

# **Verse-by-Verse Studies of Ephesians Chapters 1 and 4; and Romans 8:16-39**

**This Paper Also Includes Extensive Excerpts from**

**Norman Geisler's *Chosen but Free:  
A Balanced View of Divine Election***

**and Michael L. Brown's *Go and Sin No More:  
A Call to Holiness***

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This internet version of the paper has been modified in several relatively minor ways. The primary modification involved abbreviating several quotations. This internet version of the paper was further modified in relatively minor ways in May, 2012, at the time I split up this paper into articles to put on the Christian article sites.

**by Karl Kemp  
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## INTRODUCTION

This paper started with verse-by-verse studies of Ephesians chapter 1 and Romans 8:16-39. I consider Romans chapter 8 and Ephesians chapter 1 to be two of the most important chapters in the New Testament. The first half of Romans chapter 8, which is extremely important, powerfully deals with holiness. Those verses (Rom. 8:1-17) have already been discussed in a verse-by-verse manner in my book, *Holiness and Victory Over Sin* (pages 116-123), but the second half of this important chapter hasn't been discussed in my writings.

It was convenient to discuss Ephesians chapter 1 with the second half of Romans chapter 8 because both passages contain some of the most important verses in the New Testament (Eph. 1:3-14; Rom. 8:26-39, especially 8:28-30) that emphasize God's sovereign role in our salvation, a salvation that was planned in detail before the foundation of the world.

Some Christians miss the Biblical balance by overusing the verses that emphasize *God's* sovereign role in our salvation. They don't adequately balance what these verses teach with the larger number of verses that emphasize *our* role in our salvation. I believe Calvinists do this to some extent, some more than others. Please don't misunderstand me. I'm not attacking Calvinists (or other members of the one body of Christ). I was brought to Christ through Calvinists; as a young Christian I attended a Calvinistic church for several years; I was grounded in Christ mostly through Calvinists; and I graduated from a Calvinistic seminary (with an MA degree in Biblical Studies). Most of this was a very positive experience. Furthermore, I have observed over the years that some of the best books and Bible commentaries have been written by Calvinists. I sincerely thank God for the Calvinists.

Other Christians (including Arminians), partly in reaction to those who minimize, or even deny, *our* role in our salvation, tend to explain away (interpret away) much of what these verses that emphasize God's role teach; they tend to understate God's role and overstate our role. Over the years I have found the verses that emphasize God's role (verses that are emphasized by Calvinists) to be extremely edifying, but it's very important that we seek for the balanced truth—that we make the balanced truth of what the Bible teaches a top priority. It's necessary for us to understand our role and to do everything that's required of us by the grace of God in Christ Jesus. I sincerely thank God for the Arminians too. More often than not, I agree with the Arminians when they differ with Calvinists.

One of the sections of this paper is titled "Excerpts from Norman Geisler's *Chosen but Free: A Balanced View of Divine Election*." The contents of this recently published book (1999) fit very well with the discussion of this paper that is aiming for the balanced truth regarding God's role and our role in our salvation. Dr. Geisler calls himself a moderate Calvinist. I'm sure many Calvinists would say that he deviates so much from some of the basic ideas of Calvinism that he shouldn't be called a Calvinist. He believes in the **P**erseverance of the saints (once saved, always saved), but he doesn't accept the rather standard Calvinistic ideas regarding the first four letters of the Calvinistic **TULIP**. Anyway, whatever he is called, I found his book to be quite helpful, and I agree with most of what he says. I do think, however, that he misses the balance

somewhat by not fully incorporating everything that the New Testament says in the verses that emphasize God's role in our salvation.

Admittedly, it's not easy to determine the balance because the Scriptures don't clearly show us where the balance is. The Scriptures have quite a few verses that emphasize God's sovereign role in our salvation, and they have many verses that emphasize our role, but they don't show exactly where the balance is. One of the primary things we need to do is to refrain from just emphasizing the verses that fit our particular viewpoint while minimizing, or trying to explain away, or just ignoring the verses that don't fit our viewpoint. Yes, this happens a lot, even with many scholars.

When I use this paper in class settings, I plan to study Eph. 1:3-14; Rom. 8:28-30; and the section with the excerpts from *Chosen but Free* together as a unit. Those reading this paper should consider that approach.

The remaining verses of Ephesians chapter 1 (Eph. 1:15-23) are quite important and interesting. In these verses the apostle Paul prayed for his readers. It's a significant prayer (especially when coupled with the prayer of Eph. 3:14-19) that can teach us a lot about how to pray for ourselves and for one another. Paul prayed that the eyes of the hearts of his readers would be opened so they could understand the riches of the glory to which they had been called. In the future there is eternal glory. In the present everything we need has been provided in Christ Jesus, with whom we are united (through faith and by the indwelling Holy Spirit). He, our elder brother (God the Son; the God man), has all authority now; every enemy is beneath His feet. Through His unlimited authority and through the sufficient (resurrection) power made available to us (in union with Christ), we can be what God wants us to be, and we can do what He wants us to do, for His glory and for our good. We must know and understand these things in order to be able to have faith for them and to walk in them.

Ephesians chapter 4 is also discussed in a verse-by-verse manner in this paper. One reason I picked this chapter is that it hasn't been discussed much in my previous writings. For one thing, this chapter contains some very important teaching regarding holiness and victory over sin (see 4:1-3, 17-32). The last two chapters in the epistle to the Ephesians, chapters 5 and 6, also contain some very important teaching regarding holiness and victory over sin. In this discussion of Ephesians chapter 4, we'll consider quite a few verses from chapters 5 and 6, and I'll refer the reader to verse-by-verse discussions of those verses in my earlier writings.

Ephesians chapter 4 also contains some important teaching regarding the proper functioning of the church, the body of Christ. There's a strong emphasis on the need for unity, with each Christian fulfilling their assigned roles (by the grace of God in Christ), and there's quite a bit of emphasis placed on the importance of the five-fold ministry in the body of Christ. This chapter also contains the verses that speak of Christ's descending into the lower parts of the earth. We'll discuss all these items in some detail in this paper.

The last section of this paper is titled "Excerpts from Michael L. Brown's *Go and Sin No More: A Call to Holiness*." I very much enjoyed reading this recently published book (1999) by Dr. Brown, who currently serves as president of the Brownsville School

of Ministry in Pensacola, Florida. Throughout most of the book he teaches about holiness in Christ, strongly exhorting his readers to pursue God and holiness with all their hearts. There is one fairly serious problem with the book though, from my point of view. Right in the middle of this strong teaching and exhortation regarding holiness, Brown mixes in several pages where he contends that two passages of the New Testament demonstrate that Christians cannot walk above sin (stop sinning) in this life. The two passages of Scripture won't surprise anyone who has followed my teaching to any extent. The main passage he uses is 1 John 1:7-2:2, with the emphasis on 1 John 1:8, and he also uses, though in a weaker sense, Romans chapter 7.

Most of the extensive excerpts that I include in this paper from Brown's book deal with his effective teaching and exhortations regarding holiness, but I also include several excerpts (along with quite a few of my comments) dealing with his concession to the widespread viewpoint that the New Testament teaches that Christians cannot stop sinning in this life. I can, and I do, rather heartily recommend this book by Brown, but, in my opinion, it would be very much better without this concession. I have no doubt that Brown is very sincere regarding this concession, but I'm also confident, based on what he says in this book regarding holiness, that he would like to believe other than he does regarding 1 John 1:7-2:2 and Romans chapter 7. I won't be too surprised if I hear that he has changed his viewpoint.

It's also clear that Brown is trying to be honest about where Christians are living and that he has a pastoral concern for those Christians who would tend to despair at hearing that they could/should stop sinning. I can hear some of this, and I agree that we need to do everything we reasonably can do (as long as it's Biblical) to help one another in the body of Christ, but I'm convinced that the Bible *does* teach that Christians are called (and required) to walk in holiness, which in its full sense includes walking with the victory over all sin.

Ultimately, the best thing we can do for any person is to help them see what God really says and to encourage them to submit to Him and His Word in faith and trust. We have to believe that His grace is sufficient to do what He said He would do. We don't have to make excuses for God. Even if our generation is so far from the Biblical norm regarding victory over sin that all Christians are living in sin to some extent (and I don't believe it's true that all Christians are living in sin to some extent, but even if they are), what we must do to rectify the situation is to come back to God's Word, rightly divide it, and submit to God and His Word with humble, obedient faith.

Unless otherwise noted all quotations from the Bible were taken from the NASB (1995 edition).

May God's will be accomplished through this paper and His people be edified! All glory to God—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit! Amen!

## EPHESIANS CHAPTER 1

**Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints** [The English word *saint* means holy person, a person set apart for God. The Greek adjective (*hagios*) that is translated “saints” here (the adjective is plural here in 1:1) is often translated *holy*, including in Eph. 1:4. The NASB translated *hagios* as follows: holy (62), Holy (92), Holy of Holies (1), holy one (5), holy ones (1), holy place (7), most holy (1), saint (1), saints (59), saints’ (1), sanctuary (2) (1).<sup>1</sup>] **who are at Ephesus** [The words “at Ephesus” are omitted in some important early Greek manuscripts. It’s a common view that the apostle Paul did not send this epistle just to the saints at Ephesus, but that he also sent it to the Christians at other cities. Unlike with Paul’s other epistles, there’s nothing in this epistle of a personal nature, only that he was writing (at least for the most part) to Gentile Christians (cf. Eph. 1:13; 2:11-22; 3:1-13; and 4:17-19). It was probably written from Rome about AD 60-63. In the providence of God, this epistle was preserved (as part of the New Testament) for all Christians. I consider Ephesians to be one of the most important and interesting books in the New Testament.], **and who are faithful in Christ Jesus** [By new-covenant definition, Christians are enabled, and are required, to be saints/holy and faithful.]: **(2) Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (3) Blessed** [The NIV has “Praise (be to).” God the Father is to be blessed/praised (with thanksgiving) for the blessings He has bestowed on us in Christ Jesus. This sentence, which continues through verse 14 in the Greek (what a glorious sentence!), puts a strong emphasis on praise to God for His gracious and glorious plan of salvation. In verse 6 Paul speaks of “the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved [Christ Jesus],” and in verses 12 and 14 he speaks of “the praise of His glory.” In verse 7 he speaks of “the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us.” In verse 5 he speaks of “the kind intention [good pleasure] of His will,” and in verse 9 of “His kind intention [good pleasure] which He purposed in Him [Himself].”] **be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ** [Paul goes on to describe these spiritual blessings as he continues this long sentence. The primary blessings we have in Christ are spiritual, but the blessings are not limited to the spiritual dimension. Some of these blessings are available to us now, and some of them are reserved for the future (cf. Eph. 1:14). Even now we have the victory “in the heavenly places” (we live in the heavenly places now) by virtue of our union with Christ Jesus—by our being “in Christ.” On “the heavenly places,” see Eph. 1:20; 2:6; 3:10; and 6:12. Note that the words “in Christ,” or equivalent words (like “in Him,” “in the Beloved”) are repeatedly used in this long sentence, referring to the glorious union believers have with the Lord Jesus Christ (verses 3, 4, 6, 7, 9 [if you translate “in Him,” with the NASB and NIV], 11 [“in whom”], and 13). Verse 5 shows that we are adopted as sons *through* Jesus Christ.], **(4) just as He** [God the Father] **chose us in Him** [Christ] **before the foundation of the world** [Compare Eph. 1:5, 11; Rom. 8:28-30<sup>2</sup>; 2 Thess. 2:13<sup>3</sup>; Rev.

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<sup>1</sup> I took these numbers from the back of the *Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* for the NASB [Holman, 1981, 1998], page 1503. I consider a concordance like this to be one of the most important tools available for Bible study.

<sup>2</sup> These verses are discussed as part of Rom. 8:16-39 later in this paper.

13:8; and 17:8.<sup>4</sup> It's important to know that God, based on His foreknowledge (Rom. 8:29), chose us as individuals before the foundation of the world. (He also planned to sacrifice His Son, the Lamb, "before the foundation of the world" [1 Pet. 1:19, 20; cf. 2 Tim. 1:9].) Such teaching, which rightly emphasizes God's role in our salvation and is designed to draw forth the praise of the saints for His spectacular, super-generous plan of salvation, will help establish our hearts and lives in the grace and peace of God. It's designed to draw forth a response of love and an abiding (faith) commitment to fully submit to, and to fully walk in, the full salvation provided by Him.

There's always a need to balance verses that emphasize God's role in our salvation with the large number of verses that show the necessity for us to fulfill our role (by His grace). God took the initiative in our salvation, and we couldn't do our part apart from His sufficient grace, but it's equally true that we must do the things that are required of us. If we don't, things won't work out for our good or for the maximum glory to God.

Those that God chose, He predestined and He called, but those who are called must answer the call and submit to God and His Word through faith, and they must "work out [their] salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12) through the enabling grace of God in Christ (cf. Phil. 2:13). For further discussion aiming at a balanced Biblical viewpoint see *Once Saved, Always Saved?* (The entire paper is relevant, but especially see page 13; these page numbers go with the internet version of this paper [under Rev. 3:5]; pages 23, 24 ["Aiming for a Balanced Biblical Viewpoint"]); see the *Paper on Faith* (The entire paper is relevant, but especially see pages 3-12 [Introduction]; pages 34-37 [under John 6:44, 65]; page 43 [under Acts 13:48]; pages 43, 44 [under Acts 2:39; this discussion deals with God's call to salvation, especially with His special [limited] call of the elect<sup>5</sup>; pages 44, 45 [under Acts 16:13, 14]; pages 86, 87 ["A Chart that Will Help Us Understand the Meaning of the Words Faith/Believe and Other Key New Testament Words"]); and there are other relevant discussions in my writings that I won't list here. The section of this paper titled "Excerpts from Norman Geisler's *Chosen but Free: A Balanced View of Divine Election*" will also help the reader better understand the

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<sup>3</sup> This verse is discussed on pages 181, 182 of *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*.

<sup>4</sup> These two verses from the book of Revelation deal with the Lamb's book of life. They show that ever since the foundation of the world this book has had some names (not all names) written in it, the names of the elect, those chosen by God before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4) for salvation in Christ Jesus. In Rev. 3:5 Jesus warned some Christians that if they didn't repent their names would be erased from the book of life.

<sup>5</sup> In that discussion I also listed some verses that demonstrate that it's also Biblical to say that God *calls* all mankind (not just the elect) to repent and submit to the gospel. (Christ died for all mankind, and all are called to repent and submit to the gospel in faith.) Add Matt. 22:14 to that list, "For many are called [In this parable, all are called/invited to the wedding feast], but few are chosen." Matthew 22:14 requires a little discussion. For one thing, the word *chosen* is used in a different sense than in Eph. 1:4. Matthew 22:14 speaks of the king's choosing at the end (on judgment day) rather than God's choosing at the beginning ("before the foundation of the world"). Also, to understand Matt. 22:14 we must see the connection between the *invitation* of Matt. 22:3, 4, 8, and 9 (especially verse 9) and the being *called* of 22:14. The Greek verb (*kaleō*) translated "invite" by the NASB in 22:9 could be translated "call." The adjective "called" (*klētos*) in Matt. 22:14 is closely related to the verb (*kaleō*) used in Matt. 22:3, 4, 8, and 9; it was derived from the verb. This Greek verb is normally translated call (in some form) by the NASB: It has call (in some form) 121 times compared to the 19 times it has invite (in some form). In the margin of the NASB at 22:14 it says "or, invited" instead of "called." The NIV has "invite" in verse 9 and "invited" in verse 14.

Biblical balance between God’s role and our role in His plan of salvation.], **that we should be holy and blameless before Him** [On chosen to be holy, cf., e.g., Deut. 7:6; 14:2. As I pointed out under Eph. 1:1, the same Greek adjective translated “holy” here was translated “saints” in verse 1 (the adjective was plural in verse 1). The call and enablement to be “holy and blameless” before God is a major part of the present spiritual blessings given to us in Christ Jesus. Our living right (by God’s grace) is the bottom line of Christianity (cf., e.g., Eph. 2:8-10; 3:14-6:17; Rom. 6:1-23; 8:1-14; 1 Pet. 1:13-25; 2:24; 4:1-6; Rev. 2:1-3:22; and 22:12-15). Through the atoning death of the Lord Jesus (cf. Eph. 1:7), and by the work of the Holy Spirit (cf. Eph. 1:13, 14), Christians are enabled (by grace through faith) to live in a state of holiness and blamelessness—set apart (by God) for God, and living in the center of His will, with the victory over all sin. (It’s true, of course, that forgiveness is a foundational part of the Christian gospel that is provided through the atoning death of the Lord Jesus. This truth is typically well understood by Christians, but there is a major problem when, as so often happens, most of the emphasis is put on forgiveness and right standing. In my opinion we should put about ten percent of the emphasis on forgiveness and ninety percent on being righteous and holy through the atoning death of Christ Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit.) This is the ideal state that we can, and should, be living in as born-again Christians. Holiness is not optional for Christians (e.g., Heb. 12:14 NIV, KJV), and we must make holiness a top priority. Christians aren’t automatically holy; the only way we can live in holiness is by grace/the Spirit through faith (a faith that is based on the good news that is spelled out in the New Testament).

A major problem in the body of Christ is that many Christians (even the majority) don’t believe we can actually live in a state of holiness. Living in a state of holiness means to be set apart for God and living for Him in righteousness, doing things His way, by His grace. It includes living with the victory over sin. The ideal, and it’s not presented in the New Testament as an unrealistic ideal, is that we shouldn’t sin at all (by God’s definition of sin). But many Christians (even the majority) don’t believe we can ever stop sinning in this life. (And they even cite a few verses from the Bible to supposedly prove that all Christians will necessarily continue to sin throughout their lives on the earth. For a start see pages 194-206 of my book, *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*, and see my paper on Romans chapter 7.) If we aren’t even aiming at the target (of total victory over sin), we certainly aren’t going to hit the target.

It’s commonly said, for example, that we all sin daily in thought, word, and deed. Because of their understanding of what the Bible teaches, they (by their own admission) don’t have faith for holiness and victory over sin. (They don’t think we’re supposed to.) Also, even if you know and believe that the New Testament *does* call Christians to holiness and victory over sin, the victory still is very far from being automatic—the world, the flesh, and the devil, are engaged in intense warfare against us. For a study on the meaning of holy/holiness, I recommend the last chapter of my book, *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*. (Most of the book is relevant to the topic of walking in holiness with the victory over sin.) Included in that chapter are discussions of Eph. 5:27 and Col. 1:22, two other verses where Paul used the words “holy and blameless.”]. **In love** [The NASB (and the NIV), wrongly I believe, inserts a period before the words “in love.” In the first place, as I mentioned, verses 3-14 are all one sentence in the Greek. It’s common for English translations to split this sentence up into several sentences; I don’t



necessarily object to this, but if we add a period, we should add it after the words “in love,” with no punctuation before “in love.” My Greek New Testament<sup>6</sup> and the NKJV have no punctuation before “in love” and a comma following. I prefer this translation. The *Amplified Bible* and the NRSV have no punctuation before “in love” and a period following. The KJV has no punctuation before “in love” and a colon following. I could live with either one of these translations. By inserting a period before “in love,” the NASB (and NIV) wrongly (from my point of view) eliminates the important relationship (intended by Paul) between our being “holy and blameless” and our (fully) abiding in an experiential love relationship with God. First we should think of God’s love for us, but also included is our walking in love before Him (by His grace/Spirit), including our love for God, our love for the rest of the children in His born-again family (cf. 1:15), and for those outside the family.

We can speak of the love God had for us before we became Christians (e.g., Eph. 2:4, 5a; Rom. 5:8; John 3:16), but—and this is important—we aren’t able to experience and abide in His love (at least not to any significant extent) while we are denying (or indifferent to) His existence and/or rebelling against Him, and before we come into a relationship with Him through the new covenant in the blood of Christ. Note, for example, what Paul said regarding the former (pre-Christian) status of the Christians from Gentile backgrounds in Eph. 2:1-3, 11-18; 4:17-19, 22; and 5:8-14. We can’t be reconciled to God, have peace with Him (both mentioned, for example, in Eph. 2:16, 17), and abide in His love without changing our attitudes, motives, and priorities and beginning to truly submit to Him and live for Him in righteousness and holiness (by His grace in Christ). Our attitudes, motives, and priorities will be changed as we appropriate and cooperate with the saving grace of God in Christ. Being reconciled to God, having peace with Him, and abiding in His love involve much more than just being forgiven (as significant as that is).

On the important relationship between our being “holy and blameless” (living in accordance with the will of God) and our abiding in His love, see the discussion under Eph. 3:14-21 (especially on 3:17, 19), which is a very important cross-reference, in my *Paper on Faith* (pages 53-55 in the internet version), and see, for example, Ex. 20:1-6; Deut. 5:6-10; 7:6-16; 2 Chron. 6:14; Psalm 5:4-7; 11:4-7; 103:11; 145:20; 146:8, 9; Dan. 9:4; Hos. 9:15; Matt. 7:21-23; John 14:15-24; 15:9-14; 16:27; 1 Cor. 2:9; 16:22; James 4:8; Jude 1:21; and Rev. 2:4, 5, 15, 16; 3:1-6; 15-22. We can love only because God first loved us and because we are now experiencing His love for us (cf. 1 John 4:7-21).<sup>7</sup> We are caught up into His love—we are caught up into the love God the Father has for God the Son (cf. John 17:20-23; Eph. 1:6 [“in the Beloved”]; Col. 1:13 [“the Son of His love”])—even as we are caught up into His life, His righteousness, and His holiness. (God Himself—the triune God—is the only source for these things, and for everything else that is good.) A big part of what makes this work is the indwelling Holy Spirit, who is a very special, very personal love-gift from God to Christians (see Rom. 5:5, which is discussed on page 90 in my book, *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*), who enables us to know of, and to directly experience, His love for us (cf. Rom. 8:14-16, 26,

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<sup>6</sup> United Bible Societies, Fourth Revised Edition, 1993.

<sup>7</sup> Markus Barth (*Ephesians 1-3*, Anchor Bible, Vol. 34 [Doubleday, 1974], page 80) commented that “The reception [speaking of our experiencing God’s love] and the demonstration of God’s love among men are as inseparable in this epistle [Ephesians] as in 1 John.”

27; 1 Cor. 2:12, 13; 3:16; 6:19; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; 13:14; Eph. 1:13, 14; 2:18; 3:16-19; and 1 John 4:13), and who enables us to love (cf. Gal. 5:22).

There's a lot of teaching around the body of Christ about God's unconditional love. I believe much of this teaching is simply wrong, and it can be dangerous. It goes beyond the balanced teaching of the Bible to tell people that God will always continue to love them just the same no matter what they believe in their hearts or what they do, or don't do. This out-of-balance teaching is one reason there's so little fear of God and so little repentance and motivation for righteousness and holiness in so many Christians.

Let's not see how far we can push the love and grace of God. It's not that we can in ourselves be worthy of, or earn, God's love, but if we continue to reject and disdain His love and grace, we will ultimately be confronted with His eternal wrath, which is very different than His supposed unconditional eternal love. Compare, for example, Rom. 2:4-10; Gal. 5:19-21; 6:7-9; Eph. 2:3 ("children of wrath," on the path that culminates in God's wrath in the day of His wrath); 5:1-7; and Col. 3:5-11. The Old Testament verses that spoke of God's never-ending love for Israel, by the way, did not cover those individuals who willfully (and without repentance) forsook their covenant with God. Sincere Christians who love God and are living for Him in truth and righteousness are not in danger of facing God's eternal wrath, but they can block the full flow of His experiential love through failing to live in the center of His will. Let's not settle for less than God's will for us—for His full glory, and for our sakes. If we don't put God first in every area things cannot work right. In Luke 6:46 Jesus said, "Why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not what I say?" We must truly love God and His unique Son with a top priority, which includes obeying Him (cf. John 14:23, 24).

It's true, of course, that we must emphasize God's love, mercy, and forgiveness. (The devil and his hosts spend a lot of time attacking God's people, telling them that God doesn't love them, when He does; telling them they have committed the unpardonable sin, when they haven't; telling them that they never can stop sinning, that God's grace isn't sufficient; etc.) But it's not acceptable to put all the emphasis here. It won't work! We need the full gospel (which includes the balanced gospel)! God knows our hearts. He knows if we are making Him and His Word top priority in our hearts. If we're not, we're going to have to make it top priority to change by His sufficient grace in Christ through faith.

I'm including a section titled "Further Discussion Aiming for a Balanced Biblical Understanding Regarding God's Love and the Love He Expects from His Born-Again Children" at the end of this chapter, starting on page 19. I suggest the reader turn to that section now.

Some Quotations. First I'll quote part of what Francis Foulkes said under Eph. 1:4.<sup>8</sup> "This doctrine of election, or predestination, is not raised as a subject of controversy or speculation. It is not set in opposition to the self-evident fact of human free will. It involves a paradox that the New Testament does not seek to resolve, and that our finite minds cannot fathom. Paul emphasizes both the sovereign purpose of God and our free will. He took the gospel of grace and offered it to all. Then to those who had accepted the gospel he set forward the doctrine of election for two reasons, both of which we find linked similarly together in John 15:16; Romans 8:29; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 1:9 and 1 Peter 1:2. Firstly, Christians need

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<sup>8</sup> *Ephesians* [Eerdmans, 1989], pages 55, 56.

to realize that their faith rests completely on the work of God and not on the unsteady foundation of anything in themselves. It is all the Lord's work, and in accordance with his plan, a plan that reaches back *before the foundation of the world*. There is, therefore, no place for human boasting. [We must respond to God's grace with faith, and we must continue to cooperate with His grace, but that is nothing to boast about.] Secondly, God has chosen us *that we should be holy and blameless before him* (cf. 5:27 and Col. 1:22). Election is not simply to salvation, but to holiness of life. We were 'created in Christ Jesus,' [Eph.] 2:10 is to express it, 'for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.' We were 'predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son' (Rom. 8:29).

The ideal and goal of the Christian life, therefore, is perfect holiness (cf. Matt. 5:48), expressed in its positive aspect as dedication of life...and negatively as freedom from every fault. Behind the word *amōmous*, used similarly in Philippians 2:15, and here translated *blameless* (Revised Version 'without blemish'), lies a use in connection with Old Testament sacrifices. Only a perfect animal could be offered to God (e.g. see Lev. 1:3, 10). So, as Heb. 9:14 puts it, Christ offered himself morally and spiritually 'without blemish' to God (cf. 1 Pet. 1:19). The life of the Christian is also to be 'without blemish,' not merely by human standards but *before him* who is the witness of all that anyone does, and thinks, and says."

I'll quote part of what Ralph P. Martin said under Eph. 1:3-6.<sup>9</sup> "Here we confront the mystery of divine election which runs through much of the New Testament. Some guidelines of interpretation may be helpful. The New Testament writers proclaim God's electing mercy not as a conundrum [puzzling question] to tease our minds but as a wonder to call forth our praise. They offer this teaching not as an element in God's character to be minimized but as an assurance that our lives are in his powerful hands rather than in the grip of capricious fate, which was a fear first-century man knew well. And the doctrine is never stated as an excuse for carelessness in spiritual matters, but always as a reminder that Christians have a moral responsibility 'to confirm [their] call and election' (2 Peter 1:10) by following the highest ethical standards. We are chosen *that we should be holy and blameless.*"

I'll quote part of what John MacArthur said under Eph. 1:4-6a.<sup>10</sup> "God's sovereign election and man's exercise of responsibility in choosing Jesus Christ seem opposite and irreconcilable truths—and from our limited perspective they *are* opposite and irreconcilable. That is why so many earnest, well-meaning Christians throughout the history of the church have floundered trying to reconcile them. Since the problem cannot be resolved by our finite minds, the result is always to compromise one truth in favor of the other or to weaken both by trying to take a position somewhere between them.

We should let the antimony [a contradiction or inconsistency between two apparently reasonable principles or laws, or between conclusions drawn from them] remain, believing both truths completely and leaving the harmonizing of them to God" (page 11).

"It is not that God's sovereign election, or predestination, eliminates man's choice in faith. Divine sovereignty and human response are integral and inseparable parts of salvation—though exactly how they operate together only the infinite mind of God knows" (page 13). On page 33 MacArthur said, "Faith is man's response to God's elective purpose. God's choice of man is election; men's choice is faith. In election God gives His promises, and by faith men

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<sup>9</sup> *Broadman Bible Commentary*, Vol. 11 [Broadman Press, 1971], page 135.

<sup>10</sup> *Ephesians* [Moody, 1986].

receive them.”<sup>11</sup>

I’ll quote part of what Klyne Snodgrass said under Eph. 1:4-6.<sup>12</sup> “Election does indeed bring privilege, but not so that people can bask in privilege or disdain others. Election always brings responsibility; God has chosen us to do something — namely, to live holy and blameless lives before him (1:4; cf. 5:27). Other biblical texts on election have the same understanding, whether they refer to Israel, the remnant, or an individual like Paul or Jeremiah. God’s choosing enlists people in his work and gives them responsibility.” I’ll also quote a few sentences from his page 66, “Christians are to live in a holy and blameless manner before God (Eph. 1:4). This is not an oppressive weight, but as much privilege as it is responsibility. We are called to live in keeping with God’s intent for us.”

Lastly, I’ll quote part of what D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said under Eph. 1:4.<sup>13</sup> “So we must always start with holiness, as the Scripture does; and therefore the preaching of holiness is an essential part of evangelism. I stress this matter because there are certain quite different ideas about evangelism, some indeed that say the exact opposite. They maintain that in evangelism the preacher does not deal with holiness. The one aim is ‘to get people saved,’ then later you can lead them on to holiness. But what is salvation? To be saved is to be rightly related to God, and that is holiness. The whole purpose of evangelism is primarily to tell men what sin has done to them, to tell them why they are what they are, namely, separated from God. It is to tell them what they need above everything else is not to be made to feel happy, but to be brought back into a right relationship with the God who is ‘light and in him is no darkness at all.’ But that means preaching holiness. To separate these two things, it seems to me, is to deny essential biblical teaching. We must start with holiness, and continue with it; because it is the end for which we are chosen and delivered.”] **(5) He predestined** [As the margin of the NASB shows, “having predestined” is a more literal translation. Predestine means decide beforehand/mark out beforehand/lay out the path beforehand. This Greek verb (*proorizō*) is used five other times in the New Testament: Eph. 1:11; Rom. 8:29, 30; Acts 4:28; and 1 Cor. 2:7. This verb emphasizes God’s role in our salvation, but, as we discussed in *Once Saved, Always Saved?* and *A Paper on Faith*, when it comes to the salvation of individuals, everything isn’t just predetermined in such a way that man doesn’t have a necessary role to fulfill. God doesn’t make people repent or give them faith; He doesn’t make them holy (while they are passive), or keep them holy; nor does He compel them to continue on in faith to the end of the race. For a start, see under Acts 13:48 of the my *A Paper on Faith*.] **us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself** [On the “adoption as sons,” see Gal. 4:4-7; Rom. 8:14-17. We “receive the adoption as sons” (Gal. 4:5) when we become united with Jesus Christ by faith and are born again by the Holy Spirit. We have been adopted into the family of God, but the Bible also shows that some key aspects of our adoption/salvation are yet future (cf. Rom. 8:23).], **according to the kind intention [good pleasure] of His will** [cf. Eph.

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<sup>11</sup> After I quoted what I did from MacArthur here, I became aware that, under Eph. 2:8 of this same commentary, he said that the apostle Paul teaches (in Eph. 2:8) that faith is the gift of God. I am quite sure that MacArthur misunderstands what Paul said in Eph. 2:8. I discussed the idea that saving faith is a gift of God (an idea that I rather strongly disagree with) in some detail in the *Paper on Faith*, including a discussion of Eph. 2:8-10.

<sup>12</sup> *Ephesians* [Zondervan, 1996], pages 49, 50.

<sup>13</sup> *God’s Ultimate Purpose*, An Exposition of Ephesians Chapter 1 [Baker, 1978], page 102.

1:9; Phil. 2:13], **(6) to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed** [The Greek verb (*charitoō*), which was translated “He freely bestowed” by the NASB here, was derived from the Greek noun (*charis*), which was translated “grace” earlier in this verse (and often). Grace is emphasized in this verse (as it is throughout the New Testament), and the concept of God’s freely bestowed salvation permeates this entire sentence (Eph. 1:3-14). On grace compare John 1:16, 17.] **on us in the Beloved** [cf. Matt. 3:17; 17:5; and Col. 1:13]. [Everything we have “in the Beloved [Christ]” came from the Father’s “good pleasure”; it was His plan, and it was totally from His grace/mercy, being totally undeserved/unearned/unmerited. We can’t earn/merit anything by faith, but as the apostle said in Rom. 4:16, “*it is* by faith [not works], in order that *it may be* in accordance with grace [not merit]....” By faith we receive and cooperate with God’s grace.] **(7) In Him** [literally, “in whom,” referring to Christ, the Lamb] **we have redemption through His blood** [It would probably be better to translate the redemption; the definite article is included in the Greek. This is the redemption that was promised in Old Testament days. The idea behind redemption was the buying of slaves to set them free. We were all slaves under sin, Satan, and spiritual death, but now we have received the redemption. Now sin, Satan, and spiritual death have no legal authority over us. We haven’t just been redeemed from the guilt of sin; we have been redeemed from the authority, from the power, and from the kingdom of sin. We wouldn’t be redeemed if we were still slaves of sin living in the kingdom of sin, spiritual death, and Satan.

