

1. Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timotheus *our* brother, 2. To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse: Grace *be* unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is a very characteristic opening for the letters that Paul wrote to various assemblies, and one of three that he wrote with Timothy (2 Corinthians and Philippians are the other two).

In the majority of his letters, Paul included a reference to his apostleship and, when he did so, he was sure to show that his apostolic role was of God's determination (his letter to Titus is the only exception). *Apostle (apostolos)* speaks of someone who has been assigned a particular task and who goes out under the assignor's authority – a delegate or messenger.¹ Paul clarifies two things regarding his apostolic role: 1) he is an Apostle of *Jesus Christ*, which defines his message and his assigned task, and 2) he is an Apostle *by the will of God*, which tells us that he has been sent by God.

To the Corinthians, Paul wrote of the many who had seen the Lord Jesus after His resurrection and concludes with this: "he was seen of ... all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me [He appeared to me] also, as of one born out of due time [untimely birth]. For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet [worthy] to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church [*ekklesia*] of God" (1 Corinthians 15:7-9).² Paul, in his earlier days, was a zealous Pharisee who inflicted havoc upon the assemblies of God's people, and he did so under the authority of the Jewish religious leadership. When Jesus struck Paul with a flash of light from heaven, he fell before the Lord; his first question was, "Who art thou, Lord," and his second was: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:5-6). As a Pharisee, Paul would have been convinced that his mission of persecution was God's work, for he was, thereby, zealously protecting their Jewish religious heritage – what God had given to Moses (along with many traditions that had been added along the way). However, the instant that he understood that he was dealing with Jesus, Paul was willing to change his mission in life; perhaps he had believed the story that had been started by the religious Jews that Jesus' body had been stolen – this proved beyond a doubt that He was alive! In an instant, Paul's life changed course – little wonder that he could boldly declare: "But what things were gain to me, those I counted [regard as] loss for [on account of] Christ" (Philippians 3:7).³ Jesus said, "If any *man* come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26); Paul understood that unless Jesus was Lord over every aspect of his life, then He was not Lord at all – everything that could be accounted to his advantage (his solid Jewish heritage, training, and exemplary record as a Pharisee) he considered to be loss in order to allow Christ to hold that dominant place in his life. Paul consistently identified himself as an Apostle by (*dia*) the will of God (1 Corinthians 1:1, 2 Corinthians 1:1, Ephesians 1:1, 2 Timothy 1:1; in 1 Timothy 1:1 it is according to the commandment of God), that he was specifically directed to the Gentiles (Romans

¹ Strong's Online: <https://onlinebible.net/>.

² Friberg Lexicon; Stephanus 1550 NT: *Bibleworks* 8.

³ Friberg Lexicon.

11:13, in keeping with the commission that Jesus gave through Ananias [Acts 9:15]), and that his message was “Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2).⁴

It seems that Paul began most of his letters in this manner in order to establish in the minds of his readers that he did not write to them out of his own authority, but that he had been



commissioned by the Lord Jesus to take His Word to the world. Apostles were held in high regard among the assemblies, for they were men who had been with the Lord Jesus and had heard His words firsthand; however, because of this, there were also many who touted themselves as being Apostles when they were not – the elder of the assembly in Ephesus (although not in a good place spiritually) is commended for testing those who falsely claimed this title (Revelation 2:2). To the Galatians, Paul explained that the Gospel message that he proclaimed was not something

that he had received of men, but that it came as a revelation directly from the Lord Jesus (Galatians 1:12). To the Corinthians, he spoke of knowing someone who had been caught up to *paradise, and heard unspeakable* (inexpressible) *words* (2 Corinthians 12:4);⁵ there is little doubt that Paul was speaking of his own experience when the Lord opened the truth of the New Covenant Gospel to him. Paul wrote with the authority of God, and his subject was the Lord Jesus Christ.

For this letter, Paul is joined by *brother Timotheus* (there is nothing in the Greek to support the word *our*).⁶ We are first introduced to Timothy during the early part of Paul’s second missionary journey – when he and Silas came *to Derbe and Lystra* (Acts 16:1); inasmuch as these two cities were about 60 miles apart (about a three-day trip), clearly Timothy was a native of Lystra.⁷ Lystra would have been one of Paul’s most unforgettable places: during his earlier missionary trip with Barnabas, it was here that he brought healing to a man who had never walked, which led the people to believe that the gods had come to them and they set out to offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:8-13). With great difficulty, they were able to calm the people only to have antagonistic Jews arrive from Antioch and Iconium (where, because of envy, these Jews had previously persecuted them – Acts 13:50-51; 14:4-6). These new arrivals stirred the people and created a mob that stoned Paul (which was contrary to both Jewish and Roman law), who, although left for dead, revived (Acts 14:14-20). It is in this place that we become acquainted with Timothy, the son of a believing Jewess and a Greek father, who had a good reputation (*well reported of*) among those who were of the Christian assemblies in Lystra and Iconium (a city about 20 miles away).⁸

⁴ Strong’s Online.

⁵ Friberg Lexicon.

⁶ Stephanus 1550 NT.

⁷ <https://medium.com/acts-study-guide/iconium-lystra-derbe-back-caa71713145c>

⁸ Friberg Lexicon; <https://medium.com/acts-study-guide/iconium-lystra-derbe-back-caa71713145c>

Timothy's genuine (*unfeigned* – without hypocrisy) faith in the Lord became a comfort to Paul in his old age – a faith that he had seen in Timothy's grandmother and mother (2 Timothy 1:5).⁹

Here, Paul calls Timothy *brother*, a member of the family of God. Elsewhere he calls him his fellow laborer (*workfellow* – Romans 16:21), my beloved child (1 Corinthians 4:17), *our brother*, a servant (*minister* – *diakonos*, deacon) of God, a *fellowlabourer* in the Gospel of Christ (1 Thessalonians 3:2), a genuine child of the faith (my *own son in the faith* – 1 Timothy 1:2), and a beloved child (my *dearly beloved son* – 2 Timothy 1:2).¹⁰ Paul was heavily invested (spiritually) in the life of Timothy, and, toward the end of his life, he reminded him to rekindle (*to stir up*) the gift of God that was in him (2 Timothy 1:6).¹¹ It was Paul's desire that Timothy should finish his life well, even as Paul was assured that he had earnestly contended in the good conflict, had completed the race, and had kept (by both observing and guarding) the faith (2 Timothy 4:7).¹² To the Philippians, Timothy is described as being the only one who was of the same mind (*likeminded*) as Paul and, therefore, would extend genuine care and concern for their spiritual welfare (Philippians 2:20). Interestingly, although Paul mentored Timothy in such a significant way, other than being acknowledged as a co-author in some of Paul's letters, we hear nothing directly from him. Tradition identifies Timothy as being the first bishop of Ephesus and as being martyred in 97 AD.¹³

The specified audience of Paul's letter is the *saints* (holy – set apart unto God) and *faithful brethren in Christ* who are in Colosse.¹⁴ *Faithful brethren* speaks of those who are walking in faithfulness to the Lord, which reveals their spiritual character and their commitment to the Lord Jesus – they were not only believing but were also being obedient to His commands (John 14:23-24). These were brethren who were *in Christ* – that place that holds no condemnation from God: “*There is therefore now no condemnation [punishment] to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk [are living (present tense, active voice)] not after [according to] the flesh, but after [according to] the Spirit*” (Romans 8:1).¹⁵ Jesus said that “he that shall endure [*hupomeno* – to remain faithful through trials] unto the end [our death or the Lord's return], the same [a Greek demonstrative pronoun that specifically identifies the faithful overcomer as to one who] shall [will – future tense] be saved” (Matthew 24:13).¹⁶ This is a letter written for those who are *in Christ*, and in whom the Spirit of God is dwelling (Romans 8:9); *Colossians* is intended for those who are committed to following the Lord – in other words, those who do not hold such a relationship with the Lord may have difficulty understanding everything that will follow.

Grace, which speaks of a pronounced blessing, or a wish for favor to fall on the recipient, was frequently used in the opening greetings and closing farewells of Paul's letters (this letter is no exception: 4:18).¹⁷ *Peace*, following the manner of the Hebrew *shalom*, carries the thought of

⁹ Friberg Lexicon.

¹⁰ Friberg Lexicon; Stephanus 1550 NT.

¹¹ Friberg Lexicon.

¹² Friberg Lexicon; Liddell-Scott Lexicon, *Bibleworks 8*.

¹³ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Timothy>

¹⁴ Strong's Online.

¹⁵ Strong's Online; Gingrich Lexicon, *Bibleworks 8*.

¹⁶ Strong's Online.

¹⁷ Friberg Lexicon.

health and overall wellbeing.¹⁸ These were common greetings that were used at this time; however, Paul's greeting is that the favor and wellbeing of *God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ* may be theirs. Truly, as *saints* and *faithful brethren* who are *in Christ*, God's favor and wellbeing is theirs for they do not abide under His condemnation – what could be better than that?

3. We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,

The object of Paul and Timothy's continual *thanks* and *praying* is the brethren in Colossae; both words are in the present tense, thereby expressing a continuous action.¹⁹ To the uninitiated, it might appear that Paul is offering thanks to two divine personages: to *God*, as well as to *the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ*; however, we know from Scripture that these two (God and the Father of Jesus) are the same (John 10:30). Robert Young caught the essence of this by having this read as: "We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ..." – this brings it together without any ambiguity and is in keeping with the Greek.²⁰

Paul never revealed whether he was among the Pharisees who heard Jesus teach, but he very well could have heard the Lord from time-to-time. On one occasion, Jesus healed a man who had been a cripple for thirty-eight years and told him to take the mat upon which he had been lying and go home – this took place on the Sabbath (John 5:1-9). The religious Jews confronted the man for carrying his mat on the Sabbath even while ignoring the fact that this cripple was healed and walking. When they learned that it was Jesus Who had healed him, they *sought to slay* Him because He had performed this act of kindness on the Sabbath (John 5:16). Jesus' response to the religious leaders was: "My Father worketh hitherto [until now is working], and I work [am working]" (John 5:17). "Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he ... said ... that God was his [own] Father, making himself equal [in essence] with God" (John 5:18).²¹ To the Colossians, Paul takes this opportunity to present Jesus Christ as being truly God; this was a huge stumbling block to the Jews who had rejected the Lord as their Messiah, but it is essential to understanding the Gospel of the New Covenant, which centers itself exclusively on the sacrifice that Jesus made for the sins of mankind.

Paul and Timothy are thankful for the faithful Colossians and are *praying* for them – they are speaking to the Lord about them. These are the faithful – those who are walking in victory with the Lord – and Paul and Timothy are keeping them in their prayers. We will shortly come to what it is that they are petitioning the Lord to provide for these *saints* and *faithful brethren*.

4. Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints,

¹⁸ Friberg Lexicon.

¹⁹ Strong's Online.

²⁰ Stephanus 1550 NT.

²¹ Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon.

Having heard (since we heard) of the faith that was embraced by those in Colossae, Paul and Timothy made them the subject of thanksgiving and prayer.²² This was not hearsay or rumor that came to Paul; we will see that this report came from Epaphras (v.8) whom Paul calls a faithful minister (v.7) and who was part of the assembly in Colossae (4:12). Although it is clear that Paul learned of the saints in Colossae from Epaphras, what is also evident is that this letter was being sent to them by Tychicus and Onesimus (4:7-9). From Paul's short letter to Philemon, we learn that Epaphras was his fellow-prisoner in Rome (Philemon 23); since these two letters (Colossians and Philemon) were written at about the same time,²³ in all likelihood Epaphras was already a prisoner when Paul wrote to the faithful in Colossae – perhaps it was because Epaphras was taken by Rome that Paul heard of God's work in Colossae.

Epaphras detailed the faith of those within the assembly at Colossae to Paul, and of the *love* that they had unto *all the saints*. Once again, we can see the active relationship between faith and works; the living faith of the Colossian saints found expression in their love for their brethren in the faith. *Love* is from the Greek *agape*, which identifies a love that flows as an act of the will rather than from the emotions – it is a choice, not a response to positive circumstances.²⁴

James wrote that faith that does not have an expression in daily living is dead (James 2:17); for the Colossians, the evidence of their faith came in the form of their love for all saints – those who are *in Christ*. John explained how we can show our love for our fellow children of God: “By this we know [are knowing] that we love [are loving (*agapao*, the verb form of *agape*)] the children of God, when we love [are loving (*agapao*)] God, and keep [*tereo* – should be keeping (carefully attending to); present tense and subjunctive mood] his commandments” (1 John 5:2).²⁵ Our expressed love for God's children (*saints*) comes through loving God and living in obedience to His commands (the subjunctive mood of *keep* reminds us that this is a choice that we must make). Jesus said, “If you love [may be loving (*agapao*); subjunctive mood] me, keep [*tereo* – attend carefully to; imperative mood, a command] my commandments” (John 14:15).²⁶ What is undeniably evident is that we **must** live in obedience to the Lord or else we do not love Him (Jesus' words), we do not love the children of God, and we will not be numbered among the *overcomers* who will inherit all things in glory (Revelation 21:7). Clearly, the Colossians were living in obedience to the Lord, otherwise their *love* unto *all the saints* would not have been noteworthy.

For a moment, let's consider the word *saints* – it is translated from the Greek *hagios*, meaning holy, consecrated, or set apart.²⁷ Its ultimate expression is found in God (Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8), yet God has extended to His own a *holy* calling (2 Timothy 1:9) and the *new man* (that we are to put on) has been created by God in *righteousness* and *true holiness* [holiness of the truth] (Ephesians 4:24).²⁸ The *saints* of the Lord are simply those who have been made *holy* in Christ – they have been set apart unto God. Jesus clarified for us that there are only two options in life: “He

²² Stephanus 1550 NT.

²³ <https://www.biblestudytools.com/resources/guide-to-bible-study/order-books-new-testament.html>

²⁴ Strong's Online.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Stephanus 1550 NT.

that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad” (Matthew 12:30) – there is no fence to straddle (it cannot be one foot in the world and the other in Jesus’ kingdom). When we place our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, we, like the Thessalonians, turn *to God from idols* (1 Thessalonians 1:9); our repentance before God requires that we turn away from our former life to being focused entirely on the Lord (Hebrews 12:2) – unless there is an evident *from-to*, repentance has not taken place. Likewise, unless we remain committed to living faithfully for the Lord, we will be among those who have turned away *from the truth ... unto fables* [fiction, myths, i.e., lies] (2 Timothy 4:4).²⁹ Either in salvation in Christ or in apostasy from Him, there is always a *from-to* that takes place – anyone who downplays the importance of our faithfulness to the Lord has not read the Scriptures or is a tool of Satan to sow seeds of doubt into the hearts of God’s children – or both! If we are *in Christ*, then we are living in faithfulness to Him and are *saints*.

⁵ For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel;

The *faith* and the *love* of the Colossians is because of (*for*) the *hope* that is being reserved (*laid up*) for them in heaven. This reveals their upward look; “... let us run with patience [*through faithful endurance may we be running; hupomone* – faithfulness in the face of opposition; *run* is in the present tense and subjunctive mood (it is a present action but is only a possibility not a certainty – we have a choice)] the race that is set before us, Looking [*aphorao* – to give attention to one thing to the exclusion of everything else] unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* [the] faith ...” (Hebrews 12:1b-2a).³⁰ If our focus is on Jesus, Who is now in heaven preparing a place for His own, then there is a greater likelihood that the decisions that we make in this life will bear the influence of that upward look. If we desire to be with the Lord one day, then we must live in faithfulness to Him (Matthew 24:13), which means that we must walk according to the guidance of the Spirit of God (Romans 8:1), and that will only take place as we learn to think and evaluate Biblically – there is a need to live with eternity in view.

Jesus declared, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). He is the **only** way to the eternal glory of the Father, and that, of necessity, makes the way a *narrow* one – one that *few* will find (Matthew 7:14); *narrow* is a verb in the perfect tense (a completed past action with ongoing result) – the way to life has always been restricted (*narrow*).³¹ The salvation that God made available to mankind has always been through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the One Whom the Lord declared to Satan would come and deal him a death blow: “... it [*He*, this is a masculine pronoun in the Hebrew] shall bruise thy head [inflict a death blow], and thou shalt bruise his heel [inflict suffering]” (Genesis 3:15b).³² From the time of Adam and Eve, there has only been one way to a restored relationship with Jehovah, and that is by faith in the Promised One – the Lord Jesus Christ! Not only is Jesus the only way, but He is also *the*

²⁹ Friberg Lexicon.

³⁰ Strong’s Online; Friberg Lexicon; Stephanus 1550 NT.

³¹ Strong’s Online; https://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/verbs1.htm.

³² Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew Lexicon, *Bibleworks 8*.

truth – not *a truth*, but *the truth*. An older dictionary carries a concept of truth in its first definition, which seems to be missing from most modern dictionaries: *truth* is in “exact accordance with that which is, or has been, or shall be.”³³ In other words, *truth* is objective (not subjective) – something that is largely rejected today. Captured in this is the character of the Lord Who is “the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever” (Hebrews 13:8), and the Almighty God, “which is, and which was, and which is to come” (Revelation 1:8) – *the truth* is tied to the eternal consistency of God. Paul warned that during the time of the Antichrist, deception would be rampant because people would refuse to accept *the truth* so that they might be saved (2 Thessalonians 2:10); we need to understand that unless there is a love for *the Truth*, salvation is not possible – Jesus said that He is the only way to the Father! *Life* (eternal life) can only be found in the Lord (the *Truth*) and by faithfully walking the narrow *Way*: “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

What is the *hope* that is ours if we faithfully abide in Christ? “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear [it has not yet been revealed] what we shall be: but we know [understand; perfect tense – happens only once with continued effects] that, when he shall appear [should become visible], we shall be like him [like Him we will be]; for we shall see him as he is. And every man [one] that hath [having] this [a demonstrative pronoun that specifically points to verse 2] hope [expectation] in him purifieth [is actively purifying from all defilement] himself, even as he [the Lord] is pure” (1 John 3:2-3).³⁴ The *hope* that we have is that we will one day bear the humanity that Christ bore after His resurrection; “... as we have borne the image [likeness] of the earthy [being made of dust; a descendent of Adam], we shall also bear the image of the heavenly” (1 Corinthians 15:49) – we will see the Lord Jesus and we will be like Him: “... in the twinkling of an eye ... we shall be changed: for it behoveth ... this mortal to put on immortality ...” (1 Corinthians 15:52-53). The glorified humanity that Christ wore after His resurrection is what we will have; we do not become like the eternal God – that is Mormon doctrine: “As man now is, God once was; as God now is, man may become.”³⁵ Rather, our body of flesh (*mortal*) will be raised by the Lord Jesus in a glorified form (*immortality*) so that we may dwell in the presence of God for all of eternity. However, this *hope* rests solely in the Lord Jesus Christ, for it is only as we live in submission to Him that the glories of the new heaven and earth will be ours: “And ye shall be hated of all *men* for my name’s sake [on account of My name]: but he that endureth [*hupomeno* – to remain steadfast through trials; active voice – *he* must *endure*] to the end [*he* – (missing from the KJV but present in the Greek) a demonstrative pronoun that places an emphasis upon the one who remains faithful] shall be saved [passive voice – **God** will *save* the faithful one]” (Matthew 10:22).³⁶ The *hope* that is in Christ is only ours if we remain obedient to Him; “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth [is doing (present tense)] the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).³⁷

³³ <http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/truth>

³⁴ Friberg Lexicon.

³⁵ Stephen Covey, *The Divine Center*, p. 81.

³⁶ Strong’s Online; Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon.

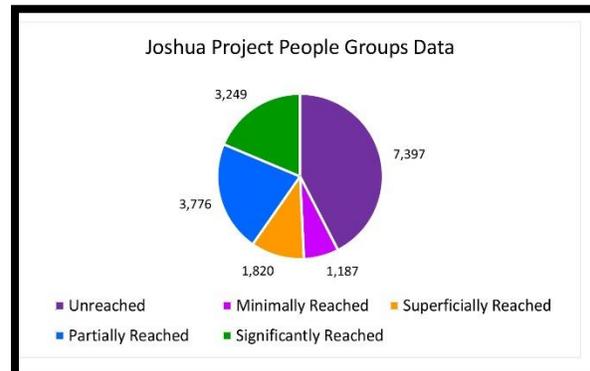
³⁷ Strong’s Online.

All that we have just considered of the *hope* that can be ours, Paul says that this came to the Colossians when they heard of *the truth of the Gospel*. Clearly, Epaphras provided Paul with a thorough description of the Gospel message that was brought to Colossae (v. 8), and Paul recognized that their *hope* was built upon a firm foundation.

6. Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth:

Which refers back to the Gospel of truth; the message of the Gospel is now present (*is come*) among (*unto*) you, as also in the whole (*all*) world (*kosmos* – all people).³⁸ The Colossians had the true Gospel, and Paul adds that this same message has gone out into the whole world. He repeats this a little later: “... the gospel ... which was preached [*kerusso* – made known extensively, proclaimed openly] to every creature which is under heaven ...” (1:23).³⁹ To the Romans, Paul made a similar statement: “So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound [the *word of God* for *hearing*] went into all the earth [*ge* – land], and their words unto the ends of the world [*oikoumene* – the inhabited world]” (Romans 10:17-18).⁴⁰ As incredible as it may sound to us (almost 2,000 years later), it seems that Paul was convinced that the Word of God had been proclaimed throughout all of the inhabited earth. Jesus said, “And this gospel of the kingdom shall [*will* – future tense] be preached in all the world [*oikoumene*] for a witness unto all nations [peoples]; and then shall [*will*] the end come” (Matthew 24:14).⁴¹ Perhaps this explains why the Thessalonians were so easily convinced that the day of Christ (the Lord’s return) had already come (2 Thessalonians 2:2), but Paul goes on to assure them that many things must take place before that day.

Today we have absorbed the religious statistic that there are still over 7,000 *unreached* people groups in the world, yet John tells us that there will be an innumerable multitude from *all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues* standing before the throne of God (Revelation 7:9).⁴² It seems that our 21st century, exalted view of ourselves does not allow for God to accomplish His purposes before our modern times – modern missions have taken a task on that God has already accomplished. Granted, there are areas of the world where the Gospel message has been **lost**, but that is vastly different from calling them *unreached*. The same could be said of most missions, churches, and the so-called *reached* areas of the world today – for the most part, they have lost the truth of the Gospel



³⁸ Friberg Lexicon.

³⁹ Strong’s Online; Friberg Lexicon.

⁴⁰ Strong’s Online.

⁴¹ Strong’s Online; Gingrich Lexicon.

⁴² <https://joshuaproject.net/>

and are content in their spiritual deception; it matters not if their label is Evangelical, Roman Catholic, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, or that which describes any of the other over 4,000 defined religions of the world.⁴³ Our responsibility is to embrace the truth of the Scriptures and live in obedience to the commands of the Lord; it is through compromise that the Gospel message has been lost, and we must commit to living faithfully for the Lord despite the cost – that is the *hupomeno* (*endure*) of Matthew 24:13!

The next phrase, *and bringeth forth fruit*, has been separated in our KJV, by a semi-colon, from what came before – a rather significant break. Nevertheless, it only makes sense for this phrase to refer to the Gospel that has gone out into all of the world, for it is followed by *as ... also in you*. The thought is this: the Gospel is bringing forth fruit (present tense) within the people of the world, even as it is among the Colossians. The truth of the Gospel was resulting in spiritual growth within the people of the world – everywhere (including among the Colossians) the Seed of the Gospel was falling upon ready hearts and minds, and it was bearing spiritual fruit to the glory of God. Let's look briefly at two illustrations that Jesus used that relate to this matter of bearing *fruit*.

The first is His parable of the soils, which provides us with an overview of how the Gospel message (the Seed) will be received. The **wayside**: “Those by the way side [alongside of the way] are they that hear [are hearing]; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved [*lest, having believed, they might be saved*]” (Luke 8:12).⁴⁴ The *waysiders* hear the Word but give no heed to it – it goes in one ear and the devil takes it out of the other. The **rocky**: “They on the rock *are they*, which, when they hear [may be hearing], receive [are receiving] the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe [are believing], and in time of temptation [testing, trial] fall away [become apostate]” (Luke 8:13).⁴⁵ These hear the Word and receive it with great delight and are among those who *are believing*; however, when their *believing* is tested, they are falling away – they withdraw from the Word and become *apostate* (*aphistemi*).⁴⁶ The **thorny**: “And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth [proceed in the Word that they have heard], and are [they are being] choked with cares and riches and pleasures of *this* life, and bring no fruit to perfection [do not come to maturity]” (Luke 8:14).⁴⁷ There is no indication of the Word being received with joy (like those on the rocky soil), but we are told that they begin to walk in accordance with it (*go forth*). It seems that they endeavored to live under the influence of both the Spirit and the flesh (*cares, riches, pleasures*) – there is an unwillingness to *reckon* themselves to be *dead indeed unto sin* (Romans 6:11). What they discovered is that this is an impossible situation; indeed, Jesus declared it to be impossible: “Ye cannot [are not able to] serve [to perform the duties of a slave; obey] God and mammon [wealth, riches]” (Matthew 6:24),⁴⁸ and “He that is not with me is against me ...” (Matthew 12:30). The First Commandment is this: *thou shalt have no other gods before me* (Exodus 20:3); yet *cares* (*merimna* – carrying the concept of distraction;⁴⁹ internal), *riches* and

⁴³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_religions_and_spiritual_traditions

⁴⁴ Friberg Lexicon; Stephanus 1550 NT.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Strong's Online.

⁴⁷ Friberg Lexicon.

⁴⁸ Friberg Lexicon; some cite *Mammon* as a Syrian god of riches.

⁴⁹ Friberg Lexicon.

pleasures (external), unless they are specifically set aside, will all demand a great deal of our time, which can easily place them ahead of the Lord in our list of priorities. Peter counsels us to cast our every care upon the Lord (1 Peter 5:7), which attends to the one item in this list that is a natural part of being human; as for wealth and pleasures, if we desire to remain without condemnation before God, then we must not live in accordance with the dictates of the flesh (Romans 8:1). *Riches* and *pleasures* are what we are to actively *reckon* (consider) as being *dead* through Jesus Christ our Lord so that we might then live in newness of life unto God (Romans 6:11). In this case, the Seed began to grow in a life where the priorities of the flesh rapidly became increasingly dominant until the Word was *choked* (*sumpnigo*), which means to strangle completely – it is little wonder that there was no fruit.⁵⁰ The **good** soil: “But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep [hold fast] *it*, and bring forth fruit with patience [*hupomone* – endurance in the face of trials]” (Luke 8:15).⁵¹ What is noteworthy is the fact that the growth that produced *fruit* did so despite difficulties; the *rocky* and *thorny* plants died when faced with the trials of life – there was no commitment to endure.

