorus

Who's to blame for the lives that tragedies claim
No matter what you say
It don't take away the pain

That I feel inside, I'm tired of all the lies
Don't nobody know why
It's the blind leading the blind

I guess that's the way the story goes
Will it ever make sense
Somebody's got to know

There's got to be more to life than this
There's got to be more to everything
I thought exists

chorus

For many the world still makes sense and they have found satisfaction in their idols, however for those who have given up all hope Jesus has an answer. Bring your prayer to Him! "Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, "Even though I don't fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!" And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him

day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" Luke 18:1-8.

A04. Nightmare #71

by Larry Norman

last night i had that same old dream it rocked me in my sleep, and left me the impression that the sandman plays for keeps, i dreamed i was in concert in the middle of the clouds, john wayne and billy graham were giving breath mints to the crowds, i fell through a hole in heaven i left the stage for good, and when i landed on the earth i was back in hollywood

the california earthquake it tore the land in half, while san andreas cleared her throat i heard tsunami laugh the ground began to tremble the land began to sway and people in the other states they were glad they'd moved away, but suddenly california just floated in the breeze, while every state that wasn't sank down into the seas

and soon i saw atlantis rumble and rise high, and the great egg of euphrates came down out of the sky, and out stepped shirley temple with guy kipee who was dead, and that communist bill robinson whom shirley called black red, they have a marionette of harpo marx they said it was an inside joke, but when i honked his horn he came alive and these were the words he spoke

"with the continents adrift and the sun about to shift will the ice caps drown us all or will we burn, we've polluted what we own will we reap what we have sown? are we headed for the end or can we turn? we've paved the forest killed the streams, burned the bridges to our dreams, the earth is bursting at the seams, and in pain of childbirth screams, as it gives life to what seems to either be an age that gleams, or simply lays there dying, if this goes on will life survive how can it, out of the grave oh who will save our planet?"

i said i'm pleased to meet you i always thought you were a scream, he said "have you ever thought of having helen keller in your dreams, i said errol flynn dropped by but he tried to steal my girl, the she ran off with ronald colman said something about a new world, now i'm stuck with my own cooking hey i'm lonely can't you see, well he grabbed my leg and said exactly eighty nine words to me, count them

"let the proud but dying nation kiss the last generation it's the year of the pill, age of the gland, we have landed

on the moon but we'll clutter that up soon, our sense of freedom's gotten out of hand, we kill our children swap our wives, we've learned to greet a man with knives we swallow pills in fours and fives, our cities look like crumbling hives, man does not live he just survives we sleep till he arrives, love is a corpse we sit and watch it harden, we left it oh so long ago the garden"

the strings snapped briskly then went slack the marionette lay dead, while hoover played with the motorcade the body slumped and bled, the man who held the camera disappeared into the crowd, i said the hope of youth, fictitious truth, lays covered in a shroud then up walked elmo lincoln and he said i beg your pardon, but we left it oh so long ago, the garden

Sin sure has screwed up this world, but it wasn't that way from the beginning in the garden. Do you know your history? God has placed mankind out of the Garden of Eden because of our sin. "And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life." Genesis 3:22-24.

A05. Wondering Where The Lions Are

by Bruce Cockburn

Sun's up, uh huh, looks okay
The world survives into another day
And I'm thinking about eternity
Some kind of ecstasy got a hold on me
I had another dream about lions at the door
They weren't half as frightening as they were before
But I'm thinking about eternity
Some kind of ecstasy got a hold on me

Walls windows trees, waves coming through
You be in me and I'll be in you
Together in eternity
Some kind of ecstasy got a hold on me

Up among the firs where it smells so sweet
Or down in the valley where the river used to be
I got my mind on eternity
Some kind of ecstasy got a hold on me

And I'm wondering where the lions are...
I'm wondering where the lions are...

Huge orange flying boat rises off a lake
Thousand-year-old petroglyphs doing a double take
Pointing a finger at eternity
I'm sitting in the middle of this ecstasy

Young men marching, helmets shining in the sun,
Polished as precise like the brain behind the gun
(Should be!) they got me thinking about eternity
Some kind of ecstasy got a hold on me

And I'm wondering where the lions are...
I'm wondering where the lions are...

Freighters on the nod on the surface of the bay
One of these days we're going to sail away,
going to sail into eternity
some kind of ecstasy got a hold on me

And I'm wondering where the lions are...
I'm wondering where the lions are...

Ecstasy is coming! Consider the joy to be God's son or daughter in place with absolutely no sin in heaven. I am ready to go there this instant! "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son." Revelation 21:1-7.

A06. Soul Of A Man

by Bruce Cockburn

I'm going to ask the question
Please answer if you can
Is there anybody's children can tell me
What is the soul of a man?

Won't somebody tell me
Answer if you can

Won't somebody tell me
Tell me what is the soul of a man?

I've travelled different countries
Travelled to the furthest lands
Couldn't find nobody could tell me
What is the soul of a man

Won't somebody tell me
Answer if you can
Won't somebody tell me
Tell me what is the soul of a man?

I saw a crowd stand talking
I just came up in time
Was teaching the lawyers and the doctors
That a man ain't nothing but his mind

Won't somebody tell me
Answer if you can
Won't somebody tell me
Tell me what is the soul of a man?

I read the Bible often
I try to read it right
As far as I can understand
It's nothing but a burning light

Won't somebody tell me
Answer if you can
Won't somebody tell me
Tell me what is the soul of a man?

When Christ taught in the temple
The people all stood amazed
Was teaching the lawyers and the doctors
How to raise a man from the grave

Won't somebody tell me
Answer if you can
Won't somebody tell me
Tell me what is the soul of a man?

Scripture declares that the soul of a man is darkness without Jesus Christ and blazing light with Jesus Christ. Matthew 6:22-23 says, "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" And Philippians 2:14-15 says, "Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe." So what are you? Light or darkness?

A07. Desperado

by The Eagles

Desperado, why don't you come to your senses,
You've been out ridin fences for so long now,
Oh and you're a hard one,
 but I know that you've got your reasons,
The things that are pleasin you can hurt you somehow.

Don't you draw the queen of diamonds boy,
 she'll beat you if she's able.
You know the queen of hearts is always your best bet.
Now it seems to me some fine things
 have been laid upon your table,
But you only want the ones you can't get.

Desperado, you ain't gettin no younger,
Your pain and your hunger, they're drivin you home,
And freedom, oh freedom,
 well that's just some people talkin.
Your prison is walking through this world all alone.

Don't your feet get cold in the wintertime,
The sky won't snow and the sun won't shine,
It's hard to tell the nighttime from the day.
And you're losin all your highs and lows,
Ain't it funny how the feelin goes away?

Desperado, why don't you come to your senses,
Come down from your fences- open the gates.
It may be rainin, but there's a rainbow above you.
You'd better let somebody love you,
LET SOMEBODY LOVE YOU.
You'd better let somebody love you,
before it's too late

Let God love you before it is too late! "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'" Matthew 23:37-39.

