

The UNION

Get Ready to Meet the King!

God Calls His Church to
Truth, Faith, and Holiness

2016
Edition

Joan H. Richardson

The UNION

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by Joan H. Richardson

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CHAPTER 12

An Incomplete Gospel

Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, *that* someone said to Him, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air *have* nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay *His* head." Then He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God." And another also said, "Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go *and* bid them farewell who are at my house." But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."
(Luke 9:57-62 NKJV)

Easy Grace?

Those called to evangelism should look to the Author of our faith for wisdom and understanding as we step out to reach souls. In the battle for their hearts, we hope to win as many as we can, but numbers might be less important than we think. Jesus wants committed lives. We overlook how He compelled the hesitant to commit their lives but cautioned those eager to join Him.

What happens to the man who doesn't consider the cost? He gives up his efforts, turning to whatever is immediately more gratifying. What about the one who wants this world and the next, unwilling to make Jesus the Lord of his life?

Our Savior deemed it important to warn those who consider a shallow or double-minded commitment to Him. The Lord requires the clear and unequivocal decision: complete devotion; nothing less than total commitment is approved in His kingdom:

I will call heaven and earth to record this day against you, *that* I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: (Deuteronomy 30:19)

There must be no backing out, no longing for the past, no regrets, and no complaints. The reward for those who persevere

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is eternal life. If we stumble, we rise again, moving forward to higher ground; in patience, we persevere toward holiness.

How can we comprehend His great mercies, wonderful love, and effectual grace toward us unless we first appreciate the depth of our deliverance from the mortal nature with its willful and selfish desires? Now the Savior has set us free from our sinful ways, and at last, we have the liberty to choose life or death. If we're wise, we'll choose life, thirsting for His goodness and surrendering to His Spirit—rising out of death into His holiness!

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.

(Galatians 6:7-8 NKJV)

When we received Jesus as our personal Savior, we should have understood that He is not here to cater to us, but we must serve Him as Lord. Through His great labor of love, He gave us the right to an inheritance of eternal life. When we live by faith, the gift is ours with all of its wonderful amenities: peace, joy, goodness, forgiveness, and the love of God.

Now that we've received Him, what is required of us but to live by faith in Him? He hasn't left us powerless to obey Him; therefore we're without excuse if we are slothful or disinterested, following this world, returning to our former condition. Surely we care about godliness—that's why we turned from sin!

Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. (1 John 3:7-8)

The devil changes the meanings of scriptures, weaving his paths through them. He always has. Each time I hear a new definition, I think of Eden. Now tell me, does *righteousness* really mean, "in right standing with God?" ... "Did God say...?"

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What Christ has done for the believer is powerful and practical. If we do righteous works, we are righteous; if we practice sin, we are hypocrites. But someone changed the true definitions. The errors seem rational to our minds because we're using human reasoning, unlike the ways and thoughts of God. By rationalizing what God is like, men have formed His identity with their imaginations for millennia. Image-making comes from the imagination and is a form of idol worship.

Those who practice righteousness, producing good works by faith, are in right standing with God. To remain in right relationship, we must walk circumspectly and wisely. We have been warned of wolves in sheep's clothing. If we follow wolves, we will theorize our faith away. Although theories are never proven, changed lives are the real evidence of saving faith. *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. (Heb. 11:1)* And what is faith without works? Dead.

The Holy Spirit is the surety, or down payment, guaranteeing our inheritance; however, if we despise that endowment, we will lose what we think we have. If we sin without repentance, our hearts will harden, blind us, and rob us of what would rightfully have been ours. We might glibly say, "We're in right standing," while practicing sin, but that is not the Word that sets us free to seek His kingdom and His righteousness.

He has given us all power to overcome and gain the goal of holiness, so those who seek Him are reckoned holy because they finish the course. By fixing our eyes on Jesus, knowing He reserves our riches in heaven, we'll endure to the end on earth. Through His cleansing blood and by His powerful Spirit, God raised us up in Him. He will never leave us whom He *foreknew*, and we are willing to put up a good fight against the darkness!

*It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with *him*, we shall also live with *him*: If we suffer, we shall also reign with *him*: if we deny *him*, he also will deny us: If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself. (2 Timothy 2:11-13) [See page 188.]*

As His life increases in us, we grow stronger. If we suffer in life's fires, they refine us; if we experience loss on earth, we gain riches in heaven. Not many self-competent, independent people,

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not many rich or wise are chosen by God, but those who know the depth of their needs are those who most deeply receive Him. And God rejoices to glorify Himself in their lives.

What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. (Philippians 3:8-11 NIV)

[Note Paul's obvious fear of God that draws him into purity.]

We will never love the fear of God until we realize it's an ally, not an enemy. Then if a sin catches us in its deadly trap, His fear will free us before the sin consumes us:

The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of knowledge: *but* fools despise wisdom and instruction. (Proverbs 1:7)

When evangelists imply salvation is free and without cost, they circumvent the words of the Messiah. The Sinner's Prayer is of value to those who fear God and repent, having considered the cost and the commitment. Jude described those who profess Jesus Christ but living in sin, they deny Him by rejecting His righteousness; their commitment was shallow. They didn't count the cost, yet they're *among us*, convincing us of casual sin.

For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord. (Jude 4 NIV)

The great exchange of His life for ours provides us the redemption of our bodies and the salvation of our souls. When we consider the alternative, eternal life is worth whatever the cost, no matter the pain or sorrow; we're not afraid to fear God:

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Now large crowds were going along with Him; and He turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand *men* to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.

"Therefore, salt is good; but if even salt has become tasteless, with what will it be seasoned? It is useless either for the soil or for the manure pile; it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

(Luke 14:25-35 NASB)

The *possessions* Jesus referred to in the passage above include those whom we hold dear; that is the context. Which will our hearts own—the Savior, or others before Him? If our decision alienates us from Jesus, we're not following Him. The life He calls us to live is courageous and bold as we participate with God for His glory. Can our Father complete and perfect His work in us? According to our faith, it will be accomplished:

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:3-6 NIV)

Understanding the cost and the prize, do we really want to know Jesus? Though it costs our lives and our comforts, do we deeply desire His likeness? Faithfulness is the evidence of our

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commitment; however, if we stumble, as all do, we repent, confess our sins, and find our forgiveness and cleansing in the water of His Word. There is no other oblation; only His Word. He faithfully lifts us up as we forsake our former nature for His.

One day we realize we are involved with the work of our Father, God Himself! As the years pass, we begin walking in synchronous step with Him.

Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him. (1 John 2:28-29 NASB)

Through Faith Alone

He saves us through our faith by His grace alone: He never had to be born of a woman, resist our temptations, take up the cross, shed His blood, suffer and die for us—but He did. He didn't have to promise us that if we would only live by faith in Him, He would save us, body, soul, and spirit—but He did. He didn't have to send His Holy Spirit to empower us to obey Him, but He did. By His grace, He did everything, and He has given us all we need for life and godliness. By His grace, giving us His gift of faith, His Spirit lives in us and through us to save us.

What's the nature of true faith? Living by faith is the series of progressive steps into holiness—the Spirit's ripened fruit, increasing in us as we believe and grow. We share the life of the Father in Jesus, gaining spiritual gifts by faith. The God of Israel is the miracle-working God. Like His Word, our faith must be living and active, the substance [lit. "reality"] of righteousness hoped for, the evidence of the unseen Holy Spirit within us.

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. (Galatians 2:20 NKJV)

Paul struggled with the flesh nature, describing his inability to win over it; we often end the story there. But he concluded,

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O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

(Romans 7:24-8:1 NKJV) [We must live by our faith.]

For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:3-4 NASB)

So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. (Romans 8:12-14 NASB)

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

(Galatians 5:19-21 NASB)

Paul made it clear by using Esau as an example: the one who loves this world without repentance will be disinherited, even though he could have owned much more than the world could afford. Most Israelites missed the promised land, disqualified because their disobedience revealed their unbelief:

And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

(Hebrews 3:18-19 NKJV)

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In the previous passage, Israel's disobedience was equated with unbelief because, if we believe something, we will act like we believe it—that's how faith works. If we don't believe something, we won't behave as though we do believe it. That would be irrational, which is why faith without works is, in reality, unbelief. Inactive faith is as dead as unbelief. It's illogical to think we can separate faith from works: if faith is alive, it works. (Read Jas 2)

Our Justification

Justification occurs as a vicarious act of faith. *Justified* actually means, "proven to be righteous." By His resurrection, Yeshua proved His blood worked for us; if it had not washed our sins away, He could not have risen, because He took our sins on Himself when He died. By Messiah's resurrection, the Father vicariously raised us from death to life. Interestingly, He gives His Spirit to those who obey Him; if His Spirit lives in us, then we truly *live* by faith.

This is why the promise is by faith, so that it may be according to grace, to guarantee it to all the descendants—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of Abraham's faith. He is the father of us all in God's sight. As it is written: **I have made you the father of many nations.** He believed in God, who gives life to the dead and calls things into existence that do not exist. He believed, hoping against hope, so that he became **the father of many nations**, according to what had been spoken: **So will your descendants be.** He considered his own body to be already dead (since he was about a hundred years old) and also considered the deadness of Sarah's womb, without weakening in the faith. He did not waver in unbelief at God's promise but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, because he was fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. Therefore, **it was credited to him for righteousness.** Now **it was credited to him** was not written for Abraham alone, but also for us. It will be credited to us who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. (Romans 4:16-25 HCSB)

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When we believe the Spirit raised Messiah from death, we believe in Him who now raises us out of deeds that lead to death. He imputes righteousness to us if we live by what we believe because we believe that He—the living Christ—will deliver us from sin. He alone has the power, so we pray! Again and again, the Scriptures state that if we go on sinning, we will die, but by His power at work in us, we will live, saved by grace through our living faith.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

(Ephesians 2:8-10 NIV)

Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matthew 3:1-2 NASB)

From that time Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

(Matthew 4:17 NASB) [After Herod imprisoned John]

Faith Made Complete

Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; ... It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘AND IN YOUR SEED ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH SHALL BE BLESSED.’ For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one *of you* from your wicked ways.” (Acts 3:19, 25-26 NASB; ref. Gen 22:18) –from Peter’s second sermon

While he affirmed we’re not justified by the works of the law, Paul made it clear: God manifests His Spirit in all who believe, living each day by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. By foreknowledge, God credited Abram’s faith as righteousness, but until he obeyed, Abram’s faith was not yet completed; he hadn’t fulfilled the imputation, counting him righteous. If he had later

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refused to obey, Abraham's faith would have been dead. *Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.* (Jas. 2:24) James/Jacob continues to address the brothers:

Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (James 4:4 NKJV)

He was not writing to the world but to the church. We know that adultery is just cause for divorce. Did Paul contradict James or Peter? When we act on our faith in Jesus Christ, His Spirit reveals His righteousness in us, imparting His life to us. Paul explained how the gift of grace comes to us for our redemption:

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also *in the likeness* of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with *Him*, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. ... But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. (Romans 6:1-7, 22 NKJV)

Why would we neglect the Gift God has offered us? John wrote down the *Revelation* that God gave to His Son as Yeshua declared to the churches in Asia: "I know your works ..." His introductory words to each of the seven churches couldn't be plainer. How does He know us all? By our *works*. True faith is the substance and reality of our hope. Good deeds are produced by activating our faith. Jesus lives in us by His Spirit when His works in us prove our faith is real. The unveiling of the Holy Spirit occurs when we act on our faith, believing Jesus Christ

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freed us from our sins. While our own efforts can't save us, His Holy Spirit produces the fruit of good works in us as we abide in His Word; His Spirit is our life:

And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.

Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. (Romans 8:11-14 NIV)

If we believe Jesus washed away our sins, and His Spirit is in us, why do we also believe He can't break our sinful habits? What unbelief!

Faith, or Fear?

A common false assumption is that if we have faith in God, we do not fear Him; furthermore it's been taught that if we fear God, then we lack faith. Men who reason with worldly wisdom are in disagreement with the wisdom of God. When we think like that, we incorrectly divide the Word and improperly address the subjects of fear and faith. If we lean on human reasoning, we will speak rashly. The danger of making hasty statements about the fear of God is lacking such fear: *and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.* (See Jn. 3:18)

The fear of God prepares us for His holiness; but if we are unafraid of Him who has the power of life and death, and He delivers a stern warning to us all, we might neglect to pay strict attention to His words, because we are in *unbelief*. A strong sense of fear should take hold of us, alerting us to dangers that lie in wait for a sleeping church. God will judge pastors and teachers who neglect to warn believers that He sounds an alarm. In fact, He issues warnings to believers that are ignored by the fearless church.

Let's not be fools, but wise. Yes, it feels more comfortable to avoid it, but the fear of God causes us to shun evil. If we reject the proverb, presumptuously, we risk our souls. Many

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believers are like dumb sheep: gentle but oblivious. The devil lacks those attributes. He is a smooth operator, a sly strategist who coaxes us to receive deadly lies that warm our hearts and please our minds.

But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them.

For you were once darkness, but now *you are* light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose *them*. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. Therefore He says:

“Awake, you who sleep,
Arise from the dead,
And Christ will give you light.”

See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord *is*. (Ephesians 5:3-17 NKJV)

Jesus said the way is hard and the road is narrow. The Shepherd of the sheep leads His sheep. The effective work of His Spirit is the *evidence* that God imputes, or credits, righteousness to us. The fruit of His Spirit is the righteousness of God in us. We grow to bear His likeness, but before He appears in us, God *reckons* His righteousness to us; then faith activates its reality as His Spirit reciprocates: as we begin to act, He finishes the action.

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His Imputation

When faith is at work, the imputation of His righteousness becomes substantive in us, fulfilled by our living faith: *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.* (Heb. 11:1) Our faith is completed by its works. God had imputed righteousness to Abraham who later passed the test of faith by obedience: *Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness ... you see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.* (Jas. 2:23, 24)

It's a great relief to discover the transformation that occurs when we receive the Savior's atonement for our sins. By faith, we *take in* His death and resurrection. Vicariously, He paid our penalty, and we vicariously died with Him. However, the gospel doesn't stop there, because the proof of our faith is the way we *act* on it by walking with Him.

Apart from *living* faith, we don't have life at all. We might say we believe, but if we remain in disobedience, then we haven't changed from what we were before we believed. In that case, we're worse off than sinners who never believed at all—at least they're not hypocrites. We must not despise our birthright!

And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. (1 John 4:16-17 NKJV)

But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. (Romans 6:22 NKJV)

Faith alone is dead, just as the body is dead without the spirit. (Jas. 2:26) Living by faith *guarantees* our entrance into the kingdom of God. Sanctification leads to holiness and is essential for life, securing our eternal destiny. We shouldn't be fooled by those who insist we're saved by grace through faith alone, and works are unnecessary for our salvation. It's not entirely true :

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as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is short-sighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:3-11 NKJV)

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2 NASB)

In a complete act of self sacrifice, the believer consecrates his body, surrendering himself to the perfect will of God. By one decisive act, we release control of our lives with a solemn vow, believing He will take over within us and begin the work that He will complete—the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God.

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. “In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful

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with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. (Ephesians 4:25-28 NIV)

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (Ephesians 4:29-32 NIV)

Throughout the new covenant writings, the apostles taught the differences between the acts of the sinful nature that lead to death and those of the Spirit that lead to everlasting life. This teaching is also consistent with the Tenakh [Hebrew Scriptures] in which God reveals His grace to all who turn from sin to righteousness. From *Genesis* through *Revelation*, the Scriptures assure us that while the righteous inherit everlasting life, the disobedient receive the due penalty for their unrighteousness, everlasting punishment. If things were otherwise, God would not be righteous. He is just, however, and no one may mock His grace. He has made the way for us to be righteous in the sight of men and angels. The command is, “*Be holy ...*” (1 Pet. 1:16)

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. (Colossians 3:5-6 NIV)

Don't be fooled. The church is in a state of lukewarm apostasy, and, to a significant extent, church-goers are in danger, lacking knowledge. The church itself is a mission field; many souls are being lost among us, simply because they have been depending on the words of pastors who are leading the sheep astray, misinterpreting the Scriptures by using human rationale, insensitive to the Holy Spirit.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat

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down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

(Matthew 13:47-50)

A great net was cast into the sea to catch all kinds. As the gospel of the kingdom was sent forth into the world, multitudes entered its nets, and they will be gathered, the good into vessels, but the bad cast away. On the day of judgment, the angels will cut off the wicked from the just among us. In our willingness to obey, our faith in His love sanctifies us with victory over sin. By a new birth, we have the right to become children of God. (See Jn. 3:16) Let's cherish it.

eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God. (Romans 2:7-11 NKJV) [Compare the text to these statements.]

We know we belong to Jesus since we crucify the passions and desires of our carnal nature. The evidence of His Holy Spirit at work in us proves we abide in Him. Others will know us by the fruit we bear, but complacency is a sly fox.

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed. not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you for to will and to do of his good pleasure. (Philippians 2:12-13)

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to

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them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.' (Matthew 7:21-23 NASB)

Redemption is the regaining of a possession in exchange for its payment, whereas *propitiation* is the winning of favor by fully satisfying the requirements. Jesus redeemed us: God the Father regained what He had lost in Eden when Yeshua paid the price for our spirit, body, and soul.

Where *is* the wise? where *is* the scribe? where *is* the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? ...

And I *was* with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. (1 Corinthians 1:20; 2:3-5)

He's watching us. His Spirit knows if we have a fruitful relationship with Him. The benefits of His promises belong to those who walk in His Spirit. This is why obedience leads to life, while sin leads to death: *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. (Rom.8:14)* All theories dim in contrast to our journey with God. If we continue in Him and pursue righteousness, humility, and love; like Paul, we might also apprehend Christ's likeness:

and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:9-12 NASB)

CHAPTER 13

Are All Sins Equal?

If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that. All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death.

(1 John 5:16-17 NIV)

I have heard it said that a fib is the same as adultery in the sight of God, but that's a perilous error. I heard a pastor say a sip of wine was like murder, but his reasoning was unsound. If the church makes illogical judgments, how can we expect more from the courts of an unrighteous nation? God grant us discernment!

It's true that one act of disobedience caused death in man by unbelief in Eden, but the idea that all sins are equal is erroneous and unscriptural. This is an example of the injustice of men who obscure the most serious "*sin that leads to death.*" (See 1 Jn. 5:16)

For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

(Ephesians 5:5 NKJV)

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-11 NKJV)

But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: for men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unfaithful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slan-

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derers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!

(2 Timothy 3:1-5 NKJV)

The Scriptures list deadly sins and teach us justice by the jurisprudence of God, by which He dealt with Israel: The one who broke the law received just punishment, depending on the degree of his transgression. For instance, thieves were required to restore four to five times what they'd stolen, but murderers and kidnappers were executed. Look into it. The righteous judgments of God are throughout the Word, showing us that sin and its punishment vary by the degree of the offense.

We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not *his* brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. (1 John 3:14-15)

When people reject the one true God, He gives them up to a reprobate mind, as He did with Sodom. Though they should have realized their depravity, in their rebellion, they were blinded and lost, without wisdom or understanding, and encouraged others to fall into decadence that robbed them of all human dignity, and eventually, life itself. Jacob's brother wrote:

Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. (Jude 7)

Men of God wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit for our instruction. The prophets taught us wisdom and discretion as well as truth. If we receive the light, we shun evil and grow into the likeness of Messiah; but if we rationalize excuses for our sins, we will fall into the depravity of the world by turning from the light to the dark. Some say God did not destroy Sodom for its homosexuality but for its violence; yet the Scriptures declare the consequences of rejecting the knowledge of God. When men turn their hearts away from God, and when

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they continually reject His righteousness, He delivers them up to a reprobate mind until His judgments destroy them.

For God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth, since what can be known about God is evident among them, because God has shown it to them. For His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, since the creation of the world, being understood through what He has made. As a result, people are without excuse. For though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God or show gratitude. Instead, their thinking became nonsense, and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man, birds, four-footed animals, and reptiles. (Romans 1:18-23 HCSB)

About Judgment

Judgment comes first to the church, then to the world. It comes to the church because God holds everyone to account for the things done in the body, whether good or evil, and He is not a respecter of persons in these matters. Just as sin begins on an individual level, judgment moves from individuals to churches to cities and finally to nations.

Therefore God delivered them over in the cravings of their hearts to sexual impurity, so that their bodies were degraded among themselves. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served something created instead of the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

This is why God delivered them over to degrading passions. For even their females exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. The males in the same way also left natural sexual relations with females and were inflamed in their lust for one another. Males committed shameless acts with males and received in their own persons the appropriate penalty of their perversion. (Romans 1:24-27 HCSB)

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The wise speak the truth in love, hoping to draw men to repentance and avert the judgments of God.

