

Bible Basics: Essential Doctrines of the Bible

Part 4B

Soteriology: The Study of the Salvation of the Believer

(also available on-line at ichthys.com)

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The salvation of the believer by grace through faith in the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

*For there is no deliverance through any other Person,
nor has any other Name on earth been given by which we must be saved.*

Acts 4:12

This is the work of God: that you believe in Him whom He sent.

John 6:29

(8) For you have been saved by [God's] grace through faith [in Christ]; and this did not come from you – it is God's gift. (9) Nor did it come from what you have done, lest anyone should boast. (10) For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for [the purpose of accomplishing] good works, which [very works] God has prepared ahead of time for us, that we might walk in them.

Ephesians 2:8-10

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Introduction: Soteriology is a Greek-derived word, literally meaning "the study of salvation" (Greek *soteria*, σωτηρία). We have devoted subpart A of part 4 to the study of our Lord Jesus Christ: His life, His unique Person, and His work on the cross in making salvation available for all mankind. Soteriology, as the word is traditionally employed in evangelical theology, is generally taken to mean the study of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and it is in this particular sense that the term is meant here, specifically, the Plan of God for saving the believer (section I), the mechanics of salvation whereby the person in question becomes a believer (section II), and the results of salvation, namely, what it means to be a believer in Jesus Christ (section III). In terms of theology, systematic or otherwise, nothing could be more important for the individual believer to understand, not only for his or her own security and assurance of salvation but also for effective evangelism.

Imprinted by God at birth on the heart of every human being is a threefold ultimate concern that dominates all serious thinking about this life, whether or not these issues are eventually faced by the person in question or are later willfully erased. Through observation of the world as God has made it, all human beings at some point (usually at an early age) become aware of their own mortality (death), their own imperfection (sin), and the existence of a perfect God in comparison to whom their own imperfection is strikingly clear (Law).

(56) Now the stinger of *death* (after which all face God) is the *sin* [nature] (through which we realize our imperfection), and the power of sin is the *Law* (in which we see the perfect standard of God which we cannot hope to match). (57) But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!

1st Corinthians 15:56-57

This inextricably intertwined set of realizations presents every human being with a dilemma which cannot be resolved through human effort: we are all sinners; we are all destined to die; and after death we shall all come face to face with a perfectly holy and righteous God, having no excuse for our sinfulness and nothing to offer in exchange for our guilt. The effect of this fundamental calculus of human life should be to create in every heart an internal pressure which cannot be ignored, and a desire for resolution which cannot be deferred. Our complete and utter helplessness in the face of impending death, judgment, and condemnation should dispose every human being to the search for a way out of this dilemma, and to an insistently immediate and tearfully grateful acceptance of the divine solution to this otherwise unavoidable and utterly horrible end. For there is no escape from the grave and from the condemnation of the lake of fire – except by appropriating through faith the work of the perfect Sacrifice for our sins, our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who died in our place on the cross.

Jesus alone is God's solution to the tripartite problem of undeniable sin, inevitable death, and ultimate condemnation. He alone is the "good news" or gospel message. For it is through the spiritual death of Jesus Christ on behalf for the sins of all mankind that God has forgiven our sin, that God has provided eternal life in place of physical death, and that God has substituted for the judgment of condemnation a judgment for determining eternal rewards instead – for all, that is, who in this life have put their faith in the Person of Jesus Christ, the God-Man, and in His work

in dying for their sins. When man's God-given free-will accepts the reality of our most essential, threefold problem and responds in faith to God's solution by believing in Jesus, salvation results, and the believer enters into a life of faith with blessed, eternal repercussions. How God the Father in His inimitable grace has planned this "so great salvation" for us (Heb.2:3), how we receive it through faith in His Son, and what it means for our present reality as Christians empowered by the Spirit and for our future glory as resurrected members of the Bride of Christ are the essential questions this study proposes to answer.

We have previously covered the sin problem (BB 3B) and the Person and work of Christ (BB 4A); in this present study, we shall see how salvation is incorporated into the Plan of God (I), how human beings enter into that salvation (II), and what the results and contexts of that salvation are for the believer in Jesus Christ (III). Nothing could be more wonderful for all who assent to believe in Jesus Christ; nothing could be more terrifying for all who refuse to accept the One Way of salvation.

(16) For God loved the world so much that He gave [up] His one and only Son, [with the purpose] that everyone who believes in Him should not be lost [forever], but have eternal life [instead]. (17) For God did not send His Son into the world to judge the world, but so that the world might be saved through Him. (18) The one who believes in Him is not being judged, but the one who does not believe has already been judged on the grounds that he has not put his faith in the Name (i.e., the Person) of God's one and only Son.
John 3:16-18

I. God's Plan to Save You

One of the most commonly misunderstood things about God's plan for salvation is the failure to understand that it is predisposed to save *everyone*. While one third of angelic kind and the vast majority of human kind will be condemned at history's end and cast into the lake of fire, that is most definitely *not* God's desire or His "first best will" for these reprobate individuals. God wants *all* to be saved (Ezek.18:23; Matt.18:14; Jn.12:47; 1Tim.2:4; 2Tim.2:24-26; 2Pet.3:9), and He gains no pleasure from their condemnation (Jn.3:17). Moreover, God has designed His plan for the ages with that intent of universal salvation as its guiding principle. Nothing could be more indicative of the truth that creature history has been constructed precisely for the eternal salvation of *all* than that Jesus Christ died *for all*.

On the next day, [John] saw Jesus coming towards him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, the One who takes away *the sin of the world*".
John 1:29

So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life *to all men*.
Romans 5:18 KJV

(14) For it is the love of Christ that constrains us, having brought us to this conclusion:

One died for [us] all; so then we all have died [in Him]. (15) And ***He died on behalf of all*** so that those who are [now] alive might no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised [from the dead].

2nd Corinthians 5:14-15

(5) For as God is One, so there is [only] One Mediator between God and Man, Christ Jesus in His humanity, (6) who gave Himself as a ransom ***for all*** [mankind] . . .

1st Timothy 2:5-6a

And He Himself is the atonement for our sins, and not just for ours, but also ***for the entire world.***

1st John 2:2

Salvation is not a divine afterthought. Just as the means of salvation, the incarnation of Jesus Christ and His spiritual death on the cross whereby He expiated all sin, was foreordained before the world was made (1Pet.1:19-20), so the salvation of all mankind was prepared even before our Lord created the heavens and the earth at the Father's behest (Col.1:16-17; 1Thes.5:9; Heb.1:2).

(1) Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for [the purpose of aiding] the faith of the elect and their acceptance of the truth which accords with godliness, (2) in the hope of eternal life which God who cannot lie ***promised before time began,*** (3) and [who] has [now] at just the right time revealed His Plan (lit., *logos*) through the proclamation [of the gospel] with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior.

Titus 1:1-3

This truth, to wit, that salvation is the fundamental ***purpose*** of God's creation of the universe in the first place, can be clearly seen from the Book of Life. Although the point is frequently misunderstood, the Book of Life, written by God in eternity past, contains the name of every single human being He would ever create, and it is only by self-willed rejection of any desire for God that a person's name is blotted out of the book.

(32) "And now, if You will forgive their sin, [fine]. But if not, [then] please blot my name out of Your Book which You have written." (33) But the Lord said to Moses, "The one who sins against Me, him will I blot out of My Book."

Exodus 32:32-33

May the [godless] be blotted out of the Book of Life, and may they not be recorded with the righteous.

Psalms 69:28

The one who wins the victory will be dressed in white clothing in this way, and I will assuredly not erase his name from the Book of Life.

Revelation 3:5

And all the inhabitants of the earth will worship [the beast], [that is, all] whose names are not [still] written in the Book of Life [where they were written] from the beginning of the world, [even the book] which belongs to the Lamb who was slain.

Revelation 13:8

The Father has written *all* down for salvation, and provided salvation for *all* through the sacrifice of His own dear Son our Lord for the sins of the world. His plan, His purpose, is for *all* to be saved, and He has so ordered the universe and so designed creature history in order that all *may* be saved. For our God is a God of the utmost compassion, resorting to judgment only when His mercy is refused.

(6) Then the Lord passed before [Moses] and called out, "The Lord, the Lord, a compassionate God, full of grace and slow to anger, abounding in mercy and truth, (7) maintaining mercy for thousands [of generations], forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin, but for him who refuses to be cleansed, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on their sons and on their sons' sons even to the third and fourth generation."¹

Exodus 34:6-7

As the verses above indicate so clearly, our God's mercy and compassion come before judgment and outweigh it more than a thousand-fold. It is only the refusal of His creatures to accept and receive His grace and forgiveness that forces Him into a posture of judgment – exactly as we should expect from a God who *is* Love (1Jn.4:8; 4:16; cf. Jn.3:16-17). For He is not willing for any to perish, but desires all to be saved (Ezek.18:23; Acts 17:27; cf. Lam.3:33).

(12) "What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? (13) And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. (14) In the same way your Father in heaven is *not willing that any of these little ones should be lost*.

Matthew 18:12-14 NIV

But if anyone hears My words and does not hold onto them, I do not condemn him. For I did not come to condemn the world but *to save the world*.

John 12:47

¹ The significant difference in translation here between "but for him who refuses to be cleansed" and "yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished" (KJV; other versions similar), is due the major English versions following the Septuagint's misunderstanding of the verbal phrase הקני אל הקני as being in the *piel* stem (a mistake continued in the Masoretic vocalization). Instead, we have here two *niphal* forms (with syncope of intervocalic *heh* in the infinitive absolute as is common in later Hebrew and not unprecedented in scripture where *niphal* infinitive absolutes are concerned: cf. תוארל at Exod.34:24, Deut.31:11, and Is.1:12; also Exod.10:3: תנעל; Job 33:30: רואל; Ezek.26:15: גרהב; Prov.24:17: וילשכבו; and Lam.2:11 (רַטעב)).

[God] who *wants all men to be saved* and come to accept the truth.
1st Timothy 2:4

The Lord is not delaying in the fulfillment of His promise (as some think); rather He is exercising patience for your sake, being *unwilling for anyone to perish*, but desiring all instead to come to repentance.
2nd Peter 3:9

Sadly, of course, since not all do "come to repentance"; not all are saved (for not all respond to His grace). Much theological confusion has arisen over the millennia from efforts to explain this apparent (and only apparent) dichotomy between God's desire for universal salvation and the reality of exceptional salvation. Many erroneous theories have been offered in attempts to reconcile these two seemingly conflicting biblical truths, often in ways that do violence to one or the other. For both doctrines are *true*, and failure to accept and teach either results in dangerous heresy.

God wishes to have mercy upon all mankind, and He has provided a Sacrifice for all so that all may be saved. At the same time, however, God has most definitely not been willing to deprive anyone of the one thing that makes human beings unique on this planet and in the universe (with the single exception of angelic kind): God has not abrogated our free-will in order to save us. Had He done so, "we" would not be who we are at all. Free-will is the defining characteristic of the human race. It is not our size, nor our appearance, nor our talents, nor our weaknesses, nor our limitations, nor our capabilities that make us what we are. It is our free-will – and what we choose to do with it. These two aspects of our essential nature are inseparable: who we are is a function of what we choose, and what we choose flows from who we are. That is true whether or not our character proves resilient over time or malleable. Regardless of the pontifications of science and philosophy, nature and the human experience are designed to bring all those of average mental capacity to the realization that in this life, we choose. And choosing is what this life is all about. We may or may not like our choices. We make poor choices or good ones, or, more likely, some combination of the two. But in all things large and small, we weigh our choices consciously and are responsible for them, and that is the true essence of who and what we are.

We human beings are individuals, and are individually the sum total of our choices and the thoughts and intents of our heart which went into making them. This is true whether in our short lives we have had success in affecting the world with our choices or have been frustrated at every turn; it is true whether our choices have been highly moral and ethical, or almost entirely evil and sinful. The fact of choosing being at the core of our personality and individual existence is the operative point, not what we chose or what resulted from our choices. We human beings are creatures who exercise free-will. We choose. That is more than just what we do. That is who we are. And more than that, it is also the reason why we are here.

(24) The God who made the world and everything in it, He is Lord of heaven and earth. He does not dwell in man-made temples, (25) nor is he waited on by human hands, as if

He needed anything from us. He is the One who gives us all life and breath and everything else. (26) From one man he created all the nations of mankind – that they should come to inhabit the whole face of the earth. He fixed and determined the specific times and extent of their habitations, (27) to the end that they should seek out this God, that they might go in search of Him and so might find Him – for He is not far off from any one of us.

Acts 17:24-27

God made this world on purpose (v.24); God has given us all the essentials we need to exist in it, "life and breath and everything else" (v.25); God has given us the historical, political, and geographical contexts wherein our lives are to be lived out here on earth (v.26; cf. Job 12:23; Ps.74:17); God is the One who created us and in so doing provided us with the ability to choose, not just for the mundane choices of life, but for the most fundamental choice of all, the choice to seek Him (v.27a); this choice has never been made in vain, since it is God's unalterable purpose that all who choose to search for Him "might find Him" (v.27b); nor is the choice onerous or difficult to carry through, "for He is not far off from any one of us" (v.27c). History, politics, the economy, our health, our wealth or lack thereof, our families, friends and neighbors, enemies and adversaries, the weather, war and peace, death and taxes, our desires and disappointments, the whole wide panorama of human existence is, as Paul assures us, merely the backdrop for why we are here, individually and collectively. We are all here to seek God, that we might find Him; and all who choose to seek Him in truth, in truth do find Him – for that has been His purpose for us from the beginning. Though not all choose to do so, God wants all to seek Him, and history has been constructed by Him as the perfect place to put the hearts of mankind to this test.

(18) So then, upon whom He wishes, [God] has mercy, and whom He wishes, He hardens. (19) So you will say to me [by way of argument], "**Why does He still find fault** [with us]? For who has [effectively] resisted His will?" (20) O [mere mortal] man! On the contrary, **who are you who is answering back to God?** The thing made will not ask its Maker, "why have you made me this way", [will it]? (21) Or does the Potter not have authority over the clay to make from the same lump a vessel for honorable purposes and another for dishonorable ones?

Romans 9:18-21

As mentioned above (and as we shall discuss in much greater detail in section I.2 below), creature history was decreed by God in every single detail before the world began – and yet history did have to be played out. For salvation to be a reality, Jesus Christ actually did have to become a human being, come into the world, live a perfect life, run the most horrific of gauntlets to get to the cross, then cover the sins of the world with His blood, His spiritual death on the cross during the three hours of darkness. In a complementary way, we actually do have to be born and live out our lives on this earth, and actually do have to make the choices upon which our eternal future (and, in the case of Christians, our eternal rewards) will be based, putting our faith in the One who died for us in order for our own salvation to be secured. All this was decreed ahead of time; but it still had to unfold in real time. Beyond all argument, if Jesus actually had to die for us to be saved, then we certainly do have to choose for Him in this life in

order to be saved.

In terms of the issue of human free-will, it is sometimes erroneously assumed that God's foreordination of history through His WILL has predetermined the decisions individual human beings will make. In the passage quoted above (Rom.9:18-21), the apostle Paul anticipates this misapplication of the doctrine of divine decrees being used as a defense by those who refuse to bend their will to the WILL of God in this life: even if determinism were true, such a person would still have no reasonable defense before God. For in such a hypothetical case, the person has already ceded to God all authority by disclaiming individual responsibility: if God has the power and authority to force a person to be an unbeliever, then He certainly has the same power and authority to condemn the person even so. This claim, of course is blasphemous in the extreme, and all the more obviously so when considered in the light of everything God has done for us in order to give us the chance to be saved and enjoy eternal life with Him and His Son forever: Jesus became a human being – and He died for all of the sins of the entire human race in order that all might have the opportunity of relying on Him and His work so as to be saved. God wants all to be saved, and the fact that most use the free-will God has given them to choose to decline salvation does not change that fact: God knew who would respond and who would not, but He created all and gave free-will to all along with an equal chance to be saved even so.

Needless to say, the world does not appreciate what our Lord Jesus has done for it, nor does it harbor any gratitude to the Father for His ineffable gift in sacrificing His Son in our place. We, the community of true believers in Jesus Christ, the genuine Church, *ought* to be appreciative. Indeed, we ought to be *so* appreciative that we have little time or energy for anything else apart from thanking God for our so-great salvation and responding to Him at all times in every way pleasing to Him. Naturally, flesh that we are, we fall very short. But it should at least occur to us from time to time that all the noise and fury that are this ephemeral world we see around us are inestimably insignificant in comparison to God's decision to save us carried out by Jesus Christ.

God has done the most for us, and while we were His enemies at that (Rom.5), but He has not and never will impose Himself on us so as to compromise our free-will – as the reality of the unsaved and their eventual condemnation makes indisputably clear. God did what we could never do: atone for our sin through the offering up of His one and only dear Son in our place. Yet we must respond to that sacrifice if we are to be saved. For God's WILL opened the door of salvation, but our will must walk through that door to receive salvation. God's gift of free-will to us is thus an astoundingly humbling and blessed thing. The divine gift of free-will is a deliberate complement to the Gift of Jesus Christ, since it was given to us for the express purpose of accepting the Gift of Jesus Christ. That is why we are here and why we have free-will at all. Human free-will, exercised in faith, is thus the converse of divine WILL which has given us the freedom and the capability of responding so as to be saved: God gave us the ability to choose for Him, or not. He gave us His image.

(26) Then God said, "Let us make Man in our image, according to our likeness, so that he

may rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky and over the beasts and over the whole earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth". (27) So God created the man in His image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Genesis 1:26-27

We have previously discussed in another place the essential meaning of the image of God as the godlike ability to choose.² Although most human beings never give it a thought their entire life-long, it would be impossible to overestimate the staggering wonder and the universe-shaking importance of God's gift to us of free-will. Not only are we human beings as a result unique in the universe (in company with the angels) but the fact of our having this God-given ability to choose makes us special in a transcendent way. Besides the angels and ourselves, no one else has the ability of anything approaching self-determination – except God. True, by every quantitative and qualitative measure our will is undeserving of comparison with the WILL of God. However, despite our minuscule size and non-existent power in comparison to God, in our capacity to choose we have been given a gift that is only mirrored elsewhere in the universe in the Person of God. The differences between the WILL of God and our free-will, between the Person of God and His image which we bear, are profound and immense, but the connection between the two is no accident. That nexus between God's will and ours is not only deliberate but a fundamental theorem in the calculus of human existence and an essential truth which must be understood if God's plan of salvation is to be properly explained. God made us for Himself (Col.1:16; Heb.2:10; cf. Rom.11:36; 1Cor.8:6). God made us with the ability to choose in order that we might respond to Him. God is pleased and glorified when we do use our free-will to respond to Him. But the divine gift of godlike self-determination is genuine and real. In the seven thousand year history of the human race, most will decline to use their free-will for its intended purpose of responding to God. If they were not able to refuse to respond, their will would not truly be free nor their response authentic.

It not only speaks volumes about the character and Person of the God who made us that He deeply desires us to respond to Him willingly and will not force us to do so against our will but also tells us much about our own importance to Him: He created us to be perfect counterparts to Him, partners who become fully His not through coercion but by their own free-will choice, with the issue of choice now as it has always been our attitude towards the Person of Jesus Christ. At the behest of God our Father, our Lord Jesus made the entire universe from nothing without effort in a moment of time, and He made it for us (and the angels). Everything exists . . . *for us*. All that exists only does so for the purpose of our self-determination, our decisions, our demonstration to ourselves and to others and to God in a real world of choice and consequence whether or not we wish to respond to God.

It is very important to understand that we human beings are more than just "important" to the

² The detailed treatment of the image and likeness of God is to be found in part 3B of this series, Anthropology, section II, "The Creation of Man".

God of the universe. The fact that we are not mere "playthings" for God could not be made more clear than through the ineffable gift of the Person of Jesus Christ. Creating two classes of creatures capable of determining their own fate would require judgment (against God's preference) and sacrifice (at God's cost). If the choice were to be real, some creatures endowed with free-will would of necessity use that free-will to resist God rather than to respond to Him, reveling in their uniqueness, becoming gods unto themselves. In the case of the angels, created perfect, this meant the inevitable defection of Satan and his legions. Demonstrating that the condemnation following such defection was just required in turn the creation of another order of creature likewise possessing free-will, one which in weakness would fall into sin, but would then in some numbers be willing to return to a loving God who in His mercy offered a way of deliverance.³ In the case of mankind, therefore, the gift of the image of God necessitated the payment of the penalty of condemnation in order for fellowship to be restored, in order for salvation to be effected. By creating Man, therefore, God committed Himself to condemning Christ.

(25) Then He Himself said to them "O you ignorant men, and slow to believe all the things which the prophets spoke. (26) *Wasn't it necessary* for the Christ to suffer these things [first], and [then] come into His glory?" (27) And taking His start with Moses and all of the prophets, He thoroughly explained to them the things [written] about Himself in all the scriptures.

Luke 24:25-27

Therefore it is not only the case that the creation of the entire universe was undertaken on our account: by initiating history through commanding the creation of the world, God the Father committed Himself to the death of His One and only Son, to judging Him on our behalf in the darkness on Calvary's cross, to purging the sins of the world in Him in order that we might be saved. Moreover, for those of us who do respond to God through free-will faith in Jesus Christ, we become one with Jesus Christ forever, just as Jesus is, since the incarnation, true God and a true human being in one unique Person forever. By deciding to make us with free-will, God committed Himself to the death of His Son *and* to His Son becoming *a genuine human being*, to be wed forever as one in Body with those who would choose to respond to Him – just as we have in like manner become one with Him as His Bride forevermore. Thus the profound implications of the gift of free-will should never be underestimated. We exist to believe in Jesus Christ; the universe exists so that we may believe in Jesus Christ; and God the Father in His immeasurable love has sacrificed the Son He has loved since before the world began so that He may be just in saving us when we do, wedding us to Jesus in the same way that Jesus is wedded to true humanity and to us forever. Salvation is therefore more than an important aspect of life for believers: seen from the divine point of view, salvation *is* history, and the entire purpose for our being here in it.

³ This principle is explained in detail in part 1 the Satanic Rebellion series, "Satan's Rebellion and Fall".

God knows the beginning from the end, and everything that would transpire in history in between. He has already decreed everything that would ever happen in the incredibly short span of creature history (short, that is, in comparison to the fast approaching day of eternity).

All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.
Psalm 139:16b NIV

Far from being a reaction to the failures of His creatures, therefore, God's plan of salvation is the superstructure upon which the edifice of history has been built. More than that, everything that would ever happen was foreordained by Him before the moment of universal creation accomplished by Jesus Christ at the Father's direction. Indeed, nothing could, nothing can, nothing will ever happen in history without the express will of God. This decreeing of the sum total of history, however, is not at all to be equated with determinism. In fact, the true situation is exactly the opposite. Since nothing can exist without God, and since nothing can transpire without His will, it was *only* by decreeing history to include all creature choices that choice was possible in the first place. The false argument reprised by Paul at Romans 9:18-21 (quoted above), "why [then] does He still find fault?", fails to take these important truths into account and fundamentally misunderstands God's purpose, God's grace, and God's love: God made us who we choose to be and who we choose to be is who God made us.

Both sides of the above statement are absolutely true and inseparable. We could not exist without God; we could not have the image of God except that He gave it to us; and it was impossible for Him not to know how we would use our God-given free-will and impossible for us to use it without His prior assent. Simply put, foreordination does not prevent genuine choice; genuine choice would be impossible without it. For men and angels to be able to choose required not only the gift of the image of God but also the venue in which to employ their free-will. That venue is the world (defined spatially); that venue is history (defined temporally). Divinely decreed space-time, therefore, the foreordained history of the world from beginning to end, consists of so much more than the physical history of the universe: the most significant things which have and are and will happen here in the world in time are the free-will decisions of the morally accountable creatures who inhabit this venue. Indeed, it is precisely for the purpose of making those decisions that God created the world and placed us in it (Jn.15:16 in Greek), so that we might seek Him and find Him. We are here to be saved. And if we refuse, we are here to demonstrate that we did not want to be saved.

The gift of free-will is the most astonishing thing in the universe. Truth be told, it is far more wondrous than the universe itself or its creation by our Lord Jesus in the blink of an eye. That is because of the mind-numbing implications of a creation that would include truly free moral agents, namely, the necessitating of God to become a man and to die in the place of all mankind, and His willingness in Jesus Christ to do so. For without a prior commitment to the incarnation and the cross, creation would not only have been pointless: it would have been impossible:

(18) For you know that it was not with perishable things [like] silver or gold that you were ransomed from the futile manner of life passed down to you by your ancestors, (19)

but [you were redeemed] with precious blood, like that of a lamb without spot or blemish, [that is, by the blood] of Christ [Jesus, (20) whose coming was] *foreknown before the creation of the world*, but who appeared [in the flesh] at the end of times because of us (i.e., for our salvation).

1st Peter 1:18-20

So much is it true that creature free-will is the most potent force in the universe and the most important element in the history of creation that scripture on more than one occasion calls us, men and angels both, *'Eliym*, "mighty ones" or "gods" (cf. the Hebrew name for God: *'Elohiym*).⁴

I said, "You are gods, and sons of the Most High, all of you." However, you shall die in the manner of Man, and fall like any other [human] prince.

Psalms 82:6 (cf. v.1)

Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your law: 'I said, You are gods'?"

John 10:34

The title *'el*, "mighty one", is appropriate for both human beings and angels, and not because our physical might is remarkable. Even in the case of angels, far mightier than we, their power is insignificant when compared with the massive size of the universe (let alone when it is compared to the power of God). We are "mighty" (*'el*) because by delegation we share in the *sovereignty* of God (*the* Mighty One: *'Elohiym*).

(4) What is Man that you are mindful of him, or the son of man that you care for him?

(5) You made him a little lower than the angels (lit. "the gods"), you crowned him with glory and honor. (6) *You made him sovereign* over all the works of your hands, you put everything under his feet, (7) flocks and all cattle, and also the beasts of the field, (8) the birds of the skies and the fish of the sea, and whatever swims the paths of the seas.

Psalms 8:4-8

God chose to make us in His image and bestowed a measure of His sovereign authority upon us with the desire that we would use that free-will to respond to His WILL. Through the fall, mankind temporarily ceded a large measure of our God-given authority over the earth to the evil one, but we still retain sovereignty over our own will.⁵ Even now, we are still "mighty ones" in that we continue to possess the divine and divinely provided characteristic of self-determination. No one else and nothing else in the universe outside of us and the angels has the godlike capacity to decide our own future, to be saved or to forgo salvation. By responding to God, creatures to

⁴ Compare also Exodus 21:6 and 22:8 where *'Elohiym* (technically a plural) is used to describe human judges ("mighty ones"), and Psalm 8:4-8, 97:7; and 138:1, where it is used to describe the angels (and is often translated "gods" instead of "God" or "angels").

⁵ All of these matters are discussed in detail in part 3A of the Bible Basics series, "Anthropology".

Creator, mighty ones to **the** Mighty One, 'el to 'Elohiym, in adapting our free-will to His WILL through faith in the Object of faith He has provided, Jesus Christ, we demonstrate our desire to be with Him forever. If, however, we decline to subordinate our will to His WILL, we demonstrate that our own sovereignty is more important to us than His Sovereignty, and that we have no desire to be with Him at all. History is thus a process not only of **choosing** where we will spend eternity through the God-given gift of self-determination but also of **demonstrating** that the choice to reject the world and conform to the WILL of God so as to be saved (or to refuse to do so) was entirely ours.

The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but **the one who does the will of God** lives forever.

1st John 2:17 NASB

Knowing precisely how and what we would decide, it may seem at first consideration that God could easily have set aside the entire exercise of creature history, creating only those whom He knew in His omniscience would choose for Him through His Son, not creating those whom He knew would eschew obedience to Jesus Christ, and dispensing with the crucible of life wherein these choices actually take place. For beyond all argument, the Father would not have sacrificed the Son if it were unnecessary. Therefore, the fact that God did not forego the process of history but has instead actually created a moral world of choice wherein Jesus of necessity had to die for the sins of all, believers and unbelievers both, and actually did so shows unequivocally that "going through with it" was indeed necessary.

Offering this genuine choice to all was absolutely essential if we were to be who we are, fitting counterparts to the Son as members of the Bride, creatures who are not merely subjects but who are endowed with the most amazing gift: a measure of divine sovereignty, the very image of God, whereby we are able to respond to His choice of us by choosing for Him in return. Actually having the chance to make this choice and to demonstrate our determination to do so was equally indispensable. Those who choose against God, moreover, are the *proof* that all free-will is genuine, ours and theirs alike.

There is an inherent number or completeness to everything which God has made, and this is so to such a perfect degree that nothing more and nothing less could attain to the perfection of the universe or, more importantly, to the full complement of creature-kind as He has perfectly designed it (cf. Eccl.3:11-14; Lk.14:23; Jn.1:9; Rom.11:25).

To everything [you have made] there is completeness – I have seen the boundary [you have] set [for all things]. But your decree is measureless.

Psalms 119:96 (cf. Ps.148:6)

Creation, therefore, and the perfect eternal glory which will result from the working out of God's perfect plan, meant creating the entire human race, full and complete, just as it meant the creating of all angelic kind in their perfect, full number. No angel was created by accident; no human being has ever been given life by accident. And just as in the spectrum of light only a small part

is visible, so in the full and complete spectrum of humanity – a full spectrum which had to be created in toto if it were to be created at all – only a small part uses free-will to choose for salvation. God's act of creating the full and complete complement of angelic kind and the entire human race inevitably resulted in the defection of one third of the angels who were disposed to rebel against the Lord and the unbelief of the vast majority of human beings who were unwilling to accept the gracious gift of Jesus Christ.

The fate of all creatures who deliberately reject God's mercy is completely just: the fate they suffer is the fate they choose to suffer (and would choose again in a thousand life-times, if likewise possessing genuine, uncoerced free-will). God is not unjust to have created them in the foreknowledge of how they would choose; the only way those who choose to reject Him could ever have avoided condemnation was not to have been created in the first place – but, since humanity could only have been created in its perfect completeness, that would have prevented the creation of those of us who are willing to respond to God's great love in Jesus Christ. God had the right to create the universe; He had the right to create us with free-will; it cost Him beyond what we can ever know to do so because it necessitated the sacrifice of His one and only dear Son for our sins; He had the right to create those who of their own truly free and uncoerced will would reject Him; and without the creation of those who determined to reject Him there could have been no creation of those of us who willing to accept Him.

Far, then, from determining our choices for us through His decreeing of creature history and the plan of salvation it encompasses and facilitates, God's foreordination of all things was the only way in which we could come into existence and be who we are – free moral agents after the pattern of the God who made us – and still be saved. God's prior decree of the course of history does not foreordain condemnation; rather, it enables salvation. It is, therefore, the very height of arrogance for any creature, angel or human being, to answer back to God, "Why did you make me this way?" For out of His infinite love He made us as we wanted to be made, and has allowed us to decide for ourselves whether or not to love Him back for it.

We love him, because he first loved us.

1st John 4:19 KJV

None of this would have been possible without the Father's sacrifice of His one and only dear Son for our sins. Because of their particular nature and the circumstances of their existence, angels never change their minds once their decision for or against God has been made.⁶ That is why the creation of the angels made mankind necessary, in order to demonstrate, through creating another order of creature in different circumstances, that repentance was possible, and that God's love would provide the means for it, if any were willing to partake of God's mercy.⁷

⁶ See part 2A of the Bible Basics series, "Angelology".

⁷ For an explanation of all these issues in more detail, see the Satanic Rebellion series, especially part 1, "Satan's Rebellion and Fall".

Creating the angels necessitated the creation of mankind (to demonstrate God's justice) and the creation of mankind necessitated Jesus' sacrifice on the cross (to enable God's mercy); and this entire plan of salvation in its essentials along with its working out in the lives of every single moral creature had actually to take place in space-time for the choices made both to be genuine and also to be irrefutably demonstrated as such. Those human beings who refuse God's gracious offer of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ follow the pattern of the devil and show that they would ignore, challenge, and replace God here and now if they could, and would stay in that attitude forever and return to it immediately following condemnation if that ever became possible. God could have made us all like the animals; we could have all, men and angels both, been made happy and permanently holy, with no possibility of being otherwise as we lived forever in bliss in a perfect universe. But we would not then be made in the image of God, possessing genuine free-will, being creatures capable of weighing the consequences and deciding for ourselves whether to follow the Way or to choose our own way – we would not then be who we are in any meaningful sense. God's gift to us of the free-will necessary to respond to His great Gift, Jesus Christ, is the essential ingredient, the image of God, the divine "spark", that makes us unique and is at the very core of what it means to be a human being: deciding our fate for ourselves. God has not predetermined that choice or forced it on us; rather, by ratifying our choice in His plan of the ages He has made our fundamental choice possible. Through the decisions we make in this life we demonstrate for all to see the truth of the axiom given above that God made us who we choose to be and that who we choose to be is who God made us.

1. Free-will faith and the Will of God

"For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother."
Mark 3:35 NASB

As explained above, history has been decreed by God as the time and place where we, His moral creatures, have been given the opportunity to adjust our will to His through the exercise of our faith in His chosen object of faith, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

(17) And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. Then He put His right hand on me, saying, "Don't be afraid. It is I, the First and the Last, (18) even the Living One. And although I died, behold, I am alive forever and ever! Indeed, I possess the keys to death and Hades.
Revelation 1:17-18

To exercise this choice is the purpose for which we have been created (see section I.1.a below): God desires us to fulfill this purpose (see section I.1.b below), has made us with the ability to do so (see section I.1.c below), and has sacrificed His one and only beloved Son for us so that we may do so and be thus saved (see section I.1.d below). In spite of God's structuring of the universe for us, in spite of His desire that we all come back to Him of our own free-will faith, in spite of the fact that we all possess in abundance everything we need to do so, and, most impressively, in spite of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross in paying the supreme penalty to wash away the sins of all mankind and thereby make possible the reconciliation to the Father

of all things in heaven and on earth, many of the angels have and most human beings will refuse God's mercy and grace. This was always an inevitable result of creating men and angels with genuine free will, and a necessary eventuality if we who do love Him were to be created in the first place and then be saved so as to receive eternal life thereafter (see section I.1.e below).

a. The purpose of God's creation of man

God did not have to create the universe. He did not have to create us. Not only was He under no necessity or compunction to do so – He existed before creation in perfect happiness, perfect peace, and perfect unity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Before the mountains were born, or you gave birth to the earth and world, from everlasting to everlasting, you are God.

Psalm 90:2

God created the universe for us. God created us for *our* benefit. It is a wonderful thing to be alive and even more wonderful to be able to anticipate the day not long hence when we shall be liberated from all the negatives of this sin-infested world and united to the Lord we love so much forevermore. As moral creatures, not only can we enjoy our status of existence and long for our coming eternal life but we can also appreciate the goodness of a God who gave us these immeasurable blessings. As believers, we can, or at least we should, stand in grateful awe of a God who sacrificed His most precious possession, His own dear Son, that we might not only exist for a moment but might live forever in His loving embrace. God is love. And we see His love most perspicuously in His creation of us and in His sacrifice of Jesus for us; for the former necessitated the latter, and the latter was essential if we were to bask in that love forever.

Everyone who is called by my Name, *for My glory I have created him*, I have formed him, indeed, I have made him.

Isaiah 43:7 (cf. Is.60:21; 61:3)

God is glorified when we respond to Him. He is pleased with us when we and others come to understand who He really is and what He is really like, appreciate Him for Himself, and respond to Him in the way He would have us to do. That is the reason, that is the purpose for us being here and for us "being" at all. God clearly does not need this response from us. Moreover, we are the ones who benefit from accepting and responding to His truth. That is not only so in the abstract: it is by our free-will faith response to His truth – which is all about who He is and was before time began, what He is in the process of doing here on earth, and what He will do in the eternal future – that we are saved (by responding to the gospel), that we are blessed in time (as we grow spiritually through His truth), and that we shall be rewarded in eternity (for the level of response we have achieved in this life). God not only created us – He created us in order to share Himself with us, and He is pleased, He is gloried, when we do respond to His grace. God loves us: in love He made us, and out of love He sacrificed His one and only dear Son Jesus Christ for us that we might respond to Him, that we might be saved through Him, that we might grow and be blessed in Him, and that we might be rewarded abundantly by Him in time to come.

God has always loved us, loved us all, elect and fallen, believer and unbeliever, saved and unsaved. God loves us – God *is* love! But He does not force us to love Him back. That is true even though He is deserving of more love in response to what He has done for us than the most spiritually advanced among us can presently appreciate. We owe Him all of our love because He created us, because He sacrificed Jesus for us, and because He has prepared an eternity of blessing for us beyond our wildest dreams. Sad to say, however, most human beings and many angels have thrown God's inestimable love right back in His face. Yet this does not detract from His glory; rather, it enhances it. Just as God is glorified here and now even by the resistance of unbelievers (as God says to Pharaoh, "I raised you up *for this very purpose*, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth"; Rom.9:17: NIV), so also He will be glorified in the case of all His ungrateful creatures at the end of days; for the day will come when "*every* knee will bow" before Him (Is.45:23; Rom.14:11; Phil.2:10). Those who reject His WILL in life will, in the end, be forced to obey (and will be condemned).

Who should not revere you, O King of the nations? This is your due.
Jeremiah 10:7a NIV

What God wants, however, is our free-will response here and now in time, when it is possible on account of our limited perception coupled with our *'el*-image of God status to wilfully ignore the truth about Him and refuse to respond at all. We who do use our free-will to respond to Him here and now by faith (in accepting the truth of the gospel) and "from faith to faith" (in growing up spiritually through the truth of the Word of God: Rom.1:17) are pleasing to Him, because in responding to Him in this way we *reflect* His glory.

"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."
Matthew 5:16 NASB

(17) Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Lord's Spirit is, there is freedom. (18) And every one of us, if we reflect the Lord's glory with no "veil" obscuring our faces (i.e., with unsullied Christian witness), is being transformed into the same image [of God] (i.e., become more Christ-like as we use our will to respond to Him) so as to reflect an ever greater degree of [God's] glory [as we do so] (lit., "from glory to glory") – exactly what is to be expected with the Lord's Spirit as the agent [of our transformation].
2nd Corinthians 3:17-18

As we shall see in section III below, these verses reflect the fundamental Plan of God for everyone of us here on earth, the vital transformation "from faith to faith" (Rom.1:17) and "from glory to glory", that is, our sanctification.⁸ By using our free-will to respond to God in faith we come to share in His holiness, initially (phase I sanctification: salvation), progressively (phase II sanctification: spiritual growth), and ultimately (phase III sanctification: eternal confirmation and

⁸ See also Peter's Epistles, lesson #13: "Sanctification".

reward). We have all been created "like God" in that we all have this God-given ability to respond to Him in the fulfillment of His plan for our lives. We all become more like Him in practice when we use that free-will faith in actual response, being then transformed by Him, being drawn closer to Him, coming to glorify Him more and more.

[It is] through these [divine blessings] that the great and honorable promises have been granted to us, so that through them we might become *partakers of the divine nature* (i.e., in contrast with our earthly sinful nature), having [through salvation] escaped earthly corruption and its lust.

2nd Peter 1:4

The Greek word for glory, *doxa* (δόξα, cf. "doxology"), originally meant opinion or reputation, and only later came by extension to mean "good reputation" or "glory". God is who He is and who He is is marvelous and perfect. Therefore to know Him truly is to become aware of the wonders of His person. All true information about God and His character reflects the inherent glory of His essence, the brilliant, refulgent, radiant awesomeness of His perfect and holy "being".

(14) Then God said to Moses, "I shall be who I am. This is what you will tell the sons of Israel: '***I am*** sent me to you.'" (15) And God also said to Moses, "Thus you will say to the sons of Israel: 'the Lord [the "is"], the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob sent me to you.' This is My Name forever, and this is how you are to think about me for all generations."

Exodus 3:14-15

(1) God, from antiquity having communicated to our fathers in the prophets at many times and in many ways, (2) has in these last days communicated to us in a Son, [the One] whom He has appointed heir of all things, [the One] through whom He created the universe. (3) He is *the shining forth of [the Father's] glory*, the precise image of His essence, the One who sustains the universe by His mighty Word . . .