On another occasion, Jesus used the illustration of a vine and branches in order to explain the relationship that He has with those who are His (those who are in Him by faith and remain faithful). “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not [is not bearing] fruit he taketh away [is removing]: and every *branch* that beareth fruit, he purgeth [prunes] it, that it may bring forth more fruit ... I am the vine, ye *are* the branches ...” (John 15:1-2, 5).⁵² In each case, the Greek word *phero*, translated as *bear* and *bring forth*, is in the active voice, which tells us that it is the responsibility of the *branch* to produce *fruit*. Jesus goes on to explain exactly how the *branch* can bear fruit: “Abide [*meno* – remain; a command!] in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot [absolute negative] bear fruit of itself, except [unless] it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide [should remain (subjunctive mood – it is our choice)] in me” (John 15:4).⁵³ The foundation for bearing fruit is bound up in our willingness to *remain in the Lord*; by faith we enter into a relationship with the Lord, and it is clear that the expression of our faith (bearing fruit) comes only through our obedience to [our remaining in] Him – “If ye love [may be loving – it is a choice that we must continually be making; it is not a one-time choice] me, keep [*tereo* – attend carefully to; a command] my commandments” (John 14:15).⁵⁴ If we take heed to live in obedience to the Lord’s commands, then we are abiding in Him and, consequently, He in us; however, our failure to be obedient to the Lord places our relationship with Him in jeopardy, for He will not remain in the one who lives in a state of disobedience (which is evidence of our lack of love for Him and that we do not believe His Word). Jesus then explains that a branch can only bear fruit if it is vitally connected to the vine; by itself, a branch will wither and die – its life comes through its connection to the vine. The application is quite simple: “I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth [*phero*] much fruit [*karpos* – singular]: for without me ye can do nothing [a Greek double negative *ou* and *oudeis*, emphasizing our inability]. If a man abide [should abide (subjunctive mood, which identifies this

⁵⁰ Strong’s Dictionary, *ESword*.

⁵¹ Friberg Lexicon.

⁵² Strong’s Online.

⁵³ *Ibid*.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*.

as a possibility but not a certainty – we have a choice!)] not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them [*they are gathering them* (Matthew 13:39)], and cast [casting] *them* into the fire, and they are [it is] burned [burning – present tense]” (John 15:5-6).⁵⁵ The fruit that we may bear for the Lord will be a direct result of abiding in Him, and that is the choice that we face on a continual basis.

What is the *fruit* that we will bear when we remain faithfully in Him? Our faithfulness to the Lord means that we have donned the *new* [*kainos* – *kahee-nos*'] *man* who has been created by God in *righteousness and true holiness* (Ephesians 4:24); “Therefore if any man *be* in Christ [wearing the *new man*], *he is* a new [*kainos*] creature: old things are passed away [gone]; behold, all things are become new [*kainos*]” (2 Corinthians 5:17).⁵⁶ “... the fruit [*karpos* – singular] of the Spirit is love [*agape*], joy, peace, longsuffering [endurance under trials], gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance [self-control]...” (Galatians 5:22-23).⁵⁷ The *fruit of the Spirit* is a singular fruit; it's not that we can lay claim to having *peace* but not *goodness* or *temperance*; if we are *in Christ*, then we must show forth the complete spectrum of the fruit of the Spirit of God Who is abiding within us (Romans 8:9) – herein is our sanctification: yielding to the Spirit of God continuously.

The Word of Truth (the Gospel) was in Colossae even as it was in the inhabited world, and, in both cases, it was resulting in *fruit-bearers* (*bringeth forth fruit* – *karpophoreo*)⁵⁸ – those who show forth the working of the Spirit of God in their lives. This fruit was evident in the Colossians from the *day* when they *heard* and *knew* the *grace of God in truth*; *knew* is from the Greek word *epiginosko*, which means to know thoroughly. As the message of the Gospel came to the Colossians, it was brought with an in-depth teaching of what it means to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ; what they heard led them to a thorough understanding of what was involved. Jesus warned that there is a price to pay for following Him (Luke 14:26-27) and that there could be no claim of love for Him without obedience (John 14:15); it is evident that this formed an integral part of the Message that the Colossians heard. These matters are virtually unheard of today; today's message begins more along this line: *God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life*;⁵⁹ what remains unstated is that God's plan for you is that He must be the highest priority in your life (Exodus 20:3), and that this can only be expressed through a new life of continuous obedience to His commands. Today, the essence of the Gospel message has been lost; it has become a matter of praying a prescribed prayer to ask Jesus into your heart, and then it is simply affirmed that heaven is now your eternal destiny. This is nothing more than a deception from Satan whose greatest achievement is found in the teaching of eternal security – what could be more satisfying to him than to have people believe that they are Christians and destined for heaven when all the while they continue to walk the broad road to eternal hell.

The Colossians came to hold a thorough understanding of the Lord Jesus Christ Who is the expression of God's grace toward us. Before Adam ever sinned, it had been ordained in the heart

⁵⁵ Strong's Online; Stephanus 1550 NT.

⁵⁶ Strong's Online; Friberg Lexicon.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Strong's Online.

⁵⁹ This is the opening statement in the *Four Spiritual Laws*, a tract made popular by Campus Crusade for Life.

of God that the *Word* would become flesh in order to bear the sins of mankind so that, from the moment that sin entered into the world, there was already a Way available for everyone to enjoy restored fellowship with their Creator (Ephesians 1:3-4; John 1:14; 14:6). That Way was a promise given to the OT saints, and became a fulfilled promise and historical fact after the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. We must be alert to messages that are passed-off as being the Gospel but are not, and then avoid them (Galatians 1:8), we must study the Scriptures carefully so that we have a full understanding of what it means to be a follower of the Lord Jesus and then walk with Him carefully (2 Timothy 2:15), and we must willingly pay the price for living in obedience to Him (Mark 13:13; Luke 14:33). Our salvation is yet future – we must live in faithfulness while on this earth because it is only in this life that we can determine our eternal destiny (Hebrews 9:27).

7. As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ; 8. Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.

Identified here is the one through whom the Colossians heard the Gospel: *Epaphras*. We know virtually nothing about this man, but there are a few things that we can glean from the three times that he is mentioned in Paul's letters.

In this text, he is called a *beloved (dear) fellow-slave (fellowservant – sundoulos)* along with Paul and Timothy.⁶⁰ To the Corinthians Paul wrote: "What? know ye not that ... ye are not your own? For ye are bought [purchased] with [for] a price [the *price* paid was the life of the Lord Jesus]: therefore [you must (*glorify* is in the imperative mood – a command)] glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).⁶¹ The Lord Jesus paid the price to purchase mankind out of sin and the devil's control. Death is the just compensation for sin (Romans 6:23), but Jesus, Who was entirely sinless, died on the cross thereby breaking Satan's power (Hebrews 2:14). If we are persuaded (believe) that Jesus died in payment for the sins of mankind, and if we by faith claim His death as being for our sins, then we are numbered among those who have been *bought* by God – we are His! Paul identifies himself as being a *slave (doulos)* of the Lord Jesus (Romans 1:1); the word speaks of ownership, of yielded rights, and of obedience without question. However, we become His *slaves* by choice (by faith), and it is clear from Scripture that we remain *His* slaves by faith – also our choice (Hebrews 3:12). Paul explained this choice to the Romans: "Know ye not [ye have not known], that to whom ye yield [are presenting] yourselves servants [*doulos* – slaves] to obey [unto obedience], his servants ye are [ye are slaves] to whom ye obey [are obeying]; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" (Romans 6:16).⁶² It is far less a matter of whether you consider yourself to be a slave than it is to know whose slave you are. If we live according to the flesh then we are *slaves* to sin and death, but if we are living according to the guidance of the Spirit of God, then we are *slaves* to righteousness that leads to life (Romans 8:1). Jesus stated, "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad" (Matthew 12:30); are we with Jesus (obeying Him unto righteousness) or are we against Him (living in obedience to sin, which leads to death)?

⁶⁰ Strong's Online.

⁶¹ Stephanus 1550 NT; Gingrich Lexicon.

⁶² Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon.

This is the choice that we face on a daily basis. If we are in Christ, then we must live accordingly – our spiritual life must be expressed through our obedience to the Lord (John 14:15; James 2:17). Paul identifies Epaphras as being a *fellow-slave* – someone who was living in willing obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ and who gloried in submitting to the Lord.

Let's take a moment to look at these comments by Jesus: "Ye are my friends [*philos*], if ye do [may be doing] whatsoever [whatever] I command [am commanding] you. Henceforth I call you not servants [*I am no longer calling you slaves*]; for [because] the servant knoweth not [*the slave does not know*] what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you" (John 15:14-15).⁶³ In essence, Jesus says that if we are living as His faithful slaves (doing what He has commanded), **then** He will call us His friends; nevertheless, it is evident from Jesus' words that our disobedience will remove us from being called His friends. Christ died in order to make the payment for the sins of mankind – He paid the price to purchase us out of sin and death, and, therefore, we are His and He is our Master. We are slaves who are dearly loved by our Owner and we, in turn, are to love Him with all of our being (Matthew 22:37). It is because we are loved that we will experience discipline from Him in order to enhance our spiritual growth and strength (Hebrews 12:6, 11; John 15:2). Within our modern Evangelical community, Jesus is considered to be a Friend and Buddy, yet we do not find this thought anywhere in the Scriptures. The fact that Jesus calls us His friends (if we are faithful to Him) is because He has revealed to us His purpose on earth and the Father's will (something that a master typically did not do for his slaves); nevertheless, He is **still** our Lord and Master! "Wherefore [*we is not in the Greek*] receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us [may we] have grace, whereby [through which] we may serve God acceptably [well-pleasing to God] **with reverence and godly fear**: For our God *is* a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:28-29).⁶⁴ Even though the Lord might look upon us as His friends, there is never a shift from our need to show reverence and fear to Him as wise slaves – "The fear [reverence] of the LORD *is* the beginning [the first step] of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do [are doing] *his commandments*: his praise endureth for ever" (Psalm 111:10).⁶⁵ The Lord Jesus, as our Master, is also our Intercessor (Romans 8:34), our Advocate (1 John 2:1) and our Mediator with the Father (1 Timothy 2:5), and the Spirit of God is called the Comforter (*parakletos* – one called alongside to help [John 14:16]) – yet it is only as we remain faithful (obedient) to the commands of God that we will continue on in such a position of spiritual blessing.

To the Galatians, Paul explained that individually they were "no more a servant (*doulos*), but a son" and, therefore, an "heir of God **through Christ**" (Galatians 4:7). However, even this does not change anything regarding our need to remain absolutely faithful to the Lord. By faith in Christ, we enter into the salvation that God has prepared – we become His purchased possession; we are bought through faith in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus and this forms the foundation of our relationship with God. Even though we also become His children (through faith) and heirs through what Christ has accomplished for us, that does not change the fact that we can only be His children and heirs because **He bought us out of sin**. Despite all of this, if we should turn away

⁶³ Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ BDB.

from Him, then we who were once *sanctified* (made holy) through the blood of Christ are now without hope, for we have abandoned the **only** Sacrifice for sin (Hebrews 10:26-29). We must use this to temper any thought of pride because of being God's heirs; we bring nothing into our relationship with Him except a commitment to live in faithful obedience to His commandments – to which He will enable us, if we are willing.

“Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath **blessed us with all spiritual blessings** [every spiritual blessing] in heavenly *places in Christ*: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that **we should be** [*should* suggests possibility, but the Greek does not include such uncertainty; this is literally: *we being*)] **holy and without blame before him** in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself,..." (Ephesians 1:3-5a).⁶⁶ God the Father has provided us with every spiritual blessing in Christ so that we, in turn, being holy before Him are adopted through Christ; we have received everything necessary in order to live acceptably before a holy God, yet the choice to do so remains with us (Romans 8:4). The Scriptures are clear as to what we are to do, but the Lord will not force His will upon us; Jesus said, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth [present tense, active voice – **we must always be doing**] the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).⁶⁷

Returning to Epaphras, a little later in this same letter Paul refers to him as *a servant of Christ* (Colossians 4:12). *Servant* is, once again, translated from the Greek word *doulos*; it was this relationship that he had with the Lord Jesus that made him a *sundoulos* (a fellow-slave) with Paul and Timothy. We read of Epaphras one other time in Philemon 23, where he is called a *fellow prisoner* with Paul. His appropriate relationship with the Lord (as slave to Master) remained strong, and it led to his imprisonment by Rome. The key to living a life that follows the example laid out by Paul and Epaphras is to live in obedience to the commands of the Lord Jesus Christ, for that is the expression of our love for Him (John 14:15) and we are commanded to love Him (*agape* – choose to love Him) with all of our being (Matthew 22:37). What are His commands? Exodus 20:3-17 provides us with ten that God wrote upon stone tablets for Moses, but under the New Covenant He now writes them upon our hearts and minds (Hebrews 10:16). We are without excuse; the Spirit of God comes into the life of the faithful for the purpose of guiding them into all truth (John 16:13) – God's Laws are written within us and the Spirit of God is right there to be our Helper so that we may, indeed, live in a manner that is pleasing to the Lord. Truly, God “hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing in ... Christ” (Ephesians 1:3);⁶⁸ therefore, our obligation as those who have been purchased out of sin by God, is to live in *righteousness and true holiness* (Ephesians 4:24).

Further to what we have just learned about Epaphras, Paul reveals that he has been a *faithful minister of Christ* unto the Colossians. *Minister* is from the Greek *diakonos* – one who carries out the commands of another, a servant.⁶⁹ The Lord's *slave*, Epaphras, became His faithful *servant* to the Colossians – he brought them the message of the Gospel without compromise. Above all, his

⁶⁶ Friberg Lexicon; Stephanus 1550 NT.

⁶⁷ Strong's Online.

⁶⁸ Stephanus 1550 NT.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

allegiance was to the Lord – he did not soften the truth of the Gospel in order to make it more pleasing and acceptable to his hearers. To the Corinthians, in defense of his ministry among them, Paul declared that he did not come “handling the word of God deceitfully” (2 Corinthians 4:2) or, more plainly, he did not corrupt, distort, or falsify the Word of God in order to gain an audience.⁷⁰ Paul was well aware of the error that was being propagated even during his time, and he recognized that none of this was a part of what Epaphras taught the Colossians – he was *faithful*, worthy of trust, in his handling of the Gospel.⁷¹ What a contrast to our day when the radio and television preachers present a form of the Gospel that reflects their individual bias – there is no clear teaching of the Word; they preach what is expedient and will not offend their support base – they handle the Word of God *deceitfully*. “For the time will come [it is now here] when they will not endure [put up with] sound doctrine [correct teaching]; but after their own lusts [according to their own desires] shall they heap [accumulate] to themselves teachers, having itching ears [itch with respect to hearing; they crave to hear only what they want]; And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth [literally: *and indeed from the truth the hearing they will turn away*], and shall be turned unto fables [myths, stories – lies!]” (2 Timothy 4:3-4).⁷²

Epaphras made clear (*declared*) to Paul and Timothy the Godly love of the Colossian assembly. It was because of his account of what the Lord was doing in Colossae that Paul could express his gratitude for them (v. 3). Paul was not directly involved in establishing the work in Colossae but rejoiced in their response to the Gospel message; the fact that he is writing to a group of people whom he had not met (except through Epaphras’ accounts) reveals his heart for the work of God among the Gentiles. His commission by God was to bear His name “before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15), and although his heart was burdened for his own people (Romans 9:3), he accepted his role as the Lord’s Apostle unto the Gentiles (Romans 11:13).

⁹ For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;

What follows is on account of (*for*) *this* – *this* being a demonstrative pronoun that refers specifically to what has come before: Paul’s thankfulness for the fruit of the Gospel that is evident among them. It is because of their receptivity to the truth of God that Paul assures them, again, of his continual prayers for them and then expresses what he is asking (*desire*) the Lord to accomplish in them. As he does so, he slides right into teaching the Colossians; he used a similar approach in his letter to the Philippians (1:9ff). With a sincere desire to know the truth of God, let’s open our hearts to what the Lord has for us through this letter to a people who brought joy to the Apostle Paul.

Paul’s petition to the Lord is that they (and we) may be *filled* with a precise and correct *knowledge* (*epignosis*) of the *will* of God.⁷³ *Filled*, as it is used here, is in the subjunctive mood,

⁷⁰ Strong’s Online; Friberg Lexicon.

⁷¹ Strong’s Online.

⁷² Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon.

⁷³ Strong’s Online.

which means that this remains a possibility, not a certainty – its occurrence includes a measure of doubt.⁷⁴ The doubt comes because we must make the choice to permit the Lord to guide us by His Spirit – He will **never** overrun our will! Nevertheless, this is what Paul is petitioning the Lord for them; his longing is that they might be filled completely with an accurate and full knowledge of what God desires for them.⁷⁵ *Filled* is also in the passive voice, which simply means that this is something that must be done for us – we cannot do it for ourselves; only God can fill us with a thorough understanding of His will, and He will only do so if we have a desire for it.

Paul’s request is that God would fill them with the full knowledge of *His will*. The age-old question is: what is God’s will? Jesus said, “And this is the will [purpose] of him that sent me, that every one which seeth [seeing (present tense)] the Son, and believeth [*everyone who is believing*] (present tense, and active voice – *everyone* is doing the *believing*)] on him, may have [might be having; present tense, and subjunctive mood, this reality is dependent upon the present tense *believing*] everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:40).⁷⁶ Jesus said that it is God’s will to grant everlasting life to everyone who is seeing and believing on His Son, and then to raise him up to glory; however, the contingency is that the *everlasting life* is only for the one who is **presently** seeing and believing – it must be a continuous action. Modern Evangelicals have turned this on its head by claiming that anyone who has believed at any time (prayed a prayer for salvation) has eternal life, whether that belief is presently active is deemed to be irrelevant. No doubt, it is God’s desire to save everyone: “[God] Who will [is ready to] have all men to be saved [passive voice – this is God’s work], and to come [active voice – this is our choice] unto the knowledge [*epignosis*, a precise and correct knowledge] of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4).⁷⁷ God is ready to save, but He will not override our will in order to save us; we must choose to believe in the Lord Jesus’ payment for our sins, and then we must retain that active belief. Jesus also said, “And ye shall be hated of all *men* for my name’s sake: but he that shall endure [*hupomeno* – to remain faithful to the Lord through trials] unto the end [simply: our death or the Lord’s return], the same [it is this one who] shall [will – future tense] be saved” (Mark 13:13).⁷⁸ It is simply not sufficient to have believed (past tense) – that will not result in salvation; Jesus said that we must remain faithful (*endure*) to Him unto the *end* and then salvation will come.

Earlier we considered the parable of the soils and recognized that there are those who hear the Word of God and begin their journey on the narrow pathway to life, but the pressures and pleasures of living are permitted to choke the life out of them (Luke 8:14). From this we understand that salvation is not obtained simply by praying for it; there is the matter of faithfully enduring in the face of the trials and temptations of life. James wrote: “Even so faith [belief], if it hath not [should not have; *hath* is in the subjunctive mood, indicating a possibility but not a certainty] works, is dead, being alone [by itself]” (James 2:17).⁷⁹ Therefore, unless our faith in the Lord Jesus results in works of obedience to Him, our faith is dead – a living faith demands continual obedience. Jesus

⁷⁴ Strong’s Online.

⁷⁵ Friberg Lexicon.

⁷⁶ Friberg Lexicon; Strong’s Online.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Friberg Lexicon.

said, “If ye love [should be loving; a present, active faith] me, keep [a command to attend carefully to] my commandments” (John 14:15).⁸⁰ What is God’s will? – believing **and** obeying!

Now Paul adds qualifiers to this *knowledge* of God’s will: it is his prayer that they will receive it *in all wisdom and spiritual understanding*. *Wisdom (sophia)* is applied knowledge that results in correct living.⁸¹ *Understanding (sunesis)* is literally a bringing together, and describes a synthesis of what we hear/see with what we know; *spiritual understanding* must, therefore, describe the ability to place what we hear/see within the context of Biblical instruction.⁸² Having a firm and broad knowledge of the Scriptures is prerequisite to making this *understanding* a reality; unless we are well versed in the Word of God, we will not be able to effectively evaluate what we hear/see. Let’s be clear; in any such evaluation, it is the Word of God that must be the Standard against which we weight all else; too frequently, God’s Word is molded to fit what we have determined to be a necessity. This even happens among those who would consider themselves to be Biblical Christians, those who would argue that the Word of God must be upheld at all costs. Let’s consider an example so that we can see how this works.

David Cloud, of Way of Life Literature, is just such a man – he takes great pride in referring to himself as a *fundamental Baptist*, yet it is clear that even as he professes “biblical dogmatism



David Cloud

and militancy for the truth and separation from error,” he also gives his *dogma* priority over the Bible.⁸³ He is a confirmed dispensationalist⁸⁴ and, as such, holds to a “clear distinction between Israel and the Church,”⁸⁵ which is commonly characteristic of dispensationalists. Consider his explanation of the need for a dispensational perspective: “The exact number of dispensations or ages is not what is important ... The important point is that there **HAVE** been various periods during which God has worked out His purposes, and during these periods God has related to men in different ways and **has required different things of him** (bold emphasis added).”⁸⁶ Even while he makes this clarification, he also states that “salvation has always been by grace through faith in God’s Word” – therefore, in essence he is saying that in the matter of the salvation of his soul, God has **always** required man to have **faith** in Him.⁸⁷ Therefore, Cloud contends **both** that God has *required different things* of man and that *faith in the Lord* is all that has ever been required to obtain salvation. Rather than constructing

⁸⁰ Strong’s Online.

⁸¹ Friberg Lexicon.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ https://www.wayoflife.org/database/is_fundamentalism_merely_five_fundamentals.html

⁸⁴ *Dispensation*, by definition, refers to the management of a household (Liddell-Scott Lexicon), and, within Biblical interpretation, is used to identify how God has *managed* mankind (worked “out His purposes”) during a particular time period as His revelation was unfolded (https://www.wayoflife.org/database/study_bible_dispensationally.html).

⁸⁵ https://www.wayoflife.org/database/study_bible_dispensationally.html

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

a theology of barriers (dispensations), perhaps a careful consideration of the context of Scripture would be more fitting since the salvation that God offers to mankind has never changed – it comes by believing (expressed faith) in the Lord, whether in His promise (OT) or in His Promised One Who came. Having fallen into the pit of dispensational theology, Cloud is in a conundrum that he doesn't even recognize: his means of Biblical interpretation lies within the subjectively constructed barriers of dispensationalism and, consequently, he is unable to arrive at a correct understanding of many passages of Scripture because his approach is, first of all, dispensational. For example, he is emphatic about the separation that exists between *the Church* and *Israel*, yet what is so obviously taught by Paul in Ephesians 2 is that Jesus, by means of His shed blood and death, brought the Jews and the Gentiles together through the common, age-old necessity of *faith* – what made the Jews distinct (the Mosaic Law of ordinances) has been removed! Jesus explained, “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold [*aule*, a reference to the Gentiles who were outside of the fold of Israel at this time]: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be **one** fold [*poimne*, **flock**, not *fold*], and one shepherd” (John 10:16).⁸⁸ It is evident that Jesus is the Shepherd of one flock (His *ekklesia*) and not two (Israel and the Church); Christ brought the two together into *one body* (Ephesians 2:16), and Cloud (through his dispensational theology) seeks to keep them apart. What Cloud so ably demonstrates is a lack of the *spiritual understanding* that Paul prayed would fill the Colossian Christians – an *understanding* that permits the Word of God to speak without man-made restrictions.

It is important that we learn to lean on the Word of God for our guidance in life and remain wary of theologies that man has very carefully assembled. We must be Bereans: “These [of Berea] were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind [eagerness], and searched [examined, studied] the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11);⁸⁹ the Bereans took the message that Paul brought to them and studied it in light of the Scriptures. Too frequently the Berean process is reversed – we take the teachings of men and evaluate Scripture in light of their doctrines; God's Word must always be the Measuring Stick.

10. That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;

Paul begins to explain how being filled with that precise and correct knowledge of what God desires will express itself in the Colossians.

The first phrase is this: *you living in a manner worthy (axios) of the Lord unto everything that pleases (Him)*.⁹⁰ To Timothy, Paul explained that it is God “Who hath saved [saves] us, and called [calls] us with [to] an holy calling [*klesis*] ... in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 1:9); this makes it very clear that the calling that we have *in Christ Jesus* is *holy*, i.e., we are consecrated to God.⁹¹ We are also told that we are to “walk worthy [*axios*] of the vocation [*klesis*, calling] wherewith ye are

⁸⁸ Strong's Online.

⁸⁹ Friberg Lexicon.

⁹⁰ Stephanus 1550 NT; Strong's Online.

⁹¹ Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon.

called” (Ephesians 4:1).⁹² With the clarification of other Scriptures, we can see that Paul has tucked into this first phrase an expression of his desire for the Colossians to live in holiness before the Lord. “But God be thanked, that ye were the servants [*doulos*, slaves] of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants [*doulos*] of righteousness ... as ye have yielded [offered] your members servants [*doulos*] to uncleanness ... even so now yield [offer] your members servants [*doulos*] to righteousness **unto holiness** ... But now being made free from sin, and become servants [*douloo*, enslaved] to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness [*hagiasmos*, sanctification], and the end everlasting life” (Romans 6:17-22).⁹³ The holiness that will be *pleasing* to the Lord comes through adequately understanding the slave-Master relationship that we have with the Lord Jesus; we must have no will but to do the will of God – slaves do not question the instructions of their Master, they simply obey. It is as we become enslaved to the righteousness of God that the fruit of *holiness* will be expressed through our living, and the end of such living is eternal life with the Lord – the only qualifier to this is that we **must remain faithful** to Him (Matthew 24:13). Paul’s prayer was that the Colossians (and we) might live in holiness before the Lord – living that is *worthy of the Lord*.

Paul now provides us with two evidences that we are walking as we should: 1) in every good work bearing fruit, and 2) increasing in the knowledge of God.⁹⁴ Let’s take a moment to consider these indications of a successful spiritual walk.

We have already considered two examples from Jesus’ teaching as they related to bearing fruit; a quick review may be helpful. In the parable of the soils, it was the *good* soil that permitted the Seed to grow and to *bring forth fruit* (Luke 8:15); what we noted earlier was that the fruit came forth with *patience* – *hupomone*, an endurance even in the face of trials; in other words, the fruit grew despite conflicts and not because of an absence of difficulties.⁹⁵ It takes a committed faithfulness to the Seed (the Word of God) in order for a life to produce fruit. In the illustration of the vine and branches, we learned that a branch cannot bear any fruit unless it is attached to the vine, for it is from the vine that the branch receives its nourishment and ability to bear fruit (John 15:4). However, we must not miss the fact that for every branch that is bearing fruit, the Husbandman (the Lord) will prune (*purgeth*) it so that it might bear even more fruit (John 15:2) – included as a part of bearing spiritual fruit is the Lord’s promise to prune in order to increase our fruit in Him. “My son, despise [reject] not the chastening [discipline] of the LORD; neither be weary of [loathe or abhor] his correction [reproof; rebuke]: For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth [rebukes, *prunes*]; even as a father the son *in whom* he delighteth” (Proverbs 3:11-12).⁹⁶ Solomon recognized that the *pruning* that the Lord does in us is for our good and comes from His love for us. “Now no chastening [discipline; training] for the present seemeth to be joyous [of delight], but grievous [of distress or sorrow]: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit

⁹² Strong’s Online.

⁹³ Strong’s Online; Friberg Lexicon.

⁹⁴ Stephanus 1550 NT.

⁹⁵ Strong’s Online.