A08. Hole Hearted

by Extreme

Life's ambition occupies my time
Priorities confuse the mind
Happiness one step behind
This inner peace I've yet to find

Rivers flow into the sea
Yet even the sea is not so full of me

If I'm not blind why can't I see
That a circle can't fit
Where a square should be

There's a hole in my heart
That can only be filled by you
And this hole in my heart
Can't be filled with the things I do

Hole hearted
Hole hearted

This heart of stone is where I hide
These feet of clay kept warm inside
Day by day less satisfied
Not fade away before I die

Rivers flow into the sea
Yet even the sea is not so full of me
If I'm not blind why can't I see
That a circle can't fit
Where a square should be

There's a hole in my heart
That can only be filled by you
And this hole in my heart
Can't be filled with the things I do
There's a hole in my heart
That can only be filled by you
And this hole in my heart
Can't be filled with the things I do

Hole hearted
Hole hearted
Hole hearted
Hole hearted

We have a very serious choice before us! Will we know God as our boss, policeman, or harsh task-master or will we know God as He is, our friend and companion? Isaiah 28:10-13 says, "For it is: Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule; a little here, a little there." Very well then, with foreign lips and strange tongues God will speak to this people, to whom he said, "This is the resting place, let the weary rest"; and, "This is the place of repose"-- but they would not listen. So then, the word of the LORD to them will become: Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule; a little here, a little there-- so that they will go and fall backward, be injured and snared and captured. Luke 10:38-42 says, "As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that

my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

A09. The Messenjah

by P.O.D.

I message, written in rhyme, prophetic
Teachers amongst the skeptics and
 guiding the misdirected
Infected with their lies and their alibis
With their third eye blind, out of line,
 they try to prophesy
I and I unfold the mysteries told
From the futuristic realms to the days of old
Make straight through the path of the one voice calling
Truth shines, back again two times
 in the Second Coming

b-section:

I am the Messenjah x 4

chorus:

This I pledge, and I'll take it to my death
I'll lay my life down for you and die over again
I and I, I'm not ashamed of the Most High
Even if I die tonight, if I die tonight
This I pledge, and I'll take it to my death
You can bet your life on my words and everything I said
You can't take away my love for this sacrifice
Even if I die tonight, if I die tonight

True king descendant, master to the apprentice
Pleased to release and reveal in me His presence
Forever blessed, I believe if Jah said it
The word of life came alive in the scriptures "C I read it
All hail, we prevail, the Tribes of Israel,
 flow through ya
We pursue the conquering lion of the Tribe of Judah
Don't let 'em fool ya, before this, the foolish get rushed
So don't slip, you never knew us

b-section

chorus

This is a passionate song from followers of Christ who claim that they are willing to lay down their lives for Christ. The apostle Peter, Christ follower, said the exact same thing in Matthew 26:35, "But Peter declared, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same." Read the gospel of Matthew or John to learn about the

rest of the story, how Peter failed, and how Christ deepened the faith of Peter and all the disciples to the surest foundation.

A10. My Sacrifice

by Creed

Hello my friend we meet again
It's been a while where should
we begin...feels like forever
Within my heart are memories
Of perfect love that you gave to me
I remember

When you are with me
I'm free...I'm careless...I believe
Above all the others we'll fly
This brings tears to my eyes
My sacrifice

We've seen our share of ups and downs
Oh how quickly life can turn around in an instant
It feels so good to reunite
Within yourself and within your mind
Let's find peace there

When you are with me
I'm free...I'm careless...I believe
Above all the others we'll fly
This brings tears to my eyes
My sacrifice

I just want to say hello again

I don't know what brand of Christianity you have been introduced to, but beware of false teachers! True Christianity sets a person free. The love of God poured into a forgiven sinner will set a person free to fulfill every good work for which God has created them. Galatians 5:1 says, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."

A11. Cry Of A Tiny Baby

by Bruce Cockburn

Mary grows a child without the help of a man
Joseph get upset because he doesn't understand
Angel comes to Joseph in a powerful dream
Says "God did this and you're part of his scheme"
Joseph comes to Mary with his hat in his hand
Says "forgive me I thought
 you'd been with some other man"
She says "what if I had been?"

but I wasn't anyway and guess what
I felt the baby kick today"

Like a stone on the surface of a still river
Driving the ripples on forever
Redemption rips through the surface of time
In the cry of a tiny babe

The child is born in the fullness of time
Three wise astrologers take note of the signs
Come to pay their respects to the fragile little king
Get pretty close to wrecking everything
'Cause the governing body of the whole land
Is that of Herod, a paranoid man
Who when he hears there's a baby
born King of the Jews
Sends death squads to kill all male children under two
But that same bright angel warns the parents in a dream
And they head out for the border and get away clean

Like a stone on the surface of a still river
Driving the ripples on forever
Redemption rips through the surface of time
In the cry of a tiny babe

There are others who know about this miracle birth
The humblest of people catch a glimpse of their worth
For it isn't to the palace that the Christ child comes
But to shepherds and street people, hookers and bums
And the message is clear if you've got ears to hear
That forgiveness is given for your guilt and your fear
It's a Christmas gift you don't have to buy
There's a future shining in a baby's eyes

Like a stone on the surface of a still river
Driving the ripples on forever
Redemption rips through the surface of time
In the cry of a tiny babe

"Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. Luke 2:13-19.

A12. Freedom Fighter by Creed

The mouths of envious
Always find another door
While at the gates of paradise
they beat us down some more
But our mission's set in stone
'Cause the writing's on the wall
I'll scream it from the mountain tops
pride comes before the fall

So many thoughts to share
All this energy to give
Unlike those who hide the truth I tell it like it is
If the truth will set you free
I feel sorry for your soul
Can't you hear the ringing 'cause for you the bell tolls

Chorus:I'm just a freedom fighter
No remorse
Raging on in holy war
Soon there'll come a day
When you're face to face with
Face to face with me

Can't you hear us coming?
People marching all around
Can't you see we're coming?
Close your eyes it's over now
Can't you hear us coming?
The fight has only just begun
Can't you see we're coming?

I'm just a freedom fighter
No remorse
Raging on in holy war
Soon there'll come a day
When your face to face with me
Face to face with me

"Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall." Proverbs 16:18.

"Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses." 1 Timothy 6:12.