Three important cross-references that confirm that *the redemption* through the blood/cross of Christ includes the full victory over sin (including the call and enablement to live in a state of holiness) are Col. 1:14 (with 1:9-14); Titus 2:14 (with 2:11-13) and 1 Peter 1:18 (with 1:13-19). (These passages are all discussed in my book, *Holiness and Victory Over Sin* [pages 146-150, 124-125, and 190-194].) On redemption also see Rom. 3:24; 1 Cor. 1:30; and Heb. 9:15. Romans 8:23 demonstrates that our redemption won’t be complete in the full and final sense until Christ returns and we’re glorified—see under Eph. 1:14.

I’ll quote part of what A. Skevington Wood said under Eph. 1:7.<sup>14</sup> “Redemption (*apolytrōsis*) has to do with the emancipation either of slaves or of prisoners. ... By derivation, the term also implies the payment of a ransom price.... Here it is specified as being ‘through his blood’ (Col. 1:20). The price paid for man’s redemption from bondage to sin was costly beyond measure. It was the very lifeblood of Christ himself, poured out in death. ... What was foreshadowed in the Levitical system was realized at the Cross when the Son of God laid down his life in death and ransomed men from sin.”], **the forgiveness of our trespasses** [These words seem to cause something of a problem in that they tend to limit redemption to forgiveness. However, I don’t believe that “forgiveness” is an adequate translation for the Greek noun *aphesis* here. I devoted an entire chapter of the book *Holiness and Victory Over Sin* to the meaning of *aphesis*. I refer the reader to that chapter, which includes a discussion of Eph. 1:7 (pages 151-153). I would translate the release from our trespasses with the guilt and the penalties (including the major penalties of spiritual death and bondage to sin, or the equivalent. Significantly, this “release” is the equivalent of “the redemption through His blood” just spoken of in this verse. And,

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<sup>14</sup> “Ephesians,” *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 11 [Zondervan, 1978], page 25.

significantly, the meaning of the word “redemption” and the fact that Eph. 1:4 spoke of our being holy and blameless before God both require a translation here that goes far beyond the forgiveness of the guilt of sin. Colossians 1:14, which was mentioned above as an important cross-reference for redemption through the blood of Christ, is all the more important as a cross-reference for Eph. 1:7 since it also uses *aphesis*.

I’ll also quote part of what Klyne Snodgrass said regarding this verse.<sup>15</sup> “...the apostle thought of salvation primarily in terms of release [release “from sin as a power or a tyrant”]. *Aphesis* often carries the connotation of release,<sup>16</sup> and the connection to ‘redemption’ shows that is the nuance here.<sup>17</sup> ... Because of grace Christians no longer live in sins or under their indictment. Instead they live in Christ.”

I’ll quote part of what Andrew R. Fausset said under Eph. 1:7.<sup>18</sup> “THE redemption which is the grand subject of revelation – viz [that is], from the power, guilt, and penalty of sin (Matt. 1:21). If a man were unable to redeem himself from bond-service, his kinsman might redeem him (Lev. 25:48). Antotypically the Son of God became the Son of Man, that, as our kinsman, He might redeem us (Matt. 20:28). ... [Commenting on “the forgiveness/remission of our transgressions,” Fausset said (in part)] This ‘remission,’ being the explanation of ‘redemption,’ includes not only deliverance from sin’s penalty [I assume Fausset is thinking, at least for the most part, of the *penalty* of hell], but also from its pollution and enslaving power [my emphasis], negatively; and the reconciliation of an offended God, and a satisfaction unto a just God, positively....” When I think of God being *reconciled*, I think mostly of the need for people to repent and turn (return) to Him in faith (by His grace) and to begin to live for Him, accepting His offer of salvation through the good news of what He has done for man through the Sacrifice of His Son, the Lamb of God. It’s not that God has difficulty forgiving, but that it’s impossible for God to rightly interact with people who aren’t living for Him, or for Him to permit such people to enter His kingdom when they would be working against the good of that kingdom, spreading the devil’s rebellion and chaos.], **according to the riches of His grace** [Compare Eph. 2:7. It’s necessary for us to know and understand the fullness of what has been provided for us at the present time so we can appropriate and walk in these things by faith. The more we understand the fullness of God’s grace, the more we will be thankful before God, and the more we will be faithful Christians. We are, of course, thankful for what we have now, but we’re also thankful—even more thankful—for the eternal glory that is reserved for us.], **(8) which He lavished upon us.** [I wouldn’t put a period here, or any other punctuation, in agreement with my Greek New Testament, the KJV, and NIV.] **In** [or, with] **all wisdom and insight** [We are totally dependent on God for this wisdom and insight regarding His plan of salvation, which comes (like every other aspect of our salvation) “according to the riches of His grace.” We can’t adequately understand, have faith in, or cooperate with God’s grace without this wisdom and insight.] **(9) He made known [making known] to us** [cf. Eph. 1:16-23; 3:3] **the mystery of His will** [The “mystery” speaks of that which was formerly hidden in the mind of God but has now been revealed through the apostle Paul, and others, regarding His plan to fully solve the sin problem through

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<sup>15</sup> *Ephesians*, page 52.

<sup>16</sup> In a footnote Snodgrass says, “See, for example, its use in Luke 4:18.”

<sup>17</sup> In a footnote Snodgrass says, “The same connection exists in Colossians 1:14.”

<sup>18</sup> *Commentary by Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown* [Eerdmans, 1984 reprint], page 399. Fausset lived from 1821 to 1910.

Jesus Christ and His atoning death, and to bring about a new heaven and new earth. This plan includes the full salvation and ultimate glorification of God’s people and the total overthrow and removal of Satan and all who persist in following him in rebellion against God and His divine order.], **according to His kind intention [good pleasure] which He purposed in Him** [Compare Eph. 1:11. I would translate “in Himself,” referring to God the Father, with the KJV and NKJV.] **(10) with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times** [Compare Eph. 3:9. The same Greek noun (*oikonomia*) translated “administration” here and in Eph. 3:9 was translated “stewardship” in Eph. 3:2; Col. 1:25, speaking of the stewardship/ministry that the apostle Paul was given by God. When we think of an administration, for example, the administration in Washington D.C., we think of an administrator at the top who has the authority—the President. God’s Administration is headed up by His Administrator, the Lord Jesus Christ, who has all authority everywhere (cf., e.g., Eph. 1:20-23; Matt. 28:18; Phil. 2:9-11; Col. 1:15-20; and 2:10). He has the authority to fully carry out God’s plans, all at the proper time. This Administration has been in effect since the atoning death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus. It will be in effect until the work has been fully accomplished; it’s clear, for one thing, that God’s enemies (though they have been defeated at the cross) have not been subdued yet (cf., e.g., 1 Cor. 15:23-28; Eph. 6:10-20). On the “fullness of the times,” cf. Gal. 4:4; Mark 1:15.], **that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth** [Compare Col. 1:13-20. This “summing up” speaks of, or at least includes, His being head over/having authority over all things. The NIV has, “to bring all things in heaven and earth together under one head, even Christ.” Without this headship/authority, He couldn’t fully save us or fully subdue the enemies of God. The Greek verb translated “summing up” by the NASB is *anakephalaioō*, which, though not directly derived from, is closely related to, *kephalē*, the word translated “head” in Eph. 1:22 [see Eph. 1:20-23]; Col. 2:10.

I’ll quote part of what Craig Keener said here.<sup>19</sup> “It was a common Jewish belief that history was moving through many stages to its climax, when everything would be put under God’s rule. ... The Old Testament and Judaism recognized that God had a sovereign plan in history to bring it to this climax.”]. **In Him** [As I pointed out there was no period in the Greek. In the Greek, “in Him” is followed by “in whom.”] **(11) also we** [The word “also” apparently alludes to the fact that “we,” in addition to Christ—through Him and in union with Him—“have obtained an inheritance.” Romans 8:32 says, “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things.” We are “fellow heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17). In Eph. 1:11, 12 “we” refers to those from a Jewish background who (including Paul) had become Christians. In Eph. 1:13 Paul shows that the Gentile Christians are also fully included in God’s salvation plans through, and in, Christ Jesus.] **have obtained an inheritance** [Compare Col. 1:12. The inheritance includes the things we have now as Christians (in this age), including the new birth by God’s Spirit and the power to be “holy and blameless” (Eph. 1:4), but these things are only the “pledge [down payment] of our inheritance” (Eph. 1:14). In the future we will be glorified, we will have a place in God’s new Jerusalem, and we will reign with the Lord Jesus in a never-ending

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<sup>19</sup> *Bible Background Commentary* [Inter-Varsity Press, 1993], page 542.

reign.), **having been predestined** [cf. Eph. 1:5] **according to His purpose** [cf. Eph. 1:9; 3:11; and Rom. 8:28] **who works all things after the counsel of His will, (12) to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ** [Those from a Jewish background were the first to hope in Christ. For one thing, the coming of the Christ/Messiah had been prophesied in their Scriptures (the Old Testament). Christ Himself and the gospel also came to them first.] **would be to the praise of His glory** [cf. Eph. 1:6, 14]. **(13) In Him** [literally, “in whom,” referring to Christ], **you also** [speaking to Gentiles who had become born-again Christians], **after listening to the message of truth** [cf. Eph. 4:21; Col. 1:5], **the gospel of your salvation—having also believed** [We must hear the gospel and understand it (not that we must understand every little detail) before we can believe (have faith in) the gospel.], **you were sealed in Him** [Christ] **with the Holy Spirit of promise** [God sealed us as His own (cf. Eph. 4:30) by giving us the Holy Spirit, the life-giving, sanctifying, charismatic-gift-dispensing Spirit. By this sealing, God made us His own, His adopted children (cf. 1:5). On this sealing with the Spirit, see 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; and compare Rom. 8:23 (“first fruits of the Spirit”; during this present age we can only receive from/through the Spirit those things that are available [in the plan of God] for this age). To be sealed with the Spirit is the equivalent of being baptized/immersed in the Spirit. (See on Acts 15:1-11 in my *A Paper on Faith*, including the subsection titled “Meaning of the Words ‘Baptism [or, Immersion] in the Holy Spirit.’ ”) The “Holy Spirit of promise” refers to the fact that the Old Testament frequently prophesied regarding/promised the new-covenant gift of the Spirit (cf., e.g., Isa. 32:15-18; Ezek. 36:26, 27; 37:14; Joel 2:28-32; John 7:37-39; Acts 1:4; 2:14-21, 33; and Gal. 3:14).], **(14) who is given as a pledge** [cf. 2 Cor. 1:22] **of our inheritance** [See under Eph. 1:11 on the “pledge [down payment] of our inheritance.” On our inheritance see Acts 20:32; Gal. 3:18; Eph. 1:18; 5:5; Col. 3:24; Heb. 9:15; 11:8; and 1 Pet. 1:4. These verses, including Eph. 1:14, all use the same Greek noun for inheritance (*klēronomia*). On our inheritance also compare Matt. 5:5; 19:29; Acts 26:18; 1 Cor. 6:9, 10; 15:50; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 1:11; Col. 1:12; Heb. 6:12; and Rev. 21:7. None of these verses use *klēronomia*.], **with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession** [Note that the words “God’s own” are in italics in the NASB; the words are not included in the Greek; the Greek just has the word translated possession with the definite article. With the translation of the NASB, or with the more literal translation “the redemption of the possession,” we could understand the possession to refer to God’s people, the elect, or for it to refer to the creation that has been corrupted by sin and Satan. Most, including the translators of the NIV (“until the redemption of those who are God’s possession”), understand the “possession” to refer to God’s people.

I believe the possession refers to God’s world/creation, which (in many ways) is yet to be redeemed from the hand of His enemies, and which will not be redeemed in the full and final sense until the Lord Jesus returns and subdues those enemies. (The book of Revelation has much to say about Christ’s end-time subjugation of His enemies, especially the last few chapters.) Then, and only then, can the saints enter into their full inheritance, which includes inheriting the earth/world (e.g., Matt. 5:5; Rom. 4:13; eventually we’ll inherit the new earth [e.g., Rev. 21:1-22:5]). See, for example, Rom. 8:17-25; 1 Cor. 15:23-28; and Rev. 19:11-22:21. I’ll briefly comment on Rom. 8:17-25; 1 Cor. 15:23-28 as we continue with this discussion of Eph. 1:14. For one thing, as Eph.



1:7 (and other Scripture) shows, God’s people have already been redeemed—we don’t have to wait to be redeemed. (It’s true, however, that our redemption is not yet complete. For example, as Rom. 8:23 shows, we [including our bodies] have not been fully redeemed yet.)

First Corinthians 15:23-28 are an important cross-reference. (These verses are discussed in some detail in my eschatological paper that includes 1 Corinthians chapter 15.) These verses show that Christ will subjugate His enemies *after* His second coming, the last enemy being death (cf. Rev. 20:14, 15).

Ephesians 4:30 says, “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” (Compare, for example, Luke 21:28; 24:21; also, Acts 3:19-21 speak of the restoration of all things that will come to pass when Jesus returns.) The “day of redemption” begins when Christ returns to glorify His people, to judge the world (which includes the removal of all unrepentant rebels), and to redeem His creation. Romans 8:17-25 (discussed later in this paper) are a very important cross-reference. Romans 8:21 says, “the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” After we are glorified, the creation, which was corrupted through sin (and Satan), will be redeemed. It will be regenerated/reborn (cf. Matt. 19:28 [“in the regeneration”]; Rom. 8:22 [“the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now”]; those pains of childbirth will ultimately (through God’s redemption plans) yield to the birth into eternal glory for the creation]; and 2 Pet. 3:13.

It’s important to know that Satan and his followers have been defeated and will be subjugated at the right time through the cross of the Lamb of God (see John 12:31-33; 16:11; Heb. 2:14; cf., e.g., Eph. 1:20-23; Phil. 2:8-11; Col. 1:18-20; and 2:15)., **to the praise of His glory**. [Compare Eph. 1: 6, 12. As emphasized throughout this long sentence (Eph. 1:3-14), God will be praised throughout eternity for His glorious plan and work of salvation, which includes glorification and the judgment and removal of all rebels. He does all things well, very well!] **(15) For this reason I too** [These last two words should probably be understood in the sense “I for my part [as God’s apostle to the Gentiles (cf., e.g., Eph. 3:1-13; Gal. 2:7-9)].”<sup>20</sup>], **having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you, and your love for all the saints** [cf. Col. 1:4], **(16) do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers** [Compare Col. 1:9. We can learn a lot about what to pray for (for ourselves and for other Christians) from the prayers of the apostle Paul. This prayer in chapter 1 is all the more enlightening when it’s combined with the prayer of the apostle in Eph. 3:14-19. (That passage is discussed in my *A Paper on Faith*.)]; **(17) that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ** [cf. John 20:17; Rom. 15:6; Rev. 1:6], **the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom** [cf. Col. 1:9] **and of revelation** [Compare 1 Cor. 14:6. It’s probably better to see the human spirit here, but it must be understood that the “wisdom” and “revelation” come by/through the indwelling Spirit of God. This wisdom and revelation will enable us to understand God’s plan of salvation, to understand what He requires of us (e.g., righteousness and holiness) and how to appropriate and walk in it (e.g., by faith/grace/the Spirit), and to understand (to some extent) the glory of the age

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<sup>20</sup> Compare F. F. Bruce (*Epistles to the Colossians to Philemon and to the Ephesians* [Eerdmans, 1984], page 269); Markus Barth (*Ephesians 1-3*, page 145).

to come for God's people. Being given a spirit of "wisdom" and "revelation" is comparable with what Paul said in Eph. 1:7-9 about God's grace abounding toward us in/with all wisdom and insight, making known to us the mystery of His will.] **in the knowledge of Him.** [The sentence that begins at 1:15 doesn't end until 1:23 in the Greek. The pronoun "Him" here is ambiguous. It could refer to God the Father, or God the Son. I would translate "Himself." (The Greek pronoun used here would normally translated "Him," but, as Eph. 1:5 for example, shows, this pronoun is sometimes translated "Himself.") Whether we translate "Him," or "Himself," I agree with the large number of commentators who say that God the Father is being referred to here. Regarding the meaning of the words "in the knowledge of Him/Himself," we can probably include the glorious reality that we are to have an experiential (personal, vital) knowledge of God as His born-again children (cf., e.g., Eph. 1:4, 5, 13; 3:19; 4:13; Phil. 3:10; and 2 Pet. 1:2, 3), but it seems the main idea here is of our having a knowledge of God's will/plan(s) (cf. Col. 1:9, 10). We can't believe as we should, or live, or grow, or be established and victorious, without this knowledge. Such knowledge is mandatory and glorious, anything but boring. All Christians desperately need it.

I'll quote part of what John Stott said here.<sup>21</sup> "...the 'knowledge' for which Paul prays is more Hebrew than Greek in concept; it adds the knowledge of experience to the knowledge of understanding. More than this, it emphasizes *the knowledge of him* (verse 17), of God Himself personally, as the context within which we *may know what is...* (verse 18), that is, may come to know truths about him [and about His plan of salvation, etc.]" **(18) I pray that** [These three words are in italics in the NASB because they are not included in the Greek. The Greek continues with the participle "being enlightened." ] **the eyes of your heart** [With "heart" here, compare "spirit" in 1:17.] **may be enlightened** [cf. Acts 26:18; 2 Cor. 4:6; and Heb. 6:4], **so that you may know what is the hope of His calling** [Compare Eph. 4:4. "His calling" refers to our call from God the Father. The NIV has, "the hope to which he has called you." We are called to holiness, etc. for this age (cf., e.g., Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 1:4; 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 1:9; and 1 Pet. 1:15, 16), but since Paul uses the word "hope" here, he is zeroing in on the future glory to which we are called, the glory of the age to come (cf., e.g., Eph. 2:7; Rom. 5:2 ; Col. 1:5 ["the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you have previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel"]; Col. 1:27 ["Christ in you, the hope of glory"]; Titus 3:7; and 1 Pet. 1:13). For one thing, this hope, which is based on our knowledge of the extreme glory of the age to come, will help stabilize our hearts now (in things like love for God, commitment, steadfastness, right priorities, praise, and thankfulness) and will help motivate us now (cf., e.g., Heb. 6:17-20), enabling us to be strong in faith as we face the difficulties of this present age. The things we hope for are yet future (though they are certain, according to plan and power of God), but the hope is in our hearts now.], **what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance** [This speaks of the "inheritance" that comes from God the Father.] **in the saints** [Compare Col. 1:12. Instead of "in," the Greek could be translated "in the case of," or "among." This inheritance is given to the saints. "The riches of the glory of [our] inheritance" looks to the future; however, "the pledge [down payment] of our inheritance" (Eph. 1:14) enables us to participate in some of this "glory" now (sufficient glory for us to live in the will of God). (Cf., e.g., Rom. 6:4; Eph. 1:1-14 [Note, for

<sup>21</sup> *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians* [Inter-Varsity Press, 1979], page 54.

example, that we are called and enabled to be “saints/holy” now.]; Eph. 3:14-21 [Especially note 3:16, “that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man.”]; John 17:22; and 2 Cor. 3:18.) On the “inheritance in/in the case of/among the saints,” cf. Acts 20:32; 26:18; and Col. 1:12.], **(19) and what is the surpassing greatness of His** [God the Father’s] **power** [Greek *dunamis*; some other relevant verses that use *dunamis* are Acts 1:8; Rom. 1:4, 16; 1 Cor. 6:14; Eph. 3:7, 16, 20; Phil. 3:10; and Col. 1:11, 29.] **toward** [or, to/unto/for] **us who believe** [This power is toward/to/unto/for those who are united with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection and in His present life (cf. Eph. 2:5, 6; they are “in Christ”), through faith, by the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom.1:4)]. **These are** [There is no period here in the Greek; these last two words were added by the translators of the NASB in italics.] **in accordance with the working** [compare Phil. 2:13; contrast Eph. 2:2] **of the strength of His might** [cf. Eph. 6:10] **(20) which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand** [The right hand is the place of authority; cf. Psalm 110:1. Klyne Snodgrass<sup>22</sup> mentioned that the picture of Christ being seated at the Father’s right hand builds on Psalm 110:1.] **in the heavenly places** [The very power of God that raised Jesus from the dead and seated Him at the Father’s right hand will, at the appropriate time, raise us from the dead (those Christians who will have died before the Lord returns will be resurrected; those still alive will be glorified without experiencing death; cf. Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 6:14; 15:42, 50-53; 2 Cor. 4:14; Phil. 3:11, 21; 2 Tim. 2:18; Heb. 11:35; and Rev. 20:5, 6)—we will begin to reign with the Lord Jesus (and God the Father) in a never-ending reign (cf., e.g., Rev. 3:21; 12:5; and 22:5). But here in Eph. 1:20 the apostle puts the emphasis on the resurrection power working for, and in, us *now*, those who are united with the Lord Jesus Christ through faith in the gospel. We have already been raised/resurrected with Him in a preliminary, spiritual (by the Spirit), very real sense. See, e.g., Rom. 6:1-11; Eph. 1:23-2:10, especially 2:5, 6; Phil. 3:10; Col. 2:9-15; and 3:1-11. Sufficient authority (the very authority of the Lord Jesus) and power have been made available to the church and to each believer to enable us to be “holy and blameless” and to fully accomplish God’s will for the church and for each individual Christian (cf., e.g., Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-18; Luke 9:1, 2; 10:1, 17-20; 2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10; Eph. 4:27; Titus 2:15; and James 4:7).

I’ll quote again from John Stott.<sup>23</sup> “How much do we know of the power of God, which raised Jesus from death and enthroned him over evil? True, the very same power has raised us with Jesus from spiritual death, and enthroned us with Jesus in heavenly places, as Paul will go on to show in 2:1-10. But how much of this is theory, and how much is experience? It is not difficult to think of our human weakness: our tongue or our temper, malice, greed, lust, jealousy, or pride. These things are certainly beyond our power to control. And we have to humble ourselves to admit it. ... But are our weaknesses beyond the power of God? Paul will soon assure us that God is able far to surpass our thoughts and prayers ‘by the power at work within us’ (3:20), and he will go on to exhort us to ‘be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might’ (6:10). This is the power of God which raised Jesus from the dead, and raised us with him. It has put all things under his feet; it can put all evil under ours.” ], **(21) far above all**

<sup>22</sup> *Ephesians*, page 75.

<sup>23</sup> *God’s New Society*, pages 67, 68.

**rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come.** [Compare, for example, Matt. 28:18; Eph. 1:22; Phil. 2:9-11; Col. 2:10; and 1 Pet. 3:22. If the Lord Jesus didn't have this total authority now, Satan might be able to frustrate God's plans for the body of Christ, or, at least, His plans for individual Christians. However, since Christ does have all authority now, no one can frustrate God's plans, and, for one thing, we can all be, and do, all that God intends. This is not to suggest that the victory is always easy, or that it is automatic (cf., e.g., Eph. 6:10-20); however, God's grace always is sufficient for those who appropriate it (which includes walking in faith and using the authority we have in Christ Jesus). We use His authority (the authority we have in Christ), when, for example, we resist temptation (or other works of the devil/demon spirits) in His name, or when we pray, or minister, in His name. The NASB, NIV, NKJV, and other translations have a period here, and that is one way to punctuate these verses, but my Greek New Testament has the symbol that takes the place of our English colon and semicolon. The KJV has a colon here; the RSV has a semicolon. The semicolon seems an effective punctuation here; this is the punctuation adopted by several commentators.] **(22) And [and] He [God the Father] put all things in subjection under His [Christ's] feet [See Psalm 8:6. Jesus Christ has all authority now, but in the plan and timetable of God, most enemies will not be totally subjugated and removed by judgment until the Lord Jesus returns at the end of this age. (See, e.g., 1 Cor. 15:24-28. First Corinthians 15:27 also quoted from Psalm 8:6.)], and gave Him as head over all things to [or, for] the church [The idea here is that God the Father first gave Jesus Christ all authority (He made Him "head over all things"; cf. Col. 2:10), then He gave Him (with His total authority) to/for (for the benefit of) the church. Snodgrass, for example, said, "The point is that Christ is head of all things *for the benefit of the church.*"<sup>24</sup> As I mentioned, because of this authority, the church (including every Christian) can fully accomplish the will of God. Satan and His forces don't have the authority to stop us.], **(23) which is His body [Compare 1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 4:4, 12, 16; 5:30; and Col. 1:18, 24. To refer to the church as the body of Christ emphasizes the glorious relationship we have with Christ, and with other Christians (cf. 1 Cor. 12:12-31; Eph. 4:11-16; 5:23; Col. 2:19; and 3:15).], the fullness [I agree with the commentators who understand "fullness" here in the sense "that which is filled," referring to the church, His body, which is filled, in a very special sense, by the Lord Jesus Christ. He is literally united with each born-again Christian through the indwelling Spirit; He sanctifies the church; He guides the church; He pours out the charismatic gifts upon the church, etc. On a practical level, individual Christians (and the church) aren't actually filled with Christ to the extent we don't know and understand the truth, and to the extent we don't submit to, and walk in, the truth by faith (cf., e.g., Eph. 3:14-19; 4:13-16). It's mandatory for us to do our part (in accordance with the measure assigned to us by God). It's also true that Christ Himself is the fullness of God (cf., e.g., John 1:16; Col. 1:19; and 2:9, 10).] of Him who fills all in all.** [The Lord Jesus "fills all in all" in the sense that His presence and authority extend everywhere (cf. Eph. 4:10; Jer. 23:24). The apostle certainly emphasized Christ's exalted position and role and what that means for us throughout Ephesians chapter 1: In 1:10 he spoke of an administration that sums up all things in Christ; in**

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<sup>24</sup> *Ephesians*, page 78.

1:20 He is seated at the Father's right hand; in 1:21 He is far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and every name that is named both now and forevermore; in 1:21 all things have been put under His feet, and it is mentioned that He is head over all things; and here in 1:23 it is mentioned that He fills all in all.]

For further study on Ephesians, Eph. 2:1-10; 3:14-21; and 6:10-20 are discussed in my *A Paper on Faith*. Ephesians 1:7; 4:17-24; 5:3-8; and 5:22-33 are discussed in my book, *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*. In this present paper we'll also discuss Ephesians chapter 4.

### **FURTHER DISCUSSION AIMING FOR A BALANCED BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING REGARDING GOD'S LOVE AND THE LOVE HE EXPECTS FROM HIS BORN-AGAIN CHILDREN**

This section was written to supplement what has already been said regarding this important topic under Eph. 1:4 on pages 6-8 of this paper. In general I will not repeat what was said there or passages of Scripture that were mentioned there. I am not attempting to say everything that could be said on this topic, but I will say enough to bring some balance to the topic. We desperately need the balanced truth of what God's Word teaches.

It is very important for us to know and to emphasize that "God is love" (1 John 4:16) and that He requires His born-again children to walk in love by His grace (e.g., 1 John 4:7-5:1<sup>25</sup>). There is no danger of emphasizing the love of God too much as long as we understand what the Bible really teaches about His love and do not reject what the Bible teaches about His wrath, vengeance, and His eternal judgment because they are supposedly incompatible with His love. And there is no danger of Christians walking in love too much as long as we do not understand love in ways that go against what the Bible teaches.<sup>26</sup>

It seems that a big part of the problem has arisen because many Christians have adopted worldly ideas about what love means (the world of our day loves words like love, tolerance, and peace), ideas that substantially miss, and often directly contradict, dominant themes of the Bible. The primary problem that I am concerned with—and it is a very serious problem—is the idea that since God is love, He cannot have great wrath, eternal wrath, and He certainly cannot cast people into hell. This idea contradicts the Bible; it also is one of the main reasons that there is so little repentance and fear of God among so many Christians in our day. Why take the warnings of the Bible seriously?

**Some Verses that Speak of God's Love for All People and/or of Our Need to Love All People:** Matt. 5:38-48; Luke 6:27-38; 10:25-37; John 3:16; Acts 14:17; Rom. 13:8-

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<sup>25</sup> These particular verses (and there are many similar verses) deal almost exclusively with the need to love our brethren in Christ.

<sup>26</sup> Some Christians are so far out of balance on their ideas of love that they think it is wrong to tell non-Christians that the day of judgment is coming and that God is calling mankind to repent and to submit to the Lord Jesus Christ and that it is wrong to confront Christians with their sin, as if such things are unloving and intolerant. Many modern ideas about love and tolerance are simply unbiblical.

10; 1 Cor. 10:31-33; 1 Tim. 2:1-6; and Titus 3:1-4. First I'll comment on Matt. 5:38-48 (what I say here has much application for many of the other verses listed). These verses are important, but there are very definite limits to what Jesus said here. These verses do not begin to say that God loves all people the same or that He will continue to love forever those who never do repent of rejecting Him and the gospel and of persecuting His people.<sup>27</sup> Hundreds of verses show otherwise; I'll list many such verses as we continue; quite a few such verses have already been listed on pages 7, 8. Rather than continuing forever to manifest love for the evil/unrighteous/unrepentant with limited blessings like the sun and the rain (see Matt. 5:45), He will, according to Jesus, cast them into the eternal lake of fire. Instead of experiencing His love, they will experience His eternal wrath.

We Christians do not know who will repent, for one thing, so throughout this life we are called to love all people (which includes treating them like we want to be treated and being concerned for their welfare, especially their eternal welfare). This does not mean that we love all people the same, or that this love will continue forever. For one thing, a large number of verses show that we are to have a special love for our brethren in the family of God.

One of the most important things we must know about love is that God demands that we love Him first (before self, life in this world, family, friends, all people, occupations, things, etc.); see, for example, Luke 10:27; 14:25-33; and Matt. 10:37. This is one area where half-baked, out-of-balance ideas about love have often led to serious error for Christians. If we Christians do not love God (I mean the God of the Bible) with top priority, we are missing what Biblical love is all about, and we are assuredly walking in the flesh to a significant extent. The devil loves *love* as long as love for God is left out. Human, religious "love" (which often includes things like doing good works, emphasizing unity with everyone and tolerance for everything but the truth) as a substitute for God and His truth is as destructive as any other idol men worship and promote. If we love God, we will obey Him, and we will love His Word, His righteousness, and His people.

Let's briefly consider John 3:16. This is a significant verse, but many read way too much into it and do not balance out what is said here with the rest of the verses in the passage (and in the rest of the Bible). John 3:18, 36, for example, show that those who willfully reject the gospel are condemned already (that is, they are condemned from the time that they willfully reject the gospel, unless they later repent) and that the wrath of God (not the love of God) abides on them. In a very real sense, they have already had their final judgment.<sup>28</sup> When God sent His Son, He knew what was in the hearts of all people. He knew that many were committed to evil and that they would not receive Christ or submit to the gospel in faith. He knew that Christ's coming would force such

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<sup>27</sup> The age we are living in is an age characterized by the grace of God in Christ, but a major feature of the gospel is that the day of judgment is coming at the end of this age and that the only way to get ready for that day is through salvation in Christ Jesus. Forgiveness is part of the gospel, but repenting and beginning to live for God in righteousness and holiness in the light of the coming day of judgment—by grace through faith—is a bigger part of the gospel. Also, even though this age is characterized by grace, there are limits to how much sin people (and especially Christians) can (temporarily) get by with.

<sup>28</sup> John 5:24 shows that it is also true, and it is a glorious truth indeed, that those who do submit to the gospel in faith have already had their final judgment. This does not mean that they could not later reverse this judgment if they are foolish enough to turn away from their commitment to Christ and His salvation.

people to manifest what was in their hearts—Christ’s coming to such people, or the gospel’s coming to them, greatly increases their sinful status before God (see, e.g., John 3:19-21; 15:18-25).

I am thankful that 1 Tim. 2:1-6 are in the Bible. It is important for us to know that God “desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4) and that Christ died for all men (1 Tim. 2:5, 6). At the same time, we cannot limit ourselves to these verses and read into them ideas that contradict other things the apostle Paul (and other writers of the New Testament) taught. Even though it is true that Christ died for all and that God calls for all to repent and submit to the gospel, it is also true that God (who knows the hearts of all people) did not choose all people for salvation and write their names in the Lamb’s book of life (see under Eph. 1:4; Rom. 8:29-30 in this paper). Many verses show that some people are children of the devil (see Matt. 13:36-43; John 8:31-47; Acts 13:10; 2 Cor. 11:13-15; and 1 John 3:8, 10, 12). In at least most of these verses, the idea is included that these people never will repent.

Second John 1:10, 11 show that we should not help false ministers in their work (those who are not teaching the truth, even if they call themselves Christians), which provides another qualification to the idea that we just love everybody the same. It is true, of course, that we would be concerned for such people, especially concerned for their eternal souls—there always is the possibility that false ministers will repent.

**Some More Verses that Bring Balance to the Ideas that God Loves All People the Same, that He Loves Unconditionally,<sup>29</sup> that He Continues to Love Forever Those Who Continue to Reject Him and His Christ and Those Who Come to Know Him but Later Walk Away from Him<sup>30</sup> : Matt. 10:32-42; 12:30-37; 23:1-39; 25:1-13 (This parable warns that although there were ten virgins at the beginning [they were all born-again Christians, who initially had oil in their lamps, which lamps were burning (Matt. 25:8)], only five of the virgins were ready when the bridegroom returned. Christ gave this teaching to exhort all Christians of the need to make it top priority to get ready and stay ready for His return. The bridegroom says to the five foolish virgins, who were not ready for His return, “Truly I say to you, I do not know you.” Those are not the kind of**

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<sup>29</sup> For God to love mankind unconditionally would mean that His love would not be conditioned by (that is, it would have nothing to do with) what the people did (including repentance and faith in Christ), or did not do. As I mentioned, in most ways this view is simply wrong. God’s blessing all people with the sun and rain (Matt. 5:43) and, more importantly, His desire that all people repent and be saved (1 Tim. 2:4) are areas where it is appropriate to speak of His unconditional love.