⁹⁶ BDB; <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/reproof>.

of righteousness unto them [the trainees] which are exercised thereby” (Hebrews 12:11).⁹⁷ The writer of Hebrews draws upon Solomon’s proverb and concludes that if we are willing to be trained by the Lord, then the *exercise* will produce within us the *fruit of righteousness*. The *pruning* of the Lord will be so that we might truly *reckon* ourselves to be *dead indeed unto sin* and *alive unto God* (Romans 6:11). *Sin* is anything that is not in keeping with what God desires of us – it can be either an action (a violation of a known command of God) or an omission (a failure to obey a known command of God).

However, beyond that, *sin* is also an inherited nature that is a part of each one of us, and it reflects the submission to Satan that came with Adam’s sin. “Knowing this [referring back to our identification with Christ in His death and resurrection (v. 5)], that our old man is crucified [together] with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed [*katargeo*: may be rendered of no effect; passive voice – it is God’s work in us; subjunctive mood – it is our choice], that henceforth we should not serve [no longer be enslaved to] sin” (Romans 6:6).⁹⁸ It is this *old man* that we are to *put off* by reckoning it as having been crucified with Christ, thereby permitting God to remove the influence of our inherited sin nature (*body of sin*), and we are to *be renewed* (being renewed; present tense, passive voice – this is God’s ongoing work in us) in our minds (Ephesians 4:22-23).⁹⁹ In practical terms, how does this happen? Paul identified the Roman Christians as having *obeyed from the heart* the teaching of the Gospel; the *heart* is considered to be the center of the inner life of man – in other words, they were completely committed to being obedient to the Lord, not only outwardly but also inwardly (Romans 6:17).¹⁰⁰ As a result of their careful attention to being completely obedient to the Lord’s Word (*then*), *ye became the servants of* [*douloo* – became enslaved to] *righteousness* (Romans 6:18).¹⁰¹ Their obedience to the commands of the Lord was their entrance into a life of righteousness: the *old man* was accounted to be dead with Christ, the *new man* of righteousness and holiness was donned, and that pesky, inherited *body of sin* was thereby rendered ineffective. This is what it means to be *in Christ* and to live under the guidance of the Spirit of God (Romans 8:1). Jesus concisely stated that if we choose to be loving Him, then we **must** be carefully obedient to His commands (John 14:15),¹⁰² and to these *overcomers* (those who are obedient to Him) He has promised that they will inherit all things in the new heaven and earth (Revelation 21:7). Obedience to the Lord is where faith in Him finds its expression in our lives. James stated “... faith, if it hath not [should not be having (present tense, subjunctive mood, which indicates a possibility only – we have a choice)] works, is dead, being alone [by itself]” (James 2:17).¹⁰³

⁹⁷ Friberg Lexicon; Stephanus 1550 NT.

⁹⁸ Friberg Lexicon; Liddell-Scott Lexicon.

⁹⁹ Strong’s Online.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

Perhaps we have heard of the *five solas* of the Reformation,¹⁰⁴ which were frequently used by the Reformers to identify their areas of distinction from the Roman Catholic teachings; one of these is *sola fide*, or faith alone, by which it is meant that “we are saved through faith alone in Jesus Christ.”¹⁰⁵ This was in reaction to the Catholic teaching that salvation could only be obtained through the Roman Catholic Church (by the authority of the pope through the bishops and priests), which had created its own list of requirements in order for someone to be considered worthy of salvation. However, setting aside the error of the Catholic Church, we must not be among those who have a tendency to stop at *faith alone* and proclaim that works have no bearing on our salvation through faith in Christ. James unequivocally states that faith is dead unless it is expressed through *works* – from this it is evident that even faith in the Lord Jesus is dead unless it is accompanied by works. The Scriptures are clear that we are not saved by works: “... a man is not justified [declared righteous] by the works of the law,¹⁰⁶ but by the faith of Jesus Christ ...” (Galatians 2:16).¹⁰⁷ However, we are still faced with James’ declaration that faith without works is dead, and Jesus’ equally explicit statement that if we love Him (an indication of our faith in Him) then we **must** live in obedience to His commands (John 14:15). What we cannot dismiss is that it is very important that we understand the Scriptures correctly at this point, for even though we are not saved by works, it is also clear that works are an important part of the salvation that Christ has purchased for us. When we believe that Jesus died to pay the price for the sins of mankind and we also believe that He did that for us, that forms the foundation of faith in Him, and at that moment we have stepped into a relationship with the Lord based solely upon faith in what He has done for us, but **that is not the end**. Faith is but the first step into Christ that must be followed by a lifetime of faithfully attending to His commands; faith leads and faithful works (obedience) **must** follow – this is the expression of Jesus’ words: “If ye love me [the subjunctive mood identifies this as a choice for us], keep my commandments [the imperative mood means that this is not optional if we have chosen to *love* Him]” (John 14:15).¹⁰⁸ While speaking with His disciples about events that would identify the end times, Jesus said, “And ye shall be hated of all *men* for my name’s sake [on account of My name]: but he that shall endure [*hupomeno* – to remain faithful through trials; the one who perseveres] unto the end, the same [it is this faithful one who] shall [will] be saved [future tense]” (Mark 13:13).¹⁰⁹ Our salvation comes by faith alone (*sola fide*), but unless it finds expression through works of obedience to the Lord, it will remain alone and dead (James 2:17). Herein is the difficulty with the Evangelical doctrine of eternal security: it rests upon *sola fide*, but not upon the Scriptures; the Scriptures bear the inspiration of the Lord (2 Timothy 3:16), the *sola fide* of the Reformers was either inaccurately formed or it has become

¹⁰⁴ *Five Solas*: 1) *Sola Scriptura* – Scripture alone; the Bible is the sole authority, 2) *Sola Fide*, 3) *Sola Gratia* – grace alone; we are saved by God’s grace alone, 4) *Solus Christus* – Christ alone; Jesus alone is our Lord, Savior and King, 5) *Soli Deo Gloria* – to the glory of God alone; we live to glorify God alone.

¹⁰⁵ <https://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/the-five-solas-of-the-protestant-reformation.html>

¹⁰⁶ The argument that Paul is using is that even the Jews were not saved by keeping the Law of Moses, which came from the Lord; Isaiah wrote of those who were keeping the Mosaic Law with great flare, yet they did not experience the Lord’s cleansing or forgiveness (Isaiah 1:10-15).

¹⁰⁷ Strong’s Online.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Strong’s Online; Friberg Lexicon.

skewed with the passing of time – either way, we must base our hope for salvation upon the Word of God alone and not upon an old Latin phrase.

Paul’s prayer for the Colossians was that, through their full knowledge of the Lord Jesus, they would live in holiness before the Lord (*worthy*) – a holiness expressed through obedience (*fruitful in every good work*) to the Lord’s instructions and an ever increasing knowledge of God. It is interesting to note that being *fruitful* is in the active voice (this is an action for which we are responsible), but *increasing* our knowledge of God is in the passive voice (this is something that we must permit God to do for us and in us). Both are in the present tense, which means that they are to be continually taking place – our obedience is to be continuous, and, as we remain faithful, the Lord will continually increase our understanding of Who He is. Although it might not seem evident from our English translation of this text, pivotal to receiving a growing knowledge of God is our obedience to Him. We know from Jesus’ words that unless we are obedient to His commandments, we do not love Him (John 14:15), and unless we continually remain faithful to Him, we will not be saved (Matthew 24:13); therefore, it is our obedience (our faithfulness) that expresses our love for the Lord and ensures that He will save us one day. *Faith* opens the relationship with the Lord Jesus and *faithfulness* maintains that relationship. “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief [faithlessness], in departing [becoming apostate] from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12).¹¹⁰ “Wherefore let him that thinketh [is of the opinion; present tense] he standeth [stands firmly; perfect tense, a completed act never to be repeated] take heed [beware] lest he fall [should fall away; subjunctive mood (a possibility but not a certainty)]” (1 Corinthians 10:12).¹¹¹ Using the illustration of the disobedient children of Israel who were freshly removed from Egypt, Paul warns the Corinthians not to presume that their future with the Lord has been secured. The one who is assuming that his salvation is safe (eternal security) needs to heed this warning for it is very possible for him to fall away.

11. Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness;

Paul is in the midst of elaborating on what it will mean for the Colossians to be living in holiness (*worthy*) unto the Lord; he’s already noted that their fruitfulness and increasing knowledge of God are two results of this *worthy walk*, and now he adds being *strengthened*. *Might* is from the Greek word *dunamis* (from which we get the word *dynamite*): in all power (*might*) being strengthened (*dunamoo*) according to the supremacy (*power*) of His glory.¹¹² *Strengthen* is in the passive voice, which means that God does the strengthening – this strengthening from God will come in all *might* (*power*). Paul identifies that it will be in keeping with the *power* of God’s *glory* (*doxa*); *power* in this instance is from the Greek *kratos*, which speaks of possessing sufficient might so as to be supreme.¹¹³ We might readily recognize God’s sovereignty as being the Creator of all things: “in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Genesis 1:1), and “the

¹¹⁰ Friberg Lexicon.

¹¹¹ Strong’s Online; Friberg Lexicon.

¹¹² Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon.

¹¹³ Friberg Lexicon.

heavens declare the glory of God ...” (Psalm 19:1). However, what is the *power* or supremacy of God’s glory?

As Moses communed with Jehovah in the newly constructed tabernacle, he expressed this desire: “I beseech thee, shew me thy glory” (Exodus 33:18). The Lord’s response was this: “Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live ... Behold, *there is* a place [a standing place] by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock [a rocky wall, cliff]: And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift [crevice] of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts [His departing glory]: but my face shall not be seen” (Exodus 33:20-23). The glory of God is something that sinful mankind cannot look upon and live; the purity of God’s holiness produces a radiance that is deadly to the sinner. When John heard the voice as of a trumpet speaking with him, he turned and beheld the Lord Jesus whose appearance was as the sun shining in its brilliance: “And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead” (Revelation 1:17). Jesus, being, first of all, eternal God, bears the full radiance (*brightness*) of God’s glory and, even though He took on a body of flesh, He is still the exact representation of the very essence (*express image*) of God (Hebrews 1:3).¹¹⁴ The writer of Hebrews applies the words of the Psalmist to the Lord Jesus: “Thou madest him [*only*; not translated but included in the Greek] a little lower than the angels [as the *Son of God*, Jesus took on a body of flesh]; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands” (Hebrews 2:7; cp. Psalm 8:5).¹¹⁵ Jesus fulfilled the plan for salvation as devised before the world was made, and was raised to the right of God the Father in heaven – “far above all ... not only in this world, but also in that which is to come” (Ephesians 1:20-21). The *glory and honour* that is bestowed upon the Lord is beyond that of all creation (even the new heaven and earth) and created beings; His glory is, in fact, what He set aside to take on the mission to purchase salvation for all of mankind (John 17:5). *Glory* is a part of the essence of God (Jesus veiled His glory while on earth), and so Paul desires the Colossians (and us) to be *strengthened* so that they (we) might reflect the majesty of God’s glory in a darkened world. “Let your light so shine [you must shine your light; imperative mood] before men, that they may see [subjunctive mood; a possibility but not a certainty] your good works, and [may (subjunctive mood)] glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16); in order for our *light* to bring *glory* to God, we must be living faithfully for Him, for only then will our light be a reflection of His glory.¹¹⁶ Paul’s prayer is that the Colossians might be made strong (it is God’s work) in accordance with the supremacy of His glory – it speaks of a life of faithfulness that reflects the *glory* of God.

Even though the Lord told Moses that no man could see Him and live, when we come to the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and earth, the picture will be very different. This will be a place without any taint of sin and everyone there will be given a glorified body; it is here that *they* (the saints/slaves of the Lord) *shall see His face* (Revelation 22:4). What has changed? Certainly not the Lord (Malachi 3:6); we have changed from mortality to immortality – we will see the Lord and will become like Him (1 John 3:2). The body of sin that has clung to us all through life will then be forever removed as the final expression of the salvation that God has prepared for us in Christ.

¹¹⁴ Friberg Lexicon.

¹¹⁵ Stephanus 1550 NT.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

A lifetime of faithfulness to the Lord will, when we meet Him, open the doors to this final freedom from the body of sin; "... he that shall endure [*hupomeno* – to remain faithful through trials] unto the end [our death or the Lord's return], the same shall [it is this faithful one who will] be saved" (Matthew 24:13).¹¹⁷

The strengthening that Paul desires for the Colossians (and us) will extend, first of all, to *all patience*, or perseverance (*hupomone*).¹¹⁸ *Perseverance*, in keeping with the Greek word *hupomone*, bears the connotation that the course that we are taking includes conflict, and that there must be a firm commitment to not be dissuaded from the determined goal. Jesus said that it is the one who *endures to the end* who will be saved (Matthew 24:13), and the strength that Paul envisions from the Lord will provide the steadfastness needed to remain true to Him and to His Word unto the end. *Longsuffering* (*makrothumia*), the second achievement of the Lord's strengthening, is, in many respects, very similar to *hupomone* – both involve endurance in the face of trials and difficulties. The difference between these two words is the object of the attitude of patience; *longsuffering* involves expressing patience toward people and *hupomone* toward things and/or circumstances.¹¹⁹ In this case, it is Paul's desire to see both (patience and longsuffering) become the experience of the Colossians (and us), and that these might be expressed with joy; not only is this all-encompassing perseverance to characterize how we live, but it is to be expressed in joyfulness – this is not a long-faced drudgery of hanging-in-there, but a joyous expression of the *longsuffering* that God extends to us.

We might consider this to be a tall order, yet we must not overlook the fact that all of this is a natural outflowing of the working of the Spirit of God within us when we live in a manner that is in keeping with the holiness of God, which is our calling (2 Timothy 1:9; cp. Leviticus 20:26). As we fill our minds with the true knowledge of God and remain willing to be guided by the Spirit of God Who is abiding within us, then we will experience *every spiritual blessing* that is ours in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). That is Paul's expressed desire for the Colossians, and that is God's desire for us.

12. Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light:

Paul now moves on to expressing *thanks* to God *the Father*, and he uses this as a teaching time of what God has done for us – he took advantage of every opportunity to either teach or review the many spiritual truths that are a part of the Gospel of God. Paul reiterates what he said in v. 2, and then moves on to outline some things that God has done for us.

First of all, God has *made us meet*. *Made meet*, which comes from the Greek word *hikanoo*, means that we have become sufficient or made to qualify for what follows; the active voice affirms that God has done this for us.¹²⁰ It is through the work of God in us that we qualify for our part

¹¹⁷ Strong's Online.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ <https://www.biblestudytools.com/encyclopedias/isbe/longsuffering.html>

¹²⁰ Friberg Lexicon; Strong's Online.

(*partakers*) in the allotment (*inheritance*) of the *saints in the light*. *Inheritance* comes from the Greek *kleros* (*klay'-ros*), which can refer to a lot that is cast or to something that has been assigned or allotted.¹²¹ It is through the idea of *allotment* that the link is made to *inheritance*, which is typically considered to be property that comes from someone who has passed away – the heir receives his inheritance.¹²² The inherited property is neither chosen nor purchased; in effect, it is a gift that has been assigned according to the terms of the will – i.e., it has been *allotted* to us.

What is the *inheritance of the saints in light*? *Saints*, as we have already seen, refers to those who have been made holy in the blood of Christ and whom God views as being righteous through the sacrifice that Jesus made; the word springs from the Greek *hagios*, or holy, and describes those who are faithfully **in Christ**.¹²³ As John struggled to describe the New Jerusalem for us, he included these words: “And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb *is* the light thereof” (Revelation 21:23); “And there shall in no wise enter into it any ... but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Revelation 21:27). This is a place of eternal **light** into which only those who are **in Christ** will enter – those whose names are in the Lamb’s Book of Life (*saints*). This place of eternal glory will be the *allotment* or the possession of the *saints*, and it is God the Father Who enables us to qualify for that eternal state. Let’s consider what it is that He has done for us.

It was before the universe was spoken into being that God formulated how He would provide a way of restoration for sinners – the people whom He had not yet created, and whom He knew would follow Satan into sin. We are told that the coming Antichrist will draw the worship of those “whose names are not [absolute] written [perfect tense – they are only written once; passive voice – God writes them down] in the book of life of the Lamb slain [perfect tense – done only once (Hebrews 9:11-12)] from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8);¹²⁴ before the worlds were spoken into existence, God had a plan in place for the saving of the souls of mankind – even though they had not yet been created. The plan that the eternal Word would become flesh to pay the price for sin was not devised after Adam sinned – it was there all along. The shedding of blood (beginning with the coats of skin as a covering for sin), as a means of restoring man’s relationship with the Lord through faith in His promise, was a temporary expression of that plan until the Fulfillment (the Lord Jesus Christ) came. “But God commendeth [*sunistao* – literally, **to place together** to prove a point; demonstrates] his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners [sinful], Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).¹²⁵ God is proving His love for us (mankind) in that 1) even while we were still helplessly sinful, 2) Christ provided the means for buying us out of sin – bringing our sinfulness and Christ’s sacrifice together is proof of God’s love for us. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth [is believing] in him should [might] not perish, but [might] have everlasting life” (John 3:16).¹²⁶ We must understand that God’s demonstration of His love does not ensure the salvation of every sinner – it simply

¹²¹ Friberg Lexicon; Strong’s Online.

¹²² <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/inheritance?s=ts>

¹²³ Strong’s Online.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

makes it possible for every sinner to have their sins removed (1 John 2:2); even those who are *believing* must guard their hearts lest they fall from faithfulness (*believing*) and *perish* (Hebrews 3:12).

As Jesus prepared His disciples for the time when He would no longer be with them, He told them this: “In my Father’s house are many mansions [*mone* – dwellings] ... I go [am going] to prepare a place for you. And if [when] I go and prepare a place for you, I will come [am coming] again, and [will] receive you unto myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also” (John 14:2-3).¹²⁷ This sounds very much like the New Jerusalem where Jesus is preparing dwellings for all who are His, with the purpose that we might be where He is; this will be a time when God *will dwell* with those who are His, and “they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, *and be* their God” (Revelation 21:3). Jesus then tells His disciples: “And whither [where] I go [am going] ye know [have known (*oida*, understood); perfect tense, this knowledge comes only once], and the way ye know [have known (*oida*); perfect tense]” (John 14:4).¹²⁸ One can almost hear Thomas’ immediate response: Lord, we don’t know (*oida*) where you’re going and how are we able to know (*oida*) the way? (John 14:5).¹²⁹ Jesus’ reply is so important: “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh [*no one is coming*] unto the Father, but by [through] me” (John 14:6).¹³⁰ Jesus is our Mediator with God (1 Timothy 2:5), and how perfectly He fits such a role, for He is eternal God (John 10:30) and He wore a body of flesh (Hebrews 2:14). “And he [Jesus] is the propitiation [the Atoning Sacrifice, the means of forgiveness] for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for *the sins of the whole world*” (1 John 2:2)¹³¹ – this is how God has worked so that we **might** qualify to have a part in His *allotment* for the *saints* in the new heaven and earth.

However, just as for Israel of old, God’s promises of what might be are dependent upon our response to Him.¹³² So, what is our part? God declared that “He that overcometh [is overcoming – present tense] shall inherit all things ...” (Revelation 21:7);¹³³ our part is to be that *overcomer* by remaining faithful to the Lord to the end. *Overcoming*, or gaining the victory, comes through remaining steadfast in the Lord despite the trials that will come our way; Jesus said, “He that shall endure [*hupomeno* – to remain faithful through trials] unto the end [our death or the Lord’s return], the same shall [this is the one who will] be saved” (Matthew 24:13).¹³⁴ God has done all that is necessary for us to be with Him *in light* for eternity; however, we must guard against letting our believing slip lest, having begun well, we are ultimately disqualified. Paul used the illustration of an athletic race to explain this matter: “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain” (1 Corinthians 9:24). The first part is obvious: in a foot race, everyone runs but only one person will get the prize; however, what follows is so

¹²⁷ Stephanus 1550 NT; Strong’s Online.

¹²⁸ Strong’s Online.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Friberg Lexicon.

¹³² Deuteronomy 28:1 identifies the condition that would determine whether Israel would receive the blessing of the Lord (Deuteronomy 28:2-14) or His curse (Deuteronomy 28:15-68).

¹³³ Strong’s Online.

¹³⁴ Friberg Lexicon; Strong’s Online.

important – literally: *in this way you must be running in order to win*.¹³⁵ Paul elaborated on this to Timothy: “And if a man also strive for masteries, *yet* is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully” (2 Timothy 2:5); for those who are competing, they will not receive the prize unless they compete *lawfully* – there are always conditions in a competition and, unless those conditions are met, the one competing will be disqualified and their chance to gain the prize will be lost. Paul did not place himself beyond this illustration but told the Corinthians that he disciplined himself lest, after having preached unto others, he should find himself to be disqualified (1 Corinthians 9:27). God has done everything so that we might qualify as an *overcomer*, yet we must live out our faith in Him according to His terms or we will be ineligible to receive His prize.

What are God’s terms? Jesus declared that the way to the Father is *narrow* (Matthew 7:14), and to His disciples He explained just how narrow: “I am the way, the truth, and the life: **no man cometh unto the Father, but by me**” (John 14:6). Therefore, we must not seek spiritual fellowship with, or instruction from, anyone who does not accept this narrow truth – everyone who is ecumenical rejects this truth by joining with those who deny this in practice (although not necessarily in creed); Paul carefully explained to the Corinthians (and us) the necessity of separating from everything that is not of God (2 Corinthians 6:14-17). Jesus expressed another condition for this *narrow* walk in this way: If you should be loving Me, then you must be obeying My commands (John 14:15).¹³⁶ We must accept Jesus as being the **only** way of salvation, we must choose to love Him, and then we must be obedient to Him in all things. Although these terms are not complicated, they are very easily compromised or rationalized away, which is what ecumenism does. Ecumenical Evangelicals may be very Biblically literate in some things, yet they choose to ignore God’s call to separate from anyone who holds to a doctrine that is even somewhat different from His Word (Romans 16:17) – focusing on all of the teachings that they have in common (in their ecumenical fellowship) serves to “justify” their violation of God’s command to separate (at the very least this focus permits them to ignore everything that would dampen their fellowship). However, Jesus made it very clear that it is only the one who remains faithful to Him who will be saved (Matthew 10:22; 24:13; Mark 13:13); our faithfulness must remain even through times of testing and great difficulty – faithfulness to the Lord leaves no place for compromise or self-justified transgression. Indeed, God has done everything necessary for us to qualify (*made us meet*) to be with Him in glory as His *saints*, yet we can forfeit it all by permitting an element of unfaithfulness to enter into our hearts – we **must run** according to the terms of the race. “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief [unfaithfulness], in departing from [becoming apostate from] the living God” (Hebrews 3:12).¹³⁷ We must take time to check to be sure that we are not hypocrites (professing a faith that we do not truly believe), and examine our faith in the light of Scripture to be sure that it is genuine and approved by God (2 Corinthians 13:5a). We must guard against seeking to broaden the narrow Way to life.

¹³⁵ Stephanus 1550 NT.

¹³⁶ Strong’s Online.

¹³⁷ Gingrich Lexicon.

13. Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son:

Here are two more things that God has done for us; the first – *delivered us from* and the second, *translated us into*, is the other side of the first. As we have already noted, we have been saved from being slaves to sin so that we might become slaves to His righteousness – slavery is not the issue, it is to whom or to what are we slaves? In like manner, the contrast here is between *darkness* and His *kingdom*.

Delivered is from the Greek word *rhuomai*, which in its passive voice (as it is here) means to draw to oneself and, thereby, to draw out of danger, or to rescue.¹³⁸ The danger from which God has rescued us is the authority (*power, exousia*) of darkness.¹³⁹ When Adam and Eve sinned, they stepped away from the light of God into the darkness of Satan and, as a result, **all of their children** have been (and will be) born under the authority of darkness.¹⁴⁰ To the Ephesians, Paul stated: “For ye were sometimes [formerly] darkness, but now *are ye* light in the Lord ...” (Ephesians 5:8).¹⁴¹ Paul understood this transformation very well; he was changed from a self-righteous Pharisee into an obedient slave of Jesus Christ, and his calling of God was “To open their [the Gentiles’] eyes, and to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power [*exousia*, authority] of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me [Jesus]” (Acts 26:18).¹⁴² When we place our faith in the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus for our salvation, He rescues us from the darkness by drawing us to Himself, the Light of the world (John 8:12).

Not only have we (the saints of God) been drawn out from under the authority of *darkness* (the kingdom of the devil), but we have been transferred (*translated*) into the kingdom of *the Son of His love (his dear Son)*.¹⁴³ As John began to write the Revelation, he identified himself as being our “brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ ...” (Revelation 1:9) – being *in the kingdom* of Jesus Christ was one thing that he had in common with those to whom he was writing. As Jesus stood before Pilate, He openly stated that His kingdom was not of this world – i.e., it was a spiritual kingdom (John 18:36), and it remains a spiritual kingdom even today. Even when the Lord establishes His millennial reign over the earth, His kingdom will still retain a large spiritual emphasis; the faithful followers of the Lord will rule with Him during His earthly reign, but more than that, we will be His priests interceding for Him with those who will be born during that one thousand years (Revelation 20:6). In this life, there are only two options as to where we can place our allegiance; Jesus expressed it this way: “He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad” (Matthew 12:30); Paul posed this rhetorical question to the Corinthians, thereby defining the two choices: “And what

¹³⁸ Strong’s Online; Liddell-Scott Lexicon.

¹³⁹ Strong’s Online.

¹⁴⁰ Jesus was not born of Adam and Eve; Mary was His earthly mother but His Father was the Spirit of God – He was born God and man, the perfect Mediator to break the power of Satan as promised (Luke 1:35; 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 2:14; Genesis 3:15).

¹⁴¹ Strong’s Online.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Gingrich Lexicon; Stephanus 1550 NT.

concord [agreement] hath Christ with Belial [meaning worthless or wicked; a name for Satan]?” (2 Corinthians 6:15).¹⁴⁴ The Pharisees of Jesus’ day were *not with Him* (they opposed Him because they longed for freedom from Rome and not freedom from their sins), and Jesus told them that they were of their *father the devil* (John 8:44). As the Lord draws us out of *darkness* (out of our sins and the clutches of Satan) we are at the same time placed into His kingdom of light, for when He was in the world He was its Light (John 9:5) and, in the eternal kingdom that will be centered in the New Jerusalem, He continues to be the Light (Revelation 21:23).

We have already noted that Jesus identified His kingdom as not being of this world (John 18:36), and so we must remain alert to the movements today that seek to build the kingdom of the Lord on earth so as to facilitate His soon return. One of the ways that this will express itself is through a push to expand our influence within our culture. “We ourselves are being redeemed, but Christians are also envoys sent to assist in **redeeming the culture** around us” (emphasis added).¹⁴⁵ Jesus did refer to His disciples as being *salt* and *light*, but we must be sure that we understand this correctly (Matthew 5:13-16). *Salt* is used as a seasoning in food in order to enhance its flavor and as a preservative for meat when refrigeration is not available; in both cases, the *salt* does not change its host, it simply enhances or preserves it. Likewise, a *light* is easily seen (like a city on a hill), and the lamp (the source of light) is placed upon a lampstand so as to provide illumination for the whole room; the *light* does not change the room (its setting), it simply illuminates what is there. Keep this in mind as we look into *culture*.