B01. When Love Comes To Town by U2

I was a sailor, I was lost at sea
I was under the waves
Before love rescued me
I was a fighter, I could turn on a thread
Now I stand accused of the things I've said

Love comes to town I'm gonna jump that train
When love comes to town I'm gonna catch that flame
Maybe I was wrong to ever let you down
But I did what I did before love came to town

I used to make love under a red sunset
I was making promises I was soon to forget
She was pale as the lace of her wedding gown
But I left her standing before love came to town

I ran into a juke joint when I heard a guitar scream
The notes were turning blue, I was dazing in a dream
As the music played I saw my life turn around
That was the day before love came to town
When love comes to town I'm gonna jump that train
When love comes to town I'm gonna catch that flame
Maybe I was wrong to ever let you down
But I did what I did before love came to town

[Repeat Chorus]

I was there when they crucified my Lord
I held the scabbard when the soldier drew his sword
I threw the dice when they pierced his side
But I've seen love conquer the great divide

When love comes to town I'm gonna catch that train
When love comes to town I'm gonna catch that flame
Maybe I was wrong to ever let you down
But I did what I did before love came to town

Consider the line in this song, "I did what I did before love came to town." BUT just suppose there was even a few people who's sin was so disgusting that they did what they did AFTER love came to town? I testify that the love of Christ is so strong that there is hope even for the perpetual sinner. There is hope even for the confused Christian who is so discouraged with the tangled messy knot of their own disgusting crimes that they have given up on God. There is hope because God has not given up with them or you! Read Romans chapter 8! "What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died--more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? Roman 8:31-25.

B02. Righteous Rocker #1

by Larry Norman

You can be a righteous rocker,
you can be a holy roller
You could be most anything,
You could be a Leon Russell,
or a super muscle,
You could be a corporate king,
You could be a wealthy man from Texas,
or a witch with heavy hexes,
But without love, you ain't nothing without love
Without love you ain't nothing, without love.
You could be a brilliant surgeon,
or a sweet young virgin,
or a harlot out to sell,
You could learn to play the blues,
or be Howard Hughes
or the scarlot pimpnell,
Or you could be a French provincial midwife,
or go from door to door with a death-knife,
But without love you ain't nothing, without love,
Without love you ain't nothing, without love.

You could be a woman feeler,
or a baby stealer,
you could drink your life away,
Or you could be a holy prophet,
get a blessing off it,
Or you could fast for fifty days,
You could shake hands with the devil,
or give your life to God on the level,
But without love you ain't nothing, without love,
Without love you ain't nothing, without love.

Larry Norman was the first artist to combine rock and roll and the Christian faith. He is also my favorite. Above is his version of 1 Corinthians 13:1-13. "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I

thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."

B03. Wayward Son

by Kansas

Once I rose above the noise and confusion
Just to get a glimpse beyond the illusion
I was soaring ever higher, but I flew too high
Though my eyes could see I still was a blind man
Though my mind could think I still was a mad man
I hear the voices when I'm dreamin', I can hear them say

Carry on my wayward son,
For there'll be peace when you are done
Lay your weary head to rest
Now don't you cry no more

Masquerading as a man with a reason
My charade is the event of the season
And if I claim to be a wise man,
 it surely means that I don't know
On a stormy sea of moving emotion
Tossed about I'm like a ship on the ocean
I set a course for winds of fortune,
 but I hear the voices say

Carry on my wayward son,
For there'll be peace when you are done
Lay your weary head to rest
Now don't you cry no more

Carry on, you will always remember
Carry on, nothing equals the splendor
Now your life's no longer empty
Surely heaven waits for you

Carry on my wayward son,
For there'll be peace when you are done
Lay your weary head to rest
Now don't you cry no more

Kerry Livgren wrote this piece on the way to the Christian faith. Here is his encouragement to carry on and not give up despite of our battles with sin and ruined dreams. There is a promised rest, for the Redeemed. The Scriptures themselves exhort in Hebrews 3, "See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is

called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first. As has just been said: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion." Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief. Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it."

B04. Everything's Still True

by The Beginners

hello how ya been
i heard about that trouble you're in
did your season of doubt turn to a season of sin
and are you ever coming back again

i remember when you were strong
i don't believe you're to far gone

everything everything's still true
everything that you led me to
everything everything's still true
nothing's changed but your point of view
everything is still true

forgetting time for the chapter and verse
sooner or later your vision gets blurred
the money was a blessing
but now it's a curse
can you remember who loved you first

Jesus still loves you Jesus still forgives
Jesus still keeps calling your name
again and again and again

Scripture warns that the deceitfulness of sin in the last days will be so bad that even the elect of God may be lead astray. Matthew 24:24-25 says, "For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect--if that were possible. See, I have told you ahead of time." And so if you have been among those lead off the path, this song from my own cousin's husband has some encouragement for you. Namely, every thing about the forgiveness and love of God is still true!

B05. Renegade

by Styx

Oh Mama, I'm in fear for my life
from the long arm of the law
Law man has put an end to my running
and I'm so far from my home
The jig is up, the news is out
They finally found me
The renegade who had it made
Retrieved for a bounty
Never more to go astray
This'll be the end today
Of the wanted man
Oh Mama, I've been years on the lam
and had a high price on my head
Lawman said 'Get him dead or alive'
and it's for sure he'll see me dead
Dear Mama I can hear you cryin',
you're so scared and all alone
Hangman is comin' down from the gallows
and I don't have very long
The jig is up, the news is out
They finally found me
The renegade who had it made
Retrieved for a bounty
Never more to go astray
The judge'll have revenge today
On the wanted man
Oh Mama, I'm in fear for my life
from the long arm of the law
Law man has put an end to my running
and I'm so far from my home
The jig is up, the news is out
They finally found me
The renegade who had it made
Retrieved for a bounty
Never more to go astray
This'll be the end today
Of the wanted man

Who knows why this song was really written? But for a moment consider the song from the vantage point of one who has transgressed the law of God being pursued by a religious lawman or worse yet by Satan the accuser of the brethren! This song could be used to express what I feel is perhaps the biggest misunderstanding about Christianity. The unbeliever imagines that to be a good Christian they must attempt to please God through their obedience to the laws of God such as do this, don't do that, and go to church on Sunday. But where would we draw the line on such a list? Or to what degree would we have to obey the list in order to be good? We all

know that Santa Clause has his list and he gives gifts to all the good children. Jesus Christ, however, also has a list and it names everyone a sinner, yet he gives good gifts anyway! Folks, Santa may be a neat fellow, but Jesus has a much better deal. He offers hope even to those who have royally screwed up. Many have a false understanding that the Christian is one who has submitted to obeying a short list of do's and don't's. This false Christianity disgusts me, but regretfully only because I have been guilty of this attitude myself. Rather than being a brother with others in the fight against sin and the pursuit of Christ, I have hunted down sinners hoping to save them from their sin, while I practiced my own sin in the secrets of my closet. By the grace of God I will learn to be a brother with others in the fight against sin. Consider this CD project my hand held out to you in Christian brotherhood. The Bible itself declares in Galatians 2:16 that absolutely no one will be or can be justified before God by obedience to the law! Why? Because Romans 3:23 declares that all have sinned. It is too late! No amount of goody-two-shoes can undo the deeds we have done. What is left? Trust in the already finished work of Jesus Christ. If you are standing for the first or tenth time by faith in Jesus Christ surrounded by heaps and mounds of your sin, you may appreciate why I included this song. Your shame for deeds done may have left you fleeing for your life, hiding your eyes from loved ones, welcoming callouses over your conscience, or weighing the advantages of suicide itself. You may have dread fear of what the self-righteous religious lawman would do to you would he know about all your sin, or worse fear over Satan's ultimate schemes for your demise. It is the purposeful design of Satan to tempt, seduce, and trap God's people in their sin and then once he has them there to accuse them until they have lost all hope and given up completely on God. Satan can leave people incapable of serving the Lord as they are paralyzed by facing their sin day in and day out. Satan's grip can only be loosed when the good news breaks through. Christ loves you dearly and through faith you can know you are forgiven forever! I pray that you will exercise your weak knees of faith and believe 1 John 4:18, "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love." Now is the time to fight Satan with the gospel, to show compassion to the religious lawman trying to be saved by the law, and to say that Jesus saved a sinner like me and he has redeemed you too!