<sup>30</sup> In this discussion about the love of God, I am not dealing with God’s emotions. I am dealing almost entirely with His final (eternal) judgment of all people. Are we going to experience His eternal love, enjoying an eternal love relationship with Him, living in His presence in His eternal kingdom that is literally full of glory and abiding in all the blessings that He has prepared for those who love Him (cf. 1 Cor. 2:9). Or, are we going to be totally separated from Him in the eternal lake of fire experiencing His eternal wrath. Even if He did continue to have *feelings* of love for the people He cast into hell, it would not affect their eternal destinies; according to the Bible, they will experience His eternal wrath, not His eternal love. There is an emotional component of love, but love is a lot more than emotions—love is an action word. If we want to experience the eternal, abiding love of God, we must submit to Him as God in our hearts and live the way He requires us to live (by the sanctifying grace of God in Christ through faith); we will be judged according to our works (cf., e.g., Rom. 2:2-13; 2 Cor. 5:9-11; Gal. 5:19-21; 6:7-9; Eph. 5:3-7; and Rev. 22:11, 12). Our works must demonstrate that our faith is real. Faith without works is dead; it isn’t saving faith.

words we want to hear from Christ at the end. [We will not hear such words if we make God, His truth, His Spirit, His righteousness, and His kingdom top priority. In other words, we will not hear such words from Christ *if we meet His conditions for salvation.*] Those words spoken to the five foolish virgins hardly fit the idea of God's unconditional, never-ending love.); Luke 10:5-16; 12:49-53; Rom. 1:18-32 (The preliminary wrath of God that is manifested now spoken of in these verses is a mild foreshadowing of the wrath of God that is to ultimately come against those who never do repent. To face the *wrath* of God on judgment day will be quite the opposite of experiencing His *love*.<sup>31</sup> Many verses speak of the *wrath to come* [cf., e.g., Matt. 3:7, 8; John 3:36; Rom. 2:1-9; 5:9; 9:22; Eph. 2:3; 5:6, 7; Col. 3:6; 1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9; Rev. 6:16, 17; 11:18; and 14:9-11].); Rom. 9:13-22 (These verses demonstrate, for one thing, that rather than draw some people to Christ, God actually hardens them so that they will not come to Christ [Rom. 9:18, 22].<sup>32</sup>); Rom. 12:14-21 (These verses show, for one thing, that Christians are not to take revenge. We are to cast our cares upon the Lord. But this does not mean that judgment will not eventually be poured out on those who sin against us. When vengeance<sup>33</sup> is required [and God is the One to determine that], God is the One who will repay [Rom. 12:19]; His leniency will not last forever; the age of grace will not last forever.

In Rom. 12:20 Paul quoted from Prov. 12:21, 22 to show that we are to do good [like sharing food and drink] to those who wrong us [at least there are some occasions where this would be appropriate, we must be led by God]. This could help motivate those against us to repent, but very often they do not repent.<sup>34</sup> If they do not repent, the evil that they have done to us, and the good we have done for them, will both be in the books when God judges all men according to their works. Should our attitude be that we never want God to judge and remove those who truly are committed to fight against God and His righteousness and to persist in doing evil? See, for example, Rev. 6:9-11<sup>35</sup>; 16:1-11, especially verses 4-6; 18:20, 24; and 19:1-3.); 2 Cor. 6:14-18; Gal. 1:8, 9; 2 Thess. 1:6-9; 2:8-13 (The apostle Paul says here that it is part of God's plan that Antichrist come "in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because [they did not repent and submit to the truth of the gospel]" [2 Thess 2: 9, 10]. "For this reason [that is, because they took pleasure in wickedness and had no interest in becoming righteous through the gospel] God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe

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<sup>31</sup> It is true, of course, that God chastens those He loves (cf., e.g., Heb. 12:5-8), but there is a very big difference between being chastened by God and being cast into the eternal lake of fire. God's chastening of His people is designed to bring about their repentance and righteousness.

<sup>32</sup> It must be understood that God never arbitrarily hardens people; He knows exactly what is in the hearts of all people, and He never hardens hearts that are not already hard. He can harden people from coming to Christ when He knows that they would be coming for the wrong reasons (e.g., without true repentance, without faith, without a desire for God's righteousness). See Rom. 11:7; John 12:37-43. Also compare Matt. 11:27; Mark 4:11, 12; Luke 8:10; 10:21-24; and John 6:44, 65. See my paper on Romans chapters 9-11; John 6:44, 65 are discussed in my *A Paper on Faith*; John 12:37-43 are discussed in my paper on John chapters 10-12.

<sup>33</sup> *Vengeance* is a heavy word; experiencing God's vengeance at the final judgment is the opposite of experiencing His love. On God's vengeance, compare, for example, Deut. 32:35, 41, 43; Psalms 79:10; 94:1-7; Isa. 34:8; 59:17-20; 61:2; 63:1-6; and Heb. 10:26-31.

<sup>34</sup> More often than not, the enemies of God and of His people throughout the Bible do not repent.

<sup>35</sup> I would translate "that they should wait [not, rest NASB] for a little while longer." The NIV has "wait."



what is false in order that they all may be judged [condemned] who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness" [2 Thess. 2:11, 12]. It is hardly a manifestation of God's love when He sends a deluding influence so that these people may be condemned. God knows their hearts, and He certainly knows that these people are committed to evil and that they never will repent.

God's judgments *never* are arbitrary; He is a good God, and His judgments are *always* righteous. He is a God of great mercy, but there are, as there must be, definite limits to His mercy. His righteousness and His love for His people require that He eventually remove those who persist in sin and never will repent; they cause chaos in His kingdom; they destroy divine order; they attack His people; etc.

Second Thess. 2:13, 14, which speak of the believers at Thessalonica [and all true believers], show the great contrast between believers and those who do not obey the gospel, who will be condemned to "the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power" [2 Thess. 1:9]. "But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved ["loved" NIV] by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning [by His foreknowledge (cf. Rom. 8:28-30; Eph. 1:4)] for salvation through sanctification [holiness] by the Spirit and faith in the truth [they repent and humble themselves before God; they submit to the gospel from their hearts, the gospel that solves the sin problem and makes people righteous and holy]" [2 Thess. 2:13, 14.]; Heb. 10:26-31, 38, 39; James 4:4, 6, 8 (James 4:4 speaks of people *making themselves enemies of God* by becoming friends of the world; James 4:6 speaks of God's *being opposed* to the proud. Neither of these expressions goes with abiding in the love of God.); 1 Pet. 2:8 ("...and to this *doom* they were also appointed." The apostle Peter was speaking here of those who reject the gospel. It is not just that they will be condemned because they rejected Christ and the gospel of salvation, but that God appointed them to this doom. Verses like this one bring some balance to the idea that God loves all people just the same in an unconditional way. God does not arbitrarily appoint people to doom: He [the God who knows the hearts of all men and who lives above the time system of the universe] knew that these people never would repent and that they would not want to be in heaven on His terms. God could have sent His Son into the world with a message that all could easily have agreed with and submitted to, but then He would not have been eliminating sin [including the root sin of pride] and rebellion from His kingdom.); 1 Pet. 3:12; 5:5; 2 Pet. 2:1-22; and Rev. 14:9-11 (Based on quite a few verses in the Bible, we can say that God desires all people to repent and believe, but also that He knew, before the creation of the world through His foreknowledge, that many never would repent and submit to Him in faith. God created the eternal lake of fire for the devil and his angels [Matt. 25:41]; I do not see how we can reasonably speak of God's love for those people who will end up in the eternal lake of fire once their eternal destiny has been determined, those who are called "accursed ones" by Jesus in Matt. 25:41. They certainly will not abide in or experience His love. At the most God could have emotional feelings for those people, regretting that they had chosen the path of rebellion and destruction without repentance.)

A Few Words About the Need for Repentance. I mentioned on page 8 that the widespread, out-of-balance understanding of the unconditional love of God (that He will love us just the same forever, no matter what we believe or what we do, or do not

do) helps explain why there is so little fear of God and so little repentance and motivation for righteousness and holiness in so many Christians in our day. (On the fear of God, cf., e.g., Acts 5:5, 11). Christians should put the emphasis on abiding in the love of God and loving God to the maximum, but we should also be afraid to sin against Him. Repentance includes changing what we believe in our hearts when it is wrong, and it includes changing how we live when such change is needed. Repentance is not something we do on our own (in the flesh); God will enable us to repent as we look to Him and cooperate with His grace.

I'll list some verses that demonstrate the need for repentance: Psalm 7:12; Ezek. 18:1-32; Matt. 3:2, 8 (with 3:1-12); 4:17; Mark 1:15; 6:12; Luke 13:1-5; 15:1-32; 24:47; Acts 2:38, 40; 17:30, 31; 20:21; 26:20; 2 Cor. 7:9, 10; 2 Pet. 3:9; Rev. 2:5, 16, 21, 22; 3:3, 19; 9:20, 21; 12:5, 16, 21, 22; and 16:9, 11. Some of these verses confirm that God calls all people to repent and that He truly desires their repentance.

Luke chapter 15, with its three parables (including the parable of the prodigal son), strongly emphasizes the point that heaven rejoices when sinners repent. This chapter was dealing, for the most part at least, with the repentance of backslidden children of God, but I believe it has much application for the repentance of all mankind. The parable of the prodigal son deals with a prodigal son who repents; it powerfully illustrates the point that God greatly loved this son and strongly desired his repentance. What about those prodigal sons who never do repent? These parables deal with those who do repent. It seems clear that those who do not repent will not be able to experience the Father's love, and especially not after the age of grace is over and the final judgment has taken place.

Repentance is not optional, and if we put off repenting while clinging to some out-of-balance understanding of God's love, we are making a big mistake. The time will come when it will be too late to repent. I assume, however, that those who have not repented before it is too late to repent will not want to repent then either, not on God's terms, not that they will like the alternative.

I winced as I read parts of what Clark Pinnock, a contemporary evangelical Christian scholar, said in his article written to advocate *annihilationism* and to reject the traditional view that God will literally send people to eternal torment.<sup>36</sup> This is an important topic in its own right, but the primary reason that I wanted to quote from this article here is that Pinnock bases his rejection of the traditional view of hell to a significant extent (as the quotations will show) on the mistaken idea that such a view is incompatible with God's love, goodness, and justice. Something must be wrong with our ideas about God's love, goodness, and justice if our ideas force us to reject what the Bible says about His wrath, vengeance, and hell.<sup>37</sup> We cannot afford to challenge God by saying that if the traditional view of hell is true, then God is not a God of love, goodness, and justice. "...what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? ... Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world?" (Rom. 3:5, 6

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<sup>36</sup> His article is in the book *Four Views on Hell*, edited by William Crockett [Zondervan, 1992].

<sup>37</sup> We have already discussed God's *wrath* and *vengeance* to some extent. I'll list some key verses that speak of the eternal lake of fire (some of these verses specifically mention eternal torment): Isa. 66:24; Matt. 5:29, 30; 13:41, 42, 49, 50; 18:8, 9; 25:41, 46; Mark 9:43-48; Jude 1:7; Rev. 14:9-11; 19:20; 20:14, 15; and 21:8.

NIV).

His view, Pinnock says, unlike the traditional view, “does not portray God as being a vindictive and sadistic punisher” (page 137). “How can one reconcile this doctrine [the traditional view of hell] with the revelation of God in Jesus Christ? Is he not a God of boundless mercy? How then can we project a deity of such cruelty and vindictiveness? Torturing people without end is not the sort of thing the ‘Abba’ Father of Jesus would do. Would God who tells us to love our enemies be intending to wreck vengeance on his enemies for all eternity? ... What does this tradition do to the moral goodness of God? Torturing people forever is an action easier to associate with Satan than with God, measured by ordinary moral standards and/or by the gospel. And what human crimes could possibly deserve everlasting conscious torture? ... Given the cruelty attributed to God by the traditional doctrine, it is inevitable that sensitive Christians would always wonder if the doctrine is true” (page 140).

“Let us begin with the moral problems surrounding the traditional view, which depicts God acting in a way that contradicts his goodness and offends our moral sense. According to Christian theology the nature of God is revealed in Jesus Christ and shown to be boundlessly merciful. [The New Testament also speaks of the wrath of the Lord Jesus (cf., e.g., Rev. 6:16, 17; 19:13-15).] God loves the whole world. His heart is to invite sinners to a festive meal (Matt. 8:11). [But what about those who spurn His mercy, who reject Him as God, who reject His Son, who fight against His righteousness and divine order, and who join the devil in his never-ending hatred of God and rebellion against Him.] He is a forgiving and loving Father toward them (Luke 15:11-32), not a cruel and sadistic torturer as the traditional view of hell would suggest. What would the goodness of God mean if God torments people everlastingly? Of course, it is not our place to criticize God, but it is permitted to think about what we are saying” (page 149). It is good idea for us to think about what we are saying!

It seems to me that the God of the Bible is being criticized here, and in sad, powerful ways. My primary purpose for quoting this material is to demonstrate that faulty ideas about what God must be like if He is a God of love and is good are being used here to attack Him. It is very important for us to know that God is not on trial—we are (Pinnock would, I’m sure, agree with this statement). Even if the doctrine of hell does not seem reasonable to us, we Christians are compelled to trust God to do what is right and good. For one thing, we do not have enough information or insight to judge God’s final judgment of the devil or of people.

I am sure that many Christians do not have an adequate understanding of the seriousness of sin. Perhaps none of us adequately understand its seriousness. It is a very serious matter when a high-level being like Satan rebels against God and is followed by a third of the angels, by the demons, and then (to some extent at least) by mankind. Consider the infinite price that God paid in the incarnation and the atoning death of His unique Son, the Lamb of God, to dethrone sin and to save those who will submit to His plan of salvation. I am totally convinced that when God’s final judgment is over, after the great-white-throne judgment, our hearts will be full of praise and thanksgiving—with no complaints or suggestions on how He could have done things better. I’ll quote further from Pinnock in the next two paragraphs.

“There is a powerful moral revulsion against the traditional doctrine of the nature of hell. Everlasting torture is intolerable from a moral point of view because it pictures God acting like a bloodthirsty monster who maintains an everlasting Auschwitz for his enemies whom he does not even allow to die. How can one love a God like that? I suppose we might be afraid of him, but could we love and respect him?” (page 149).

“The principles of justice also pose a serious problem for the traditional doctrine of the nature of hell because it depicts God acting unjustly. Like morality, it raises questions about God’s character and offends our sense of natural justice. ... Sending the wicked to everlasting torment would be to treat persons worse than they could deserve” (pages 151, 152). I am one hundred percent sure that God knows more

about true justice (and love and goodness) than we do, and that He will always do what is right, and good, and necessary. We can, and we must, trust Him. And, again, God is not on trial!

Many Christians have accepted worldly, far-from-the-Biblical balance ideas about God's love. I am afraid that many who call themselves "Christians" are not interested in the God of the Bible; some are only interested in a caricature of God derived from what man (sometimes with the *help* of the devil, even as the devil *helped* Eve see the truth in the garden) thinks God must be like to be acceptable to man, or to be worthy of the worship of man.

There are many things that we do not know or fully understand (at least not yet); the Bible has not revealed them to us, but I am confident that when the devil, evil angels, demons, and many men are cast into the eternal lake of fire it will not be because God has a hard time forgiving, far from it. I believe that the dominant factor will be that those persons never will repent, and it would be impossible for them to have a place in God's eternal kingdom without causing perpetual havoc. They would not love God, or His truth, righteousness, holiness, people, etc. They would not want to have a place in God's eternal kingdom on His terms, not that they will want the alternative.

We very often hear that there must not be a God, or even if there is a God, He must not be a good, loving God, because of all the problems in the world, problems like hunger, warfare, strife, natural disasters, plagues, and sicknesses of the inner man and of the body. Some think that God should make everything go smooth on the earth while mankind (including many who say that they are the people of the God of the Bible), for the most part, continues to reject Him, His Son, His truth (His Word), and His righteousness. And that is only half of the problem, not only do people reject God and substitute things like secular humanism, evolution, and the god of science in His place, but they typically, whether directly or indirectly, knowingly or unknowingly, submit to and fellowship with Satan and his hosts through things like false religions, the occult, psychic powers, and demon worship, things which are forbidden in the Bible. Men cannot be neutral; if we do not pursue God with all our hearts, based on His Word, we will be influenced by the devil to one degree or another. He is the "god of this world." He works in the sons of disobedience (cf. Eph. 2:2).

The Bible promises that God will come and make things right on the earth; the day of judgment is coming. Our top priority must be to get ready for that day. Then we will be able to judge God and straighten Him out—No! It does not work like that! We will be the ones who are judged. Every time we take a stand against God and His truth and righteousness, we hurt ourselves.

## EPHESIANS CHAPTER 4

**Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord** [Compare Eph. 3:1. There's widespread agreement that Paul wrote this epistle while a prisoner at Rome.], **implore** [Compare Rom. 12:1; the same Greek verb was used there, translated "I urge" by the NASB.] **you to walk** [cf. Eph. 2:10; Col. 1:10; 2:6; and 1 Thess. 2:12] **in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called** [The apostle spelled out much of what we have been called to in the first three chapters of this epistle. Compare Rom. 8:28-30. We have been called by God to be His born-again, holy and blameless, adopted children. We have been bought at a very great price; we have been redeemed from the kingdom of sin, darkness, and Satan. The Spirit of God dwells within us; our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. When Christ returns we will be glorified and begin to reign with Him (and God the Father) in a never-ending reign. How's that for a calling?], **(2) with all humility** [Humility is obviously very important for Christians. I'll quote what Harold W. Hoehner says on humility here.<sup>38</sup> "Believer's attitudes are...important. Paul listed three virtues that are to enhance a believer's walk. The first of these is humility. In Greek culture, humility was thought of as a vice, to be practiced only by slaves. But Paul stated that saints should be completely humble in their daily walks. This is the opposite of pride. On the other hand Christians should not promote false humility, but should recognize who they are in God's program (cf. John 3:30; Rom. 12:3). This virtue is listed first because of Paul's emphasis on unity (pride promotes disunity; humility promotes unity) and to counteract their past pride, so as to facilitate obedience to and dependence on God. Christ was the supreme example of humility (Phil. 2:6-8)."] **and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, (3) being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.** [Love, gentleness, patience, and peace were all listed as fruit of the Spirit in Gal. 5:22, 23. Humility and the attitude of being tolerant could have been listed there too. It should be quite obvious just how important these qualities/fruit of the Spirit are to the unity and proper functioning of the body of Christ. Compare Col. 3:12-15.]

I frequently hear Christians speak of the need for Christians to have the unity of the Spirit (a unity produced by the Spirit) no matter what we believe (or how we live). But that's not what the apostle meant to say—such unity of the Spirit is impossible. There may be some sort of unity without truth, righteousness, and holiness, but it won't be unity of the Spirit. The Bible makes it clear that it's very important for Christians to be united in love (e.g., John 17:20-23) and that the Holy Spirit will enable us to be united. We can even experience unity of the Spirit in Christ Jesus if we don't agree on every detail. We must be generous with others and make liberal allowance for their idiosyncrasies, even as they must do for us. It's not true, however, that we can have unity of the Spirit with those who are violating the new covenant through serious doctrinal error and/or through continuing to live in obvious sin (cf., e.g., Matt. 7:15-23; 18:15-18; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 2 Cor. 11:13-15; 2 Thess. 3:6-15; 1 Tim. 1:18-20; 2 Tim. 2:14-19; 2 Pet. 2:1-22; 1 John 4:1-6; and 2 John 1:7-11). We can't have the unity of the Spirit without unity in truth, righteousness, and holiness.] **(4) There is one body** [Compare Eph. 2:14-16; Rom. 12:1-13; 1 Cor. 12:4-31. Every true Christian is part of this one body, the body of Christ, the church. (The body of Christ is also mentioned in Eph.

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<sup>38</sup> *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, New Testament [Victor, 1983], page 632.

4:12, 16.) Every time the apostle uses the word *one* throughout this verse and the next two verses, he is emphasizing the need for unity. There's only *one* body, *one* Spirit, *one* hope of our calling, *one* Lord, *one* faith, *one* baptism, and *one* God the Father. The need for unity in the body of Christ permeates Eph. 4:1-16. Whether we like it or not, all the members of the body are affected by one another, and we need one another, according to the plan of God. It's terribly inappropriate for true Christians to fight one another, to envy one another, to compete with one another, etc. According to God's plan, we really do need one another; each Christian really does have important roles to fulfill. That is, we really do need one another to the extent that each of us is submitted to God in truth, living in His will, and making our proper contribution to the functioning of the body of Christ (by the grace/Spirit of God through faith).

Note the use of the word "unity" in Eph. 4:13; note the use of the word "love" in Eph. 4:15, 16; and note that Eph. 4:16 shows that the whole body is fitted and held together through every joint of the supply and that it speaks of the need for each Christian to work for the good of the body according to their assigned measure. Divine order requires unity in the family of God. Where we don't have unity, it's because God's will isn't being done and, one way or another, we have left some room/place for sin, fleshiness, worldliness, and the devil with his evil hosts (cf. Eph. 4:27).] **and one Spirit** [Compare Eph. 2:18. Every true Christian has been born of the one Spirit, the Holy Spirit (e.g., John 3:3-8), is indwelt by the one Spirit (e.g., Rom. 8:9), and is enabled, and required, and privileged to walk by/after/in the one Spirit (e.g., Gal. 5:16-18; 6:7, 8).], **just as also you were called in one hope of your calling** [See under Eph. 1:18. Christians have been called to glory. This enables us all to have the same (super-solid, Bible-based) hope that we will be caught up into the eternal glory of God when Christ returns.]; **(5) one Lord** [Compare 1 Cor. 8:6. This refers to the Lord Jesus Christ. Ephesians 4:4-6 mention God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.], **one faith** [The one faith is the Christian faith, Christianity, with some emphasis on what we believe, what we are committed to (the basic, non-negotiable doctrines of the Christian faith).], **one baptism** [Paul is speaking of water baptism here.<sup>39</sup> A study of what the New Testament teaches about water baptism demonstrates that the apostolic Christian church considered water baptism to be quite important. It certainly wasn't optional for Christians. On water baptism see under 1 Cor. 15:29 in my verse-by-verse study of 1 Corinthians chapter 15.], **(6) one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.** [Cf., e.g., Rom. 11:36; 16:27; and Jude 1:25.] **(7) But [or, And] to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.** [Here in Eph. 4:7 the apostle uses the word *grace* in a somewhat limited, special sense. (Our full salvation, including forgiveness, the new birth, our righteousness and holiness, our place in heaven, etc. is all of grace.) He is speaking here, at least for the most part, of the measure of grace (including the charismatic gifts, not limited to the nine gifts listed in 1 Corinthians chapter 12) given to each Christian (see under Eph. 4:16)—and especially to those in the ministry (he goes on to speak of the five-fold ministry)—that enables us to make our required contribution to the unity and proper functioning of the body of Christ. We are responsible before God to do our part (our measure), in accordance with His plan, by His grace. God's grace is sufficient for the body of Christ to be united and to function properly.

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<sup>39</sup> For one thing, the apostle has already mentioned the Holy Spirit in Eph. 4:4.

The fact that Christ gives different measures of grace (including charismatic gifts) to us makes us different from one another in some ways; Paul discusses such differences in 1 Corinthians chapter 12. Here in Eph. 4:1-16 Paul puts some emphasis on the fact that each measure of grace given to each Christian (whether in the five-fold ministry, or not) is given to promote the unity and proper functioning of the body of Christ (not so we can compete with one another, or have superiority or inferiority complexes, etc.). All Christians must fulfill their special assignments/service/ministries. All Christians are gifted to serve/minister in the body of Christ (we can think, for example, of some being gifted for special service/ministries in areas like intercessory prayer, helps [1 Cor. 12:28], administrations [1 Cor. 12:28], special giving [Rom. 12:8], showing mercy [Rom. 12:8], or hospitality and generosity), but especially those who are called into the five-fold ministry (cf. Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-31).

It is clear that the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23), which are part of the full salvation package that comes to us through the grace of God in Christ, are totally necessary for the unity and proper functioning of the body of Christ, but we don't typically think of the fruit of the Spirit being given to Christians by measure. They are made available in full measure to every Christian as part of the full salvation package. However, it seems that God does give special manifestations of some fruit of the Spirit to some Christians, enabling them to produce a superabundance of that fruit for the good of the body of Christ. Some manifest a superabundance of love, or joy, or kindness, etc., which is a significant blessing to the body of Christ.

Romans 12:1-8 is a very important cross-reference for Eph. 4:7. Romans 12:3, 6 (especially 12:6) use the word *grace* in a limited, special sense, which has much in common with Eph. 4:7.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, Rom. 12:3 uses the word *measure*.<sup>41</sup> In Rom. 12:3-8 the apostle Paul puts much emphasis on the need for each Christian (and especially for those in the ministry) to stay within their measure assigned by God. This staying within one's assigned measure is very important to the proper functioning and unity of the body of Christ. I urge the reader to see the discussion of Rom. 12:1-8 in my *A Paper on Faith*. First Corinthians 12:4-31 (with all of 1 Corinthians chapters 12-14) are discussed in my papers.

"Christ's gift" (Eph. 4:7; literally "the gift of Christ"), speaking of the gift that comes from Christ to each one of us, obviously comes by God's "grace." In other words, it is freely given, totally unearned, and God must receive all the glory for what is accomplished by His grace. But God's grace isn't effective in our lives unless we cooperate with His grace through faith (cf., e.g., 1 Cor. 15:10). This doesn't make grace any less grace, or rob God of any glory. God is glorified when we complete our assignments by His grace/Spirit, and we will be rewarded for faithfulness, not that God owes us anything (cf. 1 Cor. 3:14).

Christ, the head of the church, determines what the *measure* of each Christian should be. (Thank God for that! We would have a hard time trusting one another to determine our measure.) We all have important contributions to make to the proper functioning of

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<sup>40</sup> Some other verses that speak of the *grace* that enables Christians to minister in the body of Christ are Rom. 1:5; 1 Cor. 3:10; 1 Cor. 15:10; Gal. 1:15; 2:9; Eph. 3:2, 7, 8; and 1 Pet. 4:10. If we didn't minister by the grace/Spirit of God, we would have to minister in the flesh.

<sup>41</sup> Some other verses that use the word *measure* in a comparable way are Eph. 4:16 (discussed below); 2 Cor. 10:12-16 (especially 10:13); also see John 3:34.

the body of Christ. He determines what our assignments/ministries are to be in the body of Christ, and He distributes to us the gifts/grace required to fulfill those assignments/ministries. We can trust Him, and we dare not rebel against His plan for our lives. We must make it a top priority to cooperate with Him as He guides us into, and keeps us in, His plan for our lives. Also, as we are faithful He may increase our measure.

I believe one major problem we have in the body of Christ is that many Christians are determining what their measure should be, instead of Christ. (We must submit to the will of God in this area, as in every other area, or we're going to have chaos to one degree or another. His ways are always right and good!) There hasn't been much good teaching in the body of Christ on what the Bible says on this topic. For one thing, many ministers don't think in terms of limiting themselves to the measure assigned by God. (When ministers are not functioning in the measure assigned by God, it causes gigantic problems. For one thing, they will be "ministering" to some significant extent in the flesh, which leads to all sorts of big problems, including doctrinal errors.) As I mentioned, the need to limit ourselves to our assigned measure is a major point that the apostle Paul made in Rom. 12:3-8.

Many ministers (and the problem isn't limited to ministers) think they can do just about everything (this mentality permeates our culture) and that they don't have much need for the other ministries; but this isn't God's plan. (Many of us, and not just ministers, have picked up the idea that "I can do anything; in fact, anything you can do I can do better." Christians, if they aren't careful, can still be motivated by pride and stupidity. It's easy to be fleshly.) When Christians, and especially ministers, don't stay within their measure assigned by God, it leads to confusion and fleshly competition, and the body of Christ is out of divine order. For the body of Christ to function as it should, every Christian, and especially every minister, must make their proper contribution (in accordance with the plan and grace of God). Of course it's also true that we should always be open for God to use us anyway He sees fit to meet a need.

I'll quote part of what S. D. F. Salmond says under Eph. 4:7.<sup>42</sup> "God's gracious relation to *all* [referring back to Eph. 4:6] is a relation also to each *individual*. Not one of them was left unregarded by Him who is the God and Father of all, but each was made a partaker of Christ's gift of grace, and each, therefore, is able and stands pledged to do his part toward the maintenance of unity and peace." **(8) Therefore it says, "WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN."** [In verses 8-10 Paul makes an application of Psalm 68:18, which he loosely quoted here. He takes the words HE ASCENDED ON HIGH of the ascension of Christ back to glory after His atoning death (cf. Phil. 2:9-11). Christ had to descend before He could ascend. First He descended to the earth (from heaven) to be born of the virgin (e.g., Phil. 2:6, 7). Then, after His all-important atoning death on the cross, His soul/spirit descended into Hades ("He...descended into the lower parts of the earth" [Eph. 4:9]). Compare Acts 2:27 (NKJV "Because You will not leave my soul in Hades..."); Acts 2:31 (NKJV "...His soul was not left in Hades..."). (See the discussion on the meaning of Hades, Paradise, etc., starting on page 41 of this paper. I suggest the reader turn there now.) In their original setting these words of Psalm 68:18 spoke of God's ascending Mt. Zion (cf. Psalm 68:16) after defeating His opposition.

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<sup>42</sup> *Expositor's Greek Testament*, Vol. 3 [Eerdmans, 1974 reprint], page 323.



I'll quote part of what Ralph Earle said on the meaning of "the lower parts of the earth."<sup>43</sup> "This strange expression has provoked an endless amount of discussion, especially in the older commentaries. [I suppose this expression seems *strange* to Earle because he, in agreement with many, thinks this expression refers to Christ's coming down to the earth in the virgin birth, not of His descent into Hades.] There are two main interpretations. The first would refer it to a descent into Hades (cf. the Apostles' Creed). The second would apply it to the Incarnation. Some of the Early Church fathers, such as Irenaeus, Tertullian, Jerome, together with Erasmus, Bengel, Meyer, Alford, and others, took the former view. On the other hand, Calvin proposed the latter, and many modern commentators have followed him."

Paul takes the words HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES<sup>44</sup> of Christ's defeating sin, Satan, and spiritual death through His atoning death and resurrection (cf., e.g., John 12:31; Col. 2:15; and Heb. 2:14, 15). Having defeated them and taken them captive, so to speak, He could now give new-covenant salvation to those who submitted to Him and the new-covenant gospel in faith. He could now give new-covenant salvation to believers, which includes forgiveness and the indwelling Spirit to give them life and make them righteous and holy, and to distribute to them the grace/gifts to fulfill their measure in the body of Christ.

Taken in their fullest possible sense, Paul would be taking the words HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN to refer to all that we Christians receive in union with Christ Jesus. But in this context, with Eph. 4:7, the gifts could just refer to the grace/gifts that God gives to each Christian (and especially to those in the five-fold ministry), enabling them to fulfill their measure/ministry/assignments. It's also true that Paul spoke of Christ's giving the five-fold ministry to/for the church (Eph. 4:11). In the original setting of Psalm 68, the words HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES spoke of the opponents who were subdued. And in the original setting of Psalm 68, the words HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN spoke of God's sharing with His people (Israel) the spoils taken from those who were subdued.] **(9) (Now this expression "He ascended [cf. John 3:13]," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? [See under Eph. 4:8.] (10) He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens [cf. Eph. 1:20-23; Heb. 4:14; and 7:26], so that He might fill all things [For the resurrected, glorified Christ to "fill all things" includes the idea that He has all authority everywhere. See under Eph. 1:23.] (11) [The sentence that begins here goes through verse 16 in the Greek. It builds on Eph. 4:7, 8. One point that Paul makes in this sentence is the key importance of the five-fold ministry in the body of Christ, according to the plan of God. He didn't set them in the church to cause strife and divisions, or to make some Christians (those in the ministry) better than others.**

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<sup>43</sup> *Word Meanings in the New Testament* [Baker, 1986], page 311.

<sup>44</sup> There's a common view that is based on a misunderstanding of the KJV translation ("He led captivity captive"; the NASB has, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES). This view understands Paul to be saying that the captives were led from Hades to heaven, as if the meaning of the Greek verb here (*aichmalōtizō*) were *set free* instead of *make captive/take captive*. I do believe it's true, however (even though that's not what Paul said here), that since Christ defeated sin, Satan, and death in His atoning death and resurrection, He was able to take the believers from earlier days from Hades to heaven (cf. Heb. 11:39, 40; 12:23).

A proper functioning five-fold ministry (including their being properly received by the body of Christ) is a powerful force to promote unity and the proper functioning of the body of Christ. Every five-fold minister who is functioning as he should, in the will of God, will work for the good of the body of Christ. One major problem that frequently surfaced in Paul's day was that many rejected his ministry (and that of his companions) for one reason, or another, none of them being valid reasons. This rejection caused great damage to the body of Christ. There also was a serious problem with false apostles (and other false ministers) and with ministers walking to a significant extent in the flesh.