What is *culture*? Until the nineteenth century, it referred to tilling the land and preparing the earth for crops; it was not until the latter part of that century that it came to refer to the “collective customs and achievements of a people.”¹⁴⁶ Today, *culture* speaks of the “quality in a ... society that arises from a concern for what is **regarded as excellent** in arts, letters, manners, scholarly pursuits, etc.” (emphasis added).¹⁴⁷ Therefore, when Christians today speak of *redeeming the culture*, there can be no mistaking that they are referring to what is generally considered to be *excellent* in areas of art (which includes literature, music, theatre, dance, etc.¹⁴⁸) and education – two areas where the rubber of godly living definitely meets the road of life. If we consider our North American culture, what does the general population regard as excellent within the arts and education? What quickly becomes evident is that godlessness not only pervades both areas, but godliness has been carefully and deliberately squeezed out. It has been noted that “the Darwinian revolution changed both science and culture in at least five ways”: 1) fixed species are now regarded as being ever-changing, 2) supernatural intelligent design is replaced with a natural design by natural forces, 3) man, as a special creation, is reduced to being one of the animals of nature, 4) the design, direction and purpose of the universe is abandoned in favor of the work of the laws of nature, and dependent on (or a product of) events of the past, and 5) human nature is simply a product of its history, which leaves sin and evil as being largely meaningless.¹⁴⁹ Educators

¹⁴⁴ Strong’s Online.

¹⁴⁵ <https://cultureredeemed.com/christians-redeeming-culture/>

¹⁴⁶ <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=culture>

¹⁴⁷ <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/culture?s=t>

¹⁴⁸ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/the-arts>

¹⁴⁹ <https://michaelshermer.com/2018/05/evolution-creationism-controversy-as-test-case-in-equal-time-free-speech/>

have embraced the principles of evolution within the sciences, and their “justifiable” exclusion of God as the Creator of all things has spread into all other areas of education, including the arts. Therefore, since education and the arts are integral components of *culture*, it is clear that today we have a godless foundation to our culture; “science” can be used to justify almost anything since the moral compass has been removed, the arts have become an expression of gross hedonism, and everyone is free to identify as being whatever they choose. In short, today’s culture is Satan’s playground where he will keep everyone thoroughly entertained and distracted, whether spiritually, intellectually or physically. Peter identified Satan as a *roaring lion* who walks up and down throughout the earth looking for those whom he can overwhelm and ruin (1 Peter 5:8) – his target is the child of God; therefore, we are to be *sober* and *vigilant*.

Into this cesspool of unbridled expression of the sinful nature of man (even though it is excluded from modern philosophy, sin is still there) comes this irrational call for Christians to *redeem the culture* that is around us. Did Jesus speak to this matter? As He prayed for all who would believe in Him, Jesus said this: “I have given them thy word; and the world [*kosmos* – the people in the world, humanity] hath hated them, because they are [absolutely] not of the world [*kosmos*], even as I am [absolutely] not of the world [*kosmos*]. I pray not that thou shouldest take [remove] them out of the world [*kosmos*], but that thou shouldest keep [*tereo* – attend to carefully; subjunctive mood – a possibility but not a certainty; it is our choice, for God does not work against our will] them from the evil [evil one].” (John 17:14-15).¹⁵⁰ The kingdom into which Jesus draws us is not earthly (i.e., it is not a part of the *kosmos*) but spiritual; consequently, the humanity that is around us will not understand our calling to live in obedience to the Lord, and they will hate us because of Him (Mark 13:13). Nevertheless, we are in the world with the command to live faithfully for the Lord so that we might be His *salt* and *light* among a people who are spiritually blind. John elaborated on our relationship with the world this way: “Love not [a command] the world [*kosmos*], neither the things *that are* in the world [*kosmos*]. If any man [should, *love* is in the subjunctive mood – it is a choice that we all face] love the world [*kosmos*], the love of the Father is [absolutely] not in him” (1 John 2:15).¹⁵¹ Although we are clearly **in** the world, it is equally evident from God’s Word that we are absolutely not to be **of** the world; even though we live in the midst of a sea of humanity, we are not to pattern our lives after them – we are to separate from the *culture* in which we live. We should not find this surprising since our culture is under the influence and control of Satan – that one with whom the Lord has absolutely no agreement (2 Corinthians 6:15)! Therefore, *redeeming the culture* (a culture that is clearly following the devil) is not our God-given mandate, and we must guard against being taken in by those who seek to promote this teaching.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Strong’s Online; Gingrich Lexicon.

¹⁵¹ Strong’s Online.

¹⁵² *Focus on the Family* is aggressively introducing this to children and offer a CD titled *Teaching Your Children to Redeem the Culture* (<https://store.focusonthefamily.com/teaching-your-children-to-redeem-the-culture-cd/>); *redeeming culture* finds further expression through Dominionism (taking control of culture) through men like Bill Gothard and Rick Warren, and movements like the Vineyard Churches, Word of Faith and Latter Rain (<http://dominion-theology.blogspot.com/>). Most interestingly, this has also spilled over into “Christianizing” native spirituality, and is gaining popularity through the *World Christian Gathering on Indigenous People*

In 1948, Harold Ockenga raised the call to abandon separatism and to engage in a greater societal involvement, and he noted that such a change in vision received a *hearty response* from many within the Evangelical community.¹⁵³ He openly admitted that this *new* vision would involve a re-examination of “theological problems such as the antiquity of man, the universality of the Flood, God’s method of creation, and others.”¹⁵⁴ Can you see what happened? His approach was to open discussions with the cultural elite (the godless ones) regarding such things as how long man has been on the earth, was the flood that Noah escaped truly worldwide, and has God used evolution as a part of His creative activities? Rather than retaining the Lord’s standard of being *salt* and *light*, Ockenga advocated becoming more open-minded in an effort to spark *dialogue* with cultural leaders, which ultimately led to the ungodly cultural views shaping “Christian” teaching. The Evangelicals who once *heartily* welcomed this new vision have become like unto the culture of which Jesus said that we were never to be a part. Theistic evolution (the claim that God has used evolution to bring the world to where it is today) and the gap theory (this places an unspecified amount of time between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, thereby permitting the theory of evolution to fit into this *gap*) soon became fodder for those who sought to appear to be Biblical even while they embraced the devil’s teachings. Rather than *redeeming the culture*, this approach has seen a capitulation to the culture of our day; the godless culture has choked Evangelicals to the extent that they have lost their spiritual life (Luke 8:14).



Harold J. Ockenga

If we take a step back and ponder the phrase *redeem the culture*, we should be able to recognize the error that is there. John 3:16 tells us that it is the *whosoever* who is believing in the Lord Jesus’ sacrifice for sin who will be saved (*whosoever*, *believeth*, *perish* and *everlasting life* are all singular in the Greek); what we should be able to see is that Jesus died for individuals within the *kosmos* (the world), but He did not die to *redeem* the devilish culture of the world.¹⁵⁵ As we come to faith in the Lord, we become *salt* and *light* to the world in which we live but of which we are no longer a part (remember, Jesus said that His kingdom was **not of** this world). Once the *salt* and *light* becomes involved in the culture of this world, it is no longer effective: it has lost its saltiness and has been hidden under a basket (Matthew 5:13, 15).

As saints in the Lord, we have been made a part of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus – a kingdom that is not of this world. The efforts of some so-called Christians to encourage engagement in our culture for the purpose of changing it to become more “Christian,” are not only futile but stand against what the Lord has called us to do. Such efforts only serve to compromise our saltiness and dim our lights – ultimately reducing both to complete ineffectiveness. We must understand that the only way to be salt and light in this world is to live in obedience to the Lord, and that any

conferences, groups like YWAM and World Vision Canada, and men like the late Don Richardson and Richard Twiss (<http://www.deceptioninthechurch.com/reasonstoreject.html>).

¹⁵³ Harold J. Ockenga, *Foreword to The Battle for the Bible*, by Harold Lindsay.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ Stephanus 1550 NT.

compromise of God's Word and Way eliminates the impact of both the salt and light. We have been moved from the *darkness* of the culture of this world into the light of the *kingdom* of the Lord – why would we want to draw the darkness into His light through compromise? Once again, it is the devil's deception that makes us think that we can shine God's light even as we live in compromise (or, to call it what it really is – sin!). Remember the elder of the assembly in Sardis who had a reputation that he was spiritually alive, yet Jesus called upon him to quickly repent because his spiritual life was just about ended (Revelation 3:1-3). Remember, too, that it is only the one who lives faithfully for the Lord through this life who will be saved (Matthew 24:13); there is no place for compromise when we embark on the narrow Way that leads to life eternal. If we are truly His, then we must live as His obedient slaves – God has done **all** that is required for us to be with Him for eternity! What have we done with His conditions to receive that inheritance?

14. In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:

In whom refers back to the previous verse where Paul writes that we have been *translated into the kingdom* of the Lord Jesus Christ (*his dear Son*). Therefore, what follows is true for those who are *in Christ Jesus (in Whom)*.

To the Ephesians Paul wrote: “In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins ...” (Ephesians 1:7). What is evident from our English translation is that these appear to be identical (in Colossians, *even* has been supplied by the translators). In fact, a comparison of the Greek shows that these two are identical – except for the word that is translated as *sins*. In our text, the Greek word is *hamartia*, which in its 174 appearances in the NT is shown as *sin* or *sins* 172 times (the others are as *sinful* and *offence*).¹⁵⁶ Frequently we are told (as Strong's suggests) that *hamartia* means to miss the mark,¹⁵⁷ and the illustration that is often used is that of a marksman who does not hit the bullseye; an additional explanation offered is that we do not measure up to God's standard and so we fall short of what He desires of us. Although these explanations are good as far as they go, they can leave us with a wrong impression of this word that is so significant within the Scriptures. Before sin, Adam and Eve enjoyed full fellowship with the Lord but, when sin entered the world, that communion was broken because of their rebellion against God – they were now aligned with Satan, not the Lord. Therefore, we must understand that the *mark* goes far beyond God's standard for our conduct and actually identifies our broken relationship with Him. *Hamartia*, then, points to the sin-nature with which we are all born and that separates us from God.¹⁵⁸ With this understanding, it is easily evident that we cannot overcome *sin (hamartia)* by simply doing right things (i.e., hitting the bullseye) – there is a heart-condition that separates us from God to which we must attend, and what is so evident in the Scriptures is that we cannot handle this on our own. “For the wages [compensation] of sin [*hamartia*] is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through [in] Jesus Christ our Lord [literally: *Christ Jesus, the Lord of us*]”

¹⁵⁶ Strong's Online.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Interestingly, *hamartia* is used within literary circles to describe a “tragic flaw [often in character] or error that reverses a protagonist's fortune from good to bad.” (<https://literaryterms.net/hamartia/>)

(Romans 6:23).¹⁵⁹ *Death* is the end result of *sin* (*hamartia*), but God's *gift* is life **in** Christ Jesus when He is our Lord; we must not fail to see that unless we faithfully own Jesus as our Lord (becoming His slaves, for we have been bought out of sin), we will not have the *eternal life* that God is prepared to give to us.

Now let's consider the word for *sins* that is used in Ephesians 1:7 – the Greek word is *paraptoma* and literally means to fall beside; in Scripture it speaks of breaking or deviating from the truth.¹⁶⁰ The difference between *hamartia* and *paraptoma* becomes very evident: the first identifies the eternal separation from God that is ours unless we place our faith in the Lord Jesus to intervene on our behalf; the second identifies actions or omissions of which we are guilty that are not in conformity with the Way and the Truth to which we profess to adhere. *Hamartia* describes the state of all who are without the Lord and, as such, they live in a perpetual state of *paraptoma* (living that is not in accord with the Truth) against God because the essence of their being remains against Him. To the Ephesians, Paul explained that they, in their sinful state, were “dead in trespasses [*paraptoma*] and sins [*hamartia*] ...” (Ephesians 2:1); before they came to be in Christ, their lives were characterized by actions against God and separation from Him. *Hamartia*, which ultimately leads to eternal ruin in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:15), identifies the *body of sin* that we are to reckon as being dead in Christ: “Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin” (Romans 6:6), so that we might live for God as slaves of righteousness (Romans 6:11, 18). Paul's charge to the Corinthians was that they were to continually examine both their actions and their beliefs to ensure that they were not living hypocritically and that their faith was Biblical: “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove [test to ensure that something is genuine] your own selves” (2 Corinthians 13:5a).¹⁶¹ By means of this continual testing, we will quickly identify every trespass (deviation from His Way) that we commit against the Lord or our neighbor (Matthew 22:36-40), thereby permitting us to repent and return to our faithful walk with Him.

One more thing that we must note is that dealing with the *paraptoma* that is in our lives does nothing to alleviate the problem of our *hamartia*; a sinful life is a product of our sin-nature, and yet Jesus said that even those who are evil are capable of doing good things (Matthew 7:11) – actions do not always provide a glimpse into the heart. Jesus described the results of doing *right things* in an effort to please Him: “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matthew 7:21-23). These seemingly spiritually astute people filled their lives with many commendable activities that they carried out in the Lord's name (they would have appeared to be spiritually alive), yet they never attended to their fundamental need by opening a relationship with Him through faith – removing *paraptoma* from our lives does not attend to the *hamartia* that stands between us and God. Even doing good in the Lord's name will not open the way into heaven but doing what He desires will, and we cannot do

¹⁵⁹ Gingrich Lexicon; Stephanus 1550 NT.

¹⁶⁰ Strong's Online.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

His will without first becoming His child. Jesus explicitly stated: “I am [indicative mood – a simple statement of fact] the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by [through] me” (John 14:6).¹⁶² Everyone from Adam to the last man (before God removes this earth) can only gain access to heaven through the Lord Jesus – it is His sacrifice for the sins of the world that completely paid the debt for sin with finality (Hebrews 9:12). We are to put off the *old man* (that body of sin) and, while being *renewed* in our minds by the Lord, we are to put on the *new man* through whom we will express the righteousness and holiness of God (Ephesians 4:22-24).

As those who are *in Christ (in Whom)*, we have *redemption* that has been acquired through the *blood of Christ*. *Redemption* speaks of the deliverance of a prisoner or slave by the payment of a ransom; a *ransom* is the price that is paid to secure the release of a captive or slave.¹⁶³ If we are *in Christ*, then His death and resurrection have paid the price for our release from the bondage of Satan, for it was the Lord’s death that broke his power (Hebrews 2:14); His shed blood brings to us cleansing from sin. “But if we walk [may be walking; present tense, subjunctive mood (we have a choice to make)] in the light, as he is in the light, we have [are having] fellowship one with another [*each other* – a reciprocal pronoun], and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth [is cleansing; present tense] us from all [every] sin [*hamartia*]” (1 John 1:7).¹⁶⁴ The blood of Jesus is providing release from every *sin* that stands between God and us, and it is through His shed blood that He **seeks to** sanctify us or to make us holy (Hebrews 13:12) – He will not make us holy against our wills!¹⁶⁵ The debt of sin that we owe has been paid by Christ (Hebrews 9:12); by exercising faith in Him (believing), that grand redemption becomes ours, and by living faithfully according to the leading of the Spirit of God Who now abides within us (Romans 8:9), we will remain His and begin the process of sanctification (becoming holy) whereby we fulfill God’s will so that we might become fruitful branches in Christ (John 15:5).

We have just seen that the *redemption* that Christ brought to mankind provides a means to become free of the barrier that stands between the sinner and God. Paul now adds a phrase to underscore the work of Christ: *the forgiveness of sins*. *Forgiveness* speaks of pardon, a discharge from an obligation, dismissal and release; the blood of Jesus brings all of these to bear on the *sins (hamartia)* that are the basis of our separation from fellowship with His Father.¹⁶⁶ However, that is not the end of the matter; yes, we are being freed from the obligation of paying for the debt of sins that is ours, but we are not released from this debt to live unto ourselves. “Being then made free from sin [*hamartia*], ye became the servants [*doulos*, slaves] of righteousness” (Romans 6:18).¹⁶⁷ To whatever we are committed in this life, to that we are *slaves* (Romans 6:16) – it matters not if we are enslaved to happiness, wealth, power, drugs, religion, pleasure, the devil, or Christ. Therefore, since slavery is no longer the question, we must carefully consider to whom or to what we are enslaved. Jesus assures us: “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke *is* easy, and my burden is light”

¹⁶² Strong’s Online.

¹⁶³ <http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary>

¹⁶⁴ Strong’s Online; Stephanus 1550 NT; <https://ancientgreek.pressbooks.com/chapter/25/>.

¹⁶⁵ Strong’s Online.

¹⁶⁶ Strong’s Online; Liddell-Scott Lexicon.

¹⁶⁷ Strong’s Online.

(Matthew 11:29-30); the *yoke* speaks figuratively of a binding burden with strict requirements and a heavy obligation.¹⁶⁸ This is also a description of being slaves of righteousness or slaves of the Lord Jesus Christ; indeed, there is a burden to bear with exacting requirements and a tremendous responsibility. Regarding His *burden*, Jesus said, “If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross [an instrument of punishment] daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23).¹⁶⁹ Jesus spoke of strict *requirements*: “If ye love me, keep [a command to attend carefully to] my commandments” (John 14:15);¹⁷⁰ finally, we read this regarding our *obligation*: “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief [unfaithfulness], in departing from [becoming apostate from] the living God” (Hebrews 3:12).¹⁷¹ There is a cross to bear, obedience to the Lord is **not** negotiable, and we must continually guard our hearts lest we fall into apostasy through compromise – our responsibility is to live in faithfulness to the Lord!

The redemption that Christ purchased is freeing us from the bondage of sin to serve Him with all of our being. However, we must remind ourselves that the Way to life is narrow and any deviation from that Way can lead us into apostasy; we must be continually guarding our hearts so as to remain true to the One Who is Truth; “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent ...” (Revelation 2:5). Of the seven elders of the assemblies in Asia to whom Jesus addressed His messages, four were called upon to repent (Revelation 2:5; 2:16; 3:3; 3:19). Jesus purchased our freedom from sin (*hamartia*), and our personal acceptance of His sacrifice through faith in Him requires us to live as His slaves – for a slave to live according to his own desires is an act of rebellion; a slave must have no will but to do the will of his Master. A faithful walk with the Lord will serve to illuminate those moments when we may deviate from His Way, and repentance from that deviation (*paraptoma*) will restore our walk with Him.

Ephesians 1:7 and our text both identify the deliverance that Jesus brought to mankind through His shed blood, and together they tell us that the Lord’s forgiveness extends to both our eternal separation from God (*hamartia*) and when we fail to live in obedience to Him (*paraptoma*). “Wherefore let him that thinketh [is of the opinion that] he standeth [perfect tense – a one-time action; this is the heart of the doctrine of eternal security] **take heed** lest he fall [*should fall away* (subjunctive mood, identifying this as a real possibility)]” (1 Corinthians 10:12); “**Take heed**, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief [unfaithfulness], in departing [becoming apostate] from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12).¹⁷² The warnings have been issued and the consequences for being careless with our being *in Christ* have been clearly laid out; to the Corinthians, Paul provided counsel as to how to ensure a continually faithful walk with the Lord: “Examine [*peirazo* – a command to put to the test] yourselves, whether ye be in the faith [do your profession and walk harmonize?]; prove [*dokimazo* – a term describing a test for metals to ensure that they are pure; a command; is our *faith* true to the Word of God?] your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except [unless indeed] ye be reprobates

¹⁶⁸ Friberg Lexicon.

¹⁶⁹ Strong’s Online.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Friberg Lexicon.

¹⁷² Gingrich Lexicon.

[rejected; fail to pass the test]?” (2 Corinthians 13:5).¹⁷³ Although there is little evidence today of professing Christians heeding these warnings, it is critically important to our eternal future because Jesus made it very clear that it will be the one who continues to faithfully walk with Him through all of the trials of life who will be saved (Matthew 24:13; Hebrews 3:14).

15. Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:

Having briefly expressed the work that Jesus accomplished for us, Paul now launches into a description of who Jesus is. As he wrote this letter, there would have been little doubt as to the fact that Jesus had walked upon the earth as a man; after all, eyewitnesses of His physical presence on earth would have still been living (it is estimated that this letter was written about 30 years or so after Jesus’ resurrection).¹⁷⁴ Therefore, rather than dealing with what would have been commonly accepted, Paul begins to expound on His eternal character – something that the religious Jews had denied from the moment that Jesus began His ministry on earth, and what drove them to silence His voice.

The first attempt to kill the Lord came shortly after He returned from His wilderness encounter with Satan; we’re not told how He began His ministry¹⁷⁵, but we are told that His *fame* went throughout the region of Galilee (Luke 4:14). When He arrived in His hometown of Nazareth, He entered into the synagogue and, considering His fame, it is not surprising that He was asked to read from the scroll of Isaiah. He found Isaiah 61:1-2 and read: “The Spirit of the Lord GOD *is* upon me; because the LORD hath anointed [perfect tense – a completed past action] me to preach good tidings [good news; the Gospel] unto the meek ... To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD”¹⁷⁶ Thus far everything would have appeared to be normal to this assembly; however, Jesus then rolled the scroll up, returned it to the attendant, sat down and, according to their custom, commented on the passage that He had read. His commentary was this: “This day is this scripture fulfilled [*today this Scripture has been fulfilled*; perfect tense – a completed action with an ongoing impact] in your ears” (Luke 4:21)¹⁷⁷ – suddenly nothing was as it had been. This portion from Isaiah is a prophecy concerning the coming Messiah, and the Jews knew that; Jesus’ explanation of this prophecy told everyone present that He had just identified Himself as being their promised Messiah. Their response revealed their inner conflict: they were amazed at His *gracious words*, and yet they only saw Him as being the son of Joseph (Luke 4:22). They had heard of His *fame* from other areas of Galilee, and Jesus knew that they wanted to see a demonstration of what they had heard about Him (Luke 4:23). Instead, He said, “No prophet is accepted in his own country” (Luke 4:24), and went on to cite two examples: 1) during a severe famine in Israel, Jehovah told Elijah to go to a widow in Sidon (a foreign country, even though there would have been many widows in Israel) to receive food, and she, in turn, was provided with food throughout the famine

¹⁷³ Strong’s Online; Liddell-Scott Lexicon.

¹⁷⁴ <https://www.bible-history.com/new-testament/timeline.html>

¹⁷⁵ Jesus’ first miracle was at the wedding in Cana (John 2:11) but that does not necessarily identify the beginning of His teaching ministry.

¹⁷⁶ https://www.hebrew4christians.com/Grammar/Unit_Ten/Introduction/introduction.html

¹⁷⁷ Strong’s Online.

(1 Kings 17:8-16), and 2) even though there were many lepers in Israel, Elisha healed only Naaman the Syrian (2 Kings 5:9-14). Despite having marvelled at His spoken words, the people refused to accept His declaration of being the promised One and, because He reminded them that God's mercy extended beyond Israel to the Gentiles, they *were filled with wrath* (*thumos* – an expressed anger that rises suddenly) (Luke 4:28).¹⁷⁸ In their anger, they took Jesus to a steep place nearby with the intent of casting Him down to kill Him, but Jesus simply walked through the middle of this throng and went His way (Luke 4:30). This is another example of Satan's attempt to halt the work that the Lord Jesus had come to earth to complete – namely, to fulfill the promise that God had made to him in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:15). We must understand that this assembly of infuriated Jews was not intending to kill their Messiah, rather, they saw their actions as protecting their Jewish traditions; they refused to accept Jesus as being anything more than *Joseph's son*, and any claim beyond that was blasphemy to them. That became characteristic of the religious Jews until they finally pressured Pilate to have Jesus crucified, not because He was guilty of a crime against Rome, but because He stated that He was the *Son of God* (Matthew 26:63-64; John 19:7). It is concerning this eternal side of the Lord Jesus that Paul now provides instruction.

He begins by describing Jesus as the *image of the invisible God*. *Image* is the Greek word *eikon*, which means a likeness; however, in this case, Jesus is really the living appearance of God Who is a spirit (John 4:24) and unable to be seen (*invisible*).¹⁷⁹ Jesus' disciples struggled with His role as the Son of God – being not only a man but also the eternal God. When Jesus identified Himself as the only way to the Father (John 14:6), Philip asked Him to show them the Father and then they would be satisfied (John 14:8). Jesus' response was that having seen Him, they have also seen the Father (John 14:9); earlier Jesus had openly declared, “I and *my* Father are one” (John 10:30) – this was a major stumbling block for the Jews, and also difficult for His disciples to comprehend. The writer of Hebrews described the ascended Jesus as “... being the brightness [*apaugasma* – an unmatched shining forth] of ... glory, and the express image [*charakter* – an exact representation] of his [God's] person [*hupostasis* – essence] ...” (Hebrews 1:3).¹⁸⁰ Within Jesus, we see an unsurpassed radiance of glory (now that He is with the Father – John 17:5) and a precise presentation of the very essence of eternal God; we have already noted that God is a spirit (and therefore invisible to us) but Jesus came and provided an exact, visible image of God – **He is God**. The Jews had no problem with Jesus as a man, nor with all of the miracles that He performed (unless He healed someone on the Sabbath [Matthew 12:10-14]) – however, they refused to accept Him as being so much more. It was because the Lord Jesus declared Himself to be the Messiah (Luke 4:21), one with the Father (John 10:30) and the Son of God (Luke 22:70) that the Jews sought to destroy Him (Luke 4:28-29; John 10:33; John 19:7). Nevertheless, essential to our understanding of Jesus is the fact that in Him is present the full measure of Divinity in bodily form and visible (Colossians 2:9) – Jesus is all God **and** all man; He was born of Mary (His humanity) **and** conceived by the Holy Spirit (His Deity; Luke 1:35).

Modern “Christian” thinking has not strayed all that far from that of the religious Jews of Jesus' day. The Jews felt secure in their religion, which they considered to be orthodox or according to

¹⁷⁸ Friberg Lexicon.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Strong's Online; Friberg Lexicon.

the traditions of their fathers, and seemed confident that they had the ear of God since they had the temple and His means of spiritual cleansing – what they lacked was an understanding of God’s Truth. Jesus describes them as meticulously tithing their herbs even while they neglected (*omitted*) judgment, compassion and faith (which are also required by God); they carefully strained the gnat (which was unclean) out of their soup even while they were swallowing an unclean camel (Matthew 23:23-24). Evangelicals today also have a sense of security within generally accepted doctrines and traditions, along with an equally hollow perception of God’s Truth.