Hebrews 1:1-3a

God is light, and in Him there is no darkness.

1st John 1:5b

God has also made who He is sufficiently obvious for all who care to consider His creation, for everything He has made reflects Him and His glory (e.g., Rom.1:18-23; see in section II below, "Natural Revelation").

The heavens recount *the glory* of God, and the firmament tells of *the work* of His hands.

Psalms 19:1

However, a large part of the purpose of the gift of the image of God to mankind had of necessity to be the ability *not* to recognize the glory of Him and so not to respond to Him. That is so even

though beyond all argument He is worthy of receiving that recognition from His creatures as the glorious One who created all things (Rev.4:11). This necessity of preserving our ability to choose for Him (by preserving our ability to choose against Him) is the reason why the fullness of God's true and unobscured glory had to be shielded from us during this time of decision-making we spend here on the earth; otherwise, no mere mortal would be able to deny (even to him or herself) God's existence (which would otherwise be undeniable – even by the most hardened hearts), or God's goodness (which would otherwise be unimpeachable – even by the most jaded cynics), or God's power (which would otherwise be unmistakable – even by the most audacious rebels).

(17) And the Lord said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name." (18) Then Moses said, "Now ***show me your glory.***" (19) And the Lord said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. (20) But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for ***no one may see me and live.***"
Exodus 33:17-20 NIV

He [the Father] who alone possesses immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom ***no man has ever seen, nor can see.***
1st Timothy 6:16

God is glory, and perfect glory at that. So while He created us for His glory, no one should take this to mean that He needs anything from us. Nothing anyone could ever do would ever be capable of enhancing God's perfect glory in any way. Therefore by glorification we are speaking first and foremost of the honor and recognition He receives in the eyes of our fellow moral creatures when we respond to Him in a manner pleasing to Him – an eventuality which furthers His overall desire that all who are lost be saved, and that all who are saved draw closer to Him. When we do what God would have us do in spite of the fact that such actions seem like madness to the unbelieving world, those who observe catch a glimpse of who He really is, His goodness, His love, His grace, His glory. By seeing our response, saved and lost, men and angels both, gain some measure of insight into and understanding of His perfect character (1Pet.1:12; cf. Lk.15:10; 1Cor.4:9; 11:10).

(14) But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. (15) For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. (16) To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task?
2nd Corinthians 2:14-16 NIV

Therefore the means by which this glorification-effect is produced is our faith-response to God's truth, that is, our letting into our hearts of the light of Him who is ***the*** one and only true Light (1Jn.1:5):

(2) For if Abraham really was considered righteous (i.e., in the eyes of men) as a result of the works [he did], then he does have something to boast about – but not in front of God!
(3) What does the scripture actually say? [It actually says that] "Abraham *believed* in God, and [so his faith] was attributed to him for righteousness."
Romans 4:2-3

(1) It is faith [in the Living and written Word], moreover, that substantiates what we hope for. [Faith] provides proof of things unseen. (2) For it is by this [very faith] that believers of old received their divine approval.
Hebrews 11:1-2

God is thus glorified by what He does for us and by what we do in response to His gracious provision. Glorification does not change God who cannot change, but it does change us: *we* learn more about who and what He is, and are blessed thereby. This is true of all His moral creatures. The angels, who in many respects have a far better appreciation of His essence than we can ever have while in these limited bodies, and who have been around a much longer time, are nevertheless still learning about Him – through observing *us*:

(10) The prophets diligently investigated and inquired about this salvation, when they prophesied about this grace [that was to come] to you. (11) For they were eager to discover the precise time the Spirit of Christ within them was signifying as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. (12) It was revealed to them that in prophesying these things, they were not so much serving themselves as they were you – and these same things have now been proclaimed to you through those who gave you the gospel through the Holy Spirit, sent from heaven – *even angels want to look into these things*.
1st Peter 1:10-12

Angels decided their eternal futures "once and for all" before the creation of mankind. In contrast, every good decision we human beings make is resisted and opposed by the world, the flesh and the devil. When we do see through all the clutter and put God first, through believing in His Son our Lord Jesus Christ, and through following Him faithfully thereafter by means of a myriad of decisions large and small, the power of the truth of who God really is, His goodness and the genuine value of responding to it, becomes obvious to observers on this earth and above it – and He is glorified. Whenever we respond to Him, it brings Him glory, not an increase in the sum total of who He is (for He is perfect and complete and unchangeable to a degree we cannot yet properly imagine), but an increase in the level of appreciation He receives from His creatures for the astoundingly loving and gracious God He is. In saving us, blessing us in this life, and in giving us our eternal inheritance, God is glorified by the praise He receives from us and from all who observe His grace overflowing to us, and that recognition and appreciation of His character, that "glory", is His purpose in all He has done on our behalf:

(5) . . . [God] having predestined (i.e., foreordained) us in [His] love for adoption to Himself through Jesus Christ according to the good pleasure of His will, (6) for *the*

purpose of producing (at the point of *salvation*) ***praise for the glory*** of His grace which He has graciously bestowed on us in the Beloved [One].
Ephesians 1:5-6

(11) In whom we also have an inheritance, having been ordained according to the design of Him who is working everything out according to the desire of His will, (12) that we who have previously placed our hope in Christ might serve ***the purpose of*** generating ***praise for His glory*** (in the Christian *life*).
Ephesians 1:11-12

(14) . . . [sealed by the Spirit] who is a pledge of our inheritance for redeeming its preservation, for the ***purpose of*** the ***praise of His glory*** (for all *eternity*).
Ephesians 1:14

God ***is*** the truth, and it is not too much to say that it is the recognition, the understanding, the belief in Him as He really is, the truth about Him who is the truth, that constitutes His glorification.

I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.
John 14:6

God is glorified, God is pleased when we His creatures of our own free-will faith seek Him out, desirous of knowing Him and His truth, then receive, recognize, and believe it, and in that way come to understand more about Him, His wisdom, His grace, and His love. Even for the most highly motivated and consistent among us, our appreciation of these things at present is necessarily dim. For now we see only a reflection of the glory which will on that great day of days be completely revealed to us.

For at the present time our perception [of heavenly things] is like [viewing] a dim reflection in a mirror. But then [when we meet the Lord] we will see [Him] face to face. Now I have only partial knowledge, but then my knowledge [of Him] will be complete (***epi-gnosomai***; cf. ***epignosis***), just as I have always been known completely (***ep-egnosthen***; cf. ***epignosis***) by Him.
1st Corinthians 13:12

In this passage we see a recurrent theme in scripture which is consistently missed in most such discussions, namely, the importance ***to God*** of the process of our ***response*** to Him in receiving the gift of truth and of Jesus Christ who is the Truth. God is who He is, perfect in every way; we are imperfect, but are charged with changing and adapting ourselves to Him. The way in which we make this transformation of becoming more acceptable to Him is through adjusting our will to His WILL. When we use our free-will to believe His truth, we are changed, first at salvation through being reborn by accepting the truth of the gospel, then throughout our Christian lives as we believe and apply the wonders of His Word of truth, until finally when the day of eternity dawns and we know Him fully as He is in all His glory. God desires these responses from all of

His creatures, and He is glorified when they accept the truth about His glorious Person and receive in faith what He has given. Thus God's purpose in creation is all about Him the Creator, yet it is also all about us His creatures: the two cannot be separated – and are bound together by the Gift, Jesus Christ, and our response in accepting Him. God made us for Himself and also for ourselves, and it is the wedding of the two in Jesus which explains His purpose. We are blessed to exist, He is pleased to have us exist, and our coming to appreciate His love in making us to be with Him and His grace in paying the price in Jesus for this to be possible brings Him glory.

Without the world being configured as it is, namely, as a place where we are at present "groping" to find God (Acts 17:27; cf. Deut.4:29), and where even the angels still have much to learn from the working out of God's plan of salvation in human history (1Pet.1:12), neither they nor we could really ever have come to understand fully how much God loves us – for the depth of His love is only made fully obvious in His sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sins – nor could we or they make a genuine choice about whether or not to love Him back, absent the existence of this arena of free-will which is the world. And without having constructed history as He has done, with the *full* complement of actual human beings and angels (Gen.1:26-27; Ps.119:96 [Hebrew]), both created in space-time and given the historical opportunity to make an uncoerced choice for themselves, it would have been impossible to create only those of us who do wish to be with Him and who do count it our deepest joy to have been able to embrace our Lord Jesus in a grip of faith that we intend to hold tight until the end, come what may. For it is fair to say that without our experience of history and the operation of moral choice therein we would, we could never really understand all we need to know about the love and goodness of God. Perhaps we might otherwise have some understanding of it theoretically, but as it is (and as we shall see in eternity in a more detailed examination of all that has passed) we know it deeply and experientially – through personal experience. And God is glorified by our knowledge fully assimilated and acquired by faith, that is, our *epignosis* (see section II below), our belief, our true appreciation through faith of what He has done for us in Jesus Christ. For we are important to Him, and it is important to Him that we realize just how important to Him we are (something which is completely impossible without a deep understanding of what Jesus did for us on the cross and what the Father did for us in judging all of humanity's sins in Him). That is the critical and often overlooked "flip-side" of our coming to realize in life how important, how all-important, God is to us. We love Him because He loved us first (1Jn.4:19), and He is glorified when we come to appreciate just how much He loves us.

That God receives pleasure out of doing all that He does for us and having us appreciate it should not be at all surprising. There is joy in receiving, true, but even among sinful human beings there is also joy in giving; and for those acting in love, the pleasure of giving often surpasses any delight in receiving: it truly is "more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Since God has need of nothing (Acts 17:24-25), the only thing He can "get" from us in any sense of the word is a positive response. Even that response, of course, is absolutely for our own good, because in responding to the gospel we are saved, and in responding to Him and His truth after entering into a relationship of love with Him and our dear Savior we grow spiritually and earn eternal rewards thereby. These rewards, just like our salvation, unquestionably do please Him (as

scripture everywhere affirms), but without any doubt the blessing and the benefit we receive from our response to Him and His truth in these matters is disproportionately beneficial to us (especially inasmuch as God could never actually need anything from us).

Indeed, none of this should surprise us since God has "wired" this emotion of pleasure in giving into all of us as is evident from the joy we feel in nurturing our children and in the positive responses we may receive for the things we do for all those we love. It is therefore no accident that God made mankind "male and female", and ordained the family as the means of expanding the human race (i.e., precisely to teach us these lessons so that we might the better come to appreciate our heavenly Father). It is also, moreover, no accident that we the Church are, collectively, the Bride of Christ, the partner for whom our dear Lord died, giving us His all on the cross in order to save us from a fate worse than mere physical death: Jesus faced the continual burning of fiery judgment to expiate our sins that we might be delivered from the horrible fate of the second death. Only someone who loves his partner more than his own life could come close to understanding such a sacrifice, and God has given us human love precisely that we might glean some measure of understanding of His love for us thereby, a love so astounding that He gave up Jesus to death on our behalf, and of our Lord's love for us, a love so amazing that He sacrificed everything to deliver us from death.

The ability to appreciate sacrificial love is thus part of the image of God, part of what it means to be an *'el*. We are capable of giving in love, and even of sacrificial giving. Although we all fall short of the perfect ideal of such self-sacrificing love, even in our observation of those who have opted for complete selfishness instead the opposite principle of self-sacrifice is all that much clearer to us for the contrast. Confronted with the real thing, the total and completely *un*-selfish sacrifice of Jesus Christ, because of how God has made us we do have the capacity of heart to appreciate Him, to respond to Him, to love Him in return – and that is true even in the case of the countless millions in human history who have refused to do so.

For a man ought not to wear adorned hair [an effeminate mark of submission] since he is the image and glory of God. A woman, on the other hand, is the glory of her husband.
1st Corinthians 11:7

As the Bride of Christ, we are to respond to Him in the precise manner that an ideal wife would to an ideal husband. In this life, of course, there are no ideal husbands (or ideal wives either, for that matter). But we Christians *do* have an ideal Husband, and He is glorified by our responsiveness to Him (Eph.5:22-33). And how do we respond? We respond by seeking out, believing, and living the truth of the Word of God to the glory of Him who is the living Word of God. By our response to truth, we learn more and more about who He really is, His glory, and He is pleased and glorified when we do. That glorification includes the revelation of His glory in our hearts and in the world by our actions which in turn reflect that truth in our hearts, because through this process who He is becomes manifest to others as well as they observe the transformation His truth produces in us. And not only that. As we come to know Him better and better, and as we draw nearer to Him day by day, we draw closer to the glory of which we will one day be fully a part.

You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me *into glory*.
Psalm 73:24

For it was fitting for [the Father] to make complete through sufferings Him on whose account all things exist and through whom all things exist, namely, the Captain of their salvation, even Him who has led many sons *to glory*, [our Lord Jesus Christ].
Hebrews 2:10

[It is] through these [divine blessings] that the great and honorable promises have been granted to us, so that through them we might become *partakers of the divine nature*, having [through salvation] escaped earthly corruption and its lust.
2nd Peter 1:4

That is the reason we are here: to be saved and to be blessed, and our salvation and blessing please and glorify God. Or, to put it the other way around, we are here to please and glorify God, which is the only way we can be saved and blessed. Either way, God's purpose *for us* is to respond to Him. In order to fulfill our purpose for existing, all we need to do is to say "yes" to Him and His truth through faith in the gospel and the gift of Jesus Christ (and as believers to continue to respond positively to Him and His truth throughout our earthly lives). We only need to say "yes" and take with joy the inestimable Gift that He offers us; or, to put it the other way around, since God has already done everything for us in His immeasurable love in the sacrifice of His beloved Son on our behalf, all any human being really needs to do to be saved is to "not say *no*".

As the rebellious pot of Romans 9:18-21 illustrates, most of humanity has chosen not to accept God and His Gift, but has opted instead to rebuff His unfathomable love in Jesus Christ. Instead of the God-given glory that was theirs for the asking, in the folly arrogance always induces they have instead sold their eternal birthright for a mess of pottage (Gen.25:29-34).

(22) Claiming to be wise, they became foolish, (23) for *they exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God* for images and likenesses of corruptible men, of birds and beasts and reptiles.
Romans 1:22-23

The creation of the perfect sum and perfect variety of human and angelic creatures necessitated as much. The granting of the godlike power of saying "yes" inevitably occasioned many a "no", and without the possibility of "no" there could be no opportunity for those of us who do love Him to say "yes". Free-will operating without coercive restraint in time is the mechanism of the Plan of God which sorts out the "no" from the "yes", and in the great wisdom of God it does so in a completely free and self-selecting way. We are who we choose to be for that is how God made us. Time, human history, weeds out the wheat (the "yes") from the chaff (the "no"). In the end, God loses not a single person who purposed "yes" in their heart of hearts, and the salvation of all who do respond to Him brings Him glory now and will do so forevermore. For we who are of the "yes" in Jesus Christ will sing His praises and proclaim His glory for all eternity, world

without end.

For the Son of God, Christ Jesus, the One who was proclaimed among you through us, through myself and Silvanus (i.e., Silas) and Timothy, did not become "yes and no", but He became "yes!". (20) For as many promises of God as there are, are "yes!" in Him (i.e., Jesus Christ). And through Him the "amen!" [is said] to God *for [His] glory through us*.
2nd Corinthians 1:19-20

b. God's desire for all to be saved

As we have seen above, God has placed the names of all human beings in His Book of Life which was written before the creation of the world, and it is only by rejecting Him and His plan of salvation offered in Jesus Christ that a person's name is blotted out of that book (Rev.13:8; cf. Ex.32:33; Ps.69:28; Dan.12:1; Phil.4:3; Rev.3:5). The universal inclusion of all human beings in God's book of salvation shows unequivocally His desire for all to be saved. For just as the world could not be created without obligating Jesus Christ to become a man and die for its sins, so this placement in the book of the names of even those who would reject Him required our Lord to die for their sins as well – otherwise the offer and possibility of salvation would not be genuine. There is no greater testimony to the Father's desire for all to be saved than that He actually did judge His beloved Son for the sins of everyone – not only for the sins of those who come to accept Him, but also for those who fail to receive Him and even for those who would emphatically and willfully reject Him (Ezek.18:23; Matt.18:14; Jn.1:29; 12:47; Rom.5:18; 2Cor.5:14-15; 1Tim.2:4-6; 2Tim.2:24-26; 2Pet.3:9; 1Jn.2:2; cf. Lam.3:33).

(8) "Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? (9) And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' (10) In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."
Luke 15:8-10 NIV

We are all very valuable to God, for He has paid the supreme price for us all in the sacrifice of His one and only dear Son Jesus Christ. Moreover, as the passage above demonstrates clearly, God's love for the entire world is no passive thing. God has not only made salvation possible for all through the cross of Jesus Christ – He is eagerly and continually seeking out His prodigal sons and daughters out of a deep desire for them to repent of their indifference and hostility to Him so as to be saved. God does everything He can do in shepherding and guiding us all towards faith in His Son, everything, that is, except violating our free-will in forcing us to believe in Jesus.

(10) "See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven. (12) "What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? (13) And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that

did not wander off. (14) *In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.*"

Matthew 18:10-14 NIV

It is thus a testament to the incredible hardness of the human heart that so many reject the offer of salvation in Jesus Christ, resisting God's gracious and insistent efforts to bring them back at every critical turning point in their lives. In addition to providing salvation to those who desire it, therefore, the crucible of history is also designed to demonstrate indisputably not only the resoluteness of the choice of all those who turn away from God, but also the perfect love that He has consistently demonstrated to them in spite of their spurning of His love.

"Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other."
Isaiah 45:22 NIV

(16) For God loved the world so much that He gave [up] His one and only Son, [with the purpose] that everyone who believes in Him should not be lost [forever], but have eternal life [instead]. (17) For God did not send His Son into the world to judge the world, but so that the world might be saved through Him. (18) The one who believes in Him is not being judged, but the one who does not believe has already been judged on the grounds that he has not put his faith in the Name (i.e., the Person) of God's one and only Son.

John 3:16-18

For this reason we toil and strive, for we have put our hope in the Living God who is the Savior of all men, especially believers.

1st Timothy 4:10

(9) In this God's love has been revealed in us, that He sent His only Son into the world that we might live through Him. (10) In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atonement for our sins.

1st John 4:9-10

c. The essential nature of mankind

(1) The heavens recount the glory of God, and the firmament tells of the work of His hands. (2) One day after another pours forth [His] words, and one night after another declares [His] knowledge. (3) There is no tongue or culture that cannot understand their voice (i.e., of the heavens/firmament). (4) Their design has gone out into (i.e., "is visible throughout") the entire earth, and their words to the end of the world.

Psalms 19:1-4a

To whom does creation proclaim "the glory of God", to whom does it "tell of the work of His hands", and to whom does it "declare knowledge" if not to us His sons and daughters? We are all given to understand the message of creation, regardless of our language or nation, our "tongue or culture", for the divine design in making all things has proceeded to the farthest corners of God's

world, "their words to the end of the world". The message of God, however delivered, is never delivered in vain. His Word "never returns empty", but always fulfills "the purpose for which" He sends it forth (Is.55:11). The message sent by the divine design, indelibly stamped in bold letters upon every aspect of creation from the subatomic structure of the atom to the awe-inspiring architecture of the universe's galaxies to the intricacies of the human body and the human mind, is incontrovertible: there is a God, and He is eminently wise, powerful, and good. Therefore all who reject this universally proclaimed truth are without excuse:

(18) God's wrath is about to be revealed from heaven upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness – on men who suppress the truth [in their hearts about God] in their unrighteousness. (19) For that which can be known about God [from everyday experience] is obvious to them, because God has made it obvious. (20) His nature, though invisible, is nevertheless plainly apparent, and has been since His foundation of the world, for it may be clearly inferred from this creation of His – [this is true of] both His eternal power and His divinity – so that they are without any excuse: (21) **they knew about God**, but they neither honored Him as God nor thanked Him. Instead, they gave themselves over to [the] vanity [of this world] in their speculations, and their senseless hearts were filled with darkness.

Romans 1:18-21

Scripture is unequivocal on this point: everyone "knows about God", because He has made Himself unavoidably obvious in all He has made. The message about Him, His true nature, its divinity and power, and His worthiness to be worshiped and thanked for giving us this world and this life are truths which can only be denied through blatant and willful self-deception: all atheists, to the extent they really do not believe God exists, having only "achieved" that state by a consistent hardening of their hearts and eradicating the truth they once knew to point where such patent distortions of the truth can be believed (i.e., they have "exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for [such corruptible false] images": Rom.1:23). Lies of this egregious sort can only be accepted after the truth has first been rejected: they "knew about God", but instead of responding to Him, they blotted Him out of their hearts and gave themselves over to "the vanities of this world", with the result that "their [now] senseless hearts were filled with darkness". "Knowing God" is therefore not an unusual thing but a **universal** thing, not only because of how He made the universe – to sing His praises day and night – but also because of how He made us.

[God] has made everything beautiful in its [foreordained] time; but He has also placed [the notion of] eternity in the hearts of mankind – and [He has done this], moreover, without Man being able to discover the work which God has done from the beginning unto the end.

Ecclesiastes 3:11

The true Light which illuminates every human being was coming into the world.

John 1:9

Human beings are God's offspring in a very real sense (Acts 17:28-29). Not only did our

physical forms all spring from Adam whose body was constructed by the Lord Himself, but our human spirits, the other part of our dual make-up as human beings, are in each and every case directly created by God at birth.⁹ That is to say, mankind has a spiritual part created and deliberately designed by God to parallel His own Spirit. Not only do we have as an essential facet of our human spirit self-awareness and self-consciousness as a result of the image of God but we also have the inherent ability (and necessity) to choose. Furthermore, until we choose to respond to God and accept the relationship that our loving Father holds out to us in Jesus Christ, there will continue to be a tremendously large "hole" in our inner-person or "heart" (i.e., the place where spirit and body come together).

(9) For in Him (i.e., Jesus Christ), dwells all of the fullness of deity in bodily form. (10) And it is in Him that you have received your complete fulfillment, [Jesus], who is the Head of every ruler and [every] power.
Colossians 2:9-10

Without the rebirth which can only come from God through response to the gracious gift of His beloved Son, there will ever be a gnawing spiritual emptiness within. This emptiness can of course be denied, coped with, papered over, substituted for and ignored. Indeed, the record of secular history writ large and small is essentially a tale of human attempts to replace this primal need for God with material gain, personal advancement, culture, false religion, pleasure, distractions, intellectual pursuits and what have you. The one thing all such activities have in common is that to the extent that they seek to replace the need for God in attempting to do so, to that same extent they are all in truth a replacing of God with self in the hardened hearts of those who make this horrifically poor bargain. Such efforts cannot bring true happiness, only pseudo or "myth-happiness", and such substitutes can never satisfy the divinely built-in need in our spirits for a relationship with our Creator.¹⁰ Just as God made Adam to need a "helper suitable for him", allowed him by personal investigation to see that this was true, then provided Eve, the perfect partner for him,¹¹ so also God has created each of us to need Him, allows us to see this in the world through our personal experiences, then leads us to the perfect Husband, our dear Savior Jesus Christ, all of us, that is, who have set our hearts on seeking Him in order to fill this yawning void within us. We know instinctively that God exists, that He is good, and that we need Him as the true focus of our lives. For all who respond to this truth, the gospel is ever forthcoming and salvation inevitably results. The amazing thing about the human experience is that most human beings have persisted in replacing this truth with an elaborate collection of lies.

⁹ See "The Human Spirit" in section II.3 of part 3A of the Bible Basics series, "Anthropology".

¹⁰ See part 4 of The Satanic Rebellion, section I, "Strangers in the Devil's Realm".

¹¹ See "The Creation of Eve" in section II.5 of part 3A of the Bible Basics series, "Anthropology".

. . . they knew about God, but they neither honored Him as God nor thanked Him. Instead, they gave themselves over to [the] vanity [of this world] in their speculations, and their senseless hearts were filled with darkness.

Romans 1:21

In addition to our awareness of God and the inherent need for Him hard-wired into our hearts, God has also equipped every human being with a natural conscience which received an expanded ability to distinguish between right and wrong when our first parents ate of the tree of "knowing good and evil".¹² Coupled with the undeniable mortality we all possess and the universal knowledge of the existence of a perfect and righteous God, it would seem that every human being ought early on in life to be overcome by the need to seek a solution to sin, death and the inevitable judgment to follow, especially given the built-in need for God we all possess. It is in the nature of free will, however, that in the absence of *immediately* impending judgment and in the absence of the completely *unveiled* glory of God, most human beings have and will continue to make gods of themselves instead, preferring to live the short time of their lives in independence from their Maker rather than to submit to Him in any way (Matt.23:37; cf. Job 15:25), even if this unwillingness is falsely excused on the pretext of "fear" (cf. Matt.25:14-30; Lk.19:12-27).

(12) But man, despite his riches, does not endure; he is like the beasts that perish. (13) This is the fate of those who trust in themselves, and of their followers, who approve their sayings.

Psalm 49:12-13 NIV (cf. v.6; Prov.28:26)

Considering that God made us, that we belong to Him, and that "submission" consists in recognizing through faith the awesome glory He actually does possess and in accepting the inestimable gift He actually has given us in the sacrifice of His own dear Son on our behalf, such self-willed behavior is hardly laudatory. In fact, not only would it appear to be the height of arrogance to refuse so great a salvation offered to us at no cost to ourselves, throwing it back in the process right into the face of the Father who put His own dear Son to death for us, but it would also seem an act of sheer insanity – were it not for the unequivocal fact that all who do so know exactly what they are doing. God allows them to exercise their free will as they truly want to, and allows them to harden their hearts to an ever increasing degree so as to be able to press their arrogance and disdain for Him to ever higher levels – as long, that is, as they remain here in the devil's world.¹³

(11) And for this [very] reason God is going to send upon them an empowerment of error

¹² See "The Conscience" in section I.3 of part 3B of the Bible Basics series, "Hamartiology".

¹³ For the process and effect of this hardening of the heart, see "Exodus 14: Hardening Pharaoh's Heart".

so that they may believe the lie, (12) in order that they may be condemned, [even all those] who have not believed the truth but have [instead] approved of unrighteousness.
2nd Thessalonians 2:11-12

In order for the principle of genuine and uncoerced choice to be maintained, therefore, it is an essential if regrettably necessary part of the nature of every one of us to be able to deny the evidence for God's existence, His goodness, His power, and His justice, and to be able to ignore the obvious consequences for human beings who are mortal and must inevitably stand before Him to be judged after death: condemnation for our unrighteousness (absent a Substitute whose person and work we have embraced through faith). Most human beings walk about in a self-induced fog of illusion concerning the true realities of this life and the repercussions of our choices here on our status in the next. In order to save those of us who would choose to put reality over ego and flee to a loving Savior for eternal deliverance, God had to allow unbelievers to be able to ignore this same reality and assert the true intentions of their own hearts instead.

(10) When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. (11) He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables (12) so that, " 'they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!' "

Mark 4:10-12 NIV

d. The sacrifice of Christ proof-positive of God's goodwill towards all

God is love (1Jn.4:7-8). And there is no greater demonstration of His gracious and kindly disposition towards each and every one of His creatures than His sacrifice on our behalf of the One He loved with a perfect love before the world began, our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

(6) For not only did Christ die for us while we were helpless – He even did so at the critical time, [dying] on our behalf, ungodly though we were. (7) For scarcely will someone die on behalf of a righteous person; and perhaps someone might also risk death on behalf of a good person. (8) But God commends His love towards us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:6-8

No greater gift could possibly be given – and to completely undeserving and largely ungrateful recipients at that (2Cor.9:15; cf. Rom.5:1-17; 6:23). No more irrefutable proof could be offered for our Lord's love for us and for His intention that we all be saved than that He died on our behalf

(12) My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. (13) Greater love has no one than this, than that he lay down his life for his friends.

John 15:12-13

Such love surpasses human understanding, and is a sure guarantee of our God's desire that all His children be delivered from judgment through the price paid in deepest love by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ in our place.

(14) For this reason I bow my knees to the Father, (15) from whom His entire family in heaven and on earth has received its name, (16) that He may grant you according to the riches of His glory to be powerfully strengthened in your inner person through His Spirit, (17) so that, rooted and grounded in love, Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, (18) so that you may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height [of His love for you], (19) [that is], so that you may know the love of Christ which outstrips [human] understanding [in every way], and so that you may be filled up [to the brim] with the entire "fullness" of God.

Ephesians 3:14-19

e. The inevitability of disobedience if freedom is really free

Yes, in spite of God's structuring of the universe entirely on our behalf, in spite of His desire that we all come back to Him of our own free-will faith, in spite of the fact that we all possess in abundance everything we need to do so, and, most impressively, in spite of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross in paying the supreme penalty to wash away the sins of all mankind and thereby make possible the reconciliation to the Father of all things in heaven and on earth, many of the angels have and most human beings will refuse God's mercy and grace. This was always an inevitable result of creating men and angels with genuine free will, and a necessary eventuality if we who do love Him were to be created and saved. For without free will, that essential facet of our spirits which so quintessentially defines our true selves, we would not be who we are, and if all moral creatures were not given genuine choice, none of us could have been created – God's creation is perfect, and the fact that it actually *does* contain each type shows *ipso facto* that such a complete creation was necessary. The existence of rebellious and disobedient creatures determined to be condemned contrary to God's desire and in spite of Christ's sacrifice demonstrates indisputably, therefore, that our will really is free. The opportunity of response to God makes necessary the possibility of refusal to submit to Him (Jer.23:26; Rom.10:3; 10:16).

(11) "But my people would not listen to me; Israel would not submit to me. (12) So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own devices.

Psalm 89:11 NIV

2. The Plan of God for the Salvation of Individual Believers

Although the word "plan" is never actually used in scripture to describe God's construction of history (despite its occasional occurrence in that regard in some English translations, e.g., Eph.1:11 NIV; Acts 2:23 NASB), the concept is nevertheless ubiquitous and is represented by a variety of Greek and Hebrew words, for example, *prothesis*, "intent", and *boule*, "counsel" in the aforementioned passages in Ephesians and Acts respectively:

In whom we also have an inheritance, having been ordained according to *the design* (Gk. πρόθεσις, *prothesis*) of Him who is working everything out according to the desire of His will.

Ephesians 1:11

This man was handed over to you by God's *set purpose* (Gk. βουλή, *boule*) and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

Acts 2:23 NIV

Through Jesus Christ, the Father made everything that exists, and God is in control of everything that happens in human history, having decreed it in eternity past according to a plan so specific and detailed that it cannot really be fathomed:

In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind.

Job 12:10 NIV

(1) O Lord, You have searched me and known me. (2) You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. (3) You scrutinize my path and my lying down, and are intimately acquainted with all my ways. (4) Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O Lord, You know it all. (5) You have enclosed me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me. (6) Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is too high, I cannot attain to it. (7) Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? (8) If I ascend to heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. (9) If I take the wings of the dawn, if I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, (10) even there Your hand will lead me, and Your right hand will lay hold of me. (11) If I say, "Surely the darkness will overwhelm me, and the light around me will be night," (12) even the darkness is not dark to You, and the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to You. (13) For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb. (14) I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well. (15) My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth; (16) Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them. (17) How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them! (18) If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand. When I awake, I am still with You.

Psalms 139:1-18 NASB

The Plan of God comprises everything that has and will be made and done, both by God Himself and by all of the free-will, moral agents He has and will create during the course of history. There are therefore three ways or "levels" on which to consider the all-encompassing Plan of God for human history, analogous to those found in military operations (not at all surprising when we

consider that our Lord's conquest of the satanic rebellion is essentially a military operation¹⁴): 1) the overarching, unified or "strategic" level of the plan (our subject immediately below in section 2.a of this study); 2) the large-scale implementation of God's strategy over time or "operational" level where in three phases God judges His enemies, restores His people, and replaces the former with the latter (treated in the Satanic Rebellion series, especially part 5, "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement"); and 3) the lives of individual believers or "tactical" level (whose initial stages are covered below in section II of this study, "How to be saved"; part 6A of this series, "Peripateology: the Study of the Christian Walk", will focus on the tactical aspects of the Christian life after salvation).

It is of this [Church] that I, [Paul], have become a minister according to God's mandate given to me for dispensing [the truth] to you, in order to bring completeness to **God's Plan** (lit., "word", Gk. *logos*).
Colossians 1:25

[God who] has [now] at just the right time revealed **His Plan** (lit., *logos*) through the proclamation [of the gospel] with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior.
Titus 1:3

As suggested by our translations of the passages above, the word which best sums up the overarching Plan of God in all of its comprehensive power is the Greek noun *logos* (λόγος): "word", a term which in Greek can span the semantic distance from a single "word" to the entire collection of thought expressed or unexpressed upon which actions are taken. The "Word of God" thus encompasses more than the expressed words of God contained in the Bible; it also embraces the entirety of God's thought and intent in regard to His creation (cf. Rom.9:6; 2Pet.3:5-7), and most particularly so in the Person of the One through whom and for whom everything has been created, Jesus Christ **the** Word of God (Jn.1:1; 1:14; Rev.19:13; cf. 1Jn.1:2;), the One who embodies God's Plan, the One who fulfills God's Plan, and the One for whom the Plan of God has been decreed (Col.1:15-17).

(1) **The Word** [Jesus Christ] existed at the very beginning, and there was reciprocity between **the Word** and God [the Father]. And **the Word** was God. (2) This One both existed and enjoyed reciprocity with God from the very beginning. (3) Everything came into being through Him, and without Him, nothing has come into being which has in fact come into being. (4) In Him was life, and this life was the light of men.

¹⁴ Christ's successful expiation of the sins of the world on the cross is described in terms of a military victory (Col.2:15; Rev.4:4-5), and that is what His conquest of the beast at Armageddon certainly is (cf. Rev.19:11-21). Compare also the fact that the ark of the covenant is a representation of the heavenly throne of God which is itself a "battle chariot", representing the Lord's posture of reconquest and vindication. See "The Throne of God" in section I.3.b of Coming Tribulation part 2B.

John 1:1-4

In strategic terms, the Word sums up the objective of the grand design of the Plan of God, a perfect, eternal state populated by willing creatures who have been wed to the Living Word, Jesus Christ, the One who embodies the Father's will and who has fulfilled His plan.

What we have seen from the beginning, what we have heard and seen with our eyes, what we have observed and touched with our hands – this is about *the Word of life* [Jesus Christ].

1st John 1:1

In operational terms, the Word refers to the central person of History, our Lord Jesus Christ, who came into the world to save it. He is the One who is implementing God's plan in replacing Satan in the three phases of judgment, restoration and replacement (see the Satanic Rebellion series, especially part 5, "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement"). He is the One in whom we are saved when we believe in Him and His work by accepting the truth of the Word of salvation, the gospel, the gift of eternal life.

And *the Word became flesh* and tented among us. And we beheld His glory, a glory like that of a one and only Son from [the] Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:14

(11) And I saw the sky above opened up, and, behold, a white horse, and the One seated on it is called "Faithful and True", and in righteousness He renders judgment and makes war. (12) And His eyes were a flame of fire, and on His head were many [kingly] crowns, with names written [on them] which no one knows except He Himself. (13) And He is dressed in a robe splattered all about with blood, and His Name has [always] been called, "*The Word of God*".

Revelation 19:11-13

In tactical terms, the spoken Word is the truth about the Living Word who has fulfilled God's plan of salvation through His incarnation and work on the cross in dying for our sins.

Whenever anyone hears *the message* (lit., "word", *logos*) of the kingdom but does not let it [penetrate fully] in[to his heart], the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the one sown beside the road.

Matthew 13:19

This is the meaning of the parable: the seed is *the Word* (*logos*) of God.

Luke 8:11

The one who hears *my Word* (*logos*) and puts his faith in the One who sent *Me* has eternal life.

John 5:24

The objective of the Plan of God is **salvation**: its (strategic) declaration (*Logos* – Plan of the Father), its (operational) completion (*Logos* – Person and Work of the Son), and its (tactical) fulfillment in the lives of individual believers (*Logos* – Message of Good News or Gospel mediated by the Holy Spirit). Thus, the Plan of God **is** the Logos, Jesus Christ, the Word of God, the One who perfectly represents the thinking and the planning of the Father (1Cor.2:16), the One who has perfectly carried out the plan (Heb.1:3), and the One who is Himself the message or Logos which must be believed in order to be saved when the Holy Spirit makes the truth of the gospel understandable to the person in question (Jn.3:18-19). As the Word of God, therefore, Jesus Christ has been given a place of honor in the plan even above the hallowed Name of God the Father Himself, for it is only by responding to Jesus Christ that the Father is truly honored and His plan fulfilled for His creatures who possess free will (cf. Acts 4:12).

I will bow myself in worship toward your holy temple, and I will give thanks to your holy Name on account of your mercy, and on account of your truth, for ***You have magnified Your Word above Your entire Name.***

Psalms 138:2

While [Peter] was still speaking, behold, a cloud suffused with light enveloped them, and, behold, a voice [issued forth] from the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. ***Listen to Him!***"

Matthew 17:5 (cf. 2Pet.1:16-21)

(22) For neither does the Father judge anyone, but he has given all judgment to the Son, (23) in order ***that all may honor the Son*** as they honor the Father.

John 5:22-23a

(47) For this is what the Lord has commanded us: "I have made you [Jesus Christ] a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth." (48) When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and ***honored the word*** of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

Acts 13:47-48 NIV

As the Logos, Jesus **is** the Plan of God in action. He is the revelation of all of the mysteries of God and the message of good news through which all who respond are born again.

As **salvation** is the objective of the Plan of God, and as that salvation has, entirely apart from any effort on our part, been provided to us His creatures in the divine decrees which precede creation, we may call God's plan for His universe "***grace***". For it is entirely through God's grace or favor that we exist at all, and it is entirely through His beneficence that we have the opportunity to choose to be saved and enjoy an eternal life with Him through the ineffably generous sacrifice unto death for our sins of His one and only Son our Lord Jesus Christ. Before He created the universe, God directed His grace or good favor towards all who would respond to His truth in the person of the Logos, Jesus Christ, and this grace results in salvation and eternal life for all who put their ***faith*** (the great divider between the saved and the unsaved) in the God-Man who died

for us. This *is* the Plan of God: moral creatures with free-will responding to the Creator's *grace* through *faith* so as to be *saved*.

For you have been *saved by* [God's] *grace* through faith [in Christ]; and this did not come from you – it is God's gift.

Ephesians 2:8

[God] who *saved* us and called us to a holy calling, not through our works, but through His own [sovereign] choice [of us] and [His] *grace* [towards us], [that grace] which was given to us in Christ Jesus in eternity past.

2nd Timothy 1:9

(3) For we were also once mindless, disobedient, wandering [pointlessly] astray, enslaved to all sorts of lusts and pleasures, living our lives in wickedness and envy, loathsome and hating each other. (4) But [in spite of our prior sinfulness], when the goodness and benevolence of God *our Savior* appeared [in the flesh], (5) not on account of [any] works which we had done in [so-called] righteousness did He save us, but [*He saved us*] through the washing [away of our sins which leads to our] rebirth and [to our] new beginning from the Holy Spirit (6) whom He poured out upon us bountifully through Jesus Christ *our Savior*, (7) so that [now] having been justified [in this way] *by His grace*, we might become heirs in regard to the *eternal life* for which we hope.

Titus 3:3-7

Just as the overall Plan of God can be considered in three dimensions, the *strategic* level (i.e., the "big picture" of God's foreordaining of all things which necessitated the incarnation and sacrifice of Jesus Christ), the *operational* level (i.e., the temporal working out of God's plan for the ages over the seven thousand years of human history in His judging of Satan, His replacing of the evil one and his minions, and His restoration for all who are willing of an eternal relationship with Him – all based upon the cross of Jesus Christ), and the *tactical* level (i.e., God's provision of salvation for individual believers through our free-will faith response to the gift of Jesus Christ), so also in the case of this last dimension we find a similar threefold division whereby the believer "has been saved" (e.g., Rom.8:24; Eph.2:8; 2Tim.1:9), "is being saved" (e.g., Lk.13:22; 1Cor.1:18; 15:2; 2Cor.2:15), and "will be saved" (e.g., Matt.10:22; 24:13; Rom.5:9-10; 1Cor.3:15; 1Pet.1:5; 1:8-9; 2:2; Heb.9:28).