B06. With Arms Wide Open

by Creed

Well I just heard the news today
It seems my life is going to change
I closed my eyes, begin to pray
Then tears of joy stream down my face

With arms wide open
Under the sunlight
Welcome to this place
I'll show you everything
With arms wide open
With arms wide open

Well I don't know if I'm ready
To be the man I have to be
I'll take a breath, I'll take her by my side
We stand in awe, we've created life

With arms wide open
Under the sunlight
Welcome to this place
I'll show you everything
With arms wide open
Now everything has changed
I'll show you love
I'll show you everything
With arms wide open
With arms wide open
I'll show you everything ...oh yeah
With arms wide open...wide open

[Guitar Break]

If I had just one wish
Only one demand
I hope he's not like me
I hope he understands
That he can take this life
And hold it by the hand
And he can greet the world
With arms wide open...

With arms wide open
Under the sunlight
Welcome to this place
I'll show you everything
With arms wide open
Now everything has changed
I'll show you love
I'll show you everything
With arms wide open
With arms wide open
I'll show you everything..oh yeah
With arms wide open....wide open

How would you live your life differently if you truly believed that despite your weakness and sin you are held fast by the strong arms of God himself? "The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. He will drive out your enemy before you, saying, 'Destroy him!' So Israel will live in safety alone; Jacob's spring is secure in a land of grain and new wine, where the heavens drop dew. Blessed are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD? He is your shield and helper and your glorious sword. Your enemies will cower before you, and you will trample down their high places," Deuteronomy 33:27-29.

B07. One Last Breath

by Creed

Please come now I think I'm falling
I'm holding to all I think is safe
It seems I found the road to nowhere
And I'm trying to escape
I yelled back when I heard thunder
But I'm down to one last breath
And with it let me say
Let me say

Hold me now
I'm six feet from the edge and I'm thinking
That maybe six feet
Ain't so far down

I'm looking down now that it's over
Reflecting on all of my mistakes
I thought I found the road to somewhere
Somewhere in His grace
I cried out heaven save me
But I'm down to one last breath
And with it let me say
Let me say

Hold me now
I'm six feet from the edge and I'm thinking
That maybe six feet
Ain't so far down

Sad eyes follow me
But I still believe there's something left for me
So please come stay with me
'Cause I still believe there's something
left for you and me
For you and me, For you and me

Hold me now
I'm six feet from the edge and I'm thinking

"Blessed are the poor in spirit,
_____ for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn,
_____ for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek,
_____ for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst
_____ for righteousness, for they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful,
_____ for they will be shown mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart,
_____ for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers,
_____ for they will be called sons of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted
_____ because of righteousness,
_____ for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."
Matthew 5:3-10.

B08. Stand Here With Me

by Creed

You always reached out to me
and helped me believe
All those memories we share
I will cherish every one of them
The truth of it is there's a right way to live
And you showed me
So now you live on in the words of a song
You're a melody

You stand here with me now

Just when fear blinded me you taught me to dream
I'll give you everything I am and still fall short of
What you've done for me
In this life that I live
I hope I can give love unselfishly
I've learned the world is bigger than me
You're my daily dose of reality

You stand here with me now

On and on we sing
On and on we sing this song

'Cause you stand here with me

"No one will be able to stand up against you all the
days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with
you; I will never leave you nor forsake you." Joshua
1:5.

B09. Pride (In The Name of Love)

by U2

One man come in the name of love
One man come and go
One man come, he to justify
One man to overthrow

In the name of love
What more in the name of love
In the name of love
What more in the name of love

One man caught on a barbed wire fence
One man he resist
One man washed on an empty beach.
One man betrayed with a kiss

In the name of love
What more in the name of love
In the name of love
What more in the name of love

(nobody like you...)

Early morning, April 4
Shot rings out in the Memphis sky
Free at last, they took your life
They could not take your pride

In the name of love
What more in the name of love
In the name of love
What more in the name of love
In the name of love
What more in the name of love...

"Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was
condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act
of righteousness was justification that brings life for all
men." Romans 5:18. Jesus is that one who came to
justify. Brother believe it! Through faith in Christ you
can know that you are totally forgiven before the
Almighty God of the universe!

B10. What If?

by Creed

I can't find the rhyme in all my reason
Lost sense of time and all seasons
Feel I've been beaten down
By the words of men who have no grounds Can't sleep
beneath the trees of wisdom
When your ax has cut the roots that feed them
Forked tongues in bitter mouths
Can drive a man to bleed from inside out

What if you did?
What if you lied?
What if I avenge?
What if eye for an eye?

I've seen the wicked fruit of your vine
Destroy the man who lacks a strong mind
Human pride sings a vengeful song
Inspired by the times you've been walked on
My stage is shared by many millions
Who lift their hands up high because they feel this
We are one We are strong
The more you hold us down the more we press on

What if you did?
What if you lied?
What if I avenge?
What if eye for an eye?

[Guitar Break]

I know I can't hold the hate inside my mind
'Cause what consumes your thoughts controls your life
So I'll just ask a question
A lonely simple question
I'll just ask one question
What if? What if?
What if? What if?
What If I?

What if? What if?
What if? What if?
What If I?

What if? What if?
What if? What if?
What If I?

What if? What if?
What if? What if?
What If I?

What if you did?
What if you lied?
What if I avenge?
What if eye for an eye?

What if your words could be judged like a crime?
What if? What if?
What if? What if?
What If I?

What if? What if?
What if? What if?
What If I?

What if? What if?
What if? What if?
What If I?

What if? What if?
What if? What if?
What If I?

What if Christ said this to you? "If you are the Christ, " they said, "tell us." Jesus answered, "If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I asked you, you would not answer. But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God." Luke 22:67-69

B11. Hide

by Creed

To what do I owe this gift my friend?
My life, my love, my soul?
I've been dancing with the devil way too long
And it's making me grow old
Making me grow old

Let's leave...oh let's get away
Run in fields of time
Where there's no reason to hide

What are you going to do with your gift dear child?
Give life, give love, give soul?
Divided is the one who dances
For the sould is so exposed
So exposed

Let's leave...oh let's get away
Get lost in time
Where there's no reason to hide

Let's leave...oh let's get away
Run in fields of time
Where there's no reason to hide

There is no reason to hide
No reason to hide

"But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved."
Hebrews 10:39.

B12. I Wish We'd All Been Ready

by Larry Norman

Life was filled with guns and war.
And everyone got trampled on the floor.
I wish we'd all been ready.
Children died the day grew cold.