I recently found this written by a graduate of Moody Bible Institute and Wheaton College Graduate School (two well-known Evangelical schools): “Jesus chose us as friends, he died for us as friends, he caused us to trust him as our friend, and he will remain our friend for the endless ages to come.”¹⁸¹ The author is the *teaching pastor* of an assembly that expresses a need to “engage culture and serve the world around us” – to the glory of God, of course.¹⁸² In many respects, this is typical of mainline Christianity today. Within his understanding, we are *friends* of Jesus because He chose us, He died for us, He made us to trust Him, and He will be our Friend for eternity – this is Calvinism and finds such an open reception today because the responsibility for our eternal destiny rests entirely upon the Lord (He *chose us* and *caused us to trust him*). What do the Scriptures say regarding this? *Jesus chose us as friends* – God “hath chosen us in him [Christ]” (Ephesians 1:3); we, individually, have not been chosen by God, but if we are believing and thereby *in Christ*, then we are numbered among His chosen ones – the difference is monumental! *He died for us as friends* – “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8); perhaps for a good man someone might lay down his life (Romans 5:7), but Jesus paid the price for our sins while we were sinful and **not** His friends. *He caused us to trust him as our friend* – Paul and Silas told the jailor, “Believe [active voice, imperative mood; i.e., **you must** believe] on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt [*wilt*, future tense; passive voice, God does the saving] be saved” (Acts 16:31); Jesus does not *cause us* to trust in Him, **we must** believe – He told Nicodemus that **whosoever is believing** may not perish but may have everlasting life (John 3:16).¹⁸³ Despite making reference to John 15:14-15, the author completely misses what Jesus said, and he is not alone in this oversight. Let’s consider it: “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.” Evangelicals become so caught up with Jesus saying, “Ye are my friends” that they stop there, and forget to keep reading. Yes, Jesus calls us *friends*, but only **if** we are living in obedience to His commands – that is a major criteria (faithfulness) that must be met in order for us to qualify as being the friends of Jesus! In Whom was the jailor instructed to place his trust? – in the **Lord** (*kurios* – Master, the One to Whom we belong and to Whose authority we must submit) Jesus Christ.¹⁸⁴ Jesus paid the price for our sins; we have been **purchased** out of the bondage of sin and, therefore, we, like Paul, are **slaves** (*doulos*) of the Lord Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:1) – obedience is neither optional nor subject to negotiation. Jesus is eternal God and therefore His commands,

¹⁸¹ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-a-friend-we-have-in-jesus>

¹⁸² <https://www.zionsvillefellowship.org/values>

¹⁸³ Strong’s Online.

¹⁸⁴ Liddell-Scott Lexicon.

although coming from a loving heart, still come to us as from our Master, the One Who bought us. Today it is much more acceptable to view the Lord as a non-judgmental Friend Who is tolerant of our casual attitude toward His Word; our involvement in the ungodly culture of today is justified by claiming that the world is thereby subject to our light and salt. Jesus said that our light is to shine in such a way that others will see the righteousness and holiness of God reflected through us to His glory (Matthew 5:16 and Ephesians 2:10; 4:24); unless we are living in faithfulness to the Lord, we have no light and we are not salt – participation in ecumenism (today’s acceptable “orthodoxy”) and the godless culture around us, serves to extinguish our light and remove our saltiness. How can we delude ourselves into believing that we can show forth the righteousness and holiness of God while we ignore His commands?

Jesus brought a veiled version of God’s glory to earth, yet those who looked to Him had also seen the Father (John 14:9; 17:5). Paul describes Jesus as existing before (*firstborn*) every *creature* or creation.¹⁸⁵ John wrote: “In the beginning was the Word ...” (John 1:1), from which we understand that when the creative acts of God began, the *Word* (Jesus before His body of flesh) was already present – He was there, actively participating in all aspects of creation: “All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:3). Jesus is eternal God! The Jews struggled to accept it and Evangelicals prefer to dilute it; nevertheless, when we place our faith in Him, it must be as God (the Lord Who bought us out of sin) and sinless man (a perfect Sacrifice for the helplessly sinful). Jesus is that unique Mediator Who is both God and man (1 Timothy 2:5); a *mediator* is someone who intervenes between two parties in order to bring an agreement – the two parties, in this case, are an eternal God Who is holy in every respect (Leviticus 11:44; *qadowsh* – sanctified or separated from all that is unclean) and helplessly sinful mankind. Jesus, as eternal God come in the flesh of man, fits perfectly to bring a restoration of fellowship between God and man; that restoration comes through His death and resurrection whereby He broke the authority of Satan over us (Hebrews 2:14). However, we must never lose sight of the caveat; as we have noted before, His work as our Mediator remains intact only if we are living in obedience to Him. “*There is* therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk [*are living*, present tense] not after [according to] the flesh, but after [according to] the Spirit” ... “For as many as are led [*being led*, present tense] by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Romans 8:1, 14).¹⁸⁶ It is through Jesus alone that we can become children of God and, through faithful obedience to our loving Master, we will become *partakers of the inheritance* that He is preparing for those who are His (John 14:6; Matthew 24:13; Colossians 1:12; Revelation 21:7). Jesus was the One Who paid the price for the sins of mankind and, thereby, became the Mediator between fallen man and our righteous Creator – all of this was securely in place **before** the worlds were made (1 Peter 1:18-21). Jesus, the Son of God, is the *Alpha and Omega, the first and the last* (Revelation 1:10-11a) – He was there for the beginning of creation (*Alpha* and *first*), He will be there when the worlds are dissolved (*Omega* and *last*) and will forever be the Light of the eternal New Jerusalem (Revelation 20:11; 21:23).

¹⁸⁵ Friberg Lexicon.

¹⁸⁶ Strong’s Online.

16. For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether *they be* thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:

Paul continues to expound on the Lord Jesus and His role as eternal God, and particularly picks up on the Lord existing before (*firstborn*) all that has been created in the heavens (the Greek word is plural) and *in earth*.¹⁸⁷ Unfortunately, in Greek, as in many languages, *heaven(s)* can refer to the atmosphere surrounding the earth, the universe where the planets and stars are located, and to the dwelling place of God – context becomes the key to identification. However in this case, the reference is to those things that have been *created*, which would thereby exclude the eternal habitation of God. Nevertheless, Paul has included here those things that are *visible* and *invisible*, and then goes on to specifically identify some things that fall into these categories.

Thrones (the Greek word is plural) can refer to the actual seats upon which authority figures might sit; John saw God sitting upon a *throne* (singular) in heaven (Revelation 4:3).¹⁸⁸ However, that cannot be the meaning in this case for Jesus did not create the seats upon which royalties can sit; therefore, we must consider the broader application of *thrones* that refers to the domain over which a king has authority.¹⁸⁹ From this we can understand that the Lord Jesus has involved in the rising and falling of the kingdoms of the earth throughout history, and will continue to do so into the future; Daniel, in his praise of the Lord, declared that He “removeth kings, and setteth up kings” (Daniel 2:21). The Lord **oversees** the movement of the history of mankind so that it continues unabated toward what He has determined for this world and its inhabitants.¹⁹⁰ Within the OT, there was a continual progression toward the coming of the Lord Jesus to finalize the payment for man’s sin; since then, everything is moving steadily toward the end of time when the children of God will be with Him in eternal glory. However, these are all *visible thrones* that are easily identified throughout the passage of history; are there also *invisible thrones*? To the elder of Pergamos, Jesus said that He knew that he was dwelling *where is the throne of Satan* (Revelation 2:13); Pergamos bears the dubious distinction of being noted in Scripture as the place where Satan had established his *throne* (*seat* – the Greek word is *thronos*).¹⁹¹ Pergamos (or Pergamum) was an important city for several reasons: 1) it boasted several temples that were dedicated to the Imperial Roman cult, which deified its emperors (obviously inspired by the devil), 2) it was a great center for learning and boasted an extensive library (of man’s wisdom) that was second only to that in Alexandria, Egypt, 3) it had a notorious healing center (Asclepion) where the basis for healing was intertwined with Greek mythology and the god Asclepius, and 4) it boasted a massive altar to Zeus who was considered to be the father of all gods and man.¹⁹² Any one of these inextricably linked Satan to this city, and bringing all of them together into one place provided him with a location where his influence would have been very evident. It is most commonly held that the massive altar to Zeus

¹⁸⁷ Stephanus 1550 NT.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Friberg Lexicon.

¹⁹⁰ As we see in Luke 4:5-6, the kingdoms of the world are under the direct authority of Satan; the Lord’s oversight keeps all things unfolding according to His plan.

¹⁹¹ Stephanus 1550 NT; Strong’s Online.

¹⁹² <https://blog.israelbiblicalstudies.com/jewish-studies/throne-satan-rev-2-2-16/>



Altar of Zeus from Pergamos considered by many to represent the *throne of Satan*

(who is seen as the heavenly father of gods) was the throne of Satan and the ultimate expression of rebellion against the Lord God.¹⁹³ What is evident for our purposes is that Satan, at the time that John penned the Revelation, had a *seat (throne)* in Pergamos – a city that had become his habitation (*dwellleth*). Satan’s ambition was to be like unto the Most High (Isaiah 14:14), and so after the manner of Jehovah placing His name in Jerusalem (1 Kings 11:36), Satan saw fit to make Pergamos his. However, beyond Pergamos, Satan’s aspiration was to lift his *throne* above the stars (Isaiah 14:13); Satan, a spirit-being, has a *throne*, a domain over which he is ruler: the earth – he is called the *prince* (ruler, holding authority) *of the world* (John 12:31).

Having identified that Satan has a dominion (*throne*), and placing that within the context of our verse, we have the knotty problem of Jesus apparently creating Satan’s dominion. Let’s ponder this for a moment. Ezekiel was given a lamentation concerning the *king of Tyrus* (Tyre), but the language that is used affirms that its application goes beyond the king to the one who was working through him, namely Satan (Ezekiel 28:12). The evident clue that this is speaking of Satan comes in the next verse: “Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God” – quite obviously, the only ones who have been in the Garden of Eden are Adam, Eve, Jehovah, and Satan who came in the form of a serpent. This is not speaking of Jehovah, for He is giving the lamentation, Adam and Eve died many, many years before, and so we are left with Satan. Jehovah goes on: “Thou *wast* perfect [whole, sound] in thy ways from the day [time] that thou *wast* created, till iniquity [unrighteousness] was found [discovered] in thee” (Ezekiel 28:15).¹⁹⁴ What we can understand from this is that 1) Satan was created, 2) he was made without any imperfections, and 3) he was free to choose to rebel against his Creator. From Scripture we discern that Satan is a spirit: he appeared to Eve through the serpent, a physical creature (Genesis 3:1, 15), even after his rebellion against Jehovah he would appear before Him to accuse the children of God (Job 1:6; Revelation 12:10), and of Judas we read that “Satan entered into him” (John 13:27) – all of these are evidence that Satan is a spirit. Satan is a created spirit-being, and Jesus is the Creator of *all things* that are *in heaven* and *in earth*, both *visible* and *invisible* – therefore, Jesus, as eternal God, is the Creator of Satan. However, just as God did not create sin in man, so He did not place the pride and unrighteousness within Satan – each chose rebellion against the Lord: man, because of the promise of wisdom (Genesis 3:5-6) and Satan, because of pride in his great splendor (Ezekiel 28:17).

Now that we have established that Jesus is the Creator of Satan, but not of his rebellion, let’s consider what comprises the dominion of Satan. Jesus said that those who are not qualified for glory will be sent “into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41). From this we learn that God has prepared a place for the *devil and his angels*, and Revelation 12:4

¹⁹³ <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-sites-places/biblical-archaeology-sites/pergamon-2/>

¹⁹⁴ BDB.

tells us that Satan took one-third of the heavenly hosts (angels, *stars*) with him when he fell from his lofty position in the courts of heaven; therefore, fallen angels, or demons, are a part of his dominion. When Jesus was being tempted by the devil, He was taken to an exceedingly high mountain and shown all of the kingdoms of the world; Satan's proposal was that if Jesus would worship him, then he would give him all of these kingdoms (Matthew 4:8-10) – Jesus did not correct Satan's offer to give Him these kingdoms, and this affirms that they are also a part of Satan's domain. This is another consequence of Adam's sin: the dominion that God gave him over the earth and its creatures (Genesis 1:28) was relinquished to Satan. Therefore, the dominion of Satan is made up of the multitude of spirit-beings (demons) who followed him in his rebellion against the Lord and the kingdoms of the earth, which are made up of people who are born in sin and rebellion against God. Based upon what we have just learned (Colossians 1:13), those who are re-born into the kingdom of God are no longer a part of Satan's dominion – they are translated from *darkness* into the light of the Lord.

To summarize what we have just considered, we see Jesus as the creator of Satan (in his perfect form) and the One Who oversees the affairs of mankind, which are a part of Satan's dominion. The writer of Hebrews ascribes greater honor to the Lord Jesus than to Moses “inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house” (Hebrews 3:3); the principle being illustrated is that the Creator has greater honor than that which has been created. The application of this to our study is that Jesus, as the Creator of all things, is far, far superior to Satan, the created; that does not diminish the power of Satan from our perspective (1 Peter 5:8), but it provides us with further assurance of security in the Lord as we remain faithful to Him in all things. If we are *in Christ* by faith, then His promise to us is that no one is able to *pluck* us out of His hand (John 10:28). Note, this is NOT eternal security; this is the assurance that nothing external to us can separate us from the Lord (Romans 8:38-39); all the same, we are warned to guard against permitting our hearts to become unfaithful, which leads to apostasy against the Lord (Hebrews 3:12).

Dominions comes from the Greek word *kuriotes*; evident in this word is the root that it finds in *lord* (*kurios*).¹⁹⁵ A *dominion*, therefore, is characterized by strong leadership and authority. Although we might immediately think of the dominion of Satan, we must realize that the word *dominion* (*kuriotes*) is not negative in itself. We live in the *Dominion* of Canada, which means that we are required to live according to the laws of the land, and our government is not entirely negative – it bears the responsibility to protect what is right, and so we are to live in obedience to its laws in so far as they do not conflict with the Scriptures (Titus 3:1; Acts 5:29). Peter had harsh words for those who *despise kuriotes* (*government*, or authority; 2 Peter 2:9-12).¹⁹⁶ Although we do not have this word (*kuriotes*) being applied specifically to the kingdom of the Lord Jesus, we must recognize that unless we live in faithful obedience to Him (as our Master/Lord), we will not remain in His kingdom – the access to His kingdom is narrow (Matthew 7:14; John 14:6) and obedience is not optional (John 14:15). Clearly, this is one *dominion* that Jesus created and over which He exercises full control – it is His and it is *invisible* (Matthew 16:18; John 18:36)! The dominions of Satan and this world function under the general oversight of the Lord, and they are

¹⁹⁵ Strong's Online.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

unfolding according to His plans and purposes – this will become increasingly evident as end-time events unfold and the Lord becomes more actively involved in what takes place on earth.

Principalities comes from the Greek word *arche*, which strictly speaks of pre-eminence or being first, but through context it can be the beginning, or the one who is in authority or has supremacy.¹⁹⁷ Whatever there is that appears to be original or supreme from our perspective, Jesus both precedes and exceeds it. To us this might well be the angelic hosts who were created before the earth, and would include the now demonic angels who followed Satan into rebellion against the Lord. There is no ruler on earth or within the spirit realm who is greater than the Lord Jesus – He is over all; He is God! The angels of heaven proclaim His majesty (Revelation 5:11-12), all creation will declare His glory (Revelation 5:13), and He has prepared everlasting fire as the final destination for those who are in rebellion against Him (namely, the devil, the demons, and sinful mankind; Matthew 25:41).

Powers identifies authority (*exousia*) rather than ability (*dumanis*) or strength (*kratos*).¹⁹⁸ *Authority*, in turn, goes beyond the control of a people or region to the right to act or command whatever one chooses. As we consider each of these four expressions of rule (*thrones, dominions, principalities* and *powers*), the over-arching principle that Paul is endeavoring to establish is that Jesus is before all and greater than all of these; while on earth, we may well be required to live in subjection to some of these. As a matter of fact, Paul enjoined that “every soul be subject unto the higher powers [*exousia*]. For there is no power [*exousia*] but of [from] God: the powers [*exousia*] that be are ordained [put into order] of [by] God” (Romans 13:1). This identifies our obligation to submit to the authority of the governments of the land in which we live; every country has a ruling authority or several layers of it (in Canada we have the federal, provincial and municipal levels of government), and we are to live in submission to whatever form it takes. However, having said that, our first allegiance must always be to the Lord, and therefore, if a governing authority contravenes what God requires, in that area of conflict we must follow the Lord (Acts 5:29).

A literal translation of Paul’s summary is this: *all things through Him and for Him have been created*.¹⁹⁹ Jesus is the Creator of everything, yet, of everything that He has created on earth, it is only man who is eternal, for he was created in the image of eternal God (Genesis 1:27). The created universe will end (Revelation 20:11; 2 Peter 3:9-13), but all of men will live on for eternity: those who, through faith in the Lord and faithful living for the Lord, have their names written in the Book of Life, will enter an eternal *inheritance in light* (Colossians 1:12; Revelation 21:27), and those who, for whatever reason, are not numbered among those who are *in Christ* (i.e., their names are not in the Book of Life) will be cast into the eternal lake of fire with the devil (Revelation 20:15; Matthew 25:41; Mark 9:43). Through the Lord Jesus, all things have been created – even that which will not survive past the end of time (the physical universe). Yet beyond that, everything has been created *for Him* – He is the central focus of all of creation. Man, created in the image of God, was central to the physical creation (Genesis 1:28) and was made to have fellowship with his Creator (Genesis 3:8-9). Sin broke that close relationship between man and his Creator, yet God

¹⁹⁷ Strong’s Online; Friberg Lexicon; <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/principality>.

¹⁹⁸ Strong’s Online.

¹⁹⁹ Stephanus 1550 NT.

already had a plan in place so that it would be possible for that relationship to be restored. The coats of skin that God prepared for Adam and Eve began a long line of sacrifices that foreshadowed the final sacrifice that would be made to break the power of Satan (Genesis 3:15; Hebrews 2:14) and bring all of the faithful into God's kingdom: "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold [*aule* – a roofless enclosure where flocks were kept at night; here, it is a reference to Israel]: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold [*poimne* – **flock** (NOT *fold*)], and one shepherd" (John 10:16).²⁰⁰ Jesus declared openly that He would be the Shepherd of **one flock**, His *ekklesia*; the writer of Hebrews, after rehearsing the evident faith of the saints from Abel onward, says: "And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect [complete]" (Hebrews 11:39-40).²⁰¹ All of the saints of the Lord from all ages will come together into one flock and Jesus will be their Shepherd; in the new heaven and earth, the New Jerusalem will be central to the saints and Jesus will be the Light (Revelation 21:23). Jesus, the One Who willingly gave His life in order to provide mankind with an opportunity to be restored to his Creator, is consequently the focus of all who are His; "... let us run with patience [*through perseverance we should be running*] the race that is set before us, Looking unto [*fixing our eyes on*] Jesus the author and finisher of ... [*the*] faith ..." (Hebrews 12: 1b-2a).²⁰²

17. And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

Here we have a reiteration of the phrase *firstborn of every creature* (v. 15): Jesus is *before* (*pro*) all that has been created – He is God.²⁰³ However, Paul added the phrase *by him all things consist*, thereby extending the role of the Lord Jesus beyond simply being the Creator of all.

Consist has a basic meaning of put together; *all things* have been *put together* by the Lord Jesus. This is not at all surprising; as the Creator, He has, indeed, put all things together. However, if we consider this for a moment, we will then recognize that the implication of this is far greater than simply His role as Creator. For example, consider the universe. Our solar system is made up of eight official planets in nearly circular orbits around a central sun, all orbiting in a counter-clockwise direction in relation to it; added to this are numerous planetary satellites (moons), dwarf planets, comets and asteroids – all in continual motion.²⁰⁴ Beyond that, no one knows how many solar systems are in our galaxy (the Milky Way),²⁰⁵ and it is estimated that there are at least 100 billion galaxies in the observed universe.²⁰⁶ As mind-boggling as that may sound, we must keep in mind that all of this is in a state of perpetual motion, and has been since the day that it was created. Moreover, the speed at which most of these bodies move is phenomenal; even within our own solar system, the planetary orbital speeds vary from as slow as Neptune at 12,146 miles per hour (5.43 km/sec) to Mercury at 107,082 mph (47.87 km/sec), while the earth ambles along at

²⁰⁰ Strong's Online.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Stephanus 1550 NT.

²⁰³ Strong's Online.

²⁰⁴ <https://nineplanets.org/overview.html>

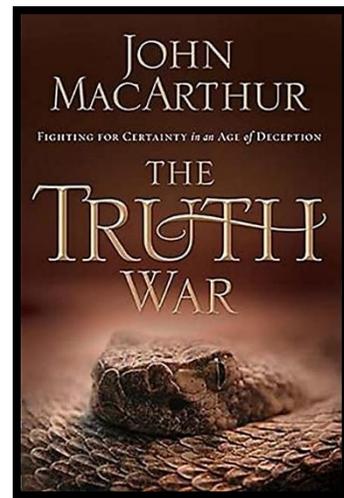
²⁰⁵ <https://spaceplace.nasa.gov/review/dr-marc-space/solar-systems-in-galaxy.html>

²⁰⁶ <http://www.physics.org/facts/sand-galaxies.asp>

66,615 mph (29.78 km/sec).²⁰⁷ When we put the complexity of all of the galactic motion together with the speeds that are involved, we can recognize that this requires great precision in order to avoid disaster. The *put together (consist)*, being in the perfect tense, speaks of the creation of all that is in the universe having been completed in the past with a very evident ongoing result from that completed action.²⁰⁸ The universe was created with all of its movement, and there is a present manifestation of the great complexity that continues unabated; the Creator's promise to Noah was that "while the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease" (Genesis 8:22) – during all of the days of the earth, the functions of the rotation of the earth on its axis (*day and night*) and its orbit around the sun (*summer and winter*) will not end. It is the Lord Who maintains the complex functioning of the earth, moon, sun and all of the other bodies in space – He created them and put them together so that they work in harmony (*consist*) according to His purposes and in keeping with His promise to Noah.

However, we have been told that there is coming a time when the earth will vanish, and all who are on the earth at that time will die and stand before God's judgment throne (Revelation 20:11-12). The Lord has provided us with life on earth so that we might prepare ourselves for life eternal – it is what we do during this life that determines whether we live eternally with the Lord in glory or with Satan in the lake of fire. Jesus stated explicitly that it is the one who remains faithful to Him throughout the trials of this life who will be saved (Matthew 24:13); in other words, our salvation is only complete when we faithfully come to the end of our lives on earth. The possibility of becoming unfaithful remains a very real threat to the child of God, which is why we have been warned to be on guard (Hebrews 3:12; 1 Peter 5:8). For the apostate who has turned away from his faith in the Lord, there is no remaining means of cleansing from sin – there is no hope (Ezekiel 18:24; Hebrews 6:4-6; 10:26-29). Evangelicals have staked their hope on the misdirected doctrine of once-saved-always-saved; it is their contention that if someone offers a prayer for salvation to the Lord, then his inheritance in heaven is eternally secured – even if he should live his entire life contrary to the Word of God, heaven still awaits. Still, Evangelical giants like John MacArthur perpetuate this tragic error and will go to great lengths to defend this false teaching.

In his book *The Truth War*, MacArthur seeks to defend his case for this anti-biblical teaching by making several contradictory statements concerning the matter of apostasy. He begins by defining it as an "abandonment, a separation, a defection – the abdication of truth altogether."²⁰⁹ He acknowledges that it comes from the Greek word *apostasia* and is satisfied with *falling away* as an accurate translation into English; nevertheless, the Greek word is much more expressive than that (*falling away*) and speaks of revolt and desertion evidenced through rebellion – a result of



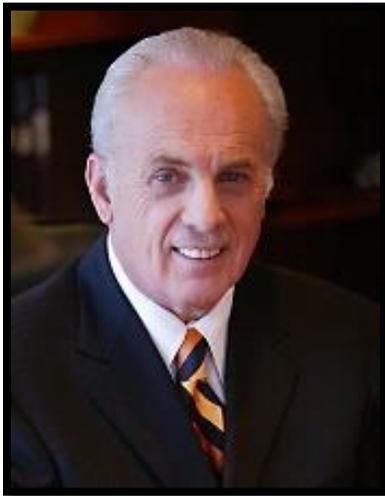
²⁰⁷ <http://planetfacts.org/orbital-speed-of-planets-in-order/>

²⁰⁸ <http://www.ntgreek.net/lesson23.htm>

²⁰⁹ John MacArthur, *The Truth War*, p. 43.

changing one's loyalties.²¹⁰ MacArthur then proceeds to categorically deny that a *genuine Christian* can become an apostate, and offers **his further definition** of apostates as those who “identify themselves as disciples but who never genuinely embrace the truth.”²¹¹ He uses the words *genuine/genuinely* – it seems that he is endeavoring to create two classes of “Christian”: a *Christian* (who might fall away) and a *genuine Christian* (who cannot fall away). In many ways this sounds like a *carnal Christian* and a *Christian*, as it is too frequently voiced within Evangelical circles.²¹² Nevertheless, MacArthur's summation is this: “An *apostate* is therefore a defector from the truth – someone who has known the truth, given some show of affirmation to it, perhaps even proclaimed it for a while – but then rejected it in the end.”²¹³ He makes a fleeting reference to Jesus' parable of the soils, but he erroneously identifies the lack of fruit from the rocky and weed-infested soils as evidence that those individuals were *always unregenerate and unbelieving – still dead in trespasses and sins*.²¹⁴ However, if he would have taken a moment to look at Jesus' explanation of this parable to His disciples in Luke 8:13-14, he would have known that what he is proposing is contradictory to the words of Jesus. Those on the rocky soil *believe* (are believing) for a time but when hard-times come, they become faithless (unbelieving); if Jesus states that they *believe*, then who is MacArthur to say that they did not believe? For those with the weedy soil, Jesus said that they *heard* and *go forth* – they heard the truth and began to walk in the way of Truth; it was as they were proceeding in that way that they became *choked* and unfruitful; Jesus says that they began to walk in the Way of the Word – they were believing and began walking in faithfulness. Jesus' words undermine MacArthur's position.

Finally, MacArthur equates *apostasy* and *false teaching*, which is like saying that death is the same thing as cancer or a heart attack. In the space of four consecutive sentences, he says: *Apostasy*



John MacArthur

*can have far-reaching ... effects ...; When false teaching goes unchallenged ...; If not vigorously resisted, apostasy will spread like leaven ...; False teaching thus attacks the church*²¹⁵

There is little doubt that these two are the same thing in his mind and lead to his intriguing statements: “People who embrace apostasy are destroyed by it. Churches wither and die because of it.”²¹⁶ Think about it, you cannot be destroyed by apostasy; if you are apostate from the Truth of God then, yes, you are spiritually destroyed and dead, but *apostasy* describes your state of being and not what brought you to such a place. If you have cancer you are not dead, but if it is not effectively dealt with then you will die; similarly, unless false teaching is identified and removed from our lives it will lead us into apostasy – false

²¹⁰ MacArthur, p.43; Friberg Lexicon.

²¹¹ MacArthur, p. 43.

²¹² Paul deals with this in Romans 8:6-7 where the *carnal mind* (fleshly oriented thinking) is identified as being *death* and contrary to God; a *carnal Christian* is, in fact, not a Christian at all.

²¹³ MacArthur, p. 44.

²¹⁴ Ibid, p. 45; he limits his reference to Matthew 13:20-22.

²¹⁵ MacArthur, p. 45.

