

The background of the cover is a high-angle landscape photograph. It shows a valley with a winding road, green agricultural fields, and a small pond. In the distance, there are large, rugged mountains under a cloudy sky. The overall scene is bright and clear.

# THE CHURCH IN ETERNITY

*Biblical Research Library*

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# THE CHURCH IN ETERNITY

**The eternal purpose for the existence of all things is to bring righteous souls into fellowship with God for eternal dwelling in the new heavens and earth. All things were created for this purpose. All God's work among those He has created is for this purpose. The sacrifice of the Son of God on the cross of Calvary was for this purpose. All our struggles and joys in this life are for this purpose. Since it is the eternal purpose of God to bring the righteous into eternal glory, then we must assume that all that is written explains God's work to bring about this purpose. We must assume that all the work of God in the history of man has been for the purpose of accomplishing this eternal plan of God. The existence of the church, therefore, is to take obedient believers throughout the world into the eternal glory of God.**

## INTRODUCTION

The problem with being human is that we are possessed with a human mind. And human minds are limited; they are fallible. We are the product of God, but this does not mean that God is fallible or that He intentionally created a fallible being that was programmed to do wrong. He simply created for possible eternal dwelling the best of all possible beings for character development in the best of all possible environments. So He who created must be greater than the product. Our fallible and limited minds, therefore, will never be as God. God never intended to create gods on earth. He simply created a being that could be prepared for eternity.

When we come to the subject of foreknowledge and predestination, the limitations of our thinking are truly realized. When we contemplate these subjects we finally understand that we are truly hu-

man in under-standing; we are absolutely limited in knowledge.

Since we are human, can we fully comprehend that which is of Deity and is beyond our experiential world? Certainly not. We are not God, but to fully understand God we must be as He. Since we cannot, then we will content ourselves with the limitations of our thinking, for we would not presume to be as God.

The Scriptures talk about "foreknow," "predestine," and "chosen before the foundation of the world." These are certainly concepts that are within the realm of God's omniscience. These are not human workings or abilities. We only have glimpses of revelation that open to us what God did before either time or history came into existence. However, these glimpses of revelation excite our imagination as to the omniscience of a God that is beyond our full understanding.

We wonder, how can God foreknow without predestining? How can He foreknow the eternal dwelling of a person without establishing the fate of that individual He foreknows will be saved? These postulations have certainly confounded theologians from the time Scripture first revealed the omniscience of a God out there who is transcendent in relation to that which He created. Unfortunately, some zealous theologians have tried to manipulate God around their limited understandings in order to understand how God works. However, no matter how limited our mental capabilities may be, we know we cannot fully understand the work of God. God made man. We must be careful not to make a god we can fully understand.

Let's consider a few things that pose questions, and if possible, determine some answers. God foreknew that one would obey the gospel. But how did He know such without the fate of that individual being sealed by His foreknowledge? In other words, since He foreknew my obedience, does this mean that my obedience was eternally sealed before my existence because He foreknew? He also foreknew those who would be condemned to hell. But did such foreknowledge presuppose that the condemned could not free-morally choose in order to be responsible for their fates? Difficult questions, are they not?

We stand on this side of God's plan of redemption that was determined before the creation of the world. We wonder and speculate as to how God could have known our destiny without irrevers-

ibly establishing such against our free-moral will. Our inability to understand only manifests our finiteness. It does not distract from His infinite ability to foreknow without predestining. In stating that He cannot foreknow without predestining we are only manifesting our frustration about not understanding God. Though frustrated some may be, we must keep in mind that we are dealing with God here, not some god that has been generated out of the ambitious ponderings of some theologian.

Here are two things we must first understand.

**1. *We must remember that we are not God.*** God **can be** what we cannot understand for He is God. He also **can do** what we cannot understand because He is God. If we presume that we can figure God out, then He is not God, but a god. He is no greater than our imagination. And if God is no greater than our imagination, then he is no god at all. Let's face it. We do not want a god we can completely figure out. We want a God who is greater than our feeble imaginations. We have sense enough to know that any god that can be figured out is no god at all. Such a god would only be the fantasy of our misguided religiosity.

**2. *We must not make the mistake of believing that foreknowledge necessitates unchangeable predestination.*** Inseparably linking foreknowledge and unchangeable predestination manifests the limitations of our human thinking. We must accept the truth that we are not able to understand how God can fore-

know something without that something being irreversibly predestined. Our lack of understanding, however, does not make foreknowledge and predestination inseparable twins. It only manifests that we are men and God is God.

From God's perspective, things are destined to occur as He knows they will occur. From God's omniscient position, He can see all history from first creation to final catastrophe. If we view history—and we must—from a human perspective, then we assume that everything that God knows is irreversibly predestined to occur. We thus blame God for evil which is the result of our choices. But can we blame God for bad things in our lives simply because He foreknew our bad decisions that bring evil upon ourselves? Certainly not. We cannot get off that easy. Our free-moral agency makes us responsible. And responsibility means final accountability. We must not think we can get by with sin by blaming God for our nonsense.

Because God can foreknow our free-moral choices does not necessitate that He predestined that such choices be made.

Before the creation of the world, God predestined a plan for man's redemption from his sinful self and inevitable destruction. He predestined a plan to rescue man from the bondage of darkness to an eternal dwelling. He has revealed this plan to man. Man must, therefore, have the opportunity to obey; he must have the free-moral choice to submit. The plan was predestined, but those who would be obedient to the plan were not.

Now since God foreknew that we would obey does not necessitate that He predestined that we should obey. Foreknowledge of our free-will choices does not necessitate predestination of those choices. The plan was predestined, not the man to obey the plan.

Here is a very important point. **God's justice in final judgment must stand without accusation.** This is to say that His justice must be consistent. In order for justice to be justice, there must be no subjective influences on man by God who claims to be a just God. Simply speaking, those condemned to hell must not be able in hell to accuse God of (1) depriving them of a plan of salvation, (2) prejudicing their minds or wills against obedience to a revealed plan of salvation, (3) predestining the condemned to their fate, or (4) not making the condemned free-moral agents in order to avoid hell. If any of these four points fall, then we can accuse God of not being fair and just.

Any theology that attacks the justice of God must be rejected. What good is an unjust God? If God is unfair – fiendish – then let us all eat, drink and be merry. What good is faith, therefore, in the face of a god who has assigned everything and everybody to unchangeable predestined fates? If destiny is predetermined, then we cannot change such. We would be at liberty to so behave as we wish simply because we will end up where God has elected that we be regardless of our choices.

But we cannot accept such a god. We believe in a loving God who does not wish that any should perish. We believe

in a God who so loved that He so gave, even His incarnate Son. This God cannot be unjust. He cannot be fiendish as to so love but also so condemn without the free-moral choice of those who would choose condemnation.

God created us with an unbiased soul, a spirit as pure as He is. To believe that God created us with a nature that was inclined to do evil, is to again accuse God of being unjust. It is to accuse God of being some cosmic comedian who creates in order to tempt men with evil. Can God truly be benevolent and just by creating a spirit within newly born infants that desires sin? What kind of God would this be? Have too many theologians created a god after their own inability to understand omniscient foreknowledge? We think so. Theologians who have struggled with the concepts of foreknowledge and predestination have created a fiendish god, one that they have determined will be unjust in final judgment. The condemned will be able to accuse this god of being unfair, unjust, and fiendish in their state of condemnation. We believe in no such god.

You might justifiably state, "I do not understand this subject." The fact that neither of us completely understands the subject is evidence that we are both on the right track. If we do not understand because we have not studied, then it is our own fault. However, after a thorough study of this subject we will still not fully understand. God's ways are past finding out. Therefore, we must be patient with ourselves. We must study, contemplate,

wonder. However, we must not frustrate ourselves when we are not able to comprehend all that God is or does. When we come to the limit of our understanding, we must accept by faith that the rest of the way is known by the God who is beyond our imagination.

Throughout this Book we hope to clarify the preceding thoughts in relation to a host of theological meanderings that have confused the religious world. We would caution you to understand that our mind-driven pen is not the result of some supernatural guidance. Our minds are limited to the fallibility that plagues men. Therefore, we simply want to challenge your thinking, but specifically, the thinking of some who have thought their way off course. We are in a realm of study where there are some things past finding out. When and if we venture into those areas, we will try to alert you to be cautious about our interpretations. Please consult the divine Textbook. This is as far as all our understanding goes concerning those things that pertain to God. His revelation is sufficient to bring understanding of these things He knows is necessary for our salvation. Therefore, we must content ourselves with the Bible as our only textbook. Anything else is simply the postulations of men who always struggle to understand the God that understands all things. And when we seek to understand the God who is beyond the full understanding of man, we must be careful to realize that our postulations are limited to this world.

## Chapter 1

# The Nature Of Man

At one time in Jesus' ministry He allowed little children to come to Him against the will and advice of some of His disciples. However, of these little children, He said, "... *of such is the kingdom of God.*" In the context of this statement, Jesus was using little children to illustrate man's true nature in infancy before sin enters into the picture of life. On this occasion, the apostles were instructed concerning the devastating nature of sin that corrupts the innocence of the individual when we reach the age of accountability. It is at this time—the age of accountability—that we must give heed to the salvation which God offers through Jesus.

We must make this point clear. When one reaches the age when he or she discovers that he or she is out of harmony with God's will, then something must happen. That which must happen is repentance. One must seek a solution for that which has corrupted the pure nature of which one was when born. One must seek the blood of Jesus. The age at which we mature to recognize our sin is called the age of accountability. It is called this simply because one becomes accountable for his sin when he recognizes sin.

Two false concepts have made their way into religious thinking that contradict basic Bible teachings concerning the pure nature of man at birth. These are the doctrines of **original sin** and **total**

**depravity.** The teaching of total depravity probably originated from the teaching of original sin. The doctrine of original sin was introduced by Origen in the third century. In the sixteenth century John Calvin introduced the idea of total depravity. Today, the beliefs of both original sin and total depravity are taught by many religious groups throughout the world. Both teachings are similar. Both are an attack against the very nature of God. And both must be considered when studying the doctrine of predestination. This is especially true with the doctrine of total depravity. Both doctrines also attack the teaching of the free-moral agency of man. If one is either born with original sin or totally depraved, then there can be no such teaching as free-moral agency.

### A. Definitions:

It is important that we understand the two theological concepts of original sin and total depravity that deal with the very nature of man at birth. These two doctrines, therefore, reflect on how God allows babies to be born into this world. Consider the following definitions:

**1. Original sin:** Original sin is the belief that man **inherits the "sin of Adam" at the time of physical birth.** In other words, because of Adam's sin in

the garden of Eden, his nature became sinful. This sinful nature is thus passed on to all humanity, for all have descended from Adam. Because of this “inherited sin,” it is affirmed that one is thus condemned at birth; he is ruined in body and soul because Adam’s sin has been passed on to him. It is taught that as a consequence of Adam’s sin, all men are descended from him with the **guilt of his sin**, and thus, are spiritually dead in sin at birth. Therefore, everyone who is born into the world deserves the wrath of God.

The concept of original sin is one of those doctrines that seems difficult to understand when viewing the nature of newly born babies in reference to the love, mercy and justice of God. It is a teaching that says babies are born sinners. They have the sin of Adam, and thus, would be subject to the punishment of hell if not baptized for remission of sins through infant baptism.

It is our personal opinion that the doctrine of original sin was born out of man’s great misunderstanding of the nature of God and His creation of man. Those who teach this doctrine must look into the face of a small infant and confess that God gave this small one a soul that is stained with sin. We wonder what concept of God those who believe in such a doctrine actually conceive in their minds. What kind of god would so view infants as condemned sinners at the time of their birth?

**2. Total depravity:** Total depravity is the teaching that the inclination in man to sin is so strong that **he is utterly unable to respond to the will of God.** As

a result of the fall of Adam, it is believed that all men since are inclined to sin because of the corruption of their nature. In other words, when Adam sinned he lost for himself, and all descendants after him, the ability to make right choices concerning spiritual matters. It is taught, therefore, that men are so disabled in soul and spirit that they cannot in any way respond to the will of God. It is affirmed that one is completely inclined to do evil, and thus, proceeds in transgression.

It is taught by some that man’s corrupted nature remains in the life of regenerated Christians. The Christian is therefore continually inclined to evil and must have an outside force that directly acts upon the will of the individual to stop one from sinning. This “outside force” is believed to be the Holy Spirit who works on the heart of both sinner and saint in a subjective and arbitrary manner. In other words, one cannot free-morally respond to the will of God unless the Holy Spirit directly subjects one to His control. One can hear the word of God and what he must do in obedience of God, but because of a depraved soul, he cannot on his own free will respond to God’s word.

It may seem that the content of this chapter is out of context in this book. It is not. The belief that individuals are predestined to eternal destruction is linked by theologians who teach such, with the supposed total depravity of man. Because men are supposed to be inclined to sin because of their depraved nature, places the responsibility of their salva-



tion on God's choice to work on their hearts through the Spirit. If God chooses not to work on the heart of the totally depraved sinner, then He has chosen that such a person not be saved. Those who are not chosen are thus destined to hell. And since this choice was supposedly made before the creation of the world, the lost have been predestined to hell.

The preceding two doctrines are doctrines that challenge some very fundamental teachings of the Bible. The principles upon which they are based attack the nature of God in the sense that we wonder what type of god would so curse babies. Is this the god of the Bible? Or, is this simply theological mythologies that have been fantasied by those who need to take another look at the God of love and mercy we read about in the Scriptures?

## **B. Understanding fundamental principles:**

We must understand that we are not born sinners. At birth, one is free from sin. As we mature, we grow to recognize our actions in relation to God's law. The **age of accountability** is that time in our lives when we recognize God's will and are able to make an emotional and intellectual response to that will. If we reject God's law, then sin enters into our life. That sin separates us from God, and thus, brings us into a state of condemnation. However, before one reaches the age of accountability, God considers us safe from condemnation. If we were to die before the age of accountability, we

would be safe in the arms of God.

The practice of infant baptism originated from the teaching of original sin. It was believed that because of Adam's sin, all men after him were born with original sin. All infants, therefore, inherited the sin of Adam. Because of this original sin, infants need to be baptized for the remission of sins. However, we want to challenge your thinking with the following thoughts. We firmly believe that the summation of these thoughts concludes in the truth that we are born free from sin and without a nature that is inclined to evil.

**1. Children are pure as the kingdom.** Jesus said that *“unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven”* (Mt 18:3). In Luke 18 Jesus is more definitive concerning the nature of children. *“Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it”* (Lk 18:16,17). In other words, men must repent and be *“born again,”* that is, *“born of water and the Spirit”* (Jn 3:3-5). By this new birth one is able to *“enter the kingdom of God”* (Jn 3:5). When one repents of sins and submits to the lordship of Jesus by being immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins (At 2:36-38), he becomes pure as a little child when entering the family of God. One must take upon oneself the humble nature of little children in order to be of the kingdom reign of God.

The concept that one must be “born again” is evidence that one is pure of sin in physical birth. Why would Jesus use the phrase “born again” in reference to being baptized to wash away all sin if one were not clean of sin when he is born? The fact that one has no sin when he is born makes Jesus’ use of the phrase “born again” make sense when He uses it in reference to baptism.

There were certainly many thoughts that Jesus wanted to convey to His disciples in the contexts of Matthew 18 and Luke 18. However, there is one point that is clear. He used little children illustrate a most profound truth concerning those who would become His disciples. Since He uses children to so illustrate the nature of the kingdom and the heart of those who would enter it, it is difficult to understand why He would do such if little children are either born sinners or are totally depraved in spirit that they are unable to respond to the will of God.

There was something about the nature of children that illustrates the nature of the kingdom. We believe it is a nature of purity, innocence and humility.

To receive the kingdom reign of Jesus, one must submit to Jesus in the sense of what Jesus prayed to the Father in Matthew 6:10. *“Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”* Luke 18:17 says *“receive the kingdom of God as a little child ...”* When one allows Jesus’ will to rule his life, he is in fact receiving the kingdom reign of Jesus into his life. As a little child willingly submits to the direction

of a parent, so men must willingly submit to the sovereign will of Jesus. When they do, the will of God is being done on earth as it is done in heaven.

If children are born in sin, then Jesus’ illustration loses its meaning. Notice that He uses the purity of children to illustrate the purity of the kingdom reign in the hearts of the submitted. He uses the willing submission of small children to illustrate the attitude men must possess in order to receive the kingdom. But if children are of a sinful, depraved nature, then Jesus’ reference to children as an example of the nature of the kingdom makes no sense. His reference to being born again makes no sense.

In order to enter the kingdom, or have the kingdom within one’s heart, there must be total submission on the part of man. The kingdom is within the hearts of those who have submitted to Jesus (Lk 17:20,21). It is not in those who refuse to submit.

Under this heading we must determine where children spiritually are in reference to the kingdom reign of Jesus. The answer to this is easy when the context of Matthew 18 and Luke 18 are understood. If the true nature of the kingdom is that which is typical of children, then it takes no great reasoning to understand that children are of the kingdom. They are not subjects in the sense of knowingly recognizing God’s will, and thus, free-morally submitting to such. They will do such when they reach the age of accountability. However, until that time they are of a pure and innocent nature that is typical of those who submit

to the kingdom reign of Jesus.

**2. Our spirits are created pure.** The Hebrew writer stated, “*Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?*” (Hb 12:9). This passage affirms that the Father created our spirits. God is the “*God of the spirits of all flesh*” (Nm 16:22; 27:16). Paul reaffirmed, “*For we are also His offspring*” (At 17:28). At conception, one is given a spirit by God, but at the point of death “*the spirit will return to God who gave it*” (Ec 12:7). Now the question is, Would God give man a sinful or depraved spirit at birth? Any doctrine that deals with the nature of the spirit of man that he receives at birth reflects on the nature of God.

Those who teach the doctrines of original sin and total depravity seem to be in a dilemma here. They affirm that God is our **spiritual Father**. But would He give a new born babe a sinful spirit or a depraved spirit? If a baby is totally depraved, or has original sin, from whom did this come? Did it come from the **natural father**? If so, then how did the natural father receive such a nature? What we have done is move the problem back one more generation. We eventually move it back to Adam, and then, back to God. Is God the originator of unclean and depraved spirits? If the depraved nature came as a result of the fall of man in the garden of Eden, then God must still be given credit for such, for it was He who depraved man.

What good would a sinful or de-

praved spirit serve? If we are to respond to God's will when we reach an age at which we can make a rational decision, then what purpose would a depraved spirit be in an individual until he reaches that age? What reason would there be for an infant to be born with original sin? **If babies are born with original sin, then this places the salvation of an individual in the hands of someone else, specifically the parents.** Every baby, therefore, that dies before making an individual response to God's law, cannot be held accountable for damnation. The parents should be held accountable, for they did not have the baby baptized for remission of sins. But if the baby is condemned regardless of who is accountable, God is still viewed as fiendish for condemning infants to hell. What kind of god would condemn to hell a baby who had no decision in reference to his need for being baptized for remission of sins?

Our spiritual Father is the Father of all our spirits and all our spirits at birth are free from sin. The Bible does not teach that God gives babies corrupted spirits when they are born. Nor does He give them evil natures. God is not the source of that which is evil. “*God is light and in Him is no darkness at all*” (1 Jn 1:5).

Would a child be born with a depraved spirit, or original sin, if born to a committed, Holy Spirit indwelt Christian couple? It seems that depravity would be broken by the sanctification of the spirit in the life of the Christian father and mother. If it is, and the child is still born either totally depraved or with origi-

nal sin, then from whence did such a nature come? If such did not come from the sanctified Christian parents, then such must have come directly from the Father of our spirits. Those theologians who hold such a belief are accusing God of giving depraved spirits to newly born babies.

For the original sin advocates, they must face another problem. The Christian father and mother are sanctified by the Spirit (2 Th 2:13; 1 Pt 1:2). However, if an infant is born to this couple with original sin, then we must conclude that there is a limit to the Holy Spirit's ability to sanctify the saint. He cannot sanctify to the point of totally regenerating one from original sin. If the original sin is passed on to the newborn baby, then the Spirit failed to fully regenerate the father and mother.

**3. God made us upright.** Solomon affirmed *“that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes”* (Ec 7:29). In other words, as stated in the previous point, God gave man a pure nature or soul at conception. We are made upright, not "down right." We are His offspring (See At 17:29). However, after men reach the age of carrying out their evil imaginations and schemes, they go astray. God has always started man on the right road. But men go astray. We are as Paul said, *“They have all gone out of the way; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one”* (Rm 3:12). Paul made this statement in the context of men going into sin in order to be unrighteous before God. His point is not that all are

unrighteous from birth. Men go into sin after birth. Men become unrighteous after they come forth upright at birth.

**4. We are accountable for our own sins.** Ezekiel 18 teaches individual responsibility for sin. *“The soul who sins shall die”* (vs 4). If one sins, *“he shall die for his iniquity”* (vs 18). *“The son shall not bear the guilt of the father ...”* (vs 20). No son has ever suffered the guilt of the father's sin. Though the son may suffer from the **consequences** of the father, he will not be responsible for the father's sin in final judgment. A son that suffers from a father's drunkenness will not be judged for the father's drunkenness. The father will be held accountable for his own drunkenness though the son may have suffered great consequences as a result of the father's sin.

The point is that we do not suffer from the guilt of Adam's sin in the garden of Eden. Each person is responsible for his own sin before God. This is what Paul communicated in 2 Corinthians 5:10. *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”* What Paul is saying is that all of us will give account for ourselves. We will not give account for the sins of our fathers or our neighbor. Therefore, since we will give account for our own sins, **we are responsible for our own sins.**

We do suffer the **consequences** of Adam's sin. This is what Paul discussed in 1 Corinthians 15:20-22. He said, *“... by man [Adam] came death ....”* *“For*

*as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.*" Because of his sin, Adam was driven from the garden of Eden, away from the tree of life, lest he eat "*of the tree of life ... and live forever*" (See Gn 3:22-24). When Adam was driven from the tree of life, he took all mankind with him. Therefore, we today suffer from the **consequences** of his sin, that is, we must all physically die. But we do not suffer the **guilt** of his sin. Adam will be responsible to God for his own personal sin.

The context of Genesis 2 and 3 where the sin of Adam is recorded, makes no mention of original sin or total depravity. God had said to Adam, "*But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die*" (Gn 2:17). Regardless of the warning, he ate, and subsequently he had to grow old and die because he was driven from the tree of life (Gn 3:22-24). He spiritually died the moment he ate because his personal sin separated him from God (Is 59:1,2; Rm 6:23). We suffer from the consequences of the physical death problem that was introduced into the world by Adam. Paul wrote, "*For in Adam all die ...*" (1 Co 15:22). Though we suffer from this result of Adam's sin, we do not suffer from the guilt of his sin.

Guilt for sin refers to being responsible for sin. Adam was responsible for his own personal sin against God. Each of us today is also responsible for our own sins. This means that we are also responsible for seeking a solution for our personal sin against God. If we find that

solution—the gospel—and refuse to obey it, we will be condemned because we did not obey the gospel. This is precisely what Paul said in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9. "*... rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven ... taking vengeance ... on those who do not obey the gospel.... These shall be punished.*" The point is that one must obey. This is not a teaching for babies. It is a teaching for those who can hear and perceive the good news of Jesus and obey His death, burial and resurrection in immersion (Rm 6:3-6).

**5. Sin comes alive at the age of accountability.** In Romans 7:9 Paul wrote, "*I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died.*" Paul did not physically die when the commandment came. He is discussing spiritual death in this context. Without law there is no sin. But God gave law and when Paul saw that his life contradicted the law, he spiritually died. And so is the case with all men. There is no man who is without sin (Rm 3:9,10,23). All have sinned, and thus, have been separated from God because of sin (Is 59:1,2). And the wages of sin is death (Rm 6:23).