(3) May the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ be praised, who has in His great mercy caused us to be reborn to a hope which lives through Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead, (4) and to an inheritance which will never be destroyed, defiled, or dimmed, but which is being guarded in heaven for us, (5) who are ourselves also being kept safe by God's power and our faith in Him to *an ultimate deliverance* (lit., "salvation", Gk. *soteria*, σωτηρία) *ready to be unveiled at the end of time*.

1st Peter 1:3-5

Sanctification: This process whereby those ordained for eternal life come to put their faith in

Jesus Christ, live their lives to and through Jesus Christ, and will ultimately become One with Jesus Christ in a fully experiential way is called "sanctification".¹⁵ Sanctification, literally, the "rendering holy" of those who choose to turn to God, is the process by which God removes us from the realm of this dead, secular world, and transfers us instead into the realm of the living and the eternal (Rom.6:19-22; 15:16; 1Cor.1:2; 1:30; 6:11; 7:14; Eph.5:26; 1Thes.4:3-7; 5:23; 2Thes.2:13; 2Tim.2:21). Sanctification is the process whereby we are made "saints", "holy ones" who are fit and acceptable to enter and abide in the eternal Kingdom of God.

(9) For this reason we also from the [very] day we heard [of your love] do not cease praying on your behalf and asking that you be fulfilled in regard to the full acceptance (*epignosis*) of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, (10) that you might walk worthy of the Lord to please Him in all things, bearing fruit in every good work, and growing by means of the full knowledge (*epignosis*) of God, (11) being empowered with all power according to His glorious might for all perseverance and patience, with joy (12) giving thanks to the Father who has *rendered you sufficient* to receive your share in the inheritance of the *saints* (i.e., "holy ones") in the light [of eternity], [the very One] (13) who rescued us *from the power of darkness* and delivered us into *the kingdom of His beloved Son*.

Colossians 1:9-13

In the first phase of sanctification, God superintends the lives of all those who are willing to respond to Him in faith, bringing the gospel message to them at just the right time so as to be saved by responding in faith to His truth about the Person and work of Jesus Christ (1Pet.1:2; 2Thes.2:13-14); as a result, we become holy in principle, being accounted righteous by God through our acceptance of Jesus' acceptable work for salvation over our own unacceptable works (Tit.3:4-7). In the second phase of sanctification, God tests the depth of our faith and calls upon us to develop it (Heb.10:14; 1Pet.1:16), so that we may draw ever closer to Him and to the standard of perfect holiness as we respond to His truth in time and fulfill the mandate of the righteousness we have been given (Rom.6:19; 6:22; 1Cor.1:30; 1Thes.4:3; 2Tim.1:9; 2Pet.3:11; Rev.22:11). In the third phase of sanctification, God renders us holy once and for all by resurrecting us in perfect, eternal bodies in which we shall be fit to enjoy sweet fellowship with Him and His Son our Lord forevermore (Rev.20:6; cf. Jn.11:25; 1Cor.15:42; Col.1:12), being thereafter incapable of sin; just as our participation in the resurrection unto life is based upon our entrance into Christ in phase one, so the rewards we shall enjoy for all eternity are based upon our level of responsiveness in phase two to the plan of God and to the truth of Him who is the Truth, our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (1Cor.3:10-15; cf. Rom.12:1).

Thus the actual "process of salvation", otherwise known as sanctification, is a progression which begins even before the believer first accepts Christ and which is completed only at the resurrection. And just as the Plan of God in its strategic sense may be represented by a circle (for

¹⁵ See in part 3B of the Bible Basics series, "Hamartiology", section V.2, "The Principle and Process of Sanctification", and Peter's Epistles, lesson #13: "Sanctification".

in this respect it encompasses all things), in its operational sense by a straight line (to represent its implementation over time), and in its tactical sense by a set of simple points (standing for each individual believer), so it is with the Plan of God for individual believers: our positional sanctification has always been encompassed by the Plan of God; our experiential sanctification tracks our Christian lives from the point of salvation to our entrance into the presence of God; our ultimate sanctification, together with all who have called upon the Name of Jesus Christ for salvation, will be a solid-state point in infinity (with our rewards based upon every decision point in this life where we exercised our free will positively in response to the truth of Jesus Christ). At present, we believers stand between the purposed initial phase of sanctification which has already been accomplished and the wondrous eternal holiness we shall possess forever in the presence of our Savior; responding to the grace of God and the truth of God here in time furthers the progress of our temporal, experiential sanctification, a process which fulfills the Plan of God for us even as it results in His Glory (and our eternal reward; cf. Tit.1:1-3).

Now this is God's will, namely, *your sanctification*.

1st Thessalonians 4:3a

But just as He who has called you is holy, you too should be entirely holy in your behavior. For the scripture says: *Be holy, for I am holy*.

1st Peter 1:15-16

If grace is the name of the Plan of God and salvation-sanctification its objective (with free-will faith being the great principle which divides those who will respond to God from those who will not), the *result* of the Plan of God is always God's *glory*. For who He is in all His wondrous love and mercy has been, is, and will be made thoroughly manifest by the working out of His plan in creature history. While this is true in all three dimensions (strategic, operational, and tactical), it is particularly true that the Plan of God for individual believers inevitably results in His glorification as through our salvation we become part of Him in Jesus Christ, an ineffably wondrous development that reveals so vividly His inexpressibly great goodness in "bringing many sons to glory" through the gift of His one and only dear Son our Lord (Heb.2:10).

In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.

John 14:20 NASB

God is glory, and the gaining of glory in which we believers are encouraged to share through our response to His Son in time is in actuality really the revelation of this truth to an ever greater degree until we all in resurrection with unveiled faces are capable of seeing Him as He really is. This progression of the advancement and the revelation of the glory of God which comes through the salvation, growth and eternal reward of believers (the corresponding purpose and result of the Plan of God in all three phases of the believer's life) is intricately woven into Paul's Ephesian doxology:

(3) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing heaven has [to offer], (4) seeing that even before the world

was founded He chose us in Him to be sanctified and blameless before Him. (5) Having predestined (i.e., foreordained) us in [His] love for adoption to Himself through Jesus Christ according to the good pleasure of His will, (6) **for the purpose of producing praise for the glory** (at **salvation**) of His grace which He has graciously bestowed on us in the Beloved [One]. (7) In whom (i.e., Christ) we possess our ransoming [from sin] (i.e., "redemption") through His blood, the forgiveness of our transgressions according to the riches of His grace, (8) which He caused to superabound towards us in all wisdom and understanding (9) [God] has made known to us the mystery He has willed (according to His own benevolent purpose which He determined in [Christ]) (10) for administering this [present] fulfillment of the epochs: namely the incorporation of all things in Christ, things in heaven, and things on earth – (11) In whom we also have an inheritance, having been ordained according to the design of Him who is working everything out according to the desire of His will, (12) that we who have previously placed our hope in Christ might serve **the purpose of generating praise for His glory** (in the **Christian life**). (13) In [Christ] you also when you heard the Word of truth, the good news of your salvation, in whom [I say], when you believed, you were sealed by the Spirit of promise, the Holy [Spirit], (14) who is a pledge of our inheritance for redeeming its preservation (i.e., safeguarding our resurrection and reward in every way), **for the purpose of the praise of His glory** (in **eternity**).

Ephesians 1:3-14

As this passage tells us, through the Plan of God we believers were blessed with salvation before God made the world (v.4), were foreordained for adoption into the family of God (v.5), and were ordained to eternal reward (v.9), all of which benefits stand firm through having been determined by God's decree pronounced before time began (v.11) and guaranteed by the seal of the Holy Spirit from the moment we believed (vv.13-14). This is the plan of salvation, our deliverance from death and judgment by God's grace in the provision of Jesus Christ in whom we have come to believe, and the ultimate outcome of these wondrous events is God's ever increasing glory, in planning and effecting our salvation (v.6), in providing for our spiritual growth, progress and production, the basis for our eternal rewards (v.12), and in bringing us safe through to the day of resurrection when we will begin to experience our eternal life and rewards to His praise and glory forevermore (v.14).

a. Foreknowledge and the Divine Decrees

Grass withers. Flowers fade. But the Word of our God will stand forever.

Isaiah 40:8

The term "divine decrees", while not occurring in scripture, is the traditional theological terminology used to express the fact that all of creature history has come about as the result of the express will of God. The *logos*, or divine "word" (i.e., a single, unified "decree"), as expressing this overall Plan of God, is a better term on two scores: 1) as we have seen above, it is a biblical designation; 2) unlike "decrees", which with their plural number may indicate something reactive, *logos* presents the Plan of God as it actually is, namely, a unified and comprehensive

whole: everything that has happened, is happening, or will happen from the beginning of time to the end has been determined in a perfect, all-encompassing totality which has left nothing to chance. Indeed, there can be no "chance", since God has foreordained, God has "decreed" every event in the history of the world no matter how seemingly minute and insignificant (cf. Ps.104:10-30). Indeed, without His decree nothing could ever have taken place.

Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.
Proverbs 19:21 NIV

"Do you not fear Me?" declares the Lord, "Do you not tremble in My presence? For I have placed the sand as a boundary for the sea, an eternal decree, so it cannot cross over it. Though the waves toss, yet they cannot prevail; Though they roar, yet they cannot cross over it."
Jeremiah 5:22 NASB

(29) Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. (30) And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. (31) So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.
Matthew 10:29-31 NIV

If this complete taking into account of every possible action is true of what we might see as random events, how much more is it not so in the case of the free-will actions of moral creatures?

A person's days are determined; you have *decreed* the number of his months and have set limits he cannot exceed.
Job 14:5 NIV

(8) Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the people of the world revere him. (9) For *he spoke*, and it came to be; *he commanded*, and it stood firm. (10) The Lord foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples. (11) But *the plans* (lit., singular) of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.
Psalm 33:8-11 NIV

All the days *ordained* for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.
Psalm 139:16b NIV (cf. Job 21:21; Ps 31:15a; 39:4; 90:12)

Who can speak and have it happen if the Lord has not *decreed* it?
Lamentations 3:37 NIV

As the Creator, God invented, created, and controls time (cf. Josh.10:13-14). Everything that has ever happened or ever will happen has already been decreed by Him (Ps.56:8; 139:16; Jer.33:25; Rom.8:28-30; Eph.1:11; 1Pet.1:2). While this is true of everything without exception, scripture emphasizes three major areas of God's foreordained control of events: 1) Jesus Christ, the Logos, the One for whom and through whom all things have been created, and the One without whom none of what goes on under the sun would have any point whatsoever; 2) God's morally

responsible creatures (i.e., human beings and angels), namely, those who have been created to respond to Jesus Christ; 3) history itself, the process wherein God allows the free-will of His creatures to determine their eternal status (and, in the case of believers, our eternal rewards). As is no doubt clear from the above description, these three are in fact indistinguishable: Jesus is here for us, we are here for Jesus, and history is the "here" we presently and temporarily inhabit.

1) Jesus Christ: As we have had occasion to demonstrate many times in the past, Jesus Christ is the central Person of history.¹⁶ His becoming a human being proves that mankind is not somehow God's second best (cf. Heb.2:16), while His sacrifice on the cross is both the cornerstone of the Plan of God and the true focal point of all creature history. For, in a very fundamental way, Jesus *is* the Plan God: we have been created and have been placed here in time in order to respond to God with our divinely constructed free-will (Jn.15:16 in Greek), and that response must come in the form of accepting the Person and the work of Jesus Christ, of believing and accepting the *word* (or gospel) concerning Him who is the Word (or *logos*) of God. It is therefore impossible to speak of history from the divine point of view without speaking of the One for whom history has been created: we are here and "here" exists that we may respond to Him.

"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day."
John 6:44 NIV

And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to Myself.
John 12:32

These passages not only show the eagerness on behalf of the Father and the Son to save all of humanity but also their active involvement in the lives of all human beings to draw each and every one to salvation. But in fact few respond to God's will, God's desire, and God's not insubstantial efforts to lead all of His children to salvation (Christ died for all, and the entire universe is structured to proclaim His glory and the need for salvation). In reality, therefore, this failure to be saved has nothing to do with God who has made every provision for salvation, most particularly in the gift of His one and only dear Son to die on our behalf, but has everything to do with the hardened hearts of mankind who by and large are unwilling to accept the gift at the price of acknowledging Christ's Person and Christ's work for them. Thus it is that from the divine perspective the cross divides human history not only chronologically (with all of human history before it anticipating that fundamental event and with all of human history afterwards looking back to it) but also individually: the cross divides the believer from his or her former life of unbelief and his or her new birth and entrance into the family of God by grace through faith; the cross divides the unbeliever from God because of his or her unwillingness to enter through the one and only gate of salvation: faith in the Person and work of the One who died to make that

¹⁶ See especially part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, section II.1, "The One Central Person of Human History".

salvation available to all. In every respect, then, Jesus' life and death for us all really is "the conjunction of the ages" (Heb.9:26; cf. Rom.5:6; Gal.4:4; 1Tim.2:6).

(1) God, from antiquity having communicated to our fathers in the prophets at many times and in many ways, (2) has in these last days communicated to us in a Son, [the One] whom He has appointed heir of all things, [the One] through whom He created the universe. (3) He is the shining forth of [the Father's] glory, the precise image of His essence, the One who sustains the universe by His mighty Word. When He had accomplished the cleansing of [our] sins, He took His seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Hebrews 1:1-3

As the passage above makes so very clear, the coming of Jesus Christ and His death for us on the cross separated the previous time of shadows from the present time of reality. Christ's sacrifice is *the* cornerstone upon which the Plan of God is founded (Ps.118:22; Is.8:13-15; 28:16; Dan.2:34-45; Matt.16:18; 21:42; 1Cor.10:4; 1Pet.2:4-8), so that all of history as it actually unfolds according to the eternal decrees of God is predicated upon the cross (Eph.1:9-10; Col.1:17-20; 2Tim.1:9-10; cf. Matt.21:42; Rom.5:6; 8:29-30; 1Cor.8:6; Eph.2:20; 1Pet.2:6-7; Heb.9:26).

I will surely tell of the *decree* of the Lord: He said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.

Psalms 2:7 NASB

The Son of Man will go as it *has been decreed*. But woe to that man who betrays him!

Luke 22:22 NIV

And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which *was ordained* of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.

Acts 10:42 KJV

(3) [The gospel] which is about [God's] Son, the One who was born of the seed of David according to His flesh, (4) and *ordained* as God's Son by the power of the Spirit of Holiness through resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 1:3-4

(8) To me, the least of all His holy ones, this gracious charge has been entrusted: to proclaim to the gentiles the unfathomable wealth that is Christ, (9) and to shed light on this mystery[, the calling out of the gentiles] which is now being brought to pass (lit., "the dispensation" of it), though it was once hidden from the ages in God who created everything. (10) God [did this] so that [His] enigmatically intricate wisdom might be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms through the agency of the Church, (11) according to *His plan for the ages* (i.e., history) which He has *implemented in [the person of]* Christ Jesus our Lord.

Ephesians 3:8-11

(16) Everything in the heavens and on the earth was created by Him (Jesus Christ), things invisible as well as those visible – whether thrones, authorities, rulers or powers, everything was created through Him **and for Him**. (17) And He Himself is before everything, and everything subsists in Him.

Colossians 1:16-17

(18) For you know that it was not with perishable things [like] silver or gold that you were ransomed from the futile manner of life passed down to you by your ancestors, (19) but [you were redeemed] with precious blood, like that of a lamb without spot or blemish, [that is, by the blood] of Christ [Jesus, (20) whose coming was] **foreknown** (and subsequently predestined) **before the creation of the world**, but who appeared [in the flesh] at the end of times because of us (i.e., for our salvation).

1st Peter 1:18-20

It should not be surprising that scripture should emphasize the foreordination of Jesus and His sacrifice, for without Him and His work in dying on our behalf history would not only have been meaningless – it would have been impossible. For Jesus is the very Word of God, the Logos; He is the Plan of God, the foundation, the cornerstone, and the Agent of it, so that everything in history comes down to Jesus Christ and His work (Jn.1:1-5; Heb.1:1-3). Viewed from the individual perspective, therefore, our response to Him is what life is really all about. "Jesus and us, and what we do about it" is the true essence of human life and human history.

2) Individuals: As Christ was foreordained to come into the world as a human being and die for the sins of the world, so those for whom He died have likewise been foreordained to creation and, for all who will accept God's gracious offer of salvation, to eternal life. We believers are the Bride of Christ and exist for Jesus Christ (2Cor.11:2-3; Eph.1:22-23; 5:22-33; Rev.21:2-4; 21:9ff.; 22:17; cf. 1Cor.15:23). For that reason our lives have been predestined as well so that the One who sanctifies and those who are sanctified have been predetermined by the Plan of God for salvation, Savior and saved foreknown in the thinking and planning of the Lord since before time began.

(47) For this is what the Lord has commanded us: "I have made you [Jesus Christ] a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth." (48) When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were **appointed** for eternal life believed.

Acts 1:47-48 NIV

No, we declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory **before time began**.

1st Corinthians 2:7 NIV

(3) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ

with every spiritual blessing heaven has [to offer], (4) seeing that *even before the world was founded* He chose us in Him to be sanctified and blameless before Him.
Ephesians 1:3-4

[God] who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not through our works, but through His own [sovereign] choice [of us] and [His] grace [towards us], [that grace] which was given to us in Christ Jesus *in eternity past*.
2nd Timothy 1:9

(1) Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for [the purpose of aiding] the faith of the elect and their acceptance of the truth which accords with godliness, (2) in the hope of eternal life which God who cannot lie *promised before time began*, (3) and [who] has [now] at just the right time revealed His Plan (lit., *logos*) through the proclamation [of the gospel] with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior.
Titus 1:1-3

And all the inhabitants of the earth will worship [the beast], [that is, all] whose names are not [still] written in the book of life *[where they were written] from the beginning of the world*, [even the book] which belongs to the Lamb who was slain.
Revelation 13:8

3) History: Putting the above two principles together, we can see clearly that from God's point of view human history is in its essence the process of uniting Christ with His Bride – everything else is superficial. The primary purpose of human history is to function as "God's threshing floor" (Matt.3:12), being designed by Him to demonstrate beyond any doubt what we His moral creatures really have chosen in life (the choice for or against Christ determining our eternal future) and just how emphatically we have chosen it (our choices in following Christ forming the basis for our eternal rewards). Through Jesus, God the Father created the universe in an instant, but in Jesus, He required three full hours to judge the sins of the world on the cross in the darkness as our Lord bore those sins that we might have the opportunity of eternal life. We believe in an instant, but our decision determines our eternal future, and all of our faith-choices thereafter have consequences that last for all eternity. Only through this process of conflict and choice in time would we ever have been able to come to learn about who and what God is in terms of His love for us, manifest supremely in the gift and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and played out in our reception of the grace thereby provided at salvation and in a plethora of ways thereafter. This is the proper, biblical perspective of history, not a geological or chronological time-line, not a narrative of civilizations, peoples, wars, politics and culture, but the calling out of God's people, their selection and their proving in the crucible of the devil's world, all based upon the salvation provided for by the blood of Christ. All the other events of "history" have in fact been woven into the true, spiritual narrative by our omniscient, omnipotent, all-wise and loving God with our salvation and spiritual growth through faith in Jesus Christ being the primary objective and concern (cf. Ps.33:11; Is.22:11; 25:1; 37:26; 44:8; Dan.9:24-27; Amos 3:6; Acts 17:31; Eph.2:10).

The Lord works out everything to its proper end – even the wicked for a day of disaster.
Proverbs 16:4 NIV

In the Lord's hand the king's heart is a stream of water that he channels toward all who please him.
Proverbs 21:1

"Have you not heard? Long ago I ordained it. In days of old I planned it; now I have brought it to pass, that you have turned fortified cities into piles of stone."
2nd Kings 19:25

The Lord Almighty has sworn, "Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will happen."
Isaiah 14:24 NIV

(9) "Remember the former things of old,
For I am God, and there is no other;
I am God, and there is none like Me,
(10) Declaring the end from the beginning,
And from ancient times things that are not yet done,
Saying, 'My counsel shall stand,
And I will do all My pleasure'. "
Isaiah 48:9-10 NKJV

"I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, 'My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.' "
Isaiah 46:9-10 NIV

(26) For from one man [Adam], [God] created the nations of mankind, that they might inhabit the entire face of the earth. And He predetermined both their appointed times and the boundaries of their settlement, (27) that they might seek God, if perhaps they might even [deign to] grope after Him and so come to find Him – for He is not far from any one of us.
Acts 17:26-27

The Foreknowledge Question: Since in His plan God has foreordained human history in its most minute details, the question of His foreknowledge as being potentially inconsistent with genuine free will often comes up in theological discussions. However, those who see divine foreknowledge and human choice as either incompatible or their interaction as somehow "mysterious" have misunderstood what scripture teaches on this account. The fact of God knowing in full omniscience all that would happen in human history and decreeing it before the fact most definitely does not in any way vitiate the free will of His moral creatures. Rather, it empowers, establishes and ratifies it.

Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.
Romans 3:31 NIV

God could not possibly "not know" ahead of time and in perfect detail all that would happen as a result of His decision to create us (and the universe for us). A vitally important part of that knowledge was His prior, complete understanding of everything we His creatures would ever do throughout the course of human and angelic history. He knew what in our heart of hearts we would wish to do and He made us and tailored our circumstances accordingly. We, on the other hand, still must actually do what we are ordained to do – completely in accordance with the free will choices God knew we would make and so decreed that we would make. Just as we could never have existed in the first place so as to make the choices we are making without God's foreknowledge and decree, so the fact of His decree makes inevitable this exercise of our free will in precisely the way God has ordained according to the precise choices He knew that we would make. Both God's foreknowledge and subsequent decree of our free will choices on the one hand and our actual making of these choices in the course of human history in accordance with His foreknowledge and decree on the other are immutable and inseparable parts of the same equation. Rather than being contradictory opposites, they are actually perfect complements which not only fit with each other hand-in-glove but could not exist apart from each other: without God's foreknowledge and decree we could never have come into being, and the fact of our existence and free will choice is indicative of and only possible because of God's foreknowledge and decree.

This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate *plan* and *foreknowledge*;
Acts 2:23a NIV

They did what *your power and will had decided beforehand* should happen.
Acts 4:28 NIV

For those *whom He foreknew*, He also predestined (i.e., foreordained) to share the likeness of His Son, so that He might be the Firstborn over many brothers [and sisters].
Romans 8:29

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who, though outcasts dispersed throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, were yet *selected in the foreknowledge of God the Father*, by means of the Holy Spirit's consecration, for the obedience in and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. Grace and peace be multiplied unto you!
1st Peter 1:1-2

If the theological terminology employed here sounds a bit difficult, the concept itself surely is not. God the Father knew who would believe in Christ, and so made all the arrangements necessary for us who were willing to do so. History is all about the choices we make, the fundamental and most consequential of which is whether we are willing to respond to God on His terms in order to be able to spend eternity with Him . . . or not. History has thus been precisely constructed by our loving Father in order to ensure the salvation of all who are willing

to be saved (and for our spiritual growth, progress and production thereafter). The fact of His prior knowledge of how each and every one of His moral creatures (in the full and perfect set of such creatures necessary for the process) would respond, given genuine free will, does not remove the choice – rather it necessitates it; likewise, the decree that makes the choice inevitable is what makes the circumstances in which the choice is made possible. Without God's foreknowledge and decree we could not exist and choose; the fact of our existence and choice is a reflection of the foreknowledge of God and His divine decree. God could not help but know us in every detail before the fact, and He has ratified who we wanted to be and what we would choose if given the chance in an eternal decree upon which human history is founded. Rather than making free will impossible, God has enshrined it as the fundamental principle of all He has created. For it is only through God's foreknowledge and decree that the Bride is able to say "I do!" – in uncoerced and genuine free will – to the Groom who had to pay the most amazing price in dying for her sins that she might be able to do so.

b. Predestination, Calling and Election

(28) And we know that, for those who love God, He works everything together for good – [that is to say,] for those who have been called according to His plan. (29) For those whom He *foreknew*, He also predestined (i.e., foreordained) to share the likeness of His Son, so that He might be the Firstborn over many brothers [and sisters]. (30) And those whom He predestined (i.e., foreordained), these He also *called* [to salvation], and those whom He called, He also justified (i.e., made righteous through faith in Christ), and those whom He justified, these He also glorified (i.e., our future resurrection and eternal life).
Romans 8:28-30

This passage provides us with the progression of God's plan of salvation for individual believers:

foreknowledge > predestination > election/selection > justification/salvation > glorification

Predestination: We have considered above the question of foreknowledge, that is, God's prior and complete comprehension of all that would occur in human and angelic history as a result of His decreeing the commencement of that process of self-selection of all moral agents. Technically speaking, although God knows all the implications of all possible alternative decisions on our part, foreknowledge comprises what would actually happen in the event of creation and the subsequent structuring of history on God's part for what actually did occur.

[Jesus, whose coming was] *foreknown* (i.e., and so foreordained through predestination) before the creation of the world, but who appeared [in the flesh] at the end of times because of us (i.e., for our salvation).

1st Peter 1:20

Predestination (otherwise known as foreordination) represents God's decree of what He foreknew (cf. Lk.22:22; Acts 2:23; 10:42; 17:26; 17:31; Rom.1:4; Heb.4:7).

"[They gathered together] to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose *predestined* to occur."

Acts 4:28 NASB

But we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God *predestined* before the ages to our glory;

1Corinthians 2:7 NASB

This is particularly true as it applies to individual believers: God knew before hand that, given the chance, we would seize the opportunity of salvation through faith in Christ, and so He has accordingly written us into His plan in such a way so as to accomplish that salvation.

Having *predestined* (i.e., foreordained) us in [His] love for adoption to Himself through Jesus Christ according to the good pleasure of His will.

Ephesians 1:5

(11) [Jesus], in whom we also have an inheritance, having been *predestined* (i.e., foreordained) according to the design of Him who is working everything out according to the desire of His will.

Ephesians 1:11

Thus predestination represents God's decreeing and thereby establishing what He foreknew. Predestination is God placing His stamp of authority and inevitability on history as a whole as it has, is and will actually happen – according to His will:

"This [Jesus], handed over through the agency of lawless men, you put to death by nailing Him [to the cross], according to the *predestined will and foreknowledge* of God."

Acts 2:23

Calling and Election: Calling is an invitation; election is a selection. While it is true that in His foreknowledge God anticipated both and decreed both according to what would actually transpire in time, from the point of view of individual human beings *calling* – the invitation to salvation, a life of following Jesus, and eternal life thereafter – precedes *election*, the actual selection of the individual in question for an eternal part in God's family by means of God's grace – through faith:

(13) And we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God *chose* you from the beginning for salvation by the sanctification of the Spirit and *by faith in the truth*. (14) For it is precisely for this purpose (i.e., salvation through the sanctification of the Spirit and faith in the truth; v.13) that He *called* you through our gospel in order that you might gain lasting possession of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (i.e., the resurrection).

2nd Thessalonians 2:13-14

Faith, the essential exercise of our free will in response to God, is the critical factor which

distinguishes an "effectual call" from an invitation that is rejected.

For those called [to salvation] are many, but those chosen [for salvation] are few.
Matthew 22:14

God wants all to be saved (many are called), but only chooses for His Son those who want to be saved, namely, that small number throughout the ages who are willing to submit their will to His will by putting their *faith* in the Person and work of Jesus Christ for salvation (few are chosen).

Paul, a servant of God and [appointed] an apostle of Jesus Christ on account of the *faith of the elect* of God and their full-knowledge (*epignosis* or "acceptance") of the truth which accords with godliness.
Titus 1:1

Thus it is that when scripture is speaking of believers destined to persevere unto eternal life, the idea of "calling" can be and often is substituted for "elect" and "chosen", since all such believers have been effectually called. The reason for the substitution has to do with emphasis. Election emphasizes our status as those who belong to God; calling emphasizes not only our entrance into His family but also the *purpose* for which God has called us: faith, salvation, and spiritual growth.

[God] who *saved* us and *called* us *to a holy calling*, not through our works, but through His own [sovereign] choice [of us] and [His] grace [towards us], [that grace] which was given to us in Christ Jesus in eternity past.
2nd Timothy 1:9

We see this progression in the following verses, where those who are called are henceforth elected (i.e., selected or "chosen" when they respond to the call of God in faith), then lead a life of faithful service to Jesus Christ thereafter, securing thereby not only their eternity with Him but their eternal rewards as well.

These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, because He is Lord of Lords and King of Kings, and *called, and elect – and faithful* are those with Him.
Revelation 17:14

So strive all that much more then, brothers, to make your *calling* and *election* secure through these good works. By devoting yourselves to these things (i.e., virtue, growth and the Christian production which springs from faith) you shall never be tripped up along your way.
2nd Peter 1:10

(11) "Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose *in election* might stand: (12) not by works but *by him who calls*—she was

told, 'The older will serve the younger.' "
Romans 9:11-12 NIV

Since, in the case of believers, the invitation (or calling) is definitely followed by faith acceptance which results immediately in our selection (election), it is easy to see how the two words, calling and election, can be used as virtual synonyms (Rom.8:28; 9:24-26; 1Cor.1:9; 1:24; 5:11; 5:17; etc.). For we are called *to* the godly purpose of salvation and spiritual growth (compare Rom.8:28 "those who are *called* according to His *purpose*" with Rom.9:11 "so that God's *purpose* in *election* might stand"). However, when the objective is to emphasize our actual acceptance of salvation, that is, our *effectual* calling (as opposed to its purpose), election (i.e., selection on the basis of faith-response) is the word/concept most often employed. God chooses or elects those who choose or elect for Him and His Son:

Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant (i.e., of believing Jews) according to *the election of grace*.
Romans 11:5 KJV

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who, though outcasts dispersed throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, were yet *elected in the foreknowledge* of God the Father, by means of the Holy Spirit's consecration, for the obedience in and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. Grace and peace be multiplied unto you!
1st Peter 1:1-2

As the context in which Jesus' words "many are called but few are chosen" occurs makes clear (Matt.22:14), the invitation to salvation goes out to many (the king compels various and sundry to come the banquet), but not all are found worthy (the man without the proper wedding garment represents those who have not been cleansed through faith in Christ; cf. Rev.3:4; 16:15; 19:8). Only the elect are resurrected to eternal life (cf. Ps.106:5; Is.41:8; 65:9; 65:22; Matt.24:22; 24:24; Mk.13:20; 13:22; 13:27; Lk.18:7; Jn.15:19; Rom.8:33; 11:7; 1Tim.5:21; 2Tim.2:10; Tit.1:1; 1Pet.2:9).

Then [the Son of Man] will send forth His angels with a loud trumpet call, and will assemble His *elect ones* from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.
Matthew 24:31

Finally, we are elected through our choice (our selection/election), but our choice would never have been possible without God's selection/election of the One who chose to die in our place, our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Behold my Servant – I will support Him. *My chosen One* – my soul (i.e., heart) takes pleasure in Him. I have placed my Spirit upon Him. He will bring forth justice for the nations.
Isaiah 42:1

A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, *whom I have chosen*; listen to him."

Luke 9:35 NIV

For this reason, calling and election tend to be used in scripture to summarize the entire process of salvation from the inception of the Plan of God to the ultimate sanctified state of believers following our resurrection and reward – because with God having done absolutely everything to bring about our final glorification, the only thing lacking for us to be effectually called and so become His chosen and elect is our willingness to accept the unfathomable gift He offers us freely in Jesus Christ (cf. Rom.9:6-12).

(28) And we know that, for those who love God, He works everything together for good – [that is to say,] for those who have been *called* according to His *plan*. (29) For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined (i.e., foreordained) to share the likeness of His Son, so that He might be the Firstborn over many brothers [and sisters]. (30) And those whom He predestined (i.e., foreordained), these He also called [to salvation], and those whom He called, He also justified (i.e., made righteous through faith in Christ), and those whom He justified, these He also *glorified* (i.e., our future resurrection and eternal life).
Romans 8:28-30

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who, though outcasts dispersed throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, were yet *selected* (lit., "elect") in the *foreknowledge* of God the Father, by means of the Holy Spirit's consecration, for the obedience in and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. Grace and peace be multiplied unto you!

1st Peter 1:1-2

c. Sanctification before salvation

As we have seen in the past and have covered briefly above, sanctification in the Plan of God is the threefold process wherein a person is set apart to God, removed from the realm of the profane and entered into the realm of the holy, from the power of darkness into the kingdom of His dear Son (Col.1:13). The first phase, salvation, enters the new believer into union with Christ; we become "one with Him", holy, sanctified, "saints" by way of our position in Jesus (Rom.1:7; 16:2; 1Cor.1:2; 1:30; 6:11; Eph.3:18). After salvation, the process of sanctification continues as we draw ever closer to God and farther away from the world through our adherence to the truth of the Word, becoming more like our Savior in terms of our behavior as we mature spiritually (Rom.6:19-22; Eph.4:12; 5:3; 1Thes.4:3-7; Heb.10:14; 12:14). The final phase of sanctification will occur for us at the resurrection when in perfect, eternal bodies we shall be perfect and perfectly sanctified in every way forevermore (Jn.17:19; Acts 20:32; 1Cor.6:2; Eph.1:18; Col.1:12; 1Thes.3:13; 2Thes.2:1:10; Rev.11:18).

While holiness and sanctification usually relate to believers, scripture also notes an aspect of God's plan wherein all who are destined to believe (through His anticipation of our future choice)

are kept safe for that future choice.

And we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning for salvation *by the sanctification of the Spirit* and by faith in the truth.

2nd Thessalonians 2:13-14

(1) Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who, though outcasts dispersed throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, were yet selected (2) in the foreknowledge of God the Father, *by means of the Holy Spirit's consecration* (lit., "sanctification"), for the obedience in and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. Grace and peace be multiplied unto you!

1st Peter 1:1-2

This last passage in particular clearly links the foreknowledge of God with the sanctification of the Spirit. Although looking forward to the time of the believer's actual phase-one sanctification at salvation, the intent of both apostles is to connect that destined sanctification to God's decree and also to indicate that while not positionally "holy" until the point of faith in Christ, we believers do indeed find ourselves under the aegis of the Holy Spirit and His protection until the moment of our salvation (and sanctification). Paul expresses this same principle for all mankind in regard to the divine provision of the Law whose ultimate purpose is evangelism:

(23) Before faith arrived, we were being guarded under the Law[*'s protection*], shut in [in anticipation of] our faith which was destined to be revealed. (24) So the Law acts as a guardian for us [who leads us] to Christ so that we might be justified by faith.

Galatians 3:23-24 (cf. Gal.1:15)

This divine protection in anticipation of salvation and our official "setting apart" or sanctification that then takes place is certainly in line with what the process of being sanctified is all about. Sanctification is the process of becoming "holy" – truly holy, that is, as opposed to false, pharisaical, outward shows of self-righteousness. Sanctification in all three phases is a result of our accommodating our will to God's Will by means of our responsiveness to His truth: that is how we become "holy" and more like our Master day by day. We attain this holiness in principle (or "positionally") when we believe; we attain it in practice as we adjust to His perfect standard of truth in our Christian walk; we attain eternally when we have carried through our faith intact until the end according to His Will. Sanctification is the process of the Christian life; imitation of Christ is its goal; and the truth of the Word of God is the means by which it is accomplished when that truth is believed initially at salvation, embraced and followed consistently after salvation, and confirmed eternally and bountifully rewarded based upon the quality of our response during this life. And while this process of spiritual transformation, God's Plan for every believer writ large, technically begins at the point when we first put our faith in Christ, it is most comforting and encouraging to realize that God's plan for us bridges the gap between His eternal decree and our official entrance in His family: even before we believed, we were under the special protection of His Spirit, so guiding us and shaping our lives that at the proper time we

might believe.

d. Justification

And those whom He predestined (i.e., foreordained), these He also called [to salvation], and those whom He called, He also *justified* (i.e., made righteous through faith in Christ), and those whom He justified, these He also glorified (i.e., our future resurrection and eternal life).

Romans 8:30

Justification is the next chronological step in the process of salvation, occurring at the point of faith in Christ for all who believe in Jesus.¹⁷ Having been foreknown as those who would believe and having therefore been foreordained for salvation in the Plan of God, believers are called to the truth of the gospel at their appointed time (having been previously superintended by the sanctification of the Spirit for that very day and hour), and are made righteous in God's eyes the moment they believe on the basis of Jesus' sacrifice for their sins.

(23) For all sin and fall short of God's glory, (24) [but we are all] *justified* without cost by His grace through the redemption (lit., "ransoming" from sin) which is in Christ Jesus. (25) God made Him a means of atonement [achieved] by His blood [and claimed] through faith, to give proof of His justice in leaving unpunished in divine forbearance [all] previously committed sins, (26) so as to prove His justice at this present time, namely, so that He would be [shown to be] just [in this] and [justified] in justifying the one who has faith in Jesus.

Romans 3:23-26

The fact that justification must follow the cross in its collective effect of considering prior believers righteous on the basis of Christ's historical sacrifice, and that it must follow actual faith in Christ for all believers from that point forward, demonstrates conclusively that our free will exercised in faith is the trigger which causes God to pronounce us "righteous": Christ's sacrifice is sufficient to provide justification for all mankind, but it can only be appropriated "through faith".

But to the one who does not work, but *believes* in Him who *justifies* the ungodly, his *faith* is credited as *righteousness*.

Romans 4:5 NASB

(1) So now that we have been *justified by faith*, let us take hold of the peace [we have] with God [the Father] through our Lord Jesus Christ, (2) through whom we have also obtained our access into this grace in which we stand, and let us boast in the hope of the

¹⁷ The specifics of this doctrine as it applies particularly to the work of Christ are covered in the previous installment of this series, Bible Basics, part 4A, "Christology", section II.8, "Justification".

glory of God (i.e., in anticipation of our resurrection).
Romans 5:1-2

As in the case of phase I sanctification, justification is a positional blessing. Justification means that God no longer views us as those who are stained by and steeped in sin, but as those who have been made truly righteous, justified and washed clean from sin through the blood of Christ, having now placed our faith in Him for eternal life. Believers will never be completely sinless in an experiential sense as long as we inhabit these bodies infested with the sin nature. However, the sacrifice of our dear Lord Jesus in dying for all of our sins – past, present and future – means that God in His perfect justice and righteousness is free to consider us *as* sinless because Christ has paid the price for all our sins – and we have accepted that Sacrifice on our behalf, laying it down on the altar before God as a substitute, so to speak, the only substitute acceptable to the Father, His dear Son our Lord Jesus. It is this righteousness-by-faith-in-Christ we now possess which has therefore opened up the door to eternal life.

(3) For we were also once mindless, disobedient, wandering [pointlessly] astray, enslaved to all sorts of lusts and pleasures, living our lives in wickedness and envy, loathsome and hating each other. (4) But [in spite of our prior sinfulness], when the goodness and benevolence of God our Savior appeared [in the flesh], (5) not on account of [any] works which we had done in [so-called] righteousness did He save us, but through the washing [away of our sins which leads to our] rebirth and [to our] new beginning from the Holy Spirit (6) whom He poured out upon us bountifully through Jesus Christ our Savior, (7) so that [now] having been *justified* [in this way] by His grace, we might become heirs in regard to the eternal life for which we hope.

Titus 3:3-7

e. Glorification

And those whom He predestined (i.e., foreordained), these He also called [to salvation], and those whom He called, He also justified (i.e., made righteous through faith in Christ), and those whom He justified, these He also *glorified* (i.e., guaranteed the future resurrection and eternal life of all who remain faithful to Jesus).