²¹⁶ Ibid, p. 45-46.

teaching is a cause of apostasy, but it is not apostasy! The one who promotes false teaching is either apostate, or he simply makes a pretense of being a disciple of the Lord (a religious pagan who has never been born again). Wading through MacArthur's confusing and contradictory explanation of apostasy should make it evident that he, although probably one of the more conservative Evangelical preachers today, must be relegated to the shelf of false teachers who are to be avoided (Romans 16:17). Being a Calvinist places upon MacArthur the burden of creatively misinterpreting Scripture so as not to dislodge the theological plank that God will save those whom He chooses; Calvinism emphasizes the sovereignty of God to the exclusion of the will of man – God will save those of His choice and they cannot be lost (this is called the *perseverance of the saints*), and so MacArthur contends that “true believers will persevere in faith to the end.”²¹⁷ If this were truly so, then what happened to such sovereignty when the sinless Adam chose to sin? Interestingly, in dealing with the topic of Adam's sin, MacArthur makes a very telling statement: “God allowed this in order that sin might come [i.e., God waived His sovereignty], in order that He might destroy it [his explanation as to why God would waive His sovereignty in this situation] ... and in the process He would save sinners who **believed** [caught in dealing with a difficult text within the confines of God's complete sovereignty over all, he lets it slip that sinners must *believe* rather than merely being chosen by God] and judge sinners who did not” (emphasis added).²¹⁸ MacArthur, identified as being a Reformed Baptist,²¹⁹ reveals a chink in his Calvinistic armor, yet he still vehemently contends that a *genuine* Christian cannot turn away from God and lose his salvation – if such appears to be the case, then his prescribed answer is that he was never truly born again.

The Scriptures state: “Take heed [a command to be continually vigilant], brethren [earlier they were called *holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling* (v.1); those who are truly born again], lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief [unfaithfulness], in departing from [becoming apostate from] the living God” (Hebrews 3:12).²²⁰ Jesus said, “And ye shall be hated of all *men* for my name's sake: but he that shall endure [*hupomeno* – to remain faithful through trials; active voice (*he* is doing the *enduring*)] unto the end, the same shall be saved [*will be saved*; future tense]” (Mark 13:13).²²¹ We must *endure* (active voice), but we will be *saved* by God alone (*saved* is in the passive voice). Clearly, faithfulness is required in order to be saved by the Lord one day, and a lack of faithfulness will have us becoming apostate from Him.

Since it is central to our eternal spiritual welfare, what is faithfulness? The dictionary says: “strict or thorough in the performance of duty,”²²² and *duty* is the conduct that is due to someone who is over us.²²³ Therefore, since Jesus bought us out of sin, we are duty-bound (as His slaves) to live in faithfulness to Him and His Word, but what is equally evident is that it must be our choice to live faithfully, and we are warned against letting *unbelief*, or *unfaithfulness*, enter into our hearts.

²¹⁷ <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/90-270/the-perseverance-of-the-saints-part-1>

²¹⁸ <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/90-239/the-fall-of-man-part-2>

²¹⁹ *Reformed Baptists* are not Baptists who have mended their ways, but rather those who hold a *Reformed* or Calvinistic view of the salvation that is offered through Jesus Christ; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_F._MacArthur

²²⁰ Gingrich Lexicon.

²²¹ Strong's Online.

²²² <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/faithfulness?s=t>

²²³ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/duty>

The sovereignty of Jesus over the complex movements of the universe is evident, but when it comes to the affairs of man's heart He gently steps aside so that we might choose to believe and live faithfully for Him (Deuteronomy 30:19). As the pinnacle of His creation, mankind was made in *the image of God* (Genesis 1:27) and created with a mind to reason and choose. *Faithfulness* and *unfaithfulness* both stand before us ready for us to choose; whatever choice that we make, God has prescribed the consequences that will come – we have the freedom to choose obedience or disobedience, but we do not get to choose what we will reap from our choice (Galatians 6:7).

18. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

Paul continues to describe Jesus, the eternal God Who took on the flesh of mankind – He is the *head of the body*, which is the *ekklesia* (*church*). Within our physical bodies, we all know that the head is that top part that rests upon our shoulders and where our eyes, nose, mouth and ears reside. However, it is so much more than simply a place for these features to call home. The head contains the brain, which is quite literally the control center for our bodies. The various parts of the brain control thought, reasoning, memory, emotion, sensory messages (such as hot, pain and loud), vision, breathing, body temperature, hunger and movement (both voluntary and involuntary) – everything that we do, think or feel involves some part, or parts, of the brain.²²⁴ It is connected to the rest of the body through the spinal cord that is made up of a bundle of nerves that reaches from the base of the brain almost to the bottom of the spine; its function is to carry messages between the extremities of the body and the brain.²²⁵

Paul identifies the *body* as being the *church* (*ekklesia*). One day Jesus asked His disciples, “Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?” (Matthew 16:13). After naming John the Baptist and various prophets, Jesus asked them what they thought; Peter's reaction was: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16). Jesus' response to Peter identifies our subject: “... thou art Peter [*petros* – a stone (see John 1:42)], and upon this rock [*petra*] I will build my church [*ekklesia* – literally, those who are called out]; and the gates of hell [Hades] shall not prevail against [overcome] it” (Matthew 16:18).²²⁶ Let's consider this carefully so that we are sure to understand exactly what Jesus is saying to Peter. *Peter* (*petros*) is a masculine noun in the Greek; *petra*, on the other hand, is feminine – without a doubt, these are not referring to the same thing.²²⁷ *Petros* is described as being *a stone*, a detached rock or boulder that can easily be moved;²²⁸ for the meaning of the Aramaic name Cephas (*Kephas* – *kay-fas*); the name that Jesus gave to Simon Peter), the KJV translators show *stone* (*petros* – John 1:42).²²⁹ When Jesus spoke of the wise man who had laid the foundation for his house upon the *rock*, the word that is used is *petra*, which

²²⁴ <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/anatomy-of-the-brain>

²²⁵ <https://www.merckmanuals.com/en-ca/home/brain,-spinal-cord,-and-nerve-disorders/biology-of-the-nervous-system/spinal-cord>

²²⁶ Strong's Online.

²²⁷ Stephanus 1550 NT.

²²⁸ Vine's, “rock.”

²²⁹ Strong's Online.

speaks of the bedrock and not a moveable stone (Matthew 7:24-25).²³⁰ Understanding the significant difference between *petros* and *petra* helps us to establish exactly what Jesus was saying.

The most obvious conclusion is that Jesus was **not** going to build His *ekklesia* upon Peter (*petros*), but upon something that is much more stable (*petra*). What had just happened? Peter, in his usual impetuosity had just declared Jesus to be the Anointed One of God, the Son of God – in essence, he called Jesus the eternal God. **This** is the bedrock (*petra*) upon which Jesus said that He would build His assembly of called-out ones (His *ekklesia*).

Elsewhere, Jesus spoke of this assembly in different terms: “My sheep hear [*are hearing*, present tense*] my voice, and I know [*am knowing**] them, and they follow [*are following**] me: And I give [*am giving**] unto them eternal life; and they shall [absolutely] never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave [has given] *them* [to] me, is greater than all; and no *man* is able to pluck *them* out of my Father’s hand. I and *my* Father are one” (John 10:27-30). Jesus begins by describing those whom He is drawing into His fold (His *ekklesia*): those who are hearing His voice and are following Him, He recognizes them and is giving them eternal life (unlike those of Matthew 7:23 whom He did not *know*). It is noteworthy that it is to those who are hearing and obeying (*following*) Him that He is giving eternal life and declares that they will absolutely *never perish*.²³¹ This is an affirmation of Jesus’ promise: “he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved” (Matthew 24:13). He then goes on to say that nothing can *pluck* His sheep out of *my hand* and *my Father’s hand*, and concludes by clarifying that He (the Son of God) and God the Father *are one*. Despite this passage being used as an argument in favor of the modern heresy of eternal security, there is nothing here that even hints that such is the case. Those whom Jesus calls *My sheep* are *in Him* and are, therefore, free from *condemnation* by God and are living according to the guidance of the Spirit of God (Romans 8:1). For those who have eyes to see, this is not a mysterious thing: those who are continually living in faithful obedience to the Lord’s commands (which is what being guided by the Spirit means) are those whom the Lord will bring to a complete salvation one day (Matthew 24:13). However, this wondrous salvation has always been conditional, and the condition is faithfulness. Consider Ezekiel 18:24: “But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, *and* doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked *man* doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned [remembered]: in his trespass [to act unfaithfully] that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die.”²³² Furthermore, the writer of Hebrews warns: “Take heed, **brethren**, lest there be in any [any one; singular] of you an evil heart of unbelief [*apistia* – *no faith*; unfaithfulness], in departing [to become apostate] from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12).²³³ Since a proper understanding of the Word of God, as it relates to these matters, is so important (for they are dealing with our eternal acceptance or rejection by God), let’s look into it just a little more.

²³⁰ Strong’s Online; Friberg Lexicon.

²³¹ This is a case of a subjunctive mood verb being used with the negatives *ou* and *me* to form the strongest negative possible in Greek. https://www.ntgreek.org/pdf/subjunctive_uses.pdf

²³² Strong’s Online.

²³³ Strong’s Online; Friberg Lexicon.

Peter wrote of this matter this way: “For when they [the context tells us that this refers to those who might sound convincing but are empty of the truth (hypocrites, *wells without water*)] speak great swelling *words* of vanity [are sounding forth pompous nonsense], they allure [literally, *to bait*; to entice into doing wrong] through the lusts of the flesh [including human “wisdom”], *through much* wantonness [without moral restraint; hedonism (self-indulgence)], those that were clean [*truly*] escaped from them who live in error [these had left the *darkness* for the light of Christ]. While they [the hypocrites] promise them liberty [freedom], they themselves are the servants [*doulos*, slaves] of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome [defeated, conquered], of the same is he brought in bondage [*duoloo* – enslavement; cp. Romans 6:16]. For if after they [those who have gone from *darkness* to light] have escaped the pollutions [corruption] of the world through the knowledge [a precise and correct or full knowledge] of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein [involved again in the corruption of the world], and overcome [defeated, conquered; surrender to it], the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known [*epiginosko* – to become thoroughly acquainted with] the way of righteousness, than, after they have known [*epiginosko*] *it*, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them” (2 Peter 2:18-21).²³⁴ Peter says that false teachers will offer freedom (*we are not under the law, but under grace* – Romans 6:15) to the unwary child of God even though they are themselves slaves to ruin (*corruption*). What is very interesting is that Peter goes on to say that should a child of God (someone who has escaped the corruption of this world) be convinced by the *good words and fair speeches* of these who are the slaves of corruption (Romans 16:18), it is then worse for them than it was before they ever stepped out of the darkness into the light of Christ. In other words, it is worse to have truly believed in the Lord and then be deceived into forsaking Him, than it is for someone who has never known the Truth at all. The subtlety in all of this is that the *good words* will never indicate that you are leaving the Lord for a lie.

If Eve had understood that she was forsaking the Lord for a lie of the devil, then she may well have remained faithful to the Lord, but she was convinced that she was discounting the Lord’s commandment for a very good cause – she would become wise (Genesis 3:6). Nothing has changed; the *good words and fair speeches* of these *slaves of corruption* are merely a cover for the *pompous nonsense* that is the essence of their religious position. Jesus warned: “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:15-16a). Those who speak religious lies will do so under the guise of Truth, therefore we must never accept their words at face value – their words may appear to be truth (*sheep-talk*), but that is simply a thin veneer that has been drawn over their lies (*ravening wolf-talk*). The Lord’s instruction is to look beyond the superficial so that we can understand who these *false prophets* really are; He says to check their *fruit* – look at how they are living, discover the meaning of the words that they use and ascertain their close associations. In this day of flourishing ecumenism among Evangelicals, it should be very obvious to us that we cannot accept what we hear without evaluation; frequently their *good words* have been redefined so as not to offend those whom they seek to impress, and so what is heard is frequently not what is meant. This is why Paul exhorted the Roman Christians to *avoid* those whose teachings were

²³⁴ Strong’s Online; Friberg Lexicon.

only alongside of the Truth (Romans 16:17) – we must not read their literature, sit under their teaching or seek spiritual fellowship with them. To do so is to follow the example of Eve and expose ourselves to deceptive lies hidden under a façade of truth – the seeds for apostasy.

Peter warned us that the position of someone who has been deceived into forsaking the truth of God after they have fully known it, is far worse than before they had heard and responded to the truth. The writer of Hebrews explains this for us: “For *it is* impossible [cannot be done] for those who were once enlightened [filled with saving knowledge] ... If they shall fall away [*parapipto* – literally to fall aside (from the Way), become lost; this phrase is best rendered as *and apostatizing* (there is no *if* in the Greek)], to renew [be restoring] them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify [crucifying again] to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put *him* to an open shame” (Hebrews 6:4-6).²³⁵ Ponder, along with me, the crucifixion of Jesus; there are two very different perspectives of His death on the cross: 1) the religious Jews considered His death to be justice because of His claim of being the Son of God, and justification for their own righteousness (Matthew 26:63-66), and 2) to those with a living faith in the Lord, it is the power and wisdom of God that brings redemption from sin (1 Corinthians 1:23-24, 30). In essence, the religious Jews saw His death and public shame as their victory, yet, for those with eyes to see, His death and resurrection are the means to cleansing from sin. The writer of Hebrews identifies those who are apostate (those who have turned away from the Lord) as crucifying Jesus again *to themselves*; at one time they considered His crucifixion as their means of salvation but, now that they have apostatized, they are crucifying Him again, except that this time it is after the manner of the Jews who beheld His public humiliation and death as justice and personal vindication. Jesus died only once (Hebrews 7:27), and there are only two perspectives of His death: 1) He died to bring us salvation, or 2) He died because He deserved it. Therefore, those who are apostate from the Lord are accounting the Lord crucified again, but this time it is according to the perspective of the religious Jews: His public humiliation was deserved and their right to live as they please is justified.

The writer of Hebrews states that the one who is apostate cannot be brought again unto repentance. The message that Jesus gave to His disciples for the world was one of *repentance and remission of sins* in *His name* (Luke 24:46-47). *Repentance* is a change of mind resulting in transformed behavior,²³⁶ and *remission* (deliverance) *of sins* identifies the need for an offering to be made before a holy God – death is the just payment for sin (Romans 6:23) and so no one can make the payment for his own sin and live, which is why Jesus, being sinless, could bear the sins of the world and pay the price for them (1 John 2:2). When we come before God in repentance and faith in the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, the price for our sins is paid and we enter into a relationship that requires our obedience to the Lord’s commands (John 14:15; 1 John 2:3-4). However, the one who is apostate from the Lord has moved from faith in Him to a rejection of His sacrifice for sins and, since there is no other sacrifice available for this cleansing (John 14:6), all that lies ahead for this one is a *fearful* expectation of condemnation (Hebrews 10:26-27). Inasmuch as he has rejected the only Sacrifice for sin, his eternal destiny is sure: a fiery expression of divine judgment. Such a rejection by the apostate can be either overt (they might verbally express their

²³⁵ Strong’s Online; Friberg Lexicon.

²³⁶ Friberg Lexicon.

rejection of the Savior) or covert (through disobedience, they slid into apostasy – they’re still religious (attend church, lead a church or study God’s Word), nothing has really changed for them, but the Lord is no longer their lord). “And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15).

Therein we understand that Peter’s words are confirmed: indeed, the apostate is far worse off than the one who has never believed. For the latter there is always the hope that they might hear the truth and turn from their wickedness to receive cleansing from sin; for the apostate, that hope is gone – his irrevocable destiny has been secured and it is the Lake of Fire. Jesus said that the one who will be saved one day is the one who is living faithfully for Him to the end of his life on earth (Matthew 24:13). From this we must understand that Jesus is the Head of a Body that is made up of those who are living in faithfulness to Him while they are present on this earth. “*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk [are walking (present tense)] not after the flesh, but after the Spirit*” (Romans 8:1) – the phrases *in Christ* and *no condemnation* only apply to those who are walking according to (*after*) the Spirit of God.²³⁷ Jesus’ disciples had difficulty with these new concepts, and so Jesus explained that “**If** a man love [is loving (present tense/subjunctive mood – the subjunctive mood normally indicates a possibility, but this in a Greek conditional statement format that unfolds into a present truth)] me, he will keep [attend carefully to; indicative mood, this is a statement of fact] my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth [is loving] me not keepeth not [is absolutely not attending carefully to] my sayings ...” (John 14:23-24a).²³⁸ In order to remain as a member of the Body of Christ and enjoy the indwelling presence of the Lord, we must live in obedience to His commandments (John 14:15), and His First Commandment is that we are to have no other gods before Him (Exodus 20:3). Jesus explained this in very practical terms: “He that loveth [is loving] father or mother more than me is not worthy [absolutely not deserving] of me: and he that loveth [is loving] son or daughter more than me is not worthy [absolutely not deserving] of me” (Matthew 10:37).²³⁹ Therefore, if we choose to place even our family ahead of our commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ, then we are not *worthy* of Him and we have violated His First Commandment. With this in mind, Paul charged the Corinthians to *examine* themselves so as to be sure that they are in the faith of the Lord, **and** to *prove* their faith in the light of God’s Word in order to ensure that it is genuine (2 Corinthians 13:5); the purpose of this continual exercise (both *examine* and *prove* are in the present tense) is to make sure that we are living in accordance with the Spirit of God (Romans 8:1), and to immediately repent of any failure that we find within us.

Paul describes Jesus as being the *Head* of the *ekklesia* – He is the One Who is monitoring all that takes place within His Body of faithful called-out ones (*ekklesia*). This is done on an individual basis: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever [singular] believeth [is believing (present tense/singular)] in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).²⁴⁰ The narrow Way to life that is opened in Christ is available to *whosoever*, to those

²³⁷ Strong’s Online.

²³⁸ Strong’s Online; https://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/conditional_sentences.htm#CONDITIONAL_PDF.

²³⁹ Strong’s Online.

²⁴⁰ Stephanus 1550 NT.

individuals who desire to come to the Lord (Matthew 7:14; John 14:6 – *no man cometh* is all singular).²⁴¹ Paul explains the relationship between Christ, the Head, and His Body more fully in the next chapter of this letter, so we will leave the details until then.

Paul continues to describe Jesus as the *beginning* – this is now the third time that he has expressed this truth: v. 15 (*the firstborn* – before all), v. 17 (*before all things*), and now, *the beginning*. There is a strong emphasis upon Jesus being the **eternal** God, which is such an appropriate theme for our day when Jesus is too frequently reduced to a Friend Who is tolerant of all of our subtle accommodations and compromises. Jesus, as eternal God in the flesh, paid the price for our sins – He bought us out of slavery to the devil; He is our Master and we are His slaves (Romans 6:16-18)! Unless we remain faithfully obedient to the Lord, we will not enjoy His salvation; Jesus said, “And ye shall [will (future)] be hated of all *men* for my name’s sake [*because of My name*]: but he that endureth [*hupomeno* – to remain faithful through whatever life brings] to the end [a demonstrative Greek pronoun was missed that identifies *this one* – this faithful one] shall [will (future)] be saved” (Matthew 10:22).²⁴² Moses is called a *servant* (*doulos* – slave) of God (Revelation 15:3), and Paul, James, Jude and John each identifies himself as being a *servant* (*doulos* – slave) of God (Romans 1:1; James 1:1; Jude 1; Revelation 1:1). It is as we permit our position as a slave of the Lord to fill our minds that we will begin to grasp the importance of our obedience to Him – He is our MASTER. Perhaps, because our western world has such a great abhorrence for slavery and an obsession with independence, our minds rebel at the thought of being spiritual slaves to the Lord Who bought us out of sin, or maybe we just have such a high opinion of who we are that the thought of being a slave, even to the Lord, is too negative. Yes, our relationship with the Lord is so much more than just that of slave-Master, yet if we do not begin with this in mind, there is a very real possibility that we will lose out entirely. Faithfulness (obedience) is central to the completion of our salvation experience with the Lord, and obedience comes the easiest to those who willingly bow before the Lord as His slaves.

Paul then carries us beyond Jesus being the *beginning* to Him as *the firstborn from the dead*. When we considered the term *firstborn* as in verse 15, we described it as referring to Jesus existing before all of creation, and the following verses clearly support this understanding. However, the context of its use here calls for a slightly different sense. The term *firstborn* (*prototokos*) is typically applied to the eldest child within a family, and it is used to describe Jesus as Mary’s first child (Luke 2:7); however, in this instance, it refers to Jesus as being the *firstborn from the dead* – clearly, this is something very different.²⁴³ This identifies Jesus as being the first one to be brought back from the dead. We might wonder as we look at the Scriptures, for we are told that Elijah raised a young boy to life (1 Kings 17:22), Elisha as well (2 Kings 4:35), and, during His ministry, Jesus raised a young girl (Mark 5:42), a young man (Luke 7:15), and Lazarus from the dead (John 11:44). All of these who were raised from the dead, continued to live as they had before until their lives on earth came to an end – they all died again. When Jesus rose from the dead after the close of the Sabbath (having been three days and three nights in the tomb – Matthew 12:40), He was raised to **never** die again – He was the first to be brought from death Who would never

²⁴¹ Stephanus 1550 NT.

²⁴² Strong’s Online; Stephanus 1550 NT.

²⁴³ Strong’s Online.

face it again. As Jesus revealed Himself to John on Patmos, He said, “*I am* he that liveth [is living], and was [became] dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore ...” (Revelation 1:18), which provides the basis for Paul calling Him the *firstborn from the dead*.

However, the word *firstborn*, when used to refer to the eldest child in a family, indicates that there are siblings and that it does not refer to an only child. Of Jesus we read: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten [*monogenes* (*mon-og-en-ace*) – an only Child] Son ...” (John 3:16).²⁴⁴ Yet it is written that Mary “brought forth her **firstborn** [*prototokos*] son: and he [Joseph] called his name JESUS” (Matthew 1:25); this, along with other Scriptures (Mark 6:3), tells us that Mary had other children after Jesus, but Jesus was the only One Who was born of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35). In other words, Jesus is the only One born of God in a body of flesh; from God’s perspective, Jesus is the *only begotten* (*monogenes*) – the eternal Word become flesh (John 1:14), but for Mary, He was her *firstborn* (*prototokos*) – her Eldest but not her only child. This is all vehemently denied by the Roman Catholic Church that elevates Mary to the place of Mother of God (*Theotokos*), insists that she remained as a virgin all of her life and that Jesus’ siblings, who are mentioned in Scripture, were actually “His cousins or the more or less near relatives.”²⁴⁵ We recognize that the Catholic Church has created many doctrines that are not supported by God’s Word, and this is no less the case here. It is important for us to keep this in mind because of the ecumenical fervor among Evangelicals that calls upon them to accept the Roman Catholics (among other heretics) as their spiritual brethren. Nonetheless, those who are *in Christ* are called upon to separate from everyone who promotes teachings that are alongside of or not in keeping with the Scriptures (Romans 16:17); therefore, in obedience to Scripture, we must spiritually avoid both the Catholics and the ecumenical Evangelicals.

Consequently, when we read that Jesus is the *firstborn from the dead*, we must immediately recognize that He is the first among others. “For whom he [God] did foreknow [*proginosko* – to know beforehand], he also did predestinate [*proorizo* – to determine beforehand] *to be* conformed [made similar] to the image [likeness] of his Son, that he [Jesus] might be the firstborn [*prototokos*] among many brethren” (Romans 8:29).²⁴⁶ A careful consideration of what is said here tells us that God has predetermined that some will be remade into the likeness of Christ so that He (Christ) might be the *firstborn* among many. Other Scriptures help us to understand this properly. “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings [*every spiritual blessing* (this is singular in the Greek)] in heavenly *places in Christ*: According as **he** [God] **hath chosen us in him** [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love” (Ephesians 1:3-4).²⁴⁷ The evidence here is that God has chosen those of us who are *in Christ* – in other words, it is those who are *in Christ* who are identified as being the *chosen* of God; what this does **not** say is that we are *in Christ* because God has *chosen us*. This is a point of stumbling for those who hold to a Reformed theology; their solution is to re-define the terms this way: “God’s foreknowledge ... is not a reference to His

²⁴⁴ Strong’s Online.

²⁴⁵ <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15464b.htm>

²⁴⁶ Strong’s Online; Liddell-Scott Lexicon; Gingrich Lexicon.

²⁴⁷ Stephanus 1550 NT.

omniscient foresight but to His foreordination (or determination beforehand)”²⁴⁸ – in essence, they are striving to make *foreknow* (*proginosko*) and *predestinate* (*proorizo*) synonyms, when any dictionary will tell you that that is not the case.

“For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive *and* remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent [absolutely will not precede²⁴⁹] them which are asleep [metaphorically, those who have died]. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ [those who are *asleep*] shall rise first: Then we which are alive *and* remain [the living, the surviving] shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air ...” (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17).²⁵⁰ “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible [not subject to decay; imperishable], and we shall be changed. For this corruptible [that which is perishing] must put on incorruption [that which will not perish], and this mortal [subject to death] *must* put on immortality [endless life]” (1 Corinthians 15:52-53).²⁵¹ “Beloved, now are we the sons [*teknon* – *children*] of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he [Jesus] shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).²⁵² When the Lord comes in the clouds of the air to gather His own, there will be a massive bodily resurrection of everyone who has died in Christ (their spirits will come with the Lord and be reunited with their bodies), but their resurrected bodies will be different – they will be immortal and like unto the Lord’s glorified body; for those who are living when the Lord comes, their bodies will be *changed* from mortality to immortality and they, too, will be like unto the Lord.

Paul describes Jesus as being the *firstborn from the dead* – He was the first to be resurrected in a body that will never be subject to death again; He will be joined by an innumerable company of those whose bodies will become immortal – He was the first but definitely not the last. This *innumerable company* is made up of only those who are *in Christ* – those who have chosen to remain faithful to the Lord in this life (John 14:15; Matthew 24:13). Because God is not limited to time as we are, He knows who will be *in Christ* and has known this from before creation (Ephesians 1:4). However, the Scriptures are filled with commands for us to remain steadfast (Hebrews 3:14), vigilant (1 Peter 5:8), discerning (Romans 16:17), and obedient (John 14:15) in our walk with the Lord, thereby making it abundantly clear that we have a choice to make. Those who are *in Christ* are those who have discovered the Narrow Way **Who** leads to life (Matthew 7:14; John 14:6) **and** have chosen to live according to the dictates of the Word of God regardless of the cost (Matthew 10:37-38). Jesus is described as the *firstborn from the dead* (Colossians 1:18) and the *firstborn among many brethren* (Romans 8:29); those who are *from the dead* and the *many brethren* are the same in this case, and both will abide with the Lord for eternity.

²⁴⁸ John MacArthur, *Saved Without a Doubt*, p. 70.