It's true, of course, that to the extent those in the ministry haven't been called by God into the ministry they are functioning in, or to the extent they aren't being faithful in their Christian lives/ministries, they have the potential to cause great damage to the body of Christ, including serious problems with disunity. Another key point that the apostle makes in this sentence is the need for those not in the five-fold ministry to make their necessary, important contributions to the proper functioning of the body of Christ. All must contribute according to their *measure* (see Eph. 4:7, 16).] **And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers** [Each five-fold minister (speaking of those who truly were called by God into that ministry) has been equipped by the grace/gifts of God to fulfill that ministry. God must receive all the glory for everything good that is accomplished. Every minister (every Christian) must be found faithful This is a very serious matter! We (and especially ministers) are affecting the lives of God's people.], **(12) for [Greek *pros*] the equipping of the saints** [The KJV has "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." The *Amplified Bible* has, "His intention was the perfecting and the full equipping of the saints." The NIV has "to prepare God's people."

The Greek noun (*katartismos*) used here wasn't used anywhere else in the New Testament, but the Greek verb this noun was derived from (*katartizō*) was used thirteen times. The verb includes the ideas of perfecting, completing, putting things in proper order, mending, restoring, training, and equipping. The Greek noun *katartisis* was also derived from this verb. It was used one time in the New Testament, 2 Cor. 13:9, "this we also pray for, that you may be made complete (NASB)"; "our prayer is for your perfection (NIV)"; the KJV has "perfection," and the NKJV has "made complete." I believe Paul's primary idea here in Eph. 4:12 is the perfecting/making complete of the saints (cf. Eph. 4:13-16), which includes equipping the saints.] **for [Greek *eis*] the work of service** [The KJV has "for the work of the ministry" instead of "for the work of service." I believe the KJV better communicates the meaning intended by the apostle. (I would put a comma after saints, with the KJV. We don't have the apostle's original punctuation.) Paul was speaking here, I believe, of the work of ministering by those in the five-fold ministry (Eph. 4:11). (The most common view in our day is that the saints do "the work of service.") The Greek noun used here (*diakonia*) was frequently translated "ministry" by the NASB, referring to those called into the ministry (e.g., Acts 1:25; 6:4; 20:24; Rom. 11:13; 2 Cor. 4:1; 6:3; Col. 4:17; and 2 Tim. 4:5). It's also true, as I have mentioned, that it is important and necessary for each Christian to make their contribution to the unity and proper functioning of the body of Christ, each according to their measure of grace (see under Eph. 4:7, 16).], **to [or "for" with the KJV and NKJV; Greek *eis*] the building up of the body of Christ** [All of the ministering by those in the

five-fold ministry (assuming they are functioning in the will of God and by the Spirit of God) works for the building up (edification), unity, and proper functioning of the body of Christ. In Eph. 4:16 Paul includes the idea that the service (ministry) of each Christian, as they fulfill their measure assigned by God, works toward “the building up of itself [the body] in love.”

I’ll quote part of what Max Turner says under Eph. 4:12.<sup>45</sup> “These leaders are said to have been given for three co-ordinate purposes. Christ gave them to equip or complete the saints; to serve the church’s needs, and to build up the body of Christ. Traditional Protestant interpretation (now reflected in all the modern translations including the NJB [*New Jerusalem Bible*]) has limited the function of the leaders to the first of these, arguing it is the equipped saints who then minister to the church and build it up, not the leaders. To propose that the latter are the subject of all three phrases is taken to be ‘Catholic’ and ‘clericalist’ interpretation. But while any ‘clericalist’ interpretation is clearly excluded by vs 7 and 16 (where the saints definitely have a part in the building up of the church), it is more probably the leaders’ functions which are still in view throughout v 12.”; **(13) until we all attain to the unity of the faith** [The body of Christ cannot function as it should, in divine order, apart from all true Christians attaining the unity of the faith. Ephesians 4:5 mentioned that there is only “one faith,” but when Paul wrote the epistle to the Ephesians, he knew that there were many current manifestations of Christians not having unity of the faith, for a variety of reasons. All Christians are required to hold and be committed to (which includes walking in line with) the basic truths that define Christianity, but it doesn’t always work out this way, as Eph. 4:14, for example, demonstrates. A primary function of the five-fold ministry is to bring about this unity of the faith (to bring things into divine order and keep things in divine order), but we have a major problem in our day in that many of those in the five-fold ministry aren’t solid in the foundational truths of Christianity themselves. We (and especially those in the five-fold ministry) must make it a top priority to learn, to teach, and to live in line with the balanced truths of Christianity, and especially the essential truths.

All ministers need to stop and seriously consider whether what they (and their group) are teaching and doing lines up with the truth (the balanced truth) of the Word of God. Just because we have been holding views for a long time doesn’t necessarily mean that they’re right. It seems to me that most ministers are not open to the idea that they might have serious defects in what they believe. I believe that many ministers are doing some building with “wood, hay, [and] straw” (1 Cor. 3:12), but I’m not the Judge. To *not* build with wood, hay, and straw requires building with the balanced truth of Christianity, and it requires conducting our lives and ministries by/after/in the Spirit, not the flesh.

This is a very serious matter! We must make it a top priority to check out our building materials now; let’s not wait until judgment day to find out. It would be very embarrassing (or worse) to find out then that we haven’t been fully faithful to God and that we have hindered the saints and done damage to the body of Christ., **and of the knowledge of the Son of God** [To the extent that we don’t know and/or aren’t committed to the essential truths of Christianity, or to the extent that we are living in fleshiness and worldliness and aren’t walking after the Spirit in righteousness and

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<sup>45</sup> *New Bible Commentary: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Edition* [Inter-Varsity Press, 1994], page 1238.

holiness, we haven't attained an adequate knowledge of the Son of God. Some other verses that speak of knowing Christ/God to consider are Gal. 4:8, 9; Eph. 1:17; Phil. 3:8, 10; Heb. 8:11; 2 Pet. 1:2, 3, 8; 2:20; and 1 John 2:3, 4, 13, 14; 4:6, 7.], **to a mature** [I somewhat prefer the translation "perfect" of the KJV and NKJV. All Christians, including young Christians, can and should be (relatively) perfect, which is the equivalent of living in an abiding state of holiness. See 1 Cor. 2:6<sup>46</sup>; Matt. 5:48; Col. 1:28; 4:12; Phil. 3:15; and Heb. 5:14; all these verses, including Eph. 4:13, use the same Greek adjective (*teleios*); all of them could be translated *perfect*, speaking of a relative perfection. Compare Heb. 10:14; 11:40. (These two verses use the Greek verb *teleioō*, which was derived from *teleios*.<sup>47</sup>) Christians who are walking in the truth by faith and by the Spirit are righteous and holy, and they can be called relatively perfect. This doesn't mean that they have arrived (cf. Phil. 3:8-16), or that they couldn't sin, or that they don't need to keep on growing/being transformed (e.g., 2 Cor. 3:18) and to keep pressing on (e.g., Phil. 3:12, 14). See the discussion of Phil. 3:8-16 in my verse-by-verse study of Philippians chapter 3.] **man** [In this context the "man" is the body of Christ. The body of Christ can't be perfect/mature until every true Christian is perfect/mature. I'm quite sure that there never has ever been a time in the history of the Christian church that the church, in its entirety (even if we limit the church to those who are born-again Christians), has ever arrived at the state spoken of in this verse, and it probably never will this side of glory. Nevertheless, this is what we are called to, and it's mandatory for each of us to do everything we can do toward this end. For a start, we're responsible to do everything we can do to get our own lives in divine order. We must not be satisfied with existing at a level lower than the one intended by God; we don't have any excuse for not doing the will of God.], **to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.** [Compare John 1:16; Eph. 1:23; 3:19; 4:15; Col. 1:19; and 2:9. The apostle is speaking of the church being filled with the fullness of Christ,<sup>48</sup> but for that to fully come to pass, each Christian must be filled with the fullness of Christ appropriate for that person. Even as young Christians we can, and should be filled with Christ, not self, fleshiness, and worldliness. To the extent we're not filled with Christ, we're not holy, spiritual (by the Spirit), (relatively) perfect, or living in the center of God's will. As Paul continues with verses 14, 15, we can see that one primary concern he had as he wrote these words contained in verse 13 was with

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<sup>46</sup> Many of the Corinthian Christians were more fleshly than spiritual (by the Spirit), but it wasn't acceptable (cf. 1 Cor. 3:1-4) or safe for them to remain in that state. Those who are led by the Spirit (and all Christians are required to follow after the Spirit, which includes walking in the truth by faith) will be relatively perfect.

<sup>47</sup> These super-important verses from Hebrews are discussed in *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*, pages 158, 159 and 166, 167.

<sup>48</sup> In Eph. 3:14-19 the apostle prayed a very significant prayer. (These verses are discussed in some detail in my *A Paper on Faith*.) The prayer emphasizes, for one thing, our need for the empowering work of the Holy Spirit, "that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man...." The prayer ends with the words, "that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God," which is comparable in meaning with the words at the end of Eph. 4:13, "to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

In Eph. 3:19 and here in 4:13 the apostle is speaking of the ideal state that should characterize all true Christians. The gospel has been proclaimed; the Spirit has been given; we must cooperate with God's grace through faith in accordance with His Word and walk in/by/after the Spirit.

those Christians who were not adequately holding to, and living in, the truth of God. They weren't solid on the basic Christian doctrines. Also, significantly, Eph. 4:24 shows that the *truth* includes righteousness and holiness.

I'll quote a few sentences from what R. C. H. Lenski says under Eph. 4:13.<sup>49</sup> "[to arrive at the measure of the fullness of Christ] is the goal for all of us. Some attain it quickly by maturing spiritually by leaps and bounds. Alas, many lag, love to stay in the infant age. [This can be very dangerous!] They have only a little of the fulness of Christ but could and should have all its wealth." **(14) As a result** [The margin of the NASB gives a literal translation, "that we no longer be." The NKJV has, "that we should no longer be." We must quickly (with a top priority, by God's sufficient grace) leave all such manifestations of babyhood and immaturity behind.], **we are no longer to be children** [The NIV has "infants" for the Greek noun used here (*nēpios*). This Greek noun was also used in 1 Cor. 3:1; 13:11; Gal. 4:1, 3, etc. Paul certainly wasn't saying that all Christians go through a stage comparable to the one pictured here in 4:14. (The problems that Paul speaks of as he continues with this verse are quite serious.) It's a dangerous place to be, and Paul wasn't making excuses for those doing it. He sharply rebuked the Corinthian Christians (that is, he sharply rebuked some of them, where the rebuke was needed) for still being babes in Christ, for being fleshly (speaking of things like jealousy and strife) instead of walking by the Spirit (1 Cor. 3:1). The church at Corinth had been founded a few years before Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. If I understand Paul he typically expected to see a reasonable level of holiness, spirituality, (relative) perfection, maturity within a few months (IF NOT SOONER), not a few years, or a lifetime. We should encourage all Christians, including new converts, with the sufficiency of God's grace to enable them to think and live in the center of God's will. I'm not saying, however, that we should be quick to jump on Christians, especially new converts, if they should miss it in some area. See the section titled "A Discussion on the Overall Teaching of the Book of Ephesians Regarding How Long It Should Take for Christians to Become Holy/Spiritual (by the Spirit)/(Relatively) Perfect," that comes after Eph. 4:16 and before 4:17.], **tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming** [The Greek noun (*methodeia*) translated "scheming" here was only used here and in Eph. 6:11 in the New Testament. There are many working against us, including some "Christians," but God is much greater than those working against us.]; **(15) but speaking the truth** [I believe the translation "holding the truth" is better. If we hold the truth (unlike those pictured in Eph. 4:14) and begin to cooperate with God's sufficient grace (which includes all the work of His Spirit, including His work through the five-fold ministry and all Christians<sup>50</sup>), we can very quickly grow out of (be transformed out of) the state of immaturity, leaving it behind, and becoming what Christians are supposed to be. God is the one who causes growth (e.g., 1 Cor. 3:6, 7; Col. 2:19), but growth won't take place if we don't do our part of submitting to God's Word and cooperating with His

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<sup>49</sup> *St Paul's Epistles to the Galatians to the Ephesians and to the Philippians* [Augsburg, 1937], page 537.

<sup>50</sup> This shows one of the primary reasons it's so difficult to live for God in holiness in most generations, very much including our own generation. When much of the body of Christ is not living in holiness and walking in the Spirit, it makes it more difficult for us to be holy, since we are not receiving all the grace that we should receive from/through the body of Christ. Anyway, if we put God first and His truth, righteousness, and holiness, He will enable us to live in holiness.

grace. Walking in/by/after the Holy Spirit by faith is not automatic, and it is not always easy. In this context Paul would want to emphasize making sure we listen to those in the five-fold ministry who are faithful to God and who know, teach, and live the truth (like Paul and his companions.) **in love** [For all Christians to walk in love is obviously very important to the unity and proper functioning of the body of Christ. Paul mentions love again at the end of Eph. 4:16, emphasizing the importance of love. We discussed the fruit of the Spirit under Eph. 4:7. Love is the first fruit of the Spirit listed by Paul in Gal. 5:22, 23.], **we are to grow up** [The form of the Greek verb used here shows the close relationship between this verb, which could be translated “that we grow up,” and the verb used in Eph. 4:14, which could be translated “that we no longer be children [babies/infants].” Both verbs are in the subjunctive mode in the Greek (which helps confirm that these two verbs are related in this discourse).<sup>51</sup> By growing up we leave the immaturity of babyhood behind. The form of immaturity pictured in Eph. 4:14 is totally unacceptable. To use the apostle’s word of Eph. 4:22-24 (cf. 4:25-32), we need to once-for-all and completely put off everything that belongs to the old man and to once-for-all and completely put on the new man in Christ.

I have made this point already, but it needs to be emphasized: We cannot grow up to the holiness/(relative) perfection/maturity that we so desperately need without holding to the basic truths of Christianity and walking in/by/after the Spirit, cooperating with God’s grace (all the grace that is available to us) through faith.] **in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ** [In Eph. 4:13 Paul spoke of “the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.” In Eph. 3:16-19 he prayed that God would grant his readers “to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; so that Christ may [fully] dwell in [their] hearts through faith [This is comparable in meaning with having the stature that belongs to the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13), and with growing up into Christ in all aspects (Eph. 4:15)]...that [they] may be filled up to all the fullness of God [which is comparable in meaning with being filled up with all the fullness of Christ].” We (as individuals and corporately, as the church) must grow up from (grow beyond) all wrong doctrine, fleshiness, worldliness, and everything else that detracts from God’s will being accomplished in our lives and in the church.], **(16)** [Colossians 2:19 is an important cross-reference for this verse.<sup>52</sup>] **from whom [Christ] the whole body, being fitted and held together** [The members of the body being fitted together and being held together is part of what enables the body of Christ to have unity and to function properly. The Greek participle translated “held together” was formed from the Greek verb *sumbibazō*. The BAGD Greek Lexicon lists the use of this Greek verb here in Eph. 4:16 under the heading “bring together, unite.” The NKJV translated this participle “knit together.”] **by what every joint supplies** [Literally, “through every

<sup>51</sup> Many commentators understand these verbs to be closely related to one another in the Greek, including the Greek scholar A. T. Robertson in his *Word Pictures in the New Testament*.

<sup>52</sup> This verse starts out, “and not holding fast to the head.” It should be obvious that all Christians, even those young in the faith, are required to hold fast to Christ. If we don’t, we’re going to have serious problems. We shouldn’t tell converts that God expects them to be irresponsible, unfaithful babies for a period of time. On the other hand, I’m not saying that converts are automatically transformed and given a mature walk in truth, righteousness, and holiness by the Spirit. We must all do our part. And I’m certainly not suggesting that we should panic and rebuke young Christians if they exhibit some fleshiness for a period. God is merciful and generous, but let’s not presume upon His mercy and generosity. Let’s not say that we cannot live as God wants us to live—His grace is sufficient, IF we appropriate it.

joint of the supply.” In this word picture the “joint[s]” apparently represent the five-fold ministry. (Several commentators make this point.) This picture (along with Eph. 4:11-14; cf. Eph. 3:1-13) rather strongly emphasizes the importance of the five-fold ministry for the growth, proper functioning, and unity of the body of Christ. Much of the supply that comes from God for the growth, proper functioning, and unity of the church comes through the five-fold ministry. This is not to deny, of course, the important fact that each true Christian is indwelt by the Spirit of God and is in direct union with Christ Jesus (and God the Father).], **according to the proper working of each individual part** [It’s important to have a more literal translation of the Greek here, “according to the working in the measure of each individual part.” For one thing, it’s important to include the word *measure* in the translation because of the use of this word in Eph. 4:7 (and Rom. 12:3). As we discussed, Eph. 4:7 emphasized the important point that each Christian has been allotted the grace (whether it has been appropriated, or not) to make their important contribution to the proper functioning and unity of the body of Christ—very much including their contribution to the all-important growth of the body into (relative) perfection/maturity/holiness.], **causes the growth of the body for the building up** [On building up/edification, cf. Acts 20:32; Rom. 14:19; 15:2; 1 Cor. 14:3-5, 12, 17, 26; 2 Cor. 10:8; 12:19; Eph. 4:29; and 1 Thess. 5:11. In Eph. 4:12 Paul spoke of the five-fold ministry building up/edifying the body of Christ. It’s clear that every single Christian is important and has important roles to fulfill.] **of itself in love** [There’s a strong emphasis on love here, with the word also being used in Eph. 4:15. This emphasis on love goes with the emphasis on unity].” We can also speak of the growth (transformation) of those who are already mature/relatively perfect/holy (cf., e.g., 2 Cor. 3:18; 1 Cor. 2:6; and 2 Pet. 3:17, 18), but it doesn’t seem that such growth (though it’s extremely important) is included in the picture of Eph. 4:12-16 (which, with 4:11, is all one sentence in the Greek). At least it seems that any such growth is subordinated in this sentence to the idea of quickly growing into a solid state of (relative) perfection/maturity/holiness (which the church at Corinth desperately needed). In the ideal case the growth of Christians won’t involve putting off sin, because we will already be living in an abiding state of holiness.

There always is room for the growth of Christians, even Christians who are holy/sanctified, in areas like knowledge, wisdom, godliness, and conformity with Christ, for the growth that comes through trials, and for the growth that comes from just being in communion with God (we are constantly being bombarded with glory rays when we live in His presence; such rays are very good for our health and well-being). Then too, we are headed for a gigantic spurt in growth (a glorious transformation) when Christ returns and we are glorified. Then we will be conformed to the image of Christ in a much fuller sense than we ever could be while living on this side of glory (e.g., Rom. 8:29), and then we will be able to know Him on a much deeper level than we can now (e.g., 1 Cor. 13:11, 12). Furthermore, I suggest we will continue to grow (be transformed) after we are glorified, and throughout eternity. God has ways to always be able to make things better. From glory to a greater glory to a greater glory! From perfection to a greater perfection to a greater perfection! He can always do more than what we could anticipate. We’ll never be able to fully plumb the depths of God and what He is capable of.

I'll quote part of what Richard J. Erickson said regarding unity when discussing Eph. 4:7, 16.<sup>53</sup> "Only on this foundation of unity, ultimately to be found in the unity of God, can the unity of the family possibly come to reality. By the same token, the members of the body, unified in theory but fragmented by nature, could never see themselves brought to union, as God wishes them to be, without the needed tools and enablement. God has therefore given grace to them all (v. 7), to each one differently as Christ has seen fit liberally to apportion (no sense of stinginess is to be associated here with the word apportion [measure]). ... This section [Eph. 4:1-16] closes with a metaphorical model of unity. Like the human body, held together by design, the church grows through the coordinated and cooperative work of its many members, who out of love for the whole contribute their individual efforts toward the good of the whole. But the plan and energy are drawn from the head who watches over and provides for his body. Indeed he lives his own life out through it (v. 16)."

I'll quote part of what Klyne Snodgrass said on Eph. 4:1-16 under the subheading *The responsibility of the individual*,<sup>54</sup> "... While it is true that some have a special responsibility to teach and preach [etc.], Paul stresses that every Christian is responsible to build up the church. We have all received grace for ministry [using the word "ministry" in a very full sense].... only as each person fulfills his or her calling is the church truly strong."

I'll also quote part of what Snodgrass said on pages 217, 218. "So often Christianity is presented as if nothing is required of believers. We place so much emphasis on human weakness, on our inability to do anything profitable, and on the necessity of God's actions in salvation that no room is left for human responsibility. *The New Testament never gives this impression!* ... This [to live like God enables and requires us to live] requires an act of the will and a determination to follow through. ...

... None of this suggests we accomplish anything by ourselves, but life with God and by his help is a life of discipline and effort. ...

... We protest that no one can actually live worthy of this calling and express our fears of perfectionism. The text is anxious about neither; its concern is only that our lives are shaped by God's salvation. Right theology should lead to right conduct. [One major problem is that much of the theology isn't right, very much including the teaching that Christians will necessarily continue sinning until they are glorified.] ... Our understanding of our call must be sincere and honest, going to the depths of our being. ...."

When we think of the growth of the body of Christ, we can also think of the growth that comes with the continual adding of new believers to the church. It doesn't seem that that type of growth is considered in Eph. 4:15, 16, but that type of growth (along with other factors) ensures that the five-fold ministry will be needed until Jesus returns. Since the body of Christ is under constant attack from the world, the flesh, and the devil, one major need is for us to be very careful we don't go backwards and lose any part of what we have attained in Christ (cf., e.g., Phil. 3:16). We can't be passive or static; we must always press on in Christ (cf. Phil. 3:12-15). It causes major problems when those in the five-fold ministry fall backwards (or never get on the straight and narrow path to begin with); they often take many Christians with them.]

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<sup>53</sup> *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible* [Baker, 1989], pages 1027, 1028.

<sup>54</sup> *Ephesians* [Zondervan, 1996], page 212. I recently learned that Snodgrass is a Southern Baptist. Thanks be to God for all the good fruit that comes from that segment of the body of Christ.



**A Discussion on the Overall Teaching of the Book of Ephesians  
Regarding How Long It Should Take for Christians to Become Holy/Spiritual  
(by the Spirit)/(Relatively) Perfect**

It fits the epistle of Paul to the Ephesians (and it fits the entire New Testament) to speak of Christians being, or very quickly becoming, what they (by God's definition) can, and should, and must be as Christians. I bring this up here for two reasons. First, there's a very widespread viewpoint in the body of Christ that it's unrealistic, even unbiblical, to think in terms of Christians abiding in a state of holiness or (relative) perfection. This is, nevertheless, the dominant viewpoint presented in the New Testament. On this topic see my book, *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*. For a start see pages 169-171.

The first paragraph starting on page 171 is especially relevant to the viewpoint presented in Eph. 4:12-16. I'll quote that paragraph here, "Several verses that I have listed do not quite fit the ideal pattern, but they help demonstrate that this pattern does exist. [I'm speaking of the ideal pattern that Christians, even those who are young in the faith, are actually to be set apart from sin and to live for God in an abiding state of holiness/(relative) perfection. The New Testament doesn't present this as an unrealistic or unattainable ideal.] These verses deal with situations in which some Christians were not yet adequately set apart from sin. Four such verses are 1 Thess. 5:23; 2 Tim. 2:21 (both are listed and discussed on pages 178, 179 of *Holiness and Victory Over Sin* under *hagiazō*) and 2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Thess 3:13 (both are listed and discussed on pages 182-185 under *hagiōsunē*). In all four of these verses, the apostle Paul was concerned that this inadequate situation be soon rectified and these Christians become sanctified."

A second reason I mentioned what I did in the first sentence of the first paragraph is that what Paul said in Eph. 4:12-16 (like the four verses just mentioned in the quotation; but unlike the dominant viewpoint presented in the book of Ephesians and throughout the New Testament) doesn't fit the ideal pattern. The fact that many Christians fall short of what we are called to, including quite a few Christians spoken of in the New Testament, doesn't change God's ideal for Christians. Let's set our sights on God's best; let's not try to find out how much fleshiness/worldliness we can get by with and still make it to heaven. That's a dangerous way to think. Furthermore, the Bible doesn't back up the idea that all that really matters is that we squeeze into heaven—we're going to have to answer to God, and there will be rewards, and loss of rewards.

*Let's look at what the book of Ephesians says regarding the issue we're considering:* We're called, and enabled, to be "holy and blameless before [God]" (Eph. 1:4); "we have [the] redemption through His blood" out of the kingdom of sin, Satan, spiritual death, and darkness (Eph. 1:7); "we have been sealed in [Christ] with the Holy Spirit," the mighty Spirit who dwells in us, who makes us alive, makes us righteous and holy, etc. (Eph. 1:13); the same great power—the resurrection power—that raised Christ from the dead has been made available to us, which enables us to live in/with Christ (Eph. 1:19, 20); God the Father "put all things in subjection under [Christ's] feet"; He then gave Him, with His authority over all things, to/for the benefit of the church (Eph. 1:20-23).

God the Father "made us alive together with Christ...and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places" (Eph. 2:5, 6); "we are His workmanship,

created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10); “for through [Christ] we both [Jews and Gentiles] have our access in one Spirit to the Father” (Eph. 2:18); the glorious prayer that Paul prayed for his readers (which applies to all Christians) in Eph. 3:14-19 is very relevant; this prayer included the request that his readers “be strengthened with power through [God’s] Spirit in the inner man so that Christ may [fully] dwell [cf. Eph. 4:13, 15] in [their/our] hearts through [the] faith...that [they/we] may be filled up to all the fullness of God” (Paul, many of his companions, and some of his readers had already entered into such a relationship with God the Father through Christ Jesus [at least to a substantial extent], but there’s always room for more); “Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us” (Eph. 3:20).

Please reread Eph. 4:1-6, especially 4:1-3; these verses clearly spoke of things Paul expected of his readers *then*, not just after a (lengthy) period of growth; Ephesians 4:17 to the end of the epistle at 6:24 is literally packed with teaching and exhortations written from the viewpoint that we as Christians are to be mature, relatively perfect, righteous, holy, humble, obedient, victorious, etc. *now*, not just at some time in the future; I’ll list many examples as we continue with this section: We are to walk no longer as the Gentiles walk in the futility of their mind/way of thinking (Eph. 4:17); we have been taught (and enabled) in Christ to once-for-all lay aside the sinful old man, to be renewed by the Spirit in our mind/way of thinking, and to put on the new man, “which...has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (Eph. 4:22-24); then, in the rest of the verses of chapter 4, Paul exhorts his readers to lay aside falsehood (not just gradually taper off falsehood/lying) and speak truth with one another, for they are members of one another (Eph. 4:25); to not give the devil any place in them (Eph. 4:27); to steal no more but to work so they can share with those in need (Eph. 4:28); to let no unwholesome word proceed from their mouths, but only edifying words (Eph. 4:29); to not grieve the Holy Spirit (by failing to walk after the Spirit in the will of God) by whom they were sealed for the day of redemption (Eph. 4:30); to put away all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, and malice and to be kind to one another, tender hearted and forgiving each other (Eph. 4:31, 32). Note that the things just listed from Eph. 4:25-32 are all part of putting off the old man and putting on the new man of Eph. 4:22-24; and note that such things are all part of what it means for Christians to be (relatively) perfect and that these things promote the unity of the body of Christ.

Throughout Ephesians chapter 5 Paul exhorts his readers to live on a high level, a level that includes being righteous, holy, blameless, (relatively) perfect, mature, and godly; “be imitators of God, as beloved children” (Eph. 5:1) (how’s that for a high calling?; it certainly includes walking in holiness and being relatively perfect); “walk in love, just as Christ also loved you” (Eph. 5:2); “immorality, or any impurity or greed must not even be named [as existing] among you, as is proper among saints; and *there must be no* filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting [proper], but rather giving of thanks. For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater [who bows before the things he covets], has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these [sinful] things the wrath of God [instead of an inheritance in the kingdom of God] comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be

partakers with them [of the wrath of God]; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light *consists* in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn [better, “approving” (with a renewed mind; cf. Eph. 4:17, 23; Rom. 8:5-8; 12:2)] what is pleasing to the Lord. Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness...” (Eph. 5:3-11<sup>55</sup>); “Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of [redeeming] the time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled [on a continuous basis] with the Spirit...always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ” (Eph. 5:15-21); “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory [better, “glorious”], having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless” (Eph. 5:25-27). The Lamb has been slain. Everything we need to be holy and blameless has been provided (cf., e.g., Eph. 1:3, 4, 7). It’s important to see that Paul speaks here (in Eph. 5:22-33) of the church having already been presented to Christ; the two have already become one; we must be faithful to Him *now* (cf., e.g., 2 Cor. 11:2, 3). In these verses Paul uses Christ’s *present* love for the church, His bride, as an illustration of how the husband should love his wife. Ephesians 5:22-33 are discussed on pages 174-178 of *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*.

In Eph. 6:1-9 Paul exhorts children, parents, slaves, and masters of slaves to live as Christians should live before God, the Judge; in Eph. 6:10-20 he exhorts his readers to fight the good fight against Satan and his hosts, making it a top priority to maintain truth, righteousness, faith, salvation, prayer, etc. by rightly using the full armor supplied by God. Ephesians 6:10-20 are discussed in my *A Paper on Faith* (pages 55-58 of the internet version).

### **A Discussion on the Meaning of the Word *Hades* in Acts 2:27, 31; the Meaning of *Paradise* in Luke 23:43; and the Meaning of *Abraham’s Bosom* in Luke 16:22**

I assume, in agreement with many, that Jesus, after His death, went to that part (compartment) of *Hades* where the believers were. That same place is apparently called *Paradise* in Luke 23:43 (“And He [Jesus] said to him [the repentant man on the cross next to Him], ‘Truly I say to you, today you shall be with me in Paradise.’ ” Luke 16:22 also speaks of that same place (Abraham would have been in Paradise) with the words *Abraham’s bosom* (“Now the poor man [Lazarus] died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham’s bosom...”).

In accordance with the prophecy of Psalm 16:10, which was quoted in Acts 2:27, Jesus didn’t remain in Hades/Sheol. (*Hades* is the Greek noun used in Acts 2:27, 31. *Sheol* is the Hebrew noun used in Psalm 16:10.) He was resurrected on the third day. I believe the translation of the NKJV “You will not leave my soul in Hades” (Acts 2:27) (or “thou wilt not leave” of the KJV) better communicates the meaning intended by Paul

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<sup>55</sup> Ephesians 5:3-8 are briefly discussed on page 186 of *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*.

than the translation of the NASB (YOU WILL NOT ABANDON MY SOUL TO HADES). The translation of the NASB leaves some ambiguity: “Abandon” could be understood (rightly I believe) to mean that His soul went to Hades/Sheol, but that He didn’t stay there long; or it could (wrongly I believe) be understood to mean that His soul never went to Hades/Sheol (which is the viewpoint of many). The BAGD Greek Lexicon (under the Greek verb *egkatalēipō*, which was translated “You will [not] leave” by the NKJV) has, “*leave... allow to remain...the soul in Hades Acts 2:27....*”

I’ll quote part of what F. Godet said under Luke 16:22 and 23:43.<sup>56</sup> “In Jewish theology, the angels are charged with receiving the souls of pious Israelites, and transporting them to that portion of Hades which is reserved for them. *Abraham’s bosom*, a figure also common among the Rabbins [Rabbis], denotes either intimate communion in general (John 1:18), or more specially the place of honor at a feast (John 13:23); this is naturally assigned to the newly-arrived stranger.... Meyer concludes, from the fact that the internment [burial] of Lazarus is not mentioned, and from the object *auton, him*, that he was transported body and soul to Abraham’s bosom. But so early as in the Targum of Canticles, we find the distinction between body and soul: ‘The righteous whose souls are carried by angels to paradise.’ The pronoun *auton* thus designates only his true self, the soul. The burial of Lazarus is not mentioned, for it took place without ceremony.... The contrast to the rich man is evident. No angels to transport his soul; but for his body, on the contrary, a splendid funeral procession.” And under Luke 23:43, Godet said, “...this word *paradise* is applied to that part of Hades where the faithful are assembled; and even in the last writings of the N. T., the Epistles and the Apocalypse, to a yet higher abode... 2 Cor. 12:4; Rev. 2:7. It is paradise as part of Hades which is spoken of here [in Luke 23:43].”

I’ll quote part of what Alfred Plummer said under Luke 16:22, 23 and 23:43.<sup>57</sup> “Lazarus in Sheol reposes with his head on Abraham’s breast, as a child in his father’s lap, and shares his happiness. Compare John 1:18. The expression [Abraham’s bosom] is not common in Jewish writings; but Abraham is sometimes represented as welcoming the penitent into paradise. [See] Edersheim *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, [Vol.] 2, page 280. ... It [Abraham’s bosom] is not a synonym for paradise; but to repose on Abraham’s bosom is to be in paradise, for Abraham is there....”

Under Luke 16:23 Plummer said (in part), “That Hades does not mean ‘hell’ as a place of punishment is manifest from Acts 2:27, 31; Gen. 37:35; 42:38; 44:29; Job 14:13; 17:13; etc. That Hades includes a place of punishment is equally clear from this passage.”

And under Luke 23:43 Plummer said, “The word [Paradise], said to be of Persian origin, is used in various senses in Scripture: 1. ‘a park or pleasure-ground’ (Neh. 2:8; Cant. 4:13; Eccl. 2:5); 2. ‘the garden of Eden’ (Gen. 2:8-10, 15, 16; 3:1-3, 8-10; etc.); 3. ‘Abraham’s bosom,’ i.e. the resting-place of the souls of the just until the resurrection (the meaning here)<sup>58</sup> 4. ‘a region in heaven,’ perhaps identical with ‘the third heaven’ (2 Cor. 12:4).”