For the time has come for judgment to begin with God's household, and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who disobey the gospel of God?

**And if a righteous person is saved
with difficulty,
what will become of
the ungodly and the sinner?**

(1 Peter 4:17-18 HCSB; cf. Proverbs 11:31)

When David sinned by adultery and murder, he tried to cover his sins, but God exposed them. The prophet Nathan judged David correctly, and the king cried out in repentance with fear and fasting. It cost him and his kingdom dearly, but God spared David's life because he repented and trusted in the God of forgiveness and grace. Though the law provided no appropriate sacrifice for his sins; still David believed in the tender mercies of our loving God.

Degrees of Sin

Be sure of this: every sin is a transgression, but not all sins are equal in degree. The next passages are evidence of this fact:

Do not join those who drink too much wine
or gorge themselves on meat,
for drunkards and gluttons become poor,
and drowsiness clothes them in rags.
(Proverbs 23:20-21 NIV)

Gluttony and drunkenness are linked together in the Proverb above since the nature of those sins is similar. Both damage the body and are addictive, holding us captive. Both are incontinent and idolatrous. In Paul's statement below, gluttony is named immediately before sexual sin; these are all similar. In sexual sin, a man commits acts against his own body.

We must all face the Lord in the day of judgment, but today we can be washed. *Now is the accepted time* to receive forgiveness. (from 2 Cor 6:2) The Lord is merciful if we will repent and believe His warnings that would free us. *And ye shall know the*

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truth, and the truth shall make you free.... If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. (Jn. 8:32, 36)

All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body *is* not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make *them* members of a harlot? Certainly not! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body *with her*? For "*the two*," He says, "*shall become one flesh*." But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit *with Him*. Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. (1 Corinthians 6:13-18 NKJV)

God is good; therefore He commands us to love Him above all. If we exalt anything else in our hearts, it is our idol. As a husband is jealous for first place in his wife's heart, God, who alone is good, is jealous for first place in ours. We can't be good as He is good unless His presence fills us; therefore let's keep Jesus Christ preeminent in our hearts.

For this is the will of God, your sanctification; *that is*, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; *and* that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is *the* avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned *you*. For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. So, he who rejects *this* is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you. (1 Thess. 4:3-8 NASB)

After many warnings against uncleanness and ungodliness and with exhortations for us to live holy lives, we are without excuse if we ignore them. We say we believe, but do our words

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and deeds contradict our confession? Jesus loves us and wants to free us from habits that plague us if we will just believe.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, seated in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.
(Ephesians 2:8-10 NIV) [*seated*, as we rest in His Spirit]

Abstain from all appearance of evil. And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and *I pray God* your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful *is* he that calleth you, who also will do *it*. (1 Thessalonians 5:22-24)

Even at church dinners and Bible studies, there are lustful looks because we have not yet rectified our behavior through faith in the cross where Messiah destroyed the strength of the carnal nature forever. Suppressed lust in the carnal heart is adultery; its confession to God sets a man free of it. If we don’t destroy our lusts, they will certainly destroy us.

Though God is longsuffering, He is not mocked, but arrogant men deny the power of God. We might parrot what we have been taught, but our unbelief rejects the truth. We must not slander the Holy Spirit or His work; we must not sin against the Holy Spirit. It is *the eternal sin* that suffers condemnation. We must not wander near that sin with our words, no matter how close we are to the Lord; the deceiver can snatch the proud.

Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy *against* the *Holy* Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the *world* to come. Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit. (Matthew 12:31-33)

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father in Jesus, and He is the Spirit of the Son in everyone born of His Word. The Initiator

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of life holds all things together, coming from the Most High God (whom no one can see) to transform hearts that welcome Him. He reveals the heart and soul of God to us who seek Him. As YHWH of Israel, He is the Rock from which living water flows in the wilderness of our need. By His presence, He strengthens or comforts us in weakness or sorrow because God loves us.

But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property. However, he kept back part of the proceeds with his wife's knowledge, and brought a portion of it and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Then Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the proceeds from the field? ... You have not lied to men, but to God!" When he heard these words, Ananias dropped dead, and a great fear came on all who heard.

(Acts 5:1-3, 4c-5 HCSB)

Why did the people fear? Was it their unbelief or faith that spurred their fear? They believed; therefore they did not lightly esteem God but feared His judgment. Was Ananias or Sapphira forgiven? They had both sinned against the Holy Spirit. What does the Word tell us? Fear God and keep His commandments by faith in His words.

Forgiveness

Some of us have had painful memories since childhood. If we consider ourselves and the grace given us by the cross Jesus died on, then we can extend the same compassion toward our own offenders. Although bitter roots might be deep, God is deeper still; He is able to free us from resentment and heal our injured hearts.

When we pray for our enemies and are kind to those who oppose us, we prove we are children of God. When we implore the Lord to forgive those who've injured us, His forgiveness springs up from His Spirit in our own hearts, and He forgives our sins as well as our offenders. Forgiveness toward others is a virtue that sets us free and unlocks windows of blessings to us. Bitterness is not permissible; its sentiment reveals unforgiveness. It is a terrifying thing to fall from practicing righteousness, grace, and forgiveness toward others, but we must not accept or

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permit the practice of sin within the church. Even so, we must forgive from our hearts anyone who has personally offended us; by considering ourselves, forgiveness should come easily. *We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.* (Jas. 3:2 NIV)

After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as *it is* in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matthew 6:9-15) [Unforgiveness is ongoing, leading to death.]

We're in a war against sins that destroy men's souls; we're not at war against the souls of men. There's a distinct difference. We who profess the name of Christ must turn from hatred or face the wrath of God ourselves. But we must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother and practices sin; then we'd affirm his sin by our association, encouraging him to continue as though his practice is forgiven apart from repentance.

It's not a mistake to discriminate between right and wrong, nor is there anything wrong with identifying sin; but many of us have trusted in Jesus' mercies and then criticize others who've not known His love or mercy.

Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men. For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us

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abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior; that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:1-7 NKJV)

Righteous Discernment

God has given mature believers the task of making righteous judgments within the church for the cleansing, nurturing, correction, and edification of its members. Ignoring immorality among us, we're partners with those who practice it.

Though churches split over these things, Paul preferred to face the conflict rather than turn away from the problem of sinners in the church. He knew hypocrisy spreads throughout the dough like leaven, making whole congregations unclean by the casual acceptance of sin.

Knowing gluttony, drunkenness, and sexual immorality are deadly sins, Paul reproved the Corinthian church for not disciplining a member who practiced sexual immorality. He knew the acceptance of sexual sin would defile the entire congregation. He didn't hate the person at fault but rebuked the leaders for not correcting the brother. They were proud of themselves for showing tolerance toward an ongoing offense, but they should have been ashamed for receiving a brother who was living in sin, allowing into the church an act that leads to spiritual death:

For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, *concerning* him that hath so done this deed, In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. (1 Corinthians 5:3-5) [Paul suggested this to save his life.]

It might seem prudish in these times when tolerance is the popular thing, but discernment is vitally important to believers—it might be a matter of life or death. Righteous judgment serves the church in love, keeping us from temptations and deadly sins. Paul told the Corinthian church to agree with him in prayer to hand the man over to the tormenters (devils!) until his buffeted soul came to repentance. The agreement worked.

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In his next letter to the Corinthians, Paul was pleased to learn that the [unnamed] man had repented. He exhorted the church to receive their brother back into fellowship. The righteous judgment ended with grace, following repentance: in mercy and love, they comforted their brother by welcoming him back as if he had never sinned. Again we read:

Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins. (James 5:19-20)

In the above passage, the apostle referred to one of the brothers as a sinner because he was *practicing* sin. A false teaching in the church would say he was never a believer, yet we agree that believers do sin. James writes, the one who convinces him to repent saves him from death and covers a multitude of sins; then the church must welcome him back in the fear of God who always extends mercy to us when we repent to pattern our lives after the Lord.

Prosperity

There's nothing new under the sun (See *Eccl. 9:1*). Many want to be rich; the temptation to fall into that snare began with Lucifer. Since the advent of the communications media, men have grown rich by convincing audiences that if they want prosperity, they should invest their savings in what often amount to scams. The “think and grow rich” philosophy has made some millionaires of thieves who deceived the naive. The same mentality has entered the church.

When men say we don't need to wait for the riches of the kingdom, I'm reminded of the prodigal son who wanted his inheritance before its due time. This teaching is a stumbling block to believers and gives the church a bad reputation, but the true church is holy, godly, and content.

If we turned to Jesus because we thought He died on a cross to make life easy for us, then we misunderstood His message. Those on the outside don't realize that sincere followers of Christ seek His kingdom and righteousness more than anything else. We know God will supply our needs when we seek His kingdom

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and righteousness, not because we want to be rich, but because He is true to His Word:

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. ...

... Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? ... (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. (Matthew 6:19-21, 25, 32-33)

While predators fill their own pockets with the money of the poor, teachers majoring on prosperity stir our hearts and minds to seek wealth, whether they intend to lead us into sin or to bless us. But Yeshua did not die on the cross for us to seek material things; on the contrary, He told us to follow Him, giving up our possessions from our hearts, taking up our crosses, and living lives of sacrifice in service to Him.

But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I

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charge you to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which God will bring about in his own time— (1 Timothy 6:8-15a NIV)

Even so, the desire to gain wealth is ungodly, worldly, and carnal; it's associated with materialism, covetousness, greed, and envy. *The love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith ... (1 Tim. 6:10).* Rich or poor, there is nothing to worry about when we cast our cares on Jesus, knowing He'll take care of us.

When we speak and act in faith, we store up an eternal inheritance without remorse. We often quote, "*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.*" (Php. 4:13) Let's read the words in context:

But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned *before*, but you lacked opportunity. Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. Nevertheless, you have done well to share *with me* in my affliction.
(Philippians 4:10-14 NASB)

As a faithful husband desires his wife, God is jealous for us to be His first and not given to adulterous desires and lusts. Do our lives belong to Him, or do other things steal our hearts from God? When He is first, He orders all other relationships.