²⁴⁹ *Prevent* is in the subjunctive mood (normally an indication of possibility), but together with the two Greek negatives *ou* and *me*, it forms a very strong negative; https://www.ntgreek.org/pdf/subjunctive_uses.pdf

²⁵⁰ Strong’s Online.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*

²⁵² *Ibid.*

Jesus is the *Head* of the Body, the *Beginning*, and the *Firstborn from the dead* so that He, Himself, should become in all, First.²⁵³ His Body (the *ekklesia*) is made up of those who are His sheep from all ages – for those who have heard, are hearing and will hear His voice and have followed, are following and will follow Him, He is their Shepherd or *Head* (John 10:27). As the *Beginning*, He is the Creator of all things, whether past or future, and the Sustainer of all that He has created and will yet create. Being the *Firstborn from the dead*, He will never die again – He, as the eternal Word, bears His body of flesh into eternity. John beheld Him in heaven as a Lamb Who had been slain (Revelation 5:6), and later declared Him to be the eternal light of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:23). In each of these roles, the Lord is in a place of primary importance – He is our LORD and eternal God, our Savior and Mediator. Our spiritual life and blessings are only possible in Him; He must be our ALL. Jesus spoke very plainly about this: “Whosoever therefore shall confess [own] me before men, him will I confess [own] also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny [*may disown* – subjunctive mood, making this a possibility, a choice that we must make] me before men, him will I also deny [*disown* – indicative mood; a statement of fact] before my Father which is in heaven. Think not [You should not suppose] that I am come to send [bring] peace on earth: I came not to send [bring] peace, but a sword [a small sword that is used here to symbolize hostility]. For I am come to set a man at variance against [*dichazo* – to divide into two: separate a man from] his father, and the daughter against [from] her mother, and the daughter in law against [from] her mother in law. And a man’s foes [*echthros* – involving hatred: enemies] *shall be* they of his own household [family]. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not [absolutely] worthy [deserving] of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is [absolutely] not worthy [deserving] of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me [literally: *and whoever is not taking up his cross and following me, he is not deserving of Me*]. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 10:32-39).²⁵⁴ Jesus identifies a test of our commitment to Him: owning Him before men, which will lead to an expressed hatred even from those who are close to us (our family), loving Him above those who are closest to us, bearing our cross and living in obedience to Him – this is, in essence, a prescription to losing our comfortable lives because of the Lord and finding His sufficiency through it all. Jesus said, “And ye shall be hated of all *men* for my name’s sake [*because of My name*]: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved” (Mark 13:13);²⁵⁵ the hatred will spring from *owning Him* before others, which is the first step in discovering the cross that He has called us to bear as we live faithfully for Him. Nevertheless, it is because of our continual faithfulness to Him, despite the oppression that will become ours, that we will one day (in the end) be saved. Jesus said, “I am the way ...” (John 14:6); by placing one’s faith in Him for cleansing from sin, we begin a journey with Him that will be filled with choices that will either strengthen or weaken that relationship. Jesus also said that we must live in obedience to His commands as an expression of our love for Him (John 14:15); following Him (obedience) is *owning Him* before others that will give rise to their hatred for us,

²⁵³ Stephanus 1550 NT.

²⁵⁴ Strong’s Online; Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon.

²⁵⁵ Stephanus 1550 NT.

which, in turn, means that we must persevere and continue to give Him that position of *pre-eminence* in our lives – He is Head of the Body and He must be our Lord.

19. For it pleased *the Father* that in him should all fulness dwell;

A literal translation of the Greek is: *because all the fullness was well-pleased to dwell in Him.*²⁵⁶ Although this might appear to be a somewhat incomplete thought, it comes at the end of a significant teaching on Jesus being the eternal God: He provides cleansing from sin, He is the express image of God, He was present before creation, He created all things, He continues to hold all things together, He is the Head of the *ekklesia*, and the first to be raised from the dead Who will never die again. The fullness of Deity was pleased to dwell in the Lord Jesus Christ because HE IS GOD! A little later, Paul reiterates this truth: “For in him [in Christ] dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead [*theotes*, divine nature] bodily [in bodily form]” (Colossians 2:9).²⁵⁷

What Paul is emphasizing over and over again in this opening of his letter to the Colossian Christians, is the very truth about Jesus that the religious Jews absolutely rejected. As Jesus spoke of the security that His sheep have in His hand and in the hand of His Father, He concluded with “I and *my* Father are one” (John 10:30). Hearing this, the Jews were ready to stone Him: “For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God” (John 10:33); they recognized that He was declaring Himself to be the Son of God (eternal God), yet they could not bring themselves to see more than Jesus, “the son of Joseph” (John 6:42). As the religious leaders of the Jews became more desperate to silence Jesus, they “sought for witness against Jesus to put him to death; and found none” (Mark 14:55). Matthew tells us: “Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death ...” (Matthew 26:59); since they could not find a truthful witness, in their desperation they would even settle for a *false witness*. Finally, they became their own *witness* against the Lord (Matthew 26:63-66); as they brought Jesus before Pilate, their charge against Him was: “We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God” (John 19:7); since the death sentence could only be carried out by the ruling Romans, the religious Jews appealed to Pilate to do it for them. Their only accusation was that Jesus had declared Himself to be the Son of God; what the religious Jews called *blasphemy*, Paul has been clarifying and emphasizing as truth to the Colossians – Jesus is God!

The phrase *all fulness* describes the extent to which the Deity filled the Lord Jesus – it was a full measure!²⁵⁸ When Jesus said, “I and *my* Father are one” (John 10:30), He was stating that He is eternal God; *are* is in the indicative mood, which means that Jesus made this declaration as a statement of fact, and the Jews understood it as such and took offense. As Jesus talked with Nicodemus, He said this: “And no man hath ascended up [active voice – no one through their own action has ascended to heaven] to heaven, but [except] he that came down [active voice] from heaven, *even* the Son of man which is [present tense] in heaven” (John 3:13). There are many

²⁵⁶ Stephanus 1550 NT.

²⁵⁷ Strong’s Online; Friberg Lexicon.

²⁵⁸ Gingrich Lexicon.

Jewish traditions that tell of Moses ascending to heaven in order to receive the Torah from God,²⁵⁹ but Jesus cuts through them by clarifying that no one has *ascended* to heaven. Enoch was taken by the Lord (Genesis 5:24) and the Lord sent a fiery chariot and horses in a whirlwind to take Elijah (2 Kings 2:11), but neither *ascended* of their own accord. Jesus tells Nicodemus that He *came down* to earth from heaven and that He *is* in heaven, thereby declaring His omnipresence – even as He was on earth speaking with Nicodemus, He, at the same time, **is** in heaven. The fullness of Almighty God dwelt in Jesus because He is God!

20. And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.

This continues the thought of that which is the pleasure of the fullness of Deity abiding in Christ. The first two phrases are actually reversed from the Greek; the first is: *and through Him to reconcile all unto Himself*.²⁶⁰

The word *reconcile* that is used here is from *apokatallasso*; the prefix *apo* speaks of separation, and this word literally identifies a transfer from one condition to another that is very different – the applied meaning is to reconcile completely.²⁶¹ The context tells us that *all* will be brought to agreement with Him, whether in the earth or in the heavens (this is plural in the Greek).²⁶² As John came to the end of the revelation that was given to him, he was shown a new earth and heaven; God declared that He was making *all things new* (Revelation 21:5), and that the overcomer *shall inherit all things* (Revelation 21:7). This is the ultimate expression of a complete reconciliation (*apokatallasso*) where *all things* will be made new by God, the One Who does not change (Malachi 3:6; Revelation 22:13).

This same word (*apokatallasso*) is used in Ephesians 2:16: “And that he [Jesus] might reconcile [*apokatallasso* – in the subjunctive mood, indicating a possibility but not a certainty] both [identified earlier as the Jew and the Gentile] unto God in one body by the cross, having slain [eliminated] the enmity thereby....”²⁶³ The work that Jesus accomplished on the cross should serve to completely reconcile both Jews and Gentiles to God in one Body – the *ekklesia*. Jesus eliminated the Law of Moses (*the enmity*, made up of the numerous laws that governed the Jews’ daily living) by fulfilling it, therefore we can be assured that the Millennial reign of the Lord will not see the Law of Moses applied to all of the world – things will be very different, but there will not be a return to something that has been ended at the cross of Christ. This is further verified by the words *in one body*; Jesus said, “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold [*aule* – a low enclosure with one opening where the shepherds would keep their flocks at night; a reference to Israel]: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold [*poimne* – flock; a tragic translation error], *and* one shepherd” (John 10:16).²⁶⁴ Truly, there will only be **one Body**

²⁵⁹ <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/11049-moses>

²⁶⁰ Stephanus 1550 NT.

²⁶¹ Strong’s Online; Friberg Lexicon.

²⁶² Stephanus 1550 NT.

²⁶³ Strong’s Online; Friberg Lexicon.

²⁶⁴ Strong’s Online.

(Flock) of those who are *in Christ*; as the writer of Hebrews ended his recounting of the faithful from the OT, he said this: “And these all [the faithful just described], having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise [this *promise* goes back to Genesis 3:15 and finds fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ]: God having provided [*problepo* – prepared beforehand] some better thing [something better] for us, that they without us should not be made perfect [*that not apart from us they should be made complete*]” (Hebrews 11:39-40).²⁶⁵ The evidence is that God is preparing one Body (one Flock) of those who are His; the unifying Factor in this is the Lord Jesus Christ Who, through His sacrifice on the cross, has brought together ALL who are in Him. Those who died in the faith during the OT times are *in Christ* just as surely as those who place their faith in the Lord today and live faithfully for Him. The OT saints died in faith even though they did not see the promise fulfilled; therefore, when the promise was fulfilled through the work of Christ upon the cross, the faith of the OT saints was also completed in Him. Christ has always been the means of reconciling faithful men to God – whether that was through the promise made or the promise fulfilled (1 Peter 1:18-20).

Paul writes that through Jesus *all things* are to be reconciled to God; we have looked at the work of reconciliation that Christ has done for mankind, but does this work go beyond that? To the Romans, Paul explained that the creation was made subject to *vanity*, not because that was its choice, but because of the subjection of the earth to the authority of Satan that came with the sin of Adam – God gave man dominion over the earth and all of its creatures (Genesis 1:28) but, with the entrance of sin, that authority was surrendered to Satan (Luke 4:5-7). Paul goes on to say, “Because the creature [creation] itself also shall be delivered [will be set free (future tense)] from the bondage [*douleia* – slavery] of corruption [subject to decay] into the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Romans 8:20-21).²⁶⁶ As John comes to the end of the revelation that he received from the Lord, he saw a *new heaven* and a *new earth* (this is a brand new creation because the old has vanished) and heard a voice from heaven (the dwelling place of God) saying, “Behold, the tabernacle [dwelling place] of God *is* with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, *and be* their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Revelation 21:3-4).²⁶⁷ This text speaks of those who, from among mankind, have inherited the salvation that God has promised to His faithful ones – God will be living among these glorified saints, and *death, sorrow, crying* and *pain* will be a thing of the past. Beyond that, God will put a *new earth* into place where there will be no *death*; considering the special Garden that God made for Adam and Eve (Genesis 2:8-9a), it should be very obvious that this *new earth* will not be empty and there will be no *death* – none of the *corruption* that is a part of this earth will be carried into the *new* one. The present creation suffers the effects of sin, but the *new* will be free of any taint of corruption; the creation will be set free from the *bondage of corruption*. The saints will abide with the Lord forever in glorified, sin-free bodies and, likewise, the newly created heaven and earth will be forever free of any impact of sin – it is a *new* heaven and earth, and not one that has been refurbished.

²⁶⁵ Strong’s Online; Friberg Lexicon; Stephanus 1550 NT.

²⁶⁶ Strong’s Online; Friberg Lexicon.

²⁶⁷ Liddell-Scott Lexicon.

“Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath ... made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation [administration] of the fulness of times [the end or completion of times] he might gather together in one all things [*ta panta*] in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; *even* in him” (Ephesians 1:3, 9-10).²⁶⁸ Earlier we saw that Jesus not only created all things, but that *by him all things* [*ta panta*] *consist* – everything in the universe is being held together and is functioning under His oversight (Colossians 1:17). In the Lord’s unfolding of the end of time, He will draw everything together *in Christ* – not only those who are His but also a new heaven and earth where they will live with Him (Colossians 1:12; Revelation 21:7, 23). Both the universe and those who are saints of the Lord will ultimately be reconciled to God in holiness, righteousness and all purity.

Paul clarifies that the reconciliation of the universe and mankind, which will be brought about in Christ, will be accomplished through the work that He did upon the cross. It was through His shed blood that He brought cleansing from sin; “But Christ being come [having come,] an high priest of good things to come [coming] ... by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place [holies; the heavenly *holies* (Hebrews 9:24)], having obtained eternal redemption” (Hebrews 9:11-12).²⁶⁹ The *eternal redemption* that Christ accomplished is for all of mankind; it is this that brings the faithful Jews and Gentiles together into one Body (Ephesians 2:16) – the reconciliation of man with God is possible through the sacrifice that Christ made upon the cross. We must understand that God does not change: He is eternally holy, just and loving; rather, it is those who bear the marks of man’s sin who must be brought into a new standing before God – a *reconciliation* that Christ accomplished on the cross and that is open to *whosoever will* (Mark 8:34). Christ’s shed blood provided that eternal offering for sin (Hebrews 9:12) and His willing death forever broke the power of the just payment for sin (Romans 6:23; Hebrews 2:14).

The *peace* that came through Christ’s sacrifice upon the cross made reconciliation with God possible for all men. His payment for sin broke the power of Satan (death) and brought *peace* between the faithful Jew and the Gentile who are now one in Him, and, in the new heaven and earth, it will also bring that which has been created into eternal accord with a holy God and sinless, redeemed mankind.

21. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled 22. In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight:

The focus of Paul’s writing changes at this point. Until now he has presented Christ as the eternal God, the means of salvation, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, and Head of the *ekklesia*; he now shifts to look at what all of this means for *you* who have become His children through faith – the members of His *ekklesia*.

²⁶⁸ Stephanus 1550 NT; Gingrich Lexicon.

²⁶⁹ Friberg Lexicon.

Paul begins by identifying who we (*you*) were before we entered into a relationship with the Lord through faith – it is directed to the Colossian Christians but we are no different from them. Being formerly (*pote – sometime*) alienated from the Lord, we were *enemies* in purpose (*mind*) by evil (*wicked*) works.²⁷⁰ *Alienated (apallotrioo)* includes the two thoughts of separation and belonging to another; indeed, our *alienation* from the Lord was because, by the sin of Adam, we were all living under the authority of Satan – we were completely in sin and separated from the Lord. Consequently, our alienation or estrangement from God was deeply rooted in who we were – both our thinking and our actions were contrary to what the Lord desired. “The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, *and* seek God. They are all gone [Everyone is turned] aside, they are *all* together become filthy [together they are corrupt]: *there is* none that doeth good, no, not one” (Psalm 14:2-3; cp. Romans 3:10-12).²⁷¹ Within our own right, we are all sinners (descendants of Adam) who are subject to the just recompense for sin: death (Romans 6:23). Understand that this is not just physical death: a lifetime of sin (both *hamartia*, who we are, and *paraptoma*, what we do) will result in an eternity of separation from the Lord in the Lake of Fire, which is called the *second death* (Revelation 21:8). To the Ephesians, Paul explained it this way: “... in time past [*pote*] ye walked [lived] according to the course [*aion – age or time*] of this world, according to the prince [ruler] of the power of the air, the spirit that [is] now worketh [working (present tense)] in the children of disobedience: Among whom also **we all** had our conversation [lived] in times past [*pote*] in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires [will; choices] of the flesh and of the mind [intentions]; and were by nature the children of wrath [*orge*], even as others” (Ephesians 2:2-3).²⁷² There can be no doubt that the heritage that we all share is alienation from God – without any hesitation, Paul includes himself within this group; it is common to all of mankind (the only exception was the Lord Jesus Who was conceived by the Spirit of God and not by man; He had a body **like unto** *sinful flesh* – Romans 8:3, yet He was *without sin* – Hebrews 4:15).

Having laid the foundation that we were all sinners who were separated from God, now Paul goes on to look at the work that Christ did to *reconcile (apokatalasso)* us to Himself (to God). To the Romans, Paul clarified that “... God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8) – while being active sinners, Christ died on our behalf.²⁷³ We are not saved because we are friends of Jesus; there is nothing that we could do to garner the favor of a holy God. Therefore, what we were before coming to faith in the Lord has no bearing on the salvation that God extends to all of mankind; we were all equally alienated from Him. Yet through Christ comes reconciliation *in the body of his flesh through death*. There are two important elements in this statement: 1) *in the body of his flesh* and 2) *through death* – each speaks to the basis for the settlement of our sin debt before a holy God that Christ accomplished for us. Let’s look into them briefly.

As John began his Gospel, he stated: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1); what he affirms very clearly is that the *Word (Logos)* is

²⁷⁰ Gingrich Lexicon.

²⁷¹ BDB.

²⁷² Strong’s Online; Liddell-Scott Lexicon; Stephanus 1550 NT.

²⁷³ Stephanus 1550 NT.

eternal (*in the beginning*) and is God. He goes on to say, “And the Word was made flesh . . .” (John 1:14) – the *Logos* became flesh, which simply means that eternal God took on a body of flesh. The angel who came to Mary said: “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee [*holy begotten*] shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35);²⁷⁴ the eternal *Word* became flesh and thereby became the only-begotten Son of God (by the work of the Holy Spirit) and the Son of Man (by means of Mary).

Why was it necessary for God to take on a body of flesh? As Jehovah pronounced judgment upon Satan in the Garden of Eden, He said, “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed [singular²⁷⁵] and her seed [singular]; it [*He*; this is a masculine pronoun] shall bruise [grind, crush] thy head, and thou shalt bruise [grind, crush] his heel” (Genesis 3:15).²⁷⁶ As we have noted many times before, contained within this promise of ruination for Satan is the equally sure testimony that it will be a Male (*He*) Who will carry it out – this is the first mention of the Promised One Who would come to bring mankind release from the power of Satan. The context is the occasion of Adam’s sin, and, as the Lord passed judgment upon those involved (Adam, Eve, the serpent and Satan, the deceiver), He also included the promise that it would end one day. However, it is equally evident that this Promised One would be the *Seed* of the woman; the angel of the Lord assured Joseph, to whom Mary was betrothed, that “that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost” (Matthew 1:20), thereby fulfilling the promise that was made to Satan in the Garden of One Who would come as the Seed of the woman. The only One Who could defeat Satan (as promised in Genesis 3:15) is God – man had just succumbed to the devil and so there was no hope outside of the Lord; only the eternal Creator could accomplish the task of inflicting a deadly *bruise* upon Satan’s head.

We might readily understand that only God could bring about the defeat of the devil, but why was it necessary for Him to take on a body of flesh? God is omnipotent – a consideration of something as large as the universe or as small as a single cell should be sufficient to establish His ability to do anything. However, when He created Adam and Eve, He did so in His own likeness (Genesis 1:27), which includes the ability to think, reason and choose; God’s desire was to have a creature who wanted to fellowship with Him – not robotically, but by choice. The tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil both stood in the Garden in order to provide Adam and Eve with a choice; God warned against choosing the latter and identified the consequence of disobedience – although they might not have understood the full import of *death*, they would have known that it was not good. Upon man’s choice to disobey, God’s justice and holiness would not permit Him to exercise His omnipotence and simply make man righteous again – that would violate His sense of justice and it would remove man’s ability to choose to have fellowship with his

²⁷⁴ Stephanus 1550 NT.

²⁷⁵ We are not told definitively to whom this *singular seed* of Satan refers; however, we do have the phrase *son of perdition* used twice in Scripture. *Perdition* can best be understood as destruction or ruin (*apoleia*), which establishes a close tie to *Apollyon* (meaning *destroyer*), a name that is given to Satan (Revelation 9:11; Strong’s Online). Jesus used *son of perdition* when referring to Judas (John 17:12) who perhaps foreshadowed the *son of perdition* yet to come: the Antichrist (2 Thessalonians 2:3) who will be utterly possessed by Satan and whom Jesus will cast from the battlefield of Armageddon directly into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 19:20).

²⁷⁶ BDB; Strong’s Online.

Creator. After Adam sinned and God had provided a way for forgiveness, man was still left with a choice, which was abundantly demonstrated through Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:3-5).

We are told that “the wages of sin *is* death ...” (Romans 6:23a), which is precisely what God told Adam: “... of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Genesis 2:17) – the promise was that disobedience (*sin*) would bring *death*. Upon man’s entrance into sin, God instituted death and the shedding of blood as a means of providing a covering for sin: “Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats [tunics] of skins, and clothed them” (Genesis 3:21).²⁷⁷ In order to provide Adam and Eve with adequate covering (their hastily prepared fig-leaf garments were not acceptable), animals died and their blood was shed; the first sacrifice for sin was made by Jehovah in the Garden of Eden. However, this was not a one-time sacrifice that forever covered sin – the death and shed blood of an animal could only provide a temporary covering for sin; yet man remained helpless to do anything to alleviate the problem – as a sinner, he could die, but that was merely just payment for his sin and would not bring a restored relationship with the Lord. That first sacrifice in Eden instituted a long line of many sacrifices until the time of Moses when the Lord established a system of sacrifices and a specifically charged priesthood to ensure that His requirements were met. Both before and after Moses, a sacrifice was only acceptable unto the Lord if it was made in faith – faith in God to bring a temporary cleansing from sin, and faith in His promise of a coming Redeemer Who would forever defeat sin and Satan. Faith was that vital ingredient that made an offering pleasing to the Lord; simply carrying out the motions of a sacrifice was insufficient to bring justification before God. Isaiah recorded a time when Israel followed the prescribed sacrificial process with great flare, yet Jehovah’s word to them was that He was being sickened by their offerings (He had no delight in them), He called their solemn festivals *iniquity*, and declared their hands to be *full of blood* (Isaiah 1:11-15) – there was much sacrificial activity but no cleansing from sin. Even as the Lord led Israel out of Egypt, the writer of Hebrews explains that they heard the word of the Lord but it did not benefit them because it was not *mixed with faith* (Hebrews 4:2).

We recognize that under the Mosaic Law, sacrifices were being made on a continual basis, yet it is “... not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins” (Hebrews 10:4). Rather, those sacrifices served to stir up the *remembrance* of sins (Hebrews 10:3), and with that would come a reminder of the necessity of faith in the Lord Who had made this way for a temporary cleansing. Throughout all of this time, animal sacrifices were made in order to provide that temporary cleansing from sin to the faithful, and, through His prophets, the Lord brought ever increasingly specific promises concerning the One Who was coming Who would make an end of sin – namely, the Seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15). The prophecies served to remind the people that the Lord had not forgotten the promise that He made in the Garden, and they became so specific that, through Isaiah, the Lord said that He would provide a sign to Israel: “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel [with us is God]” (Isaiah 7:14) – Seed of the woman, not man!²⁷⁸ In God’s wisdom and according to His eternal plan, the One Who would ultimately bring release from sin and its penalty must come in a body of flesh; through man

²⁷⁷ Strong’s Online.

²⁷⁸ BDB.

(Adam), sin and death entered into the world and through a Man (the promised Seed) would come new life (1 Corinthians 15:22). The writer of Hebrews expounded this principle: “Forasmuch then as the children [i.e., all of mankind] are partakers of flesh and blood, he [Christ] also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy [cause to be idle; always a non-physical destruction, a superior power replacing a lesser] him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver [*might set free*; subjunctive mood – this is a possibility, but not a certainty] them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to [held fast in] bondage[slavery]. For verily he took not on *him the nature of angels*; but he took on *him* the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him [He was under obligation] to be made like unto *his* brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things *pertaining* to God [literally: *High Priest to God*], to make reconciliation for the sins of the people” (Hebrews 2:14-17).²⁷⁹ The eternal God took on a body of flesh so that He, as a sinless High Priest, might bring release from sins to all of mankind.

We have stated that Christ is the fulfillment of the promise that Jehovah made to Satan in the Garden of Eden; that first promise was very general: it would be through *her seed* (the Seed of a woman) that Satan would be defeated (Genesis 3:15). After several generations, the Lord removed the inhabitants of the world through the flood and saved Noah (and his family) through whom He said that He would *establish His covenant* (Genesis 6:18) – the focus of the promise of the Seed of the woman was now narrowed to the family line of Noah (all other family lines having been removed in the flood). With God’s calling of Abraham, the scope of the promise was further reduced to his family line: “... in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed ...” (Genesis 22:18). From among Abraham’s children, the promise was carried through Isaac (Genesis 17:19) even though Abraham had Ishmael through Hagar and many other children by Keturah (Genesis 25:1-4). It was through Isaac’s son Jacob (Israel) that the promise was carried (Genesis 28:14), and of Jacob’s children, the promise to Judah was that a *sceptre (shebet* – mark of authority) and a prescriber of laws would be his *until Shiloh come* (Genesis 49:10).²⁸⁰ *Shiloh* means *he whose it is*; in other words, those with authority over the people of Israel would come through the line of Judah *until* the One came to Whom it rightfully belonged (the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ).²⁸¹

After Israel was settled in the Promised Land and Joshua had died, the people vacillated greatly between worshipping Jehovah and bowing to the gods of the land (i.e., obedience and disobedience); when the people would cry out to the Lord because of the oppression of their enemies (during their times of idolatry), a deliverer (*yasha*) would come to defeat their oppressors in the name of Jehovah and administer the Law of Moses (Judges 3:9-10) – they were judges to the people and generally heralded a time of peace. Although they brought peace to Israel and administered the Law, it is evident that they did not fulfill the prophecy concerning Judah for they came from many tribes of Israel – actually most of them were not from Judah. For example, the Lord called the first deliverer, Othniel, who was of the tribe of Judah (Judges 3:9), but he was

²⁷⁹ Friberg Lexicon.

²⁸⁰ Strong’s Online.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

followed by Ehud of Benjamin, who was also specifically called by the Lord (Judges 3:15). Clearly, the promise to Judah did not find fulfillment during the time of the judges.

When the people of Israel insisted that they needed to have a *king* (*melek*, *meh'-lek*) like unto all of the nations about them (1 Samuel 8:20), the Lord gave them Saul, a Benjamite, to be their *captain* (*nagiya* [*naw-gheed'*] literally: *one in front*; 1 Samuel 9:16).²⁸² The Lord's selection of Saul was more in keeping with the previous *deliverers*, for his specific task was to save Israel *out of the hand* of their Philistine oppressors; when Samuel anointed Saul, he did so according to the Lord's instructions and told him that he was to be *captain* over Israel. Nevertheless, when Saul was installed as Israel's leader, Samuel did so within the context of the people desiring a *king* and so the people hailed him as their *king* (*melek*; 1 Samuel 10:24). For some reason, Samuel became fully committed to Saul as the *king*, even forgetting that he (in accordance with the word from the Lord) had anointed him to be a *captain* (1 Samuel 15:1; cp. 1 Samuel 10:1). However, when the Lord rejected Saul because of his disobedience, He commanded Samuel to go to Jesse "for I have provided me [seen] a king [*melek*] among his sons" (1 Samuel 16:1);²⁸³ Jesse was of the family line of Judah (Luke 3:26-32), and the Lord chose David (a son of Jesse) to be *king* over His people Israel. The promise made to Judah was on track; the family line of the promise to Judah was established in David and carried through *until* the *Shiloh* came – the Lord Jesus Christ (Genesis 49:10).

