

Things Most Surely Believed

Doctrines Of The Christian Faith

(The date and author of Things Most Surely Believed is unknown. It is thought to have originated in England. If you have info about the author and date please let me know.)

Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.
(Luke 1:1-4)

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Introduction

What constitutes essential Bible doctrine about God, man, salvation, the final outcome of it all? Where can we find solid authority for what we believe? May we allow our minds to wander in any direction we please and conclude that our wanderings represent God's absolute truth? What is the central issue, the foundation of all Bible doctrine, man or God?

Under the inspiration of God, Luke wrote this account of the life of Christ to a man named Theophilus. Why was this particular letter included in the canon of scripture while others disappeared? These verses answer the question. "Having had perfect understanding." Do you have perfect understanding of biblical truth? How could Luke make such a claim? Luke wrote this book and the Book of Acts, but according to Bible record, he did not learn of the gospel and join its ranks until well into Paul's ministry. Notice that the first fifteen chapters of Acts were written in the third person, by someone who was not a personal part of the activities. "They" In Acts 16:10 the theme suddenly becomes "We" This change offers reasonable evidence that Luke did not personally join the ranks of Christianity until approximately the date of Acts 16. How then did he gain this "Perfect understanding?" "From the very first" does not refer to time, as if he claimed personal affiliation with the disciples from John the Baptist's ministry. The Greek words translated "From the very first" in this verse were translated in John 3:3 as again, "Born again." The marginal reference in the King James Bible tells you that this word means "From above." Undoubtedly, the Lord did not teach Nicodemus that he merely needed to experience another physical birth, but that he must experience a heavenly, spiritual birth "From above." I offer that Luke claimed this same heavenly power as the source of his knowledge and authority. In both cases the power must come from God, from above.

Luke claimed inspiration as his authority. We can claim nothing less for what we believe and practice. Since inspiration was completed with the writing of the New Testament, we cannot claim personal inspiration for new truth; we must appeal to inspired scripture as authority for God's old truth. As Luke began his inspired message with an account of the life of Christ, we should follow his example as we develop our convictions and beliefs about the essential doctrines of God, man, salvation, final things, or any other doctrine. Our first and last authority for those things which we most surely believe can be no other than the historic scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

What should be the emphasis of biblical Christianity? Is it God-centered or man-centered? The common message of the day is altogether man-centered. Any system of belief should center its focus upon its object. Could man be the god of many religious people? I wonder! This series will focus upon God without apology or compromise. I would feel the need to apologize if I did differently. We will begin with the doctrine of God, and, keeping our sights on God, we will use the light of scripture to investigate the Bible doctrines of man, salvation, and a few final things God has in store for his family. In Romans 8:29, 30 Paul wrote of a five link chain, a chain which anchors its beginning to God in eternal self-existence before he created the universe. This chain reaches across the dimension of time and anchors just as securely in God after the end of the universe. As with a physical chain, the whole chain possesses no more value or strength than its weakest link. If all the links are perfect, except for a tiny flaw in one of them, the chain cannot rise above that single flaw.

What mechanism did God set in motion for the salvation of man? How effective is that mechanism? In the belief of many people, God sincerely wished the salvation of every single person. Considering that wish, according to this belief, God designed a mechanism which will actually save only a small portion of mankind, despite his wish to save them all. If God knows all, he must have known the outcome of

his salvation mechanism. Why didn't he design a salvation mechanism which would more nearly approach his initial desire? The salvation process upon which this system of belief relies thus exhibits a crucial flaw from which it cannot recover.

What does the Bible say about predestination? Is predestination a polite word for pagan fatalism? Does it mean that God causes everything which comes to pass, including sin, disease, and cruel human suffering in its many forms? Such a notion is blasphemous to biblical predestination! According to Paul in Romans 8:29, 30, God's predestination did not deal with events, but people. The text says, "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestine to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." Events cannot be conformed to the image of God's Son, but people can. Do you see the emphasis of the word whom? This entire lesson deals with people, not fatalistic events. It begins before man was created, and it concludes with the ultimate glorification of those whom God first foreknew. Grammatically, the first whom, those foreknown, must exactly equal the last whom, those glorified. The grammar of the sentence requires it, the honor of God demands it, and the Bible teaches it from beginning to end. In this series we will study this and many other Bible doctrines. We will seek to learn what the Bible teaches about some rather unpopular doctrines, but their placement in the Bible confirms that they belong to God's salvation mechanism. Popularity polls and human philosophy do not determine God's opinion of them, nor should such trivia determine our opinion either. May God direct our minds into a fruitful study of Bible essentials.

Chapter 1: The Doctrine Of God

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me. Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof; When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Job 38:1-7.

Most formal presentations on the doctrine of God outline his more obvious attributes, omnipresence (everywhere present, nowhere absent), omnipotence (all-powerful), omniscience (all-knowing), and similar concepts. I certainly believe in all of these characteristics of God. However, this study will examine the relationship of God to the central theme of our belief. For that reason, I chose these verses from the Book of Job. Who lies at the very core of your religious conviction? In conviction and action so many people place man in this position, thus building their entire religious belief on the sand. The account of Job's life offers lively insight for a wise self-examination of our own religious views. The book tells us that in all the tragedies Job experienced, he did not sin nor charge God foolishly. In equal balance to Bible truth and honesty, it does not tell us that Job was perfect in every single reaction to his trauma. The two extremes he avoided represent the two most common pitfalls we face in our own personal tragedies. He did not despair or become bitter against God and return to a life of sin. He did not become a fatalist and charge God foolishly with causing these tragedies. A careful study of the first two chapters of the book will reveal that Satan, not God, caused Job's problems. We need to watch for these two tendencies in our times of bitter loss. Human nature in all cultures and times easily succumbs to these two tendencies.

Earlier in the record, Job cried out for a personal confrontation with God, a time to ask God, "Why?" He requested a time to order his cause and make his arguments before God, Job 23:3-5. As if in his own time to acknowledge Job's request, God answered Job, but not as Job had expected. Perhaps Job had been too self-centered in his reaction to trial. "I would order my cause before him." God's con-

versation with Job helped Job to widen his perspective and to submit his cause to God without qualification.

Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. Job, did I need to consult you when I created the universe? Did I need your advice then? Could you have helped me make the world better than I made it without your input? You thought I knew nothing of your calamity. You wanted a hearing to tell me your problem. Job, if I created the universe, do you think for a minute that I do not know what takes place in your life? That I don't care?

No book in the Bible should more impress us with the value of scripture than the Book of Job. Job faced his trial without any written record of God's work and providence. At one point he cried out for just such a record, Job 19:23, "Oh that my words were now written! oh that they were printed in a book!" If his words were now written, he could read them and gain insight into the reasons and the outcome of his trouble. We can read the first two chapters of the book and understand what Job did not know about this ordeal. He knew that Satan had assaulted his life, but he did not know that God had surrounded him with a protective hedge. Satan could cause him great misery, but he could not touch his life. Had Job known this comforting truth, would he have felt more secure, more comforted in his ordeal? Had he known about the New Testament commentary on his life, would he have endured more patiently? Remember the words from James 5:11, "Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy."

What a comfort this knowledge would have been to Job! When we face our moment of trial, do we remember the life of Job, the end of the Lord? Do we consider that, despite the ordeal of the moment, God stands closely and graciously by our side? Do we contemplate that his presence and intervention prevent the trial from escalating far beyond what we actually must endure?

If God laid the foundations of the earth, measured the determined proportions of land and water, gravity, air, and all the other essential components of our world, does he not deserve to stand at the center of our religious belief? Does he not merit our respect as having the same power in salvation and in his personal care of our life? Considering God in this way, how can anyone limit God? Yet the theme of much religious teaching is "Let God ...," or "God and Jesus did all they could do; now it is up to you." If God designed the universe and perfectly created it in his pattern, can he not equally be trusted to design and fully bring to pass the salvation of sinners? Why should man so violently protect the "Free will of man," while imposing limits upon God's will? Have we forgotten what happened when man's will enjoyed more freedom with God than we can now imagine? Read Genesis 3. Do we think man's will can be trusted more than God's?

With full confidence in their God, faithful saints may sing the same song they have always sung. Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: 'for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created'. Revelation 4:11.

Chapter 2: The Doctrine Of Man

When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever

passeth through the paths of the seas. O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! Psalm 8:3-9.

What is the central point of God and his creation? Is it man? Is it the earth? The moon? The heavenly bodies? Too many present day Christians make themselves the central point of everything God represents. How unfortunate! Such thinking discredits the dignity of God fully as much as the Dark Ages scientific notion that the earth was the center of the universe. This thinking more resembles the attitude of the wicked than the righteous. Consider these words from the prophet Isaiah.

For thou hast trusted in thy wickedness: thou hast said, None seeth me. Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee; and thou hast said in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me.
Isaiah 47:10.

Exodus 3 records the origin of the most solemn name of God in the Old Testament, Jehovah. The literal statement of God's name, as recorded in God's interview with Moses, is I AM. Did you notice the wicked man's attitude in Isaiah 47:10? "Thou has said in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me." Biblical doctrine makes God the central theme of Christian truth. Man's thinking puts man in the place of God. Man claims the title of God, I am. He claims the position of God, "None else beside me." Compare these words to Isaiah 43:10, 11. The human ego thrills at the idea that man possesses equality with God. When the serpent tempted Eve, he enticed her with the idea that she would become as "Gods," Genesis 3:5. Consider that this conversation took place in the Garden of Eden before pagan idolatry and false gods entered into man's imagination. Yet the serpent appealed to Eve's ego that she could become as gods. Gods was translated from the same Hebrew word as one of the most common names of God in the Old Testament, Elohim. Since Eve knew nothing of pagan gods, the serpent could not entice her to become as any of them. He enticed her to think that she could become like the only God she knew anything about, the God who created her and placed her in that garden! Friends, when a religion appeals to the ego of man, suggesting that he can become a god, that religion should be rejected as the siren song of the serpent. I suggest that many religions which oppose the direct teaching that man can become a god in fact teach the same doctrine indirectly. "God has done all he can do. Now your eternal future is up to you." "God cannot violate man's free will." Such commonplace phrases elevate man to godhood and deflate God to servanthood!

When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained. Recently, the world has relished the findings of a deep space probe which flew by a number of the outlying planets of our solar system. Think of the distance, the billions of miles, that little probe traveled. Think of the massive planets it photographed and studied. Then consider that this solar system represents a mere pinpoint in the expanse of the universe. Now you can read David's words with realistic appreciation for their meaning. Like a woman sewing needlepoint, the entire universe represents the work of God's fingers. God ordained both the physical mass and the numerous invisible forces which flow between these heavenly bodies. When you think of that magnificent reality which only God could accomplish, what do you conclude?

What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? Why should such a God take thought of mortal man, much less visit him with favor? Why should this God look kindly upon such a worm of creation and visit him? Do you think David held to a God-centered or a man-centered belief? Did he see man or God as the central theme of the universe?

We rejoice that David understood God's merciful favor toward man. With equal joy, we rejoice that he also understood that the cause of this favor rested in God, not man! David found no cause for God's

mindful visitation in man.

In the natural order God gave man responsibility for the natural creation. God gave him dominion over the natural creation. Does that mean that he also gave him dominion over eternity? The writer of the New Testament book of Hebrews addressed this truth succinctly. Before quoting from this passage in Psalm 8, he drew a clear conclusion.

For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak. Hebrews 2:5. Although God assigned man stewardship of the natural creation, he has not allowed either men or angels to claim dominion over the world to come. God reserves all claim to eternal dominion!

Does our belief about God permit us to accept this truth? Does this teaching from Psalms and Hebrews harmonize with our Sunday sermons? Does it blend with our daily thoughts about God and his position in the universe and in our lives? The Bible offers no middle ground. We can challenge God and falsely claim equality with him, or we can joyfully accept his exclusive claim to godhood. Everything we believe will rotate around the central theme of our religion? Do we see God or man at the center of our faith?

Chapter 3: Is Sin Inherited Or Acquired?

'Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.' Psalm 51:4.

The question of how sin passes from one generation to another lies at the heart of a person's belief about God and man. Do we inherit sin? Are we born in innocence, only to acquire sin from the wicked world around us?

"I was shapen in iniquity". The verse from Psalm 51, David's confession and prayer for forgiveness, makes a rather direct statement about his beginning. What does this verse mean? When a child is born, it has already acquired the shape of humanity. It possesses all the vital organs necessary to sustain life. From conception, this new member of the human family gradually, wonderfully takes on the shape of a new independent life. Although the context pertains to the virgin birth of Christ, we could logically apply Psalm 139:14 to the natural formation of the infant child in the womb, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made." What does he mean, shapen in iniquity?

"In sin did my mother conceive me". Many suggest that David accused his mother of conceiving him in a sinful affair with someone other than Jesse. I offer that such a thought did not remotely enter his mind! In Deuteronomy 23:2 Moses taught that an illegitimate child could not "Enter into the congregation to the tenth generation." Ancient Jewish interpretation applies this verse to positions of leadership, such as king or priest. The Old Testament furnishes a vivid example of this principle in Genesis 38. Judah fathered a son, Pharez, by his dead son's widow. Remember, God ordained that Israel's kings would come from the tribe of Judah, just as the priests would come from the tribe of Levi. Although scripture said that the sceptre should not depart from Judah until Shiloh, Christ the king, came, Judah's first king was long delayed because of this sin. How many generations passed before Judah had her king? Look at the closing verses of Ruth. Ten generations passed from Judah with no king. Is this coincidence? Who appeared in the kingly line of Judah after the tenth generation? Jesse's son, David, represented the tenth generation, demonstrating that the curse was satisfied.

If David asserted that he was the product of an illegitimate affair, he would have brought the curse immediately upon himself and another ten generations of Judah. God would have required another ten

generations without a king to satisfy the curse. Did God impose this curse? No, for David was not conceived in illegitimacy! He was Jesse's son! Rather than imposing a curse upon David and his offspring, God called him a "Man after God's own heart."

What do these words mean? "I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me". They declare that every man and woman begin their existence in sin! They do not enter the world in innocence, but with inherent sin. Does this mean that a newborn child possesses all the active sin of an adult wicked sinner? Certainly not, but it means that the nature which is prone to sin resides in the child from its beginning. David's sinful nature did not begin with an arbitrary "Age of accountability," or with his first act of sin. It began with his beginning. It began the same way with us and with every other member of the human family, Jesus Christ representing the single exception.