<sup>56</sup> *Gospel of St. Luke* (Funk, 1881), pages 393, 494.

<sup>57</sup> *Gospel According to St. Luke* [T. & T. Clark, fifth edition, the third edition was dated in 1900], pages 393, 394, 536.

<sup>58</sup> I believe that the believers left Hades behind when Jesus did (about that time anyway); they are now in heaven, heaven in a preliminary (pre resurrection) sense.

I'll quote a sentence from what Henry Alford said on the meaning of the word *Paradise* under Luke 23:43.<sup>59</sup> "The word [Paradise] is used of the *garden of Eden* by the LXX [Septuagint], Gen. 2:8, etc., and subsequently became, in the Jewish theology, the name for that part of Hades, the abode of the dead, where the souls of the righteous await the resurrection."

I'll quote part of what James Orr said regarding the "Ideas of Sheol" circulating among the Jews in the times that Jesus lived.<sup>60</sup> "Generally, however, in the apocalyptic books, a marked change is seen in the ideas of Sheol. It is still the place of the dead, but is regarded more as a state intermediate between death and the resurrection for such as shall be raised; in which righteous and wicked are separated; in which the wicked suffer punishment. The Book of Enoch<sup>61</sup> distinguishes four abodes for the departed – two for the righteous, and two for the wicked (21 1-13). One class of the wicked (those already punished in this life) remain there forever, while the others are raised, and pass to the torment of Gehenna (17 2). The righteous are in Paradise – 'the garden of life' (61 12), 'the garden of righteousness' (67 3)."

I'll also quote part of what G. R. Lewis said in his article on "Paradise."<sup>62</sup> First I'll give an excerpt from what he said under the heading "In later Jewish thought." "Stewart D. F. Salmond helpfully summarizes this material. 'In the Rabbinical literature the term [Paradise] has various senses.... Sometimes it is the general abode of the righteous dead; sometimes the happy side of sheol; sometimes the home of the specially privileged few, the abode of those who have never seen death, the place where Messiah Himself waits for the time of His manifestation.'"

Now I'll quote part of what Lewis said under the heading, "In the NT." He is speaking regarding Luke 23:43. "What meaning of 'Paradise' did Jesus intend the thief to understand? Alford, following Grotius, suggested that Jesus spoke to the thief in terms of the Jewish belief in a portion of Hades for the righteous dead, but spoke with a fuller meaning knowing that the same day he would open paradise at God's right hand. ...and some little time after on the same day was with the thief in the presence of God." I don't believe we should think of the believers being taken from Hades/Sheol/Paradise to heaven before Jesus was resurrected on the third day. Matthew 27:53 shows that a select number of saints were resurrected bodily after Jesus was. (Surely Jesus was resurrected first [cf. 1 Cor. 15:20-23; Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5; and Rom. 8:29]). Most of the believers dwelling in Hades/Paradise were not resurrected bodily at that time (they're still waiting, along with the Christians who have died the past two thousand years, for the resurrection at the time of Christ's return), but I believe (in agreement with many) that they were taken to Paradise in a higher sense. They were taken to heaven, to the place where true Christians go at death (cf. 2 Cor. 5:1-8; Phil. 1:21, 23; and 1 Thess. 4:13, 14). Hebrews 11:39, 40; 12:23 are important verses that help confirm that the believers from Old Testament days have now been taken to heaven through the victory gained by Christ

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<sup>59</sup> *New Testament for English Readers*, Vol. 1 [Baker, 1983 reprint], page 442.

<sup>60</sup> Article titled "Eschatology of the Old Testament" in Vol. 2 of the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* [Eerdmans, 1939], page 978.

<sup>61</sup> George Eldon Ladd ("Apocalyptic Literature," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Fully Revised*, Vol. 1 [Eerdmans, 1979], page 156) says, "most scholars believe [the books of Enoch] were written between 165 and 64 B.C., but conclusions vary considerably."

<sup>62</sup> *Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol. 4 [Zondervan, 1975], pages 598, 599.

Jesus. On these verses from Hebrews, see pages 166, 167 of *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*.

I'll also quote from Lewis' last heading, "Doctrinal significance." "In defense of the view that paradise was originally a portion of Hades, Louis Sperry Chafer argued that 'An illustration of this belief is given by Christ in the account of the rich man and Lazarus' (Luke 16:19-31). That it [Paradise] was removed from Hades to the presence of God, he taught was indicated by Ephesians 4:8-10 (*Systematic Theology* VII, 247, 248). The note on Hades at Luke 16 in the original Scofield Bible distinguished between Hades before the ascension of Christ (which had a compartment called paradise, or Abraham's bosom) and Hades after the ascension. ... paradise has been removed from Hades and 'is now in the immediate presence of God.' It is believed that Ephesians 4:8-10 indicates the time of the change."

**Ephesians 4:17-32.** These verses, especially when coupled with Ephesians chapters 5 and 6, constitute one of the more significant passages in the New Testament exhorting Christians with the enablement and requirement (which is a great privilege) to walk in righteousness and holiness with the victory over sin through salvation in Christ Jesus.

**So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk** [The apostle Paul was writing this epistle to Gentiles who had now become Christians (cf. Eph. 1:11-13; 2:11-3:8). The non-Christian Gentiles were, of course, walking (living) in sin.], **in the futility** [or, "emptiness, vanity"; cf., e.g., Rom. 1:28; 1 Pet. 1:18] **of their mind** [or, "way of thinking." Many Christians wrongly think that the words *mind* and *thinking* in the Bible are limited to something that man does with the head (the brain). That's a rather serious error. These words typically include something that man does with the heart/inner man/spirit/soul, not just with the head. See under Rom. 8:5-7 on pages 118, 119 of my book, *Holiness and Victory Over Sin* (including note 32), and see below under Eph. 4:18, 23 (4:23 uses the same Greek noun [*nous*] used here in 4:17).], **(18) being darkened in their understanding** [cf. Rom. 1:21], **excluded from the life of God** [cf. Eph. 2:1] **because of the ignorance that is in them** [cf. Acts 17:30; 1 Pet. 1:14], **because of the hardness of their heart** [Compare Mark 3:5; 2 Cor. 3:14. These words confirm that man is responsible for his sin. The sin problem originates in the heart of man (cf. Mark 7:20-23). (In a more general sense the sin problem originated in the fall of Satan; then mankind followed Satan in his rebellion against God.) From the heart man must submit to God in faith; in the heart the priorities, attitudes, and motives are established. What we think about God in our hearts, including our priorities, attitudes, and motives constitute a big part of our important thinking.]; **(19) and they, having become callous** [Their consciences have become insensitive. The NIV has, "having lost all sensitivity." Compare 1 Tim. 4:2.], **have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness** [or, "insatiableness, covetousness." Colossians 1:21 speaks of the former (pre Christian) status of Paul's Gentile readers as being "alienated and hostile in mind (*dianoia*), *engaged* in evil deeds." If we think wrong in our hearts, we will live wrong.]. **(20) But you did not learn Christ in this way** [What they had learned about Christ and salvation through Him, and in Him, put the emphasis on the fact that God sent His Son to solve the sin problem through forgiveness, redemption from the kingdom of sin, and

righteous and holy living in union with Christ through the indwelling Holy Spirit.), **(21) if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus** [Compare John 14:6; Eph. 1:13; and Col. 1:5. Significantly, Eph. 4:24 demonstrates that the *truth* includes righteousness and holiness.], **(22) that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self** [I would translate “old man,” with the KJV and NKJV. On the old man, which speaks of what we were before we became Christians, see Rom. 6:6; Col. 3:9 (both of these verses specifically mention the “old man”); Gal. 5:24; and Col. 2:11, 12. Romans 6:3, 4 teach that the old man has died and been buried with Christ, and Rom. 6:6 teaches that the old man was crucified with Christ (the emphasis of these verses is on dying to sin [Rom. 6:2]). Colossians 2:11 says the body of the flesh (which is comparable in meaning with the old man) has been removed by the spiritual circumcision we received through Christ, and 2:12 says we were buried with Him (which, as Rom. 6:3, 4 show, goes with dying with Christ). Galatians 5:24 speaks of the same end result from a little different point of view, “Now those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh [which is comparable with crucifying the old man] with its passions and desires.” Colossians 3:9 communicates the same message as Gal. 5:24, using a different figure of speech, with the words, “you laid aside the old man with its *evil* practices.” Ephesians 4:22 communicates the same end result but from a slightly different perspective. This verse doesn’t assume that the old man has been fully laid aside. Paul writes from the point of view that anything that remains of the old man (which, in the ideal case would have already been dealt with) must now once-for-all be laid aside (or put to death).

Many verses in the New Testament confirm that it’s not uncommon for Christians to still have sinful things, things that are part of the old man, that still need to be put off. The New Testament (and the experience of all Christians) makes it very clear that the old man isn’t automatically laid aside or put to death. The old man will continue to live (and the result will be sin for the Christian) to the extent the Christian doesn’t walk after the Spirit through faith on a continuous basis, thereby keeping the old man from living (from expressing itself in sinful ways). And it’s true, of course, that Christians can’t have faith to walk above sin unless they know for sure that this is what they are called to. *This widespread lack of knowledge and faith is a big part of the problem in our day.*

Ephesians 4:25, which uses the same Greek verb as 4:22, is an important cross-reference. There Paul exhorts his readers to lay aside falsehood. (The KJV, NKJV have “putting away lying.” See Rev. 21:8; 22:15.) Laying aside falsehood/lying is just part of what it means to lay aside the old man. Also, as Paul continues with Eph. 4:25-31, he lists some of the other sinful things that must be once-for-all laid aside by all Christians. Note “put away from you” (using a different Greek verb) in 4:31. Compare Col. 3:8; Heb. 12:1; James 1:21; and 1 Pet. 2:1.], **which is being corrupted** [I prefer the translation of the KJV, “which is corrupt.” I’m not denying the fact that, in some ways, the world is becoming more corrupt all the time, but I doubt that Paul incorporated that idea here.] **in accordance with the lusts of deceit** [There’s a strong contrast in these verses between the *truth* of God and the *lies/deceit/deception* of the devil and the world. The KJV and NKJV have “according to the deceitful lusts”; the NIV has “by its deceitful desires.” Note that the words truth and lies/deceit/deception all relate to the mind/way of thinking. The mind/way of thinking of the Spirit (when we walk by the Spirit, which includes thinking by the Spirit) always lines up with the truth, which as Eph. 4:24

shows, includes righteousness and holiness. When people lust after/desire wrong (sinful) things it is because they have been deceived and led astray by sin and Satan (this started with Eve); they have been led away from God and His truth, righteousness, and holiness. This doesn't mean, of course, that people have an excuse for their sin. Hebrews 3:13 exhorts Christians "to encourage one another day after day...so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."), **(23) and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind** [This verse is extremely important but (in my opinion) typically not well translated, or well understood. I refer the reader to what I said above under Eph. 4:17, 18, including the references to my book, *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*. I'll quote a key paragraph from endnote 32 (pages 138, 139) of that book: "I would translate Eph. 4:23 as follows: 'and be renewed by the Spirit in your mind (or thinking).'<sup>63</sup> This verse explains, in large part, *how* Christians are to be once-for-all transformed from their former sinful state (Eph. 4:17-19, 22). Significantly, in Eph. 4:17 the apostle says: *This I say therefore, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind*. The NIV has, 'in the futility of their thinking.' The Greek noun *nous*, which is translated *mind* by the NASB in Eph. 4:17, is also used here in Eph. 4:23. The Holy Spirit enables Christians to be renewed in their minds/in the way they think. See under Rom. 8:5-7 [pages 118, 119 of *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*]. He enables us to have right priorities, attitudes, and motives, and to think (and live) in line with the truth of God. This is all part of having a renewed mind. (The mind/way of thinking is not at all limited to the head. Our most important thinking takes place in the heart/spirit.)" For us to be renewed in our

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<sup>63</sup> This way of understanding these words isn't the majority view, but many agree with this viewpoint. Andrew T. Lincoln (*Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 42 [Word, 1990], pages 286, 287) doesn't agree with this viewpoint, but he acknowledges that "The majority of recent commentators [and he lists quite a few] opt for a reference to the divine Spirit [here]..." Lincoln quoted J. L. Houlden (*Paul's Letters from Prison* [Penguin, 1970], who translated the words, "Be renewed by the Spirit in your mind."

As far as I can remember, I came to this understanding of these words on my own (by the Spirit of God) before I first saw this viewpoint in print (about 1972) in the commentary on Ephesians by Ralph P. Martin in the *New Bible Commentary: Revised* [Eerdmans, 1971], pages 1117, 1118. I'll quote what Martin said under Eph. 4:23. "The summons to put off the old nature as a suit of clothes is shed may sound like a counsel of despair, for fallen man is in helpless plight. But Paul's appeal is to Christians who have known the renewal of the Spirit which, begun decisively at conversion, is a process to be continued. Hence the present tense ["present tense" of the infinitive translated *be renewed* in the Greek] of his admonition which calls upon his readers to *be renewed* in their minds (answering the need stated in vv. 17, 18) by the action of the Holy Spirit."

I agree with what Martin said here except for his speaking of a "process" of renewal of the mind/thinking by the Spirit. I agree, of course, that Christians will continue to grow (which is a process) in their thinking, but, if I understand Paul, he was speaking here (in an ideal sense) of a once-for-all renewal, a renewal that goes with the once-for-all putting off of the old man (Eph. 4:22) and putting on of the new man (Eph. 4:24). I believe that the "present tense" Martin spoke of conveys the idea of Christians continuing to abide in a renewed state of thinking right by the Spirit (and in accordance with the Word of God), not of their being in a process of renewal. Otherwise they couldn't once-for-all put off the old man or put on the new man.

Paul demonstrates this same once-for-all viewpoint in Rom. 8:5-7; 12:1, 2 (we will discuss these verses as we continue with our discussion of Eph. 4:23) and often in his writings. It seems clear to me that it isn't good enough to exhort Christians to gradually begin to think right and to gradually put off sins with the understanding that they will necessarily continue to sin throughout their lives on earth, as it is commonly taught.



minds/in the way we think, we must submit (in faith) to the Word of God (where we learn the truth of God; especially the truth of the gospel of salvation in Christ Jesus [cf. Eph. 4:20, 21]) and to the Spirit of God.

I'll also quote the next paragraph from endnote 32. "Romans 12:2 says: *and do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing [*anakainōsis*] of your mind [nous]*.... The Greek noun *nous*, which is used in Eph. 4:17 and 23, is also used in Rom. 12:2. The Greek noun *anakainōsis* is only used in the New Testament in Rom. 12:2 and Titus 3:5." It would be better yet to translate "the renewal," with the BAGD Greek Lexicon, than "the renewing." The word *renewal* fits better with the once-for-all renewal pictured in Eph. 4:17-32; Rom. 8:1-14; 12:1, 2; and in many other passages. I discuss this once-for-all renewal (as contrasted with a lifelong process of gradually beginning to think right and gradually putting off sin, but never really attaining a state of holiness) frequently in my teaching. For a start, see the last paragraph of endnote 32, the endnote that I have been quoting from. As that paragraph mentions, I'm not denying that Christians should continue to grow throughout their lives in Christ, but in the ideal case there will not be a continual growing out of sin (because we will be living in a state of holiness with the victory over all sin).

Throughout our Christian lives we should (we have the privilege to) be holy, and we should be growing (growing in knowledge and wisdom, growing more like the Lord Jesus Christ, growing in the fruit of the Spirit, etc.) This is good news! If we rightly respond to God's Word (with humble faith) it will bring transformation, not condemnation. And if we should slip into sin, God (who knows our hearts) knows if we are making Him and His Word top priority. I'm sure that He finds it rather easy to forgive and to sanctify those who are making Him and His Word top priority, and who are quick to repent.], **(24) and put on the new self** ["man." We can't stop with *putting off* the old man; we must also *put on* the new man (cf., e.g., Col. 3:10 [which specifically mentions putting on the new man]; Rom. 6:4; 7:6; 12:2; 13:14 ("But put on the Lord Jesus Christ [cf. Gal. 3:27], and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts"); and 2 Cor. 5:17).], **which in the likeness of God** [I could live with the translation of the NASB here, but the Greek more literally reads, "in accordance with (or, according to [NKJV]) God," which probably includes other ideas in addition to the new man's being *in the likeness of God*. Instead of being in accordance with sin and the lies/deceit/deception of the devil, the new man in Christ is in accordance with God. Taken in their fullest sense these words could include all the following ideas: The new man has been created by God (cf. Eph. 2:10); it is in the likeness of God; and it is in accordance with the will of God and His truth, which includes His righteousness and holiness. (When we think of man's being in the likeness of God, we think of Gen. 1:26; 5:1; and 9:6, but it must be understood that God's new creation in Christ takes man to a much higher place than what Adam had before the fall [cf., e.g., 1 Cor. 15:44-50].<sup>64</sup>) When Christians are thinking right and living right through salvation in union with Christ Jesus (being indwelt by the Holy Spirit), which is what Christians are enabled and required to do, they are living in accordance with God—they certainly aren't sinning.

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<sup>64</sup> Most of the glory of what it means to be a son of God in union with Christ Jesus, the Unique Son, is reserved for the (near) future, but we have already entered into the preliminary phase of that glory.

Ephesians 4:22-24, and especially 4:24, demonstrate how the apostle can exhort Christians to “be imitators of God, as beloved children” in Eph. 5:1. That’s quite a challenge (and it certainly includes victory over all sin, doesn’t it). Along this same line, compare, for example, Matt. 5:48; 1 Cor. 11:1; 1 John 2:5, 6; and 3:1-10. Ephesians 5:1 undoubtedly builds on Eph. 4:32 (and the preceding verses); that is, when Christians do the things spoken of in 4:32, they are imitating God (by His enabling grace.)] **has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth** [It is very important to know that God’s truth includes His righteousness and holiness. Walking in God’s truth includes walking in His righteousness and holiness.]. **(25) Therefore, laying aside falsehood** [See under Eph. 4:22.], **SPEAK TRUTH** [which is the opposite of “falsehood”/lying] **EACH ONE OF YOU WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, for we are members of one another.** [The fact that we are members of one another in the body of Christ makes it all the more imperative for us to speak truth to one another. The NIV has, “Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.”] **(26) BE ANGRY, AND YET DO NOT SIN** [Psalm 4:4]; **do not let the sun go down on your anger** [Most agree that Paul is *not* exhorting his readers to be angry here, but cautioning them to make sure that anger doesn’t lead to sin. As James 1:19 cautions, we must be “slow to anger.” It’s possible for Christians to be angry without sinning (cf. Mark 3:5), but anger can be sinful, and it can lead to great sin (cf. James 1:20; Eph. 4:31). That’s why the apostle cautions believers to quickly deal with the cause of the anger and to not let the sun go down on their anger. Sometimes we can get issues quickly resolved, before the sun goes down. On those occasions where the issues can’t be resolved quickly, or resolved at all (for one thing, we can’t act for the other person(s) who may be involved), we can take our concern to (cast our care upon) the Lord and leave it there. He’ll take care of the details; they’ll be in good hands; we can stay in peace and rest. See Rom. 12:17-21. What a privilege!], **(27) and do not give the devil an opportunity** [literally, “a place.” Compare John 14:30; James 4:7. We don’t have to, and we must not, give the devil any place in us. We would give him a place in us, for example, by allowing anger to abide in our hearts. We give the devil a place in us when we allow things that aren’t true (including false doctrine), or any sin (including stealing [Eph. 4:28], speaking unwholesome words [Eph. 4:29], etc.) to have a place in us/our lives.]. **(28) He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good** [cf. 1 Thess. 4:11; 2 Thess. 3:6-15], **so that he will have something to share with one who has need** [cf. Luke 3:11; Titus 3:8, 14]. **(29) Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth** [cf. Eph. 5:4; Col. 3:8], **but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment so that it will give grace to those who hear** [cf. Eccl. 10:12; Rom. 14:19; and Col. 4:6. The NIV has, “that it may benefit those who listen.”]. **(30) Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God** [Compare Isa. 63:10. All sin (including accepting false doctrine) grieves the Holy Spirit. We must make God and His truth, righteousness, and holiness top priority, and if we should slip into false doctrine or any other sin, we must be quick to repent.], **by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.** [The Holy Spirit sealed us when He came to dwell in us. See under Eph. 1:13 in this paper. The “day of redemption” will begin when Christ returns. At that time all true Christians will be glorified; we will be caught up into the fullness of eternal life; we will begin to reign with Christ.] **(31) Let all bitterness and wrath and anger**

**and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice** [cf. 1 Pet. 2:1]. [This is part of the once-for-all laying aside of the old man mentioned in Eph. 4:22.]  
**(32) Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.** [This is part of the once-for-all putting on of the new man mentioned in Eph. 4:24. The Bible strongly warns Christians that they must forgive if they expect to be forgiven and to maintain their forgiven status before God (cf. Matt. 6:12, 14, 15; 18:21-35). It's also true that there are many situations where something more than forgiveness (e.g., repentance, restoration) is required (e.g., Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; and 2 Thess. 3:6-15).]

Ephesians chapters 5 and 6 continue with the strong exhortation for Christians to walk as they are called (and enabled) to walk in truth, righteousness, holiness, humility, etc. These important chapters were briefly discussed above (and there were references to full discussions for many of the verses from these chapters) under the heading “A Discussion on the Overall Teaching of the Book of Ephesians Regarding How Long It Should Take for Christians to Become Holy/Spiritual (by the Spirit)/(Relatively) Perfect.”

## ROMANS 8:16-39

Romans 8:1-17, which are some of the most important verses in the Bible, are discussed on pages 116-123 of my book, *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*.

**The Spirit Himself testifies** [or, bears witness] **with our spirit that we are** [born-again] **children of God** [This is a very important aspect of our salvation; we can (and should) know in the depths of our being that we have become children of God (cf. 1 John 5:13). We have been accepted into the family of God through Christ Jesus and His atoning death.], **(17) and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ** [According to Heb. 1:2, Christ has been “appointed heir of all things.” Compare Rom. 8:32.], **if indeed we suffer with Him** [Compare Matt. 5:10-12; Acts 5:41; Rom. 5:2-4; 2 Cor. 1:5-7; Phil. 1:29, 30; Col. 1:24; 2 Tim. 2:12; and 1 Pet. 4:13. In the following verses (Rom. 8:18-39), Paul speaks, at least for the most part, of the suffering that comes to us because we are disciples of Christ, not the suffering that we experience in common with all mankind. This suffering with Christ includes spiritual warfare, the crucifixion of the flesh/old man, and persecution. We don’t want to overstate the suffering of this age, or to go looking for trouble, but as Paul said, for example, in 1 Tim. 3:12, “Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”] **so that we may also be glorified with Him.** [Most of the glory that comes to the adopted children of God is reserved for the future, when we will be glorified with Christ (e.g., Col. 3:4), and the apostle is speaking here of that yet-future glory, but some preliminary aspects of glory are available to us in this age (e.g., 2 Cor. 3:18). We have already received the down payment/pledge of our inheritance (e.g., Eph. 1:14; 2 Cor. 1:22), but we must wait for the return of Christ to enter into many key aspects of our inheritance/salvation (e.g., Rom. 8:18, 19, 23; Acts 20:32; Gal. 3:29; 4:7; Eph. 3:6; Titus 3:7; Heb. 1:14; and Rev. 21:7). What a privilege! What a destiny! To be “fellow heirs with Christ”; to be “glorified with Him”; to reign with Him! But, as this verse shows, we must be faithful to Christ Jesus and be willing to accept the suffering that comes to us because we are His disciples in order to be glorified with Him.

We may avoid a little suffering (and bring a little rejoicing to the kingdom of Satan) by living somewhere below holiness and godliness, but this is a dangerous place to live. To be out of the perfect will of God for us will always make things more difficult for us in the long run; and it won’t work for the glory of God, for our good, or for the good of the kingdom of God.

We want to make sure that any suffering that comes to us isn’t caused by our unbelief or ungodliness. As long as we’re doing our part of trusting God and walking in His truth and righteousness through faith, we can know that our sufferings haven’t come to us because of our sin, and we can know that all things—very much including our suffering—will work together for good (Rom. 8:28). As long as we’re putting God and His kingdom first, even if we should miss it through ignorance, etc., or even if we should slip into sin, it’s rather easy for God to show such Christians where they must change, or repent, and to fully restore them.

I’ll list some of the *good* things that the New Testament says will come to believers through being willing to accept (to blast through) the suffering that comes to us in this

age (some of these good things come to us during this age, but many of these good things are reserved for the future): We will grow and be improved; we will be more able to help others; we will find favor with God; we will be comforted and blessed; we will be proved genuine; we will be rewarded; we will be considered worthy of the kingdom; we will be glorified, and we will reign with Christ; and, significantly, we will glorify God (see Matt. 5:10-12; Acts 5:41; Rom. 5:3, 4; 2 Cor. 1:3-7; Phil. 1:29; 2 Thess. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:9-12; James 1:2-4; 5:10, 11; 1 Pet. 1:6, 7; 2:19, 20; 3:14; 4:12-19; cf. Heb. 12:4-17). Also, God's chastening (which typically involves suffering), when rightly responded to, will always work for good (e.g., Heb. 12:5-13).] **(18) For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed** [or, unveiled, manifested] **to us.** [Compare 2 Cor. 4:16-18; Col. 1:27; 3:4; Titus 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:7, 13; 5:1; and 1 John 3:2. For one thing, the sufferings of this age are infinitesimally brief and quite small when compared with eternal glory.] **(19) For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly** [The NIV has, "the creation waits in eager expectation."] **for the revealing** [unveiling, manifesting] **of the sons of God** [cf. Rom. 8:14, 16]. [We (the sons of God/the members of true Israel) will be revealed/unveiled/manifested when we are glorified at the end of this age. "The creation" here refers to the physical world with the animals, birds, fish, trees, plants, weather, etc. The creation waits in eager expectation for the manifestation of the sons of God, because it knows that our glorification will signal that it is time for the creation itself to begin its transition to the full glory of God's new heaven and new earth (Isa. 65:17; 66:22; and Rev. 21:1). In Rom. 4:13 (cf. Matt. 5:3-9, especially verse 5) the apostle spoke of believers being heirs of the world. Before the glorified saints can fully inherit the world, it must be glorified.

Will the animals, birds, fish, etc. have a place in God's glorified kingdom? Isaiah 11:6-9; 65:25 indicate that animals, etc. will (at least) be there during the millennial kingdom.

Paul didn't mention the conversion of the remnant of the nations here, but this would be a good place to briefly consider this topic. For one thing, Paul didn't have the benefit of having the important revelation on this topic contained in the book of Revelation, since he died some thirty years before that revelation was given to the saints. Revelation 15:4; 20:3 show that God will leave a remnant of the nations to enter the millennial kingdom, and Revelation chapters 21, 22 seem to show that the nations will have a separate existence from true Israel in the eternal state (as they will in the millennial kingdom).

As I understand it, true Israel embraces all the believers from Old Testament days and all true Christians, and although those called the nations in Rev. 15:4; 20:3 and in chapters 21, 22 (and other places) will be saved through Jesus Christ and His atoning death (cf. Rev. 21:27), they will not be part of the Christian church and they will be distinct from true Israel. True Israel will be reigning with Christ (and God the Father) throughout the millennial kingdom (Rev. 20:6) and forever (Rev. 22:5). These chapters in the book of Revelation and the topic of God's salvation plans for the nations are discussed in some detail in my eschatological writings. For one thing, between my book (*The Mid-Week Rapture*) and papers on my internet site (all the book of Revelation is discussed verse-by-verse; also see my paper, *More Regarding God's Salvation Plans for the Nations* and my eschatological papers dealing with Psalms, Isaiah, and

Jeremiah.] **(20) For the creation was subjected to futility** [see Gen. 3:17-19; 5:29], **not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope** [God, because of the sin of man, subjected the creation to futility. (It's also true, of course, that the rebellion and sin of Satan initiated the sin/corruption problems that exist in the world.) But the creation has *hope*, knowing that its subjection to futility is only temporary (cf., e.g., Isa. 11:6-9; 65:25 [cf. Gen. 1:30]; Ezek. 47:3-12; Acts 3:21; Rev. 21:1; and 22:1-5).] **(21) that** [I prefer the translation in the margin of the NASB, "because." That is, the creation is able to have this hope because it knows that the futility is only temporary. It knows that it "will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God." The KJV and NKJV have "because."] **the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. (22) For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.** [The end result of "the pains of childbirth" will be good—a birth will take place. The groaning and suffering of the whole creation won't last much longer. The whole creation will ultimately be born into the glory of God's new heaven and new earth that is pictured in the last two chapters of the Bible. Christ Himself (after His atoning death) was the first man (though He was/is much more than just a man) to be born into God's new creation (Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5; Rom. 8:29; and 1 Cor. 15:20-28).

When Christ returns, all the members of God's true Israel who will have been converted before He returns will be born into the fullness of eternal life—they will be glorified (Isa. 66:7; Rom. 8:29; Rev. 12:5; Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5; and 1 Cor. 15:20-23). All these verses are discussed in my book, *The Mid-Week Rapture: A Verse-by-Verse Study of Key Prophetic Passages*. Some of them, very much including Rev. 12:5, which speaks of the transformation and glorification of the members of true Israel that will take place at the sounding of the seventh and last trumpet, right in the middle of Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week, as a birth, are discussed in significant detail.

We can probably say that by the time the millennial kingdom begins all the members of true Israel (including those converted after the rapture) will have been born into the fullness of eternal life and been glorified (cf. Isa. 66:8; Rev. 15:2; and 20:4). Ultimately the whole creation will experience the birth into the glory of God's eternal kingdom—it will be glorified (cf. Matt. 19:28; Acts 3:21). Those who will be removed by judgment will not, of course, be included (e.g., Rev. 19:20, 21; 20:15; 21:8; and 22:15).] **(23) And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit** [At the present time we just have the first fruits of the work of the Spirit. But what glorious first fruits! They include the new birth; the enablement for us to be righteous and holy; and the charismatic gifts, etc. However, much of the Spirit's work is reserved for the future (cf., e.g., Rom. 8:11). On the "first fruits of the Spirit," see under Eph. 1:13, 14 in this paper.], **even we ourselves groan within ourselves** [Compare Ezek. 9:4; Matt. 5:4; and 2 Cor. 5:2, 4. The creation isn't the only one groaning. We Christians have some things to groan about too, referring especially to the sufferings we sometimes experience as disciples of Christ throughout this present age. The apostle isn't saying that we complain, whine, doubt, or pout—the groaning he's speaking about doesn't include these things. As Rom. 8:17-39 show, he's speaking of things like the spiritual warfare arrayed against us, and persecution. It involves suffering to be tempted; it involves suffering to see things so far from divine order in the world (with all the chaos,

blasphemy, error, false gods, pain, corruption, hatred, strife, confusion, sickness, starvation, deformity, etc.); it involves suffering to see the Christian church so far from divine order; it involves suffering to see God being ignored, rejected, and/or blasphemed by those who owe Him everything and so desperately need Him, etc.], **waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.** [Compare Phil. 3:21. We have already been adopted as born-again sons into the family of God (Rom. 8:14-16; Gal. 4:5, 6), but as we have discussed, much of our birth (the birth into the fullness of eternal life and glory) is still future for us. We must wait for the redemption of our body (for the time of our glorification). When we have been fully redeemed (including our physical bodies), we will be beyond the all-too-real potential to live according to the flesh (old man) that we constantly face during this age. It must be understood that the physical body itself isn't our main problem.

The physical body can be a bridgehead for the devil (and demons), and it can lead to sin, but (in general) sin originates in the heart/soul/spirit/inner man, not in the physical body (e.g., Mark 7:17-23). The “deeds/works of the flesh” that Paul listed in Gal. 5:19-21 are sins that originate in the inner man. Some of those sins (e.g., idolatry, sorcery, disputes, dissensions, factions, and envying) have little to do with the physical body. Paul often uses the word *flesh* of the old man (everything we were [spirit, soul, and body], including the influence of demon spirits, before we were born again), that still wants to live and express itself in sinful ways. Sometimes he uses the word *body* with comparable full meaning (cf. Rom. 6:6; 7:23, 24; and 8:10, 13).

When the apostle Paul speaks of our body being redeemed here in Rom. 8:23, he is speaking of the time when we have been glorified and the flesh/old man has been fully left behind, with no more potential to live and express itself in sinful ways. That sounds good, doesn't it?