Paul was born a Jew under the Old Testament law. However, as a child he was "*taught to know God*" as he grew up (See Jr 31:31-34). Before he reached the age at which he recognized his accountability under law, **he lived**. In ignorance of law, he thought he was right with God. But when he realized his accountability under law, **he died**, that is, he spiritually died because of sin against

law (Rm 6:23). He said that when “*the commandment came*” he died. **Before the age of accountability he was alive**, not dead in sin because of original sin. It was only when he recognized his sinful relationship with the law of God that he realized that he was dead in sin.

Romans 5:12 should also be considered in this context. Paul wrote, “*Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.*” Paul’s argument is not that we are all sinners because of Adam’s sin. The verse is divided in thought. “*As through one man [Adam] sin entered the world*” refers to Adam’s **personal** sin against God by eating of the forbidden fruit. When Adam sinned, he **introduced** sin into the world. Sin thus entered the world because Adam was the first to sin. With this sin came the introduction of **spiritual death** into his life. In other words, when Adam **personally** sinned against God he **personally** suffered spiritual death.

In the second half of Romans 5:12 Paul states that “*death spread to all men.*” The reason it has spread to all men is explained in the second part of the verse. Paul said that all suffer spiritual death “**because all sinned**” (See Rm 3:9,10,23). One is not spiritually dead because of Adam’s sin. One is spiritually dead because of his or her **personal** sin against God.

Therefore, one is not born a sinner. He is born pure from sin because there has been no occasion in the life of the new born infant to sin against God. Sin

comes into one’s life when he or she chooses to personally sin against God.

The kingdom of God is pure because of the blood of Jesus. John wrote, “*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*” (1 Jn 1:9). The word “cleanse” is in the Greek present progressive tense, thus the cleansing is continual. Therefore, the nature of the sons of God is pure because of the blood of Jesus. Jesus illustrated this purity by the purity of children. Men are as pure as children when they are **born again** by baptism for the remission of sins. When one is baptized, therefore, he is at that time as pure as the day he was physically born, for God created and gave man a pure spirit, free of any sin.

The Father made us upright at birth. We were born without sin. But this all changes when we grow up. When we grow older we sin and fall away from God’s laws. Because we make a choice to sin, we are accountable for our own sins. Our earthly father does not pass his own sin to the son. Neither does our heavenly Father pass on to us a depraved nature. Because this is true, all will stand before God to give account of their own sin that they have personally committed against the law of God. For this reason, each individual must make a free-will choice to serve God. Because we will give account for our own sins, we must choose to do the will of God. The fact that we can choose means that we are free-moral agents, and thus accountable of our own behavior before God.

## Chapter 2

# Understanding Sin

One would think that religious people would understand the concept of sin. But such is not always the case in times of humanism and religions that have been created after the desires of those who seek to fulfill the desires of the flesh. In hedonistic societies, that which the Bible identifies as sin is often condoned as accepted cultural practice. Fornication seems to be the first sin to no longer be considered sin. It is sometimes the desire of the carnal to maintain some type of religiosity in their carnality. In justifying carnality, some come up with “religious carnality.” And so, we are back to the “pagan” cultures where Paul and the early evangelists went with the gospel of Jesus. Our definition of sin that comes from the Bible, therefore, is not some outdated concept of those in centuries past. The Bible's definition of sin is as relevant today as it was when Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit.

Because of the influence of misguided culture, there is much confusion in the religious world today concerning the nature of sin. As long as men define sin by their culture, there will always be a mis-conception of sin.

In reference to the previous chapter, some unfortunately believe that sin is something that is inherited. When we are born, we are supposed to receive a “sinful nature” from Adam that has been passed down from one generation to an-

other throughout history. Others believe that sin is an entity (an existence) that exists apart from the actions and attitudes of individuals. Regardless of the individual's being, he or she can exist separate and apart from sin. Then there are those who believe that no real sin exists. We can establish our own rules, and these rules determine what society believes to be either right or wrong. The list of definitions for sin goes on.

In order to understand sin, we must understand the free-moral agency of man in relation to the law of God. Since man is free-moral, then he has freedom to make moral decisions. He must live in an environment that provides opportunity for choices. He must have the ability to make decisions and choices. And in order to make choices, there must be the opportunity to choose between that which is either good or evil in reference to law. In making bad choices in reference to God's law, men sin.

In order to direct the interactivity of individuals, God has given law. However, free-moral man has a difficult time living according to law. In fact, it is impossible for man to live without sin against law. We are all, therefore, sinners. “*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” (Rm 3:23). But how do we define how man is a sinner? How do we understand when we do wrong?

It is imperative to understand the

Bible’s definition of sin. Understanding sin helps us understand the work of God among men in the history of the world. Did God predestine that men be sinners, and because of sin, will He be just in condemning men to hell? If we cannot sin, then we cannot be lost. If we do not have a choice concerning our behavior, then God cannot be just in condemning any person to hell. In order to correctly deal with the above thoughts, it is imperative that we understand our responsibility in reference to law in order to understand God’s work among men through law.

**A. Sin is transgression of law.**

1 John 3:4 is a key passage that presents a biblical definition of sin. John stated, “*Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.*” The *King James Version* translates this text to read, “*Sin is the transgression of the law.*” In other words, sin is a personal voluntary act to transgress God’s law. If one does not do what God says he must do, he sins against God.

**SIN = NOT DOING WHAT GOD SAYS TO DO**

God has given **positive** laws to man. For example, James commanded, “*Visit orphans and widows in their trouble ...*” (Js 1:27). This is a **positive commandment**; something that God has told us **to do**. If one refuses to do this, then he sins against God’s law. He is not doing what God has said to do.

There is also a **negative** aspect to

committing sin in relation to God’s laws. Sin is doing those things that God has told us **not to do**.

**SIN = DOING WHAT GOD SAYS NOT TO DO**

An example of a **negative** law would be, “*Let him who stole steal no longer ...*” (Ep 4:28). This is a negative statement of law, something that God has told us **not to do**. But if we steal, we are refusing to obey this law of God. We are thus sinners in the eyes of God. We could define sin with the following statement:

**Sin is man’s personal free-moral choice to either not do what God has told him to do or do what God has told him not to do.**

<b>SIN</b>	<b>=</b>	<b>OMISSION &amp; COMMISSION</b>
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Sin is both by **omission** and **commission**. When one voluntarily **omits** doing what God has said to do, he or she sins against God. When one acts contrary to God’s law, he or she **commits** sin. In either case, sin is a free-moral action on the part of the individual to behave in a way that is not in agreement with godly living.

John states the above definition of sin in 1 John 5:17, though in different words. “*All unrighteousness is sin ....*” The Psalmist stated, “*For all your commandments are righteousness*” (Ps 119:172; see vs 123,142,144). Those who do the will of God do His righteousness. John



said “*that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him*” (1 Jn 2:29). On the other hand, all who do not the righteousness of God are unrighteous.

An obvious conclusion here is that one must be of an age to know and understand God’s commandments before he can be held accountable for not obeying those commandments. How can one sin against God’s law if he or she does not know the law? God would be fiendish if He held those accountable for law who do not know law. Before one can be held accountable for breaking the law, there must be a recognition of the law.

God has given to man both negative and positive laws. He has told man what to do and what not to do. All His laws, however, are righteousness. If men violate these laws they sin. Their sin is unrighteousness.

## **B. Sin is neglecting to do good.**

There is another biblical definition of sin that is more demanding on the part of man. It is this manner of sin where we always go wrong. In understanding this manner of sin, we convict ourselves as sinners, for we all know that we do wrong by not doing good. Consider the following principle:

**SIN = not doing a biblical principle of good**

Now you might believe that the above is too subjective. How can one be judged for not doing good when there is no standard of good. If we take the position that there is no divine standard of good, then

we certainly would have a host of problems. How can society determine what is good when society constantly fluctuates in its definition of what is good or evil? However, if there is a divine standard, then most of our problems are solved concerning a definition of what is either right or wrong. It is our proposition that we do have a divine standard, and that standard determines principles of good and evil.

James explains, “*Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin*” (Js 4:17). **Sin is disobedience to a biblical principle of good.** Here is how we sin after this manner. A criminal’s concept of good may be distorted. He may think, “I will do good by stealing from the rich and not the poor man.” Therefore, the criminal thinks he is doing good by stealing from the rich. However, he would still be doing evil by stealing from the rich man according to divine standards. Divine standards condemn all stealing as sin.

A man may say that he will not help his neighbor if his neighbor’s house burns down. The Bible does not **specifically** command one to help neighbors whose houses burn down. However, it does state, “*Therefore, as we have opportunity let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith*” (Gl 6:10). Therefore, if one does not do the biblical principle of good to help his neighbor, he sins. In other words, if one does not do the good that is based upon a biblical foundation of true Christianity, he sins against God.

In reference to this definition of sin

most of us go wrong. We are to love one another (Jn 13:34,35). It is true that the Bible does not give us a check list on how to love one another. Nevertheless, the principle is there. We must be driven by love to do something to our neighbor. If we neglect to act, then certainly we sin.

The emphasis of this definition of sin is based on the fact that one must do something. We cannot do as John wrote of some, *“But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?”* (1 Jn 3:17). A principle of good means that there is individual responsibility of one to another. And responsibility means there will eventually be individual accountability.

Understanding that we sin when we fail to do biblical principles of good demands that the disciple of Jesus has a clear understanding of the grace of God. The honest and sincere person confesses his sin (1 Jn 1:9). He knows he cannot perform law perfectly. He also knows that good deeds do not merit atonement for sin. By realizing that he is trapped in sin, he is driven, therefore, to the grace of God. This is what Paul had in mind when he wrote, *“O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!”* (Rm 7:24,25). When one realizes the hopelessness of living in an effort to earn justification by law-keeping or good works, he is driven to trust in the grace of God. He realizes there is no possible way for him to save himself by his own performance of law.

Those who view religion as a set of meritorious rules by which one must live perfectly in order to be saved are in a dilemma. The honest person knows he cannot keep all the rules perfectly, therefore, he realizes that he is a sinner (Rm 3:23). He is in a dilemma because he cannot keep law in order to justify himself, for in keeping law there is no justification (Rm 3:20; Gl 2:16). He cannot do good works in order to atone for sin. He is thus frustrated because of his inability to correctly perform law. The honest believer will see this dilemma, and thus, depend on the grace of God for salvation.

### **C. Sin is violating one's own conscience.**

In Romans 14:23 Paul wrote, *“But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.”* In this passage Paul makes the conscience a standard to determine right and wrong. This is in the context of a new convert doing that which violates his or her conscience. The novice or young Christian can so behave to live contrary to what he or she believes is wrong. If one so acts in a way to do something contrary to conscience, sin occurs.

In the context of Romans 14:23, Paul is discussing the “weak” Christian (the new convert) who associates the eating of meat with past pagan religious experiences. If he eats meat he thinks of those things he did while in idolatrous religion. He thus violates his conscience

There is no scripture which specifically condemns the eating of meat, for God created all foods *“to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth”* (1 Tm 4:3). However, if one grew up believing that something is wrong for him, such as eating meats in reference to religious practice, then it would be sin for him to violate his own conscience. It would be sin until he grows to know and feel that there is nothing wrong in the eating of meats. When the vegetarian can eat with a clear conscience, then he can eat without sinning. Until that time, however, the new Christian must not be intimidated to do that which is against his own conscience.

The weak Christian is forbidden to bind his conscience upon others because of the fact that it is a matter of conscience, not Scripture. He cannot demand that the whole church stop eating meat because he feels that it is wrong to eat such. Neither can the whole church intimidate him to eat that which he feels is wrong. When through further Bible study, the new Christian discovers that his conscience was wrongly formed in pagan religions, such as eating of certain meats sacrificed to idols, then he can eat without sinning. In other words, **one’s conscience is his guide until he grows in the knowledge of the Scriptures that supersede cultural upbringing or human religious traditions.**

The weak Christian has the responsibility to grow in the *“grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (2 Pt 3:18). The knowledgeable Christian has the responsibility to be tender and under-

standing toward the weaker Christian until there is spiritual growth. If the stronger Christian encourages or intimidates the new Christian to eat meat against his conscience, then both sin. The new convert has violated his own conscience by doing that which he feels is wrong. The older Christian has sinned because he or she has not walked in love. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *“But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? **But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ”*** (1 Co 8:9-12).

In Romans 14:23 and 1 Corinthians 8 Paul is saying that one’s conscience is his guide until he grows in knowledge in every area of faith. If a novice Christian does something that troubles his conscience, then Paul says he or she sins. However, new Christians have the responsibility to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus. Older Christians in the faith have the responsibility of being patient with the new Christian until there is growth beyond the influences of past pagan beliefs.

#### **D. Sin is unrighteousness.**

The conclusion to the preceding three points is the fact that man is unrighteous.

He is not unrighteous because he was born that way. He is unrighteous because he cannot so live in order to be perfect before God. Paul's general assessment of mankind in Romans 3:9,10 is true because all have sinned. "*For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. As it is written: There is none righteous, no not one*" (Rm 3:9,10).

Here is the point. "*Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight ...*" (Rm 3:20; Gl 2:16). Since no one can obey God's law perfectly in order to be justified, all are under condemnation. All are unrighteous. No one is without sin, "*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Rm 3:23). The problem with sin is that it takes only one sin to separate one from God (Is 59:1,2; Js 2:10). And when one is separated from God, he is in a state of condemnation. He is dead in sin (Ep 2:1).

Man is in a state of condemnation and unrighteousness because of individual sin against God's law. He is in sin and cannot escape by his own power. He is not by nature in sin, but in sin because of sin. He cannot by works of law justify one sin. Paul wrote, "*Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin*" (Rm 3:20; see Gl 2:16). Thus, one cannot keep law perfectly in order to be justified before God, for all men have sinned against law (Rm 3:23). So what must one do in order to have atonement for sin? He cannot by meritorious works atone for a single sin. He is thus unrighteous because he has free-

morally sinned against God and has no means of atonement on earth for sin. Who would be so arrogant as to stand before God and claim righteousness that was based upon his or her own obedience or good works? When Paul recognized the problem of sin in his own life, he was driven to the atonement of the cross of Christ (Gl 2:16).

It is important to understand this point in order to understand that we are not born sinners. We go astray after we reach the age of accountability by violating God's law. It is then that we are in sin. It is not that there is sin in us that leads us into sin. It is that we lead ourselves into sin by yielding to temptation. James stated it thus, "*Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed ...*" (Js 1:14). Therefore, in Paul's argument against judaizing teachers both in the Roman and Galatian churches, he was placing the responsibility of sin squarely on the back of individuals, not God. In view of this, God stands righteous and just. The problem of sin has always been with man, not God.

People are therefore sinners because of their personal disobedience to God's commandments. Sin is the transgression of God's commandments. If one does what God has told him not to do, he sins. If one does not do what God has told him to do, he sins. If one does not obey biblically defined principles of good, he sins. Even if one does that which his conscience says is wrong, he sins. Sin, therefore, **is the free-moral reaction of an accountable individual against the will**

**of God.** This is the entirety of the biblical definition of sin. In this sense, therefore, all account-able people are unrighteous because all have sinned. There is no one who has obtained righteousness because of his own ability to keep law or to do good works in order to atone for sin. Apart from the blood of Jesus, all are dead in sin in relation to God.

The unrighteousness of man, is not based on something that we inherited from our fathers. It is based on our inability to justify ourselves before God on the basis of law-keeping or meritorious works. The invention of the concepts as “original sin” and “total depravity” was based on a misunderstanding of man’s inability to stand righteous before God on the basis of works. If we can understand the “lostness” of man in relation to the righteousness of God, then we can better perceive that man has no chance of salvation apart from the grace of God. Salvation is by grace. Through the access of our obedient faith, we accept God’s grace (Rm 5:1,2). And once we come into the realm of God’s grace, we are accounted righteous by God, not because of our goodness. It is because of God’s goodness that is extended to us

through grace.

The doctrines of original sin and total depravity make God responsible for sin, since it is God who gives us our spirit at birth. But the biblical concept of sin makes man totally responsible for his own behavior. God will stand just in final judgment because man is responsible for his own sin.

When we discuss the subject of predestination in detail, we will discover that God has predestined the means by which man can deliver himself from sin. Thus, the plan was predestined, not the man to obey the plan.

God predestined the plan of salvation through His grace that would be revealed on the cross because He knew the predicament of man. He knew that no man could so live as to save himself. He thus stepped in with grace. When we realize that we could not save ourselves, we are driven with thanksgiving for what God did for us through the cross. Paul wrote, *“For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace that is reaching many people may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God”* (2 Co 4:15). We thank God for His indescribable gift.

### Chapter 3

## Born Free

Every Christian suffers in a world that seems to be unfair. We fall victim to a host of infirmities and wonder why life can be so cruel. We doubt God. We know better, because the other alternative to

belief is worse. Reason keeps us directed in faith to a God who is not simply out there, but here. He is close by. Our thinking tells us this. God’s word to us is that He is the God who is here. Neverthe-

less, we, with Job and a host of biblical faithfuls, have complained, “Why do the righteous suffer?”

In order to understand the foreknowledge and predestination of God, we must understand the biblical teaching concerning the free-moral agency of man. I do not believe one has a chance at understanding these abilities on the part of God unless we begin with man's free-moral agency. It is true that we will never fully understand foreknowledge and predestination. These are not abilities of man. However, in order to begin to understand, we must at least have some theology of free-moral agency. Make no mistake, this is a most important study. We must learn it well, for if we do not, we will construct a theology of God that is distorted. We will then come up with a distorted concept of God.

So here we begin. Because we can make a choice to react in a negative manner to God's law, means that all of us are free-moral agents. In fact, sin exists because we are free-moral agents and responsible for our actions in relation to an eternal God who has given law to man. It is in reference to this law that we shall give account. And because we will give account, means that we must have freedom to choose.

The term “free-moral agent” is not found in the Bible. However, the concept certainly is there. Teachings as “choose who you will serve,” “repent,” “stand fast in the faith,” all necessitate that individuals have the mental ability to determine their own destiny. Therefore, when we use the phrase “free-moral

agent” we are simply saying that one will be accountable for his or her actions in final judgment.

The term “free-moral” also means that **we are moral beings**. We have a **conscience**. This conscience hurts us if we do that which we consider to be evil. It comforts us when we do that which we consider right. Therefore, we establish moral laws by which to live because of our consciences.

“Free” refers to our privilege to make decisions of either right or wrong. God has allowed us the total responsibility to either obey or disobey. Because of this freedom, God will stand just in the judgment if we are eternally lost because of our sins. Therefore, the Bible teaches that all of us are free-moral agents who have power over ourselves. In order to have such power, we must not subject ourselves to anything that would destroy our free-moral agency. Because we are free to make choices, we will eventually be held accountable for those choices. Freedom demands responsibility and responsibility means eventual accountability.

Because we are free-moral agents, we cannot logically be individually predestined to either heaven or hell by a just and fair God. Free-moral agency assumes that individuals will be responsible for their own destinies. It also means that we will be held responsible for our own choices. We will be held accountable in order that God stand just in judgment.

The following are major points that emphasize the fundamental teaching of the Bible that we are free-moral. We are such in an environment that allows

choice. If man is a true free-moral agent, then the doctrine of individual predestination is absolutely false. If individuals have been given the responsibility to respond either positively or negatively in relation to God's will, then the notion that He has irreversibly destined individuals to either heaven or hell cannot be true. These two teachings stand opposed to one another. One or the other is true. Now consider the following explanations to determine which is true.

### A. Man has the right to choose.

The Bible teaches that God has allowed us the freedom to make choices. Joshua emphasized this when he said to the nation of Israel, "**Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve ...**" (Ja 24:15). Many in Israel chose sin. They "**did not choose the fear of the Lord**" (Pv 1:29). God sets His laws before us and expects us to obey those laws. He affirmed this in Deuteronomy 30:19. "*I call heaven and earth as witness today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing, **therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live.***" In choosing life Israel had to make a choice to respond in a positive way to God's law.

Moses was one who **chose** "*to suffer affliction with the people of God ...*" (Hb 11:25). He understood the principle of Paul that those who choose to sow "*to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life*" (Gl 6:8). God offers the Christian a way of escape from temptation. The offer assumes the ability to choose.

Paul wrote, "*No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also **make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it***" (1 Co 10:13). Because God offers this way of escape is **proof that man has the ability to choose the escape.** This teaching of Paul would make no sense if one's fate has been individually determined by God and cannot be changed.

There are those of this world who have chosen to do wickedness. But "*he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption*" (Gl 6:8; see 2 Co 9:6). Those who have chosen sin "*sow the wind, and reap the whirlwind*" (Hs 8:7). Eliphaz was right when he said, "*Those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same*" (Jb 4:8). He continued, "*But as for me, I would seek God, and to God I would commit my cause*" (Jb 5:8).

When God created man a free-moral agent, He was also giving man the right to choose whether he should or should not obey God's law. However, because we have been given this freedom, it will also make us responsible for our own choices. Therefore, with freedom comes responsibility and accountability. Any right to choose carries with it the responsibility of accepting the consequences of those choices.

God has revealed law to man. We thus have the option to either obey or disobey this law. The wicked Jezebel of Thyatira was given the privilege to choose obedience and salvation or rejec-

tion and damnation (Rv 2:20-22). Peter gave the Jews a choice concerning their salvation. “*Be saved from this perverse generation*” (At 2:40). “*Repent therefore and be converted...*” (At 3:19). Paul said to “... *work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*” (Ph 2:12). Christians must “*give all diligence*” to grow (2 Pt 1:5). Peter said, “*Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your calling and election sure...*” (2 Pt 1:10). All of these passages emphasize the individual’s responsibility to make a decision concerning God’s will. In reference to obedience, God “*is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance*” (2 Pt 3:9). Nevertheless, the time is coming when “*He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained*” (At 17:31). If we choose not to obey God, we will be eternally lost (See Pv 1:24-26; Mt 23:37; Jn 3:19; 5:40; 2 Th 1:7-9). Therefore, our eternal destiny is a choice that responsible individuals must make. God has given us the right and responsibility to make a decision concerning our eternal destiny.

## **B. Men must be truly free.**

Those who teach the doctrine of total depravity affirm that men are born with a “sinful nature” that is inclined to do evil. They are saying that it is natural for men to sin. This teaching promotes another false teaching. This teaching is that in order for one to respond to the will of God, the Holy Spirit must **work**

**in conjunction with** the word of God in order to make the sinner respond to the will of God. However, this teaching would contradict the free-moral nature of man. Since men can free morally make choices, they will be held accountable for their choices. If the Spirit works directly to affect the choices of men, then they cannot be held accountable for their choices.

In order for man to be a true free-moral agent, at least four things must exist. If any one of these four things does not exist, then the free-moral agency of man does not exist. There are four necessities for free-moral agency to exist: (1) the ability to choose, (2) an environment that allows choices, (3) the freedom of choice, and (4) the capacity to be tempted. These are the principles upon which free-moral agency exists. If we take away any one of the four principles that constitutes a truly freely moral person, then the individual is not free. And if not free, then the person is not totally accountable for sin. If one is lost because of his sin, then God is to be held accountable since He did not create man a truly free moral person with the ability to make choices. Or, God is to be held accountable because He did not put man in an environment that would guard man from sin.

In forming one’s theology concerning any teaching, the free moral choice of the individual must be guarded. It must be guarded lest we make God responsible for any individual being eternally lost.

### **1. Individuals must have the ability**



*to choose.* We would not be true free-moral agents if God had created us with an inability to make choices. God did not create us as robots. He did not program us to make the choices that He wanted us to make. We were created with the ability to make the worst of decisions and the best of decisions. In order for us to be able to make such decisions without questioning the justice of God, we had to be created with an **unprejudiced nature.** In other words, we had to be created innocent without any inclinations or urges to do either good or evil. If we were inclined to do evil, then God's justice would be questioned if He punished just one person He so inclined to do evil.