Romans 5 contains a lively commentary on the nature of man and sin. Let's first consider the context of salvation in which Paul developed that topic.

For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. Romans 5:10.

When were we enemies? When did God reconcile us? How did God reconcile us? How does God save us? Paul addressed all of these questions in this verse. In his death Christ removed the cursed animosity of sin from all for whom he died. However, Christ did not stop his work with the removal of sin; he also saves us by virtue of his life.

And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement. Romans 5:11.

How did we receive the atonement? These verses lay the foundation for Paul's teaching on the nature of sin. Without them, you cannot understand the necessity of Christ's work or the necessity of salvation all by the grace of God. We could not attain moral purity sufficient to remove the guilt of sin. We must be saved by Christ's life. Our obedience could not stand the scrutiny of divine Justice. The atonement must come through the Lord Jesus Christ. Why? Now we can study the context.

'Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:

'For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come'. Romans 5:12-14.

How did death enter the world? Does it enter the world anew as each new generation of mankind falls from childhood innocence into sin? No, it entered the world by one man, Adam. How do we know sin resides in the world? Death represents the universal consequence of sin. Think of this. If a child is born in absolute innocence, it would be immune from death. Paul's reasoning is intense and tightly drawn to a particular view. Since all inherit that sinful disposition, all are subject to death. Under normal circumstances, sin is the violation of a stated body of law. Yet no such law existed from Adam to Moses. Despite the absence of law during that time, death reigned, just as it reigned after God gave the law to Moses. Why? Because man inherits his sinful nature, as David described, he is subject to death from the beginning.

Chapter 4: The Sinner Before Salvation

And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. Ephesians 2:1-3.

If we accept the distinct Bible teaching that every saved person experiences a dramatic change which translates him from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son, Colossians 1:13, we should investigate the condition in which that person lived before. Man's condition and abilities before the new birth impact many essential Bible doctrines. Is the unsaved person sick, and in need of a prescription of moral or intellectual reform? Does he possess a struggling spark of divinity, of God, which he must fuel and encourage? Is he dead in his sinful condition? Our view of the sinner's condition before salvation will heavily influence our view of salvation itself. This doctrine must appear in our list of essential doctrines.

What does it mean that God quickened us? Quicken was a common Old English word which meant to make alive. Clearly, it carries that meaning in our study verse, because the translators set it directly opposite dead. Define dead in this verse; then the opposite to dead will define quicken. Paul did not teach salvation by works, by reform, or by New Age philosophy. These words sufficiently define the sinner's state for any who respect the integrity of scripture. We may experience degrees of illness. We may need varying amounts of reform. But dead means dead! A dead man is dead, all the way dead, 100% dead! Does the Bible use death in different ways? Of course it does. However, in any particular symbol, it represents a state in which no degrees of death exist. The person described is either dead or alive. Those who object to this Bible doctrine attempt to dilute this truth by observing that the Ephesians were not so dead that they could not walk according to the course of this world. Unfortunately for them, their philosophical tap dance confirms Paul's words. Their death related to their state with God, not to physical death. They were not only capable of walking and talking according to the sinful appetites of this world; they loved to do so! However, in terms of God they were dead!

Before the new birth, how does the child of God differ from other sinners who will never experience the new birth? Paul answered that we were "By nature the children of wrath, even as others." Not at all different from others, our nature lived to wrath, God-hating, despicable wrath. This does not mean that every sinner always lives out this vile nature to its absolute limits, but it does mean that the life principle before the new birth possesses none of the moral restraints and convictions unique to the child of God who has experienced the new birth. Paul confirmed this truth in another place.

For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. Titus 3:3.

What drives the actions and thinking of the sinner? Paul contributed further to our understanding. For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ:

Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things. Philippians 3:18, 19.

Did you know that the wicked have a god, that even the atheist has a god? They just have the wrong god! Their God is their belly! What visual images does this verse bring up in your mind? What does it mean that their God is their belly? Can we reasonably doubt Paul's intention with these words? The belly represents the appetite, the desires which rise up and drive a man to fulfill them. According to Paul's word picture, the wicked surely worship a god, but their god is their wicked carnal appetites and desires. They work to satisfy that wicked nature, as a hungry man works for his food. An Old Testament verse contributes to this thought.

How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water? Job 15:16.

The thirsty man sees water as desirable and necessary. He cannot think of it with any sense of morality. He wants it; it satisfies his thirst. What else matters? The wicked see sin in the same light. To do a certain thing which appears abominable to the child of God and to God's law holds no moral quality whatever to the wicked. He wants it; he is thirsty for it. Therefore, he takes it up in his soul and drinks deeply and with great joy.

This briefly describes the tomb of the man who lives in death, in moral and spiritual separation from God. How does such a person undergo a saving experience? Can he simply change his mind and become the exact opposite of what he was a moment before? No, such a dramatic change is impossible to this sinner! How did Paul describe the saving work? And you hath he quickened! God created life, spiritual life, where it did not exist a moment before. The energizing power and work came from God, not from the sinner. In Ephesians 2:10 Paul described this work as a creation, as dramatic and powerful as God's energizing power which created the physical universe in six days. To create, as God knows it, means to form or make out of nothing. Such was God's power and grace in your salvation from that horrible condition of sin.

Chapter 5: To Whom Is The Gospel Preached?

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 1:1.

What kind of person does the gospel address? Does it address all mankind? Or does it address a particular kind or class of people? In this introduction to the Ephesian letter, Paul carefully defined the recipients of his letter by two descriptive terms, saints and faithful in Christ Jesus. Who are saints? How does one become a saint? By Paul's use of the word here and by its use in other New Testament scriptures, we conclude that saints are not as exclusive as many would have us think. Neither are they made saints by an act of the church. When we study the doctrine of sanctification, we will learn more about saints. Legally, every child of God is a saint.

To the faithful in Christ Jesus. The person who fits this description is already in Christ Jesus. Further, in Christ Jesus he manifests faithfulness. This verse should encourage us to understand that faithfulness does not put the sinner in Christ Jesus. It rather manifests that the faithful saint holds an established relationship with Christ, dwelling permanently in him.

The New Testament fully describes the recipient of the gospel. In Acts 2:39 Peter carefully defined the recipients of his sermon.

For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. Acts 2:39.

Each term carries its unique meaning. The final description, the catch-all phrase which richly instructs us, qualifies the recipient of the gospel. “For the promise is unto even as many as the Lord our God shall call.” Peter addressed his sermon to those whom the Lord calls. We should do likewise.

In Acts 13:16 and later in Acts 13:26 Paul directed his preaching to a similar class of people. Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said,

Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience. Acts 13:16.

Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent. Acts 13:26.

What do you find in common between Peter’s message in Acts 2 and Paul’s in Acts 13? Both apostles directed their sermons without apology to a particular class of people, not to mankind in general. Peter defined this class to include “As many as the Lord our God shall call.” Paul twice specified his message to “Whosoever among you feareth God.”

Saints, God-called, God-fearing, all of these terms describe a particular kind of person, not any member of the human race. Paul further defined a valid recipient of the gospel to the Corinthian church.

For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom:

But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. I Corinthians 1:22-24.

Does it make any difference whether a man is a Jew or Gentile? None whatever, but Paul did mention one factor which cuts across race and all other barriers. “Unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks,” Paul chose the same description Peter used in Acts 2, called of God. To those whom God has called, the preaching of Christ represents the power and the wisdom of God. What causes a person to receive the gospel as an enlightening message from God? Why does one person respond in this manner while another person may hear the same message and regard it as foolishness? Paul wanted us to understand that God’s calling prepares the ear and the heart of man to hear the gospel.

To whom does God send the gospel? Does he send it to all alike? These New Testament writers did not think so. Before you disagree with them, remember that they wrote according to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. They did not write personal opinion or conjecture. They wrote as the Holy Spirit directed them. Their words represent God’s message, not their private, personal views. Since we do not always know who fears God or whom the Lord has called, we should gladly preach at any reasonable opportunity. We should declare the good news of the gospel with full understanding that those who receive it and believe it represent a unique class. God has called them, and they fear God. What about those scriptures which seem to apply the gospel to all mankind; for example, the Great Commission?

In Matthew’s record we read, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations,” Matthew 28:19. Mark’s account of this command reads, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature,” Mark 16:15. Luke reports “Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem,” Luke 24:46, 47. During Christ’s personal ministry, the gospel was primarily a Jewish message. He preached it to Jews. He sent Jews to deliver it to other Jews. Upon his as-

cent, he gave these verses to his disciples for the future of the New Testament era. All these scriptures represent various portions of that final message Jesus delivered to his apostles. “Teach all nations,” “Go ye into all the world (not just the nation of Israel).” They should preach “Repentance and remission of sins in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” Rather than apply these words to all mankind in general, the unified context helps us to understand that Jesus intended for his apostles to take the gospel beyond the Jews to all nations, all kinds of people, all races, all social groups. Within all of those nations and social castes, those whom the Lord had called, those who had thus learned to know and fear God, would respond to that message of good news.

Chapter 6: What Is The Message Of The Gospel?

Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Ephesians 1:2.

What is the message of the gospel? The word gospel comes from the Old English word God-spell. It calls for a message of good news. The same Greek word was translated good tidings in Luke 2:10. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

Every message delivered from a pulpit does not qualify as the gospel. Paul warned the Galatian churches of some who preached another gospel which was not of the same quality as the one he preached. His words offer wise insight for our spiritual discretion. In the manufacturing process we respect the necessity of good quality control. Christians desperately need more quality control on the messages they hear. To preach that God wishes the salvation of every human being, but that he will actually save only 1-2% because they failed to cooperate with him does not sound like good news. It sounds more like a defeated God! To preach that God has retreated and the devil has full control of the world for the moment is not good news to a suffering Christian!

Paul’s introduction to the Ephesian letter affords a simple, elegant characterization of the gospel message. Grace be to you. Translated from the Greek root for our English word charisma, the Bible concept of grace embodies the most intimate revelation of God. His disposition toward his people relies on his own gracious loving disposition. For the child of God who hears the gospel message, God’s grace, his gracious grace, should ring in his heart as the dominant theme. Not just to the elite, but to every child of God who hears this message, grace marks the gospel message. Have you done everything you think God has commanded you to do? The message of grace will remind you that you have only done that which was your duty. Have you suffered under the guilty plague of failure and self-condemnation? The message of grace reminds you that God’s blessings rely on his own gracious being, not on what you deserve. Do you feel overwhelmed by the trial of the day? The message of grace reminds you of Christ’s words to Paul in his trial, “My grace is sufficient!” Do you often feel stretched to the limit by the constant demands of life? Grace reminds you that your God is greater than all the demands of the universe, yours included. On the sunny slopes of blessing or in the dark valleys of stress and failure, God’s grace meets the need of the moment.

Paul did not speak of grace in an abstract theological way. He made it personal. Grace be to you. A gospel message which does not become personal, which does not inject itself into your life offers little value. More than another philosophical statement to wrangle over, the gospel contains God’s personal message of grace to you personally!

Peace, how many would gladly give their fortunes for just a taste of peace? Often, hurting people withdraw into an imaginary world of dreams and illusion just to feel the temporary comfort of peace, how-

ever brief. Others pay large sums of money to attend seminars and classes advertised to improve the prospect of peace and self-contentment. But, alas, their ill-bought peace is short lived. The quick fix they sought cannot solve their diseased soul.

Peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul extended the assurance of peace to the Ephesian church with their full knowledge of its source. The Ephesians did not gain this peace with illusion, or costly seminars. This peace came from God and from the Lord Jesus Christ. This peace constitutes an essential part of the gospel message which Paul preached.

So much for the prospect of peace, how does one attain it? The gospel message builds on God's grace and peace to his tired hurting child. It also contains the basis of that peace. Do you worry about peace with God? Stop your worry! Christ has accomplished that peace for you.

But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us. Ephesians 2:13, 14.

The price of peace with God, eternal unconditional peace, is the blood of Christ. He made you nigh to God by that personal sacrifice of his blood, his life. He is our peace. He broke down walls of separation between us and other children of God who were different from us in race or in any other particular. He also broke down the wall which separated us from God.

How can we gain some comfort of that peace in our lives? How can we experience the comfort and assurance that we share in that precious peace?

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6, 7.

Are we willing to take everything, personal failures, work problems, family problems, doubts, even our own unbelief, to God in prayer? Once we take it to him, are we willing to leave it with him? This action, this intimate personal prayer of faith, supports the whole sense of peace in our souls. This peace, this God-given peace, defies explanation. It stands the test of every trial you will ever face! Keep your hearts was translated from a Greek word which means to stand guard over. The sentinel, the armed guard over the fortress of your heart, is God's peace! My dear friends, may the grace and peace of God go with you today!

Chapter 7: A Bible Eulogy

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. Ephesians 1:3.

How can we bless God? Do we give him something he lacks, something he needs? No, but we can give him that which pleases him. God's most basic nature includes the attribute of self-sufficiency. He needs nothing from us to be God. However, he delights in our willing, loving adoration. We cannot repay the debt of our sins which he paid. Such a thought is preposterous! As we understand more of what he did for us, we should respond to his loving kindness with adoring worship. Such is the theme of this verse.

Blessed and blessings in this verse come from the Greek root of our English word eulogy. It means to speak well of. We have imposed a sad disservice upon the word by limiting it to a funeral message, a time when we remember and speak well of the deceased person. Should we not offer more eulogies to the living? In respect for this verse, should we not offer our most treasured eulogy to our God? To see the full impact of what this word means and to grasp fully what God has done for us, let's rephrase the verse, substituting this word for blessed: "We eulogize the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath eulogized us with all spiritual eulogies in heavenly places in Christ."

Does this form of the verse add any new thoughts to your mind? Does the verse really mean what it says? Does God really eulogize us, speak well of us? As we study essential doctrines, using Ephesians Chapter 1 as our guide, we will learn the language of the divine eulogy. Election, God's choice of his people in Christ before the foundation of the world, his predestining them to the adoption of children, redemption, forgiveness, the good pleasure of his will, the final gathering of all his saints, the eternal inheritance, and the mighty resurrecting power of God which enables us to believe, these all represent God's language of love, of eulogy to his beloved children. Theologians who tend to translate these doctrines into a cold legal philosophy impose a terrible disservice upon these beautiful, personal truths of the divine eulogy. I find it strange that so many Christians hear these words, exactly as used in scripture, and immediately speak evil of God. As he thought of these eternal truths, Paul spoke well of God. All too often, the religious attitude of modern religionists uses threats of eternal loss to frighten people into some form of worship. Imposing guilt trips and a manipulative capitalization on people's fears represents the gospel's greatest enemy! If you do anything religious, anything at all, out of this fear, your worship will not please God. "The Lord loves a cheerful giver" should apply to our whole relationship with God, not just our pocketbook.