A piece of bread could buy a bag of gold.
I wish we'd all been ready.

There's no time to change your mind.
The Son has come and you've been left behind.

A man and wife sleep in bed.
She hears a noise and turns her head, he's gone.
I wish we'd all been ready.
Two men walking up a hill.
One disappears and one's left standing still.

I wish we'd all been ready.
There's no time to change your mind.
The Son has come and you've been left behind.

Life was filled with guns and war.
And everyone got trampled on the floor.
I wish we'd all been ready.
Children died the day grew cold.
A piece of bread could buy a bag of gold.
I wish we'd all been ready.

There's no time to change your mind.
How could you have been so blind?
The father spoke, the demons dined.
The Son has come and you've been left behind.

"Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come," Matthew 24:40-42

C01. Are You Ready?

by Creed

Hey, Mr. Seeker hold on to this advice
If you keep seeking you will find
Don't want to follow
Down roads been walked before It's so hard to find
unopened doors

Are you ready? Are you ready?
For whats to come...Oh I said Are you ready?
Are you Ready?...For whats to come

Hey, Mr. Hero Walking a thin, fine line
Under the microscope of life
Remember your roots, my friend
They're right down below
'Cause heroes come and heroes go

Are you ready? Are you ready?
For whats to come...Oh I said Are you ready?

Are you ready? For whats to come

Ten, nine, eight, seven, six,
five, four, three, two, one
Count down to the change in life
that's soon to come
Ten, nine, eight, seven, six,
five, four, three, two, one
Count down to the change in life
that's soon to come
Your life has just begun
Life has just begun
Life has just begun
Life has just begun

Are you ready? Are you ready?
For whats to come...Oh I said Are you ready?
Are you ready? For whats to come
Oh I said Are you ready?
Are you ready? For whats to come
Your Life has just begun
Life has just begun
Life has just begun

I adjure you by the living God get ready for the return of Jesus Christ! "The Lord answered, "Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But suppose the servant says to himself, 'My master is taking a long time in coming,' and he then begins to beat the menservants and maidservants and to eat and drink and get drunk. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers. "That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked. "I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed! Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law." Luke 13:42-53

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. "Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets." Matthew 7:7-12.

C02. I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For

by U2

I have climbed highest mountain
I have run through the fields
Only to be with you
Only to be with you

I have run
I have crawled
I have scaled these city walls
These city walls
Only to be with you

But I still haven't found what I'm looking for
But I still haven't found what I'm looking for

I have kissed honey lips
Felt the healing in her fingertips
It burned like fire This burning desire

I have spoke with the tongue of angels
I have held the hand of a devil
It was warm in the night
I was cold as a stone

But I still haven't found what I'm looking for
But I still haven't found what I'm looking for

I believe in the kingdom come
Then all the colors will bleed into one
Bleed into one
Well yes I'm still running

You broke the bonds and you
Loosed the chains
Carried the cross
Of my shame
Of my shame
You know I believed it

But I still haven't found what I'm looking for
But I still haven't found what I'm looking for
But I still haven't found what I'm looking for
But I still haven't found what I'm looking for...

"And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated--the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect. Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood." Hebrew 11:32-12:4. Brother, we have salvation full and complete right now, but only by faith. Soon we will have it by sight! Is that what you are looking for?

C03. All You Zombies

by The Hooters

Holy Moses met the Pharaoh
Yeah, he tried to set him straight
Looked him in the eye, "let my people go"

Holy Moses on the mountain
High above the golden calf
Went to get the Ten Commandments
He's just gonna break them in half

All you zombies hide your faces
All you people in the street
All you sittin' in high places
The pieces gonna fall on you

No one ever spoke to Noah
They all laughed at him instead
Working on his ark, working all by himself

Only Noah saw it coming
Forty days and forty nights
Took his sons and daughters with him
Yeah, they were the Israelites

All you zombies hide your faces
All you people in the street
All you sittin' in high places
The rain's gonna fall on you

Holy Father, what's the matter
Where have all your children gone
Sitting in the dark, living all by themselves
You don't have to hide anymore

All you zombies show your faces...

"And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature." Romans 13:11-14.

C04. Everybody Plays the Fool

by Aaron Neville

Ok, so your heart is broken
You're sitting around mopin', mopin', mopin',
cryin', cryin'
You say you're even thinking about dying
Well, before you do anything rash, baby,
listen to this

Everybody plays the fool, sometime
There's no exception to the rule, listen baby
It may be factual, it may be cruel, I ain't lying
Everybody plays the fool

Fallin' in love is such an easy thing to do
But there's no guarantee that the one you love,

is gonna love you
Oh, loving eyes they cannot see a certain person
could never be
Love runs deeper than any ocean,
it clouds you're mind with emotion

Everybody plays the fool, sometime
There's no exception to the rule, listen baby
It may be factual, it may be cruel, I ain't lying
Everybody plays the fool

How can you help it, when the music starts to play
And your ability to reason, is swept away
Oh, heaven on earth is all you see,
you're out of touch with reality
And now you cry, but when you do,
next time around someone cries for you

Hey, everybody plays the fool, sometime
Use your heart just like a tool, listen baby
They never tell you so in school, I wanna say it again,
Everybody plays the fool

Everybody plays the fool, sometime
There's no exception to the rule, listen baby
It may be factual, it may be cruel, I ain't lying
Everybody plays the fool
Everybody plays the fool, sometime
There's no exception to the rule, listen baby
It may be factual, it may be cruel,
I wanna say it again
Everybody plays the fool

"If you have played the fool and exalted yourself, or if you have planned evil, clap your hand over your mouth!" Proverbs 30:32.

C05. God Part II

by U2

Don't believe the devil
I don't believe his book
But the truth is not the same
Without the lies he made up
Don't believe in excess,
Success is to give
Don't believe in riches,
But you should see where I live
I...I believe in love

Don't believe in forced entry
Don't believe in rape
But every time she passes by,
Wild thoughts escape
I don't believe in death row,

Skid row or the gangs
Don't believe in the Uzi,
It just went off in my hand
I...I believe in love

Don't believe in cocaine,
Got a speed-ball in my head
I could cut and crack you open
Do you hear what I said?
Don't believe them when they tell me
There ain't no cure
The rich stay healthy, the sick stay poor
I...I believe in love

Don't believe in Goldman
His type like a curse
Instant karma's going to get him
If I don't get him first
Don't believe in rock 'n roll
Can really change the world
As it spins in revolution, spirals and turns
I...I believe in love

Don't believe in the 60's,
The golden age of pop
You glorify the past
When the future dries up
Heard a singer on the radio late last night
He says he's going to kick the darkness,
Till it bleeds daylight
I...I believe in love

I feel like I'm falling
Like I'm spinning on a wheel
It always stops beside me
With a presence I can feel
I...I believe in love

*"And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.
God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God
in him." 1 John 4:16.*

C06. Higher

by Creed

When dreaming I'm guided through another world
Time and time again
At sunrise I fight to stay asleep
'Cause I don't want to leave the comfort of this place
'Cause there's a hangar, a longing to escape
From the life I live when I'm awake