No one would like to be a preprogrammed robot. If the robot goes wrong, we blame it on a bad chip. Bad chips are the product of the manufacturer. Therefore, we blame the manufacturer if the robot goes wrong. What shall we do about an individual who goes bad? Are we going to shift responsibility to the manufacturer? Or, is the problem with the free-moral agent who has individually chosen evil over good? In order for God to be a just God, He must not be blamed for a life that has gone wrong because of bad choices. The problem is not in the manufacturer, but in the man.

**2. Free-moral men must dwell in an environment that allows choice.** What good would be a free-moral agent who was not in an environment that would allow the opportunity to make either good and bad choices? If God had not created an environment for choice, then He would be controlling us to the

point of bringing into question His justice. If one were in an environment which did not allow evil choices, then God could not punish anyone with eternal destruction. He could not even threaten men with such. If one were punished, then God would not be a just God. He would be a fiendish God, that is, one who enjoys punishing others.

Satan's excuse for his inability to influence Job for evil was based upon an erroneous belief that God had guarded Job from temptation. Satan complained, "*Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side?*" (Jb 1:10). Satan was wrong. There was no hedge around Job. Job had simply chosen not to rebel against God in an environment for choice. So it is with the righteous today. They have simply chosen to obey God rather than man in an environment that allows such choices to be made.

**3. Free-moral agents must be given the freedom to choose.** Not only must a true free-moral agent be given the ability to choose and be placed in an environment that will allow choices, he must also be allowed the privilege of making choices. God must allow us the opportunity to react either negatively or positively to Him and to one another. Regardless of the consequences of our evil reactions, we must be given the freedom to act without outside control or preprogrammed inner control. Again, God would not be just if He punished one who did not have the freedom to make choices.

We might say that it would be fool-

ish to give man the ability to choose in an environment that allows such, and at the same time, deny one the freedom to choose. What good would be the ability to choose in an environment that allows choice, if there were no freedom to choose?

With freedom, however, comes responsibility. This is the point. Because we are truly free to choose means that we will reap the consequences of our choices, whether good or bad. If one does not like this scenario, then there are two other choices: non-existence or robotics. Who wants to “not exist”? And who wants to exist as a preprogrammed robot? Neither choice is viable. So we accept the responsibility that comes with the freedom in order to have the opportunity to exist eternally.

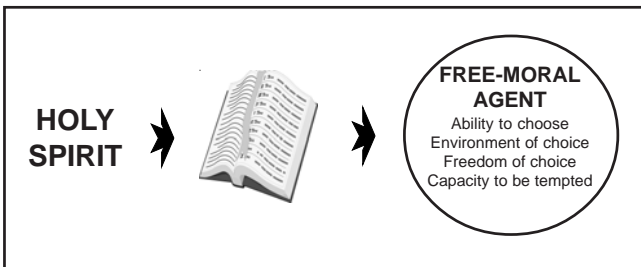
**4. Free-moral agents must have the capacity to be tempted.** The nature of a free-moral agent must be such that will allow him to be tempted to do evil. James said, “*But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed*” (J’s 1:14). God created man with lust that can be fulfilled either in a righteous or unrighteous manner (1 J’n 2:15). Without this capacity to be tempted to do either good or evil in fulfillment of our lusts, then man would not be a true free-moral agent. And if God condemned one who had not acted out

of a capacity to make free choices, then God would not be a just God. He would be a fiendish and unjust God who inflicts with hell the spiritually and mentally handicapped creatures of His work.

We must understand that God has given us the responsibility of determining our own destiny. In order to do this, God had to make us true free-moral agents. He cannot influence us in a way that controls us subjectively, that is, to take control of our free-moral agency. **This is why the Holy Spirit works on the heart of man to direct him morally through the medium of the word which He has inspired to lead men in righteousness.**

God does influence us through His word for through His word He tells us what must be done and what must not be done. God also works exceedingly abundantly above what we think (Ep 3:20). He works in our lives in order to work all things together for good (Rm 8:28). He works on us personally through others who have responded to His grace. He works in strengthening and comforting (2 Co 1:3-6; Ps 46:1). God works in ways that are past finding out. However, His work is not in a way that will work against the free-moral will of the individual.

In order for man to be truly free, he must not be inwardly prejudiced to make either



right or wrong choices that are directly controlled by the Holy Spirit. What choices are made must always make man responsible for the consequences. We must not be able to blame the Holy Spirit for lives that go wrong. Apostates have no excuse. They will never be able to blame the Holy Spirit for their fall from grace.

We must have the capacity to make choices in an environment that allows such. If this were not true, one would have just accusation against God for influencing his eternal destiny if he were eternally lost.

The doctrine of free-moral agency is a necessary result of the doctrine of the justice of God. God cannot be just if He has prejudiced men to evil. God cannot be just if He has not given individuals the ability and freedom to choose in an environment that allows choice. God could not be just if He is supposed to directly affect the choices of men.

One might argue that this places man alone in a universe of isolation. But such is not the case. God did not wind us up like clocks, and then escape to the far corners of the universe. He is here. *“In Him we live and move and have our being”* (At 17:28). He works in us for His good pleasure (Ph 2:13). However, though we are in Him and He in us, He will not relieve us of our responsibility for our actions. Free-moral agency refers to accountability. God’s presence in our lives refers to his relationship. We must not confuse the two. We must remember that His presence in His relationship with us does not relieve us of our responsibility to do His will. He will not deal with us in a way that will make us spoiled children. Because He loves us, He disciplines us. Our discipline, therefore, is the evidence that God truly loves us. We must not despise the discipline of the Lord.

## Chapter 4

### Examination Of Twisted Scriptures

People arrive at false doctrinal conclusions from at least two routes. Some allow traditional religious practices to become doctrine, and thus, seek some passage of scripture to justify their practice or belief. Then there are those who misunderstand some passage of scripture because of a lack of study or preconceived ideas. The latter has largely been the problem with the religiously inherited teachings of original sin and total

depravity. These teachings have simply been the traditional teachings of different groups who have handed down these beliefs from generation to generation. Many of those who are members of these groups who believe in such doctrines have often never seriously considered these teachings.

Doctrines as total depravity, original sin and individual predestination have resulted from an erroneous misunder-

standing of some basic biblical concepts. The most fundamental misunderstanding that has been promoted through these and similar teachings is the character of God. We wonder if those who originated these teachings ever had a clear understanding of the love, mercy and justice of God.

Any interpretation of scripture that would attack the nature of God must be false. This would be the first argument against any false teaching. Nevertheless, theologians who believe in total depravity, original sin and individual predestination do have their “proof texts.” In this chapter, it is fitting that we go to these proof texts in order to challenge some misunderstandings.

We must here discuss some of these “proof texts” that are commonly used in order to support the erroneous teachings of original sin and total depravity. (Discussions on the “proof texts” of individual predestination will be in chapter 11.)

The scriptures that are discussed in this chapter are some of the major scriptures that are used to support original sin and total depravity. However, we must challenge ourselves to understand these passages in the context of the biblical principles we have already studied. Our interpretation of the following texts must harmonize with the fundamental teachings of God’s justice and man’s free-moral agency. Any interpretation that makes the Bible contradict these or any other biblical teaching must be rejected.

One principle of Bible study we must remember here is to accept the fact that we may not fully understand a particular

passage in all its implications. We simply cannot understand everything in the Bible. We might say that we cannot understand many things that the Bible briefly mentions that are beyond our realm of understanding. The Bible talks much about God. However, we do not understand everything there is to know about God. The Bible even talks about our salvation by grace on the cross. However, we do not completely understand all that transpired with the incarnation of the Son of God. We simply walk by faith in those areas where our understanding is limited to this world.

If we interpret a passage in a way to make it contradict a fundamental teaching of Scripture, then we know that our understanding of the scripture is wrong. Scriptures must always be interpreted in harmony with clearly stated fundamental teachings of other scriptures. The Bible does not contradict itself. To interpret Scripture to make passages contradict one another is to twist passages out of context. Therefore, we leave to God those things that are beyond our understanding.

The preceding principle is vital to understand when we study subjects of Scripture that concern the work of God that is beyond the limitations of human reasoning. **We must always allow our thinking to first be directed by clearly stated fundamental principles before we turn to obscure passages that deal with God’s work beyond human experience.** Clearly defined principles of Scripture will always keep our thinking in check as we investigate difficult pas-

sages. With this in mind, consider some of the following texts that are used to prove the teachings of either total depravity or original sin.

### A. David personally sinned against God.

In **Psalm 51:5** David lamented, “*Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.*” Some have used this passage to teach that David was saying that he was born a sinner or with a “sinful nature” inclined to evil. In other words, at the moment of his birth he was supposedly stained with original sin, or totally depraved. He was either lost in sin because of Adam's sin, or inclined to sin. Consider the following points:

**1. Hebrew parallelisms:** It is important to first understand that Psalm 51:5 is a **Hebrew parallelism**. In this style of poetry, two lines of poetry express the same thought in two different lines but with different words and phrases. First of all, keep in mind that David is talking about his **conception**, not his birth. And in discussing his conception, he is talking about **the situation of his mother at the time of his conception**. If sin is inherited, therefore, this verse would not apply because the verse is discussing the situation of someone other than the one who is conceived. The context is that **David is talking about the sin of his mother**, who was a sinner as all men are sinners (Rm 3:23).

The two lines of the parallelism ex-

plain one another. Notice what David is saying in order to make this emphasis.

Line 1: *I was brought forth in iniquity.*

Line 2: *In sin my mother conceived me.*

“Brought forth” of line one is explained in line two as “conceived.” Therefore, conception is under discussion, not birth. “In iniquity” of line one is explained as “in sin” in line two. “My mother” of line two refers us to whose sin is under discussion in line one. Thus, the “iniquity” of line one would refer to David’s mother.

This makes us wonder if David is paralleling his own conception with that of his son’s conception through his adulterous act with Bathsheba (2 Sm 11). David’s mother was certainly a sinner after the pronouncements of passages as Romans 3:10,11 that there are none who are righteous. Add to this the fact that Bathsheba sinned in the conception of the son that was to be born as a result of her adultery with David. We do not know the details of David’s own conception. But we do know the details of David’s son’s conception through Bethsheba. “In sin” the son was conceived. And if David considered his own conception after the same manner, then we could easily understand what he is saying in Psalm 51:5. It could be that David was the result of a sinful relationship in the life of his mother.

**2. The tenth generation:** Though Psalm 51:5 is a difficult passage, one possible interpretation could refer to the seedline of David. Under Old Testament

law, “*one of illegitimate birth should not enter the congregation of the Lord; even to the tenth generation none of his descendants shall enter the congregation of the Lord*” (Dt 23:2). In Genesis 38 an adulterous union occurred between Judah and Tamar. As a result, an illegitimate son, Perez, was born (vs 29; see Rt 4:12). Through Perez came David (1 Ch 2:4-15). Counting Perez, David was the **tenth generation** from Judah and Tamar (Mt 1:3-6), and under Old Testament law, could legally go unto the **congregation of the Lord**. This may explain why David said in Psalm 122:1, “*I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go into the house of the Lord’.*” David’s generation was the first to be lifted from the curse of the adulterous relationship of Judah and Tamar.

In Psalm 51, therefore, David may be using a Hebrew parallelism to discuss his conception through the seedline of Judah and Tamar. Because it was law that one could not enter the congregation until the tenth generation, David seems to reflect on the curse of his seedline that began with the adulterous relationship between Judah and Tamar. If this is true, he may not be referring to a sinful relationship his mother had, from which he was born, but to the sinful relationship of Judah and Tamar. On the other hand, David may be referring both to Judah and Tamar and also a possible sinful relationship of his mother.

**3. David’s remorse over his sin:** With the preceding thoughts in mind, consider the immediate context of David’s situation. He had just commit-

ted an adulterous act with Bathsheba. A son was conceived. Nathan approached David and convicted him of his sin (2 Sm 12). David was now in remorse over his act. If point B above is correct, **David realized that he had started again the curse of an illegitimate seedline in his descendants for another ten generations**. He was the tenth generation that released his family heritage from the law of Deuteronomy 23:2. Now he had set the punishment again in action through the son that would be born to Bathsheba. Psalm 51, therefore, is more than a lamentation of David over his single act of adultery. He foresees another ten generations of his descendants under legal restriction from the congregation of the Lord. It is possible that God did not want this to happen. At least it did not, for the son died (2 Sm 12).

## **B. Men sin after they are born.**

In **Psalm 58:3** David wrote, “*The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies.*” This scripture is often used to prove the supposed “sinful nature” of an individual. Since one is supposedly depraved, it is affirmed, his inclination is to turn aside unto evil regardless of his environment. In other words, all of us were preprogrammed to sin. It is thus our nature to sin. But consider this thinking in comparison to the following points:

**1. Sin takes place after birth.** In Psalm 58:3, the Psalmist is not discuss-

ing what takes place **in the womb**. That which is under discussion takes place sometime **after birth**. This would mean that David is not discussing the nature of the soul in this passage. Whatever he is discussing comes about after our physical birth.

**2. David is calling for judgment of the wicked.** Psalm 58 is an **imprecatory** psalm. In other words, it is a call for God to reign down judgment on the wicked. The wicked in the Psalm are those who are working evil against God's servant, David. Therefore, the wicked who are under discussion here are **adults** who are working evil against David, God's anointed king.

**3. Men are drawn into sin by their own lusts.** James said that one is "*drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin ...*" (Js 1:14,15). Therefore, one sins only when he reaches the age in his life when he can be tempted. The enemies of David went astray after they had reached the age of accountability. In Psalm 58:2 David said of them, "*No, in heart you work wickedness.*" In other words, they had chosen in their hearts to work wickedness. They had made a conscious decision to sin. Therefore, they were at or beyond the age when one can make a free-moral decision. David is not talking about babies in this passage. He is talking about adults.

**4. One goes from purity to wickedness.** Notice that Psalm 58:3 says that "*they go astray.*" Before one can go astray to wickedness, **he must first start at a point of purity or righteousness.**

Ezekiel 28:15 states, "*You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you.*" One is first born perfect, that is, sinless. It is sometime after birth that one goes into sin. We are thus not born with sin. If we were born with original sin on our souls, we could not go astray into sin. We cannot go astray into sin until we are conscious of temptation, and then, we sin by yielding to that temptation.

In the imprecatory Psalm 58, David is discussing the judgment of the wicked. Because they have been drawn away by their own lust, David calls on God's judgment upon them. The point is that they had to be able to lust in order to have the capacity to be drawn away. Infants have no such lusts.

Consider also that those who teach the doctrines of original sin and total depravity affirm that when one is born he or she **is** either with original sin or totally depraved. In other words, one **is with** original sin, or is in a state of total depravity. It is now what one does, but **is**. Reference would be to a state of being, not to what an infant would be doing.

What David is discussing in Psalm 58:3 is something the wicked **are** as a result of what they **do**. They "go astray." This is not something they are at birth, but something they do in disobedience to God's will after birth. In the parallelism of the passage, "estranged" in line one is defined as "go astray" in line two. Thus the wicked actually **do** something that takes place after birth.

Since it is something that the wicked

**do**, then their wickedness is a free-moral choice on their part. What they are after having gone astray is the result of their own free-moral choices. But what they are at birth is not free-moral. The passage is talking about something (wickedness) that is the result of their own free-moral choice.

### C. Physical death came through Adam.

**1 Corinthians 15:20-22** is often used to state that one suffers spiritual death as a result of Adam's sin. It is believed that Paul is saying we spiritually die because Adam sinned against God in the garden of Eden. However, we must affirm that this passage is not discussing spiritual death. The context of Paul's statements is the bodily resurrection of Christians after the manner of Jesus' resurrection.

The subject of 1 Corinthians 15 is the **physical resurrection of our bodies at the end of time**. Paul argues that this physical resurrection must be necessary in order to correct the physical death that came into the world as a result of Adam's sin. Physical death originated as a result of Adam being driven from the tree of life (Gn 3:22-24). He thus could not eat of the tree of life and live forever. Neither can we.

The context of **1 Corinthians 15:20-22** is very important. Paul wrote, "*But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam*

*all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.*" The following are some very important teachings that Paul is trying to convey to us in this scripture:

**1. The context is talking about physical death.** The Corinthians were having problems with those who were denying the bodily resurrection to come. Paul answers their questions. The entire chapter of 1 Corinthians 15 is discussing the consequence of the resurrection of Jesus. This consequence is the resurrection of the Christian when Jesus comes again. The importance of the bodily resurrection is emphasized by Paul in verse 13. "*But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen.*" If Christ has not been raised, Paul concludes, "*Then our preaching is vain and your faith is also vain*" (vs 14).

**2. That which was unconditionally lost in Adam was unconditionally gained in Christ.** 1 Corinthians 15:20-22 is saying that all men must physically die because of Adam's sin. The question is, Why do men die? **When Adam sinned, all humanity was separated from the tree of life** (Gn 3:22-24). Therefore, "*it is appointed for men to die once ...*" (Hb 9:27). But because of Jesus' resurrection from the tomb, "*all shall be made alive.*" Jesus said that "*the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation*" (Jn 5:28,29). Both the righteous and wicked will be resurrected when



Jesus comes again. They will be resurrected because He was resurrected. This is why 1 Corinthians 15:20-22 cannot be discussing spiritual death. All did not unconditionally die spiritually when Adam sinned. If they had, then all would have been unconditionally resurrected from spiritual death by Jesus' resurrection.

We must not miss the point here. If 1 Corinthians 15:20-22 is talking about "spiritual resurrection," then we have a problem. If all were supposedly unconditionally made spiritually dead (given a sinful nature or stained with original sin) when Adam sinned, then all are unconditionally "spiritually resurrected" by the resurrection of Jesus. This would be true simply because Paul is saying that the general resurrection to come is **unconditional**. It will occur because of Jesus' bodily resurrection. If reference in 1 Corinthians 15:20-22 is to a spiritual resurrection, then the theological problems are immense. If all are now unconditionally spiritually resurrected because of Jesus' resurrection, then we can scrap any obedience to God's law. Who would need to give heed to God's will if we are already unconditionally made righteous before God?

## D. The result of sin is spiritual death.

It is important to review **Romans 5:12** in the context of this discussion. This is one of the principal passages that is used to teach either the doctrine of original sin or total depravity. Paul stated, "*Therefore, just as through one*

*man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.*" It is important to note that Paul is here discussing the **guilt** of Adam's sin, not the consequences of his sin. He is discussing **spiritual death**, not physical death as in 1 Corinthians 15.

Guilt refers to accountability for one's personal actions in reference to law. When one transgresses law, he or she must accept the responsibility (the guilt) of the transgression. Others may be adversely affected by our sin. Our families will suffer adverse consequences for the drunkenness of a father or mother. However, one will personally suffer the guilt of his own drunkenness. With this in mind, consider Paul's reference to one's guilt from personal sin as mentioned in Romans 5:12.

**1. Adam's condition:** Adam introduced sin into the world **because he was the first man to sin**. Therefore, sin entered into the world through him. As a result of his **personal** sin, he was separated spiritually from God (Is 59:2), and therefore, suffered the wages of sin which is spiritual death (Rm 6:23). This explains the first part of Romans 5:12. Thus, Adam personally sinned against God by partaking of the forbidden fruit. He personally died spiritually as a result of His sin.

**2. Mankind's condition:** The last part of Romans 5:12 discusses all men after Adam. This is where we today come into the picture. Paul had earlier written in Romans 3:10, "*There is none righ-*

*teous, no, not one.*” This is true because “*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” (Rm 3:23). None are righteous because all have sinned. Therefore, all men are spiritually separated from God because of the personal sin of each individual. We are spiritually dead, not because of Adam’s sin, but **because of our own personal sins.**

Another thing to note concerning Romans 5:12 is that the phrase “*all sinned*” is in the **active voice** in the Greek construction. The active voice emphasizes the **quality** of the verb which means that the subject is what is doing the acting. In the last half of this passage, therefore, it means that the “*all men*” are the ones doing the sinning. Therefore, death passes to all men because they are the ones who are doing the sin. If their death were the result of Adam’s sin, then the quality of the verb would be the **passive voice**, which means that the subject is **acted upon**. But in the passage, “all men” are doing the acting; they are doing the sinning. They are not acted upon as a result of Adam’s sin. In other words, they have not, in a passive manner, inherited the guilt of Adam’s sin.

### **E. The lost are in sin as a way of life.**

In **Ephesians 2:3** Paul said that the Ephesians were once “*by nature children of wrath ...*” This statement is often misinterpreted to mean that the Ephesians, and ourselves, are naturally inclined to do evil. However, this passage is not talking about one’s nature at birth, nor is it talking about the God-created

spirit of man. It is discussing a demeanor of life that was typical of the Ephesians before they obeyed the gospel.

The word which is here translated “nature” (*phusis*) is also used in 1 Corinthians 11:14 where it refers to something that was a **custom** or **common practice of society, a lifestyle**. The word has the same meaning in the context of Ephesians 2:3. The meaning of Ephesians 2:3 is that the Ephesians had made it a custom, or common practice of their society, to live in conflict with the will of God. They were the product of their society. They had accepted the sinful disposition of their culture. Thus, they were “children of wrath” because they were products of a sinful society.

Consider the following succession of thought concerning the context of Ephesians 2:3:

1. The Ephesians were once dead through their **own sins** (vs 1).
2. They **walked** according to the way of the world (vs 2).
3. They **lived** after the lust of the flesh, **doing** the desires of the flesh (vs 3).
4. Therefore, what verse 3 is saying is that it was their habit of life to sin against God.

When one is born, God gives him a spirit that is free of sin and is neither inclined to good nor evil. When we grow to the age of accountability, our own lusts can lead us into sin. Sin, therefore, is the wrong reaction of a free-moral agent against the will of God. We are free-moral agents. We are in an environment

that allows us freedom of choice. God has given us law to obey. If we reject God's laws, we sin. It is our responsibility to obey the law of God. If we do not obey we will be held accountable for our own actions at the final judgment. We will be held accountable because God's justice will stand unblemished in the judgment. His justice will stand because we are true free-moral agents.

## F. We sin from youth.

In **Genesis 8:21** God said of man, "*I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth.*" This passage is often quoted to affirm that we are born with a sinful nature that yearns toward evil from the time of our birth.

Notice that Genesis 8:21 is discussing "youth," not infants. The passage makes sense only in understanding the age at which one in his or her youth becomes accountable for evil choices. In youth one begins to understand right from wrong. In the Hebrew society, one was considered a youth when in his or her teens. Genesis 8:21, therefore, is not discussing someone who is an infant. It is discussing those in their youth who have reached the age of accountability and have chosen to sin.

It must be stated in clear terms that the doctrine of original sin is a most destructive attack against the nature of God.

The very nature of this doctrine attacks the central nature of the character of God. It is almost inconceivable why men would invent the satanic belief that a newly born and helpless baby would be in danger of hell if he or she died.

If God is loving, kind, gentle and merciful, then how or why would He allow thousands of babies to be born every hour in the world who are destined to hell against their will? A novice interpreter of the Scriptures can see that there is something diabolically wrong with such a belief. (More on this in chapter 10.)

The same can be said for the belief that thousands of babies are born with a sinful nature, inclined to evil regardless of their environment. They can be diverted from their destination of damnation only if God so chooses to send the Holy Spirit to change their hearts. This not only makes God a respecter of persons, it also makes God fiendishly unloving against those He does not choose for life, and thus, predestines to hell. This moves our studies into a discussion of individual predestination. Has God individually chosen certain people to be saved? After choosing these "elect," has He individually predestined them to eternal life? At the same time, has He thus individually predestined some to destruction? Are men relieved of their accountability for sin because they are predestined to eternal life regardless of what they do?

## Chapter 5

### Biblical Predestination

Man is a free-moral being. He is responsible for his own behavior. This means that he will be responsible for the results of his behavior at the final judgment. Since this is true, therefore, we cannot be individually predestined to either heaven or hell. Nevertheless, the Bible does discuss the subject of predestination. It is in the context of the free-moral agency of man that the biblical teaching of predestination must be understood.