How many blessings come directly from God through Christ? How many result from our obedience? A common religious tenet of the day describes salvation like this. You work as hard as you can, do as much as you can to deserve eternal life. At the end, if you did enough, God will add to your works and admit you into heaven. What did Paul say about the cause and source of spiritual blessings? God blessed us with all spiritual blessings! In all your life you never earned a single blessing by your obedience and faith. Every blessing you ever received came from God.

Where may we find these blessings? The verse enlightens our thoughts wonderfully. All of these spiritual blessings are in Christ. You never received a single spiritual blessing that didn't come through him. You couldn't do enough to earn or deserve the least spiritual blessing from God. They all flow through him alone.

Consider this idea that God speaks well of us. He eulogized us with all spiritual eulogies in heavenly places in Christ. This view opens up the whole intercessory work of Christ to our minds. Although we benefit from his eulogy, remember that the word means to speak well of, not to speak well to. To whom does Christ speak well of us? And the answer cries out from the pages of scripture that he speaks well of us to the Father. He told Peter, "I have prayed for you." He tells you the same thing; he has also prayed for you. I John 2:1 tells us that we have an advocate with the Father. Advocate comes from a word which means an intercessor, a consoler. It was used in the First Century of a lawyer, a legal spokesman in a court setting. The lawyer speaks for his client in all legal matters. So Christ speaks for you, his child, in all legal matters before his Father's court in heaven. This word assures you that he always speaks well of you to the Father!

The verse also teaches that he did more than just speak well of us. It also teaches that he translated his good speaking into actions. He speaks well of us, and he works well for us before the Father. In spiritu-

al matters he becomes the conduit for all good things which the Father provides us in response to his intercession. May our hearts overflow with the richness of God's miraculous eulogy toward us.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise him all creatures here below;
Praise him above, ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Chapter 8: Election, The First Spiritual Blessing

According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love. Ephesians 1:4.

In the last chapter we studied God's spiritual blessings, eulogies, in heavenly places in Christ. You will recall that these blessings prompted Paul to eulogize God. All who profess faith in God speak well of him. All will applaud the goodness of God, his love, his mercy, and many other attributes of grace. Strangely, when you begin to examine the particular doctrines which form the basis for praising God, many of those same people take on a different attitude, criticizing and finding fault with the Bible's description of God.

In few Bible doctrines do we see this double standard more clearly than in the doctrine of election. After speaking well of God, blessing him, Paul's first mention of a particular work which God performs was the doctrine of election. When was the last time your pastor preached a sermon on this topic? What do most people say about biblical election? Here are a few of the more common statements, along with a brief observation of the fallacy contained in them.

"It only refers to God's choice of national Israel in the Old Testament." Paul addressed our verse from Ephesians to a Gentile New Testament church; yet he said, "He hath chosen us." Us includes Paul, a New Testament Israelite, and the Ephesians, New Testament Gentile Christians. In Romans 9:24 Paul specifically included both Jews and Gentiles as objects of God's election, describing both as "Vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory." He described these chosen vessels of mercy as us, "Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles."

"It is a deep mysterious doctrine to be reserved for private discussion among the most mature Christians." Paul held no such view of election. Here in Ephesians he made it his first reason to bless God. In I Thessalonians 1:4 he offered a thanksgiving prayer to God for the Thessalonians, "Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God." Based on accepted history, Paul wrote the letter of I Thessalonians within a year of the time the Thessalonians first professed Christianity. By his comfortable use of the term, we may safely conclude that this was not his first mention of the doctrine to this church! Rather than reserve election for mature Christians, Paul apparently made it a part of their earliest instruction in the faith.

"The idea of election violates man's free will." We should carefully examine what the Bible says about man's will. Perhaps it is not as free as some might think. In response to this objection, I ask, "Whose will do you trust most for salvation, yours or God's? Do you think your eternity is more secure if based on your will or God's?" The Bible should determine our belief. Our belief should not stand in judgment of the Bible!

"Election is exclusive. It leaves out many who should be saved." Exactly the opposite is true. If we

consider the Bible doctrine of man and his undeserving sinful condition, all deserve eternal judgment. Therefore, all deserve to be excluded. Election is actually inclusive. It includes those who do not deserve to be included. I find it pathetically fascinating that those who usually raise this objection sincerely believe that only a small portion of the human family have any chance of salvation. Some will limit the number of the saved to less than 2% of mankind. And they have the nerve to object to election as being excessively exclusive! According to the doctrine of Bible election, the number of the saved, those whom God chose in Christ, is many, not few. I find it ludicrous to think that God will permit the devil to capture the majority of mankind, while he stands by, presumably helpless to prevent their loss! God is greater than the devil, my friends! He will have the victory in the salvation of those whom he chose in Christ!

“It refers to special callings and Christian living, not to eternity.” This position must adopt pagan fatalism to justify itself, a doctrine soundly rejected by scripture. Further, in this lesson Paul did not address only those people in Ephesus who help positions of special calling and leadership, but the entire church body. The final objective of election concludes too much for this interpretation, “Holy and without blame.” In Galatians 2:11 Paul described a brief, but intense, disagreement he had with Peter over fellowship with Gentile Christians. “I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed.” If the objective of election calls for us to stand before God without blame, we must conclude that Peter was not one of the elect, for Paul said he was to be blamed! This is the height of folly!

What does biblical election signify? Study this verse. Who made the choice? God did! That settles it! How did he view us in the choice? “He has chosen us in him.” God made this choice in consideration of Christ, not of our foreseen faith or obedience. He chose us in Christ! When did he make the choice? “Before the foundation of the world” sends our minds reeling beyond the world which we know or can imagine. Only God could make such a choice. Why did he make this choice? What did he determine to accomplish by election? “That we should be holy and without blame before him in love.” According to most Greek authorities, the structure of this sentence sets up a logical cause and effect relationship. “Should be” indicates the certain result of God’s choice, not his kind wishes for our good behavior. The only way we could stand before God, holy and without blame, was for God to make a sovereign choice and to include in his choice everything necessary to accomplish that goal. Thus in Romans 9:23, Paul could describe those whom God chose as “Vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory.” Notice that God prepared the vessels of mercy for glory; they did not prepare themselves!

Many think of biblical election as cold and legalistic. How did Paul view it? “Before him in love.” Paul saw nothing cold about this doctrine. He always wrote of it in a context of God’s love. To Paul, election expressed God’s love, not his arbitrary decree.

Chapter 9: Predestination, Salvation By God’s Will Or Man’s?

Having predestined us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will. Ephesians 1:5.

What is biblical predestination? Is biblical predestination the same as fatalism? Does it mean that God predestined and unconditionally ordained every event in history? The answer cries out from scripture, “No!” On a number of occasions in his prophecy, Jeremiah mentioned the idolatrous worship of his people, the remnant of national Israel. They worshipped the false gods of their neighbors. They embraced the despicable practices of these false religions, including burning their children in sacrifice to false idols. God responded to this practice that he did not command that practice, neither did it enter in-

to his mind. This does not infer that God did not know of this activity in advance, but it makes the matter crystal clear that God didn't predestine such abominations! In the New Testament Paul wrote, "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints," I Corinthians 14:33. John added his words, "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world," I John 2:16. How could God predestine a thing and then disclaim authorship for it? How could he predestine lust and pride and then say that it is not of the Father, but of the world? The Bible clearly teaches predestination, but with equal clarity it rejects the fatalistic concept that God ordained every event and act of man.

What then is the significance of Bible predestination? Our study verse makes it rather clear, doesn't it? God's predestination is not universal and general. It embraces one unique area of his activities and involvement with man. He predestined "us," people, not events and wicked actions. The objective of his predestination was to bring us to the adoption of children. The means of that predestined adoption was Jesus Christ. Its final goal was to himself. The whole activity of predestination accords with his will. Do you see all of these qualifying descriptions in the verse? One after the other, Paul carefully described and defined predestination for the Ephesian Christians, and for us.

Adoption of children, this distinctive phrase overflows with richness and grace. In the First Century a man could father a child, but refuse to accept the child as his. In this state the child had no recourse and could enjoy none of the blessings inherent in the father's name and position. If the father wished to embrace the child into full privilege, at a set time he would sponsor a large celebration and publicly "Adopt" the child. From that day forward, the child enjoyed full family privilege. He legally carried the father's name, and at the father's death he was entitled to his share of the father's inheritance.

Applied to God and salvation, this illustration floods our minds with rich assurances that God will not leave a single one of his children unclaimed. His determination to adopt them into his eternal inheritance was so emphatic that Paul said he predestined us to the adoption of children. Occasionally, theologians will attempt to interpret predestination as a timely matter, suggesting that God predestined us to discipleship or special callings. This phrase, "The adoption of children," disallows such a rendition. God's predestination did not seek our productive function as servants, but our secure position in God's family. In adoption, predestined adoption, God claims every one of his children and draws them into the blessings of his eternal family.

According to the good pleasure of his will. Whose will controls salvation, yours or God's? Often people raise the empty objection that salvation by grace violates man's free will. I ask, my friends, whose will you more securely trust for your eternity, yours or God's? Any time God imposes a law of conduct, he restricts man's freedom to violate that commandment. A man in his sins joyfully pursues sin, but he does not follow that course with freedom or with God's neutral indifference. He does so in open defiance of the moral code God gave. Remember man in the Garden of Eden. In a beautiful land unspotted with sin and its awful consequences, man could have enjoyed blissful fellowship with his Creator God. What did he do? He exercised his "Free will" and plunged himself and his offspring into sin. If man in such a perfect environment made the wrong choice, what makes us think that man in his present sinful state could possibly make the right choice?

What does the sinner's will choose?

"There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. There is no fear of God before their eyes." Romans 3:11-18.

Does this describe a will which possesses either the desire or the ability to choose God and good? You would be wise to strongly distrust your own will for salvation! Salvation comes according to God's will, or it does not come at all!

How did Paul describe God's will in this verse? "According to the good pleasure of his will." Good pleasure draws our minds into the richness of God and his infinite goodness. Those who object to God's will in salvation love to conjure up images of a cold arbitrary God whose will possesses all the compassion of the unjust judge. They are wrong! The will of God which predestined his children to full family status exudes love, warmth, and goodness.

What is biblical predestination? In the last chapter we studied Ephesians 1:4 and learned that God chose a particular number of mankind in Christ before the foundation of the world. In this verse, part of the same sentence, we learn that God predestined those whom he chose in Christ to receive full family status and blessings. This often hated doctrine appears quite lovely and wonderful when we see it from the Bible's perspective instead of man's.

Chapter 10: Predestination's Final Chapter

*To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.
Ephesians 1:6.*

This verse ends the sentence which began in Verse 3 with Paul's "Eulogy" of God for spiritual blessings. From this eulogy of God, Paul moved our minds immediately into God's choice of his people in Christ before the foundation of the world, and then into the doctrine of predestination.

What is biblical predestination? Most people hear the word predestination and think fatalism, the false notion that God ordered every event in the history of the world, sin and injustice included. The Bible will hear none of such a black doctrine! However, Paul used predestination in this verse and praised God for it. What does the Bible teach about this doctrine?

In Verse 4 Paul wrote that God's choice of his people would result in our appearing "Holy and without blame before him in love." In Verse 5 he wrote that God predestined us to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ. Finally, in closing the sentence he wrote the words of our study verse. To praise God's glorious grace, to be fully accepted in Christ, God's beloved Son, Paul firmly merged these wonderful truths with true predestination.

Man's false notions of predestination find their fulfillment in tragedy and sin. God's implementation of predestination, fully set forth in scripture, finds its fulfillment in the secure salvation of his chosen people. Examine this one sentence from a cause and effect perspective.

Cause--God has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ.

Effect--Paul, and we, eulogize God, speak well of him in worship and praise for his blessings.

Cause--God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world.

Effect--we shall be holy and without blame before him in love.

Cause--Predestination, God's true predestination, reflects the compassionate eternal purpose of God.

Effect--We receive the adoption of children, become legal members of God's eternal family according to the good pleasure of his will.

Cause--Predestination, God made a merciful determination for our salvation before he created the universe.

Effect--We shall finally and certainly praise the glory of his grace. Effect--God accepts us as his children in his beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

When we thus examine God's predestination, we gladly join Paul in speaking well of the loving God who so fully provided for the eternal blessing of his family.

Another significant scripture which we should examine on this topic appears in Paul's letter to the Romans.

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestine to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestine, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

Romans 8:29, 30.

God's foreknowledge in this lesson does not refer to God's omniscience, but to his special knowledge and determined love for his own. We should carefully note in this lesson that Paul did not say, "For what he did foreknow," "Whom," a personal pronoun which denotes people, makes up the total content of God's predestination in this lesson. Without stretching the words in the least, we can embrace God's eternal purpose for salvation, his exact completion of that purpose, and the final glorification of those whom he first foreknew. The five verbs in this sentence (Foreknew, predestined, called, justified, and glorified) move our minds from God's eternal purpose before he created the universe to the resurrection at the end of time.

The repeated "Whom," associated with each verb in sequence draws us to the unquestionable conclusion that the same exact number whom God foreknew he will also glorify. Those who believe in salvation by works teach that God foreknew every human being, wished their salvation, but that only a small portion of mankind will enjoy salvation. This lesson will not tolerate such a cheap notion of God and his eternal purpose to save. Whatever the actual number, the grammar of this verse requires us to conclude that God will resurrect and glorify exactly the same number he foreknew and predestined! Paul followed these two verses with a question? "What shall we then say to these things?" Designed to provoke sweet thoughts of God, he answered his own question, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" You see, Paul knew what God's predestination meant.

He knew it applied particularly to the salvation of God's chosen people. On the foundation of these five verbs, Paul built the remainder of the chapter and stood joyfully on the conclusion,

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:38, 39.

Because of God's predestination, we can speak well of God, rest securely in his eternal love, and join Paul in our persuasion that nothing can separate those whom God loved and chose in Christ from his

eternal love!

Chapter 11: Redemption

In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace. Ephesians 1:7.