Romans 8:30

The result of pursuing sanctification in this life (Rom.6:19; 6:22; 1Thes.4:3; 4:7; Heb.12:14) and the perfect righteousness which has been imputed to us (1Tim.6:11; 2Tim.2:22; 1Pet.2:24; cf. Rom.6:13; 6:18-19; 2Cor.6:7; 9:10; Gal.5:5; Eph.4:24; Phil.1:11; 2Tim.3:16; Heb.12:11; Jas.3:18; 1Jn.2:29; Rev.22:11) is our inevitable resurrection and reward as we share in the glory of our dear Lord Jesus forevermore. That is the ultimate purpose of the Plan of God for each and everyone of us, namely, our eternal glorification as members of the Bride of Christ together with Him in the New Jerusalem forevermore. Such a destiny is a wondrous thing to contemplate, well-worth whatever "light and momentary afflictions" (2Cor.4:17) it be our lot to endure in our

temporary sojourning on this earth.¹⁸

(16) For the Spirit Himself testifies to our spirit that we are God's children. (17) And if we are God's children, then we are also His heirs, even fellow heirs of Christ – that is if we have indeed suffered with Him so that we might also be *glorified* together with Him.
Romans 8:16-17

II. How to be Saved

Introduction: How to be saved? God wants all people to be saved (1Tim.2:4; 2Pet.3:9; cf. Lam.3:33; Matt.18:12-14; Jn.3:16 Jn.12:47; Acts 17:27). How would He not? We are all His children, His creation. More than that, He has already paid a price beyond understanding in sacrificing His One and only dear Son for the sins of the entire world (Jn.3:16; Rom.5:8; 2Cor.9:15). God gains nothing from the damnation of unbelievers (Ezek.18:23), except to the degree that He is glorified in His just condemnation of their arrogant disbelief (Rom.3:4). Having already paid for salvation for every single human being who has ever lived, God has most certainly made arrangements for that salvation to be received by one and all. Indeed, it is only by refusing His grace that anyone is blotted out of His Book of Life (Rev.13:8; cf. Ex.32:33; Ps.69:28; Dan.12:1; Phil.4:3; Rev.3:5). The only thing lacking for anyone to be saved is his or her participation in the process. The only thing that prevents a person from being saved is his or her refusal to acquiesce to God.

(22) Consider then both the mercy and the severity of God. For He is severe towards those who have fallen away, but merciful towards you – if, that is, you continue in that mercy. But if you do not, you too will be cut off. (23) And if they *do not continue in their unbelief*, they will be grafted back in.
Romans 11:22-23

How to be saved? Submit to God by doing the one thing He requires: accepting through faith the Person and the work of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus answered, "This is the work of God, that you believe in the One He has sent."
John 6:29

In Old Testament times before the coming of the Messiah and His sacrifice on the cross, those who responded to God put their faith in Him to solve the problem of their sins and so grant them salvation in the end (Rom.3:25-26). The blood-sacrifices ordained by God since Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden symbolized the spiritual death of that promised and hoped for Substitute to come (Gen.3:21).

¹⁸ For the eternal rewards given to believers who fulfill God's Plan for their lives, see part 6 of Coming Tribulation, section I.7, "The Judgment and Reward of the Church".

And I will meet with you there (i.e., at the ark). And I will speak with you from above the atonement cover between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the testimony (i.e., at the place where the blood symbolic of Christ's death is sprinkled) . . .

Exodus 25:22a

Today, after the cross, the object of salvation, the Mystery which had been hidden since the beginning of the world (Col.1:26-27), has been revealed in complete detail. Jesus is the way of salvation and the only way to be saved (Jn.14:6). Jesus is the Person in whom we must put our trust, in whom we must believe, in whom we must have faith. It is only by accepting God the Father's Substitute for our sins that we are saved, and the only thing necessary to do so and receive God's so great salvation is to accept through faith the Lord Jesus Christ, His perfect Person, God and Man, and His perfect work, dying for our sins on the cross.¹⁹ Jesus is the one and only provision of God's grace for salvation and believing in Him is the only way to exchange certain death and condemnation for eternal life.

1. Responsibility

[God] whose will it is for all men to be saved and to come to acceptance of the truth [which is the means of salvation].

1st Timothy 2:4

Since God desires the salvation of all and has provided at the highest possible price the opportunity for that salvation, the sacrifice unto death of His one and only beloved Son Jesus Christ, it is the *responsibility* of every human being (who attains mental and chronological accountability, that is) to seek and accept the truth so as to be saved. We have all received from God at birth "breath and life and all things" necessary to fulfill this responsibility with which we have been charged (Acts 17:25-29; cf. Neh.9:6). The gift and subsequent possession of the very "image of God" demands no less.

Jesus answered, "This is the work of God [which He requires of you], that you believe in the One He has sent."

John 6:29

The free will we possess, the gift of God's image, is a blessing that carries with it a definite responsibility. We are responsible to "render unto God what is God's" (Matt.22:21; Mk.12:7; Lk.20:25). Like the servant who was entrusted by his master with a talent, we are responsible to exercise that talent – our free will – in response to God's truth, accepting Jesus Christ as our Savior by obedience to the gospel through faith (Matt.25:14-30; Lk.19:12-27). Like the son who

¹⁹ The doctrines related to the provision of salvation in Jesus Christ (e.g., Unlimited Atonement, the Blood of Christ, the Spiritual Death of Christ, Propitiation, Redemption, Justification and Reconciliation) are developed in full in the previous installment of this series, Bible Basics, part 4A, "Christology".

paid lip-service to his father but refused to go work in the field, we are responsible to "do the work of God" by actually putting our faith in His Son (Matt.21:28-32). And like the hard-packed soil along the road, we are responsible to open up and accept the seed of the Word that it may sprout up unto eternal life (Matt.13:19; Mk.4:15; Lk.8:12). Failure to live up to the responsibility inherent in the possession of the free will we have been given (the essential point of the gift of the image of God) means the loss of eternal life, along with all the ineffably wonderful things "which God has prepared for those who love Him" (1Cor.2:9). It is a measure of the fundamental arrogance of the human heart that the vast majority of those so blessed have throughout history declined this universal responsibility, to their own eternal harm.

The one who believes in Him is not being judged, but the one who does not believe has already been judged on the grounds that he has not put his faith in the Name (i.e., the Person) of God's only Son.

John 3:18

2. Natural Revelation and Accountability

Truly you are a God who hides himself, O God and Savior of Israel.

Isaiah 45:15 NIV

No living human being has ever seen God at any time (Jn.1:18; 1Jn.4:12), nor can anyone do so (1Tim.6:16) – not and continue to remain alive (Ex.33:20). God shields us from perceiving the full glory of His deity so that we, sinful creatures that we are, may not be destroyed. But God's "hiding of Himself" is also designed to preserve our free will. Even if it were possible to stand in God's presence without being instantly consumed by His refulgent glory, it would be impossible *not* to submit to Him face to face. Without the veil that separates heaven from earth, it would be impossible for human beings to make an uncoerced and genuine choice about where to spend eternity. Simply put, for free will to be genuinely free, there has to be a significant gap between knowledge and experience.

The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" He replied, "The knowledge of the *secrets* of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them."

Matthew 13:10-11 NIV

So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet: "I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things *hidden* since the creation of the world."

Matthew 13:35 NIV

And he said, Unto you it is given to know the *mysteries* of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.

Luke 8:10 KJV

Given the overwhelming magnitude, unlimited power and inexpressible wonder of God, not only

could no human being see Him face to face and live – no one could experience Him and fail to submit to Him. For this reason, although He has made the truth of His existence and His perfect character plain for all mankind to see, God has also integrated "deniability" into human history (e.g., Matt.13:10-17). That is to say, God has given us all the possibility, potential and ability to live our lives as if He did not exist, and has even given us the capability of hardening our hearts to point of denying that He exists at all. The heavens proclaim His glory (Ps.19:1), but we are free to "tune out" their message and are easily able to do so. It is only under such conditions that the true choice of every man and woman could be made in genuine freedom without undue coercion or duress. This world is God's smelter and it puts our authentic free will to the test, demonstrating what is silver and gold, and what is merely dross. The truth is veiled, but it is not inaccessible; it is possible to ignore, but it is available for all who truly want it.

For from one man [Adam], [God] created the nations of mankind, that they might inhabit the entire face of the earth. And He predetermined both their appointed times and the boundaries of their settlement, [with the purpose] that they might seek God, if perhaps they might even [deign to] grope after Him and so come to find Him – for He is not far from any one of us.

Acts 17:26-27

For all who are even the least bit interested in making the smallest effort to know about Him, God provides the living water of life, the gospel of truth; and as the verse above indicates, God has designed every aspect of human life – in the case of every single human being who has ever lived – with the express purpose of offering salvation to any and all who are willing to accept it.

"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught of God.' Everyone who has *heard* and *learned* from the Father, comes to Me."

John 6:44-45 NASB

God has designed the universe, the human spirit, and the process of history in such a way so that no one who stands before Him at the last judgment will be able to say "I never had any idea of You or my mortality or my need for salvation". However, it is pointless to "draw" to Jesus those who are unwilling to accept Him if so drawn (one of our Lord's main points here in John chapter six as He remonstrates with those who saw the miracle of the bread and fish but would not accept Him as the Bread of Life). Only those who are willing are benefitted by being "drawn", that is, by being led to a hearing of the truth, that is, the gospel. The individuals in question in these verses have "heard" but they have not "learned". The Greek verb here is cognate with the word "disciple" and means "learned" in the sense of accepting the truth so as to make it one's own in the manner of a disciple. That is to say, this phrase indicates more than mere intellectual understanding; it indicates an acceptance of the truth heard as true and a willingness to respond to it. Jesus is speaking here of the faith that follows perception of the gospel and leads to salvation (i.e., "coming to Me" = "[having] learned" = responding to the gospel in faith). Hearing the truth, knowing the truth is not enough; in order to be saved, a person has to submit, yield, believe, accept, trust . . . use his/her free will in response to the Lord and to the truth that Jesus is

the One who died for our sins and that we are delivered from death through the work of the Son of God. The human condition as God has ordained it in His infinite wisdom guarantees us the knowledge of the truth, but also the ability to ignore and even deny the truth: only those who have *both* "heard" *and* "learned" (i.e., have actually accepted the need for salvation so as to respond to it) come to be saved.

Some have twisted the fact of the veiling of God's glory and the sometimes seemingly limited availability of the gospel into an excuse – as if anything less than complete and universal revelation relieves mankind of all accountability. In fact, of course, all of us are accountable to God, and would be even if He were not offering the truth of the gospel to all and even if He had not sacrificed His One and only beloved Son on our behalf so that we might be saved. The reality, however, is that God's truth *is* universally available for all who desire it and, indeed, is universally undeniable at a certain basic level to everyone (at least initially). Inherent in the nature of the universe, the nature of the human spirit, and the nature of human life are God's most basic truths, made undeniable through the process known in theology as "natural revelation".

a. Natural Revelation:

God does not hold accountable for their choices those who never attain mental or emotional maturity (for whatever reason, be it mental disability or untimely death), as the principle of universal salvation of infants and all who die before mental and emotional maturity demonstrates (2Sam.12:23; cf. Deut.1:39; 1Kng.14:12-13; Is.7:15-16). Since the price has already been paid for children who die young, since God desires them to be saved (1Tim.2:4; 2Pet.3:9), and since they never had a true opportunity to exercise their free will in response to God's Substitute for sin, our dear Lord Jesus, God who is just and fair considers them righteous on the basis of Jesus' sacrifice just as He does in the case of all who believe.²⁰ We were created by the Father's will (Rev.4:11), and He most assuredly did not send Jesus to die in our place to condemn us, but rather that we might be saved (Jn.3:17). For it is only by failing to use the opportunity to exercise faith in Jesus inherent in the gift of free will that anyone is condemned (Jn.3:18). All other human beings who have ever lived or ever will live, however, are responsible to God for the decisions they make in this life, and the most fundamental decision, the truly life-or-death decision, is whether or not they were willing to submit to the will of God so as to be saved through faith in Jesus Christ.

God has constructed us, the universe in which we live, and the process of human history together with our personal interaction in it in such a way so as to lead all of His children back to Him and to salvation, all, that is, who are willing to be led.

²⁰ This explains, for example, how it is that there will be representatives in eternity "from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev.5:9): even among the most negative of peoples and civilizations where little or no trace of any penetration of the gospel is obvious, God has taken some of their little ones to Himself that they may be saved (cf. Is.57:1-2).

(7) Surely, no one can redeem a man[*s* life from God's hand], no one can pay a ransom to God for him. (8) For the redemption price of a life is too precious for Him to relent forever, (9) that one should live on forever, and not see corruption. (10) For everyone sees that [even] the wise die. They [too] perish along with fools and those who lack common sense, and they leave their wealth behind to others.

Psalm 49:7-10

What man can live and not see death, or save himself from the power of the grave?

Psalm 89:48 NIV

The sentence of death passed upon Adam and Eve and upon us their progeny as a result of their disobedience to God is in one sense a profound blessing. For while an eternity in our present sinful state is too depressing to contemplate, the recognition of our own mortality is the most powerful evangelical tool in the universe. Unlike the animals, we know that we are going to die, and when first we realize this primary fact of our existence, it has a tendency to dispose us to seek a solution. This common human reaction to the realization that we cannot and will not live forever in this present mortal shell is, moreover, "hard-wired" by God into the human heart for the very purpose of provoking just such a reaction.

(10) I have seen all the work that God has given Man to occupy himself with. (11) [God] has made everything beautiful in its [limited] time; but He has also *placed the [notion of] eternity in the hearts of mankind* – and [He has done this], moreover, without Man being able to discover the work which God has done from the beginning unto the end.

Ecclesiastes 3:10-11

The epiphany of our uniqueness and its very temporary nature is one that comes to all of us, usually at a very early age. We know that we will perish, but we want to live. Moreover, this realization of our mortality cannot be separated from the parallel realization that no human being could ever be capable of providing any solution to this most fundamental problem of our existence through his or her own efforts. Thus it is that when our mortality prods us to "grope" for a solution to death, it is to our Maker that we naturally and inevitably turn.

(1) The heavens recount the glory of God, and the firmament tells of the work of His hands. (2) One day after another pours forth [His] words, and one night after another declares [His] knowledge. (3) There is no tongue or culture that cannot understand their voice (i.e., of the heavens/firmament). (4) Their design has gone out into (i.e., "is visible throughout") the entire earth, and their words to the end of the world. He has set a tent for the sun within them (i.e., hidden it in the heavens'/firmament's night sky), (5) and from this it goes forth like a [resplendent] bridegroom from his [wedding] canopy. [The sun] exults to run its course like an athlete [does]. (6) Its starting line is at one end of the heavens, and its circuit [takes it] to the ends [of the sky]. And nothing is hidden from its view.

Psalm 19:1-6

This is natural revelation proper, but what is commonly missed in discussions of this sort is that the truth of the existence of God written in all He has created is only half of the equation. The other half, the more important half, is how God made our human spirit as the natural counterpart of this basic truth. We, our inner-person, is designed for God's truth just as a glove is designed for the hand meant to fill it. Our heart has been constructed by our Maker for the purpose of seeking Him, and we are only truly fulfilled when we do seek out and accept the truth about Him.

So God created the man in His image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Genesis 1:27

This only have I found: God made mankind upright, but men have gone in search of many schemes.

Ecclesiastes 7:9 NIV

I will not accuse forever, nor will I always be angry, for then the spirit of man would grow faint before me – the breath of man that I have created.

Isaiah 57:16 NIV

Natural revelation, God's stamping of His imprimatur upon His creation so as to make His existence obvious for all to see, is not confined to any one aspect of the world He has made, but rather it permeates everything He has created. In Psalm 19 (quoted above), David places the emphasis upon the physical universe beyond the earth – and rightly so, because few have ever contemplated the vastness of the heavens and the wonders it contains without being filled with a measure of awe: "The starry heavens are so glorious and boundless! Who made them, and how do I, insignificant as I am, fit into this picture?" This is a message that truly has "gone out into the entire earth", whose tidings have penetrated "to the end of the world". The knowledge the heavens "pour forth" is hidden from "no tongue or culture", for "one day after another", the very heavens above the heads of all mankind "recount the glory of God", while the starry firmament "tells of the work of His hands". No one who has seen these things has ever escaped the conclusion God put in their hearts for them to make: He made all these things, just as He made us.

But it is not only in the night sky that our Lord has etched His holy Name and made Himself, His power, His glory, and His astounding wisdom manifest for all to see, rendering the conclusion that He exists entirely inescapable. God's design encompasses His entire creation, from its most minute subatomic particles to the most immense of its heavenly bodies, and not just in the material realm, but even more profoundly in the spiritual realm. We human beings truly are "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps.139:14), and it is in the wonder of the words of God as they speak to us in their "still, small voice" in the quiet of our heart that we come to know of Him most insistently and most profoundly (1Kng.19:12).

(19) For that which can be known about God [from everyday experience] is obvious to them, because God has made it obvious. (20) [God's] nature, though invisible, is

nevertheless plainly apparent, and has been since His foundation of the world, for it may be clearly inferred from this creation of His – [this is true of] both His eternal power and His **divinity** – so that they are without any excuse.

Romans 1:19-20

The word emphasized above is the Greek *theotes* (θεότης), a concept noun built upon the Greek word for God, *theos* (θεός, cf. "theology"). As with comparable English suffixes like -ship and -ness, the suffix -της is qualitative. That is to say, as "friendship" conceptualizes what it means to be a friend in all respects or "kindness" epitomizes the character of what it means to be kind, *theotes* sums up what it means to be God – not just in terms of power and majesty and eternity, but also in all of His applied characteristics, His mercy, goodness, justice and love. These verses tell us that from our common human observation of the world as God has constructed it, we know quite a lot about Him, especially inasmuch as He constructed us as well, and made us in such a way precisely that we might be able to receive this truth about Him and might be interested in doing so. As with everything else about the Plan of God, the **only** thing God did not do in instilling the undeniable message ubiquitous in creation about His existence and the true nature of His character (i.e., His "natural revelation" of Himself to the world) was to preset our free will to respond in the way He made us to respond and desires us to respond.

(24) Remember to extol his work, which men have praised in song. (25) All mankind has seen it; men gaze on it from afar.

Job 36:24-25 NIV

He sealeth up the hand of every man; that all men may know his work.

Job 37:7 KJV

(3) When I gaze upon your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have established, (4) what is Man that you are mindful of him, or the son of man that you care for him?

Psalms 8:3-4

The heavens praise your wonders, O Lord, your faithfulness too, in the assembly of the holy ones.

Psalms 89:5 NIV

The heavens proclaim his **righteousness**, and all the peoples see his glory.

Psalms 97:6 NIV (cf. Ps.50:6)

How great are your works, O Lord! In **wisdom** you have made them all. The earth is full of what you have provided (i.e., because you are their Creator).

Psalms 104:24

How great are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you have made them all. The earth is full of what you have provided (i.e., because you are their Creator).

Psalms 104:24

(25) "With whom will you compare Me that I should be equal [to him]?" says the Holy One. (26) "Lift up your eyes [to the heavens] and look. Who created [all] these [heavenly objects]? The One who brings forth their multitudes and calls them all by name. Through His abundant *power* and mighty strength not one of them is missing."
Isaiah 40:25-26

God's revealing of Himself in nature thus has two sides to it, both of which we are conditioned to understand and receive (if only we are willing to do so): His unlimited power and our comparative weakness; His incalculable vastness and our comparative insignificance; His incomparable wisdom and our comparative ignorance. Not only is God's existence common knowledge because of natural revelation – His omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence are also undeniable. Those who claim not to know these truths – or who claim He is not as He is or that He does not exist at all – are liars as they themselves know full well (see below). In addition to these truths about His infinite *nature*, God's true *character* is also revealed in what He has created. As our minds can gauge His infinity and thus perceive His fundamental uniqueness, so our consciences can comprehend His perfection and thus surmise His rightful sovereignty.²¹ From the love we observe in a world full of hate, we posit the One who is the origin of love and we deduce His intrinsic goodness; from the justice we observe in a world full of iniquity, we posit the One who is the origin of justice and we deduce His intrinsic holiness; from the life we observe in a world full of death, we posit the One who is the origin of life and we deduce His unwavering faithfulness and truth – giving us hope that there is an escape from death through Him. By comparing this true picture of the Creator to our own comparatively unloving, unjust, corrupt and downright sinful selves, we should be motivated to seek Him as the solution to our imperfection and deliverance from the grave.

b. The Sin Problem:

The epiphany that God exists, that we were made by Him for a specific purpose, and that He alone must hold the key to any solution to our mortality is inevitably accompanied by the concomitantly disturbing realization that we fall far short of absolutely holy and righteous God. That is because part of our natural heritage as descendants of Adam and Eve is the activated conscience which resulted from our first parents' partaking of the fruit of the tree of knowing good and evil.²² Through the functioning of our conscience, everyone understands that we are not worthy to enter into God's presence, and that merely recognizing the existence of God is insufficient to be saved as (Jas.2:19). For while it is impossible *not* to come to know that God

²¹ For the characteristics of the essence of God, see part 1 of this series, Theology, section I, "The Essence of God: Nature and Characteristics".

²² See part 3A of this series, Biblical Anthropology, section IV.1.b, "The tree of the knowledge of good and evil".

exists, it is certainly possible to do nothing in response to this universal conclusion to which all are led by natural revelation. In the boundless grace and mercy of God, however, it is this very understanding of our own helplessness, our need for forgiveness from God if we are to be saved from death and condemnation, that leads us to seek after Him. For God has designed us for this very purpose and ordered the life-circumstances of all human beings in precisely such a way "that they might seek God, if perhaps they might even [deign to] grope after Him and so come to find Him – for He is not far from any one of us" (Acts 17:27; cf. Deut.4:29). When we recognize that we need His help and that we are unworthy of it, we are put in the proper state of mind to accept gratefully His substitute and sacrifice for our sins, our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. For all who do seek Him out of a genuine desire for salvation, He ever proves to be "not far off".

Natural revelation is thus more than merely the evidence for God's existence implanted in His creation. God's system of natural revelation encompasses the interconnection between the world at large and the human heart, and it leads in every case to the preexisting threefold realization of heart which has been designed by Him to motivate us to seek Him: God not only exists, but He is good and will not tolerate evil; we are evil and cannot be good; without His help, therefore, death and condemnation await us. The result of these universal truths of natural revelation *should* be a healthy "fear of God" which is always "the beginning of wisdom" (Ps.111:10; Prov.1:7; 9:10; Eccl.12:13). And for all who respond to Him, for all who do seek after Him, God always provides the truth of the gospel so that they may be saved. After all, Jesus came into the world not to condemn it, but to die for all mankind, that all might be saved through His death (Jn.3:17).

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

John 1:12-13 NIV

Salvation is thus not a question of the availability of the gospel. We know that God is all-powerful, that nothing is impossible for Him. We know, therefore, that He in His great goodness, grace and mercy is not about to allow anyone to perish for want of information. Jesus died for all. Will any therefore be allowed to perish for lack of the gospel? In fact, for all who do deign to "grope" in search of a solution to the universal and fundamental human problems of human sin, God's unattainable righteousness, and the judgment of death which, absent divine intervention, awaits all mankind (cf. Jn.16:8-10), God, who has indeed provided the solution in Jesus Christ, always provides the truth necessary to be saved as well. For He is "not far from any of us" (Acts 17:24-27; cf. Deut.4:29). Nor is the task of obtaining the gospel a difficult one. It is not necessary to "go up to heaven" to get it, or journey "down to the Abyss" to hear it. For the word of salvation "is near".

But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' " or, " 'Who will descend into the abyss?' " (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach).

Romans 10:6-8 NKJV

Everyone has heard. Everyone, that is, who wishes to hear.

The heavens declare His righteousness, and *all the peoples have seen* His glory.
Psalm 97:6 NASB (cf. Ps.50:6)

(1) Does not wisdom call out? Does not understanding raise her voice? (2) On the heights along the way, where the paths meet, she takes her stand; (3) beside the gates leading into the city, at the entrances, she cries aloud: (4) "To you, O men, I call out; I raise my voice *to all mankind*."

Proverbs 8:1-4 NIV

But [if] I say, "They have not heard [the gospel], have they?" On the contrary – indeed they have: "Their voice has gone out *into all the earth*, their words *to the ends of the world* (Ps.19:4)".

Romans 10:18

With the stakes so high, eternal life or death and condemnation, why, then, do so many turn away from the Word of truth?

c. The Problem of Unbelievers:

1. Unbelievers are an inevitable result of God's creation of free-willed humanity:

The Lord has made everything in accordance with its own response, even the wicked for a day of disaster.

Proverbs 16:4

No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval.

1st Corinthians 11:19 NIV

Like the diapason of sound or the spectrum of light or any such physical range, humanity has a natural limit, and the full and complete tally of individuals who are decreed to come into this world will do so within the span of human history. Just as light can and could only exist in its complete spectrum (i.e., no yellow without blue, no infra-red without ultra-violet), so our Lord's decision to create humanity entailed the commitment to make *all* human beings, that is, the perfect, complete "spectrum" of humanity which, positing a truly perfect creation, was always destined to contain every single human being, from the first to the last.

Then God said, "Let us make *Man* in our image, according to our likeness, so that he may rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky and over the beasts and over the whole earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth". So God created the

man in His image; in the image of God He created him; male and female **He created them.**

Genesis 1:26-27

To the secular mind, human procreation may seem a chaotic and random affair (along with the rest of life), but in fact there are no accidents in the Plan of God.

To everything [you have made] there is completeness – I have seen the boundary [you have] set [for all things]. But your decree is measureless.

Psalms 119:96

There is no life without our Lord's imparting of a human spirit at birth, and every single human being meant to come into existence in the full complement of what constitutes the spectrum of humanity has or will come into existence at the exact right time of God's choosing.

I know that everything God does will stand forever; **it is impossible to add to it; it is impossible to take away from it.** God has established matters in this way so that men will be in awe before Him.

Ecclesiastes 3:14

Every free will shall have its day. What each individual person given free will chooses to do with the opportunity to choose, however, is another matter. That is true even though the Father wants all to be saved and goes to extraordinary lengths to bring all into His family, doing everything short of violating that all-important individual free will.

Then the master told his servant, "Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full".

Luke 14:23 NIV

Regardless of all human error, natural disasters, the time and circumstances of history, the opposition of the evil one, or any other impediment imaginable or unimaginable, God's Will has always been done, is being done and will be done, until every single person destined by that Will through the choice made by their free-will faith has been saved by His grace.

I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until **the full number** of the Gentiles has come in.

Romans 11:25 NIV

Like the spectrum of light, humanity is a perfect continuum. Just as creating light meant creating it in the perfection of its complete assortment of wavelengths, so also was it the case with humanity. And just as the visible portion of the spectrum is significantly smaller than the invisible part, so also the number of those determined to defy the Will of God vastly outnumbers those who choose for Him through faith in Jesus Christ. And just as the two parts of the

spectrum could never exist independently of each other, so it is with human beings. What God has created is perfect: the precise number of human beings from Adam and Eve to the last human spirit created at the end of the millennium has always been a number known to God, a perfect number, full and complete, composed of those who would choose for Him if created and of those who would not. Anything more, even one single person in either group, or anything less, even one single person in either group, would be a different creation, and would not be the perfect creation, eternally decreed, with which we have to do.

[God] has made everything beautiful in its [foreordained] time.
Ecclesiastes 3:11a

2. Unbelievers arrive at, maintain, and confirm their status of unbelief through the process of the hardening of the heart:

Consider this which I have discovered as an [important] point apart: God made mankind [to esteem what is] right, but they have sought out many subtle alternatives.
Ecclesiastes 7:29

Truth always provokes a reaction. It will always attract or repel those who come into contact with it. As we have demonstrated from scripture, not only has God constructed the entire universe to express the truth of His existence and His marvelous character, but all human beings are also predisposed to recognize this truth of His which binds the universe together – and to need it. Whether or not they will *want* it, however, is a completely different question. Nevertheless, none of us is or can be a completely free agent in this world. We have been placed here by the Lord for the purpose of testing and demonstrating the true quality and nature of our unique, individual inner-person (Jn.15:16 in Greek). We are here to face the issue of God's truth, and face it we shall, one way or another. History exists – and we exist – for Jesus Christ. We are here fundamentally and foremost to demonstrate how we feel about the choice God presents us all to allow ourselves to be saved by Him or to prefer our own will to the Will of God. If we respond to the light, we are enlightened and remain "light in the Lord" as we draw closer to Him day by day through our constant and continual attention to the light of the Word of God. If, however, a person rejects the light of the truth in Jesus Christ, darkness ensues, the heart is hardened, the perceptive eye becomes dim to all of the natural light of the truth pulsing through God's creation, and, in cases where the darkness of the world is embraced as a substitute and the natural moral law of God spurned as well, indulgence in sensuality, impurity, lust and every sort of evil is the common result (Eph.4:19). God's truth, intrinsic to His creation, demands a hearing, and choice, the critical decider which divides the way leading upward from the way leading downward, is unable to resist making the decision to accept that truth or to refuse to do so.

A key part of the image of God, our ability to choose, is our corresponding ability to be able to deny the truth when we do choose, to put truth and reality to death and to replace it with a "truth" and pseudo-reality of our own making. Were we unable to harden our hearts in this way, it would indeed be impossible for us to make decisions which contradicted the truth and ran afoul

of God's wisdom. Thus the underlying arrogance of all disobedience to God may be seen in this fundamental calculus of human existence: He made us to love Him, sacrificed His Son that we might live with Him forever, and constructed our world and our lives in such a way that these truths might be unavoidable; only by replacing His Truth with our own pseudo-truth are we able to ignore the divine reality reflected in everything we see. Only by substituting lies for the truth are we able to resist being saved.

As appalling as this situation may appear to all who recognize the horror of what awaits those who reject Him, were we human beings not able to blot the truth out of our hearts by hardening them in this way, our choice for Him and His Son our dear Lord Jesus would not and could not be a real or a genuine one. The awful "flip-side" of possessing the wonderful gift of the image of God is the corresponding ability to choose to be a "god unto oneself" – with all the terrible consequences that entails. But it is a choice.

For you are **unwilling** to come to Me so that you may have eternal life.
John 5:40

If anyone **chooses** to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.
John 7:17 NIV

Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they **did not submit** to God's righteousness.
Romans 10:3 NIV

(7) Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone, (8) and, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because **they disobey the** (gospel) **message** (lit., "the Word") – which is also what they were destined for (i.e., through their choice of disobedience).
1st Peter 2:7-8 NIV

So then He has mercy on whom He wills [to have mercy on], and He hardens whom He wills [to harden].
Romans 9:18

Although scripture sometimes describes the hardening process as in the verse directly above, God's role is really one of *allowing* those who wish to do so to reject the truth and henceforth harden their hearts against its further reception. That is why the false excuse that because of predestination we are only doing God's will when we reject Him is so damnable:

So you will say to me [by way of argument], "Why does He still find fault [with us]? For who has [effectively] resisted His will?" O [mere mortal] man! On the contrary, who are you who is answering back to God? The thing made will not ask its Maker, "why have

you made me this way", [will it]? Or doesn't the Potter have authority over the clay to make from the same lump a vessel for honorable purposes and another for dishonorable ones?

Romans 9:19-21

God, being God, could not possibly *not* have known how every individual would react when given free will and the opportunity to exercise it without undue coercion. For the process of human history to proceed, however, it is necessary for human beings who are determined not to believe to be able to "get on with their lives" and confirm their decision once they have embraced such negativity. We see the results of this self-willed hardening in the first category of bad soil in the parable of the Sower where we find individuals who have made themselves, their hearts, resistant to the reception of the truth of the Gospel:

In the case of everyone who hears the Word of the Kingdom and *refuses to let it in*, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown (i.e., the seed of the gospel) in his heart. This is the one who received the seed beside the road.

Matthew 13:19

(14) The Sower sows the Word. (15) And these are the ones beside the road where the Word is sown. And When they hear it, Satan comes immediately and removes the Word which has been sown into them.

Mark 4:14-15

And the ones [sown] beside the road are those who have heard [the truth of the gospel], then the devil comes and removes the Word from their heart, so that they might not believe and be saved.

Luke 8:12

In this part of the parable of the Sower, the soil has been "packed down" by heavy traffic beside the road (prior acceptance of the influence of the world) so that it will not allow the seed of the gospel to penetrate easily or quickly, resulting in its removal by the devil (i.e., instead of accepting the truth, the person hesitates and eventually chooses to believe false information which contradicts the gospel instead). Having been rendered resistant to truth, made dull or hard through accepting the lies abroad in the devil's world, those who have already made many choices to ignore and resist the truth of God's natural revelation, believing secular and satanic explanations, philosophies and lies instead, will ever prove resistant to the Good News itself.

This hard-packed nature of the heart does not happen accidentally or contrary to the will of the person who possesses it. Indeed, it would be impossible for anyone, creatures of the Living God that we are, made in the image of God as we are, possessing godlike free will as we do, to ignore God's truth, for whose reception we were made, if God did not make special provisions to enable us to do so. This hardening of heart is a process which will be accelerated during the Tribulation to allow the terrible events of those days to occur in a relatively short period of time:

(11) And for this [very] reason God is going to send upon them an empowerment of error so that they *may* believe the lie, (12) in order that they may be condemned, [even all those] who have not believed the truth but have [instead] approved of unrighteousness.
2nd Thessalonians 2:11-12

Had God not made such special provisions, we would all eventually be unable to resist His truth which sings to us from every corner of His creation – and thus our choice to respond to Him would not be truly free. The fact that human beings *are* able to harden their hearts, refusing to accept and ultimately rejecting what they know (initially) in these same hearts to be true, is proof of the genuineness of the free will we possess and the extraordinary opportunity we have been given: to choose *for* God of our own uncoerced volition – or to refuse to do so.

(17) So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do with their minds emptied [of the truth]. (18) They are *darkened* in their thinking, *separated* from the life of God because of this [willful] ignorance that is in them due to the *hardening of their hearts* [against the truth], (19) who, when once they have *lost all sensitivity* [for what is right], have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. (20) This is not how you learned to follow Christ.
Ephesians 4:17-20

In this passage, Paul describes the hardening of the heart as a seamless progression which has resulted in the unbeliever's futility of thought or "emptiness of mind" (i.e., a complete absence of God's truth). Nevertheless, three phases in the process are discernible here: 1) *darkening* of the mind's ability to perceive truth (resulting from resistance to the truth); 2) *separation* from the truth (resulting from rejection of the gospel and "the [eternal] life of God it offers"); and 3) complete *loss of sensitivity* to the truth (resulting from the perversion of all categories of God's truth, natural law included). Just as not all believers follow the path of spiritual growth, spiritual progress, and spiritual production, so not all unbelievers move from resisting the truth to its outright rejection and then into the downward spiral of complete licentiousness. In both cases, however, this is the natural path of the progression, the upward one requiring effort to achieve, the downward one requiring effort to resist.

It should be pointed out here that Paul's main point in describing the process of spiritual degeneration known as "the hardening of the heart" is as a palliative for Christians who are hindering their spiritual advance or jeopardizing their spiritual status through the same mistake, namely, turning away from, rejecting, and even perverting the truth. In both cases, rejecting truth produces a vanity or pointlessness of thinking, a "vacuum", so to speak, which, once truth has been rejected, draws in satanic alternatives.²³ The Greek word here, *mataiotes* (ματαιότης), along with its cognates, is most commonly a translation in the Septuagint version for the Hebrew word *hebhēl* (לִבְהֵל), meaning "windy emptiness", a lack of substance or purpose which, when

²³ See R.B. Thieme's Grace Apparatus for Perception (Houston 1974).

undirected by God, leads to being directed by the devil and his lies instead. Our focus here, however, is exclusively on the process of hardening as it effects unbelievers, and this three-fold progression of spiritual degeneration matches up precisely with the "three satanic lies" we have studied in the past:²⁴

- * lie #1: "I don't need God" (falsely assuming *independence* from God): dimming the truth.
- * lie #2: "I am like God" (falsely assuming *equality* with God): separating from the truth.
- * lie #3: "God needs me" (falsely assuming *superiority* to God): perverting the truth.

Turning away from the truth necessitates that a person turn towards what is untrue as a substitute, and the devil is quick to foster all anti-truth, anti-God thinking, both in terms of direct contact between his demons and unbelievers, and also very significantly and doubtless more widely through the system of religion, science, philosophy and all manner of alternative "truths" which he has been promoting since his temptation of Eve in the garden.²⁵ Given the vast reach of human arrogance, it is but a small step from not wanting to have anything to do with God to believing one does not need Him, from wanting to be independently sovereign to thinking one is in some way His equal, and from wishing to control one's fate in every way to imagining that one can actually "do something" for Him. These three lies, progressive in their outrageousness, correspond to the three phases of the hardening of the heart and encapsulate the mind-set of the unbeliever in his/her ever growing self-delusion at each step. It takes darkness, the blotting out of the light of truth, to believe that salvation is unnecessary or available apart from God (ruling like a god apart from God); it takes complete separation from and rejection of the truth to think that there might be any possibility of independent existence apart from God on any level and for any length of time (ruling like a god with God); and it takes a total desensitizing from truth of all sorts to imagine oneself immune from the natural consequences of behavior that violates even God's natural law and to further assume oneself capable of "helping Him" (ruling like a god over God).

This path of degeneration, it should be noted, is precisely the *opposite* of the reaction God's system of natural revelation is designed to produce. Recognition of our mortality *should* result in realizing our need for God, not accepting the devil's lie "I don't need God" (as if we could somehow live forever without Him, let alone in His presence). Realization of the existence of God and His perfect character *should* result in realizing our proper role of subordination to Him,

²⁴ See part 4 of the Satanic Rebellion series, section IV, "Satan's World-System: Tactical Doctrine", and part 2A of this series, Angelology, section II.7.4. "Satan's System of Propaganda".

²⁵ These matters are discussed in the Satanic Rebellion series, especially part 4, "Satan's World System". For the specifics on the devil's tactics in tempting Eve, see part 3 of that series, section IV.1, "The Temptation".

not accepting the devil's lie "I am like God" (as if the we pots were on the same level with the Potter, let alone being in the least control of divinely decreed history). Anticipation of the righteous judgment of God to come when this life is done *should* result in anticipating a solution which only God can provide, the Substitute who died for our sins, not the acceptance of the devil's lie "God needs me" (as if our works could ever be deemed acceptable by Him, let alone atone for sin). The reason for the *reversal* of the process God has so deeply ingrained in every facet of the world with the purpose of leading us all to salvation is purely a matter of choice. Everyone understands the truth. Few desire to let that light in.

Jesus said, "I have come into this world for [each case] to be decided: that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind."

John 9:39

Thus the process of human history on the individual level works perfectly to allow human beings to self-select their eternal futures. It is in the essence of being given genuine free will, of being true *'elium* made in the image of God, to be able to render judgment on the truth, accepting it for the truth it truly is, or resisting it, rejecting it, and eventually replacing it with our own alternative "truth" (so readily supplied by the evil one). Given that all unbelievers do know everything anyone would ever need to know to motivate them to seek God and to accept His solution to death and condemnation through faith in Jesus Christ who died for all mankind, it is an irrefutable truth that all those who will be excluded from the New Jerusalem have in fact desired it so – being unwilling to receive eternal life at the price of submitting to God. The process of rejecting these three essential categories of truth revealed in the nature of the creation and planted in the hearts of all requires such willful refusal to do God's Will that there can be little doubt about the fact that unbelievers have no one but themselves to blame. More than that, the perfection of the historical process as God has constructed it makes it abundantly clear that all unbelievers would live forever without God if they could, that many would force Him to share His power if they could, and that some would even dominate Him if they could: the will is there; all that is missing is the ability and the opportunity.

That is really the essence of the unbelieving mind-set, and so it will be revealed to have been in the case of each and every unbeliever at the Last Judgment (cf. Lk.2:34-35). Good people, nice people, friendly people, nondescript people (as well as the expected crowd of the evil, criminal, atheistic etc.) will be shown to have harbored these things in their hearts. God made them, but they wished to unmake God. That, praise God, is an impossibility, as natural revelation makes abundantly clear to all. Yet they would if they could, and would continue to embrace that way of thinking if given a hundred-thousand life-times to reconsider. In the face of death, judgment, and condemnation, the unbeliever is unwilling to relinquish to God the sovereignty over his will even for a moment, no matter the cost. Believers submit to God on His terms: through Jesus Christ His Son our Savior. Unbelievers may "worship" Him, but as Cain did, only on their own terms. They worship a god of their own making, God as they wish Him to be, someone who does not interfere with their personal desires, someone with whom they share equal privileges, someone whom they can manipulate to be and or do anything they please at any given moment, but definitely *not* someone to whom they must submit their own free will. And in all these matters, it

is the truth that is the key. In order to maintain his/her sovereignty against the Sovereignty of God for this short span of years on earth, the unbeliever must resist, reject, and pervert the truth into a different "truth". In some religions and in many manifestations of pseudo-Christianity there may seem to be some similarity to the true gospel. What is lacking in each case, however, is any true willingness on the unbeliever's part to accept the gospel as it truly is on God's terms. What is lacking is genuine faith in Jesus Christ.