The *flesh* (man in the flesh, without the Holy Spirit) is typically contrasted with the Holy *Spirit* in the Bible, not with the human *spirit*. As we walk in the Spirit by faith, we have the authority and power to keep the old man (Rom. 6:6; Eph. 4:22; and Col. 3:9) from expressing itself in sin/the works of the flesh. As I mentioned, the old man won't be annihilated until we're glorified. We need to understand that our inner man/spirit doesn't automatically become holy, or automatically stay holy, just because we have become born-again Christians (cf. 2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Thess. 5:23). We are holy only to the extent we stay aligned with the truth of the Word of God and with the Spirit of God through faith.] **(24) For in hope we have been saved** [Many aspects of our salvation are yet future (see under Rom. 8:17). We hope for those things that are yet future. Hope doesn't infer doubt (as the word *hope* typically does in English); our hope is based on the super-solid Word of God; but hope does deal with things yet future (cf., e.g., Col. 1:5, 27; 1 Thess. 5:8; and Titus 3:7).], **but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees?** [People don't hope to get what they already have and can see with the physical eyes. We can hope for the things we do not see because we can see them with the eyes of faith, based on God's Word, being enabled by His Spirit (cf. 2 Cor. 5:7; Heb. 11:1).] **(25) But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.** [We're waiting eagerly for the completion of our salvation when we will be glorified and begin to reign with Christ.] **(26) In the same way** [These words, which are all one word in the Greek, apparently refer to the fact that the Spirit Himself groans too, along with the creation (Rom. 8:22), and especially along

with us (Rom. 8:23). Why does the Spirit, who dwells within our hearts (Rom. 8:9), groan? He, the One sent to help us and who loves us, is so intensely involved with us and our affairs that if we have something to groan about so does He, as He intercedes for us. The Spirit knows the Father's love for us, and He knows the plans He has for us. God has ways of making all things work together for our good (Rom. 8:28). Praise His holy name!] **the Spirit also helps** [cf. John 14:26 ("Helper")] **our weakness** [Here the apostle is thinking especially of our weakness when it comes to praying right, in the will of God, but the Spirit is here to help us in other areas of weakness too.]; **for we do not know how to pray as we should** [The main aspect of prayer that Paul is dealing with here, in this context, regards suffering. In general we tend to pray to avoid, or to very quickly get out of, all trials and suffering (which isn't totally wrong; we're not supposed to go looking for trouble), but sometimes these trials and sufferings are part of God's will for us; when they are, they will always work for good if we rightly respond to them, staying in faith. Compare 2 Cor. 12:7-10. When we bring trials on ourselves through sin (including the sin of not putting God and His kingdom and righteousness first place [which could include the sin of not knowing things about our salvation that we could and should know], and the sins of not trusting Him and doubt), we must repent. Our sins don't work for our good. (See under Rom. 8:28.)], **but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words;** [What glorious news, to learn that the Spirit of God intercedes for us. The apostle informs us in Rom. 8:34 that the Lord Jesus Christ also intercedes for us. Furthermore, it must be understood that the Son and the Spirit are both interceding for us in perfect agreement with the plan and purpose of God the Father, who loves us and makes all things work together for our good. What a salvation! We can't, of course, abandon our responsibility to pray (the Spirit will enable us pray as we should; cf. Rom. 6:18) and to do everything else that we must do according to the will and plan of God. We always must do our part (by the grace of God in Christ).

Is Paul speaking of the Spirit literally groaning in our behalf from within us with audible groanings? I doubt it. For one thing, the groaning of the creation and the groaning of the saints are mostly to be understood in a figurative (even though it's a very real) sense. I leave room, however, for there to be occasions when the groanings of the Spirit could become audible as He intercedes for us, or as He intercedes through us for others.

Many say that Paul is referring to speaking in tongues here, but that hardly fits. For one thing, the last four words "too deep for words" are all one word in the Greek. This Greek adjective, *alalētos*, was formed from a word that means to speak, with an "a" prefix added that negates the meaning of the word (the letter "a" is used this way in many English words too, for example, atypical, asymmetric), that is, "not spoken." The BAGD Greek Lexicon, under this adjective, which is only used here in the New Testament, has "unexpressed, wordless...sighs too deep for words." Paul would have hardly used this adjective if he had been thinking of the gift of tongues (which typically deals with words that are spoken audibly), but it's true that the Spirit, who was sent to help us and is so involved with our affairs, can help us pray (including intercessory prayer) through the gift of tongues (cf. 1 Cor. 14:16-18).



I'll quote part of what Douglas Moo said under this verse.<sup>65</sup> "...it is likely that the groans are not the believer's but the Spirit's. While we cannot, then, be absolutely sure (and we have no clear biblical parallels to go by), it is preferable to understand these 'groans' as the Spirit's own 'language of prayer,' a ministry of intercession that takes place in our hearts (cf. v. 27) in a manner imperceptible to us. This means, of course, that 'groans' is used metaphorically. But vv. 22 and 23, with their references to the 'groans' of creation and the 'groans' of Christians 'in' themselves, has prepared us for such a meaning. I take it that Paul is saying, then, that our failure to know God's will and consequent inability to petition God specifically and assuredly is met by God's Spirit, who himself expresses to God those intercessory petitions that perfectly match the will of God. When we do not know what to pray for—yes, even when we pray for things that are not best for us—we need not despair, for we can depend on the Spirit's ministry of perfect intercession 'on our behalf.' Here is one potent source for that 'patient fortitude' with which we are to await our glory (v. 25); that our failure to understand God's purposes and plans, to see 'the beginning from the end,' does not mean that effective powerful prayer for our specific needs is absent." ] **(27) and He who searches the hearts** [This speaks of God the Father here (cf. Psalm 139:1-6; Luke 16:15; and Acts 1:24; in Rev. 2:23 it is Christ who searches the minds and hearts). The Spirit is dwelling in our hearts.] **knows what the mind** [or, "way of thinking." The Father knows exactly what the Spirit is thinking.] **of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.** [The Father knows exactly what the Spirit is saying (the Spirit communicates with the Father) as He intercedes for the saints, even when the Spirit just groans (based on what was said in Rom. 8:26). The Spirit knows the Father's will for each Christian, and He always thinks, speaks, and acts in line with the perfect will of God the Father. He came from heaven to dwell in the heart of each Christian and to do His part (His gigantic, super-important part) in the full outworking of the good plan of God for our lives.

I'll quote part of what Thomas R. Schreiner said under this verse.<sup>66</sup> "...since the Spirit intercedes in accord with God's will, his prayers are always answered. The prayer of believers is not always answered affirmatively since we do not always know what God's will is. [See 1 John 5:14, 15 (these verses demonstrate the important connection between praying in God's will and having prayers answered); also consider Matt. 21:21, 22; Mark 11:22-24; James 1:5-8 (these verses demonstrate the important connection between praying in faith and having prayers answered); and 1 John 3:21, 22 (these verses deal with the important connection between living in righteousness and having prayers answered).] Thus Paul prayed to have the thorn in his flesh removed three times and God revealed to him that this was not his will [at least it wasn't His will at that time] (2 Cor. 12:7-10). By contrast, the Spirit's prayers are always answered with a yes, precisely because he always prays in accordance with God's will.... The main point of the paragraph therefore emerges. Believers should take tremendous encouragement that the will of God is being fulfilled in their lives despite their weakness and inability to know what to pray for. God's will is not being frustrated because of the weakness of believers. [God's will, however, can be frustrated in our lives to the extent we fight against His will and demand our right to continue in things like ignorance regarding His Word, unbelief, other sin, and fleshiness.] It is being fulfilled because the Spirit is interceding for us and invariably receiving affirmative answer to his pleas.

<sup>65</sup> *Epistle to the Romans* [Eerdmans, 1996], pages 525, 526.

<sup>66</sup> *Romans* [Baker, 1998], pages 446, 447.

... We can see how nicely this fits with the next verses, where Paul teaches that all things work together for good and that God has designed all things so that we are conformed to the image of his Son. No wonder all things are working out for our good—the Spirit is effectively praying for us so that the will of God will be accomplished in our lives.”<sup>67</sup> **(28) And we know that God causes all things to work together for good** [It’s quite possible that the translation of the KJV and NKJV more accurately represents what was originally written by Paul, “And we know that all things work together for good,” but with the translation of the KJV and NKJV it is to be understood that God is the one who causes all things to work together for good. In this context “all things” very much includes the sufferings with Christ of this present time. It makes a gigantic difference to know that these sufferings are part of the will of God for us; things haven’t gotten out of His control; He hasn’t abandoned us; He still loves us—all things, including our sufferings, will work together for good, including *our* good. This is very good news, and it’s very important for us to know and to believe that this is true. Believing this truth will enable us to stay in faith and peace even when we’re in difficult places, not that trials are pleasant experiences.

The only qualification to these words that I know of is it would be wrong to say that the sin of Christians works for their good. God can make the sin of others (whether demons or men) work for our good, but not our sin (which includes doubting God and not trusting Him). I’m not saying there never are cases where God uses a sin of a Christian for their good (for example, He might temporarily use a sinful habit to help motivate a Christian to make a total commitment to Him), but we shouldn’t be looking for something good to say about sin. If God considers something to be sin in our lives, we must be one hundred percent against it (by the grace of God in Christ). God hates sin! And He has paid a very high price (an infinite price) to set us free from sin.

I’ll quote a sentence from what F. Godet said under this verse.<sup>68</sup> “But it would be wrong to embrace under it [the all things that work together for good of Rom. 8:28] what we may do ourselves in opposition to God’s will, since that would contradict the idea: *them that love God.*” That is, those that love God don’t sin against Him; we keep His commandments. And I’ll quote from Henry Alford.<sup>69</sup> “To include, with Augustine, the *sins* of believers in this ‘all things,’ as making them ‘humbler and wiser,’ is manifestly to introduce an element which did not enter into the Apostle’s consideration; for he is here already viewing the believer as *justified by faith, dwelt in by the Spirit, dead to sin.*”

I’ll also quote part of what John Calvin said under Rom. 8:28.<sup>70</sup> “Augustine says that even the sins of the saints are so far from doing them harm by the ordaining providence of God, that they serve rather to advance their salvation. This statement, however, though true [I don’t

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<sup>67</sup> Schreiner has a footnote here, “The personality of the Holy Spirit is emphasized in this text. In both verses 26 and 27 he ‘intercedes’ for the saints and this is possible only for a person. His personality is evident also in the word *phronēma* [mind], for only a person possesses a mind. The text also indicates distinctions between the Father and the Spirit. ... The Spirit intercedes to the Father for the saints, and it is the Spirit’s mind that the Father discerns when he searches the hearts of believers.” The Father, of course, discerns more than the mind of the Spirit when He searches the hearts of believers.

<sup>68</sup> *Epistle to the Romans* [Zondervan, 1969 reprint of the 1883 edition], page 322.

<sup>69</sup> *New Testament for English Readers*, Vol. 2 [Baker, 1983 reprint], page 914.

<sup>70</sup> *Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians* [Eerdmans, 1980 reprint], page 179.

believe it's true!], does not relate to the present passage, which deals with the cross. It should be observed that Paul has included the whole of true religion in the love of God [the love for God that was mentioned in Rom. 8:28]. The whole pursuit of righteousness, indeed, depends on this."

I'll quote part of what Charles R. Erdman said under Rom. 8:28-30.<sup>71</sup> "This 'good' is to them...only 'that love God.' ... To strengthen our faith further, Paul describes those who, from the human point of view, 'love God,' as those who, from the divine side, 'are called according to his purpose'; and then he states five successive steps by which the divine purpose is carried into effect. ... In all this majestic movement whereby these successive stages of the divine purpose are carried into effect, nothing is stated as to the agency or activity or responsibility of believers. Here the thought is of God. That Paul also believed and taught the freedom of the human will, the responsibility of man, and the need of repentance and faith and love, must not be forgotten. Nor does he ever seek to reconcile these two spheres of truth. However, in seeking to encourage us to patience in suffering and to confident expectation of future glory, he wisely fixes the attention wholly upon that which must be ultimate in all our thinking and our thanksgiving, namely, upon the mysterious, loving, eternal purpose of God." **to those who love God** [Compare 1 Cor. 2:9; 8:3; 16:22; Eph. 6:24; and James 1:12. Romans 8:28-30, which are very important verses of the Bible, put most of the emphasis on God's part (in common with Eph. 1:3-14): Those who love God<sup>72</sup> were called as individuals by God, and they were foreknown, predestined, justified, and glorified by Him. But these words about loving God help demonstrate that it's not all God; we (according to His plan) must do our part.

Many in our day seek assurance of salvation by overstating and/or misstating God's role and denying, or greatly minimizing, man's role. I'm convinced this approach can't work very well; it doesn't square with the balanced truth of what the Bible teaches. We must put the emphasis on God's part, and we must make sure He gets all the glory, but we must also understand, and do, our part, by His grace through faith. Real security comes when we are believing what He wants us to believe and living like He wants us to live—when we are living in the center of His will for His glory (by grace through faith).

Romans 8:4 shows that those who love God will walk after the Spirit and keep the requirements of the moral Law. Romans 8:5 shows that those who love God are enabled to think right by the Spirit (especially speaking of their thinking right in their hearts about God, righteousness, priorities, motives, and such). Romans 8:13, 14 show that those who love God, those who are sons of God, will be led by the Spirit of God to put to death the works of the flesh/body/old man. Romans 8:17, 18 show that they are willing to suffer with Christ. Romans 8:25 shows that they persevere (in hope). If we love God, we will keep His commandments (John 14:15, 21; 15:9, 10); and we will believe Him, trust Him, and make Him our top priority. God loved us first (e.g., 1 John 4:19), but we must reciprocate and begin to love Him, and keep on loving Him, being enabled by His grace (which includes the fruit of the Spirit of love, for one thing [Gal. 5:22, 23]). These things don't just automatically happen. The key word to describe our

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<sup>71</sup> *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* [Baker, 1983 reprint], pages 103, 104. Dr. Erdman (AD 1866-1960) pastored Presbyterian churches and taught at Princeton Seminary.

<sup>72</sup> Now that we have become born-again Christians, we love God.

role in God's salvation plans is the word *faith*. See my *A Paper on Faith*. We can't skip the word *repentance* either.

C. E. B. Cranfield,<sup>73</sup> speaking of the Greek words that are translated "to those who love God" by the NASB, points out, "By being placed at the beginning of the clause these words are given special emphasis. [These words come right after "we know that" in the Greek.] They have a rich OT and Jewish background. [In a footnote Cranfield lists many passages that demonstrate the need for God's people to love Him from the Old Testament, from the New Testament, and from other Jewish writings.] The love to God, which is commanded in Scripture, is nothing less than the response of a man in the totality of his being to the prior love of God. It thus includes the whole of religion."

I'll quote part of what Dale Moody said regarding these words.<sup>74</sup> "Many of the commentaries almost disparage emphasis on man's love for God, but this is lopsided thinking. Of course, God loved man before man loved God, but God works out his purpose only in those who respond in a positive way to his love. ... 'God knows those who love him' (1 Cor. 8:3), and one is accursed if he 'has no love for the Lord' (1 Cor. 16:22). It [man's love for God/Christ] is hardly a thing to be disparaged in a benediction such as this: 'Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love undying' (Eph. 6:24). However, this is impossible apart from God's love made manifest in Christ (cf. Deut. 6:4)."

I'll also quote two sentences from what James D. G. Dunn said regarding these words.<sup>75</sup> "In view of the following heavy emphasis on divine initiative this phrase is an important reminder that God's purpose works out in personal response and relationship; coerced love [or, the love of a robot] is not love" (page 481). "The balance of human response is present [in other words, it's not all God] in the place given to 'loving God,' but the dominant emphasis [in Rom. 8:28-30] is on God's action in calling and setting apart (not of Jew from Gentile, or of priest from people, but of those having the Spirit from the mind-set of the flesh, Jew as well as Gentile)" (page 494). And I'll quote a sentence from what Adam Clarke said here.<sup>76</sup> "To understand these verses aright, let us observe: (1) That the persons in whose behalf all things work for good are they who *love God* and, consequently, who live in the spirit of obedience. ...."

Lastly, I'll quote part of what William S. Plumer said regarding these words.<sup>77</sup> "If none can legitimately draw comfort from the leading truths of this chapter, and particularly from verse 28, unless they *love* God, how important it is to know what are the infallible signs of that holy affection. Nor do we search the scriptures in vain. The love that God demands must be sincere, not feigned, not in pretence; it must be supreme, putting Jehovah [Yahweh] before and above all others; it must regard all God's character, laws and judgments; it must be stable, not fitful. He who loves God will love God's children, God's house, God's worship and all his ordinances."], **to those who are called according to His purpose.** [It's Biblical to say that God calls all mankind to repent and to submit to the gospel (e.g., Mark 16:15, 16; Luke 24:47; John 3:16-21, 36; 2 Thess. 1:8, 9; 1 Tim. 2:4-7; and 1 Peter 4:17). The word *call* is used in this full sense in Matt. 22:14 (the *inviting* of Matt. 22:3-13 is the

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<sup>73</sup> *Epistle to the Romans*, Vol. 1 [T. & T. Clark, 1975], pages 424, 425.

<sup>74</sup> *Broadman Bible Commentary*, Vol. 10 [Broadman, 1970], page 220.

<sup>75</sup> *Romans 1-8, Word Biblical Commentary*, Vol. 38 [Word, 1988].

<sup>76</sup> *Commentary on the Bible* [Baker, 1967], page 1061. Clarke, who worked with John Wesley, died in 1832.

<sup>77</sup> *Commentary on Romans* [Kregel, 1979 reprint of the book published in 1870], page 431.

same as the *call* of 22:14). The word *call*, however, is normally used in a special, limited sense in the New Testament, as it is here in Rom. 8:28, 30, of God's *calling* of His chosen/elect ones (e.g., Acts 2:39; Rom. 1:6; 9:24; 1 Cor. 1:9, 24; 1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 2:14; and Heb. 1:15; cf., e.g., Eph. 1:4; Rev. 13:8; and 17:8).

Bible verses like Rom. 8:28-30 and Eph. 1:3-14, which speak mostly of God's role in our salvation, are designed to give the saints the right perspective, putting the emphasis on God, His plan, and His sufficient grace, and on the need to give Him all the glory. I have found over the years that verses like these (Rom. 8:28-30; Eph. 1:3-14) bless me greatly. It's very edifying to know that God has chosen us, called us, makes us holy, keeps us, etc. We are caught up into the very-stable, very-glorious, salvation plans of the God of creation. But, at the same time, we must understand the balanced truth of what the Scriptures teach, and we must make sure that we understand and are doing all that is required of us (in accordance with the plan of God, by His sufficient grace through faith).

The teaching of verses like Rom. 8:28-30 is intended for the saints. You couldn't expect non-Christians to understand or appreciate these verses. (The saints don't fully understand these truths, but we can accept them as part of God's truth and walk in the light of them.) I don't mean to suggest that these verses are to be kept secret from non-believers, but these truths were intended for believers, and we typically wouldn't bring these things up in a setting where we are sharing the gospel.

Some segments of the body of Christ strongly emphasize the truths contained in verses like Eph. 1:3-14 and Rom. 8:28-30 (which emphasize God's role in our salvation), including Augustine in his later viewpoint, and the Calvinists, and you can learn a lot from them—I have. The problem (from my point of view) is that they sometimes fail (not intentionally) to adequately balance out what these verses say with the rest of what the Bible says. We must hold the balanced truth of what the Bible teaches. It's rather easy to miss the balance in one direction, or another. Most Christians are guilty to some extent of putting the emphasis on their favorite set of verses and tending to minimize what the other verses say.

Arminians, partly in reaction to the Calvinists, without a deliberate attempt to exclude part of what the Bible says, often leave very little room for, and substantially dilute (distort), what Paul says in verses like Rom. 8:28-30 and Eph. 1:3-14. Whether we call ourselves Calvinists, Arminians, etc., we must realize that we are responsible before God to learn and to walk in the balanced truth of God's Word, not what our denomination/church happens to teach. All true Christians (hopefully) will say they agree with my last sentence, but I've observed over the years that it's quite difficult for most of us to be open to, and to seek for, the balanced truth. Most (wrongly) think that they have it already. I've also observed that all too often Christians from one background are excessively harsh and intolerant of those from other backgrounds, sometimes even denying that the others are true Christians. That judgment should typically be left to God, not that we can tolerate obvious heresy in the church.

As the apostle continues with verses 29, 30, he tells us a lot about God's glorious "purpose" (Rom. 8:28) in calling us to salvation.] **(29) For those whom He foreknew** [In this context, as the apostle is using these words here, it seems clear to me that God didn't *foreknow* all people, just the elect. Those whom He foreknew, He also predestined, called, justified, and glorified (Rom. 8:29-30). In one sense God foreknew

all people, but in the sense the verb *foreknew* is used here (which includes God's foreknowing *with favor*), it was only the elect that He foreknew. The verb *know* is sometimes used in this special, limited sense in the Bible. See, for example, Amos 3:2 ("You only have I chosen [literally, known] among all the families of the earth"); Nah. 1:7 with 1:6-8; Matt. 7:23 with 7:21, 22; Matt. 25:12; 1 Cor. 8:3; and Gal. 4:9.

I'll quote a sentence from what Godet said regarding God's *foreknowledge* under this verse.<sup>78</sup> "...it is the believer's faith, as a future fact, but in His sight already existing, which determines His foreknowledge." Although this widespread viewpoint has much to commend it, I don't believe it's fully adequate. Those who hold this viewpoint (including Godet) typically think of God's foreseeing these people submitting to the gospel in faith after the gospel is presented to them. *There is no special call for the elect with this viewpoint.* (But see above under Rom. 8:28 on the special call for the elect. Also see under Eph. 1:4 in this paper, including the added section that begins on page 19, and see everything that is said under Rom. 8:28-30 in this paper. )

I'll quote part of what Godet said under Rom. 8:28 on the *call* of God: "The *call* is the invitation addressed by God to man [to all mankind, not just to the elect, according to Godet], when by the preaching of His gospel He offers him salvation in Christ. This call by the Word is always accompanied with an inward operation of the Spirit which tends to render the preaching [of the gospel] effectual. ... It must then be held that when the apostle in his Epistle speaks of the divine call, he always embraces under the term the two notions of an outward call by the Word and an inward call by grace.... ...some consent to yield to the call and others refuse. ... The *chosen* in this passage are those who accept the call...." It seems clear to me that Godet has not adequately interpreted Paul's use of the word *call* in Rom. 8:28, 30. I have a lot of respect for Godet's commentaries; but I believe he misses the balanced truth of what the New Testament teaches here.

For one thing, using the framework set up by Paul in Rom. 8:28-30, God couldn't foresee individuals submitting to the gospel in faith until after He had chosen them, called them, etc. This viewpoint that God foreknows and chooses (elects) people *after* He foresees them submit to the gospel doesn't fully square with what Paul said, and it tends to give the wrong emphasis; the elect are choosing God more that God is choosing the elect; man is too much in the spotlight. Man cannot be totally left out of the picture; God's election of individuals is based, at least in part, on His knowledge (foreknowledge) of those individuals (He accurately knows what is in the hearts of all people), not that the elect can say that they were worthy in themselves to be chosen—we are saved by grace; God's election is not done on an arbitrary basis.

I don't agree with the view of many that God's election of individuals is not conditioned by (it has nothing to do with) anything in the individuals, including what is in their hearts. That viewpoint (unconditional election) goes with the viewpoint that after the fall all people are so totally depraved that they have no capacity to cooperate with God's grace or to have faith, and with the idea that if we did have any capacity to cooperate with God's grace or to have faith, we would be earning our salvation to some extent, and it wouldn't be all grace. However, I don't believe it is accurate to say that our responding to the gospel in faith lessens the fact that we are saved 100 percent by grace. In Rom. 4:16, for example, the apostle Paul said, "For this reason [since we

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<sup>78</sup> *Romans*, page 325.

couldn't be saved by keeping the Law] it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace....” Our receiving a gift doesn't make it any less a gift.

We should emphasize the point that God's foreknowing with favor and choosing of certain persons is nothing for them to boast about, as if they had merited/deserved His favor in any way—it's all of grace. (Humbling yourself, admitting that you are in desperate need of salvation, and submitting to the gospel in faith is nothing to boast about.) Furthermore, the fact that we, as sincere born-again Christians, can know that we have been chosen by God doesn't mean that we have the right to look down on those who aren't Christians. We are called to humility, not pride. For one thing, we don't know that the other persons have not also been chosen by God. Knowing that we were chosen by God should engender an awesome humility and thankfulness, and it should lead to a wholehearted love for God and an abiding commitment to be what He wants us to be and to do what He wants us to do (by His grace)., **He also predestined** [On this verb see Acts 4:28; Rom. 8:30; 1 Cor. 2:7; and Eph. 1:5, 11 (Ephesians 1:5, 11 are discussed in this paper). The verb *predestined* certainly emphasizes God's role in our salvation, but it doesn't require us to deny man's role, which is clearly spelled out in many verses of the Bible. God laid out the path beforehand that culminates in our being saved (which includes our ultimately being conformed to the image of Christ), but *we* must answer God's call to salvation (and glory) by His grace through faith, and we must work out our salvation by His grace through faith (cf., e.g., Phil. 2:12, 13).

As discussed in some detail in my *A Paper on Faith*, although God draws, convicts, reveals, etc., He doesn't just give us saving faith to begin with, and (although He provides the grace for us to continue in faith to the end), He doesn't force us to continue in faith to the end. I believe the New Testament makes it quite clear that born-again Christians can become unbelievers and fall away. (See my Paper titled, *Once Saved, Always Saved?*) Faith (repentance and faith) is our part, as we respond to God's call/invitation to salvation (as we respond to and cooperate with His grace). We certainly don't merit salvation by faith; and our faith is nothing for us to boast about; our receiving salvation by faith is like a drowning man receiving a life preserver.

I'll quote what Craig S. Keener said under Rom. 8:30.<sup>79</sup> “On predestination see [Romans] chapter 9. The predication of predestination on foreknowledge (8:29) does not cancel free will; most of Judaism accepted both God's sovereignty and human responsibility. (The idea that one has to choose between them is a post-New Testament idea based on Greek logic.)” I'll also quote a few sentences from what Dunn said here.<sup>80</sup> “...believers rest in the assurance that their part in the people of God is not accidental or random, but part of a divine purpose whose outworking was already clearly envisaged from the beginning. Here too the thought builds on Jewish precedents (cf. Jer. 1:5; T. Mos. [Testament of Moses] 1.14) and was warmly embraced in early Christian theology (Acts 4:28; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:5, 11; Ignatius, Letter to the Ephesians, first paragraph). See also Dupont *Gnosis*, 93-104....”] **to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren** [What a destiny! If these words weren't in the Bible, we might have thought that they were blasphemous in that they so highly exalt the saints. In a much lower sense than the one spoken of here, man was created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26, 27; 5:1; and 9:6).

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<sup>79</sup> *Bible Background Commentary – New Testament* [Inter-Varsity Press, 1993], page 431.

<sup>80</sup> *Romans 1-8*, pages 482, 483.

The Lord Jesus Christ was the first man (though He was much more than just a man; He was, and never ceased being, God the Son, who was with the Father in the beginning, and through whom all things were created) to leave death behind and to be born into the fullness of resurrection life and glory (Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5; and 1 Cor. 15:20-23). All true Christians will follow Him in that birth when He returns to the earth (Rev. 12:5; Psalm 2:7; Isa. 66:7; and Mic. 5:3; all four of these verses, which speak of our birth into the fullness of eternal life and glory at the end of this age, are discussed in some detail in my book, *The Mid-Week Rapture*).

After we have been born into eternal glory through Christ, He will be the firstborn among many [glorified] brethren. (We can also speak in terms of our being part of God's *new creation* in and through Christ Jesus [cf. 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15; and Eph. 2:10.]) Again, what a destiny! Initially we were the flesh and blood offspring of Adam (who was flesh and blood even before the fall). Now we are literally united with the Son of God (and through Him with God the Father), and before long we will be glorified with Him. See 1 Cor. 15:47-55. We will even reign with Him (and God the Father), as many verses show. It must be understood, however, that even though Christ will then be the firstborn among many brethren, there still will be a gigantic difference between Him and us, in that He will be deity (with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit), and He will be worshipped throughout eternity, including being worshipped by us. See Revelation chapters 21, 22.]; **(30) and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified** [The verb *justify* is one of the key words used in the New Testament to speak of our being saved from the state of being under sin with its guilt and its penalties (very much including the two major penalties of spiritual death and the attendant bondage to sin, not to mention the ultimate penalty of hell). See Rom. 3:24, 28, 30; 4:25; 5:1, 9, 16, 18; 8:33; 1 Cor. 6:11; Gal. 2:16, 17, 24; 3:8; and Titus 3:7. An entire chapter of my book, *Holiness and Victory Over Sin* is devoted to the meaning of justify/justification. The fact that Paul didn't include the word(s) *make holy/sanctify* in Rom. 8:30 helps confirm the full meaning of *justify* here. The verb *justify* is undoubtedly being used here (as it often is in the New Testament) in the full sense that includes being declared righteous, and being made righteous. Having been redeemed from the penalty of spiritual death, we are born again, and having been redeemed from the penalty of bondage to sin, we are called, enabled, and required to walk in the righteousness of God with the victory over all sin.]; **and these whom He justified, He also glorified.** [Although our glorification is yet future (e.g., Rom. 8:17, 18), Paul can speak of it as a completed reality: God's eternal plan to glorify all true Christians cannot be altered; in that sense it's as good as done. Also, significantly, the Lord Jesus Christ, our firstborn brother, has already been glorified and we are in Him. It must be understood, of course, that we, as individuals, must continue to be faithful to the new covenant in the blood of Christ by grace through faith.

I'll quote part of what W. H. Griffith Thomas said under Rom. 8:28-30.<sup>81</sup> "It was essential in view of the context that the apostle should emphasize the Divine side since he is concerned to show that no vicissitudes can possibly rob believers of their eternal glory. Of course we must not forget that in other passages the human side and the various human conditions of this complete work are equally clearly brought to our notice. ... Those who are

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<sup>81</sup> *St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* [Eerdmans, 1947], page 227.



most deeply impressed with the marvel, power, and absoluteness of Divine grace will never fail to realize their own responsibility, their own duty, and the conditions by means of which God works out His purpose concerning them."

I'll quote a few sentences from what Godet said under verse 30.<sup>82</sup> "It is to be remarked that the apostle only points out in its accomplishment [our salvation] the acts pertaining to God: *calling, justification, glorification*, because he is only setting forth that side of the work of salvation which is contained in the decree of predestination, and which consequently depends solely on divine causation. If his intention had been to explain *the order of salvation* in all its elements *divine and human*, he would have put *faith* between calling and justification...." I agree.

I'll quote part of what Alford said under Rom. 8:28.<sup>83</sup> "...on the one hand, Scripture bears constant testimony to the fact that all believers are chosen and called by God,— their whole spiritual life in its origin, progress, and completion, being *from Him*: while on the other hand its testimony is no less precise that He willeth all to be saved, and that none shall perish except by *wilful rejection* of the truth. So that, on the one side, *GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY*,— on the other, *MAN'S FREE WILL*,—is plainly declared to us. *To receive, believe, and act on both [of] these is our duty, and our wisdom.* ... But all attempts to *bridge over the gulf between the two* are *futile*, in the present imperfect condition of man. [We're also limited to what God has chosen to reveal to us.] The very reasonings used for this purpose are clothed in language framed on the analogies of this lower world, and wholly inadequate to describe God regarded as He is in Himself. Hence arises confusion, misapprehension of God, and unbelief. I have therefore simply, in this commentary, endeavored to enter into the full meaning of the sacred text, whenever one or other of these great truths is brought forward; not explaining either of them away on account of possible difficulties arising from the recognition of the other, but recognizing as fully the *elective and predestinating decree of God*, where it is treated of, as I have done, in other places, *the free will of man*. If there be an inconsistency in this course, it is at least one in which the nature of things, the conditions of human thought, and Scripture itself, participate, and from which no Commentator that I have seen, however anxious to avoid it by extreme views one way or the other, has been able to escape."

I'll also quote part of what William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam said under Rom. 8:28.<sup>84</sup> "There can be no question that St. Paul fully recognizes the freedom of the human will. The large part which exhortation plays in his letters is conclusive proof of this. But whatever the extent of human freedom there must be behind it the Divine Sovereignty. It is the practice of St. Paul to state alternately the one and the other without attempting an exact delimitation between them. And what he has not done we are not likely to succeed in doing. In the passage before us the Divine Sovereignty is in view.... It is the proof how 'God worketh all things for good to those who love Him.' We cannot insist too strongly upon this; but when we leave the plain declarations of the Apostle and begin to draw speculative inferences on the right hand or on the left we may easily fall into cross currents which will render any such inferences invalid. See further the note on Free-Will and Predestination at the end of ch.11."

I'll quote two excerpts from the note mentioned in the last sentence; the first is from page 347, " 'Whom he called, them he also justified: and whom He justified, them he also glorified' (Rom. 8:30). But, although the assurance of hope is given by the Divine call, it is not

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<sup>82</sup> *Romans*, pages 326, 327.

<sup>83</sup> *New Testament for English Readers*, Vol. 2, page 914.

<sup>84</sup> *Epistle to the Romans* [T. & T. Clark, 1977 printing], page 216.

irrevocable. [It's true though that our salvation is super-secure if we're at all reasonable with God. He certainly is able to keep us as we look to Him in humble faith, and, significantly, He's not trying to get rid of us, quite the contrary.] 'By their unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by thy faith. Be not highminded, but fear: for if God spared not the natural branches, neither will He spare thee' (Rom. 11:20, 21)."

The second excerpt from the note by Sanday and Headlam (pages 348, 349) deals with the important fact that Paul's holding the sovereignty of God and man's free will without trying to show where the balanced truth lies was typical of the Jews of his day. (This viewpoint wasn't limited to Paul and many of the Jews of his day. This viewpoint is also demonstrated in many verses of the Old Testament and in many verses of the New Testament that were not written by Paul.) "...[Paul's] view was shared by that sect of the Jews among whom he had been brought up, and was taught in those schools in which he had been instructed. Josephus tells us that the Pharisees [Paul had been a Pharisee] attributed everything to Fate and God, but that yet the choice of right and wrong lay with men...*War II* viii. 14...; and so in *Pirqé Aboth*, iii. 24 (p. 73 ed. Taylor) [This quotation is from Rabbi Akiba, who was born about AD 50 and who died a martyr in the revolt of Bar Kochba against Rome in 135.] 'Everything is foreseen; and free-will is given: and the world is judged by grace; and everything is according to work.'..."<sup>85</sup> For more on this topic see pages 23, 24 of my paper, *Once Saved, Always Saved?* There I referred to, and quoted from, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* by E. P. Sanders. For one thing, Sanders includes quite a few relevant quotations from the Dead Sea Scrolls. For further study see pages 257-270, 446, 447 of his book.