In the beginning of this series I told you that we would keep God at the center of all essential Bible doctrines. When we stand on the Bible, this emphasis presents no problem. Only when we try to make the Bible support our personal views of God and essential doctrines do we find difficulty.

Where do we find our redemption? The closing phrase of Verse 6 teaches that God has accepted us in the beloved, his beloved Son. This acceptance appears as an accomplished fact, not as a conditional offer. The verse we now study continues the growing list of eternal blessings Paul listed in Ephesians 1, all of which he located in the Lord Jesus Christ. He did not attribute our redemption to some redeeming quality or conduct in us. He established our redemption in Christ.

Redemption does not appear in our everyday language as often as it did in the First Century. What does it mean? The Greek word from which redemption was translated means to pay the ransom in full. Partial payment or conditional payment do not qualify for this word! It requires payment in full! It signifies that God loosed the legal debt of your sins from you and took them off and away from you. Paul included the specific price of redemption in the verse, through his blood.

Leviticus 25 contains a long discussion of redemption under the Old Testament law which symbolized the work of Christ. According to Mosaic law, no one could sell his land; it belonged to God. When a man became so indebted that he could not repay the debt, he could sell himself and, if necessary, his family, into temporary servitude to his creditor. Sometimes these creditors were severe and demanding. Therefore, the law provided that "One of his brethren," someone near of kin to him, could pay the debt, enabling the man and his family to return to their home. The redeemer must be a near relative. Redemption was truly a family matter. Redemption did not occur until the redeemer paid the price and the indebted man was released.

Apply the laws of Leviticus 25 to our spiritual relationship with God. First, our sins hopelessly indebted us to the righteous demands of God's law. We had nothing with which to pay that debt. Therefore, we must submit to its legal penalty, condemnation under the law. Even before the debt, we must hold a close family relationship with the Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. How did this relationship occur before we were born? Remember our study of Verse 5 on predestination, that God predestined us to the adoption of children. God's election of a particular people in Christ and his predestination of those people to adoption established our family relationship with God before we were ever born. In response to the legal debt of his chosen family, Jesus came into the world, assumed the whole of our sin debt, and paid the price necessary to redeem us from that burden. His blood, his sacrificial life, offered in death to the Father, satisfied every demand God's just law held against us. Through his payment of that price, our redemption was fully accomplished! This doctrine prohibits the idea of Christ dying a conditional death which actually accomplished nothing unless we meet certain conditions. Based on the price he paid to the Father, the redemption, God released us from the law and returned us to our family relationship with him.

This doctrine assures the integrity and security of God's family for eternity. It cannot tolerate the notion that a single one of those for whom Christ died will not receive the full release purchased by his

blood. When Jesus died and offered himself to the Father, he for ever took our sins off and away from us. His death released us from the debt of sin. It purchased our eternal release from sin, assuring our return to the heavenly homeland with the Father.

In Romans 8 Paul built the eternal security of God's family on this same truth. Notice the certainty of blessing which rests on the death of Christ.

Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Romans 8:33, 34.

To the charge of God's elect, these words remind us of the debt we owed to God for our sins. Can any lay that debt back to our charge? No, God accepted the payment his Son made and declared that the debt was paid. Who can condemn any of those for whom Christ died? Who can ignore the consequences of Christ's death and judge you? None, for Christ died, and God accepted that payment in full satisfaction of the debt. Christ not only died, he has risen again and stands at God's right hand. What if someone raises the sin issue against one of those for whom Christ died? Jesus speaks out to the Father, "Father, this charge is false! The sins raised by this accuser were paid when I died on the Cross. This accuser seeks double payment for a debt which I already paid!"

Paul continues his reasoning on the legal consequences of Christ's death.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Romans 8:35.

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:38, 39.

Chapter 12: Forgiveness

In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace. Ephesians 1:7.

In this verse Paul attributed two notable blessings to the Lord Jesus, redemption and forgiveness. Although the Greek word translated forgiveness in this verse may well carry an eternal significance, this setting seems to lend itself more to the practical or timely aspect of God's blessings. As we learned in the last chapter on redemption, Christ paid the full price of our sin debt. According to the law, he settled the debt in full, restoring his chosen people to their heavenly inheritance.

In the customary perspective of forgiveness we forgive someone who offended us without strict legal satisfaction or remedy. True biblical forgiveness, however, requires that we dispose of the offense by laying it upon Christ.

And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. Ephesians 4:32.

Unless you forgive your offender in this manner, the offense will likely simmer just beneath the surface and reappear in your relationship with that person at a later time. You may give the appearance of forgiveness, but you cannot scripturally forgive in any other manner than this verse sets forth. These

words richly instruct us. God forgave us for the sake of Christ, his Son. Jesus prominently appears as the cause of God's kindness, tender-heartedness, and forgiveness of us. If we ever truly forgive our brothers or sisters who offend us, we will necessarily deal with their offense the same way God dealt with our sins, by looking at them through Christ.

Our study verse deals with forgiveness between us and God, not between us and our brother or sister. From an eternal perspective, Jesus paid the ransom price for our sins by his own blood, thus satisfying the legal debt we owed Divine Justice. He cancelled the debt! Redemption assured the eternal security of everyone for whom Christ died. God need not do anything else for our eternity. However, he did something else for us. In him we have forgiveness, according to the riches of his grace. This thought suggests that, in addition to accomplishing our eternal redemption, Christ richly endows us with daily blessings and joys right here in this present life. Even now, he does not hold every sin against us. He forgives us according to the riches of his grace. When we sin or fail to honor him, he deals with us as with children. He chastens, but does not kill. We appear before the parental judgment seat of Christ, but we will never appear before the judicial bar of Eternal Justice. Christ appeared there and settled that legal matter for us. God's chastening does not intend to extract payment for our disobedience. Even in a timely sense under God's parental law, we could not pay our debt. Chastening serves to correct the erring behavior of the child, not make him pay his legal debt. We should not ignore that often a child of God sins in ways that impose lasting consequences upon his conscience and upon the lives of those close to him. However, according to the riches of God's forgiving grace, he does not hold such a sin between us and him, even in a timely sense. He richly sends his forgiving grace!

We need to carefully examine our view of forgiveness, biblical forgiveness. Repentance, however sincere and thorough, cannot erase the debt of our wrongs. A good life from this date forward cannot block out the black stain of past mistakes. We cannot repay all the debts our past sins accrued. Only the riches of God's forgiving grace can put those sins in the past and enable us to look to him with a clean heart. David's prayer for forgiveness speaks volumes to this point.

Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. Psalm 51:2.

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Psalm 51:7.

Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Psalm 51:9, 10.

Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee. Psalm 51:12, 13.

For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. Psalm 51:16, 17.

Remember, the writer of these words was David, the man after God's own heart. He was not a lost sinner, but a broken, chastened child of God praying for forgiveness. He realized his deep need for present inner cleansing from his black sin. The cleansing for which he prayed had nothing to do with his eternal redemption, but it had everything to do with his timely service to God and the joy of his salvation. That we have the psalms and the continuous record of his life after this event witnesses that God answered his prayer and forgave him.

Did God arbitrarily decide to overlook David's sin, as if to pardon a convicted criminal? No, ten thousand times, no! He forgave David exactly as he forgives us today. In Christ we have forgiveness according to the riches of his grace! May we treasure this rich blessing of grace!

Chapter 13: Justification

Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Romans 3:24.

Any serious Bible study of eternal salvation will necessarily delve into the issue of law, God's law. According to scripture, God has no intention of populating heaven with pardoned criminals. Rather, he made full provision to satisfy his holy law for every sin of every person who will live with him in eternity. Job questioned his miserable comforters, "I know it is so of a truth: but how should man be just with God?" Job 9:2. Job's question urges our thoughts into this rich field of God's justice and man's sin. That God will not condemn a good man, all will gladly confirm. How a man becomes good before God commands our attention. Job's friends accused him of some secret sin, protesting that God would never unjustly punish a good man. They could not see beyond their own good works, a common problem with many theologians. Job agreed with their conclusion, but countered with the probing question, "How can a man be just with God?"

Perhaps theologians and preachers have over-simplified the question of justification. One school of thought insists on salvation by works; the other insists on salvation without works. We cannot study Bible justification without reaching the conclusion that a tremendous work must occur to justify a man. The real question is this, "Whose works justify the sinner?" The Bible answer cries out that man's works, mixed with sin and ego, cannot justify the sinner before a righteous God. When Paul taught Titus that God saved us according to his mercy, "Not by works of righteousness," he intended the best of human effort, not the worst. Those who believe in salvation by works attempt to make the works of righteousness in this verse contrived, imagined good works. The definition of righteousness, in English or in Greek, will not allow this interpretation. A contrived righteousness is hypocrisy, not actual righteousness. The Greek word translated righteousness in this verse means equitable in character or act, innocent, or holy. This strict definition limits the verse to valid righteous actions, not hypocritical or selfish pretenses. Paul said that these acts of righteousness do not accomplish our salvation. Job countered his miserable comforters with the probing question, "How can man be just with God?"

Our study verse reveals the simple beauty of God's righteous character. According to his own law and justice, he accomplished our justification. In our criminal court system normally one of two verdicts will be reached, guilty or innocent. In the New Testament the parallel to these two verdicts is condemnation and justification. Condemnation equates to our verdict of guilty, and justification equates to innocent, or not guilty. How can God declare a man innocent whose lifestyle loved sin and pursued it? Can a few acts of obedience or legitimate righteousness erase the black sins of the past? No, Paul's conclusion in Titus 3:5 addressed this matter precisely.

Being justified freely by his grace. Freely, without a price, what does this mean? It cannot apply to God, for the remainder of the verse defines the price Jesus paid for our justification, his very life. It refers to us; we did not pay a price for our justification. God did not impose the price of justification upon us. God demanded that justice be satisfied for our salvation. Our question should not quarrel over works. God saved us by works! Our question, answered by this verse, should rather be this. Whose works saved us? Everything Jesus did during his thirty three years upon earth represent his works for our salvation. Did God accept his works for our salvation? Yes! The price of our justification cost Jesus his life, but God gave it to us freely, without a price!

Through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. We tend to isolate various Bible doctrines in neat little isolation chambers, but the Bible will not tolerate such narrow thinking. This verse joins justification, our legal peace with God, and redemption, our indebtedness to God. When Jesus paid the price of redemption, he freed us from the debt of sin. Simultaneously, he accomplished our justification, our legal position of innocence. The context of Titus 3 enlightens this topic wonderfully.

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Titus 3:5-7.

Paul captured all of our salvation in these verses. Not by equitable, holy, innocent actions which we did, but according to his mercy, he saved us. He didn't perfume over the stench of our sins. He washed them away in his blood. Through denotes agency, instrumentality. By the agency of Jesus Christ, not our own works of righteousness, he saved us. This work assures a certain result. Justifying us by his grace, God makes us heirs of eternal life.

Does the Bible teach other aspects of justification? Of course, but only this justification by grace, through the redemptive death of Christ, saves the sinner from eternal separation.

*“For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God,”
Romans 4:2.*

Without a doubt, Abraham was justified by works. Did those works earn an eternal reward for him? Did they give him reason to glory before God? No! In the court of his conscience he could rejoice that God approved of his righteous life. Surely, anything which earns an eternal place with God deserves glory. The Bible teaches that Abraham was justified both by faith and by works. Did either of these matters earn his eternal life? No, only one thing gave him reason to rejoice and glory before God, the day of Christ, John 8:56.

Chapter 14: Legal Sanctification

Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Hebrews 10:9, 10.

We will study the Bible doctrine of sanctification in two phases, legal and practical. Unfortunately, most contemporary teaching on this subject deals with only one of these aspects, while ignoring the other. As we will see, the Bible contains both, and the believer needs to know both dimensions of sanctification. We will study legal sanctification first.

Hebrews 10 deals powerfully with the priesthood of Jesus Christ. The two verses quoted above reflect the lesson's conclusion on the issue of legal sanctification. It begins with a quotation from Psalm 40. The rejection of sacrifices offered under the law does not contradict God's institution of those sacrifices. It rather enlightens us to the reality that those sacrifices never removed sin from a single sinner! Verse 1 of this chapter in Hebrews confirms that point. Our text deals with the literal removal of sin by the sacrifice of Christ, not its symbolic removal by those offerings under the law. Therefore, he could correctly bypass every offering which the Old Testament priests offered.

What puts away our sins? The last part of the quotation from Psalm 40 represents the words of the incarnate Christ, "I come to do thy will, O God." Jesus came into the world to perform God's will, as symbolically stated in those Old Testament sacrifices. However, he did not take away symbolic sin. He took away actual sin, the legal debt of the sins of those for whom he died. "By the which will," Jesus incarnate performing the Father's will, sanctified those for whom he died. Did Jesus die for every human being? If he did, every human being was sanctified, for his sacrificial offering of his own body fully accomplished the sanctification of those for whom he died.

Through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ. Through denotes means or agency. The means of our sanctification, our eternal sanctification, Jesus accomplished through his death on our behalf. Once for all refers to time. Once, for all time, Jesus' death sanctified those for whom he died. This speaks of absolute accomplishment, not a provisional or conditional proposition. Once Jesus died, the Father looks upon every one for whom he died as fully sanctified to him, without sin, spot, wrinkle, blemish, or any such thing, as if they had never committed the least sin of any sort.

Many systems of belief make a difference between sins committed before salvation and sins committed after salvation. This lesson makes no such artificial difference. Jesus died to satisfy God's holy demands for every sin which his elect would ever commit, before or after he saved them. Once for all time, he satisfied the legal requirements of Divine Justice for our sins, thus sanctifying us to the Father as holy vessels of mercy.

For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Hebrews 10:14.

First, he sanctified us by his coming to accomplish the Father's will. Then he offered himself to the Father, as both priest and offering. By that offering, unconditionally accepted by the Father, he perfected us for ever. Before he saved us, after he saved us, for time, or for eternity, his offering to the Father perfected us for ever.

But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. I Corinthians 1:30.

When I began this study, I promised to keep you close to your Lord. How can we explore these doctrines apart from him?

Why should we make this issue of our redemption, sanctification, and eternal salvation so important? My friends, at best, we will spend but a brief time in this life. From womb to tomb, our life is no more than a vapor, a puff of mist which appears and then vanishes. The success or failure of what Jesus did, as reflected in these Bible doctrines, determines where we will spend eternity. Jesus gave us supreme comfort that he would accomplish the Father's will, our sanctification, our redemption, and our eternal perfection.