[Chorus]

So let's go there
Let's make our escape

Come on let's go there
Let's ask can we stay
Can you take me higher
To a place where blind men see
Can you take me higher
To a place with golden streets

Although I would like our world to change
it helps me to appreciate those nights
and those dreams
But my friend I'd sacrifice all those nights
If I could make the earth and my dreams the same
The only difference is to let love replace all our hate

[Chorus]

So let's go there
Let's make our escape
Come on let's go there
Let's ask can we stay
Can you take me higher
To a place where blind men see
Can you take me higher
To a place with golden streets

So let's go there
So let's go there
Come on let's go there
Let's ask can we stay

Up high I feel like I'm alive
for the very first time
Up high I feel like I'm strong enough
to take these dreams and make them mine
Up high I feel like I'm strong enough
to take these dreams and make them mine

Can you take me higher
To a place where blind men see
Can you take me higher
To a place with golden streets

Can you take me higher
To a place where blind men see
Can you take me higher
To a place with golden streets

*"The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold,
as pure as glass." Revelation 21:18*

C07. Lullaby

by Creed

Hush my love now don't you cry
Everything will be all right
Close your eyes and drift in dream

Rest in peaceful sleep
If there's one thing I hope
I showed you
Hope I showed you
Just give love to all

Oh my love...in my arms tight
Every day you give me life
As I drift off to your world
Will rest in peaceful sleep

I know there's one thing that
you showed me
That you showed me

Just give love to all
Let's give love to all

C08. Forever Young

by Rod Stewart

May the good Lord be with you
Down every road you roam
And may sunshine and happiness
surround you when you're far from home
And may you grow to be proud
Dignified and true
And do unto others
As you'd have done to you
Be courageous and be brave
And in my heart you'll always stay
Forever Young, Forever Young
Forever Young, Forever Young

May good fortune be with you
May your guiding light be strong
Build a stairway to heaven
with a prince or a vagabond

And may you never love in vain
and in my heart you will remain
Forever Young, Forever Young
Forever Young, Forever Young
Forever Young
Forever Young

And when you finally fly away
I'll be hoping that I served you well
For all the wisdom of a lifetime
No one can ever tell

But whatever road you choose
I'm right behind you, win or lose
Forever Young, Forever Young
Forever Young, Forever Young

Forever Young, Forever Young
For, Forever Young, Forever Young

The Scripture commands us to bless and not to curse. Isn't it encouraging that even Rod Stewart can ask that the good Lord bless you. If he can bless you surely you can bless another! "But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked." Luke 6:27-35.

C09. I Hope You Dance

by LeAnn Womack

I hope you never lose your sense of wonder,
You get your fill to eat but always keep that hunger,
May you never take one single breath for granted,
GOD forbid love ever leave you empty handed,
I hope you still feel small when you
stand beside the ocean,
Whenever one door closes I hope one more opens,
Promise me that you'll give faith a fighting chance,
And when you get the choice to sit it out or dance.

I hope you dance....I hope you dance.

I hope you never fear those mountains
in the distance,
Never settle for the path of least resistance
Livin' might mean takin' chances but
they're worth takin',

Lovin' might be a mistake but it's worth makin',
Don't let some hell bent heart leave you bitter,
When you come close to sellin' out reconsider,
Give the heavens above more than just

a passing glance,
And when you get the choice to sit it out or dance.

I hope you dance....I hope you dance.

I hope you dance....I hope you dance.

(Time is a wheel in constant motion always
rolling us along,
Tell me who wants to look back on their years and
wonder where those years have gone.)

I hope you still feel small when you stand beside
the ocean,
Whenever one door closes I hope one more opens,
Promise me that you'll give faith a fighting chance,
And when you get the choice to sit it out or dance.

Dance....I hope you dance.
I hope you dance....I hope you dance.
I hope you dance....I hope you dance.. (Time is a wheel
in constant motion
always rolling us along
Tell me who wants to look back on their years and
wonder where those years have gone

Whatever trial you are facing I hope, along with LeAnn
Womack, that you would give faith a chance and that
God would bring you through to dancing on the other
side of your trial. Trust in Christ!

C10. Don't Stop Dancing

by Creed

At times life is wicked
and I just can't see the light
A silver lining sometimes isn't enough
To make some wrongs seem right
Whatever life brings
I've been through everything
And now I'm on my knees again
But I know I must go on
Although I hurt I must be strong
Because inside I know that
many feel this way

Children don't stop dancing
Believe you can fly
Away...away

At times life's unfair
and you know it's plain to see
Hey God I know I'm just a dot in this world
Have you forgot about me?
Whatever life brings
I've been through everything
And now I'm on my knees again

But I know I must go on
Although I hurt I must be strong
Because inside I know that many
feel this way

Am I hiding in the shadows?
Forget the pain and forget the sorrows

But I know I must go on
Although I hurt I must be strong
Because inside I know that many
feel this way

Children don't stop dancing
Believe you can fly
Away...away

Am I hiding in the shadows?
Are we hiding in the shadows?

The Lord can bring you back with dancing! Will you
continue to trust Him? At that time, declares the
LORD, "I will be the God of all the clans of Israel, and
they will be my people." This is what the LORD says:
"The people who survive the sword will find favor in the
desert; I will come to give rest to Israel." The LORD
appeared to us in the past, saying: "I have loved you
with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with
loving-kindness. I will build you up again and you will
be rebuilt, O Virgin Israel. Again you will take up your
tambourines and go out to dance with the joyful. Again
you will plant vineyards on the hills of Samaria; the
farmers will plant them and enjoy their fruit. There will
be a day when watchmen cry out on the hills of
Ephraim, 'Come, let us go up to Zion, to the LORD our
God.'" This is what the LORD says: "Sing with joy for
Jacob; shout for the foremost of the nations. Make your
praises heard, and say, 'O LORD, save your people, the
remnant of Israel.' See, I will bring them from the land
of the north and gather them from the ends of the earth.
Among them will be the blind and the lame, expectant
mothers and women in labor; a great throng will return.
They will come with weeping; they will pray as I bring
them back. I will lead them beside streams of water on a
level path where they will not stumble, because I am
Israel's father, and Ephraim is my firstborn son. "Hear
the word of the LORD, O nations; proclaim it in distant
coastlands: 'He who scattered Israel will gather them
and will watch over his flock like a shepherd.' For the
LORD will ransom Jacob and redeem them from the
hand of those stronger than they. They will come and
shout for joy on the heights of Zion; they will rejoice in
the bounty of the LORD-- the grain, the new wine and
the oil, the young of the flocks and herds. They will be
like a well-watered garden, and they will sorrow no
more. Then maidens will dance and be glad, young men
and old as well. I will turn their mourning into
gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of
sorrow. I will satisfy the priests with abundance, and
my people will be filled with my bounty," declares the
LORD. Jeremiah 31:1-14.