This chapter is a discussion of the foreknowledge of God and the predestination of the church in reference to eternal destinies. In order to understand what the Bible teaches on these subjects, it is best to state first some of the misconceptions that are taught concerning the election and predestination of the Christian. These misconceptions motivate us to investigate the subject, for we live in a world that is greatly affected by misinterpretations concerning predestination.

Some have misunderstood the Bible subjects of election and predestination in the sense that they affirm that the Bible teaches that one is **unconditionally** elected and **individually** predestined. These two beliefs are interlinked. Those who promote such teachings affirm that **before we were born**, God individually chose, or elected, those who would be saved. The salvation of those who were unconditionally elected would be with-

out any conditions on their part. In other words, they would have to do nothing in order to be chosen since their election took place before they were born. Therefore, one was elected to eternal life without any free-moral choice. His or her obedience was predetermined by God before creation. Because of this unconditional election, individuals are automatically predestined to eternal life. In other words, we are to be saved because God so chose us to be saved. Salvation is not dependent upon our choice, but upon God's individual election.

The logical conclusion to the doctrine of unconditional election of individuals is unconditional pre-destination to eternal life. Those who believe in unconditional election and predestination must and do believe that those who are not predestined to eternal life are thus predestined to destruction in hell. It is only logical to conclude that if one is not elected to life, he or she is elected to destruction. Since God has already made the elections, there is nothing one can do to change his or her destiny.

This foreordination doctrine has also been expanded by some to include the material world. In other words, before the world was created, God set in order of occurrence the events of all men. Everything has been unchangeably set in order and left to fate. Nothing can be deterred from its predestined occurrence.

What happens in the physical world in relation to our lives happens because God foreordained that it should happen. As citizens of the world, we are left to the predetermined occurrence of things. We are thus destined to either calamity or good fortune.

The doctrines of individual foreordination and predestination of man and events necessitates the belief that no saved person can fall from grace. Such teachings also assume that no unsaved person can possibly be saved. No natural catastrophe can be avoided by the prayers of the saints. Everything has been prede-termined by God and is set in order for occurrence throughout history.

The Scriptures do not teach the above doctrines that lead one to a fatalistic view of life. Fatalism is the disposition that since one can do nothing about what is going to happen, he or she must simply live a life without concern for what happens. If one has no choice concerning his or her life and destiny, why offer any prayers? Though this teaching may appeal to some, the Bible teaches that the prayers of the righteous do accomplish much. There are some vital teachings in the Bible that give hope for a better future. Through prayer things can change. We are not relegated to a world of hopelessness. We are not condemned to a fate over which we have no power to change by prayer.

Some very important concepts in the Bible deal with the teachings of election and predestination of the church. Before the creation of the world, God elected and predestined the church as a group for eter-

nal life. Before the creation of the world, God planned a universal plan of redemption through Jesus for individuals to freely choose to obey in order that they be elected out of the world at the final judgment. This plan of salvation is true simply because we are free-moral. Since we are free-moral and able to make choices, God's plan of salvation is applicable to all men. Every person on earth has a right to become a part of the group (the church) that God has chosen for eternity.

When considering the events of history, we must not view God as helpless, nor our prayers as futile. God can change history in response to our prayers. He does work for the benefit of the saints.

God's true character contradicts the false teaching concerning the individual predestination of the wicked to hell. God is a God who does not wish that any perish (2 Pt 3:9). This very desire means that anyone can be saved if they so choose to respond to God's grace. However, this salvation is conditioned upon the obedience of individuals to the will of God. God's appeal to the lost is evidence that His nature is one of benevolence, not revenge. We do not serve a fiendish God.

**Before the creation of the world, God predestined the church as a group for eternal life.** This is the important point that we must constantly keep in mind as we study through this subject. The Bible does teach predestination. But it is **the group of the saved** that has been predestined, and thus, will be elected and called out of the world for eternal heaven.

## A. The church was chosen and elected before creation.

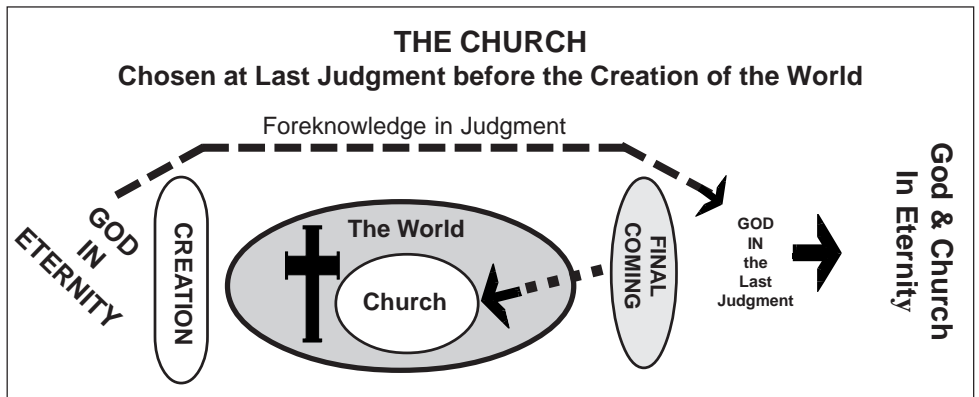
**God foreordained (unchangeably predestined) before creation that He would eternally save the church.** Therefore, He unchangeably predestined the church to eternal salvation. **All individuals, therefore, who would respond to the gospel and become a member of the church would be predestined as a part of the church to eternal salvation.**

Individuals are predestined only insofar as they are faithful and continuing members of the predestined group, the church. One becomes elected (chosen) to eternal life by his or her positive response to the gospel. We are first called by the gospel into the fellowship of the chosen (2 Th 2:14). Once obedient to the call, we are predestined to eternal life as a member of the church. When we obey the gospel, therefore, we become a part of the group that will be eventually called (chosen, elected) out of the world for eternal dwelling in heaven. Individuals must thus make individual choices to become a part of the group that God will as a

group choose out of the world for eternal salvation.

In order to understand the terms “elect,” “chosen,” and “called,” we must view God’s work from an eternal standpoint with time and history as only a brief blink in His eternal plan. Of course, it is impossible to understand how God can so view time. Nevertheless, we must make some attempt.

Before creation (the foundation of the world), God foreplanned, and thus, foreknew the eternal destiny of the church. Therefore, He “foreplaced” Himself in judgment, looking back to all inhabitants of the world and selected those who would dwell in heaven. He would select those who in history would respond by faith to His grace. In this way, He could foreknow before creation those He would elect in final judgment. He would choose them out of the world of sinners for heavenly dwelling. Therefore, the church from this viewpoint of God is the “elect,” “called,” and “chosen.” In the end, the church will be **elected** out of the world, **chosen** for eternal dwelling and **called** to heaven. As we read of the called, elect



and chosen in the New Testament, we understand from such terms what God will do at the final judgment, not what He is individually doing to individuals now in relation to obedience to the gospel and becoming members of the church. Neither should we understand such terms from the viewpoint of God individually choosing and electing people before the creation.

The reformationist John Calvin had a limited view of God's work in eternity. He thus viewed the terms "called," "elect" and "chosen" in reference to people being individually predestined to be saved and brought into the church. He believed that God did this before the creation. However, the New Testament teaches that because God foreknew His work in judgment, He could refer to those in the church as the "called," "elect" and "chosen" out of the world in final judgment. Because God knew that they would be called, elect and chosen in reference to eternal life, they are now predestined to heaven.

Calvin wrongly assumed that God individually predestined people to be saved, and thus, were elected and individually called into the church. The truth is that because God foreknew the eventual eternal salvation of all those in the church, the church group would be elected out of the world, called into heaven and chosen for eternity. The church group is now called, chosen and elected because she will be called, chosen and elected for eternal dwelling at the end of all things.

In reference to our existence and con-

finement to time, these terms are often difficult to understand. However, we must understand them from God's perspective in reference to eternal heaven, not our existence in time. Thus, we are the present elect because we will be elected in final judgment. We are the chosen because we will be chosen out of the world in the end. We are the called, not only because we have been called into the predestined group by the gospel, but there will be another calling at the end of time when God will call all the saints home.

This sheds light on the meaning of 2 Thessalonians 2:14. Paul wrote, "... *to which He called you by our gospel for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" "You" in this passage refers to the Thessalonians in general, not specifically to individuals. Paul preached the gospel in Thessalonica. Many responded. As a group, therefore, the Thessalonians have been called into obtaining the glory of Jesus. We must not simply look at this calling in a present context, but in an eternal context in the sense that Christians have been called into eternal life which they now have (1 Jn 5:11). In other words, God is presently calling people into heaven through the gospel. God sees the calling through final judgment, though we can see it only from the perspective of time when one obeys the gospel by immersion. Our understanding of the calling, therefore, is truly "short sighted." Nevertheless, we must view the obedience of the individual from an eternal perspective, not simply a time oriented event.

## B. God foreknew and predestined the saved.

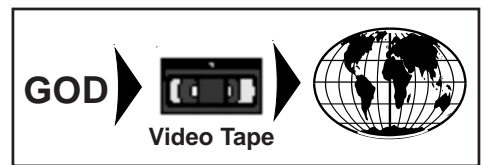
Paul wrote, “*For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified*” (Rm 8:29,30). Is Paul saying that God first chose those who would be justified, and then, predestined them to eternal life? Was such done without the free-moral choice of the individual? In order to answer those questions, consider the following:

**1. God’s foreknowledge does not necessitate unchangeable predestination.** We must not think that because God foreknows something, He automatically and unchangeably predestines that which He foreknows. God can know the happening of all events of history without having destined those events to happen. You ask, “How can He do this?” From the standpoint of man, it is not an easy concept to understand. But remember, we must not confine God’s ability to the limits of our imagination. He is a God who is greater than our thinking.

In order to understand, or at least begin to understand, consider this from another perspective. A man knows what has happened in the past. But that knowledge did not cause those events to have happened. Now God knows what is in the future. But that knowledge does not

cause those things to happen. This is a weak illustration. But keep in mind the fact that God knows the future of all events. We cannot understand this. But the fact that He does know all future events does not necessitate predestination of that which He knows.

It is easy to see that we have moved beyond our ability to fully understand this principle. Therefore, we must remind ourselves that we are not God. We cannot understand all that is within the understanding of God. However, this does not mean that God cannot foreknow the future without having predestined it. We cannot allow our inability to understand to limit God’s ability. If we say He cannot foreknow without individually predestining, then we are attempting to bring God’s work down to our level of understanding. If we do this, then it is no longer God, but a god we have conceived in our minds. And any god we conceive in our minds can be manipulated to do whatever we so choose. This god is thus not worth believing.

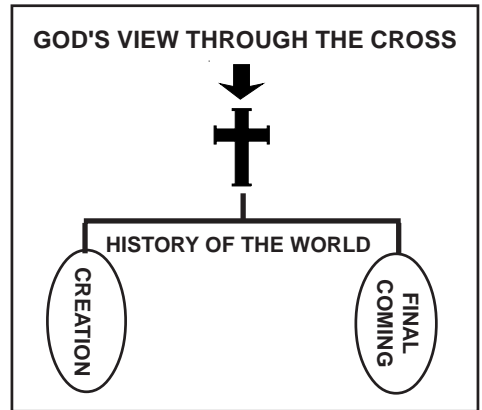


Consider another illustration. Suppose all history of the world were recorded on a video cassette tape. And suppose that the operator of the cassette recorder is as God who can run the tape forward to see what is in the future. The operator can also reverse the tape to see the past. He can change the future be-



cause of things that happened in the past. He can re-run the tape as many times as possible. He can review the prayers of the saints in order to edit the future. He can, of His own will, edit the future because of an individual's obedient actions at any one time on the tape. Does this seem hard to believe? Possibly so. However, keep in mind that we are struggling to understand something that is beyond our complete understanding. God is in control of the video player. He can push the edit button to change the future because of prayers and events that happen in the present and in the past.

God also sees history as we would view a photograph. We see a photograph that is a split second of time. We see all the photograph at one time. We see it in an instant. All of history that occurred in the split second the photograph was taken is there before us for our review. We can sit and ponder the photograph for hours, making decisions concerning its content. God could possibly see history from such a perspective. He sees history in an instant simply because He is omniscient. He knows all history, and thus, views the video tape of history as we would view the photograph. But His knowledge does not presuppose that all history is set and cannot be changed. He can change such in response to the prayers of the saints and individual's response to the cross. God responds to our prayers on behalf of the cross. Because we have come to God through the cross, we have both the cleansing of our sins and the privilege of approaching the Father through prayer in the name of Jesus.



Therefore, God views all history, and especially His children, through the cross of Jesus.

God sees the history of mankind **through the cross** (See Rm 3:25; Hb 9:15). This one event in history has changed the destiny of thousands in the future. It solved the sin problem of thousands of faithful people of God in the past. God will change the eternal destiny of any individual who responds in a positive way to the cross of Jesus. Before the foundation of the world, He could know our obedience in response to the cross without predestining such to happen. Yes, the cross was predestined. However, those who were to respond to such were not predestined. The cross of Jesus simply became the occasion for men to make a choice concerning salvation.

If God had already individually predestined the elect to be saved, then we would wonder why there would be the cross. Why could Jesus need to empty Himself for those who were going to be saved anyway? Did God simply put on a

stage show in order to amuse those who were going to heaven anyway because He had already elected them to salvation? But we must also ask, Why the cross, if God could foreknow the individual obedience of those who would respond to the cross? Now we are getting to the point.

God could know our free-moral obedience to the cross without having predestined such to occur. Simply because He can foreknow free-moral choices on the part of man does not necessitate that those choices have been predestined to happen. If they were predestined to happen, then there would have been no free-moral choice on the part of the individual. But how could God foreknow our individual choice to respond to the cross without having predestined such to happen? This is the point with which we must deal.

**2. God desires that all men be Christian.** Peter wrote in 2 Peter 3:9, *“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”* It is God’s desire that all should obey the gospel. This is in the meaning of what Jesus said in Matthew 22:14, *“For many are called, but few chosen”* (See Mt 19:30; Mk 10:31; Lk 13:30). Regardless of the desires and universal call of God, not all have conformed to the gospel call. Nevertheless, the many who do respond are called. All are given an opportunity but not all accept the grace of God.

Paul wrote, *“For whom He fore-*

*knew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified”* (Rm 8:29,30). Paul is saying in Romans 8:29,30 that God destined that every man born on earth should be conformed to the image of Jesus. However, He has allowed people the choice of responding to His call in order to conform to the image of Jesus. Most people, unfortunately, do not respond to the call, and therefore, are not justified by the cross. It was God’s predestined plan that the saved would be those who conform to the image of the Son. However, He has allowed each person to choose whether to so conform.

In the context of Romans 8:29,30, the word “called” first refers to those who have answered the immediate call of the gospel to come out of the world (2 Th 2:14). The church is composed of those who have responded to the call of the gospel. Therefore, they are the called. However, the called by the gospel are actually being called into heaven. They will be so called because the church will be called out of the world into the eternal dwelling of heaven at the final judgment.

Paul is emphasizing an important biblical truth in Romans 8:29,30. God can and did foreknow those who would obey the call of the gospel. All who did obey, would voluntarily conform to the image of Jesus, for one cannot become a Chris-

tian unless he crucifies himself (Rm 6:6). It is then as Paul says, “*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me ...*” (Gl 2:20). Those who accept the call, are justified by the blood of Jesus (1 Co 6:11). They willingly conform to what Jesus requires of them.

Here are the important points of Romans 8:29,30 to remember:

1. Romans 8:29,30 is not talking about God predestining men **to** obey Him. It is discussing the predestination of those who **do** obey Him.
2. Those who remain obedient will be eternally saved.
3. The order of God's actions necessitates foreknowledge before foreordination.
  - a. God foreknew the obedient.
  - b. God, therefore, foreordained that the obedient would conform to the image of Jesus when they bring their lives into submission to His will.
  - c. **The predestination of the obedient, therefore, began after they were obedient to the calling.** They were first called by the gospel, and then, predestined.

Before God created the world He planned that men and women should conform to the lifestyle of Jesus. Those who did, would become a part of the group of

people called the church. They would conform to the image of Jesus because they would become His disciples. This group would thus be destined to eternal salvation. Because God foreplanned this did not mean that He predestined people to become members of the church. One must free-morally choose to respond to the gospel. Therefore, God cannot be held accountable for the negative response of all those who do not become a part of the predestined group called the church.

The important point to remember is that if God has individually called and predestined people for whom He has shown respect, then we run into all sorts of contradictions in the Scriptures. We may not be able to answer all the questions. We do not know all the answers when discussing the omniscience of God. However, we do know that an interpretation is wrong if it forces us into contradictions with plain statements and clearly stated principles in the Scriptures. We thus may not know all the answers, but we will not allow wrong answers to drive us to foolish contradictions. The Bible does not contradict itself. It is men who contradict themselves in their efforts to twist the Scriptures to conform to their own lifestyles or religions that they have created after their own desires.

## Chapter 6

### Predestination Through The Church

We come now to the importance of the church, keeping in mind that “church” is people. The church is the called out

assembly of people who have free-morally made a decision to respond to the gospel. In response to the gospel, the

church has submitted to the kingdom reign of Jesus. It is the church God has already foreplanned He will elect or choose out the world for eternal dwelling. He can do this because He foreknows. Therefore, the church is the chosen. The members of the church are the elect that have been predestined unto eternal life. If one chooses to become a part of the church, then he or she as a member will be destined to heaven. Therefore, one must individually choose to become a part of the chosen in order to be destined to heaven.

Ephesians 1:3-14 is a very important scripture concerning the foreknowledge and predestination of God. Paul affirmed that *“He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ ... in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will”* (vss 4,5,11). Does this passage seem difficult to understand? It isn't.

It is important first to understand a principle here that Paul is emphasizing in the context of Ephesians 1. He begins in verse 3 by stating that all spiritual blessings are **in Christ**. The metaphor “in Christ” refers to **relationship**. It is a covenant relationship that is established between man and God through the mediatorship of Jesus. In one's established relationship with Christ, God offers all spiritual blessings in reference to one's salvation. Now follow the term “in

Christ” (“in whom”) throughout the context of verses 3-14.

#### **"IN CHRIST"**

1. We are **chosen** “in Him” (vs 4).
2. We are made **accepted** “in the Beloved” (vs 6).
3. We have **redemption** and **forgiveness** “in Him” (vs 7).
4. All things are **gathered together** “in Christ” (vs 10).
5. We have obtained our **inheritance** “in Him” (vs 11).
6. We are to the **praise of God's glory** “in Christ” (vs 12).
7. We have **trusted** “in Him” (vs 13).
8. We have **believed** “in Him” (vs 13).
9. We are **sealed** with the Holy Spirit “in Him” (vs 13).

At least one thing is clear from Paul's statements in Ephesians 1. He is discussing the church's relationship with Christ and blessings that result from conforming to the image of Jesus. Paul metaphorically uses the Greek word *en* (in) in order to explain the relationship each member of the church has with Christ. One is in Christ in the sense of being within the realm of salvation that Jesus provides through His redemptive blood.

As we study through Ephesians 1, we must keep in mind what is **not stated** in the context. Paul does not discuss the predestination of any world events. He is not talking about the predestination of any individual apart from the predestination of the church. He is not discussing the predestination of any individual to hell. He is not talking about anyone

being predestined to become a member of the church. Therefore, we must be careful not to read into this context any of these often preconceived ideas that have confused too many on this subject. We must keep in mind that Paul's discussion is about the group of the saved, that is, the church. It is this group that is headed to heaven as a result of God's foreplanned efforts to save man.

God foreordained that individuals become a part of the church group by obedience to the gospel. When people obey the gospel, therefore, they are added to the church (At 2:47). The church as a group is the body of those who have been predestined to eternal dwelling. When one becomes a member of the church, he or she becomes a member of a predestined group. One is predestined because he or she is a member of the church. We are not predestined to become members of the church. Once one is a member, he or she is thus **conditionally** predestined to heaven. The condition for salvation is faithfulness to the Firstborn of the group. Ephesians 1:3-14 emphasizes the blessings of the church. The following are Paul's major points of emphasis:

### A. We are chosen in Christ.

**God chose Christians in Christ (in the church) before the creation.** Paul stated, "*He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world ...*" (Ep 1:4). God ordained that in Christ the blood of Jesus would continually cleanse the faithful of all sin (1 Jn 1:7). He did this in order that they be presented before Him

without spot or blemish (Jd 24). The condition for continual cleansing of sin is that one faithfully walk in the light of the truth. Revelation 2:10 is true. "*Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.*" We must understand that the faithful are "chosen" from the position of God in judgment.

In order to better understand the above, we must view ourselves in the future looking back to the world's inhabitants. In viewing all those of the world from the perspective of judgment after death (Hb 9:27), who would God **choose** for heaven (Hb 5:8,9)? He would choose the obedient. And in reference to our dispensation of time, He would **choose** the church. Therefore, Christians are those who are chosen from our time-oriented perspective. They are the chosen of the world because of the omniscience of God's foreknowledge.

One will be chosen for paradise after death because he or she is **in Christ**, not outside Christ. Therefore, one must now make a free-moral choice to become a part of those whom God will eventually choose for eternal heaven. This is why the Holy Spirit used the word "chose" in reference to the church. We are the chosen now because we will eventually be chosen for eternal dwelling. Christians are the chosen because they have chosen to obey the gospel.

Our difficulty seems to be in understanding how God could have chosen one before time, before the existence of the church, without predestining one individually to salvation. The fact is that in His omniscience He did, and thus, Chris-

tians were chosen for eternal glory as the church before the foundation of the world. Whether or not we fully understand this is not the point. There are some things that God will do in reference to the church that we do not now fully comprehend. We walk by faith not by sight. Therefore, we fully trust in God that He has and will work all things according to his eternal plan.

We are thus chosen by God because we are **in Christ**, not in order to come into Christ. One must choose to become a part of Christ in order to be chosen for heaven by God at the final judgment. Christians are thus chosen in Christ because they will be chosen. They will be elected to heaven because they have personally and free-morally elected to become a part of the elect.

## **B. Christians are elected to sanctification.**

Peter said that Christians are “*elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ*” (1 Pt 1:2; see vs 19-21). Jesus purchased the church (those in covenant relationship with God) “*with His own blood*” (At 20:28). The church was purchased and sanctified. All those who become members of the church, therefore, are purchased and sanctified. God foreknew this because this is what He planned “*before the foundation of the world*” (Ep 1:4). Any who would free-morally choose to come into covenant relationship with the blood-bought

church, are thus purchased and sanctified.

God saw before the creation of the world His position of choosing and electing after the final coming. In looking back after the final coming, He would elect those who would go away into eternal life (Mt 25:46). Before the world was created, He foreknew those who would obey the gospel. Therefore, in time—at this time—the obedient were indeed elect because God will eventually elect them from all inhabitants of the world to go to heaven. One must free-morally elect to become a part of that group that God will elect out of the world in final judgment. Christians are thus elect now only in view of the fact that they are now a part of that group that God will elect in final judgment for eternal dwelling.

## **C. The church is predestined to eternal salvation.**

Jesus gave Himself for the church in order “*that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church ...*” (Ep 5:26,27; see also Ph 2:15; 1 Pt 2:24). The church is predestined to eternal salvation because it has been purchased and cleansed by Jesus. All those who choose to become a member of the cleansed church, are thus predestined to eternal salvation. One must choose to be cleansed by the blood of Jesus in order to be a part of the cleansed (See At 22:16).

## **D. The Christian’s salvation is conditioned on his faithfulness.**

Because of Jesus' death, Paul said that Christians will be presented "*holy and blameless, and irreproachable in His sight—if indeed you continue in the faith grounded and steadfast and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel you heard ...*" (Cl 1:22,23; see 1 Co 15:1,2). Those who continue faithful in the church, therefore, are presented holy and blameless before the Father when they meet judgment after death. They will be presented in such a manner because of the saving grace of God (Ep 2:8,9). Nevertheless, we can fall from grace (Gl 5:4). We can go astray and return to the sin of our former life (2 Pt 2:20-22). For this reason, our salvation is conditioned on our obedient response

to God's grace.