All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. John 6:37-39.

Hebrews 10 tells us that Jesus came to do the Father's will, intimately associated with the lesson of Old Testament sacrifices. It assures us that his coming accomplished what those sacrifices could never

do. By coming to do the Father's will, he sanctified those for whom he came. By his sacrificial death, he perfected for ever those whom he had thus sanctified.

What does this mean to you? It means that God now looks upon you as if you had never known sin in your life. You may live with your failures and sins. The sting of conscience may inflict daily pain upon you. Painful as it may seem, this sting may be a blessing in disguise to prevent you from future sins. To understand these doctrines means you understand that God does not see you as you see yourself. He sees you through the crimson flow of Christ's offering. His sight of your sins stops there. When he looks beyond Christ at you, he only sees you in sanctified perfection and love.

Chapter 15: Practical Sanctification

For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God: That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-7.

When confronted with the idea of salvation altogether by grace without works, those who believe in salvation by works often object, "If I believed that, I'd go out in the world and take my fill of sin." Perhaps they respond to a deficiency of knowledge, but their answer reveals a dreadful lack of respect for practical sanctification. One could infer from their answer that the only reason they live a godly life is to gain eternal security, a self-centered motive at best. What about the Bible motives of love, and God-honoring integrity? Are they not incentive enough for godly living?

God carefully instructed us in discipleship with good cause. He did not intend that discipleship should purchase heaven for us. Discipleship, practical sanctification, builds upon the secure family relationship of God's grace. Its only motive should be loving respect and gratitude for the God who loved and saved us when we were unlovable and incapable of saving ourselves. To that end, we examine this lesson of practical sanctification.

What is the will of God in practical sanctification? For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. This topic includes both those things which we should practice and those from which we should abstain. The verses quoted here deal with the negative. Verses 9-12 deal with positive holiness. Before we can commit our lives to positive holiness, we must discipline our conduct and remove sinful habits. That ye should abstain from defines the first step of practical sanctification. Let's examine Paul's list.

Fornication, sins of a sexual nature, this word embraces far more than mere sexual intimacy with someone other than your marriage partner. The word in the Greek language is the root for our English word, pornography. Sexual sins of any sort tend to be addictive. They consume the mind and rob it of that sense of holy integrity which honors God.

That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour, applies to all appetites of the body, not just the sexual appetite. Lack of control and moderation in any area of physical appetite often blights the otherwise positive influence of those who profess godliness. The lust of concupiscence, carries our minds beyond the actions of the body to the source of those actions, the lust of the mind. Lust represents any unlawful desire. James 1:15 explicitly maps the degener-

ative progress of lust from the evil desire in the mind, to sin in action, to death. We should not underestimate the deceptive powers of Satan as to the illusive consequences of any form of lust, sexual, financial, or ego-oriented power over our fellow-man. Lust may bring momentary pleasure, but it will always bring long-term misery!

That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter, applies practical sanctification to the more subtle interaction we experience in our daily routine with each other, especially those whom we know and regard as fellow-members of God's family. The marginal footnote to the word defraud, suggests that the word applies to oppressive activities, over-reaching the other person's rights or feelings. We call this activity "Stepping on the other person's toes." Often, under the guise of honest dialogue, an aggressive Christian will wound a fellow-believer with cruel personal attacks. This abrasive action violates practical sanctification. It satisfies the ego of the aggressor, but it does not in any way represent the gentle holiness of conduct which our Lord has commanded.

Did you notice the grouping of these negative violations into two categories? The first violation deals with an uncontrolled physical appetite. The second warns of aggressive tendencies in personal relationships. God always applies his counsel where it is needed. On the positive side of this topic, build your holy lifestyle on the following activities: Brotherly love, treat every member of God's family with the same loving protection and tenderness as if they were your brother or sister.

God taught you to love one another. The word translated love in this phrase defines a kind of love entirely different from brotherly love. It comes from the Greek word which always refers to God's love, love which does not evaluate whether the object deserves to be loved or is lovable. It describes unselfish, sacrificial love which looks out for the good of another above self. It raises our spiritual minds above the lower, but altogether commendable, fraternal love of brothers and sisters.

Verse 11 instructs us to study, engage in deep, contemplative meditation. Our study should seek three objectives; personal quietness (the avoidance of foot in mouth disease), attention to personal responsibilities and calling (not minding the other fellow's business), and personal work (doing what God has assigned to us). The consequence of this study will appear in the activities of Verse 11, honest, well-grounded walk toward them that are without.

May God direct and strengthen our practical sanctification!

Chapter 16: God's Abundant Wisdom And Prudence

In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence.

Ephesians 1:7, 8.

Sometimes verse and chapter division in the New Testament text hinders our study. We should always study these writings as one continuous document, not as a fragmented writing of disjointed thoughts. Although we have already explored Verse 7, it forms an integral part of the sentence structure of Verse 8. Verse 7 communicates two essential blessings which God bestows upon the heirs of his grace, redemption, eternal union through his blood, and forgiveness, timely kindness and relief through his rich grace.

Wherein he hath abounded toward us. We could think of innumerable blessings in which God has abounded toward us. In all of his intervention in our lives, God abounds in blessing. Verse 3 of this

chapter comprehensively embraces all spiritual blessings which we enjoy in Christ. This particular verse focuses tightly on God's abundant blessing in two individual factors, redemption and forgiveness. God's redemption did not make a meager down payment on our salvation, reducing the debt of our sins to an amount we could pay. He paid the full price of the debt! God's forgiveness was not a grudging, "I'll forgive, but I won't forget." He did not forgive us on conditions or contingencies of our obedience. He forgave us freely for Jesus' sake.

In all wisdom. When God arranged the scheme of salvation before he created the universe, he knew exactly what was necessary to accomplish our salvation. He knew who would be saved, and how. He arranged everything which his will and holy nature required to justly pay our redemption and restore us to our inheritance. The death of Christ was particular, not general. He died for the elect, not for every human being. "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep," John 10:11. It assured the salvation of all the elect for whom he died. "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day," John 6:37-39. I added emphasis to underscore the certainty of Christ's work. All whom the Father gave to his darling Son shall come to him. According to the will of God which determines and governs the question of salvation, none whom the Father gave to Christ shall be lost, but he will raise them all up to be with him at the last day. This certain accomplishment in the work of Christ displays the wisdom of God, his abounding wisdom in our redemption.

In all prudence. Prudence was translated from a Greek word which means perceptive insight. God did not plan salvation, hoping to save all mankind, only to realize in time that his plan was not sufficient and that most of mankind would not cooperate. His omniscience, his all-knowing attribute, comprehended every event in history, every thought which would ever pass through every mind. He made the saving choice of the elect, and then designed the exact means to redeem them from their sins and secure their eternal life. He wisely and prudently determined that his will and its fulfillment would coincide in the salvation of those whom he chose. The popular idea that God willed the salvation of the whole human race, but that only a small per cent of that number will realize salvation, slanders the integrity of God!

Having considered God's wisdom and prudence in our eternal salvation, we now examine his regard for our timely blessings in forgiveness. If you think of God's holy nature without regard for his merciful kindness, you could quickly remove every joy from your mind. According to scripture, the thought of foolishness is sin, Proverbs 24:9. "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" Psalm 130:3. Do you see the force of these words from Solomon and his father David? In the sense of eternal justice, God does regard iniquity! His regard for iniquity caused him to send his Son to die for the sins of those whom he loved. His judicial regard for iniquity will sentence the wicked to eternal punishment. These words speak to God's timely forgiveness of his own children. They rejoice that he does not regard iniquity in his children, at least in the way their iniquities deserve. Certainly, he chastens them as children, but he does not impose the legal debt of their sins upon them. If he did, none could stand before him.

The religious elite of Jesus' day despised him for telling a poor beggar, "Thy sins be forgiven thee." Some things never change! The religious elite look upon the same sick man and tell him all the impossible things he must do to earn God's forgiveness. If someone just told a sin-sick man that God had forgiven his sins, these people would accuse the good news bearer of blasphemy, just as they accused Jesus. Without God's merciful, wise prudence in our forgiveness, the church would cease, for

none could bow in worship unforgiven. None could pray or show compassion in any way to the unfortunate. Since none could claim God's forgiveness, none could forgive those who offend them. We would live in a cold, unforgiving world void of any value whatever. Thank God, his wisdom and prudence abounds toward us in forgiveness! All of the blessings we enjoy in time as believers in God start at this abundant fountain of refreshing forgiveness.

How does God forgive us? From this same letter to the Ephesians, Paul tells us.

“Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you,” Ephesians 4:31, 32.

Because God forgave us for Christ's sake, not our own, we can put away bitterness, wrath, anger, raging clamor and resentful angry speech. We can be kind to each other. We can even forgive each other in exactly the same way God forgave us, through Christ!

Chapter 17: A Mystery Made Known

Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself. Ephesians 1:9.

Man's intense hunger to understand the mysterious may be his greatest blessing and his blackest curse. It drives him to new discoveries in medicine, astronomy, and many humane fields. It also drives him into senseless speculation in his religious life. Who said, “The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked?”

Ephesians 1 says as much about the will of God as any single chapter in the Bible, verses 1, 5, 9, and 11. Enlarge your study to all the issues in the chapter which relate to these verses, and you see most of the chapter as a detailed technical, but understandable, revelation of God's will. Many religious teachers reluctantly confess that election and predestination are Bible doctrines, but tell you that they are mysteries which God has chosen not to reveal to us, so we should avoid mention of them, especially in public sermons and to young converts. I'm glad Paul showed no such reluctance. According to this chapter, both these Bible doctrines pertain directly to the will of God, and Paul revealed the relationship. Did God reveal everything in his will to us? No, but he did reveal the things we can find in scripture.

In this chapter Paul presented a comprehensive diagram of God's eternal purpose. How does God save sinners? Why does he save sinners? Who does he save? These questions have been debated by theologians from the First Century. Study Acts 15. A believing, respectful reading of this one chapter from the New Testament would eliminate most of those destructive wrangling debates. God saves according to his will. He saves those whom he chose in Christ before the foundation of the world. He purposed everything necessary to accomplish their salvation in his Son Jesus Christ. Biblical election and predestination do not reflect pagan fatalism, but rather the tender love of a God who will protect and preserve his family from all enemies and obstacles.

The New Testament mentions several mysteries, most often in a context of explanation and revelation. In I Timothy 3:16 Paul wrote of the great mystery of the incarnation, Christ coming in bodily form and returning to glory. The mystery unfolded as he reminded young Timothy that God was manifest in the flesh. Jesus was not a super-man who finally reached the human potential. He was God in the

flesh! This explained the mystery. In Colossians 1:26, 27 Paul wrote of a mystery which godly people from the creation of the world had struggled to understand. He told these New Testament Christians that the key to that past mystery was quite simple, Christ in you, the hope of glory. As Christ was in the Colossians, he was also in his saints throughout all past ages. As he was the Colossians' hope of glory, he was theirs, too. In I Corinthians 15:51 Paul discussed the mystery of a bodily resurrection. How significant this lesson should be to countless preachers and religious professors who claim to be Christians, but deny a bodily resurrection. We understand change; we live with it all the time. My hair which was dark brown a few years ago has changed to gray. Paul reminded the Corinthians that the resurrection will occur through a powerful change which God will orchestrate at the end of time.

God could save sinners without their knowledge. He could apply Jesus' sacrificial blood of cleansing to their souls and remove every obstacle from their entrance into glory, yet keep them in total ignorance of the matter. However, according to Paul, God chose not to follow this course. Does he reveal the details of salvation to all whom he saves? No, but he has chosen to reveal his saving purpose and truth to some portion of his family with the charge that they make it known to their brothers and sisters in God's family.

The mystery of God's will which he has made known to us in this verse reflects his good pleasure which he purposed in himself. The gospel message we preach to hungry souls should contain the same message. It should focus on the same topic, God's will and good pleasure which he purposed in himself.

All too often, religious teachers tell their audiences that God wills many things, but most of those things will never occur for a variety of reasons, including man's lack of cooperation with the will of God. Such a message stands diametrically opposed to Paul's message in Ephesians 1! They pray, "Thy will be done," but they teach that it will never be done! How can we so dishonor the God of the Bible? In Daniel 4:35 Nebuchadnezzar declared that God does according to his will in heaven and earth. In Isaiah 55:11 God declared the uncompromising success of his word.

So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. Isaiah 55:11

Please note that God's word goes out of his mouth, not out of man's. The verse speaks of God's personal will and his personal work to accomplish that will. This language will hear nothing of a frustrated will. God will have his way!

Consider these words from David in I Chronicles 29:11.

Thine, O Lord is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all.

May we honor our God by honoring his victory, and praising the certainty of his will in our salvation.

Chapter 18: Abundant Ingathering

That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him. Ephesians 1:10.

This verse continues Paul's explanation of the mystery God made known to us according to the good pleasure of his will. Scripture reveals God's will in all matters which we need to know in this life. Does God will certain things of which we have no knowledge? Of course, but any attempt to explore those matters can only result in senseless speculation. We have a wonderful sufficiency of information in those matters where God has revealed his will through scripture.

When does this verse become reality? What does Paul mean by the "Dispensation of the fulness of times?" The Greek word translated dispensation means administration or economy. Rather than referring to a particular age or dispensation of time, it seems to refer to God's ultimate administration of time. Fullness carries the thought of completion, of finality. In this statement Paul gave us his view of the end of time from God's perspective. The God who created the universe in a brief orchestrated fiat of Divine energy will likewise bring this same universe to an end with equal haste. Paul reveals part of the mystery of that end-time. The God who administers the whole dimension of time will bring it to completion, to fullness, and end its economy.

Perhaps more speculation and wild conjecture take place from pulpits on this topic than on any other major Bible doctrine. Often preachers will read a small portion of a figurative lesson from scripture and offer their unfounded interpretation that the lesson applies to the end time. Since the lesson is figurative, they cannot prove their interpretation. Regardless of the wild horrors they suggest, people blindly grasp every word, because they hunger for information about that marvelous event. One school of religious thought suggests that the whole issue of eternity is a mystery of which we know absolutely nothing. The other subjects eternity to their endless wrestings and senseless conjecture. Meanwhile, the hungry sheep of God's pasture wander in confusion, crying out for some assurance of convincing truth about that final event in God's administration of time. Shame, shame!