And the LORD said to Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever.
(Genesis 13:14-15)

When Abram met Melchizedek in the valley of Shaveh, the priest of God Most High blessed him and told him the Creator of

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Heaven and Earth had given him victory over Chedorlaomer, king of Elam, and the three kings allied with him, champions in war. Abram then gave Melchizedek one tenth of the spoils from his amazing conquest. After Abram honored Melchizedek, the LORD reinforced His blessing and multiplied His promise because he had blessed God with ten percent of his goods: God had already promised the land as an eternal inheritance to his seed. When Abram gave a tithe to the priest, God increased the promises beyond his dreams: his seed would be as innumerable as the stars; his land, from the Nile to the Euphrates! (See Gen. 15)

Abram had set an example before Moses gave the Law and long before Malachi mentioned tithing:

Bring the full tenth into the storehouse so that there may be food in My house. Test Me in this way," says the LORD of Hosts. "See if I will not open the floodgates of heaven and pour out a blessing for you without measure. I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not ruin the produce of your land and your vine in your field will not fail to produce fruit," says the LORD of Hosts. "Then all the nations will consider you fortunate, for you will be a delightful land," says the LORD of Hosts.
(Malachi 3:10-12 HCSB)

God promises us all-sufficiency when we contribute ten percent of our income to the declaration of His Word. He sees the intentions of our hearts as we rejoice in expressing our love for the Word with the seed that supports those who propagate it.

Unlike a hounding obligation, our mission is to lift the hand of the oppressor, spread the news of salvation, and give to the poor, whom God does not oppress. Paul tells us we should not give from our need but joyfully as we are able, and the Lord who knows all things will respond to us accordingly.

Gladly giving to those in need, the Corinthian congregation earned a good reputation and glorified God by their generosity and godliness. The Lord responded to their faith, giving them all sufficiency in everything—even in good deeds:

Remember this: The person who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the person who sows generously will also reap generously. Each person should do as he has decided in his heart—not reluctantly or out of

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necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make every grace overflow to you, so that in every way, always having everything you need, you may excel in every good work. As it is written:

**He scattered;
He gave to the poor;
His righteousness**

endures forever. Pr 11:24, Dt 15:7, Ex 25:2, Mal 3:10

Now the One who supplies seed for the sower and bread for food will provide and multiply your seed and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for all generosity, which produces thanksgiving to God through us. For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing in many acts of thanksgiving to God. They will glorify God for your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with others through the proof provided by this service. And they will have deep affection for you in their prayers on your behalf, and by their prayer for you, who long for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift. (2 Corinthians 9:6-15 HCSB)

. The evidence of their selfless love brought glory to God and to the message of the gospel, the indescribable gift of everlasting life to all with faith in Jesus. As His children, have we been contributing effectively, or investing in a message that is contrary to the true gospel?

The True Gospel

The gospel does not focus on worldly belongings. To the contrary, it is the message of a cross. Yeshua died for us and called us to take up our cross by denying the carnal nature of the flesh and walking after His Spirit. The Lord draws us into His holiness, but envy has entered the church while Christians might not be aware of the commandment: we must not covet. Along with lust for material things, lust for position, prestige, and title has entered the churches.

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For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ in God.

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them; (Ephesians 5:5-7 NASB)

The apostle isn't addressing pagans but the church. If we wrestle with the Scriptures, we must let the Scriptures win our hearts to believe God for the sake of eternal life. Paul warns us not to fellowship with disobedient sons:

I wrote to you in a letter not to associate with sexually immoral people. I did not mean the immoral people of this world or the greedy and swindlers or idolaters; otherwise you would have to leave the world. But now I am writing you not to associate with anyone who claims to be a believer who is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or verbally abusive, a drunkard or a swindler. Do not even eat with such a person. For what business is it of mine to judge outsiders? Don't you judge those who are inside? But God judges outsiders. **Put away the evil person from among yourselves.**

(1 Corinthians 5:9-13 HCSB; ref: Deuteronomy 17:7)

The following passage addresses the church, not unbelievers. Judge for yourself; when the Word sternly warns us, should we not fear God? Have we become so foolish in our comfort zones or in our false teachings that we have forgotten the authority and power of God?

“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:
The Amen, the faithful and true Witness,
the Beginning of the creation of God, says this:

‘I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. Because you say, “I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,” and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, I advise you to buy from Me gold

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refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and *that* the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me. He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’ ”

(Revelation 3:14-22 NASB) [Christ judges the churches by their actions, not by their profession of faith alone.]

Where Are We?

His mighty Spirit powerfully works within us *to will and to do of His good pleasure*. (See Phil. 2:13) As we approach that holy place, we will discover both predestination and our willing hearts will have transformed and conformed us to His likeness.

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

What shall we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us? (Romans 8:28-31)

Being one in the same Spirit, we are as one man, made as never before—one as Jesus is in God. Someday we will look at one another and exclaim, “We are one because He is in us, and we are in Him!” Since our old man died, we must not return to its putrid death in sin but be made holy by His Spirit, persevering to walk with Yeshua ... *the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life*. (Rom. 6:22b)

In this marriage of our lives, our Husband is preeminent; He lives through us, and we are united by His Spirit as we live by

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faith in Him and in the inspired Word of God. Those who take in His Word gain His mind to know Him. *Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. (John 14:23a NIV)*

Now all believers are *fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God. (Eph. 2:19b)* We are *fellowheirs and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: (See Eph. 3:6)* This is true of all who live by faith in Jesus our Savior. We are neither set apart by regulations nor living apart from the moral laws of God, but together we are one body, united by Messiah, the King of the Jews whose God is God of all.

"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

(John 17:20-23 NKJV) [Yeshua's prayers are always answered.]

The Renewed Jew

Jewish believers must recognize the changes that came with the new covenant, or they might find themselves snared by the old way of living, perhaps even by habits—the former fruitless things, e.g. observing regulations and ordinances, now insult the grace of God, making it ineffective through works that appear righteous but that cannot save us. The requirements of the hand-written laws God gave as ordinances were fulfilled, finished, and destroyed in His Son's flesh on the cross. We have life in Christ only as we honor His work on our behalf.

If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a law-breaker. For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live for God. (Galatians 2:18-19 NIV) —on hypocrisy

Deceptions often depend on human reason; they never look to godly wisdom. Deceivers make the things of the world seem more appealing than an abundant and righteous life. Abraham is

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the father of many nations by his covenant from God, but that covenant was not fulfilled until the new covenant appeared to supersede the Mosaic covenant. Not an addend to the Law, this covenant, as promised, refreshes us with new life:

“No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.” (Matthew 9:16-17 NIV) –Yeshua

The professing believer who loves the things of this world, unless he repents, will perish with all his stuff just like others perish. The Jew’s attachment to previous ordinances and works is a stumbling block to his righteousness in Messiah:

For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. (Philippians 3:3)

CHAPTER 14

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I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. ... For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: for this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins. As concerning the gospel, *they are* enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, *they are* beloved for the fathers' sakes. For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. (Romans 11:1, 25-29) [Paul refers to the physical seed.]

The Comfort Zone

In the preceding passage, Paul did not call the gentiles Israel. Instead his words in Romans 11 disprove the teaching known as “replacement theology”/ “supersessionism,” in which the gentile church allegedly replaces Israel. Anti-Zionism is not an apostolic instruction but began to seep into the church in the earliest centuries, provoking Paul’s strong argument against it.

Gentiles hadn't searched for Him, nor did we discover God apart from His sovereign grace. He chose each of us; we didn't first seek Him. Despite our willful nature, He chose us so that He is justified in re-electing the descendants of Israel who have rejected Him in unbelief as we had. By saving us, God is righteous and just to save them. Now it's clear: we have all sinned and have been slaves to pride, self-will, and lust.

We shouldn't forget the promises God made to Israel, among which was a blessing to the nations through Abraham's seed, Messiah. With the objective of provoking the Jews to jealousy, God would pour out His Spirit on the nations, according to His own words: *They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities:*

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and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation. (Deut. 32:21; also Rom. 10:19)

The Scriptures repeatedly support the faithfulness of God for the sons of Israel. It would be unsuitable to His nature to cast away the ones He chose to love; He is not capricious, but He will draw them to salvation at last, revealing their Messiah to them.

While we confess we were sinners saved by grace through faith in a merciful, loving Savior, are we offended because the Jews are sinners, and God loves them too? In fact, let's not be foolish: He revealed His love for Jews before He showed His love to gentiles. Knowing this and seeing that He deals with them by us, we should reconsider His kindness and His severity:

For if the firstfruit *is* holy, the lump *is* also *holy*; and if the root is holy, so *are* the branches. And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, *remember that* you do not support the root, but the root *supports* you. You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." Well *said*. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in *His* goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. (Romans 11:16-23 NKJV)

"The lump" is the seed in the first fruit as the seed in an avocado or in a fig is a lump. Spiritually, the seed in Yeshua is the Word; physically, He was the seed of Abraham. The root, made holy by the Word, was Abraham in his living faith, which fattened the tree to nourish its branches. Paul points to the partnership of disobedience and unbelief in a warning to pursue righteousness, and he flatly opposes the arrogance of gentiles who believe they are the superior Israel. He clearly said that we who enter by faith have been grafted into the olive tree, the tree

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that God cultivates and prunes, and its natural branches more easily adapt to its roots than the branches of a wild, uncultivated tree—the nations, or gentiles. He warned us to fear God and shun pride, or in our disobedience, we *also will be cut off*: But God will save a remnant, showing kindness to us who continue in Him while the warning of judgment pertains to professing believers who oppose His chosen race.

Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all *men* will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation. And one of them, *named* Caia-phas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; and not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad. Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death. (John 11:47-53) [“The whole nation” here includes the ten lost tribes that had been called Israel after the nation split, following Solomon’s death. (Judah was to the south and included Jerusalem.) The Assyrians took Israel captive, and the vast majority never returned to their homeland.]

If their leaders had believed Yeshua was their Messiah, the Jews would not have urged His crucifixion. They thought their salvation came by keeping the laws and offering sacrifices—only by outward obedience. They tripped over the stumbling stone God had sent: the ultimate Sacrifice, His only Son, would die on a tree, the judgment of the cursed.

Though Yeshua had fulfilled the prophecies, scholars were in disbelief that their Bible was more than a religion—it was actually true! The Savior carried a cross, but they couldn’t believe God would sacrifice His Son for their eternal atonement and redemption. Nevertheless, God doesn’t bless the reputations of liars, thieves, or destroyers. Yeshua was none of them but is internationally credited as the most righteous man who ever lived. The promise was fulfilled in Him: all nations have been

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blessed by Abraham's seed, the Christ [Messiah]. Two thousand years later, transformed lives continue as testimonies to His resurrection.

What then? Are we better *than they*? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. (Romans 3:9-12; also Psalm 14:1-3, 53:1-3)

What is the appropriate Christian response to the unbelief of the Jews? Perhaps we should understand the vantage point of today's Jew who adamantly opposes the suggestion that Yeshua is Messiah. Consider what the idea implies: nearly all Jews for almost twenty centuries have rejected their Messiah, even cursed His name and hated their brothers who have believed in Him.