In *Once Saved, Always Saved?* (on page 23), I also quoted from D. A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives in Tension*.<sup>86</sup> Here I'll quote several sentences from his last chapter. "The fourth Gospel [Carson's comments in this book that deal with the New Testament are mostly limited to the Gospel of John] never presents divine sovereignty and human responsibility as mutually restrictive" (page 202). "...as in the Old Testament, John does not seem to experience any difficulty in simultaneously adopting both divine sovereignty in the most unrestricted sense, and human responsibility that carries real significance. ... The treatment of the sovereignty-responsibility tension by John, then, is distinctively Jewish. It stands in a direct line of descent from the Old Testament, opposed to most of the relevant developments in the intertestamental literature [where, according to Carson, "legalism is on the rise, and with it merit theology"<sup>87</sup>], but somewhat akin to the DSS [Dead Sea Scrolls]." (page 205). "I have shown that the Old Testament, the fourth Gospel, and some other writings juxtapose divine sovereignty and human responsibility at every turn, manifesting little if any awareness of the theoretical difficulties which later thinkers discover in such a juxtaposition" (page 206). On pages 102, 118, and 119, Carson discusses the quotations from Josephus and Rabbi Akiba included in the last paragraph.] **(31) What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us** [This is a class one condition in the Greek, which means the *if* clause is assumed to be true. Instead of *if* it could be translated *because*, or *since*. Romans 8:32-39, along with the entire epistle to the

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<sup>85</sup> For further study, these quotations from Josephus and Rabbi Akiba are given in much fuller form, and they are discussed, by C. K. Barrett (*New Testament Background* [Harper and Row, 1961], pages 125, 126, and 142-144.

<sup>86</sup> Baker, 1994.

<sup>87</sup> *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*, page 120.

Romans and the rest of the New Testament, demonstrate that God *is* for us.], **who is** [who can *effectively* be] **against us?** [“These things” refer to the things of this age that involve suffering with Christ, which Paul began to discuss in Rom. 8:17 and will continue to discuss to the end of this chapter. Note “in all these things” of Rom. 8:37. The end result of all these things, as Paul has been saying (especially in Rom. 8:26-30), and as he will continue to say in the following verses, will be that, although many are against us (very much including all our enemies in the spiritual dimension), no one (or, no thing) will be able to frustrate God’s plans for us; they can’t be effective against us. They lose! We win! These things will all work for our good (Rom. 8:28), and we *will* end up in eternal glory.

I’ll quote part of what Douglas Moo said under this verse.<sup>88</sup> “If this be so [that God is for us], Paul asks, ‘who is against us?’ Obviously, Paul does not mean that nobody will, in fact, oppose us; as Paul knows from his own experience (to which he alludes in v. 35), opposition to believers is both varied and intense. What Paul is suggesting by this rhetorical question [of Rom. 8:31b] is that nobody – and no ‘thing’ – can ultimately harm, or stand in the way of, the one whom God is ‘for.’ ” Amen!] **(32) He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all** [cf. Rom. 4:25; 5:6-8; 8:3; and Isa. 53:4-12], **how will He not also with Him freely give us all things** [cf. Rom. 8:17, 18; Heb. 1:2 (Christ was “appointed heir of all things”)]? [Romans 5:6-8 emphasize that the Father’s Sacrifice of His Son in our behalf was a powerful demonstration of His love for us. I don’t suppose it would be possible to think of anything else the Father could have done that would equal what He has done—in the incarnation and the atoning death of His Son—to demonstrate His love for us. Knowing and believing that God loves us (that He is for us) is extremely important: Christianity can’t work right unless we Christians are convinced of this. It’s no wonder that the devil (starting with the temptation of Eve) makes it a top priority to try to convince God’s people that He doesn’t really love us. How could we trust God, for example, if we didn’t believe that He loved us (if we wondered whether He really was concerned for our ultimate good). We must also be convinced of the truth of God’s Word, of His sovereign authority and power, of His righteousness, goodness, etc.

There is another, closely related gift that God has given us that demonstrates His love for us. In some ways, this other gift is even more significant to demonstrate God’s love for us *as individuals* than the death of the Lamb of God because it’s so personal (Christ’s death for us was personal in some ways, but He died for all mankind); this other love-gift from the Father also confirms that the Lamb of God really has died for us and has saved us (as individuals). God has given us His Spirit, the Holy Spirit, to dwell in our hearts (e.g., Rom. 8:9-11, 23, 26, 27).

In Rom. 5:5 Paul speaks of the glorious fact that God, through the pouring out of His heart into our hearts the Holy Spirit, was pouring out (a powerful manifestation of) His love for us (as individuals). The Greek verb used in Rom. 5:5 for pouring out (*ekcheo*) is also used in Acts 2:17, 18, 33; 10:45 for God’s/Christ’s pouring out the Holy Spirit, starting on the day of Pentecost. Paul’s point in Rom. 5:5 is that we can be sure that our “hope of the glory of God,” which was mentioned in Rom. 5:2 (our hope of being caught up into eternal glory when Christ returns), will be fully realized because we can

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<sup>88</sup> *Epistle to the Romans*, page 539.

be sure that God loves us, in that, for one thing, He has manifested His love for us (as individuals) by pouring out the love-gift of the Holy Spirit into our hearts.

I have observed over the years that, even though most commentators understand the words “the love of God” in Rom. 5:5 to speak of God’s love for us, most Christians think Paul is speaking of the fact (an important fact) that we can love because God’s love is now in our hearts. (It’s true that we can love because the Spirit is now in us, but that’s not the idea, at least it’s not the primary idea, behind Paul’s use of the words “the love of God” in Rom. 5:5. Romans 5:6-8 help confirm that the apostle is dealing with God’s love for us *as individuals*.)

Talk about two love-gifts, two great manifestations of God’s love for us, that couldn’t (I don’t suppose) be equaled, not even by God! On Rom. 5:6-8 see page 90 of my book, *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*.] **(33) Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies; (34) who is the one who condemns?** [Compare Isa. 50:7-10. Many will *bring a charge against* and will *condemn* God’s elect, but these charges/condemnations can’t be effective against us (cf., e.g., John 5:24 [“judgment” probably should, be translated “condemnation”]; Rev. 12:10, 11). God’s verdict is the only one that counts. Here “justifies” probably is used in the full sense discussed under Rom. 8:30 (Paul has repeatedly spoken of this victory over sin throughout Romans chapters 1-8, especially in chapter 6 and in 8:1-14), but it could also be understood here in the less-full sense of the Judge declaring us righteous. Either way it must be understood that God does more than just declare us righteous through His Son and His atoning death. He makes us righteous with His imparted righteousness. Also, even if Christians should slip into sin, they can be immediately restored through the blood of Christ (e.g., 1 John 2:1, 2). We can’t lose unless we choose to rebel against God and the covenant He has made with us. Apathy and indifference toward God and the things of His kingdom is a form of rebellion, and it can easily lead to full-scale rebellion and apostasy.] **Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.** [Hebrews 7:25 (cf. Heb. 9:24; 1 John 2:1), which speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ, our great high priest at the right hand of God the Father, says, “Therefore He is able to save forever [or, completely] those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” And, not only this, but as we saw in Rom. 8:26, 27, the Holy Spirit also intercedes for us.] **(35) Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness [cf. 1 Cor. 4:11], or peril, or sword? [Cf. 2 Cor. 11:23-26.] (36) Just as it is written, “FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED.”** [Psalm 44:22. Compare 2 Cor. 1:9; 4:7-12 (Note that Paul makes a distinction in 2 Cor. 4:7-12 between what he and his companions had to go through and the situation for the Christians Paul ministered to). The point is that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ (His love for us). This doesn’t mean, however, that Christ (or God the Father) will always continue to love us just the same whether we continue to have faith in Him, to love Him, and to be faithful to the covenant established on His blood, or not. We can, and we must, do the basic things required of us by His grace—this must be top priority.] **(37) But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.** [Compare 1 Cor. 15:57. On our being loved by Christ, cf. Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2, 25; and Rev. 1:5. “Him who loved us”

here refers to Christ (cf. Rom. 8:34-36), but there is also a strong emphasis on the love of God the Father for us in Rom. 8:31-39 (cf. Rom. 8:28-33, 39). Christ loves us *now*, but by speaking of “Him who loved us,” Paul undoubtedly puts some emphasis on the past event of His dying for us, bearing our sins with the guilt and the penalties, which powerfully manifested His love for us. Christ was doing the will of the Father when He died for us, but He clearly did it voluntarily, laying down His life for the sheep (John 10:11-18).] **(38) For I am convinced that neither death [cf. Rom. 8:36], nor life, nor angels [Paul was undoubtedly thinking of evil angels (cf., e.g., 2 Cor. 11:14). The angels of God always work for our good (e.g., Heb. 1:14); they certainly haven’t been sent to work against us.], nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, (39) nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God [God the Father], which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.** [The Lord Jesus Christ has authority over all things, including all the things listed in these last two verses (e.g., Matt. 28:18; Eph. 1:20-23; Col. 2:10; and 1 Pet. 3:22). On *death*, the last enemy (1 Cor. 15:26), see Rev. 1:18; 2 Cor. 5:1-10; and Phil. 1:21-23. How about those who die as martyrs for Christ—isn’t that defeat? According to the viewpoint of God (which is the only viewpoint that matters) it’s victory! Whether we live or die, we have the victory in Christ. Whatever Satan and his hosts (or men) may do (and God limits what they can do), we have the victory in Christ, not that the victory is just automatic, or that it’s always easy or fun (e.g., Eph. 6:10-17).

Christ Jesus has everything covered—He has every location covered (whether height or depth), and He has the present covered along with the future, etc. He is Lord! He is our elder brother! He loves us! And, as the last words of verse 39 show, when we are caught up into this glorious love relationship with Christ, we are also being caught up into the love of the Father, who is behind this super-glorious plan of salvation. Compare John 17:20-26.]

## **Excerpts from Norman Geisler's *Chosen but Free:* *A Balanced View of Divine Election***

Introduction. While reading this book by Norman L. Geisler (which was published in 1999 by Bethany Press), I knew I wanted to include some excerpts in this paper. For one thing, so much of what Dr. Geisler says in this book squares with what I have said regarding the later view of Augustine and regarding Calvinism in my papers. These excerpts from Geisler will help confirm what I have said, and they will help the reader better understand this rather important topic. Geisler uses most of the 256 pages of this book to demonstrate that what he calls extreme Calvinism misses the balanced truth of what the Bible teaches. He calls himself a moderate Calvinist.

I'm sure that most Calvinists would object to being called *extreme* Calvinists by Geisler. They would undoubtedly say that most of what Geisler calls extreme Calvinism is rather standard Calvinism, and that what he calls moderate Calvinism deviates substantially from standard Calvinism. Based on what I know of Calvinism, I would agree with them in this assessment, but I agree with most of what Geisler says regarding (extreme) Calvinism's missing the Scriptural balance. Geisler doesn't accept any of the first four points of Calvinism that are contained in the TULIP (at least not in the way they are typically understood by Calvinists<sup>89</sup>). T is for Total Depravity; U is for Unconditional Election; L for Limited Atonement; I for Irresistible grace; and P for the Perseverance of the Saints.

I discussed the TULIP to some extent in my paper, *Once Saved, Always Saved?* Geisler agrees with the "P" of the TULIP, that it's impossible for the elect to lose their salvation. I'll include a section later in this paper titled "Perseverance of the Saints." Although I have much respect for Calvinists, I don't agree with any of the so-called five points of Calvinism the way they are typically defined by Calvinists.

Ephesians 1:3-14 and Rom. 8:28-30 are two of the most important passages in the Bible that emphasize God's role in our salvation. (Both of these passages are discussed in a verse-by-verse manner in this paper.) Both of these passages are very relevant to the later view of Augustine and Calvinism (so too for Romans chapter 9), since that viewpoint strongly emphasizes God's role in our salvation. I believe (with Geisler) that the later view of Augustine and Calvinism overemphasize God's role, while understating man's role. (It's important to emphasize God's role, and I'm very thankful for all the good fruit that has come from Calvinists, but we desperately need the balanced truth of what the Bible teaches.) Geisler deals to some extent with verses from Eph. 1:3-14 and Rom. 8:28-30 in this book, but I won't be quoting from that material in this paper.

Dr. Geisler, a well-respected evangelical scholar, "is President of Southern Evangelical Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina. He is author or coauthor of more than sixty books and hundreds of articles and has spoken or debated in all fifty states and in

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<sup>89</sup> On pages 116, 117 Geisler briefly outlines what he calls a moderate Calvinist's understanding of the first four points of the TULIP.

twenty-five countries. He holds a B.A. and an M.A. from Wheaton College, a Th.D. from William Tyndale College, and a Ph.D. from Loyola University in Chicago.”

I have greatly abbreviated the quotations from Geisler that were included in the original paper for this internet version. I had received permission to quote extensively for the original paper but not for this internet version of the paper.

Pages 29-37 (of *Chosen but Free: A Balanced View of Divine Election*). ...

“From beginning to end the Bible affirms, both implicitly and explicitly, that human beings have free choice. This is true both prior to and after the Fall of Adam, although free will is definitely affected by sin and severely limited in what it can do. ... ..the image of God (which includes free will) is still in human beings after the Fall. ...” (page 32).

“... ..belief is our responsibility and is rooted in our ability to respond. This view has overwhelming support by virtually all the great church fathers up to the sixteenth century (see appendix 1, which starts on page 145 in Geisler’s book)” (page 34).

“...is also true that no free human act can move toward God or do any spiritual good without the aid of His grace. [After going on to list some verses that acknowledge man’s dependence on God, Geisler quotes from W. G. T. Shedd (he calls Shedd a moderate Calvinist):] ‘... The sinner is free in accepting or rejecting the invitations of the gospel. If he accepts them, he does so freely under the actuation of the Holy Spirit. If he rejects them, he does so freely without this actuation and solely by his own self-determination (*Dogmatic Theology*, 3.298-299)’ ” (pages 35-37).

One difference between this viewpoint and the more standard Calvinistic viewpoint is that Geisler and Shedd do not believe that this “actuation of the Holy Spirit” works in man in an irresistible manner (note that Shedd spoke of the sinner being free to accept or to reject the invitations of the gospel). Also, significantly, Geisler (and I assume Shedd) does not believe, as the (extreme) Calvinists do, that this enabling grace of the Holy Spirit is only for the elect. (I’ll discuss this rather important topic in the next four paragraphs.)

On page 60, for example, Geisler answers the question: *Does God give the ability to come to Jesus to all men?* “The answer is that there is nothing here [John 6:65] or anywhere else to say God limits His willingness to provide this ability to only some.” Geisler goes on to mention that the Bible states that God wants all men to repent and be saved (2 Pet. 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:4; cf. Ezek. 18:32). On page 186 he mentions that “Moderate Calvinists do not deny that God moves upon the hearts of unbelievers to persuade and prompt them to exercise faith in Christ. They deny only that God does this coercively by irresistible grace (see chapters 4 and 5) and that He only does it on some persons (the elect).” He discusses this point further on pages 189-190, under the heading “Saving Faith Is Something All Can Exercise.” And on page 66 Geisler says, “as a result of the convicting work of the Holy Spirit ON THE WHOLE ‘WORLD’ [my emphasis] (John 16:8) and ‘the goodness of God’ (Rom. 2:4 NKJV), some people are moved to repent.”

It seems to me that Geisler misses the Scriptural balance here. I believe there is a big difference between saying that God wants all to repent and be saved and saying that He

gives the ability to come to Jesus to all men (see Geisler's comment in the last paragraph). In John 6:44, 65, for example, Jesus clearly spoke of God (who knows the hearts of all people) drawing some and not others (I'm not speaking of an irresistible drawing), and there are many similar passages in the Bible that confirm this biblical teaching (including Eph. 1:3-14 [especially see verses 4, 5, 11] and Rom. 8:28-30; also see, for example, John 6:37, 39, 45; Acts 13:48; 16:14; Rom. 9:16-29; 1 Cor. 1:24). John 6:44, 65 are discussed on pages 34-37 of my "A Paper on Faith" on my internet site, and essentially all of these verses are discussed in my writings. Acts 13:48 is discussed on page 43 of my paper just mentioned. In my paper on Ephesians chapter 1 (including the lengthy discussion that follows the verse-by-verse study of that super-important chapter), for example, I dealt at length with the widespread, but mistaken, idea that God (who knows the hearts of all people) loves all the same with an abiding unconditional love. How about those that Jesus said were children of the devil, for example? How about those that God knows never will repent and submit to Him or His divine order? I don't believe it is biblical to say that God gives the ability to all people come to Jesus.

It is significant, for one thing, that the word "call" is typically used in the New Testament in the limited sense of God's calling the ones He has chosen (by His foreknowledge), not of His calling all people (Acts 2:39; Rom. 1:6; 8:28, 30; 9:24; 1 Cor. 1:9, 24; 1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 2:14; and Heb. 1:5; cf., e.g., Eph. 1:4; Rev. 13:8; and 17:8), though it is true that Christ died for all people and God calls all to repent and submit to Him and His salvation in faith (cf., e.g., Acts 17:30, 31; 26:20; and 1 Tim. 2:3-7). The Bible teaches both, and there is no contradiction.

There are even passages that speak of God's hardening some hearts (rather than drawing them to Christ), but **SUCH HARDENING IS NEVER ARBITRARY**. If He hardens the hearts of some people, rather than draw them to Jesus, He certainly knows that those people never would repent and submit to the gospel on His terms, which are necessary terms. We have to understand and believe, of course, that God is good and He knows what He is doing. He doesn't make mistakes, and He isn't on trial. Geisler would agree, by the way, as would all Calvinists, that God just calls the elect, but as we discussed, Geisler believes that God gives the ability to come to Jesus to all people. I believe that idea misses the biblical balance, but I am totally confident that any people who open their hearts before God and begin to cooperate with His Word and His saving grace in Christ and persevere in that direction will find salvation.

"...Unfortunately, the extreme Calvinists have sacrificed human responsibility in order to preserve divine sovereignty (see chapter 4)" (page 37). But we don't have to sacrifice human responsibility to preserve divine sovereignty. Our sovereign God has chosen to leave a significant role for people to play in their repentance and acceptance (in faith) or rejection of the gospel. For one significant thing (although God draws, convicts, etc.) He doesn't just give us saving faith to begin with, and (although He provides the grace for us to continue in faith and sincerely calls for born-again Christians who are living in sin to repent, as in Revelation chapters 2, 3 for example), He doesn't force us to continue in faith. (See my *A Paper on Faith and Once Saved, Always Saved?*) We cannot tell God what He must do if He is sovereign, which He is. In His sovereignty He



has chosen to allow many things to happen that are not His will. He never wills for His people (or His cherubim, angels) to rebel against Him and sin, for example, but He limits how far He permits sin to go. He never loses the overall control of His universe.

Page 42. “No one has ever demonstrated a contradiction between predestination and free choice. There is no irresolvable conflict between an event being predetermined by an all-knowing God and it also being freely chosen by us.”

Pages 56-58. Geisler is disagreeing here with what he calls the extreme Calvinists’ view of total depravity. (This is the T of the TULIP. Much that I have already quoted from Geisler, and much that I’ll quote as we continue, also relates to this important topic.) ... I’ll also include a few words from page 116 here, “[Moderate Calvinists] insist that being ‘dead’ in sin does not mean that unsaved people cannot understand and receive the truth of the gospel as the Spirit of God works on their hearts. ....”

Pages 59, 60, 71. “... [From what I know of Calvinism, I wouldn’t call this viewpoint (the Calvinistic viewpoint that regeneration precedes faith) extreme Calvinism. It seems to be the standard viewpoint of Calvinists. Anyway, I agree with Geisler’s viewpoint that the Bible teaches that faith precedes regeneration.] ....”

Pages 161, 162. This excerpt is from appendix three, which is titled “The Origins of Extreme Calvinism.” I had quoted some 350 words from Geisler here. He argued for the viewpoint (which he says was “virtually the whole of the Christian tradition up to the Reformation”) that fallen human beings have the ability to submit to God’s saving grace and rejecting the idea of man’s being saved by God’s irresistible grace. He discusses the fact that this erroneous viewpoint traces back to the Augustine (AD 354-430) in his later years.

On page 162 Geisler says that one of the things that caused Augustine to change his viewpoint was his controversy with the Donatists, where he affirmed “that heretics could be coerced to believe *against* their free choice to confess the Catholic faith. ... If the church can coerce heretics to believe against their will, then why can’t God force sinners to believe against their will?” Later I have a section titled “Augustine and the Donatists.”

Pages 181, 182. These pages are at the beginning of appendix five, which is titled “Is Faith a Gift Only to the Elect?” I had quoted some 250 words from Geisler here. He argues against the idea that faith is a gift of God given only to the elect. He spends quite a bit of space here arguing against the common Calvinistic interpretation of Eph. 2:8, that this verse speaks of faith being a gift of God given to man in regeneration. He argues (rightly I believe) that Eph. 2:8 speaks of *salvation* being the gift of God, not faith. He says that even John Calvin agreed on this interpretation of Eph. 2:8. On Eph. 2:8-10, see my *A Paper on Faith* (pages 77-80 of the version on my internet site). A key point of that paper is to demonstrate that faith is something we do, in response to God’s initiative.

Page 218. This excerpt is from appendix eight, “An Evaluation of the Canons of Dort.” Geisler quotes Article XIV of the *Canons of Dort*. Geisler argues here against the Calvinistic idea that faith is a gift of God to the elect that (in the final analysis) cannot

be rejected (irresistible grace).

Pages 228-231. “there are no verses properly understood that teach regeneration is prior to faith. Instead, it is the uniform pattern of Scripture to place faith logically prior to salvation as a condition for receiving it. ....”

## Perseverance of the Saints

Geisler deals with this topic on pages 117-128. The thing that caught my attention the most in his rather brief treatment of this topic was that he listed Gal. 5:4; Heb. 6:4-6; and 10:26-29 under the heading “True Believers Lose Rewards, Not Salvation.” I don’t believe there’s any possibility that this heading gives the correct interpretation of these verses. Also, Geisler (on page 128) speaks of 2 Tim. 2:13 as “one of the strongest verses of all verses on eternal security.” I don’t believe that this verse offers any support for the doctrine once saved, always saved. In fact, the “trustworthy statement” of 2 Tim. 2:11-13 contains a very powerful warning to Christians that they dare not deny Christ—they must stay faithful to Him—lest He deny them and they forfeit salvation. We’ll look at 2 Tim. 2:11-13 in the following section.

On pages 99, 100 Geisler discusses “Extreme vs. Moderate Calvinism on Perseverance.” He is concerned that “some extreme Calvinists seem to imply that none of the elect will die in sin [in other words, some extreme Calvinists believe that if “Christians” die in sin it demonstrates that they really weren’t elect of God or true Christians, because true Christians don’t live in sin (they aren’t characterized by sin) and they don’t die in sin], while the moderate Calvinist holds that no elect person will be lost, even if he dies in sin.” I believe the moderate Calvinist is on very shaky ground here; I don’t believe the Bible backs up this viewpoint. Apparently Geisler doesn’t go as far as the advocates of “No-Lordship Salvation” in leaving room for sin in the lives of Christians. On pages 128, 129 he cautions believers to examine themselves to make sure they are true believers. (No-Lordship Salvation and Antinomianism are discussed in my paper, *The Christian, the Law, and Legalism.*)

I’ll include several excerpts (going on for several pages) from my paper, *Once Saved, Always Saved?* (from pages 20-22 of the version on my website), from a section titled, “Origin of the Doctrine Once Saved, Always Saved” I recommend reading the entire paper.

“This doctrine [perseverance of the saints; once saved, always saved] originated, for the most part at least, with the later view of Augustine. He died AD 430. I’ll start with a lengthy quotation from a Calvinistic theologian, L. Berkhof (*Systematic Theology*,<sup>90</sup> page 545): ‘The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints...is to the effect that they whom God has regenerated [caused to be reborn] and effectually called to a state of grace, can neither totally nor finally fall away from that state, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end and be eternally saved. This doctrine was first explicitly taught by Augustine, though he was not as consistent on this point as might have been expected of him as a strict predestinarian. With him

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<sup>90</sup> Eerdmans, 1941.

the doctrine did not assume the form just stated. He held that the elect could not so fall away as to be finally lost, but at the same time considered it possible that some who were endowed with new life and true faith could fall from grace completely and at last suffer eternal damnation. The Church of Rome with its Semi-Pelagianism, including the doctrine of free will, denied the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints and made their perseverance depend on the uncertain obedience of man. The Reformers [Luther, Calvin, and others] restored this doctrine to its rightful place. The Lutheran Church [not following Luther], however, makes it uncertain again by making it contingent on man's continued activity of faith, and by assuming that believers can fall completely from grace. It is only in the Calvinistic Churches that the doctrine is maintained in a form in which it affords absolute assurance.... The Arminians rejected this view and made the perseverance of believers dependent on their will to believe and on their good works. [Arminians would insist that their works are by grace. Also, they would also say that they could not have believed apart from the enabling grace of God made available to all mankind.] ... The Wesleyan Arminians followed suit.... The Reformed or Calvinistic Churches stand practically alone in giving a negative answer to the question, whether a Christian can completely fall from the state of grace and be finally lost. [All underlining is mine.]

I'll quote part of what David Bercot says (still quoting from my paper, *Once Saved, Always Saved?*) on the view of the early Christian writers under the subheading, "Can A Saved Person Be Lost?" (*Will the Real Heretics Please Stand Up: A New Look at Today's Evangelical Church in the Light of Early Christianity* [Scroll Publishing, 1989, 1999], pages 65, 66):

'Since the early Christians believed that our continued faith and obedience [true faith includes obedience (by grace)] are necessary for salvation, it naturally follows that they believed that a "saved" person could still end up being lost. For example, Irenaeus [about AD 130-200], the pupil of Polycarp [who knew the apostle John], wrote, "Christ will not die again on behalf of those who now commit sin because death shall no more have dominion over Him.... Therefore we should not be puffed up.... But we should beware lest somehow, after [we have come to] the knowledge of Christ, if we do things displeasing to God, we obtain no further forgiveness of sins but rather be shut out from His kingdom" (*Against Heresies*, bk. 4, chap. 27, sec. 2. [Heb. 6:4-6]). [Irenaeus didn't mean that there is no forgiveness for sins committed after conversion, but that (according to the Bible) we Christians must know that it is very dangerous to leave any room for sin, and especially sin that falls in the category of being willful, defiant sin or apostasy.]

Tertullian [about AD 160-240] wrote, "Some people act as though God were under an obligation to bestow even on the unworthy His intended gift. ... For do not many afterwards fall out of grace? Is not this gift [of salvation] taken away from many?" (*On Repentance*, chapter 6)

Cyprian [about AD 200-258] told his fellow believers, "It is written, 'He who endures to the end, the same shall be saved' [Matt. 10:22]. So whatever precedes the end is only a step by which we ascend to the summit of salvation. It is not the final point wherein we have already gained the full result of the ascent." (*Unity of the Church*, section 21)

One of the Scripture passages that the early Christians frequently cited is Heb. 10:26: "If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left." Our preachers usually tell us that the writer of Hebrews wasn't talking about saved persons. ... All the early Christians understood this passage to be talking about persons who had been saved. ....' Many more similar quotations from early Christian writers [quite a few of these brethren were martyred for Christ] are available. (See the appendix of my

paper, *Once Saved, Always Saved?* on my internet site.)

(I'm still quoting from *Once Saved, Always Saved* for the next four paragraphs.) It is important to understand that the perseverance of the saints was only part of the package that Augustine came up with. An important part of the package was the idea that man is so completely fallen that he has no ability to respond to God's grace. Calvinists often use the words "Total Depravity." I agree that man is so fallen that God must take the initiative in our salvation, and that salvation must be all of grace since we do not merit salvation in any way. But Calvinists (following Augustine) include the idea that man is totally unable to respond to God's grace and God must do everything, including giving faith to His chosen ones. ...

It is important to see that the doctrine of once saved, always saved did not arise on its own, but as part of the Augustinian/Calvinistic system briefly described above. The doctrine follows quite naturally once you accept this theological viewpoint. However, it would have been very difficult for the doctrine to arise on its own with wide acceptance because of its limited scriptural support, especially when you consider the many passages of scripture that clearly refute the doctrine. Many such passages are discussed in this paper. The primary verses used to support the doctrine are listed below (in the paper *Once Saved, Always Saved?*)

There are many Christians today, including many Baptists, who hold once saved, always saved but do not agree with much, if any, of the Augustinian/Calvinistic viewpoint. [Geisler fits here to a significant extent.] However, I believe we can say that their doctrine traces back to this viewpoint (whether directly or indirectly) in most cases. After all, the doctrine of eternal security is appealing, and easy to accept. Once the doctrine had received wide acceptance, it became rather easy to accept the doctrine without the supporting structure provided by the theological viewpoint of the later Augustine and Calvinism.

I'll quote from W. W. Adams. (At the time of this writing he was a professor at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The quotation is taken from the Introduction to *Elect in the Son* by R. Shank (1970).<sup>91</sup>) 'Let it be remembered that, less than a hundred years ago, all five cardinal points of Calvin's system of theology [the TULIP] generally prevailed among Baptists, as theological textbooks of the times will confirm. Today, only one point remains to any appreciable extent among Baptists, inevitable perseverance, and there is growing evidence that Baptists are increasingly questioning this last vestige of the central core of Calvin's system of theology. Our only legitimate concern in all of this is, What saith the Scripture? Amen!'

## **A Study of 2 Timothy 2:11-13**

Because of the subject matter of this epistle written by the apostle Paul to Timothy, who was a minister under Paul with quite a bit of authority/responsibility, these verses we are studying were especially aimed at those in the ministry, but there's no doubting that these verses also have much application for every Christian, whether called into the

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<sup>91</sup> Westcott Publishers.

ministry, or not. There's widespread agreement that this is the last epistle that the apostle wrote (at least it's the last of the epistles written by Paul that we possess). The time for him to be martyred for Christ at Rome was apparently not far off (cf. 2 Tim. 4:6, 7), not that it was only a couple of days off (cf. 2 Tim. 4:9, 21).

A major thrust of the epistle was to urge Timothy to be fully faithful to Christ in his Christian life and ministry (see all four chapters on this point), and Timothy was to exhort other ministers to do the same thing (e.g., 2 Tim. 2:2, 14-21, 25, 26). The more difficult the times, the more we must make it a top priority to remain faithful to Christ. (It's also true that when things are going relatively easy, we must be diligent to make sure we don't backslide. The history of Israel in the Old Testament demonstrates this important point.) Paul wrote this epistle knowing that some ministers had stopped being faithful to Christ (cf. 2 Tim. 1:15; 2:17-21; and 4:10).

**It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him** [Romans chapter 6 is an important cross-reference on dying with Christ and living with Him (especially note Rom. 6:8), but there the emphasis is on the fact that we live with Christ *now*, having been raised from the dead (cf. Col. 2:12, 13; 3:1-3). The yet-future eternal life is also included there (cf. Rom. 6:22, 23; Col. 3:2, 3). Here in 2 Tim. 2:11 the words "we will also live with Him" speak of our yet-future eternal life, which is a common perspective in the New Testament (cf. Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30; Rom. 8:11; 2 Cor. 5:4; Gal. 6:8; 1 Thess. 5:10; 1 Tim. 6:12, 19; Titus 3:7; James 1:12; Rev. 2:7, 10; and 7:17).

Significantly, the words "if we died with Him" here in 2 Tim. 2:11 mean much more than just having an initial new-birth experience. They include the idea that the believer goes on to make it a top priority to ensure that the old man with its sinful works really is put to death and that we are living as faithful Christians (e.g., Romans chapter 6 [almost every verse]; Rom. 8:12-14; Gal. 5:24; Eph. 4:22-24; and Col. 3:5-11). This includes taking up our cross (cf. Matt. 10:37-39; 16:24-27; Mark 8:34-39; Luke 9:23-26; 14:26-33; and Gal. 6:12, 14), which includes being willing to suffer with Christ (cf., e.g., Rom. 8:17, 18 ["and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may be glorified with *Him*. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us"].); **(12) If we endure** [Paul had just mentioned in 2 Tim. 2:10 that he *endured* all things for the sake of those who are chosen. The apostle had special trials to *endure* as the apostle to the Gentiles, and some special trials came to ministers like Timothy (cf. 2 Tim. 2:1-10), but all Christians must persevere and be willing to *endure* the trials and temptations that all believers face, whether in the ministry, or not (e.g., Acts 14:22; 1 Cor. 4:12; 9:12; 2 Cor. 1:6; 1 Thess. 2:14; 2 Thess. 1:4; 2 Tim. 3:11; 4:5; Heb. 10:32; 11:27; 12:7; 1 Pet. 2:20; and Rev. 2:3). Those who *endure to the end* (by God's sufficient grace) will be saved (Matt. 10:22; 24:13; and Mark 13:13).], **we will also reign with Him** [These words speak of our yet-future reign with Christ (cf., e.g., Rev. 2:26, 27; 3:21; 5:10; 20:4, 6; and 22:5).]; **If we deny Him** [We would deny Him by failing to be faithful to Him and the covenant we have with Him (cf., e.g., 1 Tim. 5:8; Titus 1:16; 2 Pet. 2:1; Jude 1:4; Rev. 2:13; and 3:8).], **He also will deny us** [See Matt. 10:32, 33; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26; and 12:8, 9.]; **(13) If we are faithless, He remains faithful** [cf., e.g., Rom. 3:3], **for He cannot deny Himself.**

As I mentioned, Geisler listed this verse as “one of the strongest verses of all verses on eternal security.” (Many Christians agree with Geisler’s understanding of this verse.) It seems clear to me that 2 Tim. 2:12, 13 constitute a strong teaching against eternal security. *This verse surely wasn’t written to take back (to contradict) what the apostle had just clearly stated in verse 12.* And there are many other verses, throughout the Old Testament and the New Testament, that demonstrate that God’s people can turn their backs on God/Christ and cease to be His people. (See my paper *Once Saved, Always Saved?* for many examples from the New Testament.) I consider this verse to be a very strong warning to Christians that they certainly can lose their salvation. It’s no wonder that there is so little fear among so many Christians in our day, when we explain away all the warnings of the Bible, whether well intentioned, or not. The Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, makes it very clear that we should be afraid to sin against God!