They said to God: "Leave us alone! What can the Almighty do to us?"
Job 22:17 NIV

d. Phase One Hardening of the Heart: Darkening of the Truth

They knew about God, but they neither honored Him as God nor thanked Him. Instead, they gave themselves over to [the] vanity [of this world] in their speculations, and their senseless *hearts were filled with darkness*.

Romans 1:21

At some point in every human life, the reality of God, His existence and His perfection, shines through, enlightening the heart. The truth of Him, such potentially good news, given our common mortality, and such potentially disturbing news, given our common depravity, is an issue that must be faced, an issue which the entire creation and our God-given makeup requires us to face. When this light illuminates our hearts with the truth of who He is, we ought to respond with hope: a God who is perfect and all-powerful, a God who clearly made us for some purpose, a God who has revealed Himself to us, such a good, holy God would by His nature only do so if He wanted to help us – and since there is no *earthly* solution to the ultimate threefold problem of death, sin and judgment, to whom else could we possibly turn? For all those who respond to these universal and obvious conclusions by turning *to* God instead of away *from* Him, He provides the gospel message, having already provided all the solutions to be gained through it based upon the sacrifice of His Son.

He is the One who gives us all life and breath and everything else. (26) From one man he created all the nations of mankind – that they should come to inhabit the whole face of the earth. He fixed and determined the specific times and extent of their habitations, (27) to the end that they should seek out this God, *that they might go in search of Him and so might find Him* – for He is not far off from any one of us.

Acts 17:25b-27

God is "not far" from any and all who exhibit the least bit of inclination to "go in search of Him". The journey is not great. No one has to "go up to heaven" to find Him, or travel "down to the Abyss" to be saved. God has ever made His salvation "near" – for all those who truly want to find it (Rom.10:6-8). The issue is one of choice. When the light of the truth of God's natural revelation streams into a person's heart – and every human being becomes aware of Him at some point in their lives, usually very early on – that truth either occasions the "search process" which will eventually result in salvation for all who are genuinely willing to accept it, or it occasions a

refusal to accept these truths of who and what God is. For all those who, in spite of the pressures of the true underlying reality of life, are disinterested or negatively disposed towards the One who gave them life in the first place, being too enamored of their own independence to consider submitting to the One to whom they owe everything, "life and breath and everything else" (Acts 17:25; cf. Neh.9:6), refusal to respond to this light begins the process of hardening. The first step in "emptying one's mind of the truth" (Eph.4:17) is the "darkening of one's thinking" (Eph.4:18).

As the introductory quotation from Romans 1:21 above makes quite clear, it is precisely the prior rejection of the truth which results in the darkening of the heart, a giving in to the "vanities and speculations of this world", that is, the acceptance of "other truths" over God's truth, the pursuit of "personal truth" instead of seeking Him and the gospel. While the world idolizes many of the systems of philosophy, religion and outright pragmatism which men have conceived as substitutes (not without the aid of the devil), scripture describes the heart filled with such darkness chosen over light in different terms: such hearts are "senseless" (Rom.1:21: Greek *asynetos*). This word is of kindred derivation to the verb we find in the parable of the Sower in Matthew's account referring to the refusal of the unbeliever to *allow* the truth of the gospel to enter his hardened heart. "Senselessness" in the context of the unbeliever's negative attitude to the truth thus means "willful refusal to allow the light of truth to penetrate".

In the case of everyone who hears the Word of the Kingdom and *refuses to let it in* (*mé synientos*, μή συνιέντος), the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown (i.e., the seed of the gospel) in his heart. This is the one who received the seed beside the road.
Matthew 13:19

Refusing the light necessarily brings on the darkness. Refusing to accept the truth means accepting Satan's substitute lies instead. If we expel God's light, darkness is the consequence, and the greater our resistance to it, the deeper the darkness which results.

(19) And this is the [basis for] judgment: the Light (i.e., Jesus Christ) has come into the world, yet men loved the darkness more than the Light because their deeds were evil.
(20) For everyone who commits detestable practices hates the Light and does not come to the Light, lest his deeds be exposed [for what they really are]. (21) But everyone who acts in accordance with the truth comes to the Light so that it becomes obvious that his deeds have been done in God (i.e., in accordance with God's will).
John 3:19-21

Phase one hardening of the heart is focused on making excuses for not coming to God's light. Resisting the pull of the gospel is essentially a rejection of the logic of our mortality – for who other than God can save us from the grave? Unbelievers in this initial stage of hardening frequently challenge (in their hearts, even if they make no outward protestations) God's ability to save them or to save everyone, or question God's justice, on the (false) grounds that He has not provided them or provided everyone with the necessary information to be saved, or even claim they have no free will at all (Rom.9:17-24). In reality, however, the truth is that unbelievers would rather live their lives in their own way and apart from any interference from God.

Therefore, in its incipient manifestations, hardening one's heart against the truth is analogous to trying to declare a truce with God – as if a person could exist forever as a god in his or her own right, independent of the One who made us.

(13) They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave. (14) Therefore they say unto God, "Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. (15) What [is] the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?"
Job 21:13-15 KJV

Disdain for God, for His truth, and for His solution in Jesus Christ to the universal problem of death hardens the hearts of unbelievers against Him with the result that they become, to one degree or another, "enemies of God in their thoughts" (Col.1:21). God loved them. Jesus died for them. The gospel is available to each and every one of them. But they refuse Him. In becoming their own arbiters of what the truth is they may have put God off, but they have only deceived themselves. By shutting out the light, they have let in the darkness and have begun the spiritually stultifying process of the hardening of their hearts. Unbelievers often seek to shift the responsibility for their refusal to believe onto God, but in reality this is always their own choice, and God cannot be deceived on that point (1Chron.28:9; Jer.11:20, 17:10; 20:12).

But the godless in heart lay up anger; They do not cry for help when He binds them.
Job 36:13 NASB

In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God.
Psalm 10:4 NIV

They say, "How can God know? Does the Most High have knowledge?"
Psalm 73:11 NIV

Blessed is the man who always fears the LORD, but he who *hardens his heart* falls into trouble.
Proverbs 28:14 NIV

Your heart became haughty because of your beauty, [and so] you *destroyed your wisdom* on account of your splendor.
Ezekiel 28:17a

(3) The wicked are estranged from the womb; They go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies. (4) Their poison [is] like the poison of a serpent; [They are] like *the deaf cobra [that] stops its ear*, (5) Which *will not heed* the voice of charmers, charming ever so skillfully.
Psalm 58:3-5 NKJV

And *you are unwilling* to come to Me so that you may have life.
John 5:40 NASB

Today if you hear His voice, *Don't harden your hearts* as they did at the provocation [at Meribah].
Hebrews 3:8

e. Phase Two Hardening of the Heart: Rejection of the Truth

While the darkening of the mind which occurs in phase one hardening is largely a passive resistance to the truth (Eph.4:18a), the next phase of the process of choosing one's own ways over those of the Lord is the active rejection of the truth, a course which results in the person in question separating him or herself from the truth altogether (Eph.4:18b). It is now not merely a matter of resisting the light and bringing on an ever growing darkness. Now we find a state of complete blackout wherein no light can penetrate and all truth is rejected immediately, out of hand, and with no consideration whatsoever.

If your eye is bad, your whole body is dark. So if the light within you is darkness, how great that darkness is!
Matthew 6:23

The "bad eye" or inability to perceive the light referred to by our Lord immediately above is indeed a problem of perception, but the spiritual blindness such persons are suffering under is one which has been entirely self-induced (Prov.5:6). No longer do we have a passive ignorance wherein the truth is merely ignored. Now we have an active or prejudicial ignorance wherein any new offering of truth is energetically opposed and firmly rejected. As Ephesians 4:18 puts it, they are "separated from the life of God because of this [willful] *ignorance* that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts [against the truth]".²⁶ This blindness to and studied ignorance of the truth is the result of hardening one's heart against it to the point where no openness to it remains.

For those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath (i.e., deliberately), fulfilled these by condemning Him.
Acts 13:27 NASB

(10) As it is written [in scripture]: "There is no one righteous, not a single person. (11) There is no one who understands (i.e., deliberately). There is no one who diligently seeks God. (12) All have turned away, [and] have become worthless. There is no one who is doing what is good – there is no one, not even a single person."
Romans 3:10-12

Now the unspiritual man cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God. They are

²⁶ The Greek word *agnoia* (ἄγνοια) means here more than mere "not knowing". Rather than representing a natural or original state of a lack of knowledge, it represents a studied or "willful" ignorance which is the result of the free will of the person in question.

foolishness to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

1st Corinthians 2:14

(3) And to the degree that our gospel really is covered by a veil, it is obscured in this way only in the case of those who are perishing. (4) For in the case of such persons, the god of this world has **blinded the minds** of these unbelievers, in order to prevent the shining forth unto them of the light of the gospel of Christ's glory – even Him who is the very image of God.

2nd Corinthians 4:3-4

(3) First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. (4) They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." (5) But they **deliberately** forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water.²⁷

2nd Peter 3:5 NIV

See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us to [actually] be called children of God! And [that is just what] we are! For this reason the world does not understand us because it has not understood Him (i.e., deliberately).

1st John 3:1

This active, willful ignorance of second stage hardness is frequently accompanied by a shift from an agnostic viewpoint to full-fledged atheism (or its equivalent in embracing some system of religion or philosophy antithetical to true Christianity). In the parable of the Sower, such persons who have failed to "let the gospel in" (Matt.13:19), have by this point become so involved with the traffic of the world and hardened thereby that they are made vulnerable to all of the devil's lies, agents and false systems which attack truth "eating up" whatever seed of the Word may fall their way in the future.

(5) The Sower went forth to sow His seed, and while He was sowing, some of the seed fell beside the road and was trampled [by the traffic], and the birds of the air ate it up . . . (12) And the ones beside the road are those who have heard [the truth of the gospel], then the devil comes and removes the Word from their heart, so that they might not believe and be saved.

Luke 8:5 & 12

Phase two hardness actively rejects the truth, God's standards or even His existence. Persons hardened to this degree are self-focused, and vastly overrate their own abilities, importance or personal righteousness. They are no longer able to detect or notice the absence of truth in their

²⁷ The NIV's translation of the participle *thelontas* (θέλοντας) as "deliberately" is precisely correct.

hearts. They feel sufficient unto themselves to decide for themselves what is true and what is not.

(37b) [Jesus Christ:] "I have come into the world in order to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." (38) [Pontius Pilate:] "What is truth?"
John 18:37b-38a

Although God made them for the truth and the truth for them, unbelievers at this stage have separated themselves from any further consideration of the truth. Unwilling to yield to God's truth, they have established themselves as a "truth unto themselves". They claim, like Pilate, that the truth cannot be determined, but only so that whatever truth they invent for themselves may not be contradicted by any authority outside of themselves. In their minds, they have promoted themselves to a virtual equality with God, possessing equal ability and authority to determine and decree what truth may be. The result of this hardened thinking is not "greater insight" or "enhanced consciousness", but the blacking out the light of truth entirely.

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."
Psalm 53:1 NIV

Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.
Mark 4:24 NIV

f. Phase Three Hardening of the Heart: Perversion of the Truth

The example of Pharaoh in Exodus chapter 14 illustrates the lengths to which a person who has reached phase three hardening is capable of going in actually opposing God – as well as demonstrating the reason for God's empowering of the process (cf. 2Thes.2:11-12). Pharaoh, it will be recalled, continued to rebel against the Lord's demand to "let My people go", well beyond any sort of rational limit. When he relented, he only did so to obtain temporary relief from the current plague or plagues the Lord had sent upon him, and in the end maintained his adamant determination to have his own way against God's way even unto death. Confronted with the overwhelming power of God in a way in which few if any other human beings have ever been, a special "hardening" was necessary – not to cause Pharaoh to do something he would not have otherwise done, but to *allow* him to continue to do what he actually wanted to do in spite of the ever growing perspicuousness of the madness of his actions. That is the essential dynamic of the hardening of the heart and its essential purpose: God allows people to make the choices they truly want to make; resisting the truth goes against the entire construct of God's creation so that a certain amount of blinding oneself to that truth is necessary in order to continue to make choices which in their essence contradict it. Phase three hardening finds the person in question not only considering him or herself independent of God (in accordance with satanic lie #1), not only asserting his or her equality with God (in accordance with satanic lie #2), but now in effect claiming superiority over God (in accordance with satanic lie #3).

This is an evil thing in everything which is being done under the sun, namely that there is one outcome for everyone, and moreover that the hearts of the sons of Man are full of evil, and there is *madness in their hearts* during their lives, and afterwards they [go to join] the dead.

Ecclesiastes 9:3

Denying our need for God, denying the power of God, and even denying the existence of God is a sort of madness because all these denials contradict fundamental truth, truth which all human beings *know* to be true – until they deliberately blot it out by their own choice through the hardening process. Hardening of the heart is putting the truth to death in one's own thinking, and lest the individual unbeliever become completely paralyzed and prevented from doing what he or she genuinely chooses to do, God allows each and every one to harden the heart so that the truth need not be continually confronted or free-will hindered. By the time the third stage of hardening has been reached, the fear and trepidation of violating or contradicting reality (which all human beings naturally possess) has virtually vanished. To use a physical analogy for this spiritual reality, it is as if the truth that touching a hot stove is a mistake has been cast from the memory entirely. Instead of manifesting itself in physically self-destructive behavior, however, phase three hardness manifests itself in spiritually self-destructive behavior.

[These third-stage individuals], who, when once they have *lost all sensitivity* [for what is right], have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

Ephesians 4:19

Giving into the lusts of the sin nature without any further rational restraint – for even many unbelievers in phases one and two can see well enough that such behavior is a horrible mistake even from a secular point of view – is a hallmark of this final stage of hardening (cf. Heb.3:12-13). We should not imagine, however, that this complete "loss of sensitivity" for the truth will only manifest itself in lasciviousness. Just as in Pharaoh's case, stage three hardening's main characteristic is the development of an implacable attitude of superiority to God. While this may manifest itself in the indulgence of all sorts of illicit behaviors (which are of course not the unique province of individuals in this state), the underlying trait for everything such persons do is their sense of empowerment, empowerment to define what truth is and stamp that truth on the universe. For that reason, this final step in the journey away from God may result in atheism or religious fervor. The atheism of the terminally hardened is an active and aggressive one, however (i.e., not a mere personal opinion as in phase two, but a "truth" which must be energetically evangelized or at least acted upon with vigor). In like manner, the religiosity of such persons always amounts to helping God (really a god of their own making) do what He cannot seem to do for Himself. In both cases, stage three hardened individuals wish to dictate terms to God, to determine for Him what is the truth, and to decide for themselves and for Him what reality is and will be (and for all the rest of us as well, as far as it may be in their power). This mind-set is the very definition of arrogance, arrogating to oneself authority, power and privileges that are not really one's own, and there can be no greater form of arrogance than the attempt to dispossess one's Creator, the Ruler of the universe. Just as Pharaoh is the prime

historical example of this type, so antichrist is the prime prophetic example of this sort of person and way of thinking.

. . . the man of lawlessness, [antichrist,] . . . that "son of destruction", the one who will oppose and exalt himself against every so-called god and object of worship to such a degree that he will [even] take his seat in the temple of God and represent himself as being God.

2nd Thessalonians 2:3b-4

In times shortly to come, we will see during the Tribulation a divinely enabled acceleration of the process of hardening in order to allow the beast to win to his kingdom all its natural adherents within the relatively short period of those seven years. Those dark days will see much of mankind rapidly plunged into the darkness of third-stage hardening – by their own choice.

(9) [The lawless one's] appearance [will come about] through Satan's empowerment [and will be] accompanied by every [sort of] false miracle, both signs and portents, (10) and by every [sort of] unrighteous deception [designed] for those who are perishing, [namely those who will believe these lies] because they did not open themselves up to the love for the truth so as to be saved. (11) And for this [very] reason God is going to send upon [these unbelievers] an *empowerment of error* so that they may believe the lie, (12) in order that they may be condemned, [even all those] who have not believed the truth but have [instead] approved of unrighteousness.

2nd Thessalonians 2:8-12

We are all made in the image of God according to His likeness. We are all *'eliym*, "gods", in the sense that we have been given the God-like ability to choose. We may respond to the truth, or we may reject it. For those who follow the wrong path, its natural end is stage three hardening, not merely refusal (stage one) or rejection (stage two), but the complete and wholesale obliteration of the truth and of any further sensitivity for it. With all the restraints of spiritual reality removed, we human beings are capable of sending our minds ranging to the furthest expanses of the earth and of the heavens, imagining in our self-induced madness that we can "understand" and can even "come to control" things we cannot really even adequately conceptualize (cf. Ps.73:9; Prov.17:24). That is a frightening realization, but a necessary possibility if the choices we make here on earth – for Jesus Christ or against Him – are to be absolutely genuine.

(3) For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. (4) They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. (5) They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills. (6) Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence. (7) From their callous hearts comes iniquity; the evil conceits of their minds know no limits. (8) They scoff, and speak with malice; in their arrogance they threaten oppression. (9) *Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth.*

Psalms 73:3-9 NIV

This only have I found: God made mankind upright, but men have gone in search of many schemes.

Ecclesiastes 7:29 NIV

(3b) "They have chosen their own ways, and their souls delight in their abominations; (4) so I also will choose harsh treatment for them and will bring upon them what they dread. For when I called, no one answered, when I spoke, no one listened. They did evil in my sight and chose what displeases me."

Isaiah 63:3b-4 NIV

Unbelievers may try to shift the responsibility for the hardening of their hearts. They may try to blame God – "Why did you make me this way?!" (Rom.9:20) – but the fundamental issue in this process is one of individual choice. Rejecting the truth is a choice, and God has designed the hardening process in order to preserve the right to choose. Thus hardening does not remove choice; rather, it allows the genuine inclinations of each individual to come to the fore and to be maintained in spite of the truth which echoes and resounds from every facet of the creation.

The godless in heart harbor resentment; even when [God] fetters them, they do not cry for help.

Job 36:13 NIV

A man's own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the Lord.

Proverbs 19:3 NIV

As we have pointed out above, human history serves the purpose of weeding out the reprobate from the elect, of allowing each individual human being to decide for him or herself whether or not a relationship with God is desired. The sad reality is that in the course of mankind's seven thousand years the vast majority have been disinterested in knowing Him and unwilling to come to Him at the price of bending their will to His Will, even in so simple and non-meritorious a matter as accepting the Person and the work of Jesus Christ for salvation. The process of hardening of the heart makes this enormously foolish mind-set possible to maintain, whereas the constant pressure of the fear of death, the fear of a perfect God, and the fear of eternal judgment might otherwise eventually produce a response from those who in their heart of hearts would otherwise be unwilling to give in, and it allows each person so inclined to demonstrate after the fundamental choice of direction has been made the true mettle of their spirits and the firmness of that negative choice. At the last judgment it will be made indisputably clear from a case by case examination of every human life that while unbelievers regret going to hell, they do not at all regret the decisions they made to reject God, His truth, and Jesus Christ our Savior – and would do so again in a thousand life-times, if given a genuine choice without having to face the unbearable coercion of undeniable truth. Hardness of heart is what makes it possible for such persons to deny that truth, at least as long as they live.

In the progression of the hardening process, we see God's great grace at work. No one is damned for one instantaneous decision against Him (though we are saved by His grace through a simple

and momentary act of faith in His Son). As the unbeliever moves ever farther away from God, God is ever calling him or her back, and the hardening process is really a set of barriers meant to resist and impede spiritual decline through each of which the unbeliever must crash in turn in order to reach the nadir of phase three hardening. It is by the unbeliever's own choice that the voice of the Spirit calling to repentance and to faith grows ever fainter, and yet it never becomes entirely inaudible – where there is life, there is still hope. No human being can look into another person's heart and discern what may or may not potentially "turn that person around", but God knows. He has so constructed human history in every single one of its smallest twists and turns to give each human being for whom Christ died – and Jesus died for all – every chance for salvation. And more than that – He has so designed the circumstances of every life to bring out the true response which genuinely lies at the depth of every human spirit. No one who would choose for heaven from genuine free-will faith if only the circumstances were propitious has ever gone to hell. And everyone who has ever been or ever will be condemned has been so through their own genuine and deliberate choice, in spite of God's provision of truth in every aspect of the universe, in spite of life events and circumstances perfectly designed to lead that person to salvation, and in spite of the fact that Jesus died for their sins so that no impediment exists to being delivered from the lake of fire and being brought safely into the presence of God except that person's unwillingness to be saved. That is why unbelievers are condemned: they are not willing to be saved. Given the God-like power to say "no!", many human beings say "no!" regardless of the negative consequences of doing so (and regardless of the blessed results of alternatively saying "yes!"). The sacrifice of Jesus Christ has made salvation possible for all. God has done everything in providing for our deliverance. The fact that so many are so unwilling to submit their will to God even in such a simple way only proves the genuineness of their decision on the one hand and the perfection of God's method in allowing His moral creatures to decide for themselves where they will spend eternity on the other (cf. Matt.18:3-4). All that is necessary for salvation is to not say "no!" to God.

For the Son of God, Christ Jesus, the One who was proclaimed among you through us, through myself and Silvanus and Timothy, did not become "yes and no", but He became "yes!".

2nd Corinthians 1:19

The one who believes in Him is not being judged, but the one who does not believe has already been judged on the grounds that he has not put his faith in the Name (i.e., the Person) of God's only Son.

John 3:18

Unbelievers prove by spurning the truth throughout their lives that they want no part of God, that they would ignore Him forever if they could (phase one hardening), that they would replace Him if they could (phase two hardening), and in extreme cases (phase three hardening) that they would rule over Him if they could (or simply put Him to death). Since God has arranged things perfectly to allow every genuine plant of faith to sprout from the Word and survive unto eternal life, in the case of those who refuse to come to Him, no amount of time or second chances would ever change the ultimate result.

This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. (20) Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. (21) But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

John 3:20-21

3. Providence

You gave me life and showed me kindness, and in your providence watched over my spirit.

Job 10:12 NIV

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day.

John 6:44 NIV

And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to Myself.

John 12:32

As we have seen in our treatment of the doctrine of sanctification above, God superintends the lives of all those who are willing to respond to Him in faith, bringing the gospel message to them at just the right time so as to be saved by responding in faith to His truth about the Person and work of Jesus Christ (1Pet.1:2; 2Thes.2:13-14). But God's providence, literally "seeing ahead of time" what is needed, ensures not only that all destined to believe have what they need to believe but also that those destined to refuse to believe do not lack anything whatsoever that would have caused them to change their minds.

Typical of the way unbelievers and opponents of all things true behave, one often hears the objection, "What about the people who have never heard the gospel?" The implication is that since God has somehow "failed" (in their opinion) to give everyone an equal chance, that therefore it is only right for Him to save everyone regardless of their attitude towards Him. This canard is easily shown up for what it truly is: a false indictment of God on the one hand and a vain attempt to excuse their own personal choices on the other. For one thing, any person who levels this objection *has* heard the gospel, and so is unquestionably without any excuse. For another, this "lack of provision" is of course only apparent. Given His divine nature, it was impossible for God *not* to know before the fact exactly how each person in human history would choose under any possible set of circumstances. As we have seen above, human responsiveness to God is in its essence not primarily a question of reaction to circumstances but the result of deep-set proclivities in each individual human spirit. Where there was any chance for responsiveness to Him on even the most minimal level, we may be sure that God has *never* failed to provide – and provide perfectly – in order to maximize the opportunity and the actual response to Himself in faith by every single human being who has ever lived; indeed, that is how our glorious God has arranged history even in its seemingly most insignificant details.

(26) For from one man [Adam], [God] created the nations of mankind, that they might inhabit the entire face of the earth. And He predetermined both their appointed times and the boundaries of their settlement, (27) that they might seek God, if perhaps they might even [deign to] grope after Him and so come to find Him – for He is not far from any one of us.

Acts 17:26-27

Periods of history where a substantial effort in *human* witnessing is not apparent from our highly imperfect and incomplete historical record do *not*, therefore, reflect any lack of compassion on God's part but rather a lack of interest on the part of those nations and periods where the witness of the gospel may seem to be scanty or even non-existence. In fact, of course, God has never left Himself without a witness in the world since, as we have seen, nature itself in its every aspect and nuance proclaims His existence, His goodness, and our need for Him.

(16) "In the past, he let all nations go their own way. (17) Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy."

Acts 14:16-17

Wherever and whenever there has been any genuine desire for God in human hearts, individually or collectively, God has always made Himself and the way of salvation known.²⁸ The Father has always "drawn" His creatures to Himself (Jn.6:44), and, after the resurrection, Jesus is "drawing" everyone with more intensity than before (Jn.12:32). But in spite of all of God's efforts, the majority of mankind continues to resist. How can God Almighty be resisted? Only because He has given us His image in the ability to choose whether to respond to His drawing of us to Him, or to resist, go our own way, and continue instead to be gods unto ourselves.

I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them.

Hosea 11:4 NIV

This is the essential meaning of the common scriptural picture of Mankind endowed with free-will as a pot made by the Master Potter. The Potter has fashioned each and everyone of us in a perfect way, perfect, because it is exactly the way we have chosen to be fashioned. God has perfectly anticipated our free will responses to the gifts of "life and breath and all things" (Acts 17:25; cf. Neh.9:6), and has fashioned us, positioned us, and dealt with us appropriately. Since unbelievers as with all human beings are "who they chose to be", it is the height of gracelessness to complain, "Why did You make me like this?" (Rom.9:20).

Finally, however, this is not to suggest that somehow unbelievers are "locked-in" to the hardened

²⁸ Compare Jonah's mission to Nineveh: but for the existence of the book of Jonah, we would have no idea that an entire generation of Assyrians had turned to the Lord in saving faith.

position in which they find themselves. Where there is life, there is always hope. As in the case of Israel where "God is able to graft them in again" to His warm embrace "if they do not continue in unbelief" (Rom.11:23), so also every unbeliever who still lives still possesses free will and the corresponding ability to respond to God through faith in Jesus Christ – if they so desire in their heart of hearts.

(20) Now in a large household there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and clay, the former [meant] for noble purposes, the latter for ignoble ones. (21) Therefore if anyone purifies himself from these [sinful activities], he will be a vessel [used] for noble purposes, sanctified, most useful to his Lord, and ready for every honorable job.

2nd Timothy 2:20-21

Everyone is a sinner, everyone has at least some hardening of heart when saved. Even though the desensitizing of hardening relieves the pressures that lead toward the right choice, the potential of turning around and embracing Jesus Christ remains a possibility as long as a person continues to draw breath. Life is a crucible of tests for us all. It verifies who we are, who we have chosen to be, what our true inner-person genuinely desires and to what degree. In the course of human history, many prodigal sons have come back to the Lord – and many others once loyal have turned away. It therefore behooves us who have believed to spare no effort in drawing closer to Him and in serving Him as we were meant to do, and to continue to pray for and witness to those who are of a different mind in the hopes that God's ineffable mercy will yet lead them to repentance.

As ambassadors of Christ, as though God were urging you through us, we beg you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God!

2nd Corinthians 5:20

4. **Repentance**

(20) "You know that I have not hesitated to preach (lit., proclaim) anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. (21) I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus."

Acts 20:20-21 NIV

These verses demonstrate perfectly what biblical repentance really means for unbelievers: turning away from the world and their previous allegiance to it, and turning towards God through faith in Jesus Christ. For practical reasons, the Bible often does seem to describe repentance as a separate step in the process of salvation. In reality, however, repentance is the opposite side of the coin to responding to God through faith in Jesus Christ: putting one's faith in Jesus Christ is impossible without first having one's thinking about the world and our relationship to it radically shaken, and experiencing a fundamental change of heart in response to the gospel always leads to the expression of genuine faith. Faith is impossible without repentance; genuine repentance

never occurs without being followed by faith.

And it will come to pass that *everyone* who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

Joel 2:32a

Thus it has been written: "Behold, I am placing in Zion a Stone of stumbling and a Rock of tripping up. But he who puts his faith in Him *will not* be put to shame."

Romans 9:33

True repentance on the part of the unbeliever towards God and His truth is a fundamental change of attitude, a deep and life-changing realization that persistence in the course of unbelief leads only to death, judgment and destruction, whereas a complete turnaround is necessary in order to be saved from this otherwise common destiny of all mankind. This essential "about-face" in the unbeliever's whole previous way of looking at the world and his or her life is reflected in the biblical vocabulary of repentance (an English word which has become so loaded-down with false connotations as to have the potential of being very misleading). In the Greek of the New Testament, *metanoëo* (μετανοέω) means, etymologically, to change one's mind or attitude, while the most common word for this concept in the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *shubh* (שוב), means to turn around and come back. Both verbs indicates a clear and genuine change on the unbeliever's part (of attitude and of spiritual direction respectively). It is important to note that while salvation may be for some an extremely emotional experience, neither of these words in any way connotes that an excessive display of emotion is somehow necessary for effecting the basic change of attitude away from the world and toward God which is necessary in order to accept the truth of the gospel. An emotional display on its own means nothing. Judas deeply regretted his betrayal of Christ to the point that he took his own life (Matt.27:3-5)²⁹, but nothing in the biblical account suggests that he ever changed his mind about his need for a Savior or had any desire to come back to God through actually *believing* in Jesus. Others, like the Philippian jailer, may receive the gospel "with joy" (Acts 16:34), a circumstance which in no way should be taken to mean that an essential change in their way of looking at the world has not first taken place. Just as in the process of hardening the heart the truth must be rejected in order for the lie to be accepted, so also in order to receive the truth of the gospel, the world, its ruler, and his lies must first be abandoned in order for the glorious light of God's truth to shine through unto salvation. Repentance, therefore, is the biblical way of describing our fundamental choice in rejecting the lies of this world, just as its counterpart, faith, describes our fundamental choice in accepting God's truth in Jesus Christ (Hos.10:12).

And they said, "Men, why are you doing this? We too are human beings subject to the same mortality as you, giving you the *good news* to *turn away from* this pointless

²⁹ Rather than *metanoëo* (μετανοέω), the verb used to describe Judas' regret here is *metamelomai* (μεταμέλομαι), a verb which, just as in our English usage of the concept of regret, may or may not be accompanied by a concomitant, fundamental change in our way of thinking.

[idolatry] **back to** the living God, who made heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them."

Acts 14:15

5. The Gospel

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me will live, even if he dies. And everyone who lives and believes in Me will surely not die forevermore."

John 11:25-26

Gospel is a direct Old English translation of the Greek word *euangelion* (εὐαγγέλιον), "good news" or "blessed proclamation", and there is no better news for sinful human beings facing death, judgment, and condemnation than that Jesus Christ has died for us and that we may have eternal life by simply putting our faith in Him (2Tim.1:9-10). For Jesus is "the resurrection" and He is eternal "life". Through faith in Him, His perfect Person and His perfect work in dying in our place on Calvary's cross, victory over death, resurrection and eternal life, are available to every single person, because Jesus died for all mankind. Jesus Christ is the "good news", who He is and what He has done. Believing the truth of this good news, believing that He is the God-Man and that He was judged and died for our sins in our place, results in eternal life for all who are willing to accept Jesus Christ as their substitute. By seating Jesus at His right hand in heaven, the Eternal King has announced to the world that His Son's work on the cross has been accepted so that no further barrier exists between God and Man to prevent salvation – other than the willingness of individual human beings to accept through faith the truth of this blessed proclamation and hold it fast with joy to the end of life. For though we had nothing with which to recommend ourselves to God and no way to earn our way back into His good graces, the Father undertook to save us by sending His one and only dear Son into the world, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and judged all of our sins in His body that we might not perish but have eternal life through believing in Him (Jn.3:16).

But God commends His love towards us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:8

For what the Law could not accomplish, because it was weak on account of [its dependence on sinful human] flesh, God [did accomplish]: having sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for the purpose of [expiating] sin, [God] rendered summary judgment on [all] sin in [Christ's] flesh.

Romans 8:3

This message of good news, this blessed proclamation, is the essential divider which splits mankind into two distinct groups, believers who accept the truth of the gospel and rejoice over it, and unbelievers who refuse to accept it, reject it, or even seek to contradict it (hardness phases one, two and three respectively). Jesus *is* the good news, the fact that He was willing to become

a man and come into the world to die for our sins in our place that we might be forgiven through belief in Him.

(5) You too should have this attitude which Christ Jesus had. (6) Since He already existed in the very form of God, equality with God was [certainly] not something He thought He had to grasp for. (7) Yet in spite of this [co-equal divinity He already possessed], He deprived Himself of His status and took on the form of a slave, [and was] born in the likeness of men. (8) He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even [His] death on [the] cross [for us all].

Philippians 2:5-8

This is the gospel, the good news: that Jesus, the God-Man, has died for us and paid the penalty for all of our sins so that we might be saved through believing in Him. Accepting through faith the truth of this most important message in the history of the world is how we are saved, for this is the gospel, the proclamation of good news that there is a way for us to be delivered from death, judgment, and damnation – there is a way to be saved: through faith in Jesus Christ.

(15) Then I said, "Who are you, Lord?", and the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. (16) But stand up on your feet. For I have appeared to you for this [very] reason, [namely] to appoint you a minister and a witness, both of what you have [now] seen, and of [other things] in regard to which I shall appear to you [later]. (17) [For] I am going to rescue you from this people (i.e., Jewish opponents) and from the gentiles to whom I am sending you (18) to open their eyes that they may turn from darkness to [the] light, even from the power of Satan unto God, in order that they may receive the forgiveness of [their] sins and a share among those who have been sanctified *by faith in Me.*"

Acts 26:15-18

Here we have it from the very lips of our resurrected Lord that "faith in Me" is the means through which we are delivered from darkness unto light, forgiven our sins, and given a share in all the wonders of the world to come. Throughout all of human history, it has ever been so, whether anticipating the future time of God's sacrifice for sin or celebrating its reality now complete in the acceptable sacrifice of our Lord, His work provides us with forgiveness and our faith in Him and His work is the means of salvation. This is the essential "decree" of God to which all human beings must respond for deliverance (2Pet.2:21; Rev.14:6; cf. Ps.148:6b; Jn.12:50; 2Pet.3:2): "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31).

Start of the gospel of (i.e., "good news about") Jesus Christ, God's Son.

Mark 1:1

For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of (i.e., "good news about") His Son . . .

Romans 1:9

a. The Gospel of the Kingdom:

(14) And after John was arrested, Jesus went into Galilee proclaiming the *euangelion* (gospel) of God, (15) and saying, "The time has been fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is near. Repent and put [your] faith in the gospel (*euangelion*)."

Mark 1:14-15

The occasional description of the gospel as "the gospel of the kingdom" (Matt.4:23; 9:25; 24:14; cf. Lk.1:43; 8:1; 16:16; Acts 8:12) does not represent any sort of alternative content for the message of good news. The gospel is the good news about Jesus Christ, that He came into the world as a true human being and died for the sins of the world, opening up the gate of deliverance from death unto eternal life for all those willing to accept the truth of God's good news, all those, that is, who put their faith in Jesus and His work on the cross. The kingdom of God is and represents the reality of eternity beyond this present, corrupt and temporary world. God is the true Sovereign of the universe, and His Kingdom was, is and will be the only true Kingdom (e.g., Ps.103:10; 104:19; 104:22, etc.). In relation to the gospel, by placing our faith in Jesus Christ we become subjects of God's Kingdom even as we are delivered from the power of the present world ruler (Jn.14:30).

And now, behold, I know that you will not see my face [again] – all of you among whom I have journeyed in my proclaiming of the Kingdom.

Acts 20:25

[God the Father], who rescued us from the power of darkness and delivered us into the Kingdom of His beloved Son.

Colossians 1:13

When Jesus returns, He will establish His literal, millennial kingdom, and when human history is over, "the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matt.13:43 NIV), that is, in the eternal state whose capital is the New Jerusalem. Until those glorious days to come, the kingdom of which we are a part and which we serve is "not of *this* world" (Jn.18:36; cf. Jn.8:23). We are, in terms of our spiritual position "in Christ", subjects of the Kingdom whose "citizenship" is in heaven, not on earth (Phil.3:20). Thus the phrase "gospel of the kingdom" calls attention to the deliverance we believers experience *from* the present world – its evil ruler, its corruption, its pain and trouble – and *into* the world to come. Through faith in Jesus Christ, we anticipate our *future* actual deliverance, one that belongs to us in principle here and now, and it is to that future deliverance, and to our resurrection and reward in the kingdom of our blessed Savior and God our Father that we diligently and longingly aspire: "May thy Kingdom come!" (Matt.6:10; Lk.11:2).

b. The Gospel before the Cross:

It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those (i.e., Exodus generation) *who formerly had the gospel preached to them* did not go in (i.e., to the promised land),

because of their disobedience (lit. "unbelief").
Hebrews 4:6 NIV

And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, ***preached before the gospel*** unto Abraham, [saying], In thee shall all nations be blessed.
Galatians 3:8 KJV

As these two verses make clear, the gospel has ever been the same, whether anticipating God's solution to sin and death in the coming Messiah or celebrating it in the visible Person of our risen Lord Jesus, faith in Him and what He has done for us is the only way of salvation, the way into the eternal Kingdom of God, the only escape from death unto life eternal. The gospel is the great divider because *Jesus* is the great dividing line between life and death for all mankind (cf. Lk.2:34-35; Heb.4:12).

(34) Do not think that I have come to hurl peace upon the earth. I have not come to hurl peace upon the earth but a sword (of divisiveness). (35) For I have come to divide . . . 'a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. (36) A man's enemies will be the members of his own household'. (37) Whoever loves his father or mother above Me is not worthy of Me, and whoever loves his son or daughter above Me is not worthy of Me. (38) And whoever does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. (39) Whoever has found his life will lose it, and the one who has lost his life for My sake will find it.
Matthew 10:34-39

Unless one confesses "Jesus as Lord", an act of faith rather than a ritual pronouncement, one which necessarily includes acknowledging His divinity and humanity, His whole person and His work on the cross, there is no salvation (Rom.10:9). But for all who do accept Him as the Son of God and embrace the forgiveness of their sins in His Name through one simple act of faith, believing the truth of God's good news and being willing to receive it, the door of eternity and the entrance into the Kingdom opens wide (for more on pre-cross salvation, see below, section 6.d "The Mechanics of Saving Faith").

I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.
John 10:9 NIV

6. Faith

Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.
Acts 16:31

As the scriptures demonstrate throughout, the issue in salvation is not one of knowledge or perception or understanding; rather, the issue is one of faith – believing in the veracity of God and His message of good news and accepting it non-meritoriously (Lk.7:50; Acts 26:18; Gal.3:2-

9).³⁰

Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.

Luke 8:12 NIV

If you are the Christ," they said, "tell us." Jesus answered, "If I tell you, you will not believe me".

Luke 22:67 NIV

Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

John 6:29 NIV

Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him.

John 12:37 NIV

"Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you."

Acts 13:41 NIV

Nor is salvation a matter of believing in the existence of God – everyone, as we have seen, comes to that knowledge or belief, even if later in life they throw it aside in hardness of heart.

You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

James 2:19 NIV

In biblical terms, faith is an act of free-will. Saving faith is a response to God, the act of accepting the truth of the good news that the Son of God died for our sins and that we are saved by putting our faith in Him as our Substitute. Saving faith is a decision – to submit to God in order to be delivered from judgment by being willing to accept the truth of the gospel and thereby embrace Jesus Christ as Savior through the gospel. Merely hearing the gospel is insufficient for salvation – it must be "mixed with faith".

(19) Now we see that they (i.e., the Exodus generation) were unable to enter into this [place of rest] because of their *unbelief* [lack of faith]. (1) So let us beware lest any of you should seem to fall short [on this score], by casting aside [God's] promise [in a similar way]. (2) For we have had *the gospel* proclaimed to us just as they did. But the Word they heard did not profit them, for, though they heard it, *they did not mix it with faith*. (3) Therefore it is we who *believe* who enter into this rest [not those without faith], just as He has said . . .