In this verse Paul carefully avoided any suggestion of figurative or symbolic language. He told us that this message makes up part of God's revealed explanation, the mystery made known, about the end of time. He found it unnecessary to frighten the Ephesians with predictions of bloody wars where human blood would rise to the level of a horse's bridle in the valley of the war. He made no suggestion of a secret rapture where some would be taken to glory in the middle of the night, while other poor souls remained behind to wonder what had happened.

What events will characterize the end of time? What will God really do in that final moment of time? According to Paul, he will "Gather together in one all things in Christ." What does this mean? What are all things in Christ? He provided another clue to help us understand more of the mystery God has made known about this event, "Both which are in heaven, and which are on earth." Apparently, some of those things which are in Christ will be in heaven at the end, and some will be on earth. Without mentioning the word, Paul could not have more clearly described the resurrection of the dead, the last event of time, I Corinthians 15:51, 52.

Consider another verse whose image of the resurrection contains great comfort.

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep (Their bodies sleep in the grave.) in Jesus will God bring (Their living souls which enjoyed the glory of heaven during the time between their death and the resurrection.) with him. I Thessalonians 4:14.

Do you see how this verse from I Thessalonians describes the gathering of things in heaven and things on earth? God's will, his good pleasure, is to gather together, restore to oneness, that which was separated in death, body and soul. Does the Bible teach a literal bodily resurrection? Yes, it certainly

does! From Job 19:26 (Perhaps the most graphic verse in the Bible on a literal bodily resurrection. God's resurrection will restore what worms destroyed in the grave!) to I Corinthians 15, the Bible distinctly teaches that the same body which died will rise and be changed to inhabit eternity with God. Do we fully understand the resurrection? No, but the Bible teaches us that it will occur nonetheless. We will not inhabit a newly created body in eternity; we will inhabit the same body we occupied in time, but it will be changed and adapted to eternity. God will gather together in Christ that which was separated in death. He will restore the body to life, but it will be a different life than we experienced on earth. What the new birth did to the soul, the resurrection will do to the body.

I can think of nothing which more justifies the victorious declaration of Christ in Revelation 1:8, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty." Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet, and Omega is the last. Jesus said, "I am Alpha and Omega." He did not merely say that he controlled the beginning and the end. He said he was the beginning and the end. As God sovereignly operated in the creation, the beginning of time, he will sovereignly operate in the end of time, the resurrection.

We will study more about this subject.

Chapter 19: Universalism Examined

That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him. Ephesians 1:10.

Appealing to seemingly universal terms in scripture, people occasionally decide that God determined to save every human being, the doctrine of universalism. This tendency takes on two distinct forms. The common form alleges that Jesus died for every person, making it possible for them to be saved if they comply with certain conditions. This doctrine makes the will of man, not the will of God, operative in salvation. It slanders the will of God, for it teaches that the death of Christ alone saves no one! Man must do something in addition to what Jesus did, or he will not be saved. This error has been sufficiently discussed that I will not further deal with it in this chapter. The other error asserts that God will actually save all mankind. Advocates of this position use such verses as this to advance their position, alleging that God will gather together in one all things, meaning all mortals who ever lived or will live. They build their position on a few such verses, while wresting, denying, or ignoring a large number of scriptures which distinctly teach that God will punish the wicked in eternity.

Paul classified all things which God will gather together. He will gather all things that are in Christ. He made the same use of all in Verse 3 where he stated that God has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ. As we enjoy no spiritual blessings outside of Christ, God has no intention of gathering together anything which he has not already treasured in Christ. Of those whom he chose in Christ, all share that eternal standing with full security that they will not lose it. However, this standing in Christ does not include all mankind! It applies particularly to those whom God chose and placed in Christ before the foundation of the world, Ephesians 1:4.

Biblical harmony will balance our minds against invasive extremes. If we study the Bible on the premise that God inspired it and that he preserved its valid message to his family, void of contradiction, then we can freely examine our opinions in the light of all scripture, not just those scriptures which seem to favor our private viewpoint. Let's examine some verses which deal with God's eternal judgment to see if they support the universalist position.

Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation. John 5:28, 29.

Does this verse teach that all will rise from the dead to glory? Or does it teach that some will rise to eternal life and some to eternal punishment, damnation? To ask the question challenges the clear literal reality of the verse! What does this verse teach about the final resurrection? First, it denies the popular doctrine of a split resurrection, that the righteous will rise at one time and the wicked will rise to judgment years, perhaps as many as a thousand years, later. The hour is coming, one epochal time, one hour, one moment of measurable time, in which both the wicked and the righteous will rise from the dead. Notice that those who rise from the dead rise in the character of their nature and destiny. The righteous rise to life, and the wicked to damnation. This verse does not teach salvation by works, but it certainly does confirm that a man is known by his works. The law of God written in the heart of all the elect at the new birth, will convert a man or woman to a different lifestyle than they formerly pursued. The good tree, made good by the grace of God, will bring forth good fruit, and the evil tree will bring forth evil fruit. This verse emphatically rejects the concept that all will rise to eternal life and glory!

And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. Acts 24:15.

In this verse, which forms part of Paul's defense of his faith, he obviously defined what historic Baptists and Bible believers have defended throughout the ages, that there will be a general resurrection, both of the just and the unjust. At the resurrection, mankind will be divided into two categories, just and unjust. Does this sound like universalism?

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:

And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats. Matthew 25:31, 32.

And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal. Matthew 25:46.

Occasionally, people attempt to interpret this lesson as if sheep were obedient children of God and goats were disobedient children of God. My friends, the lesson says too much for that position! Do those who hold to this position believe in evolution, natural or spiritual? Their position requires that they believe in spiritual evolution. Sheep and goats differ genetically! You cannot feed a goat enough sheep food to convert him into a sheep; neither can you feed a sheep goat food and convert him into a goat! The basis of division relates to a distinction in essential nature, not behavior. Sheep and goats will be separated from each other. Sheep manifested that they were sheep by their lifestyle, and goats manifested that they were goats by their lifestyle. Children of God may change from time to time, from obedience to disobedience or from disobedience to obedience. The state of this judgment is final; the punishment and the life are equally of endless duration. The Bible does not teach universal salvation!

Chapter 20: The Inheritance Obtained

In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of him who

worketh all things after the counsel of his own will. Ephesians 1:11.

Once again, we find the rich treasure of essential Bible doctrine in our Lord Jesus Christ. In our study of Verse 10 we learned that God's will assures the resurrection to glory of all those whom God chose in Christ. This verse builds on that truth, but applies the certainty of God's grace to a blessing we receive and enjoy in this life. Also adds the blessings of this verse to those defined in Verse 10. As we will receive the resurrection to glory in Christ, we have also obtained the inheritance in him. God filled this verse full of evidence that salvation is by his grace and purpose, not by our works. First, he described this blessing as an inheritance, not wages, but an inheritance. You receive an inheritance based on being named in a will, normally because of a loving family relationship. You do not earn your position in a will. Your position in the will occurred by the benefactor's love for you, not by your earning the position. In the same manner God saves us according to his eternal will, as it were, his legal document which distributes his personal estate, signed and witnessed. Election, as presented in Verse 4, finds its completion in perspective of God's will. God did not merely choose his people arbitrarily, any more than he chose them based on foreseen good works. He chose them based on his love and his determination to shed his love abundantly upon all the beneficiaries of his will.

Do you actually receive the inheritance of eternal life now, or must you wait until death? What does this verse say? We have obtained an inheritance in him. This language does not speak of future possibility. It speaks of present reality! Advocates of salvation by works teach that no one receives eternal life until death. They suggest that you live only with the prospect, the possibility, of obtaining eternal life. If, at death, you have performed enough good works, then you will receive eternal life. This doctrine violates our verse, along with numerous other scriptures which teach that God gives us eternal life now, in this life. We must wait for the full realization of the inheritance in the resurrection, but we have now received it in terms of the new birth, and an irrevocable title to the full possession.

Being predestined according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will. Once again, Paul reinforced that predestination has to do with the salvation of the elect, not with every senseless act of man. Paul joined predestination with the inheritance and the will of God, not with the wicked acts of man! The will of God, that formal legal document which named the heirs of eternal glory, designated both the heirs of God and their inheritance of eternal glory. Predestination states God's determination to see that those whom he named in his will shall surely receive their inheritance.

Some interpret the words, "Worketh all things after the counsel of his own will," to mean that God causes every act of sin which ever occurs. They are wrong! Such an interpretation contradicts a number of other scriptures which deny that conclusion.

*For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.
I Corinthians 14:33.*

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. I John 2:16.

And they have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my heart. Jeremiah 7:31.

(How could God predestine something which he did not command, something which did not enter into

his heart?)

What do the words mean, “Being predestined according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will?” All must be interpreted according to the context in which it appears. For example, in I John 2:16, quoted above, “All that is in the world” specifically relates to those things in the world which meet the descriptions, lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life. It makes no reference to the many other things in the world whose origin is of God. The context determines the meaning of all. In our study verse, “Being predestined according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will,” should be applied to all things which relate to our obtaining the inheritance, the action and accomplishment of the sentence. God predestined us to salvation and ordered everything necessary for that salvation according to his own will. In that wonderful activity, God works everything necessary to accomplish our salvation, the death of Christ for sin, his intercession before the heavenly court to accomplish our justification, the application of Christ’s blood to the soul of the elect in the new birth, the preservation of those so justified in this life, and the glorification of them in the resurrection. God is in charge of all these things to assure that those whom he predestined according to his eternal will shall surely be with him in eternity.

Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.
John 17:24.

The Father answered this prayer. The inheritance is certain to all the family of God!

Chapter 21: Trusting Christ

That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise. Ephesians 1:12, 13.

What does it mean to trust in Christ? Do you trust your trust, believe in your believe, or do you really trust in Christ? As a result of your trust in Christ, do you praise your own faithfulness, or do you praise the glory of God? Your honest answer may tell you much about the validity of your faith!

First of all, Paul said “We first trusted in Christ.” This seems to refer to the Jews to whom God gave his oracles, his inspired Old Testament. The New Testament mentions a number of Jews, before and after the birth of Christ, who trusted in him. It also mentions a number of Old Testament saints who by faith embraced the promise of the Messiah and trusted in him.

Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad. John 8:56.

Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. I Peter 1:10, 11.

In these two verses we find specific mention of Abraham seeing the day of Christ and rejoicing, and the prophets all responding to the Spirit of Christ in them as he testified to them of Christ’s sufferings. Can we for a moment doubt that they trusted in Christ?

In whom ye also trusted. When the Ephesians and other Gentiles heard the gospel, it came upon them with such powerful conviction that they received it with great joy and trust. The gospel of your salvation describes the content and flavor of the message they heard in the gospel. The message they heard in that early pure gospel told them the story of their salvation. It centered on Jesus Christ, their Savior. It told them how he came, what he did for them, and it assured them that his mission was completed in victory. It did not present a defeated, helpless Christ, but a conquering victorious Christ. It did not tell them about a potential salvation which they could accept or deny. It told them about the God who saved them and kindly shared the joyful news of their salvation in the message he sent to them in the gospel.

In whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise. What does it mean to be sealed? When these people believed the gospel of their salvation, they took upon their lives a mark, a brand, that influenced every aspect of their lives. The royal seal of God marked them as citizens of another country and members of the royal family. Despite the trauma of adversity and trial, they could rise above the stress of the moment and rejoice in the seal of God upon them. The characteristics of that seal do not show threats and warnings, gloom and doom. The holy Spirit of promise brands them with the rich blessings of God's promises. It assures them that God has singled them out to receive his grace. The gospel should always carry a personal application to the life and person of its audience, those whom God has prepared to truly hear the words, as he opened their hearts and ears.

That we should be to the praise of his glory. In Verse 10 we read of the resurrection in which God will gather together in one all things in Christ, all the family of God, both in heaven and on earth. In Verse 11 we read of the inheritance which we now receive, according to the security of God's predestining grace. This verse responds to the loving security of those blessings which we have received and those which God has guaranteed to us. We may consider this thought from two possible perspectives, a timely and an eternal.

From the eternal perspective, all true believers shall surely praise the glory of God in heaven. Belief does not secure the inheritance of eternal life or the resurrection to glory; it rather responds to the God who already gave it. Belief does not cause the sinner to obtain eternal life; it bears evidence that he already possesses it!

"Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him," I John 5:1.

Although I reject the modern translations, most of them in this particular verse splendidly emphasize the truth of the lesson by showing the difference in verb tense between belief and the new birth. The present tense believer has already been born of God. If you were already born of God before you believed, how can belief cause the new birth? True belief bears witness that the person who so believes has been born of God, possesses eternal life and the eternal inheritance, and shall rise from the dead to glory with Christ. True believers shall surely praise his glory.

In a timely perspective true believers both name the name of Christ and depart from iniquity, II Timothy 2:19. Thus, they praise his glory now. Truly, God's intent in providing sufficient evidence of his goodness to enable us to believe is that those evidences should motivate us to rest only as we walk in the way of his glory. Christianity should not inspire a lifestyle that nurtures man's carnal ego. It will generate self-respect and contentment like no other walk. However, it does this by inspiring us to do everything to the glory of God, not to our personal honor before men.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. Matthew 5:16.

The key to this lesson lies in the way you let your light shine, so that people will see your walk and glorify your God!

Chapter 22: The Earnest Of The Inheritance

Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory. Ephesians 1:14.

Although we do not use the word earnest in everyday conversation, it is a well-defined legal term in land or other large property acquisitions. The earnest represents a small deposit in guarantee of the completion of the purchase. By using this term here Paul gave us one of the richest assurances in the Bible of our eternal security. The sealing of that holy Spirit of promise in Verse 13 portrays the conscious blessings which the Lord bestows upon his believing children. As we have already discussed, neither works nor belief cause our eternal salvation, but trusting Christ upon hearing the good news of the gospel, brings an inner joy and peace which no man can describe.

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost. Romans 15:13.

Belief does not produce eternal life; it produces joy and peace, the sealing of the believer that he shall surely receive the full blessings of eternal joy in the presence of God. When a person believes and trusts in Christ, they do not receive eternal life. They already possess it, I John 5:1. However, the joy and peace they do receive represents one of the most powerful influences in their life. This joyful peace exemplifies the personal assurance of God that you are a member of the royal seed of God's eternal family.