Would faith in Yeshua the Jew turn a Jew into a gentile? Is Christianity actually the Jewish faith or a gentile myth? Had Yeshua fulfilled the prophets' words about Him as a suffering Savior? Did Jews fulfill Isaiah's words when they turned their faces from Him? Will God unveil the eyes of their hearts?

The ancestors are theirs, and from them, by physical descent, came the Messiah, who is God over all, praised forever. Amen. (Romans 9:5 HCSB) [Paul, supporting Israel]

Those who believe the promised seed of Abraham was in Jesus Christ are considered his spiritual descendants since just as the forefather of our faith, Abraham, begat Isaac by faith in the promise; we are his children by faith in his promised seed. Even so, God hasn't rejected the descendants of Jacob through whom Christ came in the flesh, but He remains faithful to His covenant with Abraham concerning his natural sons.

Though historically, Israel often turned from their LORD, those who rebelled were cut off. Why were they cut off? they had not believed His words.

Today many prefer judgment for the Jews, not the grace we easily presume is ours, but Paul warned us not to boast against

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the natural branches, because God will graft them in again, but He will cut us off if we refuse to repent. If what was true for Israel is true for us, our sins will find us out.

Most churches refuse to acknowledge the rightful inheritance of the Jews, believing the Jews' genetic heritage is now the spiritual heritage of the church. Presuming that's true, they misinterpret as spiritual the promise to possess Canaan, and they spiritualize everything else God intended as property rights for Jacob's descendants.

While Israel prefigures our experience in Jesus, revealing the ways of God to us, most of us reject the idea that our sins can disqualify us. Even though Israel's sins cut many off from God, replacement theologians deny being so close to Israel as that! Still He reminds us by His words to the churches in Asia: He knows our works and judges us accordingly.

Despite being warned, the church eats up grace like a child does candy; however, misinterpretations do not protect us from the truth by denying it. Anti-Semitic persuasions have turned many away from the writings of the apostles and prophets, and they are unafraid because they have eaten another lie: they need have no fear of God.

The Fear of God

We can be sure our interpretation is incorrect when it creates complicated problems that require distorted definitions. For an instance, a common alteration to the definition of *fear* circumvents its true meaning. As a rule, teachers have avoided researching the word *reverence*,⁴⁴ which is their choice in preference to "fear." It comes from the seventeenth century French *reverer*, or the Latin, *revereri*, with *re-* expressing, "intensive force," and *vereri*, which means "to fear." The original definition of *reverence* was, "intense fear," but cultures have a way of diluting and changing the accurate meanings of words. Of course we should be in awe of God, and in most applications, that means to fear Him. The Hebrew, *yare* or *yirah*,⁴⁵ means "fear," which is its translation in most versions of the Scriptures: *By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil. (Prov. 16:6)*

During the time of Jesus, Greek was the second language of the Hebrews. Over 70% of the funerary stones in Israel, which

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are dated 300 BC through AD 500, have Greek inscriptions.⁴⁶ In a graveyard just outside the walls of Jerusalem, archeologists uncovered 40% of the gravestones from the same era, which were inscribed in Greek, even though the graves include remains of Jewish priests and their families.

Since He came from Galilee, the province where Greek was most commonly spoken in Israel, Yeshua and his disciples surely spoke Greek, as well as Hebrew and probably Aramaic. It's reasonable to believe that after His ascension, the apostles spread the good news to the entire world by writing the gospels and letters to the churches in Greek, the second language⁴⁷ of the Roman Empire and how the name "Jesus Christ" came to be.

When translating the Greek New Testament, scholars have had to deal with the word *phobos*.⁴⁸ From its root, the word means "extreme fear, reverence, respect, or honor," depending on its context and usage. It is often translated as "fear." It could not be otherwise, since even Moses was terrified and didn't dare look at God. (See Acts 7:32) The terror of God was also known to Abraham, Job, Jonah, David, and the apostles, who clearly understood the importance of the great fear of God in the church. They had learned from our Lord's example and words, from the Tenakh, and from experience. Their warnings are sure.

When Jesus' sweat poured down like blood at Gethsemane, was that merely reverence, or His *fear* of God? It is written, *who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared;* (Heb. 5:7) If Jesus had been afraid of His imminent physical death, would that have prompted a response from His Father? God answered Him, saving Him from the second death because of His perfect fear.

Despite these facts, for years many teachers have agreed that *fear* actually means, "reverence," and they say *reverence* means, "respect." As a result, we have accepted a god, perhaps softened with age, one more to our desire; even so, the Father we call *Abba* is Maker of heaven and earth. He commands us to fear Him and shun evil. We can't be holy while we continue in sin unless we change the definition of holiness.

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The abiding fear of God redirects our course, or His chastening hand corrects us. Though He is merciful and loving, and though He is gentle, He can also be severe, and so we are warned to shun sin. (See Rom. 11)

God-fearing scholars translated the word correctly as “fear.” Notwithstanding that, your instructors have almost certainly told you, “‘Fear’ doesn’t really mean ‘fear.’” That notion is simply untrue. There’s no mistake in its frequent translation: the fear that shuns sin and draws us into holiness is partner to godliness. We who fear the Lord remind ourselves of our own weaknesses; if we tremble, we turn to Him to deliver us from temptation or from sin.

The fear of the LORD *tendeth* to life: and *he that hath it* shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil.
(Proverbs 19:23)

One of the great wonders of our Father is His longsuffering toward us when we falter. His keeping power is great in all our trials and shortcomings. His love is unquestionable and undying for every believer; even when we were sinners, Messiah died for us to free us from sin. But we must not presume upon His grace, or we will abuse it. God is not mocked.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep *for* the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.
(Romans 8:35-37)

For all the promises of God in him *are* yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us. Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, *is* God; Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts. (2 Corinthians 1:20-22)

We have all heard the rationale of the teacher who quotes, “*the goodness of God leads you to repentance*” (Rom. 2:4b), then explains that because He is the God of love, His goodness makes us want to turn from sin. The idea is that we shouldn’t fear His

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goodness, but that has never been the problem. We might suppose the fear of the Lord is *not* to shun evil; or that naturally, we should shun evil because we love Him. But perhaps we are not as affectionate as we think we are. If we have such love for God, and if our love keeps us from sinning, then why do we sin? The Word, and its solemn warnings are clear us. The context of his letter to the church in Rome warns us who judge others:

And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to his deeds: (Romans 2:3-6)

What is the goodness of God? His righteousness, holiness, and love: His perfect nature, which is *always* good. In patience He is good; in wrath He is good; in judgment He is good; in grace He is good; in hatred He is good; in love He is good. God is *always* good; no one compares to Him. His goodness should draw all men to Him who saves the penitent; otherwise, we are without excuse if we continue in sin.

We have been persuaded to be fearless of God; thus many of us have been just as casual about our sins as before we accepted His gift of life. We believe all things are possible with God except our holiness—that He can only perfect us in theory. If we are willing to love Him, then we are willing to honor Him with fear; but our love of Him does not keep us from sin.

The hypocrisy of teaching theories supports faith without works, leading to death, but we must recall His words to the churches that judge them for their *deeds* in *Revelation*, chapters 2-3 with which Paul agrees: *For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.* (Rom. 8:13)

Give no respect to distorted definitions of words. *Fear*⁴⁹ means nothing less than dread, terror, alarm, awe, or a deep reverential sense of accountability. We who've personally been

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confronted with His holiness fear God and know the terror of the Lord. Though others substitute their casual experience for faith., We are wise who heed His warnings, fear His Hand, and obey His Word:

A messenger of Jehovah is encamping, round about those who fear Him, and He armeth them. Taste ye and see that Jehovah is good, O the happiness of the man who trusteth in Him. Fear Jehovah, ye His holy ones, for there is no lack to those fearing Him. Young lions have lacked and been hungry, and those seeking Jehovah lack not any good. Come ye, children, hearken to me, The fear of Jehovah I do teach you. Who is the man that is desiring life? Loving days to see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking deceit. Turn aside from evil and do good, seek peace and pursue it. The eyes of Jehovah are unto the righteous, and His ears unto their cry. (The face of Jehovah is on doers of evil, to cut off from earth their memorial.) (Psalm 34:7-16 YLT)

Here is another error: that we should not fear the loss of our salvation if we deliberately turn from God or continue to sin without repentance. But His Word calls us to holiness:

See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more *shall not we escape*, if we turn away from him that *speaketh* from heaven: Whose voice then shook the earth, but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this *word*, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire. (Hebrews 12:25-29)

The world is full of fear, but most people don't fear God or keep His commandments. Those who do not trust in God fear other people, darkness, cramped places; they fear failure, success, death, germs, crowds, heights, elevators and escalators,

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airplanes and motorcycles! People are afraid of relationships, commitments, and responsibilities. The world is terrorized by many things that God commands us *not* to fear. The fear of things that could happen, even fear of the unknown, causes us torment. People have committed suicide because they feared things that never happened. Their imaginations multiplied and enlarged their trials, which never came to pass.

These fears have torment, but the fear of the Lord purifies us. In fact, the only one we *should* fear is God. He disperses all other fears because God makes us *more than conquerors* who fear Him, shunning sin. (See Rom. 8:37) Otherwise sin would destroy us.

Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees! Say to them *that are* of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: Behold, your God will come *with* vengeance, *even* God *with* a recompense; he will come and save you. (Isaiah 35:3-4)

God loves us, and our faith in Him sets us free from the fears of this world. We overcome our trials without fear or cowardice but with power and boldness by faith in Jesus. We know God is *with* us and not against us, but we are not arrogant or foolish. Those who *fear* the Lord honor Him. The fear of God leads us to life, love, and humility. Faith that leads to obedience pleases Him—and oh, yes, we should please our Father! (See Gal. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:4; 1 Jn. 3:22; Php. 4:18; Col. 3:20; Heb. 13:21)

Queen Esther approached the throne to intervene for the Jews, fearing her king, Xerxes. Though she had intimately embraced him as her husband, when she approached the throne in Persia, she faced her possible execution. But she understood her calling to protect the Jewish people and obeyed because she feared God more than the king. [Read the OT book of Esther.]