In Ephesians 1:3-14, therefore, Paul discloses the predestination of the church as a group. Before creation, or before the foundation of the world, God predestined the church to be saved. God predetermined that He would save the church which Jesus would purchase with His own blood. Therefore, Christians will be saved, not because they are individually predestined to be saved, but because they free-morally chose to become a part of the predestined church. Once one makes a free-moral choice to obey the gospel, he is predestined to eternal life if he remains faithful to his calling. He thus has a choice to become a part of those who are destined for eternity.

## Chapter 7

### Opportunity For Response

In order for man to be a true free-moral agent, he had to be placed in an environment that would allow choices to be made. Such was the garden of Eden, for in it God created the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This tree offered an opportunity for Adam to make a choice. And the choice he made introduced sin and death into the world (Rm 5:12; 1 Co 15:20-22).

Did God know that Adam would eat of the tree? Certainly. Did God thus create Adam while at the same time know that he would sin and fall? Certainly. Is God therefore evil because He went ahead and created Adam while knowing that Adam would sin, and thus, bring both

spiritual and physical death upon himself? Certainly not! God had a plan to save man that was in His mind before the creation of the world. Paul wrote that God revealed through Jesus "*the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ ...*" (Ep 3:9). The mystery was the plan God conceived by which He would save man. The plan was ready before the creation of the world.

God stands just because He foreplanned the mystery that would solve the problem of man's sin. We must keep in mind, therefore, that God did foreknow Adam's sin. In knowing such, God did

not need a plan that would be based upon Adam's not sinning in the Garden. You ask, "Then why the presence of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?" In fact, Why create man in the first place if God knew Adam would eat and fall? These questions are answered in the fact that in order for man to be a true free-moral agent he must be placed in an environment that allows choices. Therefore, Adam was allowed a choice, and if he had not eaten of the tree, then certainly Cain would have eaten, or even you or me. So let's dispel this notion that all the responsibility is on the back of Adam. We all sin and are unrighteous before God (Rm 3:9,10,23). No one can keep law perfectly in order to be saved (See Rm 3:20; Gl 2:16). And since God knew that no one could keep law perfectly, He planned before the creation of the world the atonement of the cross of Jesus (Ep 1:4).

As to why God created man when He knew that most would not respond to His will in order to be saved, we must profess that we do not know. We do know that because of His love, God desired eternal dwellers to be with Him in eternity. And in order for one to be morally fit for eternal habitation, he or she must be placed in an environment that would mold characters for eternal dwelling. So here we are, in the best of all possible environments, being prepared to spend eternity with God. Personally, we must be happy that God enacted His plan. We prefer existence over non-existence, though this present existence has its problems. Actually, the problems are only

challenges when compared with the glory that will be revealed to the righteous. Paul wrote, "*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us*" (Rm 8:18). Therefore, we must dispel this notion that our sufferings are too great to earn the salvation to come. The gift is not comparable to the greatest suffering we could endure. We cannot earn salvation by suffering. The gift is too fabulous to earn.

God has now enacted His predestined plan for reconciliation after the sin of Adam. The plan was conceived before creation. It is in force today. It is the responsibility of every person to respond to this plan. Our response must be free-moral. It must be our choice in order that God's justice be upheld in judgment when those who reject His grace are given their due reward.

### A. God offered the universal plan.

God's redemptive plan was determined **before the creation of the world**. Therefore, it was predetermined, and thus, predestined to happen. It was determined that Jesus be crucified "*from the foundation of the world*" (Rv 13:8). Paul wrote that it was determined that men be saved in Christ "*before the foundation of the world*" (Ep 1:4). In the Old Testament this great mystery was prophesied in prophecies as Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22. Old Testament prophets "*prophesied of the grace that would come to*" us (1 Pt 1:10). Even angels desired to know what God had in store



for revelation in Christ (1 Pt 1:10-12). However, this mystery was not revealed until Jesus came to earth. And when He came, the revelation of God's grace was made known at the cross (Ti 2:11).

(As a footnote here, we must affirm that Satan did not know of God's redemptive plan. Since God's angels did not know (1 Pt 1:10-12), we would suppose that God would not reveal the mystery to Satan before the time of fulfillment. However, we would guess that Satan knew that something was up, for throughout history he struggled against the seedline from which the Savior of the world would eventually come. He and the demons knew that Jesus was the "Holy One from God" (Lk 8:28). Therefore, when Jesus appeared on the scene of history, Satan knew something was about to happen. He thus unleashed his greatest energy against Jesus. But as usual, God turned the work of Satan against Satan himself. Satan generated the hatred of the Jewish religious leaders who eventually brought into existence the predestined crucifixion, and subsequently, salvation of all men through the cross. Satan's supposed victory in having Jesus crucified was actually predestined to happen. Even Satan cannot escape the foreknowledge and predestination of the omniscient God.)

## B. Jesus is the universal Savior.

Jesus was "*the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*" (Jn 1:29). His invitation for salvation is to all. "**Whoever** believes in Him should

*not perish but have everlasting life*" (Jn 3:16). John wrote, "*He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world*" (1 Jn 2:2). God offered Jesus to the whole world. However, He did not offer **unconditional salvation for all men**. Jesus is a universal Savior who offers **conditional** salvation. Men must respond to the salvation that is offered through Him according to the conditions of the plan. God offers His grace to man through Jesus. However, this grace must be received. We must accept God's offer. Acceptance of the offer is our responsibility.

Conditions assume responsibility to make a free-moral choice. In other words, one must make a choice concerning the grace of God. If there were no conditions, then there would be no need for free-moral choice.

The fact that there are conditions also affirms that salvation cannot be unconditional and universal. Not everyone will choose to accept the free gift of God's grace. And since there will be a host of those who choose not to accept God's gift, means that Jesus' atonement is applicable only to those who receive the gift. Thus Jesus' atonement is limited. It is limited to those who have free-morally chosen to humble themselves "*under the mighty hand of God*" (1 Pt 5:6).

## C. The obedient answer the universal call.

There is salvation only in Christ, "*for there is no other name under heaven*

*given among men by which we must be saved*" (At 4:12). Only in Christ is there redemption by His blood (See Ep 1:7; Gl 1:4; 1 Pt 2:24; Rv 1:5). Men are called into Christ, into this salvation, by the gospel (2 Th 2:14) which is the death of Jesus for our sins and His resurrection for our hope (1 Co 15:3,4). One obeys the gospel by immersion into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (Rm 6:3-5). Though few obey, all are offered this universal call to accept God's grace. None who heed the call are rejected. When one obeys the gospel by baptism, he or she becomes a part of the group that will be elected to eternal glory. In other words, election of individuals happens only when one free-morally chooses to become a part of the elect. When one is a member of the church, he or she is chosen and elected.

**One will be elected by God in final judgment if he is born again.** Jesus made an invitation and stated a condition for salvation in John 3:3-5. *"Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. ... unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."* The invitation is to enter the kingdom. The condition is to be born again. Now we must make a decision. We must exercise our free-moral agency.

The invitation to be born again is made to all men. God allows people to make a free-moral response to the gospel. Those who submit to the lordship of Jesus and are born again, are called. They are called because they have cho-

sen to become a part of that group (the church) that is called by the gospel unto salvation.

We would conclude thus: It was prophesied in the Old Testament that Jesus, the Lamb of God, would die in order to take away the sins of the world. This salvation would be limited only to those who free-morally come into a covenant relationship with God by obedience to the gospel. His atonement is limited only to those who are of the faith of Abraham. If it were not, then all men would be eternally saved. God did not predestine people to become a part of the elect. His redemption was planned for all those who free-morally choose to trust in His grace through faith, and thus, become a part of the elect.

We must keep in mind that such things as "responsibility," "faithfulness," "choice" and "conditions" have no relevance concerning salvation if God has already chosen those individuals who will be saved. If the atonement were to be limited only to those who were individually elected to obey, then the universal call of God to all men makes no sense. However, if salvation depends on a free-will choice on the part of individuals, then one is responsible for his or her own destiny. God's call to all men makes sense. Therefore, since the call is universal, one must make a choice to obey God's predetermined conditions for salvation. One must also make a choice concerning his or her faithfulness to the decision to obey the gospel.

## Chapter 8

### Opportunity For All

The action of God that He so loved the world that He gave His only Son (Jn 3:16), presents opportunity to all who would believe. Opportunity can exist only if those to whom it is given have the ability to respond to it. There would be no sense in giving opportunity to “all who believe” unless we have the ability to choose, and thus, change our destiny by obedience to the gospel.

Because man is a free-moral agent with freedom of choice, God offers salvation to all who would choose to obey Him. In reading the New Testament, three things are very evident concerning God’s salvation: (1) God desires that all be saved. (2) Jesus was sent to all men. (3) The proclamation of the gospel went to all the world. If these three points are true, then there is no such thing as individual predestination. If these points are true, then each person is responsible for his or her own salvation. These points thus stand upon the biblical teaching that God has made a universal call of salvation to all men throughout the world. This universal call has existed since the beginning of time. Since God’s call is universal, everyone has the opportunity to obey.

#### A. God desires all to be saved.

God is “*not willing that any should perish*” (2 Pt 3:9). He is not a respecter

of persons. Therefore, “*in every nation whoever fears him and works righteousness is accepted by Him*” (At 10:34,35). The word “whoever” refers to opportunity being presented to every person who hears the gospel. Because of the desire on the part of God to save men, the gift of grace through Jesus was sent “*to all men*” (Rm 5:18), for He had “*mercy on all*” (Rm 11:32).

It is the desire of the Father and Son that all be saved. This desire is expressed in pleas that men and women come unto the salvation that is offered through the cross (See also Jn 3:14-17; 6:33,51; 7:37; At 17:30; 2 Co 5:19; Cl 1:20; 1 Tm 2:4-6; 4:10; Ti 2:11; 1 Jn 2:2).

If God has already predestined who is going to be saved and who is going to be lost, the expressions of His desires for the salvation of people would be nonsense. Such expressions of desire would make God hypocritical. His plea that all believe when there are some in the audience who are individually predestined not to believe, would accuse God of hypocrisy. Such is the logical conclusion to the doctrine of individual predestination.

If God calls, and the individually predestined person who is destined to hell cannot respond, then the character of God is under attack. It is under attack because God would be making a call to those who cannot of their own free will obey God, and thus, God’s call would be foolish.

Why would God call if He knew His call could not be answered? If He calls while knowing that He has already predestined some in the audience with the inability to respond, then He is a cruel God. And if He is such a God, then He is not the God of the Bible. It would be easy to be an atheist in reference to such a god, for the Bible itself teaches that no such god exists.

## B. Jesus came to bring salvation to all.

As a result of the Father's desire to offer an invitation for salvation to all men, Jesus came to personally offer Himself as a ransom for all. Jesus made a universal plea to all to come to the salvation that is offered through Him. He said, "*Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden ...*" (Mt 11:28).

Jesus also said, "*I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me*" (Rv 3:20). In fact, He says that "*if anyone loves*" Him, He and the Father "*will come to him and make Our home with him*" (Jn 14:23). Therefore, John said, "*Let him who thirsts come. And whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely*" (Rv 22:17). Jesus did not come for a select few who have already been predestined to eternal life. He came to call all men to Himself.

If Jesus knew that there were some who could not respond to His pleas because they were individually predestined to hell, then the sincerity of His pleas would certainly be questioned. In fact,

He would have been hypocritical to offer a plea for salvation to one who could not possibly respond. Were the Father and Son playing some kind of cosmic comedy in offering salvation to those they had already predestined to hell? If the doctrine of individual predestination is true, then there are some very serious accusations that are made against the Father and Son.

## C. The disciples proclaimed salvation to all.

**The disciples proclaimed Jesus to all men in order that all have an opportunity to respond.** Jesus had commanded His disciples to "*go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature*" (Mk 16:15). They were to "*make disciples of all the nations*" (Mt 28:19). Jesus said such because "*repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations ...*" (Lk 24:47). In fact, before Jerusalem's destruction in A.D. 70, Jesus prophesied that "*this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations ...*" (Mt 24:14).

The early disciples followed Jesus' instructions. When men asked what to do to be saved, preachers responded as Peter in Acts 2, "**Let every one of you be baptized ...**" (vs 38). Paul wrote, "*For whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved*" (Rm 10:13). As a result of this evangelistic zeal, "*the word of God spread, and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem ...*" (At 6:7). "*And the word of the Lord was be-*

ing spread throughout **all the region**" (At 13:49). God "*opened a door of faith to the Gentiles*" (At 14:27) and "*so the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed*" (At 19:20). By the time Paul wrote the letter to the Colossians around A.D. 62, the gospel had gone into all the world of the Roman Empire (Cl 1:6,23).

The conclusion to this point is a devastating blow to the doctrine that God has unconditionally and individually elected certain people to eternal salvation but unconditionally and individually condemned others to hell. If people were so elected or condemned, then why would God put out a **universal plea** for the repentance of all men? Why would Jesus offer an invitation **to all** to come to Him for salvation? Why would the disciples be given the time consuming work of preaching the gospel **to all men of all the world**?

The fact is that all men do have an opportunity for salvation. That opportunity lies in the hands of those God has commissioned to preach the gospel. It is in the hands of Christians. It is in our hands as students of God's word. If we fail to preach the good news, countless thousands in the world will be eternally lost without the opportunity of hearing the gospel invitation. Therefore, we must preach and teach the gospel to all. We must give every man and woman on earth an opportunity to hear the gospel of Jesus.

Here is what must be concluded. Because God does not wish that any should perish, Jesus said that He stood at the door to offer everyone an opportunity for salvation. Because He offered the opportunity to all, Jesus sent His disciples to go to every creature in order to give all a chance to hear and be saved by calling on the name of the Lord. Therefore, God wants the gospel preached to all men in order that all men have an opportunity to obey. And because men can free-morally respond to the call of God through the gospel, it is not a waste of time and energy to evangelize the world. Because men and women are not individually predestined to either heaven or hell, we can with hope preach the gospel to all the world in anticipation of bringing many souls to salvation through Jesus.

Knowing that all will give account for their sin motivates the disciple of Jesus into action. He or she knows that no one will have the opportunity for eternal dwelling with God unless he or she responds to the gospel. It is for this reason that we are evangelistic. It is for this reason that we take every opportunity to preach the gospel to those who have never heard. Evangelism is based on individual accountability for sin. We can sin by not doing the good of preaching the gospel.

## Chapter 9

# Prayer Changes Things

There are those who believe that all events of history have been unconditionally predetermined by God and cannot be changed. This belief leads one to a **fatalistic** view of life, that is, why try and why pray if one can do nothing to change one's course of life. This pessimistic and fatalistic view of life has been the ruin of many people and has led to the digression and underdevelopment of many societies. It has kept many in physical and mental poverty and discouragement. However, this is not a biblical world view.

The beauty of Christianity is that it gives hope. As a Christian one has hope for a better life on earth. This better life is based upon the fact that Jesus brings optimism about life. And when one is optimistic, he or she approaches everything in life differently. To the Christian, life is not a series of predetermined events that occur regardless of the prayers of the saints. We are not doomed to fate regardless of our prayers. Life is the blessing of God who has allowed free-moral individuals to make good choices, and thus, reap good things. Our behavior and prayers can change things.

Jesus said, "*I have come that they may have life, and that **they may have it more abundantly***" (Jn 10:10). Christians enjoy the abundant life simply because they view life from the perspective of

what Paul wrote in Romans 8:28. "*And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.*" There is no secret to this abundant, happy life about which Jesus and Paul spoke. If one wants this life, he can choose such. If one chooses such, then life can change for the better. One can reap good by sowing good.

Christianity is a belief of servanthood. "*Whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all*" (Mk 10:43,44). These are marvelous words when applied to the life of an individual. Jesus said, "*If you know these things, **happy are you if you do them***" (Jn 13:17). He who knows the power of servanthood has discovered the abundant life about which Jesus promised to those who obey Him. Those who are servants are always the most happy people.

When we belong to God, then we recognize that God works in our lives, "*for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure*" (Ph 2:13). It is God "*who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us*" (Ep 3:20). Therefore, God can change things. He can change them

in our lives for He seeks to help His children.

This chapter is centered around a few biblical examples that prove the biblical world view that life is not fate. God did not predestine all events of history to occur according to some divine historical map. The Bible teaches that men have power over their destinies. Though life may deal some hard and unjust blows, there is always hope for the future. The biblical world view of hope may not deliver one from tribulations of this world. However, it does provide that mental and spiritual stamina that gets one through life and into eternity with God.

### A. God changed Hezekiah's destiny.

In 2 Kings 20 God said to Hezekiah that the time of his death had come. God advised him to get his house in order (vs 1). Realizing that death was imminent, Hezekiah *“turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the Lord”* (vs 2). God's answer was, *“I have heard your prayer. I have seen your tears: surely I will heal you”* (vs 5). God changed the hour in which He knew Hezekiah was going to die. The event of Hezekiah's death was changed by a divine response to a man's prayer. We must conclude, therefore, that God can answer prayer in order to change history.

Now one may question that God knew Hezekiah would ask that he not die. Fair enough. But consider that God can know all options of life. He can know all that could happen as a result of any particular thing we might do. Simply

because He can know all the options does not mean that the options are predestined. It simply says that He is omniscient. Hezekiah had two options that God knew in reference to his health. If he continued on his present course of life, the option of death stood before him. God simply comes to him and tells him what is going to happen. In this case, however, Hezekiah believed that God could switch his life over to the other option. That option was life. However, we assume that the extending of Hezekiah's life was to further God's purpose with Israel. We must always understand the principle of life and death that Paul stated to the Philippians. He wrote that he had a *“desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better”* (Ph 1:23). Hezekiah's situation may have been similar to Paul's in reference to the church. *“Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you”* (Ph 1:24).

God gave Hezekiah fifteen more years for Israel's sake, and not specifically for the sake of Hezekiah. After all, why did God come to tell him concerning his impending death in the first place? Was it not for the reason that He knew Hezekiah would turn in tears so he could be granted another option and more time to guide Israel on the right path? There is something greater in the context here than simply giving Hezekiah fifteen more years of life.

### B. God changed Nineveh's destiny.

Jonah was sent to preach to the doomed city of Nineveh. Jonah pro-

claimed, “*Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown*” (Jh 3:4). It was a short sermon. As a result of his preaching, the entire city repented. The destruction of the city was averted. Jonah 3:10 states, “*Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.*” Here is a case where the history of an entire city was changed because of the repentance of the city. So God can change things when men repent.

Did God know that Nineveh would repent? Certainly! So why did He send Jonah? He sent Jonah for the same purpose He came to Hezekiah. God foreknew the options. He simply revealed the options in order to bring about repentance for His greater plan. We would assume that Nineveh was not one of those “pagan cities” as we usually view pagan cities. After all, they repented because of the preaching of Jonah. Even Jesus said of them in reference to His generation, “*The men of Nineveh will rise in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah ...*” (Mt 12:41).

God wanted to preserve Nineveh a little longer. He had faithful people in Nineveh just as He had such in Jerusalem. We must not think that God wrote off the rest of the world because He chose to work through Israel to bring forth His Son into the world. It is important to understand that God wanted to preserve Nineveh for the sake of the faithful Gentiles who were within the city limits.

God’s desire to preserve by encour-

aging change in the lives of people is manifested in a host of biblical situations. For example, at one time He was going to destroy Israel because of their rebellious attitude. But Moses prayed and the nation was spared (Ex 32:4-14). Jeremiah records that God can determine in an **instant** whether to let a nation stand or fall. Through Jeremiah God revealed what He does among the nations. Listen to this most profound statement: “*The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it*” (Jr 18:7-10).

God deals with individuals as He deals with nations. The events in the lives of individuals greatly depend upon the conduct of their lives. By much prayer, however, things can be changed. Jesus said, “*If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes*” (Mk 9:23). Through repentance God can open up tremendous options. We simply need to pray for the options.

### C. God changes things for the Christian.

The principle of prayer in the Christian life presupposes that God will act on the request of his children. Prayer is



necessary for Christians in their walk in life (Rm 12:12). It is a part of the Christian armor (Ep 6:13-18). Paul asked for prayers (Rm 15:30; Ep 6:19; Ph 1:19; Cl 4:3; 1 Th 5:25; 2 Th 1:1) and practiced such in his life (Rm 1:9; Ep 1:16; 1 Th 1:2).

If there is no possibility of God intervening in the affairs of man and the world, then all prayer to the Christian is simply a mental exercise of wishful thinking. But such is contrary to the very nature of New Testament teaching on prayer. Any theology that would negate the power of prayer as taught in the New Testament must be false. It is the purpose of prayer to bring God's working hand to the aid of the Christian. Such is an axiomatic truth of New Testament teaching on prayer. Therefore, the Christian can change things by calling on the Father to work in his life.

The concept of prayer and fate are opposed to one another. If prayer is to be what the New Testament teaches it is, then there is no such thing as unchangeable fate or predestination of events.

Because God foreknows the occurrence of all human events or options, does not preclude that He has destined those events or options to occur. Hezekiah prayed that the event of his death be delayed. It was delayed. The city of Nineveh repented and their certain destruction was stopped. God does work in the lives of men and women to change things according to their prayers.

We must keep in mind that we are not God. We do not think as God. If we

thought as God and understood how God thinks, then we would be God. The fact is that we do not have omniscience as God. Therefore, we must not frustrate ourselves concerning how God both foreknows the events of history and at the same time does not predestine such events to happen.

Remember the video. In the omniscience of God, all history would be recorded on the video. The options are all there. God can run the video forward or in reverse at will. He sees all time, not as we would see man, but as the photograph. Therefore, He can put a historical option in the forward direction by hearing a prayer in the reverse section. The recording is not programmed in order to be unchangeable. It is programmed in order to be changed in response to the prayers of the saints. Each person has the privilege of praying in order to place into action one of the many options that God already knows.

History is a multiple choice direction. However, all the directions are possible, that is, they can happen. We have the choice as to which direction to take. God can know all the choices. We choose the direction. He sets it in motion. He can foreknow our requests and the particular course of history that He will set in motion on behalf of our requests. But let us not conclude that He has predestined our requests or the direction that results from our choices. He has simply foreknown all the options. We have personally made the free-moral choice as to which option of life we want. From there only God knows, not predestines.

## Chapter 10

# The Nature Of God

In this chapter we come to one of the most important logical conclusions to the erroneous teaching that people are individually predestined to their own fate according to the will of God. If individuals are so predestined, then the character of God must be brought into question. If individuals are predestined regardless of their free-moral choices, then we must redefine God after the nature of the doctrine of individual predestination. Specifically, we must wonder why God would predestine individuals to eternal destruction. Why would God show respect of persons in order to elect certain ones to life while at the same time predestining others to hell? Is God so fiendish as to determine before creation those who would go to hell?

The biblical description of the character and nature of God is often very different from the deities of man-made religions. The harsh gods of vengeance that are promoted by religiously misguided teachers of false religions rely on fear as the primary motivation for obedience. With the God that is revealed in the Old and New Testaments it is different. The God of the Bible is wise, benevolent, merciful, loving and just. He motivates by love and grace (1 Co 15:10; 1 Jn 4:19). These characteristics contradict the image of God that the teachers of the doctrine of unchangeable predestination of individuals would have us believe. Con-

sider the following characteristics of God in relation to the doctrine of individual predestination:

### A. God is knowledgeable and wise.

The God of the Bible is wise and knowledgeable above all. His knowledge and wisdom cannot be compared with the wisdom and knowledge of man *“because the foolishness of God is wiser than men”* (1 Co 1:25). The Bible portrays a God who is *“wise in heart and mighty in strength”* (Jb 9:4). *“With Him are wisdom and strength, He has counsel and understanding”* (Jb 12:13). *“His understanding is infinite”* (Ps 147:5). God’s wisdom stands alone, that is, there is no humanly imagined god that can compare with the true God.