The first two *if* clauses (in 2:11b and 12a) go together and refer to those who stay *faithful* to Christ until the end (which we all can and should do—this is the will of God; and His enabling grace is sufficient). The last two *if* clauses (in 2:12b and 2:13) also go together and refer to those Christians who are *not faithful* to Christ and deny Him. “If we died with Him” (2:11b) and “if we endure” (2:12a) both refer to those Christians who remain faithful. “If we deny Him” (2:12b) and “if we are faithless” (2:13) both refer to those Christians who turn their backs on Christ. The words “He remains faithful” (2:13) apparently are limited (in this context) to saying that He remains faithful to do what He frequently said He would do—when He denies those who have denied Him.

The words, “for He cannot deny Himself” (2:13), rather powerfully back up this idea. That is, if He didn’t deny those who deny Him, He would have to deny Himself, which is impossible. A more literal translation of the Greek of these last words makes this point even more dramatic, “for to deny Himself He is not able.” The words “He remains faithful, for to deny Himself He is not able” were written, it seems clear to me, to help put the fear of God in the hearts of any Christians who would consider entertaining the idea of denying Christ. Although the idea that He remains (He is) faithful to bring to pass what He has said He would do for all those who stay faithful to Him apparently isn’t included in verse 13, it certainly is Scriptural and true.

Unfaithfulness (without repentance) does not always result in loss of salvation (it depends, for one thing, on the level of unfaithfulness; it also depends, to some extent, on the level of maturity of the Christians who are being unfaithful to God; and God, who is merciful, knows the heart), but all unfaithfulness is a serious matter, and all unfaithfulness robs God of glory, hurts the body of Christ, and can lead to a loss of rewards (which is a serious matter), if not loss of salvation.

I’ll quote part of what John R. W. Stott said under 2 Tim. 2:11-13.<sup>92</sup> “Paul now quotes a current saying or fragment of an early Christian hymn which he pronounces reliable [trustworthy, faithful].<sup>93</sup> It consists of two pairs of epigrams, which are general axioms of

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<sup>92</sup> *The Message of 2 Timothy* [Inter-Varsity Press, 1973], pages 63, 64.

<sup>93</sup> Stott has a footnote here, “There are four similar quotations in the Pastorals [the so-called Pastoral epistles: 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus] introduced by the formula ‘the saying is sure’, namely in 1 Tim. 1:15; 3:1; 4:9 and Tit. 3:8.”

Christian life and experience. ... The first pair relates to those who remain true and endure, the second pair to those who become false and faithless.

The death with Christ which is here mentioned ["if we died with Him"] must refer, according to the context, not to our death to *sin* through union with Christ in his death, but rather to our death to *self* and to *safety*, as we take up the cross and follow Christ. [I don't believe we can exclude our death to *sin*.] ...

This other pair of epigrams envisages the dreadful possibility of our denying Christ and proving faithless. The first phrase 'if we deny him, he also will deny us' seems to be an echo of our Lord's own warning: 'whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven' [my emphasis] (Mt. 10:33).

What then of the second phrase 'if we are faithless, he remains faithful'? It has often been taken as a comforting assurance that, even if we turn away from Christ, he will not turn away from us, for he will never be faithless as we are. And it is true, of course, that God never exhibits the fickleness or the faithlessness of man. Yet the logic of the Christian hymn, with its two pairs of balancing epigrams, really demands a different interpretation. 'If we deny him' and 'if we are faithless' are parallels, which requires that 'he will deny us' and 'he remains faithful' be parallels also. In this case his 'faithfulness' when we are faithless will be faithfulness to his warnings. ... So he will deny us, as the earlier epigram asserts. Indeed, if he did not deny us (in faithfulness to his plain warnings), he would then deny himself. But one thing is certain about God beyond any doubt or uncertainty whatever, and that is 'he cannot deny himself.' "

I'll quote a short paragraph from what William Hendricksen said regarding 2 Tim. 2:13.<sup>94</sup> "It is hardly necessary to add that the meaning of the last line cannot be, 'If we are faithless and deny him, nevertheless he, remaining faithful to his promise, will give us everlasting life.' Aside from being wrong for other reasons, such an interpretation destroys the evident implication of the parallelism between lines three and four." Commenting on the warning contained in 2 Tim. 2:12b, 13, Hendricksen (a Calvinist) said, "It is a very earnest warning for those who might be inclined to become disloyal."

I'll also quote part of what R. C. H. Lenski (a Lutheran) said under 2 Tim. 2:13.<sup>95</sup> "Men [some men] expect Christ to act in the same way [that some men act, contradicting themselves, etc.] on judgment day: deny all his warning threats, give them and thus himself the lie, and let these deniers enter heaven as do his faithful believers. ... 'he is not able.' Count on the changeless Christ to all eternity." God cannot allow rebels into His eternal kingdom without destroying the divine order of that kingdom.

## Augustine and the Donatists

I'll quote from Philip Schaff.<sup>96</sup> He's dealing with "Augustine and the Donatists. Their Persecution and Extinction." "Augustine himself, who had previously consented only to spiritual measures against heretics,<sup>97</sup> now advocated force, to bring them into the fellowship of

<sup>94</sup> *Thessalonians, Timothy, and Titus* [Baker, 1979], page 260.

<sup>95</sup> *St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon* [Augsburg, 1946], page 796.

<sup>96</sup> *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. 3 [Eerdmans, 1984 reprint], page 364.

<sup>97</sup> We should be very careful using the word *heretic*. There's widespread agreement that the core beliefs of the Donatists were quite orthodox. Yes, there were some excesses, and there was some fleshiness, but they didn't have a corner on such things.

the church, out of which there was no salvation. He appealed to the command in the parable of the supper, Luke 14:23, to 'compel them to come in'; where, however, the 'compel'...is evidently but a vivid hyperbole for the holy zeal in the conversion of the heathen, which we find, for example, in the Apostle Paul." Luke 14:23 deals with inviting Gentiles to become Christians, not with trying to force "heretics" back into the fellowship of the church.

On pages 166-172 Geisler has a section titled, "The Extreme 'Calvinism' of the Later Augustine." He has already informed us (see on his pages 161, 162 earlier in this paper) that Augustine's controversy with the schismatic Donatists was part of what caused him to change his viewpoint about man's free will. I'll include two excerpts from the later Augustine that deal with the Donatists (from Geisler's page 168). Geisler includes many more excerpts from Augustine on pages 166-172.

The first excerpt is under Geisler's heading, "Compelling Donatists is acceptable." "Wherefore, if the power which the Church has received by divine appointment in its due season...be the instrument by which *those who are found in the highways and hedges* [Luke 14:23 (discussed above in the excerpt from Schaff)] – *that is, in heresies and schisms – are compelled to come in, then let them not find fault with being compelled, but consider whether they be so compelled* (*Corrections of the Donatists*, 6.24)."

In this next excerpt, which Geisler titled "Christ used violence on Paul," Augustine was dealing with the fact that the Donatists insisted that "*Man is at liberty to believe or not believe.*" Augustine responded that Christ had compelled Paul, who became an apostle. "*Why, therefore, should not the Church use force in compelling her lost sons to return, if the lost sons compelled others to their destruction? [I would agree that it could have been proper to use force against Donatists who were using force to keep some in their fold, but that is very different than using force in trying to compel her lost sons to return.]* (*Correction of the Donatists*, 6.22-23)." Augustine was taking quite a leap from Christ's arrest of Paul (while on his way to Damascus to attack some more Christians) to the Church's right to try to force heretics and schismatics into the communion with the Catholic Church of that day. Nor would it be accurate to argue (as some do) that Paul's conversion demonstrates that man has no part to play in his conversion.



## **Excerpts from Michael L. Brown's *Go and Sin No More: A Call to Holiness***

I very much appreciated reading this newly published book by Michael L. Brown. (It was published in 1999 by Regal Books.) Dr. Brown (he has a Ph.D. in Near Eastern Languages and Literature from New York University, and has served as a visiting professor at Fuller Theological Seminary School of Missions and at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) currently serves as president of the Brownsville Revival School of Ministry in Pensacola, Florida.

I'll include extensive excerpts from Brown in this section. Most of the excerpts deal with the extreme privilege, but also with the responsibility, that all Christians have to truly be set apart from sin and for God through salvation in Christ Jesus. Brown repeatedly makes this point in this book, often in powerful ways.

Later in this chapter I'll include some excerpts (and I'll interact with these excerpts) where Brown acknowledges that there are passages in the New Testament (especially 1 John 1:7-2:2; but also Romans chapter 7) that prove that Christians cannot live above sin. I'm not bringing this up to be critical—this topic is extremely important. I'm quite convinced that these passages don't support the widespread viewpoint that Christians cannot walk in victory over sin. What I'm sharing is good news, very good news! The purpose of God is to bring transformation to Christians, not condemnation.

Transformation comes through salvation in Christ Jesus, but it comes by grace through faith, a faith that must be based on what the New Testament actually teaches.

I don't know Dr. Brown, but based on what I know of him from this book, I'm confident that he would like to believe that the New Testament, in its entirety, does teach (and call Christians to) victory over all sin, and I won't be surprised to hear that he has changed his viewpoint regarding 1 John 1:7-2:2 and Romans chapter 7. If Brown were to change what he said regarding these passages and the fact that all Christians will continue to sin to some extent, his book (which I rather highly recommend) would be far better in my opinion (but it wouldn't be as well accepted by most Christians, at least not at the present time).

I am greatly abbreviating the quotations for the internet version of this paper. I included page after page of quotations in the original paper, having received permission to quote extensively from the publisher. I still have several copies of the original paper.

I'll quote a few paragraphs from Brown's preface, which is titled, "Arise from Your Slumber!" "...It is a sad but undeniable fact that the abysmal standards of our society merely reflect the abysmal standards of much of the Church. ..." (page 15).

"... ..I continue to be convinced that habitual, deliberate sin has no place in the life of a believer. [I believe we can and should say that *no* sin has a (legitimate) place in the life of a believer. This is the ideal viewpoint consistently presented in the New Testament.] Being under the lordship of Jesus and walking in the Spirit means making a break with sin, being set free from the domination of sin, and living a life marked by obedience.... I believe that this is the biblical norm, in spite of the temptations, battles, and frustrations we all face. ... If God calls us to be holy, then we *can* be holy" (page 16).

“... And when we realize that *God hates sin*—acutely, passionately, totally—we have more than enough reason to flee from that which defiles and cleave to that which is good, pure, and wholesome—in other words, to that which is holy and to Him who is holy. It is for Him, through Him, and to Him that we are holy. ...” (page 17).

Chapters 1-3, “Twenty Reasons Not to Sin.” I’ll list Brown’s twenty reasons, then I’ll quote a small part of what he said in these chapters. ...

I’ll quote a few sentences from pages 23, 24 of chapter 1. “... If you play with sin, you *will* be destroyed. It is never worth it in the end. Never! ... When we see sin for what it really is—in its most full and extreme forms—it will help us to flee from even the ‘smallest’ sins.”

On page 48, under “Sin Hurts the Lord” (one of Brown’s twenty reasons not to sin). ...

On page 54, under “Sin Brings Reproach—to the Sinner, to the Church, to the Name of the Lord” (another of Brown’s twenty reasons not to sin). ...

On page 64, under “Sin Puts the Sinner on the Side of the Devil, Demons, and the World” (another of Brown’s twenty reasons not to sin). ...

On pages 64, 65, under “Sin Sets the Sinner Against God, the Church, Holiness, Life, Blessing, and Victory” (another of Brown’s twenty reasons not to sin). ...

On page 74 Brown mentions that sin can cost you your salvation.

Chapter 4, “The Fateful End.” This chapter is quite important, but I can’t quote the entire book. The point is that sin always has a bad *end*. Brown deals mostly with sexual sins in this chapter. For one thing, he exhorts God’s people to not dress or act in seductive, suggestive ways.

Chapter 5, “‘Go and Sin No More’: What Does the Bible Say?” On pages 93-95 Brown deals with John 8:1-11, the verses that deal with the woman taken in adultery and brought to Jesus. ...

“*‘We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?’* (Rom. 6:1, 2). ...

“The great problem in the Church today is that we make light of our disobedience and freely excuse our sins. ...

...[The Lord] is not calling us to do anything we cannot do. ... But if Jesus says we can be free from sin, if Paul tells us we have died to sin, if John tells us to live above sin, then somehow, some way, by God’s enabling grace, we can do it” (page 102).

“...” (page 106). One reason I included this excerpt was to underscore Brown’s point that the major conflict is between the Spirit (the Holy Spirit) and the flesh, not (as many say) between our flesh and our spirit. The Spirit is well able to win every battle, and we will always win over sin when we walk after the Spirit through faith (cf., e.g., Gal. 5:16).

Chapter 8, “The Letter Kills’: The Peril of Legalistic Religion.” ...

“... [Here Brown makes the point that although holiness freely comes from God, we must repent and submit to His plan of salvation and be disciplined and persevere.]” (page 153).

“Legalism is Deadly, but License Is Damnable. While Legalism Slays its Thousands, Libertarianism Slays it Tens of Thousands” (page 155). ...

Chapter 11, “Cut Off Your Hand and Gouge Out Your Eye.” This chapter builds on what Jesus said in Matt. 5:29, 30; 18:7-9; and Mark 9:43, 45, 47, 48. “...graphically explains the ruthless way in which we must deal with sinful tendencies and habits.... ..” (page 198).

...

Chapter 12, “It’s All Grace!” “...there are leaders who seem to forget [some never learned] that salvation by grace includes *freedom* from sin as well as *forgiveness* of sin. ...” (pages 213, 214). ...

Chapter 13, “Have You Forsaken Your First Love?” Brown speaks here of our need to make having an intimate loving relationship with God top priority. He discusses the fact that sin is an assault on our relationship with God. ...

Chapter 14, “Be Holy.” Brown discusses at length here the fact that God commands us to be holy and enables us to be holy through the blood of Christ and the Holy Spirit. He speaks of the great privilege it is to be holy and pure before God. ...

**Excerpts and Discussion Regarding Michael Brown’s Contention that the New Testament Teaches that Christians, Though They Are Called and Enabled to Live Holy Lives, Cannot Really Live Above Sin**

I very much appreciate what Brown said in the excerpts I have included above, and there is very much other material of a similar nature that I didn’t quote. If I stopped with those excerpts, however, I wouldn’t be accurately presenting Brown’s viewpoint regarding holiness. I have given the main thrust of his viewpoint, but there’s a very important qualification that he makes to his teaching (and exhortations) regarding holiness. I’ll start with a few sentences from page 257. (These sentences come right before the words I quoted above from page 257.) I’m sure these words (and some of the other words in the following excerpts) will surprise some readers in light of Brown’s strong insistence on the need (and privilege) for Christians to be holy, as reflected in the excerpts included above. “... For every sin of omission we see, [God] sees hundreds. For every sin of commission we resist, He sees others we do commit—some even unknowingly.”

It’s good and necessary to be honest about where we are,<sup>98</sup> but does this last excerpt line up with what the Bible teaches? I’m not highly motivated to discuss the question as to whether all Christians sin to some extent or not, but I do believe that many Christians throughout the history of the church have, for the most part at least, lived above sin,

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<sup>98</sup> We must admit that many people, including many Christians, are very slow to see and to admit their sin.

starting with the apostles (after Pentecost).<sup>99</sup> The really important question is what does God's Word say on the subject? It would be difficult to find any topic more important than this one for Christians to prayerfully, humbly consider. If God says we can live above sin, *we can*. His Word is all that really matters; He will back up His Word. We can't afford to base our faith on the lives of men; we must base our faith on God and His Word.

Can Brown back up what he said regarding the fact that all Christians sin to one degree or another from the Bible? Well, he does give a few verses to substantiate this major concession to victory over sin, but I'm convinced that his understanding of these verses is wrong, even if his viewpoint regarding these few verses is accepted by many Christians. The primary verses he uses to demonstrate that Christians cannot live above sin are 1 John 1:7-2:2, with the emphasis on 1:8, and he also cites Romans chapter 7. With respect to 1 John 1:8 some eighty to ninety percent of evangelical Christians agree with Brown's viewpoint. With respect to Romans chapter 7 some fifty percent agree.

It's no wonder that most Christians have a very hard time finding a solid Biblical basis for faith for victory over sin when even many of those teaching holiness maintain that several passages of Scripture teach that no Christian can ever stop sinning in this life. I trust the reader will agree, and I'm sure that Brown will agree (I'm impressed with his zeal for God, his respect for the Scriptures, and his strong motivation for righteousness and holiness), that if what I'm sharing here is true—and I'm sure that it is—it's good news, very good news indeed. It fits what the Bible so clearly teaches in so many places, and it fits what every true Christian desires.<sup>100</sup>

I'll include some excerpts from pages 98-101, and [in brackets] I'll interact with what Brown says. "... [I agree that all Christians are engaged in warfare against sin, that the potential for sin is all too real, and that there is a lot of sin among Christians (including evangelical Christians) in our day, but I don't agree that all of us sin (again, that's not the really important question, but what does the New Testament teach?). One of the most important verses that demonstrates that all Christians must wage warfare against sin is Gal. 5:17. But, as Gal. 5:16, and much other Scripture demonstrate, this doesn't mean that Christians will sin. Quite the contrary.<sup>101</sup> If we walk in/by/after the Spirit through faith (and we can), we won't sin.] ... [The apostle John also has a lot to say about the wrath of God for those who don't submit to Christ in faith but persist in sin.<sup>102</sup> John's emphasis on the love of God must not be understood in a way that dilutes his emphasis on the wrath of God. As far as the Bible is concerned, God's love and His ultimate wrath against those who persist in unrepentance are both true. Brown then quotes 1 John 3:6, 8-10 (I won't quote these verses here), verses that strongly teach that

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<sup>99</sup> Holiness and victory over sin can only come by grace through faith in the power of the Holy Spirit. In our day, where there has been such a concerted effort to convince Christians that they can't stop sinning, and where so little room has been left for the work of the Holy Spirit, including His gifts and the enablement to effectively fight spiritual warfare and deal with demon spirits, it's almost surprising that we don't see more sin in the body of Christ. Anyway, we have plenty of sin, and any sin is too much sin.

<sup>100</sup> We must make every effort to accurately interpret the Scriptures. We have no right to tilt our interpretation in the direction of what we want the Bible to say.

<sup>101</sup> See pages 195-200 of *Holiness and Victory Over Sin* for a discussion of Gal. 5:16-25.

<sup>102</sup> Cf., e.g., John 3:36 (with 3:16-20); 5:29; 15:6; 1 John 2:17; Rev. 6:16, 17; 11:18; 14:10, 19; 15:1, 7; 16:1, 19; 19:15, 20-21; 20:10, 15; 21:8; and 22:15.

true Christians don't continue to live in sin. For a discussion of 1 John 2:28-3:12, see pages 208-213 of *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*.]

... [I totally agree. That is, I totally agree with Brown's point that the fact that a Christian commits a sin doesn't demonstrate that that Christian never was truly saved. First John 2:1, for example, which will be quoted and discussed below, clearly demonstrates that John acknowledged that a true Christian could commit an act of sin (I don't mean to suggest he limited the quota to one possible sin only). But there's a gigantic difference between the Word of God saying that *a Christian could commit an act of sin*, and it saying that *all Christians will continue to sin*. First John 2:1, along with the overall teaching of this epistle by the apostle John (not to mention the rest of the New Testament), teaches that Christians shouldn't have any sin. If it's wrong to teach that Christians can live above sin, I believe John will be found guilty (and Paul, and Peter, etc.). On 1 John 2:1, see page 206 of *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*.] ... [Brown now quotes 1 John 1:8-2:2 from the NIV, which I'll include in this excerpt.]:

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. [This verse (1 John 1:8) has often been used to "prove" that all Christians will necessarily continue to sin. As I mentioned, some eighty to ninety percent of Christians in our day (including Brown) understand this verse that way. I'm happy to be able to say, however, that I'm sure that that interpretation is wrong. For one thing that interpretation, which may seem obvious at the first reading, especially when it's read without any knowledge of the context in which these words were spoken, goes against the clear teaching of this epistle, with its strong emphasis on the need for victory over sin for Christians.

It is necessary to understand that John wrote this epistle to counteract an early form of Gnosticism that was attacking the church at that time (which is a fact acknowledged by essentially all Christian scholars of our day). The Gnostics, who claimed to have the truth and therefore had the right to correct the gospel taught by John, claimed to be without sin—for them sin wasn't an issue and the blood of Jesus wasn't the answer. They believed salvation came through their special, secret knowledge. It was *special* all right, denying that sin was the problem and denying the blood of Christ. Talk about heresy! On the Gnostics and the interpretation of 1 John 1:8, see pages 200-208 of *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*. First John 1:5-2:6 are discussed there.] If we confess our sins, he is faithful and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness [These last five words (the last five words of 1 John 1:9) help confirm what I'm saying about 1 John 1:8. Over and above forgiving us our sins, God will purify/cleanse us from all wrongdoing/unrighteousness. There really is power in the blood! (See page 204 of *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*.)] If we claim we have not sinned [This is exactly what the Gnostics were claiming. Sin wasn't an issue, they said; so they didn't need (nor did they believe in) the blood of Christ. They didn't believe that Christ died for sins.], we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives [God is on record saying that all men are sinners and need the Savior from sin, the Lamb of God. Significantly, however, God is not on record saying that all Christians will continue to sin. Quite the contrary!] My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin [As discussed on page 206 of *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*, John's goal for his Christian readers (including us) was that they would never commit another act of sin. I'm quite sure that he didn't consider this to be an unrealistic goal. He believed that there's power in the blood! It seems to me that

these words, by themselves, should cause those who think John was saying that no Christian can stop sinning in 1 John 1:8 to seriously reconsider their interpretation.] But if anybody does sin [Note that John said *if*. This is a class-three condition in the Greek; this construction supports the idea that John wasn't assuming that all Christians will commit an act of sin. How could he, based on what he just said in the first half of this verse, not to mention the many other relevant things he said in this epistle.], we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world [Christ died for the sins of all mankind, but the Sacrifice isn't effective for those who don't submit to the gospel in repentance and faith.] (1 John 1:8-2:2).

... [I'm still quoting Brown from pages 98-101] ... [There's provision in the blood of Christ to be purified/cleansed from all wrongdoing, to be purified/cleansed from all sinning (cf., e.g., 1 John 1:7, 9). Also, as 1 John 2:1, 2 show, there's provision for a Christian who has sinned to be fully restored when they repent.] ... [Brown is speaking here of born-again Christians claiming to be living above sin. (He says that such Christians are deceived and going against God's Word.) There's no disputing the fact that all of us were sinners before we became born-again Christians (e.g., 1 John 1:10). Brown is basing this statement, at least for the most part, on 1 John 1:8. As I mentioned, this is the most-widely held interpretation of 1 John 1:8. But the majority is often wrong, and I'm quite sure they're wrong here. This is a very serious error that has caused great damage to the body of Christ.] ... [The words of 1 John 1:9 (which starts with the words "If we confess our sins") were aimed first and foremost at those who were denying that they were sinners who needed to be purified/cleansed by the blood of Christ, that is, they were aimed at the heretics John was writing against when he wrote this epistle. We'll discuss this very important verb *purify/cleanse* when we discuss 1 John 1:7 below.] ...

[Brown goes on to make it clear that John wasn't taking sin lightly or giving Christians an excuse to continue in sin. Rather John hated sin and encouraged his readers to holiness. If we're putting God, His Word, and His righteousness first place in our hearts, He knows it, and I'm sure He finds it rather easy to forgive and restore such children when they repent. No, He's not trying to get rid of us. Yes, He does love us.]

...  
... [Brown now quotes 1 John 2:3-6 from the NIV (verses that I'll quote in this excerpt), verses that strongly confirm that Christians shouldn't be sinning at all (which is very good news). These verses are discussed on pages 207, 208 of *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*.] We know that we have come to know Him if we obey His commands. The man who says, 'I know Him,' but does not do what He commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. [These words were aimed, at least for most part, at the heretics John wrote this epistle against. They insisted that they had come to know God. They were sure that they had an inside track on the saving truth, but it was clear that they weren't living according to His commandments. The Gnostics had explanations as to why they didn't keep the commandments, but they were bogus explanations, even if they sounded good to many.] But if anyone obeys His word [which includes keeping His commandments], God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in Him [and how we know who isn't in Him, including the heretics (which can be very important to know)]; Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did' [These last words certainly confirm that Christians shouldn't have any sin. How could

John say such strong, clear words here when a few verses earlier (in 1 John 1:8) he told us that if any Christian says he is walking above sin he is deceived. It seems to me that these words, by themselves, should have enough power to overthrow the wrong interpretation of 1 John 1:8.] (1 John 2:3-6).

....”

Now I’ll quote part of what Brown said regarding 1 John 1:7 on page 165; this is a very important verse, and it is another verse that can help keep us from misinterpreting 1 John 1:8. “... The verse [1 John 1:7] itself seems simple enough, telling us, ‘If we walk in the light [which includes the truth and righteousness of God], as He is in the light [This doesn’t leave room for darkness; in the ideal case there won’t be any darkness, which includes all sin.], we have fellowship with one another [unlike the Gnostics, who had left the body of Christ to start their own super-church (cf. 1 John 2:19, 26)], and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin.’ ... [Brown assumes that John’s last words infer that we will continue to sin to some extent as long as we live in this world. I don’t agree with his assumption. Living without any sin is the consistent ideal presented throughout this epistle, and walking in the light does include living without any sin. We’ll discuss the meaning of the very important words “purifies us from all sin” as we continue.] ... [I agree with Brown that we will not reach total perfection in this life, but that doesn’t mean that we will necessarily sin.] ... [As I mentioned, we’ll discuss purification (from sin) as we continue.]

...” I’m sure that these words from Brown resonate with many Christians, but I’m even more sure that what’s going to ultimately help us the most in our battle against sin is the super-solid knowledge that God has called us to live above sin (we don’t ever have to wonder whether this is one of those sins we can’t have the victory over when the temptation comes; we can have a super-solid faith for victory over all sin) and has provided sufficient grace (at a very high cost to Himself) for us to live in holiness. Anyway, I’m quite sure that Brown hasn’t fully understood what 1 John 1:7 is saying.

Brown assumes (in agreement with many), wrongly I believe, that the *purifying* of 1 John 1:7 (the NASB translates *cleanses* instead of *purifies*) is a purifying of believers from sins they have committed. We could include that type of purifying here; as we have seen, 1 John 2:1, 2 demonstrate that a full restoration for Christians who have sinned is available through our great high priest and His atoning work. But the primary *purifying/cleansing* that John is speaking of here in 1 John 1:7 is the all-important sanctifying of our hearts and lives, which enables us to live holy lives in the light *now*. His blood has power to make us clean/pure and to keep us clean/pure.

The Greek verb translated “purifies” (by the NIV) here in 1 John 1:7 is *katharizō*. This Greek verb is frequently used in the New Testament of a *sanctifying* type of purifying/cleansing (see 2 Cor. 7:1; Titus 2:14; Heb. 9:14; James 4:8; 1 John 1:9; and there are other verses). For more on this important point, see under 1 John 1:7 and 9 in my book, *Holiness and Victory Over Sin* (pages 202-204). Also, all of the verses just cited are discussed in that book, with the exception of James 4:8, which doesn’t really need any explanation; it says, “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse [katharizō] your hands, you sinners [James isn’t speaking of sinners asking God to forgive them and restore them to a right standing; he’s speaking of their need to stop sinning (by the grace of God in Christ); in other words, he’s speaking of a *sanctifying*

type of purifying/cleansing.]; and purify [using a different Greek verb with a parallel meaning] your hearts, you double-minded.”

I’ll also quote a paragraph from page 169. “...[We’re not fully walking in the light to the extent we’re walking/living in sin.] ... [When discussing the idea that we all fall short and sin to some extent, Brown mentions that we may have a fleeting thought of envy or competition. In general these thoughts don’t constitute sin if the Christian quickly and decisively rejects such thoughts. For one thing, thoughts can come from several sources. I don’t believe God is quick to use the word *sin* regarding His children; sin is a serious word. The more we accept the widespread idea that all Christians sin daily in thought, word, and deed, the more we tend to find “sin” just about everywhere.<sup>103</sup> Even our best acts are tainted with sin, we are told. I’m sure God could look at us and our acts as all being tainted with sin if He chose to evaluate us against a standard of total, absolute perfection of spirit, soul, and body, but the Bible doesn’t back up that idea. The Bible speaks of Christians being dead to sin, being new creations in Christ, walking in righteousness and holiness, etc. Anything that God does consider to be sin, we must take very seriously.] ... [Here Brown mentions that we may speak a judgmental word about a brother in Christ.] Some are quick to call every negative word spoken by one Christian regarding another Christian to be sin. Many such negative words are appropriate and necessary and far from being sinful; the Bible contains many examples. Again, *sin* is a serious word to use; we shouldn’t use it lightly. At the same time, we certainly must avoid speaking any word that God considers to be sinful.] ... [We need some balance here too. I can picture a Christian accepting the condemning accusations of a demon for not being focused enough on God in prayer that day when God didn’t even consider it be close to sin.] ... [Some of these things could constitute sin, but we need some balance here too. God, who knows the heart, is the one who determines whether His children have sinned, or not. Everything short of total, absolute perfection is not sin.]”

The primary verses that Brown uses in this book to “demonstrate” that Christians will continue to sin are 1 John 1:7-2:2, as discussed above. But he also uses Romans chapter 7, though in a weaker sense, to back up this point. The appendix of his book, which covers pages 265-283, is titled, “What About Romans 7?” He devotes many pages of this appendix to exhort his readers to not cast away the dominant message of this book, “a book whose whole thrust is that you *can* live a holy life” (page 267). On page 268 Brown says that Romans 7 is the only chapter in the New Testament where the apostle Paul seems to picture the believer being defeated by sin. But he reminds us that Romans 6 and Romans 8, the chapters that right before and right after Romans chapter 7, are two of the most powerful chapters on holiness in the Bible and that the Bible is packed with verses that exhort God’s people to put away sin and become righteous and holy.

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<sup>103</sup> I’ll quote Brown’s footnote 20 of his chapter 7. In this footnote Brown argues against overstating the sinfulness of believers.



Brown argues against using Romans chapter 7 to dismiss God's call to holiness, but his understanding of this chapter is far from adequate in my opinion (which is good news!). I'll quote two last paragraphs from Brown that deal with Romans chapter 7 (from page 180), "...[The words I had quoted from Brown here made the point that it doesn't seem that the apostle Paul spoke only of his pre-Christian life in Romans chapter 7. I'm very sure Brown is wrong here, even though about half of Christendom interprets Rom. 7:14-25 as referring to Paul the Christian. I'm totally convinced that Paul's "I" of Rom. 7:14-25 speaks of those who only had the old-covenant Law. They had not been born again through Christ Jesus; they had not received the Holy Spirit, who was not mentioned in these verses. See the discussion of Romans chapter 7 on pages 104-116 of *Holiness and Victory Over Sin* and see my March 1999 paper titled *The Interpretation of Romans Chapter 7 and Righteousness and Holiness.*] ... [Brown went on to argue that Paul certainly was not resigned to being continually defeated by and enslaved to sin in his Christian life.] ...

... [As I mentioned there's a gigantic difference between being engaged in warfare against sin (all Christians must wage warfare against the world, the flesh, and the devil), and sinning. As far as I'm concerned, it's clear that Romans 7:14-25 say absolutely nothing about Christians sinning, or even Christians struggling with sin, since these verses are not speaking about Christians. Paul wrote Romans chapter 7 to demonstrate that all men need Christ; there is no other answer; the old covenant (even though it was given by God), which was based on the Mosaic Law, cannot save us from sin, even if we love it, know for sure it's the Word of God, even memorize it, because it can't give us the power to keep the Law. God didn't give the Law to save us. Before the foundation of the world, He ordained that His Son would die to save us from our sins. Only Christ can give us the power to keep the Law, through the blood of the new covenant and by the indwelling Spirit. As Paul shows in Romans chapter 7 (and other places) the Law actually increases the sin problem rather than solving mankind's one great problem.] ...."