As a man deposits earnest funds to assure his final purchase of the property, so God conveys this wonderful assurance only upon those whom he intends to save in eternity. He has already purchased the possession, but he has not yet redeemed it. What does this mean? Christ paid the price of our redemption from sin in his death, a finished transaction which purchased a precisely defined people. This thought forbids the popular view that Christ died a conditional death for all, but a factual death for none. His death purchased a particular people, as surely and definitely as if you had paid an agreed price for a new home. That home is precisely described in the title deed. The price is specifically named in the purchase contract. You do not pay for unnamed property which decides it wants to be purchased; you pay the stipulated price for the particular parcel you want to purchase. When Jesus gave his life, he paid the full legal price to remove the sin-guilt of all for whom he died. They were named in the covenant of redemption, the title deed which describes the people he chose in Christ before the foundation of the world, Ephesians 1:4.

When one of those heirs of glory hears the good news of the gospel, he hears about the wonderful certainty of the price Jesus paid for his redemption. He learns about the incorruptible riches of that heavenly estate which he shall enjoy throughout eternity. He reacts with joy unspeakable and full of glory, the joy and peace of believing. By giving this conviction of joy and peace, the Lord assures this person that the promise is sure and his inheritance incorruptible. In this way the Lord tells you that you are his! It represents his earnest to you that his purchase of you for all eternity is certain, not conditional or inconclusive. Just as the deposit of earnest money assures the final purchase of the property, this joy

and peace assures that the full reality of heaven belongs to you.

Until the redemption of the purchased possession. Jesus paid the full price of our redemption. What does this mean? It means that he has not yet taken possession of all which he purchased. It also means that he will undoubtedly claim all that he purchased. Would you be surprised if I told you that redemption is not yet complete? Jesus fully paid the price, but he has not yet claimed all which he purchased by that price.

I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes. Hosea 13:14.

I will redeem them from death. Few verses in the Old Testament speak so clearly of the resurrection of the body. Jesus paid the legal price for both your soul and your body. He claimed your soul in the new birth; he will claim your body in the resurrection. Only when he has taken full possession of body, soul, and spirit will redemption be complete.

And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. I Thessalonians 5:23.

Christ's deposit of earnest money, his bestowing upon you of that joy and peace, guarantees your final resurrection to glory. None to whom he gives that earnest will lose their inheritance!

Unto the praise of his glory. The whole concept that heaven will be one endless parade of our personal works, of our crowns of merit earned by our good works, is blasphemous to the biblical truth of heaven. First and last, beginning to end, heaven's activities will praise the glory of the Savior Redeemer! Hear the echo of that heavenly chorus.

And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation. Revelation 5:9.

Chapter 23: A Thanksgiving Prayer

Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers. Ephesians 1:15, 16.

What prompts you to offer a thanksgiving prayer to God? What kinds of events make you feel so fully blessed of God, that you want to talk to him in personal intimate prayer without asking for a single thing? You just want to tell him how thankful you are for his blessings. Perhaps we thank him for deliverance from a personal tragedy, a physician's report of good health, or the return of someone you love after a long absence. All of these things deserve thanksgiving. What prompted Paul's thanksgiving prayer in these verses? He mentioned two things which moved him to record one of the most touching prayers found in the New Testament, their faith in Jesus and their love to all saints.

After I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus. Anything which confirms legitimate faith in Christ should move every true believer in Christ to thank the Lord for another evidence of his loving mercy and grace. Every time you hear of someone who manifests true faith in God, you hear of another relative, another member of your heavenly family. According to Paul's Thessalonian writings, all men do not have faith, II Thessalonians 3:2. Those who bear evidence of faith witness by that faith that they belong

to the Lord. Thank him that he continues to work his grace in the hearts of men and women, that he will not fail in his eternal purpose to gather together in Christ all the heirs of eternal glory. Thank him that he makes himself known with such tender love and goodness that his children cannot resist the joyful opportunity to manifest faith in him.

From Galatians 5:22 we learn that faith is a fruit of the Spirit, meaning that the Holy Spirit produced faith in the heart of those who possess it. Contrary to the idea that man can spontaneously produce faith, or that his carnal intellect is capable of faith, this lesson teaches that the Spirit of God produces faith in the life of his children through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. God sends his Spirit into the heart first in the new birth; then the Spirit produces faith as a fruitful consequence of his presence. Faith does not produce eternal life; eternal life produces faith! Understanding this evidence of God's saving grace, Paul rejoiced and offered a thanksgiving prayer to God for the Ephesians. Love unto all the saints. Christian love far surpasses the typical fraternal love of most organizations, including many churches. Remember the Lord's teaching on love in the Sermon on the Mount.

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

Matthew 5:43-48.

Before offering the typical protest, "That's impossible! I can't do that!" look at what this lesson really teaches. Jesus set the lesson in contrast with the "Love your friends, hate your enemies" mentality which prevails in most circles of human relationships. He did not intend that you feel or show the same kind of love toward an immoral enemy to God as you show toward a faithful Christian. Biblical Christianity rises far above a "Mutual Admiration Society." The word translated love in this lesson comes from a word which means love in a social or moral sense, not love in an emotional sense. Christian love does not require that you feel or show intimate emotional love toward your enemies. It does require that you show the same moral integrity and social equity toward your enemy as you would show toward your best friend. God sends the blessings of good weather on the wicked as well as the righteous. We should imitate him, be his children in conduct, by showing the same ethical integrity toward all men, regardless of their moral character. You will never favorably impress anyone by crawling into the moral cesspool with the wicked. Even in the business world, Christians should conduct their affairs with such integrity as to distinguish themselves from the wicked world in which they live.

Without question, the Ephesians lived in this manner toward their fellow-man. However, they rose above even this noble conduct in their special love toward all saints. They didn't fall into the typical fraternal love of favoring the saints who agreed with them and sending all other saints to hell. They loved all saints, those who agreed with them and those who disagreed. They rose above the attitudes and conduct of the moment and realized that God's grace had worked a tender creation in Christ within these saints. That work justified their love toward these people. It also justified Paul's beautiful thanksgiving prayer for them. All too often, professing Christians judge others and their differing opinions with undue harshness, much like the Pharisees whom Jesus condemned in this lesson from the Sermon on the Mount. God never intended that his church become another closed fraternity or clique of self-centered egotists.

As Paul learned of this exemplary faith and love in the Ephesian church, he continually thanked God for them and prayed for God to send them a special blessing. Think of some particular person or church you know whose faith and Christian love etch a special place in your mind. Now, stop and thank the Lord for them. They will receive a blessing from your prayer, and so will you!

Chapter 24: Biblical Revelation

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him. Ephesians 1:17.

This verse describes the pivotal request of Paul's prayer which he began in Verses 15 and 16. He prayed that the Ephesians might be given the spirit of revelation. Divine revelation does not occur in the free-form style usually portrayed by religious people in our time. God never reveals anything which violates scripture! One revelation from God cannot contradict another revelation he gave at a different time! When people want to deviate from scripture, they falsely claim that God gave them a new revelation. Perhaps they got a new revelation, but it did not come from God!

Paul's prayer for the Ephesians' revelation included several key blessings.

Wisdom and knowledge, compatible with God's former revelations in scripture, always characterize God's revelations, Verse 17.

Enlightened understanding perceives specific biblical truths, the hope of his calling and the riches of his glory in our eternal inheritance, Verse 18.

God's relationship with us stands on the greatness of his power toward us, not on the greatness of our personal religious performance, Verse 19.

Belief occurs only by the working of the same divine power which God wrought when he raised Christ up from the grave, Verse 19. Man's rational mind alone cannot believe the things of God.

The focal point of true Christianity is the exalted Christ, not an ingenious man, Verse 20.

The exalted Christ shall claim the final victory over his enemies, Verses 21 and 22.

All of these verses fill out the balance of Paul's prayer for the Ephesians. If you ever wondered what to include in your prayers, examine this list and pattern your prayers after it. We should not think of prayer as a blank check which we can use to gain selfish, ungodly goals for ourselves. God encourages us to pray for those things which we need, but not for those things which contradict his will or his moral code. Contrast Paul's prayer in these verses with the condemnation of selfish prayer outside the will of God.

From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. James 4:1-3.

God will not answer prayers of this kind. In contrast, do you doubt for a minute that he answered Paul's prayer? We often think of prayer as an open-ended wish list to God, never considering that prayer should also include thanksgiving to God for his blessings, and requests for his blessings upon others. In the model prayer Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy will be done." In this particular prayer Paul asked the Lord to perform his will in the Ephesians, naming the unique blessings which reflect the will of God. Much of contemporary religious teaching assumes that man's rational mind can perceive God's spiritu-

al realities. This verse denies such a thought! Knowledge of Christ requires wisdom and revelation from God. Can man's natural intellect grasp the things of God? Let scripture answer the question. For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. Romans 8:5-8.

But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. I Corinthians 2:9-11.

Do all children of God enjoy this knowledge? Based on Paul's prayer that a well established church partake in this blessing, I doubt that all children of God receive this full insight into the truth of Christ. In the new birth God writes his law in the hearts of all his children, making himself known to them and establishing a new morality in their minds, but this does not mean that they will all enjoy the full knowledge of the gospel. The parable of the sower suggests that many children of God allow problems in their minds and their lives which interfere with the fruitfulness of the seed sown, the word of the gospel. The deceitfulness of riches, stones of carnality and prejudice which lie just below the surface of the heart, the cares (worries) of this world, and many similar things stand in the way of this full knowledge. This very fact justifies Paul's prayer for the Ephesians, and it equally urges us to pray for each other that our lives may be fruitful fields, well prepared and receptive to "The spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him."

Chapter 25: Enlightened Eyes

The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints. Ephesians 1:18.

Do all children of God know the comforting beauties of gospel truth? What kind of things should we ask the Lord to give us? What should we expect from a true revelation? When the Lord directed Paul to record this prayer, he endowed us with rich insight into his method of dealing with his children. Frequently, religious people claim to have received private revelations which contradict the revelation of scripture. This cannot be! Spiritual eyes which God has enlightened with his revelation will respect scripture, not defame and contradict it. Someone has said, "Those who spiritualize tell spiritual lies, because they have no spiritual eyes." We need not symbolize and mystify God's truth. He made it plain in scripture and urged us to seek out its riches.

How much knowledge of truth does a child of God possess? I firmly believe that God writes his law in the heart of everyone who experiences the new birth. God's law in the heart makes its recipient aware of God, love God, and labor to honor God. God writes this law in the heart directly by the Holy Spirit, not by preaching or any other intermediate means, II Corinthians 3:3. To suggest that a person whose moral values show no regard for the morality of God is a child of God in disobedience, dishonors God and the effect of that law in the heart. However, to suggest that every child of God possesses intimate knowledge of gospel truth equally violates scripture. Repeatedly, Solomon urged his son to gain wisdom and understanding, wise counsel for God's family. New Testament writers equally urged the churches and individual Christians to whom they wrote to labor for knowledge and understanding of God's truth. "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock," Revelation 3:20, was written to a church, not to a

lost sinner.

That ye may know. “And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding,” Jeremiah 3:15. Paul prayed that God would use his words to enlighten the Ephesian church with knowledge. This represents the true power of the gospel; God uses it to enlighten his children with knowledge, convincing, believable knowledge of his eternal truth. The salvation we receive through the gospel embodies deliverance from spiritual ignorance and falsehood to the enlightening wonders of his grace in Christ Jesus. Paul wrote the Corinthians regarding meat offered to idols, “Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge,” I Corinthians 8:7. Every child of God does not understand the danger of idolatry. In context Paul was concerned for those within the family of God who were weak in the faith. He understood the reality of God sufficiently that he could easily eat meat offered in an idol’s temple for the sake of his physical appetite. However, a weak brother might see him in that setting and think that he worshipped the idol. Thus, the weak brother would fall into idolatry. This background wisely sets the stage for Paul’s conclusion, “Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend,” I Corinthians 8:13. Every child of God does not enjoy the full knowledge of his salvation. This explains why Paul so earnestly prayed that the Ephesian church might enjoy the fruits of this revelation, enlightened eyes. That ye may know what is the hope of his calling. Paul made this particular knowledge the first fruit of God’s revelation. Enlightened eyes see their salvation in God’s calling and understand the secure blessings of that calling. This inspires hope in them toward God. Rather than teaching biblical hope, many religious teachers seem content to ridicule hope and pacify their egos with such expressions as “I don’t need hope; I know.” My friends, never permit Satan to move you to dishonor any biblical truth, hope included. In Colossians 1:27 Paul taught that Christ in you is the hope of glory. In Hebrews 6:19 we read that hope is an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast, entering into heaven itself. I have no desire to belittle such a Bible gem. Do you? Hope, biblical hope, springs from God’s calling. Only those whom he has called will know the comforting joy of hope in Christ. Bible hope could be defined as joyful expectation of an eternal future with God, not wishful thinking for the impossible.

The riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints. How do you receive an inheritance? Your only title to an inheritance lies in the will of your benefactor, not your own will. The numerous scriptures which compare our eternal relationship with God to an inheritance all witness that our salvation depends on God’s will, not man’s. From eternity, God named those whom he intended to save in his will, and none whom he so named in his will shall ever lose their inheritance, John 6:37-39. Paul characterized this inheritance with thought-provoking words, riches and glory. May we regard our inheritance with similar reverence.

My Father is rich in houses and lands, He holdeth the wealth of the world in his hands! Of rubies and diamonds, of silver and gold, His coffers are full, He has riches untold. I once was an outcast stranger on earth, A sinner by choice, and an alien by birth; But I’ve been adopted, my name’s written down, An heir to a mansion, a robe, and a crown. I’m a child of the King, A child of the King: With Jesus my Saviour I’m a child of the King. (Hattie Buell)

Chapter 26: What Enables A Man To Believe?

And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places. Ephesians 1:19, 20.

These verses continue Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians which began with Verse 15. This church stands

out as one of the most exemplary churches in the New Testament. Perhaps several years later, in Revelation 2:1-7 John wrote to this church with glowing commendations. Even in this present letter, we find a conspicuous absence of rebuke or criticism. In both conduct and faith Ephesus was a model church. Paul did not pray that they believe; they already did believe. He prayed that God would enlighten their spiritual minds to understand why they believed, and how. In an age when so many teachers hold that man's rational intellect fully possesses the ability to believe the whole gospel, if only someone will tell them, this verse contains a timely message.