Then Esther told *them* to reply to Mordecai: “Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which *is* against the law; and if I perish, I perish!”
(Esther 4:15-16 NKJV)

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The underlying fear of God always keeps us; it keeps our hearts right with Him. Churches often neglect the gift of life because they have no fear of God, but instead, they fear the opinions of their peers. That is why they believe the lie that we should not fear Him who is on the throne. Refusing to face His warnings, they reject the fear of God that keeps us close to Him.

Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us.

(1 John 4:17-19 NKJV)

The journey to perfect love is a trek, leading us to wisdom that comes from the fear of the Lord. His fear sensitizes us to the Holy Spirit, but torment fills the soul of a man who practices sin, because the law continually affirms its righteous judgments against his unrighteous deeds. It doesn't let up until he repents. Clearly, he isn't made perfect in love, or he would not be in sin.

The apostle John, caught up to heaven to write *Revelation*, saw Christ in His glory and wrote, *And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: (Rev. 1:17)* Does John condemn himself for having feared the One who stood before him? But the weakness of the church is her presumption; the fear of God ends lukewarm hearts, complacent sins, and the abuse of grace.

And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me. (Jeremiah 32:39-40)

Walking in the Spirit, torment has no place in us. As we abide in Him, He abides in us, and we walk in His Word that cleanses us. Progressing in the faith, we gain the victories. With His fear as our friend, we walk securely. Knowing our boundaries, by our faith, we do not trespass them.

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Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

(1 John 2:3-6 NKJV)

If we presume familiarity with Him, perhaps we haven't begun to walk with Messiah. As we move forward with Jesus, we realize how poorly we've represented the Lord in the past. Jesus never approached the Father like a pal or raised His voice at Him. But we laugh about our sins as though we're drunkards who enjoy behaving like fools.

Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not: Fear ye not me? saith the LORD: Will ye not tremble at my presence, which have placed the sand *for* the bound of the sea, by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it: and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it? But this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart; they are revolted and gone. (Jeremiah 5:21-23)

With virtue, God judges the nation that turns away from His fear:

“Like a cage full of birds,
So their houses are full of deceit;
Therefore they have become great and rich.
'They are fat, they are sleek,
They also exceed in deeds of wickedness;
They do not plead the cause,
The cause of the orphan, that they may prosper;
And they do not defend the rights of the poor.
'Shall I not punish these *people?*' declares the LORD,
'On a nation such as this
Shall I not avenge Myself?'

“An appalling and horrible thing
Has happened in the land:

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The prophets prophesy falsely,
And the priests rule on their *own* authority;
And My people love it so!
But what will you do at the end of it?"
(Jeremiah 5:27-31 NASB)

How terrible it is when righteousness leaves the house of God, and the saltiness is gone! We have believed our nation can continue in sin, and God will not judge us. As a result, there is little fear of God in the land. Ignorant of His judgments, we suffer their effects because not even the church fears God!

To fear the LORD *is* to hate evil.
I hate arrogant pride, evil conduct,
and perverse speech.
I possess good advice and competence;
I have understanding and strength.
(Proverbs 8:13-14 HCSB)

Without the fear of God, we lack strength and understanding. Christians have wandered from His righteousness, believing sin is permissible while it continues to bring forth death without respect of persons. Thankfully, this is not the experience of all who profess faith in Christ. That's not to say we never fall or we live perfect lives; but we would spare ourselves grief by taking up the cross and surrendering our hearts to follow the Lord.

For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again:
but the wicked shall fall into mischief. (Proverbs 24:16)

And if you address as Father the One who judges impartially based on each one's work, you are to conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your temporary residence. For you know that you were redeemed from your empty way of life inherited from the fathers, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. ... By obedience to the truth, having purified yourselves for sincere love of the brothers, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again—not of perishable seed but of imperishable—through the living and enduring word of God.
(1 Peter 1:17-19, 22-23 HCSB)

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So honor will come to you who believe, but for the unbelieving,

**The stone that the builders rejected—
this One has become the cornerstone,
and
A stone to stumble over,
And a rock to trip over.**

They stumble because they disobey the message; they were destined for this.

**But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood,
a holy nation, a people for His possession,
so that you may proclaim the praises
of the One who called you out of darkness
into His marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:7-9 HCSB)**

Our Holy Sanctuary

God calls us *saints*, or holy ones, expecting us to act like we believe it. If the deceiver convinces us that, by fearing God, we don't have faith, when God warns us to turn from evil or die, we are not afraid and do not believe His words. The converse is also true: if we don't believe Him when He warns us, we won't fear or obey Him.

The fear of the Lord is an agent of purification, drawing us into His likeness and finding a refuge in Him. Disobedience is the fruit of unbelief just as righteousness is the fruit of believing. Many imagine He hides His eyes when we practice sin. If He did that, He wouldn't care for us: *He scourges every son whom He receives. (See Heb. 12:6)*

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure. Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; (Philippians 2:12-15)

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“It is the LORD of hosts whom you should regard as holy.
And He shall be your fear,
And He shall be your dread.

“Then He shall become a sanctuary;
(Isaiah 8:13-14a NASB)

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.

(1 John 5:2-4 NASB)

Shortly after Jesus said, *But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell. Yea, I say unto you, Fear him (Lk. 12:5)*, He consoled His disciples, saying, *Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. (Lk. 12:32)* The first command is the warning; the second, the reassuring.

Now see that I, *even I*, am He,
And there is no God besides Me;
I kill and I make alive;
I wound and I heal;
Nor *is there any* who can deliver from My hand.
(Deuteronomy 32:39 NKJV)

For you have not come to a *mountain* that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which *sound was such that* those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them. For they could not bear the command, “IF EVEN A BEAST TOUCHES THE MOUNTAIN, IT WILL BE STONED.” And so terrible was the sight, *that* Moses said, “I AM FULL OF FEAR and trembling.” But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of *the* righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than *the blood* of Abel. (Continued)

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See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned *them* on earth, much less *will we escape* who turn away from Him who *warns* from heaven.

(Hebrews 12:18-25 NASB)

For we know Him who said, "*Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,*" says the Lord. And again, "*The LORD will judge His people.*" It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:

*"For yet a little while,
And He who is coming will come and will not tarry.
Now the just shall live by faith;
But if anyone draws back,
My soul has no pleasure in him."*

But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.

(Hebrews 10:30-39 NKJV) [The writer reassures the obedient sons of God who live by faith and endure to the end.]

By faith, Abraham received the covenants and promises for his descendants and for the nations. Isaac inherited them, and Jacob took them from God, becoming Israel. He gave Judah the promised scepter and gave the Law to Moses. The precedents of worship came by Israel, prefiguring heavenly things. He gave their prophets His words to bless the world. God made His Word the preeminent Son of God and Messiah, our Savior, who came into the world by the seed of Israel as the *Son of man* and by the Seed of the Word as the *Son of God*. (Read Is 7:14.) And He promised the Son of David His everlasting kingdom.

CHAPTER 15

Concerning Predestination

If salvation were as simple as most of us say it is, we would not need a book filled with inspired words to study. Holy men of God would not have been led to write them. For at least the first few centuries, men didn't believe we only needed one sentence to be saved. But our salvation is profound.

The Teaching

Then the Jews surrounded Him and said to Him, "How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me. But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one." (John 10:24-30 NKJV)

Notice Jesus didn't say, "Because you don't believe, you are not my sheep." It was the other way around: He identified those whom the Father had given Him by their ability to hear His voice. They would follow Him, and He would give them life as they received His words. The others could not understand what he was saying since they were not given to Christ by the Father. In other words, we who believe do so because we are His sheep, appointed to believe by the Father who is greater than all.

And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given." (Matthew 13:10-11 NKJV)

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Someone might say that it wasn't given to them because they didn't believe; however, that isn't what Jesus said. He said they didn't believe because they were not His sheep—even though He came for the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

The doctrine of predestination comes largely from Paul's letter to the Romans in which he declared that God chooses those to whom He shows mercy but hardens the hearts of others. The fact that the word "predestined" is in the Scriptures is enough to at least look into it.

Someone might say, "Well, that was just Paul." *But no prophecy of scripture was written by any man's private interpretation of things, but holy men of God spoke as the Holy Spirit moved them. (See 2 Pet. 1:20-21)* This is why we believe the Bible. It's clear that the Father shows mercy and compassion by grace, and those who believe in Christ also believe by grace. Furthermore, all who are willing, by the grace of God are willing:

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do his good pleasure. (Philippians 2:12-13)

What shall we say then? *Is there* unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, "*I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.*" So then *it is* not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, "*For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.*" Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. (Romans 9:14-18 NKJV)

We were slaves to sin when He showed us mercy and compassion simply because, in His sovereignty, He chose to do that. His ways are not our ways, and God does not pattern His thoughts after ours. (See Is. 55:8-9) To mortals, predestination just doesn't seem fair—which is why Paul warned us to receive Him as He really is, simply because He is God, and God is good.

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Apart from God in Christ, there is no standard by which to discern good from evil. Considering His great mercies, we bow in awe.

And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth forever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? (Daniel 4:34-35)

Why is the instruction of predestination important for us to believe? Believing all the Scriptures helps us to appreciate and understand that salvation was given us entirely by the grace of God. He set us free when He foresaw us, trapped in bondage to sin. He loved us as He knew we could be, wanting us to grow into His likeness by faith in the power of His life, which He would give us as the chosen of the Father. Eternal life is ours if we choose life over death—a decision only a free man can make.

Another reason Paul tells us about predestination is to instill in us the fear of the Almighty as the Sovereign One. Have we understood who He is? Most teachers deny the discomfoting fear of God, which is why only a remnant will be saved. But the fear of God is only discomfoting if we sin, and there is a reason we should accept it: the work of God in our hearts is eternal:

He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end. (Ecclesiastes 3:11 NKJV)

We say we are Israel, and that's true of all who follow in the steps of Abraham. He feared God and obeyed His words by his faith. He both obeyed because he believed and feared God since he believed. Though teachers will have a stricter judgment, all of us who have the Holy Spirit will face God. If we have believed our teachers instead of the Word of God, the LORD will treat us no differently than He treated an unbelieving Israel.

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He chose Abram out of Ur by grace, giving him a son by a promise and the faith to believe in it. Why? By grace He chose him. He promised Abram the country and the nations by grace. God chose him out of his land and apart from his family—which were not chosen. He chose Jacob, not Esau and chose Pharaoh to harden his heart. God reserves the right to choose whom He will.