If we conceive a god in our imagination that cannot work or know beyond our thinking, then this god is no greater than our imagination. He is no greater than the limits of our thinking. If God is viewed to be no greater than the wisdom of man, then this god is limited to the wisdom of man. False gods, therefore, are always handicapped by the limited wisdom of those who construct them after their own imagination.

This brings us to the point. Theologians have had a difficult time understanding how God could foreknow something without having predestined that

something to occur. For example, God knew that we would obey the gospel. But how could He know such without having predestined our obedience? Because we do not understand how God can foreknow without predestining does not mean that He cannot do such. Our feeble limitations of knowledge and wisdom must not limit God. If we do place limitations on His foreknowledge, then we are creating a god we can fully understand. We have just created an idol god. We must continually remind ourselves that *“His judgments and ways [are] past finding out”* (Rm 11:33; see Ep 3:20).

Here is another point. If men are unchangeably predestined to hell at the time of birth, then we would certainly question the wisdom of God. What wisdom would be seen in such an act on the part of God? Why would God be so cruel as to predestine one to destruction without that person having an opportunity for life? In fact, if God so predestined individuals, we would question His very character. Is God fiendish? Why would God create individuals that He had predestined to destruction? This is illogical. This is thinking that does not come from the wise God we read about in the Bible. It is thinking that comes from irrational theologians who seek to create a god in their minds that they can figure out.

## **B. God is loving, benevolent and merciful.**

God said that He shows *“mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and*

*keep My commandments”* (Ex 20:6). David said, *“Remember, O Lord, Your tender mercies and Your lovingkindness, for they have been from of old”* (Ps 25:6; see also Ps 31:7; 36:5; 57:10; 68:5).

It would certainly be contrary to the benevolent and merciful character of God to create individuals upon whom He could have no mercy concerning their salvation. In fact, the Bible pictures God grieving over the sins of men. He grieved over the wicked state of man before the flood of Noah’s day (Gn 6:5,6). He grieved over the sins of Israel (See Ex 32:8; Jr 7:31; 19:5). God grieves over our sin today. Peter revealed that God *“is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance”* (2 Pt 3:9).

God does not individually predestine us to die in sin. This is not His nature. Because of His grief over our sin, He predestined a plan that would deliver us from sin. He gives us the option, therefore, of coming to Him in faith in order to be delivered from our sin.

The fact that God grieves over the sinfulness of men is proof that He has given us the ability to choose our own destiny. **Our view of God, therefore, must not be so foolish as to make Him grieve over the certain destruction of wicked men He has individually predestined in the first place.** Why would He grieve over those He has predestined to destruction? This makes no sense.

God grieves because He is loving, benevolent and merciful. **God’s grief over man’s sin makes sense only if man has the ability to determine his own**

**eternal destiny. God's grief makes sense only if men and women have a free-moral choice to choose life by accepting the love of God to save them through Jesus.** He grieves because we do not choose life. When individuals reject the gift of the God who "*so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son*" (Jn 3:16), then they cause grief in the heart of this benevolent and merciful God.

### C. God is sincere.

God was sincere in sending Jesus as a sacrifice for sin. The sending of His Son was a sincere effort on God's part to present an opportunity for men to be saved by His grace. He "*so loved the world*" that He was willing to give His only Son (Jn 3:16). However, if the Father sent His Son while knowing that His death would be futile in rescuing those who were individually predestined to damnation, we would seriously question His sincerity. Not only that, we would seriously question the love of God as it was expressed at the cross. What sincerity would be expressed in the death of Jesus for those who were already predestined to life? What sincerity would be expressed in Jesus dying for those who were not predestined to be saved by the cross? In fact, if individuals were already predestined, why send Jesus in the first place? The incarnation and crucifixion would certainly be questionable on the part of God if all things were unchangeably set in order before creation.

If individuals were already predestined to either life or death at the time Jesus showed up on earth, then why all the trouble of going to the cross? Is God playing games? If individual predestination is true, then the Bible would teach such. We would thus know that God had individually predestined us to either heaven or hell. In knowing this, would we not question God's purpose in going through the difficult plan of bringing Jesus through the seed of woman to the cross for the atonement of those who were already destined to heaven? We certainly would. We would question God's sincerity for we would conclude that He is playing some salvational game with us.

### D. God is just.

God is "*a just God*" (Is 45:21). "*There is no iniquity with the Lord our God, no partiality, nor taking of bribes*" (2 Ch 19:7). He will judge "*without partiality*" (1 Pt 1:17). Because of this, His judgments will always be upright (Ps 119:137). Therefore, **God could never condemn one to hell that He either created to be predestined to such or had subjectively influenced to sin.** This is why James said, "*... God cannot be tempted by evil. Nor does He Himself tempt anyone*" (Js 1:13). Sinners could not be blamed for sinning against God's moral laws if they were predestined to do so. They could not be judged for breaking those laws if God created them with a spirit that was inclined to sin.

Individual predestination stands in

contrast to the justice of God. In other words, if we are individually predestined to either life or death, God cannot stand just in judgment. In fact, all talk about judgment is senseless if destinies have already been assigned. **The concept of the future reality of judgment exists only on the basis that individuals will be held accountable for their actions. And individuals can be held accountable only if they are truly free-moral agents.** The dilemma of those who believe in individual predestination is to figure out how God can stand just in judgment while at the same time having already determined the verdict. Have men created a god with a smirky smile on his face as he assigns the wicked to a hell that they have already been destined to go before the creation of the world? To answer this question properly reveals the hideousness of the doctrine of individual predestination in its attack against the just God of the Bible. Only a fiendish god would predestine one to hell.

### **E. God is patient.**

Peter wrote that God “*is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance*” (2 Pt 3:9). It is the nature of God to be patient with man as he struggles with himself in a world of choice-making. During the days of Noah every imagination of man was evil (Gn 6:5). Nevertheless, “*the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah while the ark was being prepared*” (1 Pt 3:20). It is God’s nature to be patient with us as

we learn lessons of life in order to keep ourselves from the evil one.

However, if individuals are predestined to hell, there is no reason for God to be patient with doomed individuals. For what would He be patient? Is He simply being patient for the time He has set to destroy the wicked? Peter stated that He is patient with men. God is patient for the repentance of all men. This patience of God is in reference to men, not events God has supposedly planned in the future. He is patient with men in their struggles to bring their lives into harmony with His will. But if there are those who are unchangeably destined to hell, God’s patience is of no use to them.

The fact that men often cannot understand that God can foreknow something without having predestined it to happen, is proof that even God’s foolishness is wiser than the wisdom of men. In order for God to judge without respect of persons, He must not tempt or influence any individual to sin. He must also have created man to be truly free without establishing eternal destinies apart from the free choice of men. If we contend that God does assign destinies apart from the choice of men, then we are judging God to be unjust. We would conclude that His redemptive acts are not sincere. He would not be a benevolent and merciful God. We would question the wisdom of God. For this reason, this is why the doctrine of individual predestination attacks the very nature of God. The god of those who believe in individual predestination cannot be the God

of the Bible. The God of the Bible does not desire that any should persiah, and thus, He has given every man the opportunity to seek Him (See Rm 1:20).

## Chapter 11

### God's Work To Save Man

The preceding chapters lay the foundation concepts for understanding any particular context of scripture in reference to the salvation of man. If the preceding principles are understood, then there is little problem in understanding certain "proof texts" that have been twisted out of context in order to prove the doctrine of individual election and predestination.

What has usually led people to misunderstand the foreknowledge of God is that they have scurried to particular texts that "appear" to affirm individual predestination. These texts are then taken out of the biblical context of God's eternal plan of redemption. They are thus interpreted in a manner that contradicts the whole context of the Bible's definition of God's foreknowledge and eternal plan.

In studying particular passages, we must first establish fundamental biblical teachings, and then, allow these teachings to direct our understanding of specific texts. If we generate an interpretation that contradicts a fundamental principle, then we know that our interpretation of specific texts will be wrong. This principle of Bible study is specifically crucial to the understanding of predestination in reference to the church. Unless one establishes an overall view of God's purpose and work in saving man,

he or she will become confused with some scriptures that deal with the predestination of the church.

There are various scriptures that are used by some to teach the doctrines of unconditional election and individual predestination. These are classic examples of interpreters taking scriptures out of the context of God's fundamental principle of His plan of redemption. Taking a passage out of its natural context in order to teach an erroneous doctrine is certainly unjustified. However, making a passage contradict fundamental biblical teaching is inexcusable. The following are cases where men have many times misunderstood the work of God in the lives of men. Many have misunderstood these passages simply because they have approached these specific statements of scripture with the preconceived idea of individual election and predestination.

#### A. God chose Jacob over Esau.

Paul uses the lives of two individuals in Romans 9 in order to state his case concerning the work of God to bring about His redemptive plan. The first work of God involved God's choice of Jacob over Esau. The second involved God's raising up of Pharaoh in Egypt in order to accomplish His work through the

nation of Israel.

Paul wrote concerning God's plan through Jacob, "*Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated*" (Rm 9:13). Romans 9 is used to teach that God chose, and then individually predestined Jacob to continue the seedline of the nation of Israel because of His unconditional favor ("love") of him over Esau. God chose him because He supposedly loved Jacob more than Esau in an emotional sense. However, this scripture is not talking about the predestination of individuals to either heaven or hell. It is talking about **lineage** or **heritage**. Paul is emphasizing the lineage of the one through whom the blessing of the Christ would come.

**1. God raised up Jacob.** Understanding Paul's thoughts of verses 11-24 of Romans 9 clears up most of the challenge of interpreting this context. The following are the important thoughts of the chapter to remember:

**a. God chose Jacob.** Before they were born, God chose one of Isaac's sons for blessing (Jacob) and one for disfavor (Esau) (vss 11-13). The one who would receive the blessing would be the one through whom the seedline of blessing that was promised to Abraham would continue (Gn 12:3). Paul wrote of God's choice, "*Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated*" (vs 13; see Mt 1:2,3). Paul uses the words "loved" and "hated" to express God's choice of Jacob over Esau. This choice simply meant that Esau was not chosen. Paul's use of these words was not meant to convey an emotional

feeling of God that He respected Jacob over Esau. The use of the words simply refers to **choice**. God chose Jacob but did not choose Esau. Through Jacob the seedline would continue through whom the Seed would come.

**b. God chose a nation.** In verse 15 Paul wrote, "*I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.*" It is God's right to have "compassion" on whom He so chooses, regardless of the nature of the one on whom He has "compassion" (vss 17,18). In Romans 9, the compassion of God refers to **God's choosing of Jacob's seedline as the heritage from which the nation of Israel was to come, and eventually, the Messiah**. Paul is saying that God has the right to choose Jacob over Esau in order that His plan of redemption be carried out through Jacob's descendants.

Again, keep in mind that Paul is using the words "compassion" and "mercy" only to indicate God's desire in choosing one son through whom the promise of a nation would come. These terms are not used to indicate God's feelings toward either son.

**c. God is the potter.** In verse 21 Paul asks, "*Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?*" The potter (God) has the right to mold the clay as He so chooses (vss 19-24). Now keep in mind that Romans 9 is talking about God's unfolding of His plan of redemption for man through Israel **before** the actual plan was

made known through Jesus. **He is not discussing the personal salvation of either Jacob or Esau.** Paul's argument in Romans 9 is in reference to the nation of Israel, not in reference to the individuals of either Jacob or Esau.

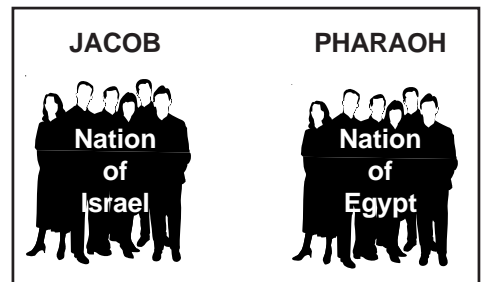
Romans 9 does not teach that God would unconditionally elect and predestine the salvation of individuals. Paul does not discuss the **salvation** of either Jacob or Esau. However, God could and did **foreknow** the righteousness of Jacob over Esau, and thus, selected Jacob as the one through whom the nation of Israel would be developed. Verses 12 and 13 of Romans 9 refer to the **descendants** of Jacob and Esau, not their personal eternal destinies (See Gn 25:21-23). God ordained that through the **descendants of Jacob** (Israel) the Christ would come to bless all nations. This was God's predestined plan. Because He saw the nation of Israel coming forth from the descendants of Jacob, He chose Jacob. His foreknowledge was the basis upon which the choosing of Jacob was made. **God foresaw the results of Jacob's free-moral choices in life, and thus, chose Jacob as the one through whom the foreseen nation of Israel would come.**

**2. God raised up Pharaoh.** In Romans 9:17,18 Paul wrote, *"For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'Even for this same purpose I have raised you up, that I might show My power in you, and that My name might be declared in all the earth.' Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens."*

God does not unconditionally harden

individual hearts. He did not directly harden Pharaoh. Pharaoh's heart was hard **before** God called Israel out of Egyptian captivity. **God's command to let Israel go only provided an opportunity for arrogant Pharaoh to stiffen his attitude against God's will.** When proud and arrogant men as Pharaoh confront God's will, their hearts are hardened more. In fact, Exodus 8:15,32 and 9:34 state that **Pharaoh hardened his own heart against God.**

Verses 19-24 of Romans 9 teach that God molds and controls nations (See Jr 18:1-10; Rm 13:1,2). He works in the lives of individuals who represent nations in order to *"make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy"* (vs 23). In the context of Romans 9, therefore, Paul is discussing **God's work among nations.** He uses individuals to represent those nations. He used Jacob to represent the nation of Israel. He used Pharaoh to represent Egypt.



It was God's right to choose whom He wills in order to bring about His plan of redemption. Therefore, of the two sons of Isaac (Jacob and Esau), He chose the descendants of Jacob to be the nation through whom the Messiah would come. Romans 9 is not a discussion of the per-



sonal salvation of either Jacob or Esau. Paul is discussing the choosing of a nation. This nation was called out of Egyptian captivity. In the calling, Pharaoh's heart was hardened more by his personal rejection of the will of God. Nevertheless, the nation of Egypt could not stop the work of God to bring forth the nation of Israel. Regardless of Pharaoh's hardened leadership, Israel was born as a nation when she came forth from Egyptian captivity.

**3. Review of Romans 9:** In order to understand the specifics of Romans 9, one must continue the theme of the argument of Paul that is stated in Romans 3:20, "*Therefore, by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight ...*" (See Gl 2:16). This truth is based upon God's plan of salvation, that it is by grace and faith, for "*the just shall live by faith*" (Rm 1:17; Hb 10:38; Gl 3:11).

Israel sought justification through law-keeping and meritorious deeds. The problem with such a system is that "*there is none righteous, no, not one*" (Rm 3:10). "*All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*" (Rm 3:23). Paul's argument is that we are justified by God's grace (Rm 5:1,2). Because of God's mercy, Jesus was sent forth for our sins (Rm 5:8). Jesus did not come because of our goodness, nor did He come because we earned a right to His atonement on the cross by our works of law. Legalistic Jews thought they had earned the gift of grace because of their heritage from Abraham and because they had been custodians of the law. They were wrong.

In Romans 9 Paul reminded the Jews

that the true sons of God are such through faith. "*For they are not all Israel who are of Israel*" (Rm 9:6). Those who were descendants of Abraham through Jacob were not the true children of God, "*but the children of the promise are counted as the seed*" (Rm 9:8). This was the promise to Abraham that in him all nations of the earth would be blessed through the redemption of Christ (Gn 12:3). The promise was given through grace, not because of the works of Abraham who the Jews wrongfully perceived had earned it. The promise was given to all men and was received upon the basis of faith, not meritorious works of law.

The promise and work of God through Abraham's descendants was foreknown, and thus, planned by God before the characters of the plan were born. Paul's argument is that such had to be the case in order that God's work not be accused of happening because of the performance of those He used to bring it about. He wrote, "*For the children not yet born, not having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls*" (Rm 9:11). Therefore, before Jacob was born, God had already foreknown, and thus, foreplanned His fulfillment of the promise through Jacob, not Esau.

We must not, therefore, accuse God of unrighteousness (Rm 9:14). God foreplanned His work of redemption in order to show His mercy, that it is not dependent upon the works of man. Paul stated, "*So then it is not him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who*

*shows mercy*" (Rm 9:16). Paul later explained in the letter, "And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace ..." (Rm 11:6). Therefore, the plan to work through Jacob had to be made before Jacob was born in order that we understand that the plan was God's work because of grace, not because of Jacob's works of law.

Paul extends his argument even to Pharaoh, for God intended to use Pharaoh in order to give birth to the nation of Israel. He said of Pharaoh, "Even for this same purpose I have raised you up ..." (Rm 9:17). He raised up Pharaoh to manifest His power to carry out His plan through Israel. Therefore, because of His foreplanning to bring forth Israel, and thus the Messiah, "He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens" (Rm 9:18). God "willed" His work when the events were taking place because He had foreplanned the nation through whom the Christ would come.

Lest we accuse God of unjust wrath against those whom He foreknew would harden themselves against His will, Paul reminds us that God uses the rebellion of man to manifest His longsuffering to carry out His plan. Paul asked, "What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?" (Rm 9:22). It is not that God made the rebellious to be hardened. God's work only presented the occasion that manifested their hardened heart. In reference to the righteous, Paul continued, "... and that He might make known the riches of His glory on

*the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?"* (Rm 9:23,24). The plan was revealed, therefore, in order to manifest the graciousness of God. His grace and mercy were not generated in response to the supposed righteousness or works of law. The plan was foreplanned in order that it be a manifestation of God's grace and mercy (See Ep 2:4,5).

## **B. Drawn by the gospel.**

Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me" (Jn 6:44,45).

John 6:44,45 has been used to teach that no one can possibly come to the Father and be saved unless God personally draws him. It is erroneously affirmed that God personally draws one because he or she has been individually predestined and called unto eternal glory. In order to be drawn, it is believed that God sends forth the Holy Spirit in order to motivate one to respond to the preached word. However, I believe some should take another look at this passage.

**1. We are drawn on God's terms.** It is true that no one can come to God unless he is drawn by God. **One cannot come to God on his own terms.** God

draws men on His terms, and those terms are obedience to the gospel. The drawing power is the gospel, “*for it is the power of God to salvation ...*” (Rm 1:16). This is why Jesus said, “*Therefore everyone who has **heard and learned from the Father comes to me***” (Jn 6:45). When one is taught of the love of God that was manifested on the cross, he is moved to respond to God's grace. John wrote, “*We love because He first loved us*” (1 Jn 4:19). God's love is the drawing power. In order to know of this love, and thus be drawn to God, one must hear and learn the gospel.

The preceding is seen in Paul's statement of 2 Thessalonians 2:14. “*To which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” People are called into the body of Christ by the appeal of the gospel of God's grace. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “*For in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel*” (1 Co 4:15). Today, it is the gospel that draws men and women into Christ. This is exactly what Jesus is saying in John 6:45. When one believes the gospel of Jesus, he is drawn to the Father.

**2. We are drawn by being taught.** Verse 44 of John 6 does not explain how one is drawn to Jesus. Jesus simply states that one cannot come to Him unless he is drawn. Verse 45 is the explanation as to how one is drawn. One must be **taught**. He must be taught by **hearing and learning**. “*Taught*” refers to teachers who teach. However, “*hear*” and “*learn*” refer to those who are taught. One must make a voluntary choice to be a ready

listener and learner of Jesus before he or she can be drawn to Jesus (See At 17:11).

**3. We are drawn to make free-moral choices.** In order to come to the Father, **one must be willing to be drawn**. Some of Jesus' audience were not willing. To them He said, “*But you are not willing to come to me that you may have life*” (Jn 5:40; see Mt 23:37). Therefore, before one can be drawn to Christ, he or she must willingly hear and learn of Him. This places the responsibility of being drawn upon the shoulders of those who are taught the gospel. In other words, in order to be taught, and thus, drawn to Jesus by the Father, a person must free-morally make a decision to respond to God's call through Jesus.

**4. We are drawn by the gospel.** We must always remember that God calls individuals today through the **gospel**. This most important concept is clearly taught by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:13,14. “*But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” In order for anyone to be drawn to Jesus, he or she must hear the good news of Jesus' death for our sins. One must hear of His resurrection for our hope. This is the drawing power of God. When we respond to the cross, we have been drawn to Jesus. What Jesus said is true. “*Therefore every one who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me*” (Jn 6:45).

We retain our free-moral agency to choose our salvation if we are allowed to be willingly drawn to God through the gospel. When we are taught the gospel, we are allowed to make a free-moral choice concerning obedience. If we obey, then we are destined for heaven because we have made a choice to become a part of the church that has been predestined to heaven. However, if we choose not to obey the gospel, then we are destined to hell.

### C. Open hearts allow understanding.

In John 8:42,43 John recorded, *“If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word.”*

This statement by Jesus is often used to teach that certain individuals are predestined to destruction, and thus, they cannot understand Jesus' teachings. It is taught that one cannot understand because he or she is not of those who are predestined to obedience and life.

The Jews in the context of John 8:42,43 did not understand Jesus because of what is said in verses 24,31, and 32. Jesus said, *“... if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.”* *“If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”* The Jews did not understand Jesus' teachings **because they did not want to understand.** It was of these hardened Jews

that Jesus said, *“Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand”* (Mt 13:13; see 13:14-17). The Jews thought they knew God, but they had fabricated a religion after the traditions of the fathers. Any teaching that was contrary to this religion was assumed to be false. Therefore, they could not see the truth because they were looking through their traditions which blinded them.

If one has a submissive heart to the will of Jesus, he or she can understand the words of Jesus. However, those who are hardened against His will, most certainly will not understand His word. Such are as those who are *“always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth”* (2 Tm 3:7).

### D. All can follow Jesus.

Jesus said, *“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand”* (Jn 10:27-29).

This statement of Jesus is used to teach that some are individually predestined to be the sheep of Jesus and some are predestined not to be sheep. However, there are some important thoughts in the context of this verse that make this interpretation impossible.

John 10:27,28 is not saying that one cannot be a sheep of Jesus. This is true because of Jesus' plea to these people in verse 38. He pled, *“Though you do not*

*believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him.*" Jesus knew that if they accepted the miraculous works that He worked, then they would have to reconsider who He was. Nicodemus was one such person. He came to Jesus and said, "*Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him*" (Jn 3:2). Jesus presented His miraculous works to be proof of His sonship. His audience had to make a decision concerning this proof. Their opportunity to make a decision concerning the proof meant that they were responsible for themselves. They could become sheep if they accepted the proof.

Keep in mind also that one is a "sheep" because he or she has believed in and followed the shepherd. The sheep are the obedient believers who are listening to the instructions of the shepherd. They are the ones about whom Jesus said, "*He who believes in the Son has everlasting life ...*" (Jn 3:36). Those who believe "*walk in the light*" (1 Jn 1:7). They are obedient to the will of the Father. This is what makes them the flock of God. They cannot be snatched out of the hand of the Savior simply because they have chosen to be obedient to the will of the Shepherd.

Jesus said, "*... no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand.*" The point is that no one outside the mental and moral character of the believer himself is able to take the believer from the flock. Each believing sheep must make an individual free-moral choice to

stay with the flock. **No one** can subject the sheep to leave the flock against their will. If one leaves the flock, therefore, as an apostate believer, he or she is totally responsible for his or her own sin. Jesus simply places the responsibility for faithfulness on the shoulders of each believer. Each sheep must make a decision to stay with the flock.

What Jesus is teaching in John 10:27-29, therefore, is the exact opposite of how some use the passage in teaching the predestination of individuals. Sheep have chosen to be of the flock. They have made a choice to follow Jesus. The Devil cannot voluntarily take away from Jesus anyone who has made a decision to remain in the flock. The responsibility to faithfulness, therefore, is placed upon the shoulders of the flock, not the Shepherd. It is the flock that must determine to follow Jesus. We are disciples, not of ourselves, but of Jesus. And being a disciple assumes we have responsibility.