C11. Hands

By Jewel

If I could tell the world just one thing
It would be that we're all ok
And not to worry because worry is wasteful and useless
in times like these
I will not be made useless
I won't be idled with despair
I will gather myself around my faith
for light does the darkness most fear

My hands are small, I know,
but they're not yours they are my own
but they're not yours they are my own
and I am never broken

Poverty stole your golden shoes
but it didn't steal your laughter
And heartache came to visit me
but i knew it wasn't ever after
We will fight, not out of spite
for someone must stand up for what's right
cause where there's a man who has no voice
there ours shall go singing

In the end only kindness matters
In the end only kindness matters
I will get down on my knees and I will pray
I will get down on my knees and I will pray
I will get down on my knees and I will pray

My hands are small, I know,
but they're not yours they are my own
but they're not yours they are my own
and I am never broken
My hands are small, i know,
but they're not yours they are my own
but they're not yours they are my own
and I am never broken
We are never broken
We are God's eyes
God's hands
God's mind
We are God's eyes
God's hands
God's heart
We are God's eyes
God's hands
God's eyes
God's hands
We are God's hands
God's hands
We are God's hands.

If you have ever received Christ as Lord and Savior he is truly living in side your life. Believe it! "To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." Colosians 1:27 If you know anything about the Christ of the Bible you need also to obey Paul's admonition, "Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed--not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence--continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." Philippians 2:12-13.

C12. Will You Be Ready To Go Home?

By Stained Grass Window

POEMS

A. Opportunity

by Edward R. Sill, 1841-1887

This I beheld, or dreamed it in a dream:
There spread a cloud of dust along a plain;
And underneath the cloud, or in it, raged
A furious battle, and men yelled, and swords
Shocked upon swords and shields. A prince's banner
Wavered, then staggered backward, hemmed by foes.

A craven hung along the battle's edge,
And thought, "Had I a sword of kenner steel-
That blue blade that the king's son bears - but this
Blunt thing!" - he snapped and flung it from his hand.
And lowering crept away and left the field.

Then came the king's son, wounded, sore bestead,
And weaponless, and saw the broken sword,
Hilt-buried in the dry and trodden sand,
And ran and snatched it, and with battle-shout
Lifted afresh he hewed his enemy down,
And saved a great cause that heroic day.

B. Charge of the Light Brigade

by Alfred Tennyson, 1809 - 1892

Half a league, half a league,
Half a league onward,
All in the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.
"Forward, the Light Brigade!

Charge for the guns!" he said:
Into the valley of Death
 Rode the six hundred.
"Forward, the Light Brigade!"
Was there a man dismayed?
Not tho' the soldiers knew
 Someone had blundered:
Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die:
Into the valley of Death
 Rode the six hundred.

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon in front of them
 Volleyed and thunder'd;
Storm'd at with shot and shell,
Boldy they rode and well,
Into the jaws of Death,
Into the mouth of Hell,
 Rode the six hundred.

Flashed all their sabres bare,
Flashed as they turned in air,
Sab'ring the gunners there,
Charging an army, while
 All the world wondered:
Plunged in the battery smoke,

Right through the line they broke;
Cossack and Russian
Reeled from the sabre-stroke
 Shattered and sundered.
Then they rode back, but not -
 Not the six hundred.

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon behind them
 Volleyed and thundered;
Stormed at with shot and shell,
While horse and hero fell,
They that had fought so well
Came thro' the jaws of Death,
Back from the mouth of Hell,
All that was left of them,
 Left of six hundred.

When can their glory fade?
Oh, the wild charge they made!
 All the world wondered.
Honor the charge they made!
Honor the Light Brigade,
 Noble Six Hundred!

C. Be Strong

by Maltbie Davenport Babcock, 1858 - 1901

Be strong!
We are not here to play, to dream, to drift;
We have hard work to do, and loads to lift;
Shun not the struggle - face it; 'tis God's gift.

Be strong!
Say not, "The days are evil. Who's to blame?"
And fold the hands and acquiesce - oh shame!
Stand up, speak out, and bravely, in God's name.

Be strong!
It matters not how deep intrenched the wrong,
How hard the battle goes, the day how long;
Faint not - fight on! To-morrow comes the song.

D. How Did You Die?

by Edmund Vance Cooke, 1866 - 1932

Did you tackle that rouble that came your way
 With a resolute heart and cheerful?
Or hide your face from the light of day
 With a craven soul and fearful?
Oh, a trouble's a ton, or a trouble's an ounce,
 Or a trouble is what you make it.
And it isn't the fact that you're hurt that counts,
 But only how did you take it?

You are beaten to earth? Well, well, what's that?
 Come up with a smiling face.
It's nothing against you to fall down flat,
 But to lie there - that's disgrace.
The harder you're thrown, why the higher you bounce;
 Be proud of your blackened eye!
It isn't the fact that you're licked that counts;
 It's how did you fight and why?

And though you be done to death, what then?
 If you battled the best you could;
If you played you part in the world of men,
 Why, the Critic will call it good.
Death comes with a crawl, or comes with a pounce,
 And whether he's slow or sly,
It isn't the fact that you're dead that counts,
 But only, how did you die?

E. If

by Rudyard Kipling, 1865 - 1936

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or, being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise;

If you can dream - and not make dreams your master;
If you can think - and not make thoughts your
aim,

If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same:
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out
tools:

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings,
And never breathe a word about your loss:
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on!"

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings - nor lose the common
touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much:
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And - which is more - you'll be a Man, my son!

F. Keep a-Goin'

by Frank L. Stanton, 1857 - 1927

If you strike a thorn or rose,
Keep a-goin'!
If it hails or if it snows,
Keep a-goin'!
'Taint no use to sit an' whine
When the fish ain't on your line;
Bait your hook an' keep a-tryin' -
Keep a-goin'!

When the weather kills your crop,

Keep a-goin'!
Though 'tis work to reach the top,
Keep a-goin'!
S'pose you're out o' ev'ry dime,
Gettin' broke ain't any crime;
Tell the world you're feelin' prime -
Keep a-goin'!

When it looks like all is up,
Keep a-goin'!
Drain the sweetness from the cup,
Keep a-goin'!
See the wild birds on the wing,
Hear the bells that sweetly ring,
When you feel like sighin', sing -
Keep a-goin'!

G. Crossing the Bar

by Alfred Tennyson, 1809 - 1892

Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me,
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea.

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell,
When I embark;

For tho' from out our bourne of time and place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crossed the bar.

H. The Fool's Prayer

by Edward R. Sill, 1841 - 1887

The royal feast was done; the King
Sought some new sport to banish care,
And to his jester cried: "Sir Fool,
Kneel now, and make for us a prayer!"

The jester doffed his cap and bells,
And stood the mocking court before;
They could not see the bitter smile
Behind the painted grin he wore.

He bowed his head, and bent his knee
Upon the monarch's silken stool;
His pleading voice arose: "O Lord,
Be merciful to me, a fool!"

"No pity, Lord, could change the heart
From red with wrong to white as wool;
The rod must heal the sin: but, Lord,
Be merciful to me, a fool!"