What is the exceeding greatness of his power to us. The idea of God's active sovereign power did not embarrass Paul. He built his whole view of God on it! He felt no awkward need to attempt the impossible reconciliation of man's free will and God's sovereign will. He believed in God's sovereign will in salvation and in belief! As he built the foundation for belief, he did not call attention to God's retiring nudges. He prayed that the Ephesians know more about the exceeding greatness of God's power toward us.

The exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe. God does not direct this power toward all mankind; he directs it toward those who believe. In fact, the whole thought of the lesson concludes that belief itself results from that power. In his natural state man will not and cannot believe in God, in the spiritual dimensions of his being. The devils believe in God, but they do not understand his spiritual nature or his design with his chosen family. This particular concept of belief means more than mere acknowledgement that God exists. It signifies a trusting confidence in God as Lord and Savior.

His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power. What prompts belief? Human intellect? A convincing evangelist? What do these words say? We believe according to the working of his mighty power. His power causes belief. Wicked man may well be aware that there is a God, but he cannot believe, trustingly and lovingly, in God without the working of this mighty power. Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead. The same power God exercised in raising Christ from the dead, he utilizes to cause someone to believe. What does this mean? First, God did not send out a gentle, open-ended invitation to any in the graves who wanted to rise. He directed his power specifically toward one particular grave which held one particular body, the body of his Son. When God directs his power in salvation and subsequent family protection, he does not issue a general invitation. He directs his power to a particular individual. Some object to this interpretation claiming that it violates the "Whosoever will" invitation of Revelation 22:17. However, they fail to note that the book of Revelation was written to seven churches, not to lost sinners. Of all the individual members of those seven churches, people already saved and identified with godly service, some were more willing to deny themselves than others. Some were willing to serve God without qualification, while others wanted to serve God only to the point of comfortable convenience. Is it not the same today? The Lord invited all of the seven churches to take the water of life and refresh their spiritual vigor. Unless you believe in evolution, you understand that water does not give life. It refreshes and purifies life. John did not invite dead, lost sinners to take spiritual water and evolve into living children of God. He invited tired, discouraged, sometimes carnal, children of God to take a deep drink of God's pure water and refresh their spiritual vitality.

Does belief cause eternal life? Let scripture answer the question.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. John 5:24.

Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. I John 5:1.

Both verses state that the believer presently possesses eternal life, in contrast to the idea that he gains eternal life by believing. Both verses confirm the lesson of Ephesians 1:19, that we believe through the working of God's sovereign power, the kind of power he used to raise Christ from the dead, directed, effectual power. Does this sound strange to you? In an age which dedicates itself to man, rather than to God, it certainly does. Does this doctrine find any support in historical Christianity? I quote from the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 3, Of God's Eternal Decrees, Paragraph 5.

Those of mankind that are predestined unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to His eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of His will, hath chosen, in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of His mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith, or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving Him thereunto: and all to the praise of His glorious grace.

May we praise the mighty power which enabled us to believe such a loving God!

Chapter 27: The Exalted Christ

Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come. Ephesians 1:20, 21.

Paul has not yet finished his prayer for the Ephesians which he began in Verse 15. Does this sound like a prayer? It should. Too often, we think of prayer as a shopping list. Why pray to God unless you want something? This attitude forgets that prayer should always include thanksgiving for past blessings. It also neglects the rich truth that prayer constitutes an act of intimate, personal worship. These words written by Paul definitely sound like worship, don't they? When you pray, do you include thanksgiving and worship on your prayer agenda? Try it. The results will amaze you.

When did the Father exalt Christ? Many teach that Satan rules supreme in this world today. They are wrong! The Father exalted Christ at his resurrection and ascension. Today, he occupies heaven's throne at the Father's right hand. His dominion encompasses this world and the world to come. The Father exalted him above all other beings and all other names. Some look around them at the wickedness, suffering, and death in the world and question the rule of Christ. My friends, he is not responsible for such things. According to the Bible, he stands beside us through such trials. He has not promised to prevent all such things from touching our lives. Remember the conversation between God and Satan regarding Job. Remember Job's experience. He suffered more tragedy in a few short hours than most of us will experience in a lifetime. He cried out to understand why such things had crashed in upon his life. Yet despite all his tragedy, he did not charge God foolishly, nor stop trusting in God. His friends, deceived with prosperity theology, tried to convince him that the only reason for his suffering was some hidden sin in his life. Hungry for juicy scandal, they tried everything to get him to confess. In the end God rebuked them and required that they take their offerings to Job, who, in this instance, acted as God's priest. He offered sacrifices to God for those foolish friends. They were wrong! Job was right!

A few minutes ago, I learned that a professional friend of mine died unexpectedly yesterday. This knowledge touched me deeply. How will his family react to the shock? What will they do without him? I will miss him professionally; they will miss him every day. Perhaps at this moment they, like

Job, wrestle with their loss and ask God why. Perhaps the answer doesn't appear immediately. Does God know their grief? Yes, he most certainly does! Does he care? Yes, he unquestionably cares! With such matters occurring all around the world, does he remain exalted? Yes, he does! We react to the moment, to the shock of immediate emotions and losses. God knows all about the future. In sunshine or in storms, he remains exalted. He remains God! When death claims someone dear to us, we react to our personal loss. When we find the presence of mind to follow Job's example, to trust God, even when we do not understand why it happened, we approach God's eternal perspective of the matter. At the moment our precious ones are taken suddenly from us, they also entered the presence of God in glory. They have no more grief, no pain, no worried sleepless nights. They have entered glory. Can we grieve? Of course, we can. When Jesus reached the grieving sisters of Lazarus, he did not rebuke them or shame them for their bitter tears. In fact, he wept with them! Then he comforted them that he was the resurrection and the life. To give us a sweet assurance that he cared and that he indeed would claim the final victory, he raised Lazarus from the dead, proof positive of his exalted status with the Father. God has not relinquished his dominion over this world or the world to come. Surrogate rulers do not substitute for him. He remains on the throne!

For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak. Hebrews 2:5.

What does this verse teach? It tells us that God has not given rule over the world to come to angels. He retains it in his own personal dominion.

The same comforting truth applies to this world in which we live. According to ancient history, all of the apostles died a violent death for their faith, except John. They sealed the testimony of their faith with death. Nero had Paul beheaded. Pagan tribesmen crucified Peter, upside down at his request. Did this cause them to question the truth of Christ's exalted dominion? No, they faced death, even in these violent forms, with the supreme comfort that their Lord stood with them in the experience. Notice Paul's confession of faith, shortly before his death.

According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. Philippians 1:20.

At this time, Paul wrote from Rome, under house arrest. Roman guards were chained to him around the clock. His cause was just, and the charges against him were false. Did he complain about the unfairness of it all? No, he used this dreadful situation to preach Christ to Roman soldiers and anyone else who would come to listen. In this verse he confessed that his greatest desire was to magnify Christ in his body. To Paul, magnifying Christ did not require that his body be bathed and dressed in an expensive suit. He did not have to stand in a pulpit in church to magnify Christ. Would he have preferred that condition? Of course, but he accepted his present distress with a longing that, distress and prison notwithstanding, he would magnify Christ. May our prayers include worshipful exaltation of Christ.

Chapter 28: The Ruling Christ

And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all. Ephesians 1:22, 23.

While most Christians accept that Christ sits exalted in heaven, many reject the idea that he presently rules, that he actually exercises dominion. Such an idea can stand only as it relies on philosophical rea-

soning, for it finds no quarter in scripture. Acceptance of the lordship of Christ does not require that we make him responsible for every event which occurs. God knew that Herod would have thousands of infants murdered in a vain attempt to kill the newborn Messiah. Therefore, he inspired Jeremiah to prophesy of the event several hundred years beforehand. Does that mean God caused Herod to kill those little children? The very idea is preposterous! Based on Christ's present lordship, Herod will answer for his murderous sin on judgment day, and suffer the just penalty of Divine Justice. Because of the lordship of Christ, he will bring all of the wicked to justice, no exception.

Consider these words from David.

He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. Psalm 72:8. Wherefore David blessed the Lord before all the congregation: and David said, Blessed be thou, Lord God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. Thine, O Lord is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all. I Chronicles 29:10, 11.

The first verse is part of a prophecy of the Messiah. The second quotation from I Chronicles speaks of the present dominion of God. Notice that the verbs appear in present, not future, tense. This lesson speaks of God's present rule. "Thine is the kingdom." He gave him to be the head over all things to the church. Here we see a specific application of Christ's rulership. It addresses his spiritual dominion over his family, his church. The New Testament uses the word church in at least two ways. The Greek word translated church means called out. It was used in Greek culture of the citizens in each city-state who were called out of their homes to conduct business related to their community. All people in the community did not belong to this voting class. They were called out from the general population. In the sense of those who identify with a local church, this word fits perfectly. The Lord calls them out from the world and the general population of mankind to conduct business for him. In the sense of the eternal church, they, too, will be called out from the general population of mankind to conduct the eternal business of praising God for his mercy. Christ holds lordship over his church in both senses, the timely and the eternal. In the timely application he provides scripture as a thorough furnisher of everything we now need to intelligently serve him. What should we believe? Can we decide on our own to ignore certain Bible doctrines and substitute other ideas more to our personal liking? No, Christ is the head of the church, and he determines truth! Can we decide how to conduct our public worship services, adding things which appeal to our private tastes and neglecting other things which scripture commands? No, Christ provides direction to his church in all timely matters. Consider this quotation from a Waldensian Confession of Faith, dated 1120 A. D.

Moreover, we have ever regarded all the inventions of men (in the affairs of religion) as an unspeakable abomination before God.

These ancient Christians understood the lordship of Christ! We should follow their example. The elegant simplicity of New Testament public worship includes congregational song worship, public prayer, and expository preaching. The head of the church gave nothing else to the public worship of his church. When conducted with due reverence, the church needs nothing else! Equally true, and probably more to the specific context of this lesson, Christ sits as head over his church in the eternal sense. Perhaps the blackest mark against professing Christianity today is the tendency to arrogantly send everyone to eternal hell who does not agree with a particular dogma of a particular church. Those who practice this self-serving judgment of all who disagree with them take personal credit for eternal judgment. All will not spend eternity in heaven with God. God will most surely judge those whom he deems wicked and deserving of such judgment. However, the issue of judgment belongs to God, not to

narrow religious dogmatists who think the whole world should agree with them! Christ sits as head of his church alone! He will rule, and, as he deems appropriate, he will judge!

The fulness of him that filleth all in all. Although we cannot judge the exact number of the saved, this verse clearly contradicts those who presume to judge on outward appearance and personal interpretation or dogma, sending 99% of the human race to eternal woe and pronouncing only the few who agree with them as possibly saved. I find it incredible that God would be satisfied to let the devil have 99% of the human race, while he contents himself with 1%. Does that describe the fullness of Christ? The number of the saved in heaven, when expressed in comparative terms in scripture, always appears as a large number, very likely the majority of the whole. This harmonizes with those scriptures we have examined on the dominion and lordship of Christ. May we bow in reverential worship of the ruling gracious Christ.

Chapter 29: The Grand Conclusion In Christ

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. Ephesians 1:3.

To suitably close this study, let's return to this beautiful panoramic verse. The Bible includes some thoughts which act as a microscope. They magnify a small, but significant, portion of God's work, revealing the inner workings of his grace. Other verses serve as a telescope, bringing huge segments of God's work into closer view. Clearly, this verse falls into the telescopic variety. It reminds us that God gives us every spiritual blessing we shall ever know in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ. Think of blessings in time or blessings in eternity, this verse brings them all into view.

I began with a promise that this study would stay close to the Lord Jesus Christ. Did I keep my promise? As the whole structure of a building depends on the dimensions and strength of its foundation, so the whole of a person's belief in God cannot escape the foundation upon which he builds. If you make man the central thought of your belief, then you cannot get far away from man in any part of your belief. You will trust man's will, not God's, for salvation. You will believe in what man must do to accomplish salvation, not what Jesus did. You will hang everything on your foundation! If you make God the foundation of your faith, you will see God's will, not man's, as the causative factor in salvation. What Jesus did, not what you think man must do, will settle the salvation issue in your mind. If you build your belief on man, you will think that only those few of mankind who follow your personal definition of Christianity will be saved. If you build on the foundation of God, you believe that God will save all of those whom he chose to save.

What Foundation Should We Seek For Our Belief?

For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. I Corinthians 3:11.

What does this verse mean? It establishes that the only foundation which God will honor, the only one which will stand the test, is Jesus Christ. In God's eternal purpose, no other foundation exists! We should stand with God!

In this one chapter of scripture which has guided us through our brief study of essential doctrine, Ephesians 1, we have experienced some of the strongest assurances in scripture of the right foundation, God. We have tasted of the pure waters of grace. Four times, in verses 1, 5, 9, and 11, we have seen the

will of God as the operative factor. From Paul's apostleship, Verse 1, to God's predestination of those whom he chose to the adoption of children, verse 5, to the revelation of his will, Verse 9, to the workings of the inheritance obtained, Verse 11, God's will prevails. God will surely have the victory! Fifteen times in this chapter, Paul mentioned particular blessings which we receive in Christ. From the general, Verse 3, to the specific, election in Verse 4, redemption and forgiveness in Verse 7, and resurrection in Verse 10, God gives his children everything good in Christ. Good works, faith, or anything else which we may do in response to God's tender, but effectual, dealings with us, do not cause our salvation, but rather result from it. Everything we receive from God, everything, comes through our family standing in Christ. Even our trust is in him! In the companion book to Ephesians we find this focus on Christ further emphasized.

That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Colossians 2:2, 3.

For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. Colossians 2:9.

God grant us enlightened hearts to see our hope of eternity and our joy in time all on the secure foundation of our Lord Jesus Christ. May we see the victory in him and give him the reverential worship which he alone deserves.

On Christ salvation rests secure;
The Rock of Ages must endure;
Nor can that faith be overthrown Which rests upon the "Living Stone."
No other hope shall intervene;
To Him we look, on Him we lean;
Other foundation we disown,
And build on Christ, the "Living Stone."
In Him it is ordained to raise
A temple to Jehovah's praise,
Composed of all His saints, who own No Saviour but the "Living Stone."
View the vast building, see it rise;
The work, how great! The plan how wise! O wondrous fabric! Power unknown, That rests it on the
"Living Stone."
But most adore His precious Name;
His glory and His grace proclaim;
For us, the lost, condemned, undone, He gave Himself, the "Living Stone."
Poem by: Samuel Medley

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