### **E. Hearts are opened by the gospel.**

Luke recorded, "*Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul*" (At 16:14).

This passage is used to teach that God unconditionally chooses to open the hearts and minds of selected individuals. They are opened because God has supposedly unconditionally elected before the creation those individuals who will be saved. It is assumed that because

Lydia responded to the preaching of Paul, God had sent the Holy Spirit into her heart in order that she respond to the message. The Spirit was supposedly sent because she had been individually predestined to eternal life. Again, this is an erroneous view and one that must be reconsidered.

In the context of Acts 16:14, **Lydia's heart was opened by the preaching of the word of God. She was disposed to hearing truth, and when truth was spoken, she listened.** She already had an open mind to the teachings of God because she was one "*who worshiped God*" (Compare At 17:11).

Some have paralleled the opening of the understanding of the apostles in Luke 24:45 with the case of Lydia. However, there are some great differences between these two contexts. Jesus opened the understanding of the apostles during His earthly ministry "*that they might comprehend the Scriptures*" (Lk 24:45). But this was not in conjunction with their salvation as was with the case of Lydia. Also, it was the apostles' "understanding" that was opened, not their hearts. Jesus opened the apostles' minds by inspiration that they might understand the prophecies that referred to Him. In Lydia's case, it was a simple fact of a willing and open heart accepting the preaching of Paul.

If Lydia's heart was opened in the same sense as the apostles' minds were opened, then she still was not saved by such. She and her household had to be baptized for the remission of sins in order to be saved (See At 2:38; 22:16). She

had to do something in response to what she heard. Simply because her heart was opened did not mean that she need not obey what she heard. The opening of her heart, therefore, did not have reference to her salvation. **It had reference to her hearing the word of God.** The fact that she and her household were at a common place of prayer is proof that they were open-hearted and devoted individuals.

The Lord opened her heart **to heed** the things spoken by Paul. By use of the phrase "to heed," Luke is directing us to understand that Lydia **obeyed** the things spoken by Paul. She obeyed because the Lord had communicated to her through Paul what she must do in order to be saved. She gave heed (obedience) because she was drawn to Jesus through the teaching of Paul (See Jn 6:44,45). She was a willing listener, and thus, one who willingly obeyed Paul's instructions.

Keep in mind that if God had subjectively moved Lydia to obey the gospel, He would have been a respecter of persons. Why did not God open the hearts of all those to whom Paul preached by the river? The fact that not all responded is evidence that God did not arbitrarily select Lydia and her household over the others who were present.

God's grace has been revealed to **all men** (Ti 2:11). God "*desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*" (1 Tm 2:4). He does not select a few. Jesus promised, "**If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine ...**" (Jn 7:17). Lydia and her household were desiring to do God's will. They worshiped God.

Paul's presence and preaching only offered the opportunity for their obedience.

## F. The obedient have a receptive disposition.

In Antioch of Pisidia, Paul and Barnabas preached in the synagogue of the Jews. However, *“when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, ‘It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.’”* (At 13:45,46). Luke records, *“Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed”* (At 13:48).

Acts 13:48 is a passage that is often used to uphold the teaching that certain individuals are unconditionally chosen for salvation. However, notice what this verse says in view of the Greek text. The Greek word *tetagmenoi* is often translated either “ordained” or “appointed.” However, the better translation of “**disposed**” would be more consistent with the context and the fundamental teaching of free-moral agency. Therefore, the paraphrased meaning would be, “Those who were **of a mind to obey** did obey.”

The fact that the Jews **willfully rejected** the gospel of God in verse 46 magnifies the **willful acceptance** of the gospel by the Gentiles in verse 48. The

Gentiles accepted the gospel, not because they had been predestined or unconditionally elected to do so, but because they were of a **disposition to hear and obey**.

Before Paul and Barnabas arrived in Antioch, the Gentiles of Acts 13 **disbelieved**. The Bible teaches that all men who disbelieve are condemned (Jn 3:18; Mk 16:16). Were these Gentiles of Acts 13 saved in unbelief before they had a chance to hear and obey the gospel? If they were saved in “unbelief,” then why did Paul and Barnabas undergo all the persecution in order to teach them the gospel? What if Paul and Barnabas had never come to Antioch? What if evangelists today never go to the millions of the world who have never heard? Are the millions of the world today saved in unbelief? Are they saved in ignorance? The Bible nowhere teaches “salvation by ignorance.” Therefore, it is the responsibility of every Christian to proclaim the gospel to all nations as Paul and Barnabas proclaimed the good news to the unbelieving Gentiles in Antioch (Mt 28:19,20; Mk 16:15,16). As a result of their preaching, the Gentiles believed and obeyed the gospel.

Acts 18:9,10 is a parallel concept to the events of Acts 13. Luke recorded, *“Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, ‘Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.’”* Those God claimed in Corinth by saying that they were His people, were not the ones who had already obeyed the gospel. These were the ones yet to hear.

They were idolaters in Corinth who had not yet heard the gospel. God encouraged Paul in this vision, however, to stay in Corinth until they had a chance to hear. And when they heard, they would **immediately obey**, for they were “disposed unto eternal life.” These were “truth seekers” who would respond to the preaching of the gospel. For this reason God claims them as His people. Keep in mind that there are those who are in ignorance of the gospel, and thus, in unbelief and condemnation. However, those who are disposed unto eternal life in all the world will obey if they only have the chance to hear. If we preach, they will believe.

### G. Christians are the elect of God.

Peter addressed the “*pilgrims of the Dispersion ... elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ*” (1 Pt 1:1,2).

From statements as the above, some have taught that God elected specific individuals to be saved, and by this, foreknew their salvation. It is taught that God has individually elected some for obedience and cleansing by the blood of Jesus. However, there are some fundamental problems with this understanding.

The belief that God has individually elected people to be saved is an attack against both the foreknowledge and justice of God. Here is how. God can foreknow those who are disposed to obey the gospel when they hear. Such foreknowl-

edge is manifested in Acts 18:9,10 when the Lord encouraged Paul to stay in Corinth, for He said, “*I have many people in this city.*” **God foreknew the elect, but He did not foreordain individuals to become the elect.** If He individually elected those He would save, then He rejected everyone else. In judgment, therefore, God would be unjust to condemn to hell those He refused because they had no say in their judgment of condemnation.

1 Peter 1:1,2 discusses **the elect as a group**, not as individuals. God foreknew that men would be obedient to the gospel. That group of obedient individuals is **the elect**. Individuals become “elect” when they choose to become a part of “the elect.” Because they choose obedience to the gospel, they are predestined with the elect to eternal life. This group is the church for which Jesus died. This is what Paul meant when he told the Thessalonian church that God “*chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth*” (2 Th 2:13). One is chosen when he chooses to become part of the chosen. In this way God’s justice can stand. Men have a choice. They can determine to obey the gospel and become a part of the predestined elect, the church. However, if one is individually predestined to be a part of the elect, then God’s justice falls.

We must understand the teaching concerning the elect in reference to eternal heaven and not in reference to coming into the body of the saved. As a reminder, view such from God’s position in final judgment. He will elect out of



all the world those who will go to heaven. This group that will be elected to go to heaven, is presently and commonly referred to in the New Testament as the church. The church is the elect because God foreknew and planned that they would be justified because of their free-moral obedience to the gospel. He did not elect them to become members of the church. However, He will in final judgment elect the church to become inhabitants of heaven. The elect, therefore, **refers to going to heaven, not to becoming a member of the church.**

God has elected and predestined the group called the church to eternal heaven. Individuals are not predestined to become members of the church. One must make an individual decision to become a member of the predestined group, the church. However, God can foreknow those who

are disposed to obedience to the gospel as He knew there would be some in Corinth who would listen to and obey Paul's preaching. But such foreknowledge of individual obedience does not necessitate individual choosing and election by God. Every individual has the free-moral responsibility to choose to become a part of the elect and chosen for heaven. But to say that God has individually chosen those who would obey the gospel is to say that God is a respecter of persons. It is also to say that He is hardened against those He has not individually predestined, but has condemned to hell without their choosing. Such thinking is entirely contrary to the nature of God. Any theology that attacks the loving and just nature of God must be logically wrong.

## Chapter 12

### The Results Of Unbelief

Are people predestined to disbelieve the gospel? Regardless of the appeal of the love of God through the cross, are there those who are predestined not to respond to the love of God with an obedient faith? No matter what God has done, are there those who can never respond to the love of God because God has so ordained that they cannot believe and obey the gospel? These are challenging questions if the doctrines of unconditional election and individual predestination are true. They are questions with which one must deal if he believes in these doctrines.

It is never wise to take any scripture out of its context. Most biblical interpreters will agree with this principle of Bible interpretation. However, it is a principle that is commonly violated when we investigate erroneous teachings from the Bible. In fact, one could say that any passage that is taken out of context will teach something that is false in reference to the context in which it is used. When we consider the subjects of faith, obedience and love, it is important to use biblical definitions of these words that originate from their biblical contexts. It is important to understand these concepts

in the context of action and obedience. Because these particular subjects have been taken out of their biblical context, we end up today with a host of definitions that are strange and foreign to what God originally meant when He first revealed them in the Bible.

The subject of this chapter refocuses our attention on a biblical definition of faith, obedience and love in relation to one's responsibility toward God. If one is free-moral responsibility, then there will be individual accountability before God.

In the Bible there is a simple relationship between faith, love and obedience that must always be understood. James expressed it, "*Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead*" (Jas 2:17). Paul expressed the concept in Galatians 5:6. "*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.*" If one does not understand this inseparable relationship between faith, love and obedience, he or she will misunderstand a host of scriptures. Because there have been interpreters who have failed to see this relationship, there has been much confusion propagated concerning passages that emphasize faith. A misunderstanding of the inseparable link between faith and obedience is what has led to a misunderstanding of many statements in the New Testament that refer to belief and obedience.

### A. Unbelief results in disobedience.

Peter wrote, "*Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone,' and 'a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence.'* *They stumbled, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed*" (1 Pt 2:7,8).

Some have used this statement of Peter to teach that God has unconditionally appointed some to disbelieve the gospel. But those about whom Peter here speaks were disobedient because they rejected Jesus and they rejected Jesus because of unbelief. Luke stated what they actually did. "*But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God for themselves ...*" (Lk 7:30). Paul wrote, "*But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our report?'*" (Rm 10:16). **They would have obeyed if they had believed.** In passages as 1 Peter 2:8, **disobedience is the same as unbelief.** Therefore, God knew that many would stumble by unbelief when Jesus came. The fact that Peter quotes David (Ps 118:22) and Isaiah (Is 8:14), who prophesied this "stumbling" many years before its actual fulfillment, is proof that God foreknew ("appointed") those who would reject Jesus.

God foreknew and predestined the church group unto eternal life. This necessitated that the disobedient group of unbelievers would be destined to destruction. They would be so destined, not because they were unconditionally predetermined to be of this group but be-

cause they individually would refuse to believe. By the preaching of the gospel, one is given a choice by God to become a member of the church group that has been predestined to eternal life. If one refuses the invitation to believe, then he or she can blame only himself or herself for remaining a part of those who are destined to destruction.

## **B. Illogical conclusions result from misunderstood scriptures.**

In order to emphasize the erroneous nature of a particular belief, it is good to reason to the logical conclusion of the teaching of the belief. This is especially helpful in examining the fallacy of unconditional election and individual predestination. In the following points, the erroneous conclusions to these beliefs are emphasized. In other words, **if the doctrines of unconditional election and individual predestination are true, then the following points would also be true:**

### **ERRONEOUS CONCLUSIONS**

1. If we are individually elected and predestined, it would be impossible for those whom God had unconditionally elected to so sin as to lose their souls.
2. If we are individually elected and predestined, it would be impossible for the non-elect to so obey God in order to be saved.
3. If one is not of the individually elected and predestined, then he or she cannot be held accountable for sin.
4. If we are individually elected and pre-

destined, God is responsible for bringing a sinner into this world, destining him to sin, and then condemning him to hell for the sin he was destined to commit.

5. If we are individually elected and predestined, sin cannot be the transgression of God's law if it is God's law that sinners transgress His law.
6. If we are individually elected and predestined, faith and obedience have no respect in the eyes of God because God has already destined faith and obedience on the part of the elect.
7. If we are individually elected and predestined, the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross was useless because the elect had already been predestined to eternal life.
8. If we are individually elected and predestined, no one should strive to live a righteous and moral life because the destinies of all men have already been established and cannot be changed.

Certainly, the above points are false. However, if one believes that individuals are unconditionally elected and individually predestined to either hell or heaven, then he or she must believe these points. These are logical conclusions to the doctrines of unconditional election and individual predestination.

We must remind ourselves that man is a free-moral agent. God created man to be responsible for his own destiny. If one is eternally lost at the final judgment, God's justice stands firm because He created man truly free. God gave man laws by which to direct his paths. It is the re-

sponsibility of each individual to respond in a favorable manner to the will of God. If one is lost, he has no basis upon which to point an accusing finger at God for being lost. Because we are free-moral individuals means that we will be entirely responsible for our behavior. If we sin against God, then we will be held accountable for those sins. The lost will have no one to blame for their condemnation.

God foreordained that the church be saved. This was His plan before the creation of the world. Therefore, all who individually choose to become obedient to the gospel are added to this group which is destined to eternal salvation. The Christian's salvation, however, is based upon faithfulness. By faith and obedience one continues to be a part of the predestined elect. Peter addressed those who are the "*elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus*

*Christ*" (1 Pt 1:2). But he also says to the elect, "*Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble*" (2 Pt 1:10). Some did not heed this warning, and thus, Peter writes of them, "*For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them*" (2 Pt 2:20,21). Those who turn from the group that is destined to heaven, will be lost because they have individually chosen to leave the fellowship of the saved. They will be condemned because they left the community of those God will choose out of the world for eternal dwelling.

## Chapter 13

### The Reality Of Sin And Apostasy

There is a false conclusion that many people immediately assume when they are beginning to understand the fact that one is saved, not by law-keeping or meritorious works, but by the grace of God. This conclusion is that if one is saved by grace, then he cannot fall from grace. This conclusion results from thinking that has not yet changed from legal thinking to a mind of grace and faith. God's grace

is conditional, and condition means that there are responsibilities on the part of man. If those conditions are not met, then the grace is not applicable to the salvation of one's soul.

Those who invented the doctrines of unconditional election and individual predestination misunderstood the conditions for God's grace. Their misunderstanding led them to construct a doctrine

that made it impossible for one to fall from grace. Their conclusion was that if individuals are unconditionally elected and individually predestined to eternal life, then we must assume that one cannot fall from the grace of God. If God says that the individually predestined are saved, then they cannot fall. However, the conclusion is wrong for the Bible teaches otherwise. One can fall from the grace of God. One can so sin as to be eternally lost.

As we read through the New Testament, one of the predominant threats against the church was the work of Satan to draw disciples away from Jesus. The New Testament writers continually warned against falling away from the truth or returning to that from which Christians fled. Nevertheless, some disciples did not heed these warnings, and thus, apostatized from the faith.

When studying the subject of predestination, it is important to understand that the believer has a free-moral choice to become a part of the predestined group, the church. However, if one is individually predestined, then there is no such thing as apostasy. How can one apostatize from that which he or she was never a part in the first place. If the New Testament teaches that there is such a thing as falling away from the faith, then there can be no such thing as individual predestination.

There are some religious groups, however, who teach that once a person becomes a Christian, he or she can never so sin as to fall away and be eternally lost. It is concluded that since the righ-

teous have been individually elected and predestined to heaven before the creation of the world, they can never so sin as to lose their souls. They will never fall away from the grace of God so as to be eternally lost. However, there are some principal biblical teachings that say that a Christian can fall so as to be lost. The following points set forth some major obstacles for this belief:

### A. The nature of sin.

We must keep in mind the definitions of sin that are given in the New Testament (See chapter 2). The biblical definition of sin helps us understand those doctrines that are constructed upon the foundation of an erroneous concept of sin. As a review of the material of chapter 2, consider the following two points:

**1. Sin is a way of life.** The word sin is used in the Bible to refer to **a way of life**. In other words, when one continues in the practice of sin in general he or she does what Paul reminded the Ephesians concerning their former manner of life, “... *in which [sin] you once walked according to the course of this world ... in the lust of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind ...*” (Ep 2:2,3). John said that this is the one who “*walks in darkness*” (1 Jn 1:5-10). Before their conversion, the Ephesians lived in a sinful behavior that was commonly practiced in their culture. Therefore, they were in sin because they were sinning against God.

**2. Sin is a particular action of life.** There is also the definition of sin as a

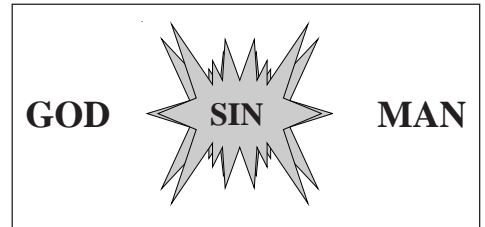
**particular action** which the Christian does that is contrary to God's will. This is the sin John had in mind in 1 John 2:1. "And if anyone *sins*, we have an advocate ...." This is the "occasional" sin that Christians commit but do not practice as a way of life. Therefore, there is a difference between **living in sin** and **committing a sin**. The unrepentant will lose his soul for practicing sin. The repentant will be forgiven of a sin if he or she willingly confesses the sin (See 1 Jn 1:7-9).

There is, therefore, a difference between the unbeliever who lives in sin and the believer who commits sin. The unbeliever will be lost because he or she did not obey the gospel (See 2 Th 1:7-9). The believer who continues in a sin will be lost because he or she is unrepentant of a particular sin in life for which he or she will not repent (See Hb 10:26; 1 Jn 5:16). There are also the periodic sins of the believer's life for which he continues to repent and confess (See 1 Jn 1:9; 2:1). Such sins are covered by the blood of Jesus as we struggle to walk in the light.

## **B. The result of sin is separation and death.**

It is important to remember what sin does to our relationship with God. All men have sinned (Rm 3:9,10,23). Sin in the life of the individual separates one from God (Is 59:1,2). And in separation from God there is spiritual death (Rm 5:12; 6:23). The result of sin is separation from God and the result of separa-

tion from God is spiritual death. Whenever we think of sin, therefore, we must think of death.



### **1. All have sinned against God.**

"There is none righteous, no, not one" (Rm 3:10), "**for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God**" (Rm 3:23). "For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin" (Ec 7:20). We live in a world of sin. It is true that no one can keep law perfectly, therefore, all men are cursed with death because of sin. Only through the grace of God can we have hope of salvation.

When we become a Christian, we do not lose our ability to sin. We are still free-moral agents. God does not make us robots. For this reason, Paul exhorts Christians, "**Awake to righteousness, and do not sin**" (1 Co 15:34; see Ep 4:26). Because of the worldly desire of men to seek pleasure by following after lust in a sinful manner (See Rm 8:12,13), Paul said, "*But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection ...*" (1 Co 9:27). He is warning every Christian concerning the deceitfulness of sin in one's life. The Christian can fall into willful sin, or unrepentant sin, for which there is no forgiveness (Hb 6:4-6; 10:26).

The Christian's salvation as a result of obedience to the gospel in baptism is **conditional**. Christians must remain

“faithful.” Paul warned the Christians in Rome, “*For if you live according to the flesh you will die ...*” (Rm 8:13). The salvation of Christians is at least based on the following conditions:

#### MAINTAINING FAITHFULNESS

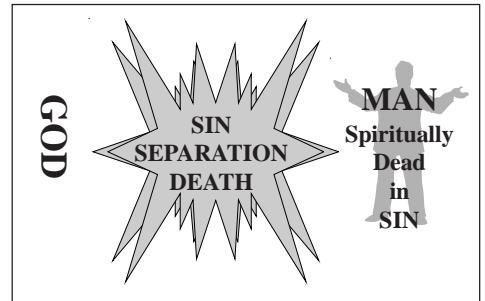
1. We must hold fast the word of God (1 Co 15:2).
2. We must be faithful until the end (Hb 3:6).
3. We must continue in the faith (Cl 1:23; Hb 10:38).
4. We must be faithful even to death (Rv 2:10).
5. We must bear fruit (Jn 15:1-7).
6. We must abide in Jesus (Jn 15:4).
7. We must walk in the light (1 Jn 1:7).

Even if one carries out in his life all things necessary in reference to the above, he will still sin. No man can keep God's law perfectly in order to save himself. One sin makes a sinner and a sinner must call upon the grace of God for salvation.

God says that all are under sin, and thus, fall short of His glory (Rm 3:10,23). When we come to Jesus, we must continue to be faithful to our commitment to Jesus in order to be eternally saved. We must thus guard against returning to the practice of the sinful life lest we are separated from God.

**2. Sin separates one from God.** Sin causes **spiritual separation** from God. Spiritual separation from God in life means that one is headed for eternal destruction after the final judgment. Isaiah stated, “*But your iniquities have sepa-*

*rated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you*” (Is 59:2). The key word of Isaiah 59:1,2 is **separation**. Sin, or iniquities, causes one to be spiritually separated from God. Those who willfully sin have separated themselves from God because they have consciously chosen to rebel against His will. Therefore, whenever the subject of sin is discussed, we must remember that unconfessed sin means **separation from God**. The Christian who continues in an unconfessed sin is spiritually separated from God.



**3. Separation because of sin causes death.** Paul wrote in Romans 5:12, “*Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin ....*” Adam was the first to introduce sin into the world. He was the first man to sin, and thus, became the representative of all men for all have sinned. When Adam personally sinned against God, therefore, he personally suffered separation from God. He spiritually died as a result of his own sin.

However, all men are in a similar predicament. The last half of Romans 5:12 discusses the problem of all men. “... and thus death spread to all men, **because**

*all sinned.*” God’s judgment concerning sin is, “*for the wages of sin is death ...*” (Rm 6:23). All men, therefore, suffer spiritual separation from God. Spiritual death is the result of sin. All men are “*dead in trespasses and sins*” (Ep 2:1). The Christian’s situation, however, is different. John wrote, “*But if we [Christians] walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin*” (1 Jn 1:7). Nevertheless, Christians must remember the warning of James. “*But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is fullgrown, brings forth death*” (Js 1:14,15). The Christian, therefore, can be drawn back into a life of sin where he is spiritually separated from God.

Therefore, when sin is mentioned in the Bible we must think of two things: **separation** and **death**. The result of sin is separation from God. The result of separation from God is spiritual death which will ultimately result in eternal destruction. All men have sinned. All men, therefore, must seek for a means to reconcile themselves to God. That means is the gospel. Christians have free-morally obeyed the gospel, and therefore, have contact with the cleansing blood of Jesus. Nevertheless, Christians can so give themselves over to the lust of the flesh that they can lose their souls.

The conclusion to the above thoughts in relation to the doctrines of uncondi-

tional election and predestination is quite clear. If sin in the life of every individual is a constant reality, then each person on earth, whether Christian or non-Christian, is subject to damnation. There are simply none who can stand before God and claim to be righteous, for all men must seek a solution for sin.

Paul exhorts individual Christians to be diligent. “*Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*” (Ph 2:12). There are a host of similar statements in the Bible. All such statements are emphasizing the individual responsibility of each Christian as Paul told Timothy to “*take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you*” (1 Tm 4:16). If all Christians are so exhorted, then the possibility of returning to a life of sin is real. If we must be exhorted to continue faithful, then there is the possibility of becoming unfaithful. Christians can give up their salvation by returning to their former manner of life. It is necessary, therefore, that Christians “*exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin*” (Hb 3:13).