³⁰ Charles Ryrie, on p.134 of his Survey of Bible Doctrine, counts over two hundred New Testament passages where salvation is said to be dependent upon faith alone.

Hebrews 3:19 - 4:3a

Placing faith in Jesus Christ is a choice which involves no personal merit whatsoever, for Jesus Christ is the One who has meritoriously died on our behalf. Salvation is a gift freely given and appropriated by faith alone. The Giver possesses the merit; the recipients are merely willing to receive the gift.

(8) For you have been saved by [God's] grace through faith [in Christ]; and this did not come from you – it is God's *gift*. (9) Nor did it come from what you have done, lest anyone should boast.

Ephesians 2:8-9

(2) For if Abraham really was considered righteous (i.e., in the eyes of men) as a result of the works [he did], then he does have something to boast about – but not in front of God!

(3) What does the scripture actually say? [It actually says that] "Abraham *believed* in God, and [so his faith] was attributed to him for righteousness (i.e., as a gift, not as something earned)."

Romans 4:2-3

It is God who gives us the gift of Jesus Christ (2Cor.9:15; cf. Rom.5:15-17). Faith is merely the ability to accept that life-saving gift, and believing is merely a matter of exercising the choice to do so. It is not a matter of works; it is simply a matter of utilizing our God-given ability to respond to the truth, submitting our will to His Will through faith.

Jesus answered, "This is the work of God, that you believe in the One He has sent."

John 6:29

This simple, non-meritorious act of placing our faith in Jesus Christ, believing the truth about Him contained in the gospel and made real and meaningful to us by the Holy Spirit (see below) is the way in which we receive the grace God has provided for all mankind in His dear Son who died for all.

For God loved the world so much, that he gave His only beloved Son, in order that whoever believes in Him might not perish, but have eternal life.

John 3:16

a. The Etymology of Faith:

While the Bible uses many different terms in discussing faith, when that word and its cognates are found in our English versions, it usually means that the version is translating a form of the Hebrew root *`aman* (אמן) in the Old Testament or the Greek word *pisteuo* (πιστεύω) in the New Testament. The basic verbal form in both cases is most often translated "believe". For example, at Genesis 15:6, where we are told that Abraham "believed in God, and God credited it to him for righteousness", *`aman* is the word used. The root is related to the idea of being firm and reliable

(thus *`amunoth* are supporting pillars, while *`amen*, our amen, means "truthfully or reliably so"). Therefore, in the Hebrew, the concept of belief carries with it the idea that the object of belief (i.e., God) can be relied upon by those who put their trust in Him. Thus the root *`aman* implies that, like a solid pillar, God will support us when we lean on Him (and to this we can all say amen!). The Greek word *pisteuo* is the one used to render *`aman* in the 3rd century B.C. Greek translation of the Old Testament (i.e., the Septuagint). Since this version greatly influenced the linguistic choices of the New Testament writers, we may be sure that in our literature *pisteuo* likewise carries this same connotation of reliance on God. In all ancient Greek, *pisteuo* means to have faith or belief in an object. As the negative concept of *apistia* (faithlessness) makes clear, the "faith" indicated by *pisteuo* is more than intellectual appreciation of something (cf. Rom. 11:20-23 where unbelief is a very willful attitude of heart). Additionally, the participles of *pisteuo* are used by various New Testament writers where English versions commonly use the noun "believer(s)". This last fact is significant, because, to writers of scripture, believers are people who "have, are, or have come to be in a state of believing". Whatever the tense employed, the participle used in lieu of the noun makes crystal clear that believers are people involved in the *action* of belief, whether that action is emphasized as having taken place (Acts 18:27; 19:18; 21:20, 25; Titus 3:8), ever continuing (Eph. 1:19), or having been accomplished once and for all (Heb. 4:3).

b. The Definition of Faith:

Now without faith, it is impossible to please [God]. For whoever wishes to draw nearer to God must believe that He exists, and that He will reward those who earnestly seek Him.

Hebrews 11:6

Faith, as we know from the book of Hebrews, is the reality of things not seen: "Faith grounds what we hope for in reality; it is the proof of matters which are invisible" (Heb. 11:1; cf. 2 Cor. 4:18; 5:7). Paul, the author of Hebrews, goes on to show how faith is one of the quintessential virtues of the Christian life, because by means of faith famous believers of the past pleased God and witnessed to Him before mankind, acting often with total disregard for the values and standards of this world (verses 2-40). They acted in faith, which, according to verse one, gave their hopes a reality, and therefore a conviction which rendered the opinions of this world valueless by comparison.

Paul puts things the opposite way of what one usually sees. "Give us a sign!" is the cry of erstwhile believers from our Lord's day up until the present. "Prove to me you're really God!" Hebrews tells us that for the truly commendable believers of the past, things worked exactly the reverse of this. They had faith that what at present they could only hope for (God's promised rewards) would indeed come to pass; that what at present was invisible (the existence and righteousness of God) was nonetheless a reality. This faith is then described as the grounds for their hope, as the proof of the invisible. For the rewards they hoped for and the invisible God who will distribute them do exist. By their faith, the believers described in chapter eleven give us proof of this. If there were no true rewards, no just and righteous God, then such faith and the

mighty acts it has inspired would never exist under the sun. But as it is, the tremendous witness of these courageous believers is abundant proof of the power and reality of God, and of the glorious rewards He has in store for all who persevere in faith. Faith, therefore, encompasses our entire Christianity (Gal.1:23). More than an attitude or action of mind, faith implies reliability (Rom.3:3). It is a profession, a surrender, a yielding, a decision, an act of humility in obedience to and in respect for the authority of God in the fear of God. Only in such total commitment to and reliance upon the integrity of God do we experience the reality of the as yet unseen wonders promised to us.

Faith is a change of direction, a return to God (Lk.1:16-17; Acts 3:19; 9:35; 11:21; 15:3; 15:19; 26:18-20; 2Cor.3:16; 1Thes.1:9; 1Pet.2:25; cf. Matt.13:15; Lk.22:32; Acts 14:15; Jas.5:20). For as believers, we have now turned away from the world and have turned back to the God who made us, trusting in Him and His offer of salvation rather than in ourselves. We have turned our backs on sin in repentance and have turned for our forgiveness and deliverance instead towards the One who died for those sins that we might be saved through faith in Him. And we have rejected the lies of the world and its evil ruler, and have instead affirmed that it is God's message which is the truth, placing our faith in the gospel and in the One who is the Living Word of God, our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

c. The Essence of Faith:

Faith, therefore, is more than just an understanding or acknowledgment of God's existence or Christ's divinity. As James says, "Do you really believe in God? That's all very nice. But the demon's believe too and shudder [in anticipation of their coming judgment]" (Jas.2:19). James' point is that faith is not merely an intellectual appreciation of the reality of God or even a mental recognition that Christ is God's one and only true Son. Faith goes beyond mere cognizance of information. Faith both appreciates and embraces these facts. When a person puts his or her faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as the only way to the Father, the only way to escape death and judgment, that person is immediately changed forever, and no mere mental assessment could possibly accomplish a miracle of such proportions. So accompanying our mental perception of the facts of the gospel, our faith must also entail a definite commitment to following Christ. This notion is even present in the Greek word *epignosis* (ἐπίγνωσις), often used (along with its cognate verb *epignosko*) to express "knowledge" of God in salvation contexts. *Epignosis* means more than mere knowledge (as the simplex form *gnosis* suffices for that meaning); *epignosis* is focused knowledge, with the *epi-* prefix directing the acceptance entailed therein towards the object of faith, the gospel message of our dear Lord Jesus; *epignosis* includes the idea of the acknowledgment of, and therefore of the *obedience to* God's truth and will (Rom.1:28; 1Tim.2:4; 2Tim.2:25).

[Jesus Christ], through whom on behalf of His Name I have received [this] grace and [my charge of] apostleship, for the [fulfilling of His] purpose among all the gentiles of their **obedience** [consisting] of [their] faith.

Romans 1:5

Thus faith is *not* a mere intellectual appreciation of who Jesus is and what He has done (for "even the demons" know this), but an *acceptance* and *commitment* of heart to this truth as the way of salvation. God made us to need Him and has done everything necessary for us to return to Him – and because of Jesus' sacrifice we are obliged to do so. Accepting the truth of the gospel in faith is an act of obeying God, the first and fundamental act of obedience which enters us into the family of God and begins the life of faith.

d. The Mechanics of Saving Faith:

(30) And [he] brought them out, and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (31) And they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."
Acts 16:30-31 KJV

As these verses show, it is the motivation to be saved which is critical rather than any detailed prior understanding of the process of faith in salvation. As with the Philippian jailer above, so in the case of the vast majority of us, the (often initially foggy) details of just how we came to believe are of far less importance than the reality of our having placed our faith in Jesus Christ so as to be saved.

(39) One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" (40) But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? (41) We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." (42) Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." (43) Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."
Luke 23:39-43 NIV

We cannot know just how much information this second crucified thief had about our Lord, but it seems to have been very limited – and yet completely sufficient. He realized that Jesus was the Son of God and was dying for him. He rejected his former way of thinking and appealed to the Lord in faith instead. Jesus' reply, assuring him of his salvation, demonstrates clearly that genuine repentance, faith, and recognition of who Jesus is and what He has done for us is what is really important rather than any specific formula of salvation – for this thief clearly made use of no such "magic words" (and had no time or opportunity for any sort of ritual). He merely said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom", and our Lord, recognizing that he had faith sufficient to be saved assured him of his salvation through that faith: "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise".

This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.
Romans 3:22 NIV

It is fair to say that anyone reading the Bible or hearing the gospel accurately presented would come to the conclusion that he or she is being asked to put his or her faith in Jesus Christ, that is, to trust in Him for salvation by believing in Him. Such an act of faith is not a mere mental

appreciation as all are acutely aware (for the Spirit makes the truth of the promise of eternal life clear to all who hear as well as the need to believe it in order to receive it; see below). Saving faith does, therefore, involve the will. It is a matter of choosing for Jesus, of pledging one's allegiance to Him as Savior, of saying "I do" to Him as our new Husband, so to speak. Putting our faith in Him is making a commitment that most definitely does imply the intention of following Him faithfully in this life. But the choice is a very simple one, simple in its essence, and simplified even further – to the point of crystal clarity – by the small, still voice of the Spirit. Knowledge, information, and personal intelligence are variable and somewhat different in the case of each human being and each giving of the gospel – but these incidental matters are not the issue. The issue is one of faith, exercised in uncoerced free will. The issue is one of choosing for Jesus, for an eternal life with Him, of believing in Him . . . or of refusing to do so.

The first detailed account of personal salvation in scripture is found at Genesis 15:6, where we read that Abraham "trusted the Lord, and the Lord reckoned this to him for righteousness". In Old Testament times, believers looked forward to the cross, to the day when God would somehow wipe away sin and open the door of salvation (cf. Rom.3:25b). God has never left Himself without a witness to the mighty deed of deliverance He would render for the world through the sacrifice of His Son. From the coats of skin given to Adam and Eve, through the system of Levitical offerings, up to the actual day of the cross, God has always made it clear to anyone interested in listening that our salvation depends upon the sacrifice of another in our place to pay the penalty for our sins. Abraham trusted in God – not in himself or in his own righteousness – for this ultimate deliverance, and that trust, maintained throughout his life, was the way of salvation for him. In Romans 10:9-10, Paul tells us that the same is true for us today: if we "confess Jesus as Lord with our mouth, and believe in our heart that God raised Him from the dead" we shall be saved.

James makes it clear that Paul is not "adding" anything to the mechanics of faith. One cannot really be a believer, he points out, without that belief being demonstrated in the life (Jas.2:18-26). As evidence, he quotes Abraham's successful passing of that most difficult test of faith, the command from God that he sacrifice his son. Rather than vacillating, Abraham had faith that the God in whom he had trusted would work it all out for good, and the deliverance of Isaac through a substitute provided by God becomes a picture of Christ's sacrifice for us to this very day. If we really do believe God in our heart, it is absolutely impossible that confessing Jesus as Lord "with our mouth" will not follow, along with any and all manifestations of our faith that God will perform through us in the Christian lives we go on to lead. Apart, then, from the clear picture we have of the saving work of the Person of our Savior, Jesus Christ as we look back on the cross, the way of salvation remains the same for Paul as it was for Abraham: believe in the Lord. And while Abraham could only look forward with hope to the Sacrifice which God would provide on his behalf, we now have sure and certain knowledge of the work on the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, knowledge for which, as Peter tells us, "the prophets sought and searched" (1Pet.1:10-12). The "confession" part of Romans 10:9-10 is therefore not a prerequisite for becoming a believer, but Paul's way of assuring us (as God did with Abraham, and as James makes clear in his own way) that all true believers can be discerned by their works. No one who has really put their faith

in Christ would refuse or be unwilling to confess Jesus as Lord. Just as for believers faith without works is dead, so in salvation true faith always produces life-changing results.

For God did not send His Son into the world to judge the world, but so that the world might be saved through Him. The one who believes in Him is not being judged, but the one who does not believe has already been judged on the grounds that he has not put his faith in the Name (i.e., the Person) of God's only Son.

John 3:17-18

This and other passages (e.g., Jn.1:12; 10:25; 20:31; 1Jn.5:13) which equate saving faith with "believing in the Name" of Jesus do not constitute exceptions to the process we have described above. Rather, this is merely an alternative way of expressing the object of our faith, namely, Jesus Christ, His perfect Person and His perfect work. The "name" is of utmost importance in scripture because, based on the Old Testament pattern, God's "Name" expresses the essence of who He is and what He does.

(14) Then God said to Moses, "I shall be who I am. This is what you will tell the sons of Israel: 'I am sent me to you.'" (15) And God also said to Moses, "Thus you will say to the sons of Israel: 'the Lord [the "is"], the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob sent me to you. "This is My Name forever, and this is how you are to think about me for all generations."

Exodus 3:14-15

Therefore believing in the Name of the Son of God is believing in His divine Person and in His divinely ordained work of salvation. "Calling on the Name" is likewise merely a different way of expressing the life-changing results of genuine faith in the Lord, and that has been the case since the beginning of human history.

Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh. At that time men began to call on the name of the Lord.

Genesis 4:26 NIV

. . . for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Romans 10:13 NIV

And again, this calling on the Lord is not a means of being saved but a result of the life-changing salvation that has already been provided by grace through faith just as Paul had explained prior to the verse quoted directly above:

As Scripture says, "Anyone who *believes* in him will never be put to shame."

Romans 10:11 NIV

For when it says in the previous verse, "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom.10:10 KJV), it is clear that no one with

God's righteousness is unsaved, so that "confession unto salvation" is a manifestation of prior saving faith and *not* a separate requirement or a means independent of faith. That is why Paul reverses the order in verse nine (confession of faith preceding "believe in your heart"), and why in the verse eleven he sums up by emphasizing faith alone: "Anyone who **believes** in him will never be put to shame."

e. Faith Epistemology:

Although by no means necessary to know and understand in order to be saved in the first place, the biblical principles of how it is that unbelievers come to know and understand God's truth in order to be saved are good and proper for all believers to learn (and most appropriate to discuss here in a systematic study of this kind). The problem of how limited, physical, and sinful human beings can apprehend unlimited, spiritual, and holy truth is one which has exercised philosophers and theologians for millennia, and one which is also often adduced by skeptics as an objection to the gospel:

(37) Then Pilate said to Him, "So you are a king then?" Jesus replied, "You say [rightly] that I am a King. For I have been born for this purpose, and have come into the world in order to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." (38) Pilate replied to Him, "What is truth?"
John 18:37-38

The objections that truth is incomprehensible, inaccessible, and even inappropriate for mortal and corrupt human beings would certainly be true – were it not for the mercy, the power, and the grace of God:

- Although from the secular point of view we lack any way of accessing or accepting such truth, in His design and creation of us, God has provided us with an invisible spiritual part so that we may indeed receive this truth.

The fact that we are in truth dichotomous, possessed of a human spirit which, from the point of its gift to us by God at birth, will never cease to exist, solves the problem of accessibility: within our physical body dwells a purely spiritual part designed by God to respond to and to receive the truth.

- Although from the moral point of view in our corrupt status we could never be deserving of its reception, God has paid the price for all our sins so as to be just and righteous in His provision to all of the truth of the gospel to the end that all might be saved.

Jesus' sacrifice solves the moral problem: by dying for the sins of the entire world once for all, God has removed sin as a moral impediment to salvation, making the issue now instead the willingness to accept through faith the Person and the work of His Son our Lord Jesus Christ so as to be saved.

- Although from the human point of view we appear limited in our perception to what our eyes and ears and other senses may perceive, God has provided a supernatural means for us to understand spiritual truth.

The teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit solves the perceptual problem: while our spirit must access all other information through its interface with the presently corrupt and sinful body, processing it in the "mind" or "heart" where the spirit and the body come together (see BB 3A section II.4, "The Dichotomy of Man"), in respect to divine truth, the Holy Spirit bypasses our material part and communicates directly with our purely spiritual part so that all spiritual truth received flows in the opposite direction, that is, not from the body to the spirit through the senses and into the mind/heart, but from the spirit to the body into the mind/heart.

(5) Jesus responded, "Truly, truly I tell you, that unless a person is born from water and Spirit, he is not able to enter into the kingdom of God. (6) That which is born from the flesh is flesh, and that which is born from the Spirit is spirit."

John 3:5-6

"The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

John 3:8 NKJV

"If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?"

John 3:12 NKJV

And this is [exactly] what some of you were – but you were washed [clean], but you were made holy, but you were made righteous by [faith in] the Person (lit., Name) of the Lord Jesus Christ, **and by the Spirit of our God.**

1st Corinthians 6:11

– and these same things have now been proclaimed to you through those who ***gave you the gospel through the Holy Spirit***, sent from heaven – even angels want to look into these things.

1st Peter 1:12b

We have dealt with the first two of these three solutions to the epistemological problem sufficiently in the past (in BB 3A and 4A respectively), and while we shall cover the third in all of its aspects in the next installment of this series, it will be helpful here to discuss the Spirit's role in making the gospel understandable to those who hear it.

[God] whose will it is for all men to be saved and to come to acceptance (*epignosis*) of the truth [which is the means of salvation].

1st Timothy 2:4

This verse makes it eminently clear that it is God's will for His truth to be understood and believed, so that, *pace* the objections of science and philosophy, in His justice He has certainly made the reception of His truth possible. Since God desires all to be saved, it certainly would be out of keeping with His perfect character not to have provided a means whereby all human beings can come to a complete understanding and acceptance of the truth of the gospel (i.e., the *epignosis* of it). As discussed in the section on "The Essence of Faith" above, *epignosis* is not just knowledge (*gnosis*), but knowledge of divine truth which has been responded to and accepted through faith. *Epignosis* is truth understood *and* believed (1Cor.13:12; 2Cor.1:13; Eph.4:13; Col.1:9-10; 2:2; 1Tim.2:4; 4:3; 2Tim.2:25; 3:7; Tit.1:1; 2Pet.2:20-21; cf. Rom.1:28; 1:32; 3:20; 10:2; Eph.1:17; Phil.1:9; Col.1:6; 3:10; Philem.1:6; 2Pet.1:2-3; 1:8). In responding to the gospel, we apply our faith to the truth; God supplies the means for us to understand that truth so as to believe it.

(9) But as it is written: "What the eye has not seen and the ear has not heard, and [what] has not entered the heart of man, [these are the very] things which God has prepared for those who love Him". (10) And God has revealed [these very things] to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches out everything, even the deep things of God. (11) For who knows the things of a man except the spirit of man which is in him? In the same way too no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. (12) And we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, in order that we might know the things graciously given to us by God. (13) And these are the very things we are speaking about, not in words taught by human wisdom, but with words of the Spirit, communicating spiritual information to spiritual people. (14) Now the unspiritual man does not receive the [deeper] things of the Spirit of God. For they are foolishness to him and he is not able to understand them because they are appreciated [only] through spiritual means. (15) But the spiritual man does appreciate them all, though he himself is not appreciated [in this regard] by anyone. (16) For [as it says] "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Who will instruct Him?" But we do have the very thinking (lit., "mind") of Christ (i.e., His truth from the Spirit).

1st Corinthians 2:9-16

This passage, carefully considered, tells us all we need to know about God's special provisions to His children for their reception of His truth, the essence of which is the communication of the Holy Spirit to our human spirit (cf. also Rom.8:16; 1Jn.2:10; 2:27):

- v. 9: Divine truth, something which cannot "enter into the heart" through human sensual perception, has nevertheless been "prepared by God for those who love Him". So while eyes and ears are incapable of discerning God's divine truth on their own, God's special provision of this truth to be received and understood guarantees that God has also provided the means for this to occur, not physical and empirical means, but spiritual and invisible means.
- v. 10: It is "through His [Holy] Spirit" that God "has revealed" His truth, beginning with the gospel and continuing for those who accept Jesus Christ as their Savior into every

aspect of divine truth contained in scripture. The Spirit is the One who makes the reception of divine truth possible (for eyes and ears are incapable of correctly perceiving it without help and our earthly mind is unable to understand it absent divine assistance). As God, the Holy Spirit knows all divine truth, and is capable of communicating even "the deep things" of God to those who respond.

- v. 11: Just as there are certain things which only individual human beings can really know about themselves, so God is the only One who can know about God. Therefore just as we can only know about someone else's deep inner-thoughts if they tell us, so the only way for us to know about God's thinking, God's truth, is if He communicates it to us, and it is the Holy Spirit whose ministry it is to communicate with us, doing so by ministering directly to our human spirits whenever the truth is proclaimed.
- v. 12: Believers are explicitly said to have been given the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit for the *purpose* of the perception of "the things graciously given to us by God" (i.e., the whole realm of divine truth). In the case of any and all who are not yet part of God's family, the "good news" of God's gift of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ is made understandable through the same ministry of the Spirit who acts in this interpretive capacity whenever the gospel is being proclaimed.
- v. 13: God's spiritual process for communicating truth through the Holy Spirit is here seen to "short-circuit" the worldly, physical process of normal perception: spiritual matters are empowered by and made understandable through the Spirit's teaching ministry so that human agents of divine truth are able to "communicate spiritual matters" (which would otherwise be incomprehensible) "to spiritual people", that is, those who are being enabled by the ministry of the Spirit to receive this spiritual information (limited to perception of the gospel in the case of unbelievers).
- v. 14: With the exception of the gospel, it is impossible for unbelievers to comprehend spiritual truths, since they lack the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit.
- v. 15: Believers, on the other hand, are able, with the Spirit's help, to receive, comprehend, believe and understand all divine truth. However, since this is accomplished through the Spirit's agency, the world is incapable of understanding how believers receive the truth and make it their own through faith.
- v. 16: Divine truth may seem entirely inaccessible, but as members of the Body of Jesus Christ, we have access to the very thinking of Christ, the whole truth of the Bible, through the ministry of the Spirit. By the same means, unbelievers too are enabled to receive entry-level information about the truth, that is, the gospel message about salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, made real and understandable to everyone who hears the gospel.

There is, therefore, no barrier to the unbeliever truly appreciating and understanding the message of Good News, for God has graciously provided a supernatural means for everyone to know and accept the truth through the power of His Spirit. As is the case with all truth at all times, however, it must be believed to be truly understood and retained so as effect genuine change:

In the case of everyone who hears the Word of the Kingdom and *refuses to let it in* (*mè synientos*, μή συνιέντος), the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart (i.e., the seed of the gospel). This is the one who received the seed beside the road. Matthew 13:19

f. False Issues:

All divine truth is always opposed by the father of lies, the devil (Jn.8:44). Given the fundamental importance of the gospel as the essential truth necessary to be believed in order to gain initial entrance into the family of God, it was inevitable that Satan would save some his most pernicious attacks for his attempts to pervert the proclamation of the good news that salvation is available for all through faith in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. The list below makes no claim of being anywhere near comprehensive, but it is hoped that its perusal will provide a sense of the sorts of false issues which have been and continue to be introduced by the evil one in order to poison the gospel message and turn the unbeliever away from drinking the pure water of life in order to be saved through its truth:

1. The lie: "Water-baptism is necessary to be saved". The truth: Water-baptism is a ritual which plays no role whatsoever in salvation; the baptism of the Spirit is what the Bible emphasizes, not the water ritual meant primarily for the Jewish nation to prepare the way for the Messiah (Matt.3:15; Acts 1:4-5; 1:8).
2. The lie: "Circumcision is necessary to be saved". The truth: Circumcision is a ritual which is part of the Law fulfilled by the work of Jesus Christ (Rom.10:4; cf. Matt.5:17). Believers are not required to participate in it before or after salvation (Acts 15:1-31; cf. Gal.5:2).
3. The lie: "Obeying the Mosaic Law is necessary to be saved". The truth: No system of works or behavior is a prerequisite for salvation, nor will any system of works provide salvation, not even the Law of Moses (Rom.3:20; Gal.3:16).
4. The lie: "A public pronouncement of repentance is necessary to be saved". The truth: True, biblical repentance is a genuine change of heart away from the world and towards Jesus Christ in response to the truth. True, biblical repentance is inseparable from saving faith (Acts 10:43; 13:38; 26:18).
5. The lie: "It is necessary to feel saved in order to be saved". The truth: As long as we are in these mortal bodies, the fact of indwelling sin guarantees emotional swings which are not necessarily indicative of our spiritual status (1Jn.3:20). Receiving the truth with joy does not guarantee salvation (Lk.8:13); salvation is based upon our free-will choice to trust in Jesus Christ

for eternal life (regardless of how we may "feel" about it: Rom.3:21-24).

6. The lie: "Saying the 'sinner's prayer' is necessary to be saved". The truth: The so-called "sinner's prayer" in *any* form does not predate the revival movements of the 18th century (and we may be assured that those who believed in Christ before this prayer was invented are saved nonetheless; cf. Rom.10:12).

7. The lie: "Obeying an altar-call is necessary to be saved". The truth: Altar-calls in *any* form do not predate the revival movements of the 19th century (and we may be assured that those who believed in Christ before this practice was invented are saved nonetheless; cf. Rom.16:1-20).³¹

8. The lie: "It is necessary to join a church in order to be saved". The truth: Denominations and the idea of specific membership in a denomination or in a specific local church are not found in the Bible or required by it for Christians for any reason, and certainly not for salvation. Institutions which make this claim or imply it are placing their own organizational goals ahead of the truth (2Pet.2:1).

9. The lie: "It is necessary to acknowledge Christ as 'Lord' in order to be saved". The truth: Jesus Christ *is* Lord, and the truth of His deity is an important part of the gospel which all who are given to understand it by the Holy Spirit accept as part of their exercise of saving faith. No separate, public, demonstrative proclamation of this fact is necessary to be saved, and to the extent that a person relies on this or any other false addition to the gospel as the basis of their confidence (whether included on this short list or not), to that extent their salvation is problematic, because no one can be saved by works (Jn.6:29; Eph.2:8-9).

7. **Spiritual Rebirth**

Truly, truly I tell you, unless someone is born anew/from-above, he is not able to see the Kingdom of God.
John 3:3b

The Greek word *anōthen* (ἀνωθεν), means either "again/anew" or "from above", and is sometimes used in the New Testament deliberately in both senses at once (e.g., Lk.1:3). This same dual applicability is employed by our Lord here in the apodosis (i.e., the "if" clause) of the above condition: without being reborn from God above, no one can 1) enter the Kingdom in the first place (for this takes rebirth unto eternal life), *or* 2) understand the truth about the Kingdom in the second (in order to "see" the truth of the Kingdom, we must first have an empowerment from above).

Spiritual rebirth thus involves two major and fundamental changes from our pre-salvation status:

³¹ Matthew 10:32 and Luke 12:8 are not speaking of and do not require an otherwise unsolicited demonstration and pronouncement of faith as a requirement of salvation.

1) positionally, we become alive to God (whereas formerly we had been dead to Him); 2) experientially, we are enabled to understand all His truth through the gift of the Spirit (whereas formerly our ability to perceive divine truth had been limited to natural revelation and, through the Spirit's ministry, to the gospel). Both aspects of our spiritual rebirth are essential components of being "born again from above".

a. How to be Born Again:

(16) For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is *the power* whereby God may save everyone who believes (whether the Jew first, or the Greek). (17) Because in it *the righteousness* of God is revealed (i.e., "unleashed") from faith to faith, as it is written, "[it is he who is] righteous on account of his faith [who] shall live".
Romans 1:16-17

(12) But as many as *accepted* Him, to them He gave the power *to become children of God*, [that is,] to those who put their *faith* in His Person, (13) [even those] who were not [born] of blood, or fleshly desire, or human will, but [who] were *born of God* (i.e., "born again").
John 1:12-13

Faith in Christ, accepting Jesus Christ, the truth about who He is and what He has done for us as contained in the gospel, is what opens the door to our spiritual rebirth. God, who "waits [on us] to be gracious to us" (Is.30:18) and who desires "all to be saved" (1Tim.2:4) has already "given us the power to become children of God" through Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf; His righteousness is now "unleashed" and He is free to forgive us since Christ has paid our penalty. Our spiritual rebirth therefore comes *by* this grace, but must be taken up "through faith" (Eph.2:8-9).

[It is God who] *brought us to birth* of His own Will by means of *the Word of truth*, so that we might be a sort of "first fruits" of His creations.
James 1:18

(3) May the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ be praised, who has in His great mercy *caused us to be reborn* to a hope which lives through Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead, (4) and to an inheritance which will never be destroyed, defiled, or dimmed, but which is being guarded in heaven for us, (5) who are ourselves also being kept safe by God's power and our faith in Him to an ultimate deliverance ready to be unveiled at the end of time.
1st Peter 1:3-5

[For you] have been *born again* not from corruptible seed but through *the Word of God* which lives and abides forever.
1st Peter 1:23

We are not "accidents", but have been born again through the Will of God. The intermediate means God has used to bring about our spiritual rebirth is "the Word of truth", the "Word of God", namely, our positive *response* to the truth of the gospel message about His Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

(5) Jesus responded, "Truly, truly I tell you, unless a person is born from water (i.e., the water of the Word) and Spirit, he is not able to enter into the Kingdom of God. (6) That which is born from the flesh is flesh, and that which is born from the Spirit is spirit.
John 3:5-6

[A]nd these same things have now been proclaimed to you through those who gave you *the gospel through the Holy Spirit*, sent from heaven – even angels want to look into these things.
1st Peter 1:12b

[B]ut you were washed [clean], but you were made holy, but you were made righteous by [faith in] the Person (lit., Name) of the Lord Jesus Christ, and *by the Spirit* of our God.
1st Corinthians 6:11b

The Holy Spirit is the Agent of our rebirth, making the gospel message, the "water of the Word", understandable to us in spite of our sinful and mortal condition (the Word is described as "water" because it is the essential substance for spiritual life just as actual water is for physical life: Is.55:1; Jn.3:5; 3:8 [Greek]; 4:10; 4:13-14; 7:37-39; 1Cor.10:4; Eph.5:26; Tit.3:5-7; Heb.10:22; 1Jn.5:8; Rev.7:17; 21:6; 22:1; 22:17; cf. Ex 17:5-6; Num. 20:8; Ps.42:1-2; 63:1; 84:5-7; Is.41:17; 44:3). This "spiritual birthing" by the Holy Spirit is accomplished in each and every case for all those who accept the "water of the Word" through faith, that is, through believing the truth of the gospel message which the Spirit Himself makes understandable.

(29) If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who has been *born of Him* [also] practices righteousness. (1) See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us to [actually] be called *children of God*! And [that is just what] we are!
1st John 2:29 - 3:1a

Being born again means becoming a member of God's family, becoming a child of God, and it is being spiritually reborn that makes a person a child of God. God wants to make every human being a part of His eternal family, but only those who accept His Son, the Head of the family, are reborn into that spiritual family. We need and can do nothing to be born again. All that is required of us to become children of God is to believe in the Person and the work of Jesus Christ.

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.
1st John 5:1a NIV

When we are born again by submitting our will to the Will of God through believing in Jesus, we are fundamentally changed, and that all-encompassing change affects us in two essential ways.

First, we are fundamentally changed as to our *status* (positional change). Second, we are fundamentally changed as to our *direction* (experiential change). The first category of change is real but not yet operational; the second category of change is operational but invisible. As reborn believers we possess many new things which are most definitely ours by virtue of now belonging to Jesus Christ, but which we have not yet begun to enjoy in a tangible way (such as our resurrection, eternal life, being in the presence of the Lord forever, etc.). As reborn believers we also possess new things which are presently operational, although not visible to the human eye (such as spiritual gifts). The first category of blessings are essentially our inheritance which is being kept safe in heaven for us until that glorious future day; the second category of blessings constitute the operational "capital" we have been given to honor our Lord with what remains of our lives after salvation.

b. Our New Position as Reborn Believers:

A more comprehensive list of the positional benefits which accrue to every member of the Body of Christ is provided in section III below. Our purpose here is to explain in principle what our new position in Christ means and of what it essentially consists.

Our dichotomous human nature remains unchanged when we are reborn: physically, our bodies are the same before and after salvation, and we also have the same unaltered human spirit we had before we were saved.³² But our spiritual rebirth does entail two monumental changes: first, we have been internally transformed in that we have been given the ability to learn God's truth (covered in the following section), and, second, our essential relationship with God has now been completely transformed as well (our topic here).

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us *a heart for coming to know the truth* (i.e., invisible perceptual change). And *we are in* [the One who is] the Truth, even in [God's] Son Jesus Christ (i.e., invisible positional change). This One is the true God and *eternal life*.

1st John 5:20

Before being saved, we were dead to God – not physically dead, but dead in the sense that we lacked any relationship with Him; we were "spiritually dead".³³ This status of "spiritual death" is the common heritage of the human race from birth since our first parents violated God's command and ate of "the tree of knowing good and evil", the penalty for which was "dying you will die" (Gen.2:17). This sentence of death was threefold in nature: 1) immediate spiritual death (i.e., the severing of their relationship with God); 2) eventual physical death (i.e., mortality

³² See part 3A of the Bible Basics series, "Anthropology", section II.4, "The Dichotomy of Man".

³³ See part 3B of the Bible Basics series, "Hamartiology: the Biblical Study of Sin", section I.1, "The Three Aspects of Death".

in place of immortality); and 3) ultimate eternal death (i.e., separation from God forever in the lake of fire – absent a solution provided by Him and accepted through faith). Theologically speaking, salvation is first and foremost the reversal of this post-Eden status of spiritual death and the removal of impending eternal judgment through the restoration of our spiritual relationship with God lost by Adam and Eve at the fall.

(21) For since death [came] through a man, resurrection of the dead also [had to come] through a man. (22) For just as in Adam, all die, so also *in Christ* shall all be made alive.
1st Corinthians 15:21-22

Positionally in Adam, all are "dead", spiritually speaking; but upon believing in Christ, all are reborn and become alive again to God, spiritually alive, that is, in terms of our relationship with Him and our position in Him. Being born again, therefore, means that while we were previously spiritually dead, we are now alive to God.

He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive (i.e., all who *belong* to Him, like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; cf. v.37).
Luke 20:38 NIV

Though once spiritually dead, as believers we have been reborn spiritually into God's family and are now His children. The wonderful effects of this new life, this eternal life we now possess, are not obvious to the world (except as it notices the changes in our behavior that our new life in Christ brings about). Because our eternal life will not be fully revealed until the resurrection (Col.3:3; 1Jn.3:2), it is not immediately obvious to the world that we have "passed from death into life" (1Jn.3:14), and that therefore we will not experience "the second death" (Rev.2:11; 20:6; 20:14; 21:8).

Truly, truly I say to you, that the one who hears My Word and believes in the One who sent Me has eternal life and does not enter into judgment but has passed from death into life.
John 5:24

The Bible provides us with a number of spiritual analogies which express the reality of the new relationship we now enjoy as part of the Bride of Christ. And while in each case the full realization and actualization of these blessings must await the resurrection, every such positional blessing ought to remind us of what we have been called to be, and motivate us to live up to our marvelous new status of born-again believers in Jesus.

1) Once **dead** to God, now **alive** to Him:

Before salvation we were spiritually **dead** and in need of **rebirth** (Matt.8:22; Lk.15:24; Jn.3:3: 3:7; Col.2:13; 1Pet.4:6; 2Pet.1:4; Jude 1:12).

And you [too were once spiritually] **dead** in [your] transgressions and sins.

Ephesians 2:1

After being born again, we now possess **eternal life** in Jesus Christ (Jn.3:14-16; 3:36; 5:24; 5:39; 6:47; Acts 5:20; 1Jn.5:11; 5:13).

(4) But God, being rich in mercy on account of the great love He had for us (5) made us **alive** in Jesus Christ – even though we were **dead** in our transgressions: you have been saved by [His] grace.

Ephesians 2:4-5

Having been made **alive** in Jesus Christ, we should now live in accordance with that **new life** (Rom.6:4; Col.3:5; 1Tim.6:12).

In the same way [that Christ did], consider yourselves as well to be [positionally] **dead** to sin, but [spiritually] **alive** to God in Christ Jesus our Lord!

Romans 6:11

2) Once under the **enmity** of God, now at **peace** with Him:

Before salvation our sinfulness merited only God's **enmity** (Eph.2:14-15; cf. Rom.8:7).

You were once **alienated** from God – your very thoughts were hostile towards Him and your deeds were evil.

Colossians 1:21

After being born again, we are now at **peace** with God in Jesus Christ (Eph.2:16).

Yet God has now made **peace** with you through the death of Christ in His physical body so that you may stand before Him as holy, without blemish and free from accusation.

Colossians 1:22

Having been **reconciled** to God in Jesus Christ, we should now live in accordance with that **restored relationship** (Rom.6:4; 12:2; Eph.2:10; Col.1:22; 3:15; 1Thes.5:13).

So now that we have been justified by faith, let us take hold of the **peace** [we have] with God [the Father] through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 5:1

3) Once **separated** from God, now **brought near** to Him:

Before salvation we were **without Christ** (Col.1:21).

[R]emember that you were at that time **separated** from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and

without God in the world.
Ephesians 2:12 ESV

After being born again, we have now been **brought near** in Jesus Christ (Rom.8:35; 8:39).

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been **brought near** by the blood of Christ.
Ephesians 2:13 ESV

Having been made **brought near** to God in Jesus Christ, we should now live in accordance with that **new closeness** (2Cor.6:17).

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.
James 4:8 ESV

4) Once **enslaved** to sin, now made **free** in Jesus Christ:

Before salvation we were in **slavery** to sin (Jn.8:34; Rom.6:20; 7:25; Gal.4:3).

For we were also once mindless, disobedient, wandering [pointlessly] astray, **enslaved** to all sorts of lusts and pleasures, living our lives in wickedness and envy, loathsome and hating each other.
Titus 3:3

After being born again, we have now been **liberated** in Jesus Christ (Rom.8:15).

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has **freed** you from the Law of sin and death.
Romans 8:2

Having been **liberated** from sin in Jesus Christ, we should now live in accordance with that **new freedom** (Rom.6:19; 6:22).

For you were called unto **freedom**, brothers. Only do not use your **freedom** as an opportunity for the flesh, but be slaves to one another through love.
Galatians 5:13

5) Once conformed to the **old** sin nature, now **made new** in Jesus Christ:

Before salvation we lived under the influence of our **former** sinful nature (Eph.4:22).

Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your **old self** with its practices.
Colossians 3:9 NIV

After being born again, we have now been **made new** in Jesus Christ (Eph.2:10; 2:15; Gal.6:15).

For if anyone is in Christ, that person is a **new creation**. Prior things have passed away.
Look! New things have come.
2nd Corinthians 5:17

Having been **made new** in Jesus Christ, we should now live in accordance with that **newness of life** (2Cor.4:16; Eph.4:24).

Therefore we have been buried with Him (i.e., Jesus) through this baptism [of the Spirit] into His death, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the Glory of the Father, so also we might walk in **newness of life**.
Romans 6:4

6) Once under the **condemnation** of sin, now **justified** by faith in Jesus Christ:

Before salvation we lived under the power of **sin** (Rom.3:9; Gal.3:22).