" 'Tis not by guilt the onward sweep
Of truth and right, O Lord, we stay;
'Tis by our follies that so long
We hold the earth from heaven away.

"These clumsy feet, still in the mire,
Go crushing blossoms without end;
These hard, well-meaning hands we thrust
Among the heart-strings of a friend.

"There ill-timed truth we might have kept -
Who knows how sharp it pierced and stung?
The word we had not sensed to say -
Who knows how grandly it had rung?"

"Our faults no tenderness should ask,
The chastening stripes must cleanse them all;
But for our blunders - oh, in shame
Before the eyes of heaven we fall.

"Earth bears no balsam for mistakes;
Men crown the knave, and scourge the tool
That did his will; but Thou, O Lord,
Be merciful to me, a fool!"

The room was hushed; in silence rose
The King, and sought his gardens cool,
And walked apart, and murmured low,
"Be merciful to me, a fool!"

I. L'Envoi,

by Rudyard Kipling, 1865 - 1936

When earth's last picture is painted, and the tubes are
twisted and dried,
When the oldest colors have faded, and the youngest
critic has died,
We shall rest, and, faith, we shall need it - lie down for
an aeon or two,
Till the Master of All Good Workmen shall set us to
work anew!

And those that were good will be happy: they shall sit
in a golden chair;
They shall splash at a ten-league canvas with brushes
of comets' hair;
They shall find real saints to draw from - Magdalene,
Peter and Paul;
They shall work for an age at a sitting and never be
tired at all!

And only the Master shall praise us, and only the
Master shall blame;
And no one shall work for money, and no one shall
work for fame;
But each for the joy of the working, and each, in his
separate star,
Shall draw the Thing as he sees It for the God of
Things as They Are!

J. Hebrews 13:5-6

from the Christian Scriptures

*Keep your lives free from the love of money
and be content with what you have,
because God has said,
"Never will I leave you;
never will I forsake you."
So we say with confidence,
"The Lord is my helper;
I will not be afraid.
What can man do to me?"*

Where?			When?							
			Innocence		Fallen			Glory		
			Eternity Past	4000 BC Creation	Fall to Sin No Law	1500 BC Moses' Law	Advent of Christ 0-33 AD	Church Age Kingdom Age	Great White Throne	New Heaven and Earth
Who?	God	Father	God's Perfect Fellowship	God's Perfect Fellowship with Adam in the Garden of Eden	Living in Unapproachable Light, 1 Timothy 6:16			God's Perfectly Restored Fellowship with All Mankind in the Holy City	All Restored	
		Son			Pre-Incarnate, John 8:58	Incarnate, John 1:14	Paradise, Luke 23:43			
		Holy Spirit			John 10:30	Everywhere, Psalm 139:7	Indwelling Believers, John 14:17			
	Mankind	Living Mankind	No Fall No Death	Gen 1:31	Serving the Savior or Satan on Earth, Ephesians 2:1-5			No Hades No Dead	Acts 3:21	
		Deceased Believing Mankind			Blessed in Paradise, Luke 16:22					
		Deceased Unbelieving Mankind			Punished in Hades until the final judgment, Luke 16:23 and Rev 20:13					
	Angels	Holy Angels	No Creation	No people	Serving Mankind at God's Command, Hebrews 1:14			Rev 20:3		
		Imprisoned Angels	Gen 1:1		Imprisoned in Tartarus, 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6					
		Fugitive Angels			No Fall	Thalaasa, Rev 20:13				
		First Beast Demon			No Unholy Angels	Rebelling Against Christ				Lake of Fire Revelation 19:20
		False Prophet Demon			Gen 1:31	Accusing Mankind				Abyss Revelation 20:2
		Satan				1 Peter 5:8 and Revelation 12:10				

The chart indicates the whereabouts of God, mankind, and angels throughout the ages of history. Note that the punishment of deceased unbelieving mankind in Hades is temporal as promised when Jesus said *"the gates of Hades will not prevail"*, Paul wrote *"Hades where is your victory?"*, and John wrote *"Hades gives up."* Also note that certain fallen angels are already held in a separate prison, Tartarus, awaiting final judgment and sentencing to the Lake of Fire which is *"prepared for the Devil and his angels."* Satan's rebellion will be crushed and Christ will be victorious in the salvation of all his people. You too can know your name is already written in Heaven through faith in Jesus Christ!

What?

What are we? Genesis 1:26-2:3 (AB)

26) *And God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the flying creatures of the sky, and over the tame animals, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creature that crawls on the earth." And it was so.*

27) *And God created humankind in his own image. In God's image he created him; male and female he created them. 28) And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the flying creatures of the sky, and over all the tame animals, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over all the creatures that crawl on the earth." 29) And God said, "Look, I have given you every plant yielding seed, which is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree, which bears fruit yielding seed. It will be your food. 30) And to every wild animal of the earth, and to every tame animal of the earth, and to every flying creature of the sky, and to every creature that crawls on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green plant for food."*

31) *And God saw everything that he had made, and look, it was very good. There was evening and there was morning, a sixth day. 1) Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their vast array. 2) And on the sixth day God finished his works which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his works which he had made. 3) So God blessed the seventh day, and made it holy, because he rested on it from all his works which God had created and made.*

How?

How did sin? Romans 5:8-19 (AB)

8) *But God commends his own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. 9) Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we will be saved from God's wrath through him. 10) For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we will be saved by his life. 11) Not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.*

12) *Therefore, as sin entered into the world through one man, and death through sin; and so death passed to all people, because all sinned. 13) For until the law, sin was in the world; but sin is not charged when there is no law. 14) Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those whose sins weren't like Adam's disobedience, who is a foreshadowing of him who was to come.*

15) *But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if by the trespass of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God, and the gift by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many.*

16) *The gift is not as through one who sinned: for the judgment came by one to condemnation, but the free gift came of many trespasses to justification. 17) For if by the trespass of the one, death reigned through the one; so much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ.*

18) *So then as through one trespass, all people were condemned; even so through one act of righteousness, all people were justified to life.*

19) *For as through the one man's disobedience many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one, many will be made righteous.*

Why?

Why did God? Romans 11:25-36 (AB)

25) *For I do not desire you to be ignorant, brothers, of this mystery, so that you won't be wise in your own conceits, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, 26) and so all Israel will be saved. Even as it is written,*

"There will come out of Zion the Deliverer, and he will turn away ungodliness from Jacob. 27) This is my covenant to them, when I will take away their sins."

28) *Concerning the Good News, they are enemies for your sake. But concerning the election, they are loved for the fathers' sake. 29) For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. 30) For as you in time past were disobedient to God, but now have obtained mercy by their disobedience, 31) even so these also have now been disobedient, that by the mercy shown to you they may now also obtain mercy. 32) For God has shut up all to disobedience, that he might have mercy on all.*

33) *Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God. How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out. 34) For "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" 35) Or "Who has first given to him, and it will be repaid to him again?" 36) For of him, and through him, and to him are all things. To him be the glory for the ages! Amen.*