If one is unconditionally elected and individually predestined to eternal life, then all the passages in the Bible in reference to exhortation for faithfulness are actually wasted paper. Why all the exhortation if one cannot fall from his or her state of salvation. If remaining within



the saving grace of God is without condition, then certainly the Holy Spirit would have been wasting His time in inspiring warnings of apostasy. If it is impossible for the saved to fall from grace, then there would be no need for the saved to be warned.

Another teaching that puts the Holy Spirit in a position of wasting time is the teaching of salvation by grace only. It is true that there is no salvation by works

of law, for no one can keep law perfectly in order to save himself (Rm 3:20; Gl 2:16). It is also true that no meritorious deed can atone for sin. It is imperative, therefore, that we trust in the grace of God for our salvation. However, our faithful response to God's grace is necessary in order to remain within the realm of His saving grace. We are saved by grace, but not by grace alone.

## Chapter 14

### Warning Of Apostasy

If the Bible warns Christians not to sin, then it is possible that Christians can so sin as to lose their souls. In other words, why would there be warnings given to all Christians concerning sin, if all Christians were not able to so sin as to lose their souls? Christians are saved. But they are not saved in a manner that will not allow them to be lost if they continue in a sin.

In this chapter we review the concept of apostasy. If the New Testament teaches such a concept, then there can be no such doctrines as “once saved, always saved” and “individual predestination.” In other words, apostasy assumes that one is first in a saved relationship with God, and then falls away from that relationship. One must first stand just before he or she can apostatize from a saved relationship with God. If one is never in a saved relationship with God, then certainly there would be no such thing as turning away from God in apos-

tasy from the faith. Therefore, if the concept of apostasy is taught in the New Testament, then the concept of once saved always saved as a result of being individually predestined, does not exist. The following points prove beyond doubt that a saved person can turn from his state of salvation:

#### **A. The Corinthian church was warned against apostasy.**

There are many warnings in the New Testament for Christians to take heed concerning apostasy. These warnings are given to Christians in order to exhort them not to fall from their state of salvation. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “*Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall*” (1 Co 10:12). Concerning a brother who was living in immorality, the Corinthian church was exhorted to assemble together and “*deliver such a one to Satan*” (1 Co 5:5).

This sinner was first in a saved relationship with God. However, because of his sin he was to be delivered to Satan. Because one can so sin as to be lost, one can leave the presence of God and be delivered to Satan. Paul exhorted all at Corinth to continually examine their behavior because of their danger of falling into sin. *“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Prove yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless indeed you are disqualified”* (2 Co 13:5). “Disqualification” means that one is first qualified. “Delivered to Satan” means that one was at one time not of Satan. Both of these concepts prove that a Christian can be saved, but lose his or her state of salvation because of sin.

### **B. Individuals are warned against apostasy.**

Paul did not exclude himself from the possibility of apostasy. To the Corinthians he wrote, *“But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified”* (1 Co 9:27). He also gave a personal warning to Timothy. *“Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine”* (1 Tm 4:16). *“In latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons”* (1 Tm 4:1). Therefore, Peter warns Christians to *“beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked”* (2 Pt 3:17). If one departs from the faith, then he first must have been of

the faith. If one is led away to the error of the wicked, then he first must not have been of the wicked. There is thus no guarantee that a faithful Christian cannot turn away from his or her state of salvation.

### **C. Elders are warned against apostasy.**

When Paul left the Ephesian elders for the last time, he warned them against the apostasy that would come from among themselves. *“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, .... For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves”* (At 20:28-30). This very apostasy happened. In fact, the whole church turned from its “first love” and was warned by Jesus to repent lest He come on them and remove their lampstand from its place (Rv 2:5).

Some elders of the Ephesian church were first saved and faithful. However, in Acts 20:28-30 Paul warned that some would fall away from the faith. In fact, the entire church at Ephesus was in a state of apostasy by the time John wrote the book of Revelation. The example of the Ephesian church shows beyond doubt that even elders and an entire congregation can go into apostasy.

### **D. The Thessalonian church is warned against apostasy.**

In his last letter to the Thessalonian church, Paul warned, *“Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition”* (2 Th 2:3). In this warning Paul states that the church can be so deceived as to turn away from the truth. In fact, he warns the church of Thessalonica of an inevitable “falling away” that will come when the man of sin is revealed who will deceive many. This “falling away” refers to the church, not to unbelievers. The unbelievers were never in a saved relationship with God where they could “fall away.” Paul’s emphasis, therefore, is on a “falling away” of those who were first saved.

There are numerous warnings against apostasy throughout the New Testament. Because there is always the possibility of one being overcome by sin, Christians are warned to “take heed” and to *“exhort one another daily ... lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin”* (Hb 3:13). Christians are encouraged to *“keep yourselves in the love of God”* (Jd 21) and *“to make your calling and election sure ...”* (2 Pt 1:10). This is necessary, according to Hebrews 12:15, *“lest anyone fall short of the grace of God ....”* In Galatians 6:1 Paul exhorted the Galatians, *“Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.”*

The following are just a few scriptures that give warning to Christians not

to give up that which they have received because of their obedience to Jesus. The fact that these warnings exist, is evidence that the Christian can so sin as to fall away from the grace of God.

#### **WARNINGS AGAINST APOSTASY**

Matthew 24:4,5,11-13

1 Timothy 3:6; 4:1,16; 6:10-12

Acts 11:21-23; 14:21,22

2 Timothy 3:1-15; 4:2-5

Romans 8:12-14

Hebrews 2:1-3; 6:4-6; 10:26

1 Corinthians 15:1,2

2 Peter 1:8-11; 2:20-22; 3:16-18

Colossians 2:4-8,18,19

1 John 2:23-25

Christians are saved. They are warned to “take heed” lest they fall from their salvation. The fact that they are exhorted to guard against their fall into sin is proof that they are saved. It is also proof that they can so sin as to be lost. Christians should take every opportunity to make their calling sure. And if any are overtaken in sin, stronger Christians should help restore the weak with a spirit of gentleness, knowing that they too can fall away.

Any teaching concerning apostasy is teaching against the doctrines of unconditional election and individual predestination. If a saved person can fall from God’s grace, then God cannot keep one saved. But the truth is that one can fall from grace, and thus, the teachings of unconditional election and individual predestination are not true.

## Chapter 15

### The Parables And Apostasy

One of the central themes of the parables of Jesus is the apostasy of those who accept the teachings of the kingdom of God, but then fall away. The general message of many parables is based in the fact that a message of truth was accepted by the characters of the parables. However, after the message of truth was received, there was a turning away from that message. There is pictured in many parables of a falling away from an established relationship with God. Jesus teaches that though the message of the kingdom is often received with eagerness, apostasy from the kingdom too often occurs. The following parables of this chapter are key parables that teach the concept of the apostasy of those who turn away from God:

#### A. Parable of the sower:

In the parable of the sower Jesus said that some of the seed of the sower “*fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them*” (Mt 13:3-8; see vs 18-23; Mk 4:2-20; Lk 8:4-15).

In the parable of the sower Jesus teaches that there are some who “received the seed.” They received **the word of God** with joy. However, the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches make some unfruitful. Notice the key phrases in this parable that emphasize the concept of apostasy. “*The birds came and devoured them ... when the sun was up they were scorched ... the thorns sprang up and choked them.*” The message of this parable is that different types of hearts receive the message of the kingdom. For various reasons, however, some give up the message and turn aside once again to the world. They do so because they did not fully understand the importance of the message.

#### B. Parable of the servant:

In the parable of the servant Jesus said that the “*evil servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming.’ and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth*” (Mt 24:45-51; Lk 12:42-48).

The point of the parable of the servant is the condemnation of the unfaith-

ful servant. However, **he was first a faithful servant.** He was of the kingdom just as the rest of the servants. However, because he became unfaithful he was condemned. This parable clearly teaches that we can turn from faithfulness to unfaithfulness with reference to our relationship with the kingdom.

### C. Parable of the talents:

In the parable of the talents Jesus said the following, *“Then he who had received the one talent came and said, ‘Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.’ But his lord answered and said to him. ‘You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed.”* Jesus said that the master said to this servant, *“And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”* (See Mt 25:14-30).

The three individuals to whom talents were delivered in this parable were **in the kingdom.** Two were faithful with the responsibility that was delivered to them. However, one was unfaithful. He was an “unprofitable servant.” He was subsequently cast “into the outer darkness.” Because he was found unprofitable, he was judged unworthy. Though he was found unworthy, he still had the same opportunity as the others. He was considered a servant to whom talents

were given. And thus one who was responsible for what was given.

### D. Parable of the unforgiving debtor:

Jesus said concerning the unforgiving servant, *“But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, ‘Pay me what you owe!’”* The one who owed could not pay so the unforgiving servant cast him into prison. When the master heard this, he called for the unforgiving servant and said to him, *“Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?”* Jesus then stated, *“And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him”* (See Mt 18:23-35).

In this parable there are two individuals who are of the kingdom. However, one becomes unforgiving. Because of his unforgiving spirit, he was delivered to the tormentors. Jesus said concerning him, *“And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him”* (vs 34). Jesus concluded the parable by stating, *“So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”* Therefore, one can go into apostasy by being unforgiving.

### E. Parable of the ten virgins:

The foolish virgins did not take sufficient oil in their lamps in order to meet

the bridegroom. They said to the prepared virgins, *“Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.”* However, the wise virgins stated, *“No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.”* Jesus continued in the parable, *“And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut”* (See Mt 25:1-13).

Jesus delivers the parable of the ten virgins in order to portray those **who are of the kingdom**. Some were prepared to meet the Son of Man. Some were not. The point of the parable was that being of the kingdom did not guarantee that one would be prepared to receive the Son.

Jesus’ message in the parables was directed to those who through faith could understand the message of the parables. In many of His parables He taught that there would be those who would receive His message. They had become or would become disciples. However, He stated that some of the many would become unfruitful. Because of laziness, irresponsibility, riches, persecutions, and a host of other reasons, there would be some

who would lose their salvation. Therefore, it is the responsibility of all disciples to “take heed lest you fall.”

The summation of the teaching of apostasy in the parables is very clear. Our conclusion to the apostasy that is taught in the parables is a forceful argument against the belief that God individually elected certain people to be saved. If those who were considered faithful servants in the parables fell into unfaithfulness, then certainly there is no such thing as God’s individual election of individuals for salvation and that these individuals cannot fall from God’s grace. If there is no such thing as individual and unconditional election, then there is no such thing as individual predestination.

The nature of the teaching that one is individually predestinated is contrary to the nature of man’s free-moral agency and accountability for sin. All New Testament teachings, therefore, teach against individual predestination. Since all will be held accountable for sin, then all must have a right to choose life. And if we have a right to choose life, then we are not predestined. The saved, therefore, will enjoy heaven because they made a choice to obey God.

## Chapter 16

### Case Histories Of Apostasy

This chapter is another study of apostasy. However, it is a study from a different perspective than the previous chapters. We have studied that the New Testament warns of apostasy. The parables

teach apostasy. Churches were warned against apostasy. Now here are cases where individuals in the New Testament actually fell from their saved state into a state of apostasy.

The New Testament contains examples of those who fell away from the faith in the first century. These are examples of those who were once saved, but fell away from their saved state. The point here is that if there are those in the the New Testament who were considered faithful by the Holy Spirit, and then fell away, then certainly no one can be so saved as to not be able to leave the faith. If this is true, then certainly no one is so predestined that he or she cannot fall from God's grace. The following are some of the examples of those who fell away from the truth in the first century:

#### A. The apostasy of Hymanaeus and Alexander:

Here is the example of two Christians who fell away from the faith. Concerning the case of Hymanaeus and Alexander Paul wrote, "... *having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck, of whom are Hymanaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme*" (1 Tm 1:19,20). Paul delivered these two "to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme." These men were once saved, but they were delivered unto Satan. If they had not been saved, **then they could not have been delivered unto Satan**, for they would already have been in Satan's possession. They were first faithful, and then, they were delivered to Satan.

#### B. The apostasy of some Galatian Christians:

In Galatians 5 Paul discusses the apostasy of some Galatian Christians who were resorting to law as a means of justification. The legalistic teachers of Galatia were attempting to bind law-keeping on the church as a means of justification. However, in Galatians 5:4 Paul states the following concerning those who would seek to be justified by a legalistic practice of observing law. "*You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.*"

This statement is an example of men who were once saved. They were in the grace of God. They were first "of Christ" before they became "estranged from Christ" (Gl 3:26,27). Because of their legal efforts to justify themselves, **they were falling away**. Paul warned, "*I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel*" (Gl 1:6).

Could the Galatians have been severed from Christ if they had not first been joined to Him? Could they be falling away if they had not first been with Christ in a state of salvation? The fact that they would be severed from Christ if they resorted to legal justification validates the fact that they were once joined to Him.

Paul's point here is very clear. God's grace saves one. All who are in the grace of God are saved. The legalistic teachers of Galatia were once in the saving grace of God. However, Paul says they are now **fallen from grace** because they have sought to be justified by works of law. In order for one to fall from grace, therefore, he has to first be in the grace of God.

One very clear teaching of the letter to the Galatians is that the Galatians had come into the saving grace of God. They were saved. Paul said they were so saved, not by works of law, but by faith, or trust in God's grace (See Gl 2:16). They had been freed from the necessity of perfect law-keeping in order to be justified and the burdens of their religious traditions (Gl 5:1). They had been delivered "*from this present evil age*" (Gl 1:4). Nevertheless, they were being "bewitched" by those who were taking them back to law-keeping (Gl 3:1). They were thus turning away from Jesus to another gospel (Gl 1:8). They were turning to a legal justification that would bring only condemnation (Gl 5:4). They were therefore falling from a saved state in relation to God to a state of condemnation.

### C. The apostasy of Demas and others:

Paul said of Demas, "*Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica ...*" (2 Tm 4:10). Demas had "*forgotten that he was purged from his old sins*" (2 Pt 1:9). He, as well as others, had forsaken their salvation. They were once "*slaves of sin*" (Rm 6:17), and then, they had "*tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come*" (Hb 6:5). However, they fell away. Hebrews 6:6 says that it "*is impossible ... to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame*" (Hb 6:4-6). Of those who would turn to the world, the Hebrew writer stated, "*Of how much*

*worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has ... trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace*" (Hb 10:29). Such apostates have "*turned aside after Satan*" (1 Tm 5:15; see Rm 11:22). They were once saved but gave up their salvation.

Notice carefully what Peter said in the following statement.

*For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: 'A dog returns to his own vomit,' and, 'a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire'* (2 Pt 2:20-22).

The point of Peter in 2 Peter 2:20-22 is that some who were once saved, had fallen away from their salvation. These of whom Peter spoke were once in a salvational relationship with God, but gave up such when they turned again to the world. Those who escape the pollution of the world through the knowledge of Christ, and then turn back, are as dogs returning to their own vomit. Such are those as Demas who turn back to the world. Men as Hymanaeus and Alexander were delivered to Satan by



Paul because they fell away from the truth. They forgot that they were purged of all sins. Therefore, they have fallen from God's grace.

Keep in mind that those in the New Testament who are identified as leaving the faith are also identified as once maintaining the faith. There can be no "falling away," "turning back," or "turning again" unless one was first in a way to which he again returns. In relation to their salvation, they were once lost, then saved, and then they turned again to their former state of condemnation. The New Testament teaching concerning the apos-

tasy of some who were once saved completely destroys the doctrine that God has individually predestined some to eternal life.

The New Testament is filled with warnings against apostasy (See 2 Co 13:5; Hb 3:13). Such warnings would not make sense if those who were in fellowship with the saints, but were actually predestined to damnation, had no choice concerning their salvation. If God had already predestined them to condemnation, then there would be no sense for the Holy Spirit to give warnings concerning apostasy.

## Chapter 17

### Security Of The Believer

One of the precious teachings of the New Testament is the security of the believer that is based upon the grace of God. Because of God's grace, the Christian can lay his head down at night and thank God for his salvation. He does not have to worry about whether he has performed enough good deeds in order to merit his salvation. His trust is not in his performance of law, but in God's grace. However, the point is not that one is saved without obligations. We cannot turn the grace of God into immoral living (Jd 4). We cannot sin in order to cause God's grace to abound (Rm 6:1). We must remain faithful to our calling. We must respond to the grace of God (See 1 Co 15:10).

It is assumed by those who believe and teach individual predestination that

one cannot fall from the grace of God since he or she has been saved by God. If individual predestination is true, then certainly one could not so sin as to be lost. However, the New Testament teaches that one is secure in the faith only insofar as one continues in the faith.

The believer's salvation is secure because of the grace of God and one's walk in the commandments of God. There are conditions to salvation by grace. John wrote, "*If we walk in the light as He is in the light .... the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin*" (1 Jn 1:7). The condition for this continual cleansing of sin is based on the **if** of John's statement. And the "if" is that we walk in the light. God's grace through the cleansing blood of Jesus is effective to those who maintain an obe-

dient relationship with God. As long as one continues in the faith, he or she is secure.

What some have done in their theology is use those passages that emphasize the security of the saints by the grace of God to support a teaching that salvation is secure regardless of one's obedience to the law of God. Salvation thus becomes secure without condition. Various texts are misunderstood to support this erroneous understanding. The following material is a re-examination of some of these texts.

We must remember that it is always best to first examine a passage in its original context. We must never take a passage out of its context in order to use it to support a teaching that is foreign to its biblical context. The problem with many unbiblical teachings is that proof texts are often taken out of context in order to support some erroneous teaching. Therefore, in the following points we must examine those proof texts that are used to support the teaching that one cannot fall from grace. These supposed proof texts must be examined in their correct biblical context.

### **A. One must continue hearing and believing.**

John 5:24 is often used as a text to teach that one cannot fall from the life that he or she has in Christ. Jesus said, "*He who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment ....*"

The words "hear" and "believe" in

this passage are in the **present progressive tense**. In other words, Jesus is saying, "**He that keeps on hearing and believing ... shall not come into judgment.**" As long as one maintains obedient hearing and believing, he or she has eternal life and shall not face a judgment of condemnation. But when one ceases hearing and believing, he loses his eternal life and will face a judgment of condemnation.

We must also keep in mind that the words "hear" and "believe" in the context of Jesus' statement in John 5:24 refer to the life response of those who accept Jesus as the Son of God. Reference is not simply to listening to the words of Jesus and believing these words. Reference is to the totality of one's life in response to what he or she hears, and thus, believes.

### **B. Jesus gives eternal life.**

John 10:27-29 is also used as a proof text to teach that God will not allow the saved to be taken from Him. Jesus said, "*And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish: neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.*" In view of this text (Jn 10:28), Paul said that "*God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it*" (1 Co 10:13). Therefore, James writes, "*Resist the devil and he will flee from you*" (Js 4:7). Satan has no power to voluntarily grab Jesus' sheep. He "*walks about like a roaring lion, seek-*

ing whom he may devour” (1 Pt 5:8). But in reference to those in the church he is not devouring at will. He devours only those who do that about which James warned. *“But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is fullgrown, brings forth death”* (Js 1:14,15). When we allow ourselves to be drawn away from Jesus by the unlawful fulfillment of our own lust, then Satan, as a roaring lion, will viciously devour us. For this reason, the New Testament warns about following after the unlawful fulfillment of the lusts of the flesh (See Rm 8:12-15; Gl 5:16-18). If one remains faithful to Jesus, Satan cannot steal him away from Jesus. Satan’s influence is only over those who allow themselves to be deceived. And if one allows himself to be deceived, then he will be held accountable for his willingness to believe a lie (2 Th 2:10-12).

### C. Christians shall never die.

John 11:25,26 is used to teach that those who believe in Jesus can never die. Jesus promised, *“And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die”* (Jn 11:26). The words “live” and “believe” in this text are both **present progressive tense**. In other words, as long as one **continues to live and believe in Jesus** he will never die. A similar emphatic statement is made in John 3:36. *“... he who does not believe the Son shall not see life ....”* The word “believe” in this text is also present progressive tense. In

other words, the one who continues to **disbelieve** shall not see life. Therefore, if the one who “believes” in John 11:26 cannot fall from grace so as to be lost, then the one who “does not believe” in John 3:36 cannot obey Jesus so as to be saved. But this cannot be true. If we were locked into a supposedly God-ordained destiny, the free-moral agency of man concerning his own destiny could not exist. But men are not unconditionally doomed to damnation. Neither are the saved unconditionally secured in salvation.

The statements of John 11:25,26 and John 3:36 must be understood in the Greek present tense in which they were originally written. Understanding this helps to interpret the conditional nature of the passages. “Never die” is conditioned upon one continuing in a state of belief. If one discontinues believing, that is, he ceased obedience, then he will fall from the cleansing blood of Jesus that is provided by the grace of God.

### D. The promised Holy Spirit was a seal.

Ephesians 1:13,14 is used to support the teaching that the Spirit so seals one that he or she cannot be “unsealed.” This passage is used to support the claim that the Christian is so sealed by the Holy Spirit that he cannot fall from the grace of God. Notice carefully what Paul wrote. *“In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy*

*Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of your inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory* (Ep 1:13,14)

First consider that the Ephesians had “heard the word of truth.” They **believed** the gospel of salvation. It was the Holy Spirit who inspired the word to be preached to them. It was the inspired words of the Holy Spirit that they believed. They believed in Jesus, but it was the Holy Spirit who revealed the message to them by the preaching of inspired men (See Ep 3:3-5). When they obeyed the gospel, Paul had imparted the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit to them by the laying on of his hands (See At 19:1-7). The “seal,” therefore, refers to their **divine ownership. They were sons of God because of their obedience to the message they had heard.** The added evidence of that ownership was the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit that had been imparted to them by Paul. All of this was God’s “guarantee” of their salvation in heaven which was yet to come.

If the Ephesians discontinued their belief, their inheritance would be forsaken. They must hold fast the word as Paul warned the Corinthians. *“Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel ... which also you received ... by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you”* (1 Co 15:1,2).

Christians are sealed in a manner that **certifies** them to be sons of God. They are certified to be the sons of God by their obedience to the gospel. In order to remain certified, they must continue to walk in the light (1 Jn 1:7).

Consider this point in a negative manner. Suppose individuals are “sealed” in condemnation. If the Ephesians, however, “broke the seal” by obedience to the truth in order to be saved, then they can “break the seal” in disobedience to be lost. One must remember that the “seal” is not a guarantee of salvation. Any Christian can so sin as to break the seal, and thus, be lost. Paul warned, *“Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall”* (1 Co 10:12).

The result of continued sin in the life of the saved will be eternal separation from God. In view of this, the New Testament contains many warnings to Christians concerning the dangers of sin. Jesus warned of sin in the parables by picturing real life situations of people not being prepared. However, several Christians in the first century refused to take heed to these warnings. The New Testament states that these saved people fell away from the truth. They gave up their certification of sonship. They forsook their eternal inheritance. Because of the possibility of apostasy, therefore, Christians should give the more earnest heed to make their calling and election sure (2 Pt 1:10).

One must also look on the positive side of the New Testament’s teaching concerning apostasy. That positive side is that Christians can know they are saved. John wrote, *“We know that we are of God ...”* (1 Jn 5:19). Christians must be assured and confident about their salvation. They should be confident of

such, not because of their own works, but because of the grace of God.

All sin and fall short of the glory of God. There is none righteous, Paul proclaimed (Rm 3:10). And since there is none who can keep law perfectly in order to be saved, we must trust in the grace of God. Paul affirmed that by works of law we cannot be justified (Rm 3:20; Gl 2:16). By good deeds we cannot atone for sin. Since men cannot so work as to be justified, or do good works to atone for sin, then all of us must depend on the grace of God for salvation. However, this grace is conditional. It is conditioned upon our faith. We must maintain an

obedient faith in response to the grace of God in our lives.

Through faith one remains a part of the group that God predestined would go into eternity. God will save this group by grace. Those of this group will be called out of this world because God elected the church before the world was created. And since the members of the church have conformed to the image of the Son, they are destined to heaven. This is the mystery God has revealed in these times. Therefore, we must thank God for his great gift of grace. Because of His grace, the church is destined for heaven.