Not as though the word of God hath taken no effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, *are they* all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these *are not* the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. For this *is* the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son. And not only *this*; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, *even* by our father Isaac; (For *the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;*) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. (Romans 9:6-13)

First, the LORD chose Abram out of Ur in Babylon; next, he chose his promised son Isaac. Though Isaac preferred Esau, God appointed Isaac's second-born son, Jacob; yet to each, He gave twelve sons and provided riches to both. Nevertheless, Esau, the gamesman and Pharaoh the king knew His wrath. How do we account for the choices? Paul says, "O man—who are you?" At last, it comes down to us:

You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to Him who formed it, "Why have You made me like this?" (Romans 9:19-20 NKJV)

Maybe most of us have thought since we're saved by His grace, it doesn't matter if we sin. However, it mattered to God when Israel sinned, lacking the fear of God. Had they feared Him, they would have shunned sin and brought their faith to life by their actions. In our desire to belong to God, we must believe

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and persevere in our faith, trusting that God is at work within us to do His will. Twenty-three thousand were slain in one day when they sinned in that wilderness—all of them were delivered out of slavery in Egypt.

Obedience is the way to life; if we were hand-picked to choose life, we must believe and obey. *Not all Israel is Israel...* (See Rom. 9:6-9) but all who practice the faith of Abraham are his children. Why would we resist His will? The Word is the truth that liberates us to choose life and urges us to fear God, but if we take our salvation for granted while continuing to choose our flesh over His Spirit, we will be stunned by our condemnation.

We were lost but found; hopeless but now filled with hope. Before the foundation of the world, He chose us to believe. How could we return to the sins from which we've been freed?

If we continue in sin without repentance, we'll be cursed forever. God is not a respecter of persons. We were liberated to choose between two fathers. If we believe all of His words, we will fear God, shun evil, and choose life, not death.

Our choice, based on the strength of our desire, is simple though profound. Knowledge for the warfare between darkness and light is essential for us to win. As we practice the faith, we confess the Savior who won the war just as He wins the warfare through us by our faith in Him.

Unbelievers are not His sheep and don't have the freedom to decide between life and death. Some, however, will turn from unbelief when they hear the gospel since the Father chose them, just as He chose us, perhaps by foreknowledge; nevertheless, we were chosen by grace. Their bitterness will be turned to sweetness; their cynicism, to faith when they receive forgiveness from God in Jesus Christ. Who are they? They're His sheep who hear and obey His voice.

The Chosen

First God sent His Word; then He sent His Word in Christ to speak His message to His sheep—the Jews of Israel. Jesus sent His disciples who received the Word and went to the world to speak to the lost among the nations whom God had chosen: *How can they believe unless they hear, and how can they hear unless it is preached? How can they preach unless they are sent?* (See Rom. 10:14-15) The will of God is our commission.

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Is predestination somehow related to our commission?

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, sayeth the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. (Jer. 29:11)

For You have created my conscience.
You knit me together in my mother's womb. ...
Your eyes saw me when I was unformed,
and in Your book were written
the days that were formed—
when not one of them had come to be.
How precious are Your thoughts, O God!
How great is the sum of them! (Ps. 139:13, 16-17 TLV)

But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive and gave gifts to men. ... And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers. (Eph.4:7-8, 11)

Many are like Esau because we've been reading the Bible like a novel, or we've preferred to listen to men whose words we enjoy. Other than Bibles, the best-selling books in Christian stores are fiction, fully absorbing our interest. Have we trusted in men without the Spirit, believing their fiction is true? The Spirit-inspired words disinterest us if we haven't believed His incisive truth that alerts us to ourselves and our times.

If it were possible for a sinner to repent, God would receive him. He doesn't want anyone to perish; but none seek God—men turn to darkness rather than light. Even their righteousness is filthy rags to Him, but they still struggle to attain the holiness that's impossible for the natural man.

Paul's argument shows that by His sovereignty, even while foreknowing us, the Almighty saves us. His Holy Spirit inspired the apostles; we who believe receive the words of writers who entrusted their souls to the Sovereign of the creation; we know they were inspired because their words are true; they cut to our core; they come to pass: *The testimony of Jesus Christ is the spirit of prophecy* (See Rev. 19:10): *Genesis to Revelation*, it's true:

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“The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since he Himself gives to all *people* life and breath and all things; and He made from one *man* every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined *their* appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we also are His children.’ (Acts 17:24-28 NASB) –Paul addressed pagans in Athens

As an example to us, the descendants of Abraham had been slaves in Egypt four hundred years; yet apparently the Jews of the first century believed that, as sons of Abraham, they had never been slaves. Their teachers had made them oblivious to their history, which was also their present condition by bondage to sin. We see that attitude in the church today:

They answered Him, “We are Abraham’s descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How *can* you say, ‘You will be made free’?” Jesus answered them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.

(John 8:33-36 NKJV)

Are slaves free men? Although it is the Word of God, many churches treat predestination as a false doctrine. They weave their way through the Word to disprove and rationalize it rather than simply believe it. Whenever we weave, we’re following the serpent. When we believe the inspired words, their truth in our hearts unlocks the rest; however, if we challenge them, we will be lost with the other Scriptures. Our full conversion to Christ depends on making our carnal hearts believe our spiritual God.

Professing believers are no different today than Jews who believe they are sons when they are slaves. The right to become sons of God (See John 3:16) is a process, but if our faith is an impractical theory, we’ll practice sin. As slaves, we’ll be caught

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in a deadly trap. How easily we forget His words, *a servant abideth not in the house forever*. (See John 8:35) The house is the body. Jesus was saying that a servant will not be resurrected because he lacks the relationship of the Son to the Father.

As angels forcefully took Lot's hand and pulled him out of Sodom, God calls us to glory. If He hadn't moved in our lives, we'd be lost in our sins; if He hadn't given us faith, we'd be without hope. But if our perception of predestination is fatalistic, pride or presumption will ensnare us, and we will not obey the commission to take the gospel into the whole world. But if we accept the plan of God and run the race to gain the prize, then we obey, showing we love Him, cooperating with Him in His plan.

But there are some of you that believe not.... Therefore said I unto you that no man can come unto me , except it were given unto him of my Father. (John 6:64a, 65)

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)

“But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one.” (John 10:26-30 NKJV)

All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.” (John 6:37-40 NKJV)

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By a divine decision, God sent His Word into the world to reveal His love for mankind. Those He calls to repentance and faith will find the freedom to love and obey Him.

elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ:

Grace to you and peace be multiplied. (1 Peter 1:2 NKJV)

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, *be* glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. (Jude 24-25)

The Freed Will

Jesus told a parable about a farmer who planted seed. (Read Luke 8:4-15) The harvest depended on the kind of soil the farmer plowed and planted. He explained, when the Word is received, it takes root, and its life bears fruit that multiplies.

The important thing is to *hear* the Word of God, i.e. to *believe* and *receive* the truth about His provision to save us; then His words change us. Next the Word prompts, urges, and commands us to put off the old self and put on the new man. We now have freedom to choose the old or the new because when we *believe* His words, we *receive* His life, and He sets us free.

Even when we were vile, practicing sin, we responded—even in our fear, we believed He loved us. His love still wins our hearts, and His truth still sets us free. We experience intimate closeness by honest confession to Him and to one another as needed. When wisdom increases, we become bond slaves to righteousness, free as servants by choice. Pressing in to know Him more, our love grows. Activated by faith, we believe He is alive, and His Spirit lives in us. We run the race till we see the finish line and the crowd, cheering us on to win the crown.

Though our flesh prefers to sleep, we war as sons of light. We press in; not shrinking back but aiming for the mark, we gain victories over our crucified nature by taking up the cross. The challenges might increase as we grow in His strength, but the

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load seems to lighten. As a man on his deathbed yields to the inevitable; we must yield, but to a glorious death that brings life.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

(John 1:12-13 NKJV)

Born of Him, we have a right to become like Him. Nowhere do the Scriptures say God has done everything, or that we don't need works that prove our faith for salvation. The Word is filled with exhortations and warnings to do good works by the power of the Spirit living in us, to *walk after the Spirit*, not the flesh.

Therefore, God's chosen ones, put on heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, accepting one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a complaint against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive. Above all, put on love, the perfect bond of unity. And let the peace of Messiah, to which you were also called in one body, control your hearts. Be thankful. (Colossians 3:12-15 HCSB)

Obedience is our decision, made by faith in the Word that urges us to be holy. We believe God and live by faith in the power to obey Him. As God was in His Son, He is living in us. We need to be changed, and we can believe He will perfect us.

Consider Job who cried out for justice for the righteous. What was God's response? That He is sovereign and wonderful beyond our comprehension. His righteous servant, Job, fell on his face in awe, gaining insight into His nature as few have done. Job surrendered to God that day, giving it all up to Him. Though He might slay him, Job didn't shrink from what he'd seen. God rewarded the prophet and included his memoir in the Scriptures, enriching future generations with wisdom.

Whether God predestines us for mercy or wrath is His right as our Creator. But we want to control our destiny and claim a part in our salvation, so that's difficult for us to accept. However, we had decided His appointment, we would be without hope. He is perfect, but we are fallen; yet He loves us. He compels us to trust in His wisdom, loving Him because He first loved us.

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Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use? What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And *He did* so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, *even* us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles. (Romans 9:21-24 NASB)

God predestinates everyone, and His predestined plans were determined from eternity. He knew us before we were formed in our mothers' wombs. When we were hopelessly lost as slaves to sin, He had already determined to deliver those of us He fore-knew, i.e. those whom He would know by intimate relationship.

He calls many out of sin but further hardens others. As a blacksmith first forms his hammer and anvil to shape his work in the fire, the God of Israel is sovereign, using every trial together for the good of those who love and obey Him, but He does not force our loving obedience. That choice is ours by our salvation. Even when we can't understand His ways, He is God.

Israel was practicing sin, and God turned them over to their enemies for seven years. When they cried out to the Lord, He heard their cry and raised up a frightened young man who was threshing wheat in a winepress to hide it from the Midianites. The weakest and the least in his father's house was Gideon: *And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour!* (Judg. 6:12)

God had chosen Gideon to lead Israel *as one man* (Judg. 6:16) against the Midianites. For His glory, He granted him signs and wonders that bolstered his faith for battle. Gideon mustered his army: thirty-two thousand men, but God said they were too many. They'd rob Him of His glory, claiming their own strength had won the victory. All thirty-two thousand had been called to fight, but twenty-two thousand were afraid to die and were allowed off the battlefield, leaving ten thousand: still too many.