For all **sin** and fall short of God's glory.
Romans 3:23

After being born again, we have now been **justified** in Jesus Christ (Rom.5:17; 8:10).

[But we believers are all] **justified** without cost by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.
Romans 3:24

Since the Father has now **justified** us (i.e., considers us righteous) in Jesus Christ, we should now live in accordance with that new positional **righteousness** (1Pet.3:12).

Do not offer up your [bodily] members to sin as weapons of unrighteousness. But rather offer yourselves up to God as those now alive from the dead, and [offer up] your [bodily] members to God as weapons of **righteousness**.
Romans 6:13

As mentioned above, this list makes no pretensions of being complete (see section III below for more), but it should provide a good indication of the absolutely fundamental nature of the *positional* changes accomplished by our spiritual rebirth as children of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born again, he is not able to see the kingdom of God".
John 3:3

As our Lord's categorical statement to Nicodemus clearly demonstrates, without spiritual rebirth, without being "born again", we are not able to enter the eternal state, God's kingdom. Entrance into eternity requires a major change in us. The life we were born with the first time is not enough. We must be "born again" to acquire new life, the eternal life that can only come from faith in Jesus Christ – that is how we enter God's family and receive our claim on eternity. Our present bodies, being mere earthly flesh and blood, cannot possibly survive until or exist in the eternal kingdom (1Cor.15:50). When we are "born again", born a second time by the Spirit, not the flesh (Jn.3:6), we are given to possess this new life positionally. That is, we have a full and forceful claim upon eternal life by virtue of our secure position in Jesus Christ, but we do not actually yet experience it to the full.

Our experiential enjoyment of the eternal life that is given to us at our new birth will only come about when our new, resurrection bodies match up with this new truth, this new life, we now possess in principle. That is, we will only fully experience the reality of our new life at the resurrection. The resurrection body is the new body that will house our new life (gained positionally at the new or second birth when we are born again). By being "born again", we do have new life and are assured of the new body that will one day complement it. By being "born again", we are assured of entering the kingdom of God.

Being "born again", according to Christ's comments in this context of John chapter three (as well as in all other passages of scripture in which the concept occurs), is a reference to the new life we have in Christ, that eternal life which is ours now by virtue of our faith in Him and identification with Him, an eternal life which will be ours to experience in full when our present mortal bodies take on immortality at the resurrection. Blessedly therefore, all who believe, although qualified only for death by our first birth (Rom.5:12-14; 1Cor.15:22; Heb.9:27; Ps.51:5), through our faith in Jesus Christ have been born "again", and have passed from death (the imminence of judgment and the second death) to life (eternal life, possessed in principle here and now and destined to be unveiled in full at the resurrection: Jn.5:24; 1Jn.3:14).

Therefore, to be "born again" means to possess a new, second life, the eternal life given by God the Father to all who believe in His Son (Jn.3:15-16). As believers, we possess this eternal life positionally here and now (1Jn.5:13) as a pledge of the future experiential acquisition of eternal life that will take place when our present corruptible bodies are raised in incorruptible form (1Cor.15:53-55). For that reason, we who have been "born again" are "new creatures" (2Cor.5:17; Gal.6:15; Eph.2:15; 4:24), and children of the Living God (1Cor.4:15, Gal.4:19; 4:23-29, Philemon 1:10). We have been reborn now by our faith in God's Word (Jn.3:36), but we also look to the future when we shall realize the fruits of our eternal life in the new bodies God has promised to us:

(1) Therefore since you have been resurrected [positionally] with Christ, strive for the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. (2) Think on the things above, and not the things on the earth. (3) For you are already [positionally] dead [to all that], and your [true] life has been *hidden away* with Christ in God. (4) When Christ –

your [true] life – is revealed [at the 2nd Advent], then you too will be revealed in glory.
Colossians 3:1-4

This eternal life we possess as an integral counterpart of the new birth is "hidden away safe" with God. When He who is our hope, our dear Lord Jesus Christ, appears at the time of His glorious return to earth, then we too shall be clothed in glory, the glorious reality of our new, eternal bodies, the everlasting vessels for the eternal life which is ours by being born again through faith.

c. Our New Orientation as Reborn Believers:

Spiritual rebirth also transforms believers in extremely important ways which *are* presently discernible (if invisible), effecting critical experiential change in us at salvation by fundamentally altering our essential direction in life and our orientation to the world. Unbelievers are "pointed the wrong way", and, as we have seen in section I of this study, God goes to great lengths to get them to "turn around" – *away from* the world and *towards* our Lord Jesus. Jesus Christ is "the Way" (Jn.14:6; cf. Acts 9:2; 16:17; 18:25-26; 19:9; 19:23; 24:14; 24:22; 2Pet.2:2; 2:15; 2:21), and God has constructed the entire universe, human history, and the particular circumstances of every individual's life so as to ensure that no single person who might potentially be willing to turn around and be saved should be lost – for Christ died for all (2Cor.5:14-15; cf. Matt.26:28; Jn.1:29; 3:16-17; 12:47; Rom.3:23; 1Tim.2:5-6; Heb.2:9; 7:27; 1Jn.2:2; 3:5), and God desires all to be saved (1Tim.2:4; cf. Ezek.18:23; Matt.18:14; Jn.12:47; Acts 17:27; 2Tim.2:24-26; 2Pet.3:9). While the unmistakable grand design of the cosmos and every single thing God has created testify to His existence and to His goodness (Ps.19:1-6; Rom.1:18-20), the Agent of evangelism is the Holy Spirit (Jn.3:5-6; 1Cor.6:11; 1Pet.1:12). It is the Spirit who speaks to the conscience of the unbeliever, convicting him of his need for a Savior to wash away his sin (1Cor.6:11; Heb.10:22; 2Pet.1:9; Rev.7:14), of his inability to measure up to the perfect righteousness of God and his consequent need to acquire the righteousness which can only come through faith (Rom.1:17; 3:22; 4:5-13; 9:30; 10:6; Gal.5:5; Phil.3:9; Heb.11:7), and of the absolute certainty of judgment after death without accepting the work of the One who was judged in place of us all, Jesus Christ our Lord (Acts 24:25; cf. Matt.25:31-46; Rom.2:5; Heb.6:2; 9:27; 10:27; 2Pet.2:9; Jude 1:6; Rev.20:11-15):

(8) "When [the Holy Spirit] comes, He will call the world to account regarding sin, and righteousness, and judgment: (9) regarding sin, because they do not believe in Me, [the only One who can forgive their sins]; (10) regarding righteousness, because I am going to my Father and you are not going to be seeing Me any longer [as the standard of righteousness]; (11) regarding judgment, because the ruler of this world has been convicted [already, demonstrating that all who do not believe are destined for judgment]." John 16:8-11

In other words, we are imperfect (v.9); God is perfect (v.10); therefore judgment is inevitable – as even Satan could not avoid it (v.11). And just as it is the Spirit who first makes these truths of the gospel clear to the unbelieving heart, so it is the Spirit who both provides the fundamental reorientation believers experience at the new birth, and who continues to be our Guide forward

up the high road to Zion after salvation.

(5) Those who are oriented to the flesh think about the things of the flesh, but those who are orientated to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. (6) For the thought-pattern of the flesh results in death, but the thought-pattern of the Spirit results in life and peace. (7) Now the thought-pattern of the flesh is [one of] enmity towards God, for it does not obey God's law, nor is it [even] able [to do so]. (8) And [so] those who are under the control of the flesh (i.e., unbelievers enslaved to the sin nature) are not able to please God. (9) But you are not under the control of the flesh, but under the control of the Spirit – if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, that person does not belong to Him.

Romans 8:5-9

Previously oriented to the flesh, as believers we have now been reoriented to the Spirit (Rom.8:5). Previously constrained in our thinking to the things of this world, we have in regeneration been liberated in our thinking so as now to be able to set our minds on the things above, the things pleasing to God (Rom.8:6). The pattern of thinking which dominates the heart of the unbeliever is incapable of orienting to God and His truth (except to receive the gospel), so that no one who has not experienced the fundamental reorientation of thinking provided by the Spirit when we are born again is capable of pleasing God (Rom.8:7-8). At the new birth, we believers were freed from this absolute control of the sin nature which dwells within us all and are now instead under the control of the Holy Spirit (Rom.8:9a). Moreover, unique to all believers of our present age is the fact that every one of us has the Spirit of Christ actually indwelling our bodies (Rom.8:9b), a blessing not afforded to previous generations of believers (Jn.14:17). It is important to note, however, that just as the breaking of the control of the sin nature and its replacement with the control of the Spirit does not deactivate the decision-making power of our hearts (Rom.8:10-13), so the fundamental reorientation received when we are given new life in Christ, while it will always be with us in principle, will never cease to require the active engagement of our free will to maintain (Rom.8:14-17).

(1) Therefore since you have been resurrected [positionally] with Christ, **keep** seeking after the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. (2) **Keep** thinking on the things above, and not the things on the earth.

Colossians 3:1-2

As born again believers, just as we were birthed anew through the truth of the gospel by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, so we have now been given the means to continue responding to God through His truth, and it is the Spirit who continues to be the Agent of our spiritual progress by making God's truth understandable to us. For it is truth – the truth of the gospel – that is at the core of our initial reorientation to God, and God's truth will ever be the compass which, resident in our hearts and consciences and quickened by the Spirit, points the way forward on the straight and narrow path. It is this new, God-given ability actually to **understand** the truth of the Word, an ability received when we are born again and empowered afterwards by the Spirit residing in us, which makes the perspective of believers so unique and so different from that of unbelievers.

This is why believers have, for example, a "heart for God", are often "stirred in their consciences", and in general look at and think about the world in such a fundamentally different way from those who have not been reborn: being spiritually alive is, practically speaking, all about our newfound ability to take in the truth of the Word and to respond to the Lord therewith – and the Spirit's efforts in prodding us and helping us to do so (cf. Phil.2:13). For God's truth is the "living water" which sustains our spiritual life here in the world (Rev.7:17; 21:6; 22:1; 22:17; cf. Is.55:1; Jn.3:5; 3:8 [Greek]; 4:10; 4:13-14; 7:37-39; 1Cor.10:4; Eph.5:26; Tit.3:5-7; Heb.10:22; 1Jn.5:8).

(9) But as it is written: "What the eye has not seen and the ear has not heard, and [what] has not entered the heart of man, [these are the very] things which God has prepared for those who love Him". (10) And God has revealed [these very things] to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches out everything, even the deep things of God. (11) For who knows the things of a man except the spirit of man which is in him? In the same way too, no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. (12) And we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, in order that we might know the things graciously given to us by God. (13) And these are the very things we are speaking about, not in words taught by human wisdom, but with words of the Spirit, communicating spiritual information to spiritual people. (14) Now the unspiritual man (i.e., the unbeliever without the Holy Spirit) does not receive the [deeper] things of the Spirit of God. For they are foolishness to him and he is not able to understand them because they are appreciated [only] through spiritual means. (15) But the spiritual man (i.e., the believer with the Holy Spirit) does appreciate them all, though he himself is not appreciated [in this regard] by anyone. (16) For [as it says] "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Who will instruct Him?" But we do possess the very thinking of Christ (i.e., the Word of God made understandable to us by the Spirit).

1st Corinthians 2:9-16

In terms of how we actually function in the world, this divinely supplied ability and encouragement to learn and live by God's truth is the great division which separates the spiritual way in which a believer sees life from the unbeliever's materialistic world-view. Outside of the gospel, unbelievers are incapable of understanding the truth of the Word of the God (1Cor.2:9; 2:14). For this reason they are unable to "know the Lord" (Jer.9:24) or to serve Him properly, or to please Him in any way (Rom.8:8; cf. Heb.11:6) – nor are they interested in doing so (for all who ever are genuinely interested in having such a relationship with Him are led to salvation). Believers, on the other hand, have received at regeneration a newfound ability to receive the revelation of God's truth (1Cor.2:10; 2:12-13; 2:14-16). And it is through our exploitation of this new ability and new orientation to God and away from the world, learning about Him and growing closer to Him through His truth, that believers make spiritual progress and earn eternal rewards, glorifying our dear Lord Jesus in time and for all eternity. Indeed, making *progress* in following Jesus Christ is the counterpart of the essential reorientation *toward* Jesus Christ received at our rebirth. Before regeneration, we were dead to Christ; after being reborn, we are alive to Him and Jesus now *is* our life. This fundamental reorientation away from the world and towards the Lord who bought us is accomplished in principle when we are born again, but it is

only by responding in our new status through the Spirit to the truth of Him who is the very Word of God that we begin to live up to that wonderful new status.

As many as are being led [forward] by the Spirit, *these* are the ones who are [truly] the sons of God.
Romans 8:14

As born again believers, just as we have been given a new relationship (our position in Christ covered above) which has opened up spiritual opportunities for us, so we have also been given a new heart (our newfound ability to perceive God's truth in the power of the Spirit's ministry) which has provided us the means of exploiting those opportunities. By faith in the gospel we are now God's children; by continuing to exercise that same faith in spiritual growth we come to produce a crop for our Lord which glorifies Him and provides the basis for our own eternal rewards. The former we have as our birthright on the basis of the new birth (it is a relationship/position); the latter represents a potential, unfulfilled at salvation, but meant to be exploited throughout our earthly lives thereafter (it is a responsibility/opportunity).

(25) I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. (26) I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. (27) And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.
Ezekiel 36:25-27 NIV (cf. Ezek.18:31)

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.
Hebrews 10:22 KJV

At salvation, we not only receive a positional cleansing in the sense of being forgiven all our sins and being made righteous in Jesus Christ: we also receive an experiential cleansing which "washes clean" our hearts.

(3) For we were also once mindless, disobedient, wandering [pointlessly] astray, enslaved to all sorts of lusts and pleasures, living our lives in wickedness and envy, loathsome and hating each other. (4) But [in spite of our prior sinfulness], when the goodness and benevolence of God our Savior appeared [in the flesh], (5) not on account of [any] works which we had done in [so-called] righteousness did He save us, but through the **washing** [away of our sins which leads to our] **rebirth** and [to our] **new beginning** from the Holy Spirit (6) whom He poured out upon us bountifully through Jesus Christ our Savior, (7) so that [now] having been justified [in this way] by His grace, we might become heirs in regard to the eternal life for which we hope.
Titus 3:3-7

The effect of this cleansing of our hearts, minds and consciences is the removal of the spiritual

blindness which afflicts the unbelieving world: just as if the Lord has thrown on a light switch and illuminated our hearts, when we respond to the light of the gospel by believing in Jesus, we immediately receive the ability to perceive and drink in the light of all of God's truth.

"One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!"

John 9:25b NIV

Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind."

John 9:39 NIV

And to the degree that our gospel really is covered by a veil, it is obscured in this way only in the case of those who are perishing. For in the case of such persons, the god of this world has blinded the minds of these unbelievers, in order to prevent the shining forth unto them of the light of the gospel of Christ's glory – even Him who is the very image of God.

2nd Corinthians 4:3-4

Previously we were spiritually asleep (1Thes.5:6-7); now we have been awakened and are commanded to remain spiritually alert (Mk.13:33; cf. Eph.6:18; 1Pet.5:8). Previously we were under the control of the sin residing in our mortal bodies and were thus unable to please God (Rom.8:8); now we have been released from that control and are commanded to follow this lead of the Holy Spirit (Rom.8:4; Gal.5:16-18).

If we live because of the Spirit, let us also walk by means of the Spirit.

Galatians 5:25

The "new heart" referred to in Ezekiel 36:26 quoted above is, of course, not meant in the physical sense of the organ which pumps blood through our body. In biblical terms, the "heart" is the inner person, and, specifically, the place where our immaterial human spirit interfaces with our physical body. Neither our body nor our spirit – the two essential parts of our nature as human beings – is fundamentally changed at salvation. What *is* changed is twofold: 1) our spirit is now no longer enslaved to the sin nature resident in our flesh (so that we now have the opportunity to choose for the truth, both to know it and to follow it), and 2) the Holy Spirit now works together with our human spirit to make the truth perceptible to us (so that now we have the ability to understand and believe the truth). God makes these same two gracious provisions available to unbelievers in respect to the gospel, but only believers are both free to learn and respond to all of His truth, as well as being led and empowered to do so. Through the new birth, we are "new people", and that newness entails both the opportunity to and the responsibility of responding to the Lord with a life of sanctification and spiritual growth.

(21) [For you have learned the truth] – if, at any rate, you have truly heard Him (i.e., Jesus) and have been instructed in Him according to what is [definitely] true in Jesus –

(22) that in respect to your previous behavior you have put off the old Man, the one that is

being destroyed by deceptive lusts, (23) and that instead you are being re-made in the spirit of your mind, (24) and that you have put on the new Man, the one created in righteousness and sanctity of the truth according to God's standards.

Ephesians 4:21-24

(9) Stop lying to each other, having put aside your "former person" (10) and having put on the "new" one which is being renewed to a full and obedient knowledge [of the truth] according to the image of the One who created it.

Colossians 3:9-10

In both of these passages, the release of the sin nature's absolute hold on our hearts (i.e., the "putting off of the old Man" at Eph.4:22 and the "putting aside of the former person" in Col.3:9) is complemented by the new creation we experience at spiritual rebirth (the "putting on the new Man" at Eph.4:24 and of the "new [person]" at Col.3:10). In both passages, this putting off of the old, that is, the breaking of the positional power of the sin nature, initiates a process of inner, spiritual growth: the "remaking of our thinking" (Eph.4:23) and the "renewing of our new inner person" (Col.3:10). This new person we become at salvation is, positionally speaking, "created in righteousness and sanctity" (Eph.4:24), and accords with "the image of the One who created it" (Col.3:10). That is to say, we are reborn in complete holiness, righteousness, and perfection – and that is the standard of behavior to which God calls us (Eph.4:22-23; Col.3:9). However, as both of these passages also make clear, the liberation of our human spirits through our born again experience, while it comes as a result of our response to the truth of the gospel (i.e., it is "of the truth" in Eph.4:24, and accords with "the image of the One who created it" in Col.3:10), requires continuing effort after salvation for us to exploit this opportunity for the "remaking of our thinking" (Eph.4:23) and the "renewing of our new inner person" (Col.3:10). This is the only way for us to come to know and live by the "truth [which is] according to God's standards" (Eph.4:24) and to actually attain to that "full and obedient knowledge [of the truth which is] according to the image of the One who created it" (Col.3:10).

Without question, the passages above are densely packed with principles of truth (and for that reason are seldom translated in a helpful fashion and even more rarely understood in depth). It will therefore be helpful for us to take up here on a point by point basis this issue of what precisely our new birth means in terms of the tangible and presently operative changes it effects for all believers.

And he who received seed into the good ground, this is the one who hears the Word and ***lets it in*** [so as to understand it], [and] who then produces a crop, with one netting a hundred-fold, one sixty-fold, one thirty-fold.

Matthew 13:23

And those [last ones] are they who received seed into the good ground who hear the Word and ***accept it***, and [then] produce a crop, one thirty-fold, one sixty-fold, one a hundred-fold.

Mark 4:20

And in respect to the [seed] which was sown in the good ground, these are they who in a good and worthy heart hear the Word and *retain it*, then produce a crop in perseverance.
Luke 8:15

The Sower sows the seed of the Word, the gospel message of salvation for unbelievers and the entire content of the truth of the Word of the Kingdom for believers (Matt.13:19; Mk.4:14; Lk.8:11). The seed which fell upon the hard-packed ground was never allowed to penetrate so as to sprout (Matt.13:4; Mk.4:4; Lk.8:5); these are unbelievers who refuse to let the Word of salvation enter their hearts, and it is soon "taken away" by the evil one and "trodden underfoot" by the worldly influences he engenders (Matt.13:19; Mk.4:15; Lk.8:12). The seed which fell upon the rocky ground was never able to penetrate to any depth (Matt.13:5-6; Mk.4:5-6; Lk.8:6); these are temporary believers who fall away into apostasy when the pressure on their faith proves too heavy for them to bear (Matt.13:20-21; Mk.4:16-17; Lk.8:13). The seed which fell upon the thorny ground was never able to receive enough light to produce a crop (Matt.13:7; Mk.4:7; Lk.8:7); these are believers who become distracted from our main objective in life and fail to take in enough truth of the Word so as to fulfill their purpose (Matt.13:22; Mk.4:18-19; Lk.8:14). The seed which is sown on the good ground, however, finds a receptive heart and produces a respectable crop for the Lord. It is not impenetrable to the Word (since after rebirth there is no longer any structural impediment of opposition from the sin nature blocking reception of the truth). It is not resistant to the Word (since the heart is "good and worthy", having been cleansed at salvation so as to be able to accept the truth). It is not distracted from the Word (since the person in question cooperates with the Spirit in a continuing process of spiritual growth). Herein we see the three essential results of the new orientation toward God's truth received at spiritual regeneration and meant to be continued and exploited by all those who are followers of our Lord Jesus Christ:

1) We are no longer unable to see the light of the truth. The seed of the Word has sprouted into a "faith plant" which is able to drink in the light of the truth and the water of the Word (Jn.12:46). The living Word now lives in us and we have eternal life in Jesus through it.

Therefore cast aside all [moral] filthiness and effluence of evil, and in humility [continue to] receive *the Word implanted in you*, for it is able to save your [eternal] lives.
James 1:21

And this is the *testimony*: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.
1st John 5:11 NIV (cf. 1Jn.3:6; 3:9; 5:18).

The state of spiritual death into which we are born (Gen.2:17; Rom.5:14-15; Eph.2:1; 2:5; Col.2:13) has been replaced with new life, eternal life (Jn.3:15; 6:54; 10:28; 17:2; Rom.5:21; 6:23; Tit.1:2; 3:7; 1Jn.1:2; 2:25; 5:13; 5:20). Being no longer dead to God but alive in Him we are now no longer spiritually blind but able to see (Jn.9:39; Acts 26:18; cf. Is.42:7). The indwelling of the Holy Spirit we have received at salvation (Jn.14:16-17; Rom.8:9; 1Cor.3:16; 6:19; 2Cor.6:16; 2Tim.1:14; Jas.4:5) now enables our human spirit to understand, accept, and receive the truth to which we choose to expose ourselves so that, when we choose to believe it,

said truth becomes a part of the content of our heart usable by the Spirit in His guidance of us (Rom.8:5-16; 1Cor.2:9-16). While the spirit of the unbeliever is impenetrable to the truth (as in the hard-packed ground of the parable of the Sower), rendering him incapable of "receiving the things of the Spirit of God" because "they are foolishness to him" since he is "not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (1Cor.2:14), we believers through the ministry of the Spirit can receive the truth and can understand it (Prov.8:8-9; 20:27).

(12) And we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, in order that we might know the things graciously given to us by God. (13) And these are the very things we are speaking about, not in words taught by human wisdom, but with words of the Spirit, communicating spiritual information to spiritual people.

1st Corinthians 2:12-13

For God who said, "Let light shine forth from the darkness!" is He who has shone forth [His light] into our hearts to illuminate our knowledge of God's glory in the Person of Jesus Christ.

2nd Corinthians 4:6

This is the essence of the fundamental reorientation we receive at the new birth, the newfound ability to understand so as to be able to believe, apply and follow the truth of the Word of God. No longer is our previous status of spiritual death a hindrance to us, for now we are spiritually alive (Rom.6:11; 8:10; Eph.2:5; Col.2:13; cf. Lk.15:24; 15:32; 20:38). No longer is the sin which dwells in us an absolute barrier to receiving, believing and living by God's truth (Jn.8:32; Rom.6:6), for now we have the Spirit dwelling in us as well, and He is well-able to overcome this barrier whenever we choose to follow Him instead of our own lusts (Rom.8:5; Gal.5:16-18; Jas.4:5). No longer are the sins we have committed and the lies of the world we have believed veiling our view of the truth and blocking out the light of the Word through their darkness (Acts 26:18; 2Cor.3:15-18): at salvation we are forgiven and our slate is wiped clean (1Cor.6:11; Tit.3:5-7); we are given a "new heart" in the sense of being completely cleansed from everything old which obscured our view of the truth (Heb.10:2; 2Pet.1:9), a "circumcised heart" in the sense of having everything old which blocked our view of the truth completely removed (Col.2:11-14).

[God] made no distinction between us and them, for He *purified their hearts* by faith.

Acts 15:9 NIV

(21) and since we have [this] Great High Priest over the household of God, let us approach [the throne of grace to pray] with a truthful heart in complete faith, (22) *our hearts sprinkled [clean]* of [any] bad conscience and our bodies washed with pure water [of the Word (cf. Eph.5:26)].

Hebrews 10:21-22

And we know that the Son of God has come and has *given us a heart for coming to know the truth*. And we are in [the One who is] the Truth, even in [God's] Son Jesus Christ. This One is the true God and eternal life.

2) We are now capable of continuing to receive the light of the truth. If nurtured through the light and water of the truth, taken in and believed, and if allowed to root deeply, our faith plant will continue to grow. The living Word penetrates deeply and permanently into our hearts and we abide in Jesus through it (cf. Jn.15:1-9).

3) We should henceforth consistently cooperate with the Spirit in receiving and applying the truth:

As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father.

1st John 2:24 NASB

As this verse teaches, our positional spiritual status depends only on our continuing faith. However, our experiential spiritual *progress* in the Christian life requires that we emulate the faith-response of salvation with continual and continuing positive choices after salvation. This duty to mirror our salvation-response to Jesus Christ in continuous life-responses to Him after salvation is a comprehensive one covering every aspect of our lives. Six areas which are particularly acute and apropos of our topic here are as follows:

a) The need to master the sin nature:

And if Christ is in you, although your body is dead because of sin (i.e., because it is still sinful by natural birth), the Spirit is life because of righteousness (i.e., the Holy Spirit is your pledge that you have passed from death to life through the righteousness which comes by faith).

Romans 8:10

Although reborn and spiritually alive, believers still reside in a body of sin, a body infested with the sin nature which "sets its desire" against the Spirit (Gal.5:17; cf. Jas.4:5). An ever increasing mastery of the sin which still abides within our bodies is a fundamental necessity of the Christian life after salvation (and something which can only be achieved through the power of the Holy Spirit and consistent spiritual growth). Positionally speaking, we have indeed been freed from the mastery of the sin nature (Col.2:11); and, experientially speaking, the forgiveness we receive at spiritual rebirth (Col.2:13-15), and the initially unfettered and unsullied influence of the Holy Spirit with whom we have been baptized (Col.2:12), providing us with absolute clarity of thinking and spiritual perception, frequently give new believers a memorable "honeymoon" of closeness to God and joy in the Lord. For this state of confidence in the Lord, joy in salvation, and crispness of spiritual perspective to continue, however, spiritual momentum must be maintained: on the one hand, the faith we exercised in believing the truth of the gospel must now be directed toward the entire realm of God's truth contained in scripture for our spiritual growth, and on the other hand the attitude of repentance we exercised in turning away from our former manner of life must continue in ever increasing sanctification in our walk and with confession of

all sin when we do fail.

If we live [in spiritual rebirth] because of the Spirit, [and we do], let us also [now continue to] walk by means of the Spirit (i.e., in the rest of our Christian lives).
Galatians 5:25

For if we do not pursue sanctification and if we do not maintain our spiritual momentum through learning, believing and applying the truth of the Word of God, we will quickly find ourselves falling back into our old patterns of life as our consciences, once cleansed, begin again to fill up with the detritus of the world, and our spiritual vision, once made crystal clear, will again begin to dim through accommodation with the darkness of this world. And while some believers do manage to "move sideways" through life, neither gaining spiritual ground, nor falling completely away, the failure to grow towards the good coupled with an unwillingness to turn away from the world is a very dangerous combination. That is why, in respect to the sanctification side of this equation (although spiritual growth and holiness are really inseparable and should be pursued in tandem), the Bible is replete with encouragement and admonitions which instruct us in no uncertain terms to stay away from sinful behavior.

(6) Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen [into an angry stare]? (7) Will you not be forgiven if you do what is right? But, if you do not do what is right, [know] that sin is crouching at the door, and that it desires to have you – but you must gain the mastery over it".
Genesis 4:6-7

Cain, of course, did not respond to this invitation to salvation but instead killed his own brother (cf. 1Jn.3:12). And, indeed, unbelievers, while able to respond to law and order and manifest all other manner of honorable behavior in the secular realm, are incapable of mastering the sin nature to the point of living in a truly sanctified way.

(34) I am telling you the very truth: Everyone who is committing sin is sin's slave. (35) And the slave does not abide in the household forever, but the Son does abide [in the household] forever. (36) Therefore if the Son frees you, you will genuinely be free.
John 8:34-36

Recognize that our "old man" (i.e., our sinful nature) has been "crucified" together [with Jesus], so that this body of sin of ours might be rendered lifeless in order that we might not serve this sin [in our flesh] as slaves.
Romans 6:6

This liberation from the sin which resides within our bodies is positional, but still crucial, for while it is true that as long as we live in this mortal condition we will continue to struggle with sin, without the liberation we have from it through faith in Jesus Christ, we would be absolutely unable to gain the mastery over it. Perfecting the sanctification to which we have been called is no small thing nor is it easily or quickly achieved in most cases, but it is an essential part of the

Christian walk.

But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not [even] make any plans for carrying out the lusts of the flesh.

Romans 13:14

(24) Don't you know that all the runners in the stadium run the race, but that only one receives the prize? Run in such a way so as to achieve what you are after. (25) And again, everyone involved in competition exercises self-control in all respects. Those athletes go through such things so that they may receive a perishable crown of victory, but we do it to receive an imperishable one. (26) So as I run this race of ours, I'm heading straight for the finish line; and as I box this bout of ours, I'm making every punch count. (27) I'm "pummeling my body", one might say, bringing myself under strict control so that, after having preached [the gospel] to others, I might not myself be disqualified [from receiving the prize we all seek].

1st Corinthians 9:24-27

Pursue peace with everyone, and sanctification, without which no one will see the Lord.

Hebrews 12:14

(1) Therefore since Christ died in His flesh, we also should arm ourselves with the same mind-set, [considering] that whoever has suffered in his flesh [as Jesus did] is finished with sin (lit., "has stopped from" it), (2) so that he might not live the remaining time of his life in this flesh [in service] to [its] human lusts but to the will of God.

1st Peter 4:1-2

b) The need to follow the Spirit instead of the flesh: The key to carrying out our new mandates of sanctification and spiritual growth (which to be effective must go hand in hand) is the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

(1) So now, there [awaits] no judgment of condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (2) For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has freed you from the Law of sin and death. (3) For what the Law could not accomplish (i.e., solving the sin problem) because it was weak on account of [its dependence on sinful human] flesh, God [did accomplish]: having sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for the purpose of [expiating] sin, [God] rendered summary judgement on [all] sin in [Christ's] flesh, (4) so that the [perfect] righteousness which the Law demands might be fulfilled in us – we who walk not according to the [sinful] flesh, but according to the Spirit (i.e., believers). (5) Those who are oriented to the flesh think about the things of the flesh, but those who are orientated to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. (6) For the thought-pattern of the flesh results in death, but the thought-pattern of the Spirit results in life and peace. (7) Now the thought-pattern of the flesh is [one of] enmity towards God, for it does not obey God's law, nor is it [even] able [to do so]. (8) And [so] those who are under the control of the flesh (i.e., unbelievers enslaved to the sin nature) are not able to please God. (9) But

you are not under the control of the flesh, but under the control of the Spirit – if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, that person does not belong to Him. (10) And if Christ is in you, although your body is dead because of sin (i.e., because it is still sinful by natural birth), the Spirit is life because of righteousness (i.e., the Holy Spirit is your pledge that you have passed from death to life through the righteousness which comes by faith). (11) And if the Spirit of Him who raised Christ from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies [at the resurrection] through that [very same] Spirit who dwells in you. (12) So then, brothers, we are under obligation – but not to the flesh to live by its rules. (13) For if you are living by the rules of the flesh, you are destined to die. But if by the Spirit you are putting to death the practices of the body, you will live. (14) For as many as are **being led by the Spirit of God**, these are the [true] sons of God. (15) For you have not received a spirit of slavery [leading you] back to [a state of] fear [of damnation], but you have the Spirit who has entered you into God's family (lit. "of adoption"; Gk., *huiiothesia*, υιοθεσία, "placement-as-a-son"), in whom we cry, "Abba! My Father!" (16) For the Spirit Himself testifies to our spirit that we are God's children. (17) And if we are God's children, then we are also His heirs, even fellow heirs of Christ – that is if we have indeed suffered with Him so that we might also be glorified together with Him.

Romans 8:1-17

(16) But I tell you, walk in the Spirit and you will not carry out what the flesh lusts for. (17) For what the flesh lusts for is contrary to the Spirit's will, and the Spirit is opposed to what the flesh lusts for. Since these are diametrically opposed to each other in this way, what you are doing is not what you yourself choose. (18) But if you are **led by the Spirit**, you are not under the Law. (19) The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; (20) idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; (21) drunkenness, orgies – and whatever is similar to all these things. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of heaven. (22) But the **fruit of the Spirit** is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, uprightness, faith, (23) humility, self-control. Against such things, there is no Law. (24) Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its weaknesses and its lusts. (25) If we live because of the Spirit, let us also **walk by means of the Spirit**.

Galatians 5:16-25

As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as **his anointing** teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him.

1st John 2:27 NIV (cf. 1Jn.2:10)

The positive guidance of the Spirit who leads us into all good paths and who teaches us all the divine truth we are willing to receive and believe is balanced by His restraining ministry which keeps us from involving ourselves in the world and from giving into the cravings of the sin

nature. From the standpoint of our own rightly-responding consciences, this aspect of following the Spirit instead of the flesh in scripture is often expressed as "the fear of the Lord".

"The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding."
Job 28:28b NIV

The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever.
Psalm 19:9a NIV

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.
Psalm 111:10a NIV

The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, turning a man from the snares of death.
Proverbs 14:27 NIV

Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole [duty] of man.
Ecclesiastes 12:13 NIV

(10) For we must all stand before Christ's tribunal, so that each of us may receive recompense for what he has accomplished through this body, whether it be good or worthless. (11) Therefore since we know the fear of the Lord, while we attempt to persuade men God sees us entirely for what we [truly] are – and I trust that what we [truly] are is equally clear to your consciences.
2nd Corinthians 5:10-11

Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.
1st Peter 1:17 NIV

Failure to respond to the positive guidance of the Spirit which by its very nature leads us into paths of righteousness (Ps.23:3; Prov.4:18) along with a corresponding failure to respond to the restraining ministry of the Spirit which otherwise endues us with a healthy fear of the Lord will inevitably lead to spiritual decay in place of spiritual advance. If we refuse to feed our hearts on the truth, believing it and putting it into practice in our lives, and if we refuse to cleanse our hearts through confession when we stumble, our spiritual perception – so crystal clear at the point of salvation – will become clouded, our hearts will gradually be re-hardened, and our salvation will eventually be endangered (if we dare to allow the process of spiritual degeneration to go too far). King Saul became "a different person" when the Spirit came upon him (1Sam.10:6; analogous to the gift of the Spirit we receive at salvation), but later fell into the worst sort of self-destructive and even anti-God behaviors – because he did not continue to advance in the Spirit but rather chose to retrogress in opposition to the Spirit's guidance, disregarding the Spirit's restraint.

We believers are children of light (Eph.5:8), but sin is darkness (cf. Col.1:13). If we live according to the light, we will truly be light in the Lord (Eph.5:8), but if we turn back to the

darkness, how terrible is that darkness (Matt.6:23).

God is light, and the Spirit leads us to the light of the truth by which we have been saved in Jesus Christ our Lord. If we close our eyes to the light and turn back instead to the darkness of this world, how will that not corrupt our perception of the truth, how will that not harden our hearts and blind our eyes to the light? As with Saul, it seems that it is often all too easy to slip back into the pattern of the old. Indeed, the only sure way to avoid that all too common pitfall is by resolutely embracing the truth, by moving forward in the Spirit toward the light of the upward calling of Jesus Christ.

Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.
Proverbs 4:23 NASB

Watching over our hearts requires a consistent heart-response to the Spirit's leadership, moving forward through believing and applying the water of the truth He supplies, and submitting to the Spirit's restraint in turning away from every negative influence.

Do not be a lover of this world, nor of what is in this world. If anyone is a lover of this world, a [genuine] love for the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world and its lust are passing away, but whoever does God's will is [going] to stay [alive with God] forever.
1st John 2:15-17

With the pre-salvation hardness of heart removed at our rebirth, spiritually speaking we can now breath freely. To avoid the clogging up again of our spiritual "respiration", following the Spirit's lead in spiritual growth and sanctification is essential. Otherwise, like barnacles on a once swift ship, calluses can again be accumulated on the heart over time by rejecting or neglecting truth and by embracing sin. In order for the wondrous initial and immediate effects of salvation to continue, responding to the Spirit's calls upon our consciences is absolutely essential, both in terms of staying away from sin and evil and in terms of aggressively embracing spiritual advance. We are given the Spirit in order to be able to receive the truth and grow (1Cor.2:12), and this is the only way to draw closer to Jesus Christ or accomplish God's purpose for us in this life.

(8) For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light. (9) Now the fruit light produces accords with all goodness, righteousness and truth. (10) So [in all things] you should [always] be calculating what it is that pleases the Lord. (11) And do not participate in dark deeds which bear no fruit. But rather expose them as such. (12) For the things done in darkness by those [who reject the truth] are shameful even to mention. (13) But all things become visible [for what they really are] when they are illuminated by the light, (14) because everything which has been made visible [through such illumination] is light. That is why it says, "Arise, sleeper! Awake from the dead, and Christ will shine [His light of truth] upon you!" (15) So be very careful how you are walking – not as those who are unwise but as those who are wise. (16) Redeem

your time, for the days are evil. (17) For this reason do not be foolish but learn what the Lord's will is. (18) And don't get drunk with wine which is dissipating, but instead be made [spiritually] full through the [Holy] Spirit.

Ephesians 5:8-18

c) The need to confess when we do sin: As the above discussion suggests, the state of complete and perfect spiritual vision received at salvation is not necessarily a permanent one. Our internal, spiritual circumstance depends upon our decision making going forward, and even the most dedicated believers continue to lapse into occasional sin requiring renewed "cleansing from unrighteousness" (1Jn.1:9). Further, just as unbelievers can make all sorts of mental accommodations with reality (i.e., choosing to believe all manner of lies as part of their world-view), so it is possible for believers to accommodate their own thinking to the world instead of to God's truth, and this is not a cut and dried, either/or proposition. Confession of sin results in forgiveness of sin, but just as it does not result in the removal of divine discipline for that sin or the natural consequences of that sin, so confession of sin does not automatically sweep away all of the cobwebs of truth-rejected/lie-accepted thinking. We are all responsible for what we choose to believe, what we choose to value, and to what we choose to give our attention. To the extent that we give our faith, esteem and attention to the truth and to spiritual things, to that extent we will grow closer to the Lord and advance spiritually. But to the extent that we give our faith, esteem and attention to the things of this world, to that extent we will be retrogressing spiritually and clogging up the conduits of our spiritual perception. A believer's spiritual state is the sum total of his/her spiritual momentum and decisions made after salvation, good and bad (a function in large part of the degree to which we are taking in and believing the truth of the Word). And just as increased deviation from the truth is the one true way to alienate a believer from God and lead him into apostasy (even if the person in question practices occasional confession of sins), so the accompanying pattern of worldly thinking darkens the light within, gradually hardening the heart that was softened at salvation (cf. Jer.13:15-16). For this reason, confession of sin needs to be accompanied by a genuine change of mind about our previous behavior. God forgives us whenever we confess our sins, but if we do not take the opportunity of confession to modify our future behavior going forward and, even more fundamentally, our way of thinking about such things, setting ourselves to adopt God's point of view about such matters rather than the world's, then instead of building a foundation for growth we are merely practicing a sort of retrograde damage control. On the other hand, even if we have, like the prodigal son, gone into a "far country" in our thinking and behavior, spiritual recovery is certainly possible through embracing the very process of growth and sanctification whose neglect has clouded our spiritual perception and distanced us from the Lord and from the joy of our salvation.

Therefore tell the people: This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Return to me,' declares the LORD Almighty, 'and I will return to you,' says the LORD Almighty.

Zechariah 1:3 NIV

d) The need to transform our thinking: At the point of being reborn, our spiritual "eyes" are completely enlightened (Matt.6:22-23), though we probably as yet know very little divine truth outside of the gospel and what God has revealed to all mankind in His natural order, we are

now fully able to receive all manner of biblical truth (no "darkening" of our "eyes" as yet) and possess the indwelling ministry of the Spirit who makes all such truth understandable to us when we are exposed to it (1Cor.2:9-16). Our job at this point is to listen and believe – God takes care of the rest. However, to the extent that we do not immediately devote ourselves to an enthusiastic and energetic program of learning the truth of God's Word, we can expect the crisp, clear lucidity of our spiritual "eyes" to begin to dim.

(19) And this is the [basis for] judgment: the Light (i.e., Jesus Christ) has come into the world, yet men loved the darkness more than the Light because their deeds were evil.

(20) For everyone who commits detestable practices hates the Light and does not come to the Light, lest his deeds be exposed [for what they really are]. (21) But everyone who acts in accordance with the truth comes to the Light so that it becomes obvious that his deeds have been done in God (i.e., in accordance with God's will).

John 3:16-21

At salvation, God does not remove our memories or prior experiences. As a result of living in this world, our minds contain a very large measure of worldly and untrue information, some of which we have no doubt not only given our attention to in the past but have also believed despite its being untrue. Following salvation, our clarity of *perception* must be engaged in the effort to produce an equally important clarity of *understanding*. As we give attention to the truth of God's Word, our hearts begin to be cleansed in terms of their content (just as at spiritual rebirth they are cleansed in terms of their spiritual vision).

(4) For the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly, but are powerful for God, for the destruction of strongholds, (5) destroying sophistries and every presumption that raises itself up against the knowledge of God, and taking every thought prisoner so as to obey Christ.

2nd Corinthians 10:4-5

As we learn and believe the truth, as we begin to see things from God's point of view instead of from our human, secular point of view, the worldly thought patterns, opinions, false information, foulness and outright lies to which we have been exposed begin to be exposed for what they are. We do not forget this "information", but the more we learn of God's truth, the better we become at discerning between the truth and the devil's lies, between God's will and the way of the world, between good and evil. An essential part of the process of spiritual growth after salvation is that all the prior "data" we have stored in our hearts has to be satisfactorily analyzed, vetted, reformed, and discarded as appropriate. In short, our whole way of thinking needs to be restructured, and that cannot happen without a steady diet of the biblical truth of the Word of God.

Therefore I entreat you by God's mercy, brothers, to dedicate your bodies as a living sacrifice, well-pleasing to God – [this is] your "priestly-service" spiritually performed. Do not be conformed to this world, but ***be transformed by this renewal of your thinking***, so that you may discern what God's will for you is, namely what it is good, well-pleasing,

and correct [for you to do].
Romans 12:1-2

(12) Since we have such a confident expectation of success [based on the support from the Spirit's ministry], we speak the truth unreservedly – (13) and not like the previous situation where Moses had to put a veil over his face so that the Israelites could not see that temporary glory fading out; (14) now their hearts became hard, and until today at the reading of the Old Covenant there is still a [similar sort of] veil remaining in place [one which hides the true glory]; and [this "veil" which obscures the truth] is not being taken off because only in Christ is it done away with; (15) so until this present day, whenever Moses is read, this veil [of sorts] lies over their hearts, (16) but whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is removed – (17) for the Lord and the Spirit are one, and ***wherever the Lord's Spirit is, there is also freedom*** (i.e. the opportunity and power to do God's will). (18) And everyone of us, when we reflect [like a mirror] the Lord's glory with no "veil" obscuring our faces (i.e., with unsullied Christian witness), is being transformed into the same image (i.e., becomes more Christ-like) so as to reflect an ever greater degree of glory – exactly what is to be expected ***with the Lord's Spirit as the agent of our transformation.***
2nd Corinthians 3:12-18

(21) [For you have learned the truth] – if, at any rate, you have truly heard Him (i.e., Jesus) and have been instructed in Him according to what is [definitely] true in Jesus – (22) that in respect to your previous behavior you have put off the old Man, the one that is being destroyed by deceptive lusts, (23) and that instead ***you are being re-made in the spirit of your mind,*** (24) and that you have put on the new Man, the one created in righteousness and sanctity of the truth according to God's standards.
Ephesians 4:21-24

Many believers, especially those saved later in life, still remember the vivid experience of exhilaration and joy of salvation in the full knowledge and unshakeable belief of now possessing eternal life in Jesus Christ. But for spiritual growth and spiritual safety, that experience has to be built upon until the heart is filled to capacity with a treasure trove of unshakeable beliefs about every aspect of life in every area of biblical truth. And this transformation of our thinking is the only way to maintain the clear vision of our spiritual "eyes" which, in the absence of doing what we have been called to do, will grow cloudy with time as we allow the joy of our salvation to fade. Carried to extremes, there is even the danger of a complete black-out of spiritual perception should the thinking of the world be allowed to dominate our hearts once again and swamp our faith.

And he who was sown on the rocky places, this is the one who hears the Word and immediately receives it with joy. He has no roots [to his faith], however, but lasts only a short time. So when tribulation or persecution occurs on account of the Word, he is immediately tripped up.
Matthew 13:20-21 (cf. Mk.4:16-17; Lk.8:13)

This unwillingness to continue to receive the Word after salvation stemming from a half-hearted commitment to Jesus must be replaced by willingness and follow-through in seeking out, learning, believing and applying all the truth of the Word of God, so the day may come when worldly influences are no longer able to dim our spiritual perception or draw us from the path of spiritual progress.

(11) Christ Himself appointed some of us apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers (12) in order to prepare all of His holy people for their own ministry work, that the entire body of Christ might thus be built up, (13) until we all reach that unifying goal of believing what is right and of giving our complete allegiance (Greek: *ἐπίγνωσις*, *epignosis*) to the Son of God, that each of us might be a perfect person, that is, that we might attain to that standard of maturity whose "attainment" is defined by Christ; (14) that we may no longer be immature, swept off-course and carried headlong by every breeze of so-called teaching that emanates from the trickery of men in their readiness to do anything to cunningly work their deceit, (15) but rather that we may, by embracing the truth in love, grow up in all respects with Christ, who is the head of the Church, as our model. (16) In this way, the entire body of the Church, fit and joined together by Him through the sinews He powerfully supplies to each and every part, works out its own growth for the building up of itself in love.
Ephesians 4:11-16

This remolding of our thinking through the truth of the Word in order to make it compatible with and, ideally, completely in sync with God's thinking is the ultimate spiritual "high ground" and a hallmark of spiritual maturity. Thinking as God thinks after salvation through matching our response to the light of truth with the apparatus received at salvation which enables us to let in the light is the only way to receive wisdom and, indeed, is wisdom in its own right.

Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn out its seven pillars.
Proverbs 9:1 NIV

By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established; through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures.
Proverbs 24:3-4 NIV

Each of us is (or should be) allowing Wisdom to build a "house" in our hearts, fully equipping it in a perfect way. When we experienced spiritual rebirth, the "doorways" and "windows" of our inner-person were thrown wide-open to the light of the truth, but faith is the doorkeeper that lets truth into our hearts. For the passageways to remain wide and clear, and for our inner-house to become fully furnished with every good thing God has provided, we must continue both to pursue the truth and to believe the truth. In this way we shall throw out the old, worldly furniture and replace it with the perfect furnishings of the truth of the Word of God. In this way we shall have an inner-household acceptable for the presence of our Lord Jesus, seeing and evaluating everything now according to the true standards He has stored up for us in the Bible.

Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him".
John 14:23 NIV

In this way, the light of the truth will continue both to illuminate our way in this world, allowing us to see things for what they really are, see them as God sees them, and also to expose the residual darkness in our hearts until the antiseptic light has purged away every bit of that contagion of darkness in every last corner of our inner-dwelling.

(2) May [God's] grace to you and [His] peace be multiplied by means of the full-knowledge (*epignosis*: truth believed) of God and our Lord Jesus, (3) inasmuch as His divine power has bestowed upon us [every]thing we need to live and to live in a godly way (i.e., physical and spiritual provision) **through** this full-knowledge (*epignosis*) of Him who has called us for His own glory and renown (i.e., the continued provision is based upon continuing attention to the truth).

2nd Peter 1:2-3 (cf. 2Pet.1:8)

In this way, we will truly be "light in the Lord" (Eph.5:8), and the light within us will enable us to distinguish between what is truly good and what is not, expose the deceptions of evil with divine illumination, and accomplish God's will for our lives as He reveals it to us by His Spirit through His holy Word.

(1) Therefore I entreat you by God's mercy, brothers, to dedicate your bodies as a living sacrifice, well-pleasing to God – [this is] your "priestly-service" spiritually performed.

(2) Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by this renewal of your thinking, so **that you may discern what God's will for you is**, namely what it is good, well-pleasing, and correct [for you to do].

Romans 12:1-2 (cf. Rom.2:17-18)

(5) You who are slaves, obey your masters according to the flesh with fear and trembling with simplicity of heart just as you [should obey] the Lord, (6) not doing so with "eye-service" (i.e., only when they are watching you) as those who seek to please men, but as servants of Christ, **accomplishing God's will from your heart**, (7) serving with good will as if to the Lord and not to men, (8) for you know that whatever good thing each one of you accomplishes, he will receive [a reward] for this from the Lord, whether he is slave or free.

Ephesians 6:5-8

(9) And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in full-knowledge (*epignosis*: truth believed) **and in all discernment**, (10) **so that you may be able to evaluate** the things that are good and appropriate [for you to do] to be sincere and without offense in regard to the day of Christ (i.e., to gain a maximum reward at Christ's judgment seat), (11) full of the righteous production Jesus Christ [commends] to the glory and praise of God.

Philippians 1:9-11

(3) Now **this is God's will**, namely, your sanctification (i.e., separation from sin). [He desires you] to keep away from immorality, (4) and for each of you to know how to keep his [or her] own vessel (i.e., body) under control in sanctification and honorable conduct, (6) not [giving in] to the passions of lust as do the gentiles (i.e., unbelievers) who do not know God, (7) so that you may not transgress and thereby take advantage of your brother/sister [in Christ]. For the Lord is an Avenger of all these sins as I have warned and have born solemn witness to you before. For God did not call you to uncleanness but in sanctification.

1st Thessalonians 4:3-7

Solid [spiritual] food is for the [spiritually] mature, those who by [diligent] practice have trained their [moral] perceptive faculties to [properly] **distinguish between good and evil**.
Hebrews 5:14

(35) So do not throw away this conviction of yours – it leads to a great reward. (36) You need to keep persevering so that you may carry off in victory what has been promised – **after you have accomplished God's will**. (37) For yet a little while, how short, how [short the wait], and He who is coming shall come, nor will He delay. (38) "Then shall my righteous one live by his faith, but if he shrinks back, My heart takes no pleasure in him (Hab.2:3-4)." (39) Now we are not possessed of cowardly apostasy which leads to destruction, but we have faith which leads to [eternal] life.

Hebrews 10:35-39

(15) For thus it is **the will of God** for you by doing good to silence the ignorance of the ignorant. (16) [Do so] as free people, and not as those using your freedom as a cloak for evil, but as servants of God.

1st Peter 2:15-16

(1) Therefore since Christ died in His flesh, we also should arm ourselves with the same mind-set, [considering] that whoever has suffered in his flesh [as Jesus did] is finished with sin, (2) to the end that [we also like Him] may no longer live what is left of our lives on earth in human lusts **but in God's will**.

1st Peter 4:1-2 (cf. v.6)

(16) For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father but from the world. (17) And the world and its lust are passing away, **but the one who does the will of God** abides forever.

1st John 2:16-17

As these verses demonstrate, the transformation of our thought processes accomplished by continuing to let the light of truth into our hearts after salvation is the way in which we come to discern God's will more correctly and, ideally, to respond thereafter to that will for our lives through the life-long pursuit of spiritual growth, spiritual progression, and the spiritual

production that brings the greatest eternal rewards to the glory of God. This is the essence of spiritual maturity, the epitome of which is our imitation of the Lord who bought us, our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, namely, the achieving of a mature walk with Jesus which can only occur in those who have both learned and believed God's truth so as to be able to discern and follow His will.

(14) For this reason I bow my knees to the Father, (15) from whom His entire family in heaven and on earth has received its name, (16) that He may grant you according to the riches of His glory to be powerfully strengthened in your inner person through His Spirit, (17) so that, rooted and grounded in love, ***Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.***
Ephesians 3:14-17

(9) Stop lying to each other, having put aside your "former person" (10) and having put on the "new" one which is being renewed to a full and obedient knowledge [of the truth] ***according to the image of the One*** (i.e., Christ) who created it.
Colossians 3:9-10

(8) Though you have never laid eyes on [Jesus], yet you love Him. And though you cannot see Him at this present time, yet you have faith in Him. For this reason you rejoice with an inexpressible joy that bespeaks the glorious future to come, (9) when you shall carry off in victory the ultimate prize – your life's [eternal] deliverance – which is the very purpose and objective of this faith of yours.
1st Peter 1:8-9

For [Moses] grew strong by seeing the One who cannot be seen (i.e., by keeping his mind's eye on the invisible Jesus Christ).
Hebrews 11:27

As growing believers in Jesus, we should now behave in accordance with the light of truth for which we now have a natural affinity incomprehensible to this dark world (Jn.1:5). Just as salvation entails a fundamental reorienting to the truth of the gospel (Jn.3:19-21; cf. 1Jn.2:11), so after salvation, now that we are able to *see* the Kingdom (Jn.3:3), it is incumbent upon us to continue our march to Zion, letting in the light and rejecting the darkness, until we all pass through her narrow gate and receive our promised rewards.

The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day.
Proverbs 4:18 NIV

(12) The night is nearly over and the day is close at hand. So let us put aside the works of darkness and put on [instead] ***the armor of light.*** (13) Let us walk in all appropriateness as in the daylight, not in carousing and binging, not in sexual impurity and license, not in resentment and spite, (14) but instead ***clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ,*** and do not [even] make any plans for carrying out the lusts of the flesh.

e) the need produce a crop through the light of the truth: As indicated in the discussion above, for all Christians determined to respond to Jesus and His truth after being saved, the process of growth and spiritual advance, while it may be described in terms of its stages (i.e., internal growth to maturity, external progress and success in the passing of tests so as to build spiritual muscle, and production of a spiritual crop through ministering to the Church of Jesus Christ), is of course in reality a contiguous and interwoven whole. No matter how long we may find ourselves on this earth, and no matter how much we may learn about the truth scripture contains, and no matter how many tests we may pass, and no matter how productive we may be for Jesus, there is always room for improvement. To our last day we will still need *everyday* to be doing *all the things* our Lord has called us to do, namely, to be learning and believing the truth, applying it appropriately to the life-circumstances we face, and sharing our gifts, energy and resources with our brothers and sisters in Christ (i.e., we will never stop learning, it is never too early to minister, and there will always be tests to pass). After we receive new life through the gospel, the process of our growth thereafter is an organic one. As in the parable of the Sower, once the seed of truth has been planted in our hearts, we must let it keep growing up towards the light until it fulfills the purpose for which God sent it forth (Is.55:11). If we refuse to allow the weeds of this world to choke off our growth, our faith plant will fully mature and produce an abundant crop for our Lord Jesus and His Church (Is.60:1ff.; Is.61:3b; Jer.4:3-4; 1Cor.3:6; 9:11; cf. Jas.1:18).

But the one who was sown on good ground, this is the one who hears the Word and lets it in, the one who then produces a crop and yields one a hundred, one sixty, and one thirty-fold.

Matthew 13:23

(1) I am the true vine and my Father is the vine-dresser. Every branch [that is] in Me which does not bear fruit (2) He removes, and every branch which does bear fruit He prunes so that it might bear more fruit. (3) You have already been pruned because of the Word I have spoken to you. (4) Stay part of Me, and I will [stay] part of you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it remains part of the vine, so you too cannot [bear true fruit] unless you stay part of Me. (5) I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in Him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing. (6) If anyone does not remain in Me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

John 15:1-6 NIV

[For you] have been born again not from corruptible seed but through *the Word of God* which lives and abides forever.

1st Peter 1:23

No one who has been born of God continues in [a life of] sin, since *His seed* (i.e., the Word of truth in which we believe) remains in him, and [so] he is not able to continue in

[a life of] sin since he has been born of God.
1st John 3:9

f) The need to persevere: Finally, since believers are those who believe in Jesus Christ, to be saved we all need to persevere in our faith in Jesus Christ, faithful to the end, avoiding the process of hardening of heart described in section II.2 above so as not to fall away from the One in whom we have put our trust for eternal life (e.g., 1Pet.1:5; cf. 1Jn.3:9).³⁴

(8) Though you have never laid eyes on [Jesus], yet you love Him. And though you cannot see Him at this present time, yet you have faith in Him. For this reason you rejoice with an inexpressible joy that bespeaks the glorious future to come, (9) when you shall carry off in victory the ultimate prize – *your life's [eternal] deliverance* – which is the very purpose and objective of this faith of yours.
1st Peter 1:8-9

The only way to be safe in this life, is to continue our forward progress in God's plan for us after salvation, continuing to embrace the light of the truth of the entire Word of God just as we allowed the light of the gospel into our hearts so as to be saved (2Cor.4:4; cf. 2Tim.1:10). Only through following the truth – and through the sanctification and spiritual growth it engenders – can we be assured of arriving safely on the shores of eternity, with a good report in hand that glories the Lord who bought us (Jas.1:22-23).

(14) I have given them Your word, and the world hated them, because they are not of the world just as I am not of the world. (15) I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one. (16) For they are not of the world just as I am not of the world. (17) So make them holy (i.e., “sanctified”) by means of Your truth – Your word is truth. (18) And just as you sent Me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. (19) I am consecrating Myself for their sake, so that they too may be made holy (i.e., “be sanctified”) through truth.
John 17:14-19

(3) May the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ be praised, who has in His great mercy caused us to be reborn to a hope which lives through Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead, (4) and to an inheritance which will never be destroyed, defiled, or dimmed, but which is being guarded in heaven for us, (5) who are ourselves also being *kept safe* by God's power *and our faith* in Him *to an ultimate deliverance* ready to be unveiled at the end of time.
1st Peter 1:3-5

³⁴ Please also see "Apostasy and the Sin unto Death", section IV.6, part 3B of the Bible Basics: "Hamartiology"; and for the doctrine of perseverance specifically, Peter's Epistles, lesson #21: under "Perseverance", and lesson #27: under "Preserving Your Eternal Life".

(22) Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth [of the gospel] so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. (23) For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

1st Peter 1:22-23 NIV

(37) For yet a little while, how short, how short [the wait], and He who is coming shall come, nor will He delay. (38) "And [in the meantime] my righteous one shall live *by his faith*, but if he shrinks back, *My heart takes no pleasure in him.*"

Hebrews 10:37-38 (cf. Habakkuk 2:3-4)

Conclusion:

(30) And having led [Paul and Silas] outside he said, "Sirs, *what do I need to do to be saved?*" (31) And they said, "*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved*, you and your house[hold] too."

Acts 16:30-31

Distilled to its essence, salvation is a choice, exercised through faith when we believe in Jesus Christ, the God-Man who died for our sins on the cross. God is the One who has taken care of all of the particulars in His ineffable grace, and God is the One who manages all of the mechanics in the process of our rebirth and perseverance unto eternal life. Our part is merely to avail ourselves of the gift of salvation and the continuing, bountiful grace in the provision of His truth for us after we have been born again – He takes care of the rest. All we have to do is to choose for Jesus and to keep choosing for Jesus Christ, day by day. All we have to do is not say "no", for all the promises of God are a resounding "YES!" in Jesus Christ our dear Savior (2Cor.1:20).

III. What it Means to be Saved

For if anyone is in Christ, that person is a *new creation*. Prior things have passed away. Look! New things have come.

2nd Corinthians 5:17

As demonstrated above in section II.7 under "Our New Position as Believers", when we are born again, everything changes – for good in every way. We were dead, but have now been given new life in Jesus Christ through a spiritual rebirth which leads to resurrection and eternal life. Scripture is replete with descriptions of what our new status as sons of the Living God and members of Christ's eternal Church involves to the point that any attempt to provide a comprehensive list of the benefits of our so-great salvation must inevitably fall short.³⁵ Broadly

³⁵ For worthy prior attempts, see L.S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas 1948) v.3, pp. 234-265; R.B. Thieme Jr., *The Plan of God* (Houston 1973) pp. 23-27.

speaking, the benefits of salvation may be divided categorically into the deliverance it achieves, the new position into which it places us, the present advantages believers enjoy, and the future blessings upon which we have fixed our hope:

1. Deliverance:

a. Born Again: Instead of being spiritually dead on account of sin, we have now been rendered spiritually alive by the Spirit through faith in Christ (Matt.19:28; Jn.1:13; 3:3-8; 1Cor.4:15; Gal.2:20; 4:29; Tit.3:5; Heb.12:9; Jas.1:18; 1Pet.1:3; 1:23; 1Jn.2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1; 5:4; 5:18). Our new life has given us a new standing with God. For believers, life has begun again anew, and is now to be lived for Jesus Christ apart from sin (2Cor.5:17; Eph.2:10; 4:22-24; Col.3:9-10; cf. Rom.12:2; Eph.2:15). No longer spiritually dead but alive, we are no longer separated from the life of God. Rather, instead of being dead to Him, we have passed from death to life (Jn.5:24; 1Jn.3:14), so that now we are positionally dead to sin but alive in Him and to Him and for Him (Rom.6:1-23; 8:10; 1Cor.15:22; Eph.2:5; Col.2:13; 2Tim.2:11; 1Pet.4:1; 1Jn.3:6).

For just as in Adam, all die, so also in Christ shall all be made *alive*.
1st Corinthians 15:22

b. Forgiven: Instead of facing the prospect of dying in our sins (Jn.8:21-24; Eph.2:1), believers are not under condemnation but have had all of our sins blotted out through faith in Jesus Christ (Jn.3:18; 5:24; Acts 13:38; 26:18; Rom.6:11; 8:1-4; Eph.2:1-5; 4:32; Col.2:13; 1Jn.1:7-9). We have been cleansed from sin through our faith in Jesus Christ, with the filth and the stain of sin positionally washed away forever (Jn.13; 1Cor.6:11; Eph.5:26; Tit.3:5; Heb.10:22; Rev.7:14; 22:14). As a result, we are no longer subject to the lies of this world but have responded to the truth and are to reflect that truth in our lives for Christ (Matt.5:16; 2Cor.3:18). In Jesus, we are no longer under the darkness of sin (Rom.6:7), but are ourselves "light", witnesses to the sinless one true Light, our Lord Jesus Christ (Jn.12:36; Eph.5:8; Phil.2:14-16; Col.1:12-13; 1Thes.5:5; cf. 2Cor.6:14).

This is My blood of the [New] Covenant which is poured out for the *forgiveness* of sins concerning many people.
Matthew 26:28

c. Redeemed: Through faith in our Savior Jesus Christ, we believers have been ransomed from sin and bought free of slavery to it by the blood of our Lord's saving work on the cross (Matt.20:28; Lk.1:68; Jn.8:31-36; Rom.3:24; 1Cor.1:30; 6:20; 7:23; Gal.3:13; 4:4-5; Eph.1:7; 1:14; Col.1:14; 1Tim.2:6; Tit.2:14; Heb.9:12-15; 1Pet.1:18-19; Rev.5:9).³⁶

In whom (i.e., Christ) we possess our *ransoming* [from sin] (i.e., "redemption") through His blood, the forgiveness of our transgressions according to the riches of His grace.

³⁶ See Bible Basics, part 4A, "Christology", section II.7, "Redemption".

d. Reconciled: Once separated from God because of sin, through Jesus Christ believers have been brought near to Him. Though we were alienated from God in the past, we now stand positionally "near" in the presence of our holy Father through the blood of Jesus Christ (Eph.2:13; cf. Heb.4:16; 7:19; 10:22; Jas.4:8). As sinners, we were once God's enemies, but we have now been reconciled to Him by the blood of Jesus Christ through our faith in Him and His sacrifice for us on the cross (2Cor.5:18; Eph.2:16; Col.1:20-21).³⁷

(8) But God commends His love towards us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (9) So how much more is it not true now, after we have been rendered righteous [through faith] in His blood, that we shall be saved from the [coming] wrath through Him? (10) For if when we were His enemies we were *reconciled* to God through the death of His Son, how much more is it not true [now], since we have been *reconciled* [to Him through Jesus' death], that we will be saved by His life? (11) And not only that, but we even exult in [our new relationship] with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained this *reconciliation*.

Romans 5:8-11

2. New Position:

a. Adoption: Previously excluded from having any part with God's holy people (Eph.2:12), we who believe have now been made sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ. We have been adopted into the family of God, no longer considered as outsiders subject to God's wrath because of sin, but made His children through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ (Jn.1:12-13; Rom.8:16-17; 8:23-24 Gal.3:21-4:7; Eph.3:15; Heb.12:4-11; 1Jn.3:1-2).

(5) Having foreordained us in [His] love for *adoption* to Himself through Jesus Christ according to the good pleasure of His will, (6) for the purpose of producing (at salvation) praise for the glory of His grace which He has graciously bestowed on us in the Beloved [One].

Ephesians 1:5-6

b. Bride of Christ: Through faith in Jesus, all believers are part of His Bride, members of His eternal and heavenly Church. As the eternal complement of our Lord, we believers, the Church of Jesus Christ, are destined and designed to be with Him forever (Matt.9:15; Matt.25:1-13; Mk.2:19; Lk.5:34; Jn.3:29; 2Cor.11:2-3; Eph.1:22-23; 5:22-33; Rev.19:7-14; 21:2-4; 21:9ff.; 22:17). We are eternally part of Him as His Bride, washed of our sin by His blood, loved, cherished and possessed by Him in a way that even a perfect human marriage could only

³⁷ See Bible Basics, part 4A, "Christology", section II.9, "Reconciliation".

approximate (Eph.5:25-32; Rev.19:7).³⁸

(25) Husbands, love your wives as also Christ loved His Church and gave Himself over [to death] on her behalf, (26) so that He might sanctify her, having purified her by the washing of the water [of truth] in [His] Word. (27), so that He might Himself [and] for Himself present His Church in glory, without spot or blemish, but so that she might [instead] be holy and without blame.

Ephesians 5:25-27

c. Citizens of Heaven: Believers are no longer "of this world", but are citizens of heaven. Although we remain in the world, we are no longer of it (Jn.17:16; 1Pet.2:9 & 11). We have set our sights not on the things which are seen, but on the unseen hope of glory to come (2Cor.4:17-18; 5:7; Col.1:27; 3:1-4; 1Tim.1:1). Through faith in Jesus Christ we are no longer bound by sin to this visible world of dust, but are citizens of heaven, awaiting the return of our King when our full enjoyment of our heavenly citizenship shall begin (Phil.3:20; Heb.12:22-24; cf. Eph.2:19).

(8) By faith, Abraham, when He was called [by God], obeyed and went forth into the place he was destined to receive as an inheritance. He went forth, moreover, in ignorance of where [exactly] he was heading. (9) By faith, he sojourned as an alien in the land he had been promised, dwelling in tents with Jacob and Isaac, coheirs of [this same] promise. (10) For he was waiting for the foundation of *that city* (i.e., the New Jerusalem) whose architect and builder is God.

Hebrews 11:8-10

d. Cleansed in our Conscience: The previous hardness of our unbelieving hearts has now been removed (Eph.4:18), our consciences being cleansed by the washing of the new birth to perceive and receive the truth of the Word of God (1Pet.3:21; Heb.9:14; 10:22). As believers, we have turned toward God and away from sin. In faith we have changed our basic orientation from being directed towards sin and evil to being directed instead towards God and His truth through faith in Him who is the Truth, our Savior Jesus Christ (Lk.1:16-17; Acts 3:19; 9:35; 11:21; 15:3; 15:19; 26:18-20; 2Cor.3:16; 1Thes.1:9; 1Pet.2:25; cf. Matt.13:15; Lk.22:32; Acts 14:15; Jas.5:20).

And this (i.e., the list of offenders in vv.9-10) is [exactly] what some of you were – but *you were washed* [clean], but you were made holy, but you were made righteous by [faith in] the Person (lit., Name) of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit of our God.

1st Corinthians 6:11

e. Heirs of an Eternal Inheritance: As children of God, we have also become His heirs in Jesus Christ. Through faith in our Savior we have been liberated from the fear of death and

³⁸ See part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion, section II.8.iv, "The Bride".

understand that our physical death only means entrance into eternal life wherein we have an inheritance that will never fade away forevermore in Jesus Christ our Lord (1Pet.1:4; cf. Matt.6:19-21; Acts 26:18; Rom.8:16-17; Eph.1:14; 1:18; Phil.1:21; Col.1:12; 2:3; Heb.9:15; 10:35; 2Jn.1:8; Rev.11:18; 22:12).

(3) May the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ be praised, who has in His great mercy caused us to be reborn to a hope which lives through Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead, (4) and to an *inheritance* which will never be destroyed, defiled, or dimmed, but which is being guarded in heaven for us, (5) who are ourselves also being kept safe by God's power and our faith in Him to an ultimate deliverance ready to be unveiled at the end of time.

1st Peter 1:3-5

f. Justified: All believers have been made righteous in Christ. By virtue of being in Jesus Christ through faith, God now considers us righteous and no longer sinful, possessing as we do not our own self-righteousness, but the genuine righteousness of our very own Lord and Savior through our position in Him (Is.45:25; Jn.3:18; Rom.1:17; 3:21-24; 3:28; 4:4-7; 4:13; 4:24; 5:1; 5:8-9; 8:1; 9:30-31; 10:6; 2Cor.5:21; Gal.2:16; Eph.2:8-9 Phil.3:9; Heb.11:7). We may therefore always be confident in belonging to Jesus Christ because our righteousness is completely a result of what He has done in dying for all of our sins, not upon anything we may have done or failed to do.³⁹

For we maintain that a man is *justified by faith* apart from observing the law.
Romans 3:28 NIV

g. Sanctified: We who have put our faith in Jesus Christ are no longer sinners by nature but are in fact positionally sinless. Our current standing is that of "sanctified", that is, we are positionally holy and without sin as a consequence of our faith through being baptized by the Holy Spirit into our sinless Lord Jesus Christ (1Jn.3:6-9; cf. Rom.6:1-2). We are "saints" or "holy ones", having been "sanctified" or made "holy" in Him. Though we were formerly profane, separated from holy God by our sins (Ps.143:2; Rom.5:8; Eph.2:1-3; 2:12; Col.2:13; cf. Eph.4:22), now we have been made holy in Jesus Christ, sanctified by our faith in Him and His work for us on the cross (Rom.1:7; 8:27; 12:13; 1Cor.1:2; 6:11; 2Cor.1:1; Eph.1:1; Phil.1:1; Col.1:2; 1Thes.3:13; 2Thes.1:10; 1Tim.5:10; Philemon 1:5; Heb.3:1; 1Pet.1:15; Jude 1:3; Rev.8:3 et passim in the New Testament).⁴⁰

(15) Then I said, "Who are you, Lord?", and the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. (16)But stand up on your feet. For I have appeared to you for this [very]

³⁹ See Bible Basics, part 4A, "Christology", section II.8, "Justification".

⁴⁰ See Bible Basics, part 3B, "Hamartiology", section V.2, "The Principle and Process of Sanctification".

reason, [namely] to appoint you a minister and a witness, both of what you have [now] seen, and of [other things] in regard to which I shall appear to you [later]. (17) [For] I am going to rescue you from this people (i.e., Jewish opponents) and from the gentiles to whom I am sending you (18) to open their eyes so as to turn from darkness to [the] light, even from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive the forgiveness of [their] sins and a share among those who have been *sanctified by faith* in Me."
Acts 26:15-18

h. Sealed and under God's own Guarantee by the Pledge of the Holy Spirit: Through the indwelling of the Spirit, God the Father has put His special seal of protection upon every believer as a pledge and an unbreakable guarantee of salvation for all who maintain their faith in His Son our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom.8:10; 2Cor.5:5; Eph.1:13-14; 4:30).

(21) Now the One who has *given us security* in regard to Christ together with you and who has *anointed* us (i.e., with the Spirit) is God – (22) [Yes, He] has also *sealed* us and given us His *pledge* of the Spirit in our hearts.
2nd Corinthians 1:21-22

i. Under Grace: Believers in Jesus Christ are not under the Law but under grace. In Christ we have been redeemed from our sins and from the concomitant curse of the Law so that we now find ourselves instead under the grace of God through faith in our Savior (Rom.6:14-15; Gal.3:10-13; 3:23-25; 4:1-7; 5:18; Eph.2:1-10; cf. 1Cor.9:20-21).

(1) So now that we have been justified by faith, let us take hold of the peace [we have] with God [the Father] through our Lord Jesus Christ, (2) through whom we have also obtained our access into this *grace* in which we stand, and let us boast in the hope of the glory of God.
Romans 5:1-2

j. Union with Christ and Oneness with the Father and Spirit: Through our faith in the Person of Christ and Jesus' saving work for us on the cross, we believers have been entered into union with the Trinity (Matt.28:18-20), becoming "partakers of the divine nature" as those whose proper place is in eternity in everlasting fellowship with God (2Pet.1:4; cf. Eph.3:6; Heb.3:1; 3:14). In particular, believers are said to have a special relationship in this regard to our Lord Jesus, with the phrase "in Christ" repeatedly used to describe our essential status as Christians (e.g., Jn.14:20; 15:1ff.; Rom.16:7; Eph.2:6; 2:10; Heb.3:14; 1Pet.5:14).

For if anyone is *in Christ*, that person is a new creation. Prior things have passed away. Look! New things have come.
2nd Corinthians 5:17

3. Present Advantages:

a. Access to God as Priests of Jesus Christ: As those belonging to Jesus Christ, we believers

share the spoils of His victory on the cross (Ps.82:8; Is.33:23b; 53:12; Lk.11:21-22; Eph.4:7-10). Inasmuch as Jesus has become our High Priest (1Tim.2:5; Heb.7:24-25; cf. Job 16:20-21; Is.53:12b; Heb.4:14; 6:19-20; 9:11-12; 9:24) through His efficacious sacrifice of Himself on our behalf, we believers now share that priesthood (1Pet.2:5; 2:9; Rev.1:6; 5:10; 20:6), a blessed part of which is our newfound access to the throne of grace (Eph.2:18; 3:12; Heb.4:16), wherein we are allowed to petition the Father directly in Jesus' Name, and to petition our Lord directly as well (Jn.14:13-14), without the need of any intermediaries.

(9) And they sang a new song, saying, "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain and have purchased with your blood for our God [men] from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, (10) and have made them into a kingdom and *priests* to our God, and they will rule upon the earth!"
Revelation 5:9-10

b. Fellowship with God: Being indwelt by the Father (Eph.4:6), the Son (Jn.14:20; Rom.8:10; 2Cor.13:5; Eph.3:17; Col.1:27), and the Holy Spirit (Rom.8:9; cf. Jn.14:17; 2Tim.1:14; Heb.6:4), and having a special relationship with the Father and the Son (Jn.14:23), and being unified by the Spirit (1Cor.12:13), our new position in Jesus Christ and in the Trinity as a whole opens up for us as believers a wonderful life of fellowship with God, the Father (Rom.8:15; Gal.4:6), the Son (1Cor.1:9; Phil.2:1; 1Pet.1:8), and the Holy Spirit (Phil.2:1; Heb.6:4), wherein we actually experience the peace, the power, and the joy of a life with God, basking in His radiant light even as we walk through this valley of death and deep darkness.

We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.
1st John 1:3 NIV

c. Divine Protection: God has always extended extraordinary care to the community of the faithful (e.g., Deut.32:10; Ps.17:8; Zech.2:8). As members of the Bride of Christ (Rev.19:7; 22:17; cf. Eph.5:23-32), believers come in for His special protection, a care and concern so complete that not a hair on our heads can be lost without our Lord's say-so (Lk.21:18; cf. Matt.10:29-31). We can, therefore, have confidence that everything that happens in this life is meant for our good in every way (Rom.8:28; cf. 1Cor.10:13), and that our Lord will take care of us come what may (Matt.6:30).

God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."
Hebrews 13:5b NIV

d. Spiritual Gifts: All believers of the Church Age receive at least one spiritual gift at the point of salvation (1Cor.12:7-11). The gifts of the Spirit are many in type (e.g., 1Cor.12:8-10), but all have the same purpose: the edification of the Church of Jesus Christ (1Cor.12:7; Eph.4:12-16; Col.2:19). Whatever gift or gifts we have been given, therefore, constitute a responsibility to serve our Lord but also a previously unparalleled opportunity to earn eternal rewards through production that pleases our dear Savior.

"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'"

Matthew 25:21 NIV

4. Future Blessings:

a. New Jerusalem: Jesus has promised us a place with Himself forever (Jn.14:1-4), and that place will be in the heavenly New Jerusalem which descends to earth at the close of human history (Rev.21:1-2). In our eternal abode, we will experience all the wonders of eternity, the river of the water of life which proceeds from the throne of God (Rev.22:1), the tree of life which adorns the banks of the river and bears fruit to delight us forevermore (Rev.22:2), and, the greatest blessing of all, an eternity in the presence of the Lord Jesus we love so much and of our heavenly Father (Jn.14:3; Rev.22:4; cf. Matt.18:10).⁴¹

(12) "The one who wins the victory I will make a pillar in the temple of My God and he shall never go out again. And I will write upon him the Name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem (which is going to come down from heaven from My God), and My new Name. (13) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Revelation 3:12-13

b. Resurrection: All who have followed Jesus Christ in faith will be resurrected at His return to earth (1Cor.15:23). Instead of the grave, we who believe are guaranteed never to see death again (Jn.11:25), and will receive on that great day of days a perfect, eternal body whose blessings and capabilities we can only dimly conceive at present (1Cor.13:12). To experience eternity and our eternal life to the full, God has promised us and will give us the perfect, eternal means to do so, a body of glory which will never grow old, die or decay, identical in type to the one our Lord now possesses (1Jn.3:2; cf. 1Cor.15:49).⁴²

For we know that if our earthly tent-dwelling (i.e., our physical body) be struck, we have an abode [that comes] from God, a dwelling made without human agency, eternal in the heavens (i.e., the resurrection body).

2nd Corinthians 5:1

c. Reward: While we do not know the precise nature of the special future rewards which will fall to the lot of those who respond to our Lord's commands to spiritual advance, progress and production here in this life (Dan.12:13; Heb.11:6), we do know that there is a judgment before

⁴¹ See "The New Jerusalem and the Eternal State" in section VII of Coming Tribulation part 6.

⁴² See "The Resurrection of the Lamb's Bride" in section V of Coming Tribulation part 5.

our Lord to assess "the things done with the body" here on earth (2Cor.5:10; cf. Rom.14:10; 1Pet.4:17), and that this judgment is not one of punishment (as in the case of unbelievers), but of evaluation for the purpose of determining reward (1Cor.3:10-15; cf. Matt.16:27; Rev.22:12). While all believers will receive at least something (Matt.25:24-30; Lk.19:20-26), knowing this ahead of time should motivate us to strive to maximize our output for the One we love, our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, in the hope of a good report on that day of days.⁴³

The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "**Feed my sheep.**"
John 21:17 NIV

Conclusion: Salvation is God's free gift made available to all mankind by grace and received through faith apart from any human works. It is the most valuable thing on earth, and, indeed, is the reason why we have been placed here: to receive God's promise of deliverance and eternal life through faith in the Person and the work of His one and only beloved Son, Jesus Christ our dear Lord and Savior. God has already done everything necessary for us to receive the gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ. All we have to do is be willing to receive it. That willingness – to believe or not to believe – is the great divider which separates the living from the dead, and the key to explaining God's creation of mankind.

(2) By this [test] recognize the Spirit of God (i.e., those who have Him): Every spirit (i.e., person) who acknowledges Jesus Christ as having come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit (i.e., person) who does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God.
1st John 4:2-3a

We beg you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God!
2nd Corinthians 5:20

⁴³ See "The Judgment and Reward of the Church" in section I.7 of Coming Tribulation part 6.