Next, God gave them a simple test: how would they drink water from a brook? Those who drank by lapping it, cupping it in their hands, were included for battle. Only a remnant, three hundred fearless and determined men, gained a victory by faith

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that night: many had been called; few, chosen. They were not chosen for their wisdom but because they were the fewest.

Only three hundred men were called, chosen, justified, and glorified. But from the start, all thirty-two thousand had been called with equal opportunities. In the same way, we are chosen who hunger and thirst for righteousness, humility, and love, longing to know Him, living as He lived, and we are a minority. By refusing cowardice and rejecting compromise, we will be resilient in battle: *For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.* (Rom. 8:29)

“Strive to enter in through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open for us,’ and He will answer and say to you, ‘I do not know you, where you are from,’ then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.’ But He will say, ‘I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.’”
(Luke 13:24-27 NKJV)

Co-Laborers

Some reject the messages their daily tasks bring, despite all the little difficulties that could be used to reshape their souls. In practice, do we prefer independence, loving this world more than Him? He would interrupt us and call us to Himself in our every-day trials. Let’s sensitize our spiritual ears to hear Him in all kinds of hardships: *For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* (Rom. 8:38-39) Yielding to His Spirit is vital for us to secure our salvation. We must consider His *kindness and severity*, knowing what God did to Israel:

As I live, saith the Lord GOD, surely with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out, will I rule over you: and I will bring you out from the

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people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I plead with you face to face. (Ezekiel 20:33-35)

By terrible adversities, God stretches out His hand to conform us to His Son. There in our wilderness, He pleads with us to change. Not mocked, He establishes our fear for His absolute Lordship. His mercies rejoice in us who believe.

○ LORD, You have searched me and known *me*.
You know my sitting down and my rising up;
You understand my thought afar off.
You comprehend my path and my lying down,
And are acquainted *with* all my ways.
For *there is* not a word on my tongue,
But behold, O LORD, You know it altogether.
For You formed my inward parts;
You covered me in my mother's womb.
I will praise You, for I am fearfully *and* wonderfully made;
Marvelous *are* Your works,
And *that* my soul knows very well.
My frame was not hidden from You,
When I was made in secret,
And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.
Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed.
And in Your book they all were written,
The days fashioned for me,
When *as yet there were* none of them.
(Ps. 139:1-4, 13-16 NKJV)

Abiding

How can we know God? By continually opening our hearts, baring our souls, and turning to Him, He opens Himself to us; receiving His words by believing them, we renew our minds; walking in His steps, we commit our lives to His righteousness and love. We might be accused and persecuted, but the God who delivers us also strengthens us.

The Lord foreknows our humble, yielded hearts, and guides our paths through life. We neither despise our birthright nor spurn our promised destiny; however, all who serve the flesh

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will be destroyed with the world. Instead we honor God, investing our souls in His kingdom. *But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience. (Lk. 8:15)*

Yeshua has been long-suffering toward us; therefore, we must not judge others but test ourselves instead. The apostles exhort us to be patient for the fruit of righteousness to ripen because we know God is good. So we passionately run after His holiness until we discover that His holiness has apprehended us!

He will not forsake us, but we must want Him more than life itself! While He declares us holy, sin is inherently in our flesh; it was like this for our Savior who overcame it and now lives in us. Though not immune to sin, we refuse to give it dominion:

You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. (Gal. 5:13-15 NIV)

Abraham fearfully believed in God to raise Isaac from death, acting on faith that now inspires us. When our hearts have been plowed by life's trials, the Word can fall into the softened soil. If our roots are deep, we'll choose life, not death. If we love Him, we'll pay attention to His words and trust in Him; miraculously, everything will work together for our good by our faith.

We must compare everything with the Scriptures. By faith, we escape the corruption of our former nature to be partakers of the divine nature with changed hearts and lives. Walking with the Lord, we become like Him. Wasn't this His desire in Eden?

as His divine power has given to us all things that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption *that is* in the world through lust.

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to persever-

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ance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, *you* will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. (2 Peter 1:3-9 NKJV)

Our hope of salvation is in knowing Jesus Christ the Lord completely. Yearning to know Him was the driving force that compelled Paul forward, despite the trials he knew he'd face:

When He had called the people to *Himself*, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. (Mark 8:34-35 NKJV)

While death is not what the carnal nature wants, death is its destiny. That nature died in His death; now we can grow in our salvation by the Spirit and the Word. Trembling, we believe and yield the fruit of His Spirit, knowing we would fail without Him. By Jesus' blood, we are washed; now we rise in His holiness.

Sin Leads to Death

Our flesh was in His body that was crucified since He came in our likeness. For us to follow Him, we must receive His death with our nature in it; then put on Christ, patterning our lives after His. Dying daily to selfish, carnal ways, we live in the Spirit that raised His body out of death. If we refuse the cross that crucified our mortal nature, we can't participate in His resurrection either.

Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. (Romans 6:6-7)

Yeshua gave up His life to take our sin, destroying the work of the devil. By faith in Him, our identification is in Him. As we welcome His life into ours, we give up our lives to Him so we can become partakers of His life. Faith finds its reward:

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For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but *how* to perform that which is good I find not. ... O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin. There is therefore now no condemnation for them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

(Romans 7:18, 24-25a) [Re: the struggle of slavery vs. freedom]

The most widely received false teaching in today's church entices us to believe the ongoing sins of Christians don't lead to death, a contradiction of the Scriptures. We deceive ourselves if we think God doesn't see our sins. After making a profession of faith, if we presume sin is part of the normal Christian life, we will miss the mark of the biblical mandate for holiness.

Arguments against the possibility of losing our salvation are based on human logic, but the Scriptures consistently warn us to walk circumspectly, bringing forth the fruit of the Spirit by our obedience to Christ. If we love Him, we believe Him; if we believe Him, we obey Him. Otherwise we disobey by unbelief, using our favorite doctrines to argue against His warnings. By ignoring the truth, we encourage others to be fearless of God, but read about us who believe grace covers the practice of deliberate sin:

What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?

(Romans 6:15-16 NIV) [The sin that enslaves you can lead to death. Below: Do we redeem the time, or waste it?]

For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock

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was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness.

Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY." Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall. No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it. (1 Corinthians 10:1-13 NASB)

If we refuse to act by faith in the Word, but push it aside as we continue to sin, then faith has no effect in our hearts. In that case, we don't have a right to the promises, because *without faith, it is impossible to please him.* (See Heb. 11:6) If we think we love Jesus but live in opposition to His words, we are self-deceived hypocrites, wolves in the flock.

No one is so strong that he can always resist evil, but the Holy Spirit gives us strength to stand against it as we yield to His power and rely on Him in our weaknesses. He is our hope of salvation, *Christ in you, the hope of glory.* (See Col. 1:27) Sanctifying us by His words, He also speaks within us. As we believe His every word, He will lead us to His resurrection:

But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:22-23 NIV)

Paul solemnly warned us: if we live like the old man of our past, we will die, but when we live by faith in Jesus, He imparts

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His *life* to us. Just as the vine gives life to its branches, He provides life for us if we abide in His Spirit and the Word. By our strong desire for Jesus Christ, we gain tenacious faith and our inheritance, everlasting life. Can we fall into sin? Of course we can, but what joy in the Spirit when we give up our reins to our Father and run this race together with Him to the end!

I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:14)

When Esau was born, he already had the absolute right to his inheritance; even so, he gave it up for food because he didn't cherish his birthright but despised it. As Jacob's elder, he'd also have inherited the blessing but lost it as well, being immoral and sensual, finding in himself no ability to repent. He made the decision and traded his birthright for stew—short-sighted, he lived for this world. As the one not chosen, he lived a carnal, spiritually impoverished life.

Follow peace with all *men*, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble *you*, and thereby many be defiled; Lest there *be* any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears. (Hebrews 12:14-17) [There was no grace for him to find repentance.]

Plenty of people shrink back to live for the material world rather than the unseen kingdom. His Spirit warns us from heaven: don't despise your birthright by continuing in sin, but prove your love for Christ over this world. The fear of the Lord enables us to shun sin before we fall into its trap. If we fall, we repent; but the longer we wait, the more difficult it is to return.

For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. (Galatians 6:8 NASB)

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Two things are at work in us: the flesh and the Holy Spirit; these are at war over our souls. To gain the victory, we must live in His Holy Spirit daily. Our Savior has gone before us into battle. How do we win in warfare? Beating the air with words? No, but we win by speaking against adversities with the scripture that pertains to each battle: when the authority of His Word is in our hearts, by faith, our speech declares it:

But what does it say? *“The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart”* (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:8-9 NKJV)

How does that save us? In the same way it delivers us from habitual sin: by recognizing the truth and exposing our sin in its confession:

For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, *“Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.”* (Romans 10:10-11 NKJV; cf. Is. 28:16)

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
(1 John 1:9)

Now we understand how foolish we've been, thinking less of those whom God has not chosen and expecting of them what they cannot deliver. The responsibility is ours: God requires us to love them from our hearts, declaring His righteousness and love to a world of sinners. His sheep will hear and turn by realizing their need; desiring the Word they hear, their hearts take in its seed.

We must repent for our pride that considers others as less than we are. Do we think we are standing on solid ground? The Scriptures exhort us to be careful not to fall. By longing for His will, we want His Spirit to take control of our souls that our souls might live together in Him. The more intimate we become with God, the closer we are to His love for others.

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God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. (Acts 17:24-28a) – Paul in Athens

By predestining us, “Is God playing games with our lives?” Not at all. He’s revealing Himself to those He chooses out of the vast multitude of those who shun Him. He glorifies Himself by revealing His love for the unlovely and manifesting His wisdom through the simplicity of our faith.

Paul said we live and move within His presence that holds everything in the universe together by His power. He agreed, we are all the offspring of our Creator. In saying these things, he was casting a net, hoping to draw men to Christ while knowing that His sheep would hear His voice and respond to His message.

If we are willing to repent and believe, then God is working in us. If we are willing to receive Him, He is at work to free us from our sins. If our hearts open to Him, He will come in and fellowship with us by His Spirit who all the while works in us to want Him more. When we are willing to accept His attributes, He renews our minds about His ways, His nature, and His Identity. When we surrender to Him as He really is, we learn He is far greater than we had imagined, and the way He thinks and His thoughts are unlike ours.

Then we realize that though we’ve been believing He is like us, He has been changing us to be more like Him. Since only His Spirit is as He is, we can only reflect His likeness by walking in His Spirit. He is the Sovereign One whose mysterious ways and whose love are immeasurable. We must respond by loving Him who foreknew and predestined us as His own dear children before He created the universe.

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