The promise made by Jehovah in the Garden was never lost throughout all of the generations before Mary, who was chosen to bear eternal God (the *Word*) in a body of flesh for the specific purpose of bringing redemption to mankind (Matthew 1:21). In keeping with the prophecies that had been made, Jesus was born of the family of Abraham (Genesis 12:3) and of the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10); He came according to the eternal plan of God so that He might "make reconciliation for the sins of the people" (Hebrews 2:17). The eternal *Logos* became flesh (John 1:14), in the flesh He *did no sin* (1 Peter 2:22), and He was crucified because the religious Jews refused to accept the fact that He was God (Matthew 26:63-66). Being without sin, Jesus, as our High Priest, "bare [took up; active voice; He took upon Himself] our sins in his own body on the tree ..." (1 Peter 2:24); "For he [God] hath made him [Jesus] *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin [literally: *He Who did not come to know sin, on behalf of us, He was made sin*]; that we might be made [become] the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5:21).²⁸⁴ While Jesus was on the cross, darkness covered the land from noon to three o'clock – the time when He was bearing the sins of the world. After three hours, His cry was, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34) – God the Father looked from heaven, saw only the sins of the world and looked away. "And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend [entrust] my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost [*ekpneo* – active voice (Jesus relinquished His physical life, it was not taken from Him); *breathed out* and died]" (Luke 23:46).²⁸⁵ Jesus relinquished His life to the Father while He was bearing our sins; in other words, He died under a load of sin that was not His own; "for the wages of sin *is* death" (Romans 6:23) – through

²⁸² Strong's Online; BDB.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Friberg Lexicon; Strong's Online; Stephanus 1550 NT.

²⁸⁵ Strong's Online.

His death, the just payment for the sins of mankind, which He bore, had been made. It was because eternal God took on a body of flesh that He could make the full payment for the sins of the world; the Seed of the woman broke the power of Satan (Genesis 3:15; Hebrews 2:14). Jesus, being without Personal sin, died for the sins of everyone – He became the substitute for everyone who is born of Adam: “For as in Adam all die [are dying (present tense)], even so in Christ shall all be made alive [future tense]” (1 Corinthians 15:22).²⁸⁶ Jesus said, “. . . the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall [will (future tense)] hear his voice [the voice of Jesus, the Son of Man], And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:28-29).²⁸⁷

Within the Revelation that Jesus gave to John, mention is made of a *first resurrection*, which, of necessity, means that there must be at least one more (Revelation 20:6). Those who have part in the *first* have been favored by the Lord (*blessed*) and have lived faithfully for Him (*holy*), and it is these who will be a part of the harvest of the righteous when the Lord comes in the clouds (commonly called the *rapture*). The *second* resurrection takes place when the present earth and heaven are gone and *the dead will stand before God* (Revelation 20:12) – although not specifically called a *resurrection*, it is evident that all of those from the Millennium and all of the unrighteous dead from all ages will be alive and standing before God to be judged, even *death and hell* are emptied of all who have been caught in their clutches (Revelation 20:13).²⁸⁸ Everyone will be resurrected, but their eternal destinies will vary according to their relationship with the Lord; those who were born during the millennium who placed their faith in the Lord will be welcomed into the glories of the new heaven and earth, whereas those whose names are not found in the Book of Life will enter the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:15).

It was because the Lord had taken on a body of flesh that He could die as the substitute for sinful mankind. As we have considered the fact that it was necessary for the Lord to have a body of flesh in order to accomplish the reconciliation of mankind with his Creator, at the same time we have seen that this became a real possibility only through the willing death of the Lord Jesus. The just payment that God required for sins was death (Romans 6:23), and Jesus died, not because He had sinned, but because He bore the sins of the whole world.

According to the Mosaic Law, the high priest entered into the holiest place of the tabernacle, or temple, only once each year; there he would sprinkle blood from a bullock upon the mercy seat to make atonement for his sins and the sins of his family, and this was repeated with the blood of a goat that was sprinkled for the sins of the people (Leviticus 16:11-16). God declared to Moses that He would dwell in the Holy of Holies between the cherubim that stood on either side of the Ark of the Covenant upon which the mercy seat rested (Exodus 25:22). Therefore, when the high priest entered into the holiest, he was coming into the very presence of Jehovah where he would sprinkle the blood upon the mercy seat thereby obtaining temporary righteousness (atonement from sin) before God for himself, his family and the children of Israel – a righteousness that was only imparted to the individual through his faith in the Lord. Drawing upon this historical

²⁸⁶ Strong's Online.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ A more complete examination of this is done in the study of Revelation, *The Millennium* (<https://www.thenarrowtruth.com/the-millennium.html>).

illustration, the writer of Hebrews explains: “But Christ being come [having come] an high priest of good things to come [coming], by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building [creation]; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once [once for all] into the holy place [holies], having obtained eternal redemption *for us*” (Hebrews 9:11-12).²⁸⁹ Jesus, in fulfillment of this ancient practice that brought temporary atonement for sin, entered once into the heavenly holies bearing His own blood to make atonement for the sins of mankind once and for all. As long as the earthly high priests continued to annually enter into the Holy of Holies, it showed that God had not yet opened the way into His presence (Hebrews 9:7-8); however, when Jesus paid the price for sin upon the cross, He committed His spirit to the Father “And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom ...” (Matthew 27:51a). When Jesus died bearing the sins of the world (1 Peter 2:24; 1 John 2:2), thereby bringing to an end the activities of the earthly high priest and the function of the earthly Holy of Holies, the veil that shielded the presence of God was torn from *the top to the bottom*. The most holy place of the temple was opened as an affirmation that the Promised One had come and fulfilled all of the temple functions: He became the sacrifice in order to pay the debt of sin (Ephesians 5:2; Titus 2:14), and He is our High Priest Who now intercedes with the Father for His faithful ones (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25; 9:24; 1 John 2:1).

We noted earlier that the high priest would enter into the Holy of Holies once each year to sprinkle blood upon the mercy seat as a means of atoning for the sins of the people. As the writer of Hebrews explained the functions of the OT sacrificial system, he spoke of the Ark of the Covenant (the box that originally held the “golden pot that had manna, Aaron’s rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant”), and over it were the “cherubims of glory shadowing the mercyseat [*hilasterion* – the place of forgiveness]” (Hebrews 9:4-5). Paul speaks of Jesus “Whom God hath set forth [purposed] *to be* a propitiation [*hilasterion* – mercy seat] through faith in his blood ...” (Romans 3:25) – Jesus is the only place of forgiveness: He is the living Mercy Seat (John 14:6).²⁹⁰ The blood sprinkled upon the mercy seat within the temple was to be appropriated by faith for the cleansing from sin (atonement came only through faith in the Lord); likewise, the shed blood of Christ as the final sacrifice for sin can only be appropriated by faith. Jesus “Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and [might] purify unto himself a peculiar [chosen] people, zealous [eager] of good [*kalos*] works” (Titus 2:14); both *redeem* and *purify* are in the subjunctive mood (a possibility, but not a certainty) indicating that our redemption and purification are dependent upon the choices that we make – Christ has done all that is necessary for these to become a reality in us, but our choices will determine the outcome!

Ephesians 2:10 – “For we are his [God’s] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good [*agathos*] works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” We have been created *in Christ* for the purpose of *good works* – activities that are in keeping with His commands (Ephesians 4:24). *Agathos*, as used here and translated as *good*, speaks of that which is spiritually and morally excellent to the benefit of others; this is what God has prepared beforehand for how we are to live.²⁹¹ Yet in writing to Titus, Paul said that Christ *gave himself for us* so that we might

²⁸⁹ Stephanus 1550 NT; Gingrich Lexicon.

²⁹⁰ Strong’s Online; Friberg Lexicon.

²⁹¹ Friberg Lexicon; <http://www.sermonindex.net/modules/articles/index.php?view=article&aid=34161>

be a people who are eager of *good works* (Titus 2:14); in English we see the same phrase, but in Greek it is different. This time, *good* is from the Greek word *kalos*, which is basically the same thing as *agathos* except that it bears an outward expression that identifies the *works* as being praiseworthy, fine or beautiful – it is the *works* that are so defined, not the one who is doing them. Jesus said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good [*kalos*] works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16); our *good works* are to shine before men so that they might *glorify* God. Jesus is the ultimate example of this; as He went about healing so many, most frequently we see those who were healed giving praise to God and not to Jesus. When Jesus saw the woman who had been bent over for eighteen years, “he laid *his* hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and **glorified God**” (Luke 13:13). Being eternal God, Jesus was glorified thereby; however, He performed the miracles in such a way that, for those around Him, the glory went to God the Father. Likewise, our *good works* are to bring glory to God (not to us). Does the light of God shine through what we do, or do we act simply to be seen of men?

For the Colossians, Paul draws the contrast between their former lives of *wicked works* to their new lives in Christ that are marked by holiness. From our study, we have seen that in Christ their *wicked* (*poneros*) activities have been changed to *agathos* (receiving God’s approval), with an eagerness for *kalos* (works that will bring glory to God).²⁹² The purpose of Christ’s sacrifice was so that He might have a *chosen* people who are *holy* (consecrated **to** God and separated **from** the world), *unblameable* (free of defects, unblemished, without fault) and *unreprovable* (above reproach, not accused of wrong) before Him.²⁹³ By now it should be evident that our lives *in Christ* simply cannot be construed to be a time when we rest upon a prayer for salvation and look forward to the glories of heaven – that is not having an eagerness for *good works* that will glorify the Lord. This is all a part of Jesus’ charge: “whosoever doth not bear [not bearing (present tense)] his cross, and come [coming] after me, cannot [is not able to (this is not Jesus’ restriction but it is because of our unwillingness to bear *His cross*)] be my disciple ... [and] whosoever he be of you that forsaketh [is renouncing (present tense)] not all that he hath, he cannot [is not able to] be my disciple” (Luke 14:27, 33).²⁹⁴ There is a price to be paid for abiding *in Christ* and it is our very lives. Christ paid the price for our sins: He bought us out of slavery to sin and, therefore, **we are His slaves**. The truth of the matter is that we are all slaves – the only question is: will we be slaves to sin and Satan, or slaves to the Lord of glory (Romans 6:17-18)? It seems that our heads have been so filled with visions of our own self-worth that we find it difficult to bow before the Lord and permit Him to work through us to accomplish that which will bring glory to His name. However, unless we are willing to make Jesus the Master of our lives (we being His obedient subjects), we simply are not His followers, and the glories of heaven are not our destiny. Jesus has done all that is necessary for us to be reconciled completely to God, yet we, who have been created in His image, must choose!

²⁹² Strong’s Online.

²⁹³ Friberg Lexicon.

²⁹⁴ Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon.

²³. If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and *be* not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, *and* which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister;

Paul has just explained the mighty work of reconciliation that Christ accomplished through His death upon the cross: He became that place of forgiveness (*propitiation*) and cleansing whereby we, who were enemies of God through sin, are able to stand before Him in holiness. This is the potential that is available to everyone who is born, but Paul now seeks to make it understood that this is a possibility that can either come to fruition or fail – even for those who have been truly born again. The work that Christ accomplished is without fault and complete in every respect; however, since we have been created in the image of God (even after the fall into sin, that was not removed – Genesis 9:6), we hold the ability to choose how we will live, and the choices that we make will determine our end.

Paul’s explanation of the condition that is tied to standing before the Lord in holiness, begins with the word *if*. The Greek is *eige* and is best understood as *if indeed* or *if truly*.²⁹⁵ Therefore, what follows becomes the requirement that must be fulfilled in order to remain in that position of being reconciled to God, with the understanding that *if* this does not occur, then that desirable place of holiness will not remain. Paul is addressing the Colossian believers – the holy and *faithful brethren* who are *in Christ* (Colossians 1:2); these are not carnal or nominal Christians (who are really the enemies of God – Romans 8:7) but are *genuine* (as MacArthur would phrase it) and faithful to the Lord. Therefore, based upon this alone, those who hold to the heresy of eternal security (most Evangelicals) and those who claim the perseverance of the saints (like MacArthur and those who follow Reformed theology) would consider that what Paul is about to launch into is completely unnecessary. Why would two groups who have historically stood in opposition to one another apparently land on the same side when it comes to what Paul is about to teach?

The eternal security faction says that once you have asked for salvation, you cannot lose it; their hope of heaven rests upon their ability to look back to the day when they prayed for salvation and their understanding of God’s promise of “eternal salvation” to everyone who *believes*. They consider God’s gift of salvation to be irreversibly given, and draw a sharp line of distinction between *relationship* and *fellowship*.²⁹⁶ As I have been told: “If eternal life can be lost, then it is not eternal life.” However, the *gift* of God is salvation (not eternal life); eternal life is a part of His salvation, and, therefore, if you lose your salvation then you also lose eternal life. **Their claim** is that eternity in heaven is guaranteed through *relationship* (asking Jesus to be your Savior), and *fellowship* (obedience to the Lord) has no bearing on that eternally secured *relationship*. One proponent of this doctrine quotes Titus 3:5 as Jesus “saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy” (NIV), and concludes: “Thus salvation is not contingent upon

²⁹⁵ Strong’s Online.

²⁹⁶ One writer has said: “... a relationship with God is part of eternal life. But there is a vast difference between relationship and fellowship ... We can be children of God and born again into His family [*relationship*], but if we do not obey Him or do what He says, then we will have little fellowship with our Heavenly Father.” (<https://redeeminggod.com/sermons/miscellaneous/11-reasons-i-hold-to-eternal-security/>)

our works.”²⁹⁷ However, if he would have read just two more verses, he would have seen this: “so that, having been justified by his grace, we **might become heirs** having **the hope** of eternal life” (Titus 3:7, NIV). Even the NIV, with all of its translational difficulties, shows that our salvation is, in fact, not eternally secured, otherwise the *might become* and *the hope* (of Titus 3:7) would not have been there – the doctrine of eternal security would require this to be: *we are heirs of eternal life*. As is so often the case, they are selective in their use of Scripture and neglectful of the Greek verb tenses and moods that might not always be readily evident in English translations (nor supportive of their heresies).

The Reformed faction, on the other hand, are equally selective in their use of the Scriptures and careless in their attention to verbs – this is something that these two groups have in common. For the Reformed, their security comes from their definition of who makes up God’s *elect*, and a skewed view of the sovereignty of God. Don’t get me wrong, God is sovereign; after all, He is the Creator and Sustainer of all things.

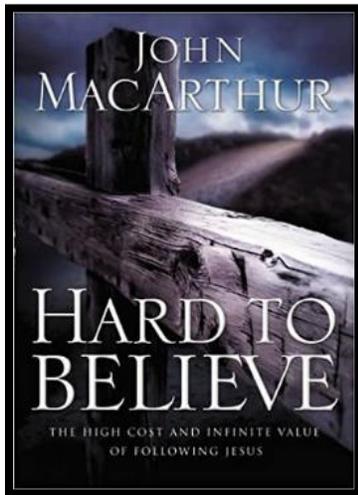
When God created Adam and Eve, He said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness ...” (Genesis 1:27), and then went on to place all of the other creatures that He had made under the authority of man (Genesis 1:28) – in other words, God Who is sovereign over all, assigned to man (who was made in His image) sovereignty over His creation on earth. The *dominion* that man was granted was in keeping with being created in the God’s image. When Adam sinned, we know that that sovereignty was largely transferred to Satan (Luke 4:5-7), yet sin did not eradicate God’s *image* from man. After the flood, when Noah and his family were out of the ark, Jehovah expanded their menu to include the creatures of the earth, and, at the same time, He placed a fear of man within them (Genesis 9:2-3). The Lord went on to forbid the eating of the blood of creatures with their flesh, stating that He would avenge the shedding of man’s blood whether by man or beast, and then clarified: “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man” (Genesis 9:4-6). God’s reason for capital punishment is that man was created in His own *image*. Even in his sinful state, man still bears that image and, as we saw earlier, that includes the ability to think and to choose. Just before Moses died, he gave Israel this final challenge: “I call heaven and earth to record [be witnesses] this day against you, *that* I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live...” (Deuteronomy 30:19). Yes, God is ultimately sovereign, but Moses clearly believed that the children of Israel had the ability to choose between life and death; as we reflect on their history (both before and after Moses) it is evident that there were many in their midst who chose not to be faithful to the Lord – yet they, too, were, at one time, able to choose life.

For the Reformed mind, “if God, in His sovereign, eternal, elective purpose, has determined to bring people to salvation, then He will be sure that they receive the gospel.”²⁹⁸ In their zeal to uphold the sovereignty of God, they do a great disservice to His image that He has placed within everyone; as a matter of fact, they will go to the extent of removing man’s ability to even choose to enter the pathway to life. Jesus said: “Enter [imperative mood; a command] ye in at the strait gate: for wide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that leadeth [is leading (present tense)] to

²⁹⁷ <http://www.bcbsr.com/topics/etsec.html>

²⁹⁸ John MacArthur, *Hard to Believe*, p. 201-202.

destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth [is leading] unto life, and few there be that find [are finding] it” (Matthew 7:13-14).²⁹⁹ Despite many references to this seemingly straightforward passage, MacArthur says: “God confronts sinners with this ultimate choice [life or death]. They are *responsible* for choosing, yet so hopelessly mired in sin that no one ever chooses rightly without divine enablement” (italics in the original, square brackets added).³⁰⁰ Yet within a few pages of this, he emphasizes over and over that “you’ve got to walk through the [narrow] gate”;³⁰¹ there seems to be a rift in his thinking – what he said before does not fit with what he’s saying now. Within MacArthur’s Calvinistic theology, God places the choice between life and death in front of the sinner, makes him



responsible to choose while knowing that he can’t make the right choice and yet commanding him to walk through the narrow gate. What’s at stake here is that if God chooses for him (what MacArthur calls *divine enablement*), He has then violated His image that is within the sinner (that ability to choose); if the sinner cannot help but choose death, and God overturns his choice and gives him life, that cannot be construed as being his choice and, therefore, God does the saving even against the will of the sinner. Jesus forthrightly issued the command to those within His audience to *enter* through the narrow gate; the Reformed will say many contradictory things, but the final draw will always be that God must make the choice to save you. The *elect* (those who will be in heaven with the Lord) are simply those whom the Lord chose to save before He even created the world. They consider Romans

8:29 (which we looked at earlier) and openly declare that God’s foreknowledge and His predetermination are the same: “God’s foreknowledge ... is not a reference to His omniscient foresight but to His foreordination (or determination beforehand).”³⁰² What becomes disturbingly evident within Calvinistic teaching is that there must be a re-definition of many of the commonly understood words – what is called *foreknowledge* suddenly becomes predetermination; this works well to help sustain their wilting TULIP,³⁰³ but it is contrary to their English definitions and a desecration of God’s Holy Word!

I include these aberrant teachings so that we might be equipped to identify those who teach doctrines that are not in keeping with the Word of God and then avoid them (Romans 16:17). Now

²⁹⁹ Stephanus 1550 NT.

³⁰⁰ MacArthur, Hard to Believe, p. 73.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

³⁰² MacArthur, Saved Without a Doubt, p. 70.

³⁰³ In other studies we have considered this: **T** – Total depravity (man’s inability to enter onto the pathway to life); **U** – Unconditional election (God will, according to His pleasure, save some and banish the rest to the Lake of Fire); **L** – Limited atonement (Jesus did not die for all of the world but only for those who will be saved according to God’s predetermination); **I** – Irresistible grace (If God determines to save you, you will not be able to resist His push into salvation; the lost do not experience this grace); **P** – Perseverance of the saints (those whom God has saved He will preserve; they will always persevere in holy living and obedience).

let's return to our text and consider the conditions that Paul identifies for those who desire to remain as reconciled children of God and are living in holiness before Him.

Paul provides two perspectives of a single threat to remaining *holy* before the Lord: the first is something that we must do, and the second is what we must avoid. We are to be continuing (a present tense verb) *in the faith* – our trust in the Lord Jesus and His reconciling work must remain. The Greek word is *epimeno* and means to keep on or to stay as you are.³⁰⁴ The first condition that is laid out for us is that we are to remain *in the faith*, but this is not to be a precarious, finger-tip grip on *the faith*. We are to be *grounded*, which is in the perfect tense and passive voice and, therefore, means *to have the foundation laid*.³⁰⁵ The perfect tense tells us that this was completed in the past; it will be done only once with ongoing results from that completed action.³⁰⁶ The passive voice indicates that this action is not something that we do for ourselves, rather, it is done for us: the reason that we can *continue in the faith* is because it is the Lord Who lays the foundation of our faith within us – our continuing in the faith begins on a solid footing. God sent the Lord Jesus Christ so that “whosoever believeth [*pisteuo* – *pist-yoo* ‘-o] in him should not perish” (John 3:16); *believeth* is in the present tense and active voice (this is something that I [as the *whosoever*] am to be doing continually), and it means to be persuaded of the truth of Jesus as the only Way to life.³⁰⁷ I must *believe* – that is my acceptance of what God has done to reconcile me to Himself. Yet our text tells us that God is the One Who lays the foundation for our faith in Him – is this a contradiction? Anyone who believes that the Scriptures are the Word of God will know that this cannot be a contradiction, so let's consider this further.

Individually, we *believe* the Good News of Christ's payment for the redemption of mankind, and that opens us to receiving the salvation that God has prepared. However, our *believing* only means that we have agreed with God that there is only one Way for us to be reconciled to Him, and that way is through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. It means that we have recognized that we are sinners who are born into slavery to sin and Satan, and *believing* expresses our desire (our choice) to turn from such slavery to the Lord Who has paid the price to release us from that bondage. With our agreement with God (*believing* – *pisteuo*) comes His placement within us of the foundation for what we have come to *believe* – the groundwork for *faith* (*pistis*). Let's be sure that we understand this fully.

What we must clarify is the difference between *believing* (*pisteuo*) and *faith* (*pistis*). *Believing* is a verb that describes an action; the action taken is primarily in the mind and means to be persuaded or convinced of the truth of a matter.³⁰⁸ It is as we become sufficiently convinced to form a conviction of the truth of a matter that we are *believing*: we weigh the information that we have been provided and, if we are convinced of its veracity, we then *believe* it. *Faith*, on the other hand, is a noun and is the substance of what is *believed*: “Now faith [*pistis*] is the substance

³⁰⁴ Friberg Lexicon; this word is somewhat more low-key than *hupomeno*, to which we have become more familiar; this is simply a call to remain in place with no regard to trials or opposition.

³⁰⁵ Liddell-Scott Lexicon.

³⁰⁶ https://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/verbs1.htm

³⁰⁷ Strong's Online.

³⁰⁸ Friberg Lexicon.

[assurance] of things hoped for, the evidence [conviction] of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1).³⁰⁹ Our *faith* forms the basis for what we believe regarding those things that we cannot see, and what we *believe* serves to shape our faith – whether it is a saving faith (as in the Lord Jesus) or a misplaced, deceptive faith.

Returning to our passage, we note that the context is those of us who have been reconciled to God through the Lord Jesus’ sacrifice; to us the challenge is given to remain *in the faith*. *Grounded* tells us that the moment that we *believed*, the Lord placed within us a firm foundation upon which to exercise our new faith (a one-time placement [perfect tense] by God [passive voice]). Looking at the Scriptures, we learn that there are two things that the Lord deposits within us to form that solid basis for our faith in Him: 1) the Holy Spirit comes to abide within us (Romans 8:9; John 14:16), and 2) He writes His Laws within our hearts and minds – the Ten Commandments that He first wrote upon tables of stone (Jeremiah 31:31-33; Luke 22:20; Hebrews 10:16). Within these two important elements are contained both how we are to live and the means to do so faithfully: His Laws tell us how to live before God and man, and His Spirit is the means by which we can apply His Laws consistently and accurately to His glory.

The common misunderstanding today is that the Ten Commandments (the Law of God) have been removed by the Lord’s death upon the cross, which immediately removes the basis for *how* we are to live – one-half of the Lord’s firm foundation for our faith in Him. Among Evangelicals there is a general acceptance of nine of the Commandments because they claim that they can be *found* in the NT Scriptures; yet Paul wrote: “All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God [*every Scripture is inspired by God*], and *is* profitable for doctrine [teaching], for reproof [testing to reveal error], for correction [restoration], for instruction [training] in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16).³¹⁰ Consequently, their view of God’s Laws is not Biblical and so the foundation of their faith is shaky; to compound the matter, many Evangelicals also like to use Romans 6:14 (“ye are not under the law, but under grace”) as a license to do whatever is right in their own eyes. However, such reasoning is fundamentally flawed and a careful consideration of the Scriptures illuminates the error for those who have a heart for the truth of God’s Word. Let’s consider the Ten Commandments for a moment:

1. God wrote them upon tables of stone with His finger: “And he [Jehovah] gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God” (Exodus 31:18); “And he [Jehovah] declared unto you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, *even* ten commandments; and he wrote them upon two tables of stone” (Deuteronomy 4:13). Of all of the Scriptures that we hold as being God’s Word to us, this is the only portion (Exodus 20:3-17) that we are specifically



³⁰⁹ Strong’s Online.

³¹⁰ Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon.

told that God wrote, and He wrote them upon stone! Today we use a phrase to refer to something that cannot be changed: we say that it has been written, carved or set in stone, which means that it is “something permanent and immutable, something that is absolute.”³¹¹ Not only did Jehovah (Who cannot change – Malachi 3:6) write the Ten Commandments but He wrote them in stone – they are, therefore, *permanent*, *immutable*, and *absolute*.

2. The Ten Commandments represent the Lord’s covenant with mankind; His purposes were much greater than just Israel. Yes, the Lord proclaimed this covenant of Commandments to Israel, but we need to keep in mind the Lord’s desire for this people: “Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure [a valued property] unto me above all people: for all the earth *is* mine: And **ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation**” (Exodus 19:5-6a). God’s expressed desire for Israel was that they would become a people who showed forth His holiness, and priests who would bring the Ten Commandments (the Lord’s Covenant) to the world – a review of Israel’s history clearly shows that this did not become a reality.

Earlier we saw that the Lord affirmed His covenant for the salvation of mankind through Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Genesis 9:9, 17:7, 17:19, 28:14); beyond that, the Lord said that Abraham “obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws” (Genesis 26:5). Until we come to the children of Israel gathered at Mt. Sinai, there is no indication that God’s *commandments* were written down – it seems, rather, that they were communicated directly to those who were pleasing to the Lord. At the same time, we must recognize that those before Mt. Sinai were not without an understanding of what Jehovah required of them, for the Lord testifies that Abraham observed His *commandments*, *statutes* and *laws*. Moses received the Ten Commandments as a written record of God’s covenant with mankind: these were His Laws that had been kept by Abraham and were now written so that everyone might know His requirements.

A distinction is made between the Law of God (the Ten Commandments which God wrote upon tables of stone) and the multitude of ordinances that formed a covenant made specifically with the children of Israel. After God’s Laws are given to us in Exodus 20:3-17, we read the words of the Lord to Moses: “Now these *are* the judgments [ordinances] which thou shalt set before them [the children of Israel]” (Exodus 21:1); “And **Moses wrote all the words of the LORD** ... And he took the book [not the tables of stone] of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient” (Exodus 24:4, 7). The words of the Lord that Moses wrote formed God’s *covenant* with the children of Israel – they were God’s specific requirements for Israel and were based upon His Ten Laws (Deuteronomy 6:1-2). Following this, the Lord gave Moses specific instructions regarding the construction of the tabernacle, the function of the priesthood, the system of sacrifices that was required and guidelines for the administration of justice among the people (Exodus 25-31; the full details are found in Leviticus and Deuteronomy).

3. The tables of stone (the Ten Commandments written by God) were kept in the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies within the tabernacle (Deuteronomy 10:2). Although the Ark initially held the stone tables, Aaron’s rod that budded and a golden bowl of manna (Exodus 16:33-

³¹¹ <https://grammarist.com/idiom/carved-in-stone-set-in-stone-and-written-in-stone/>

34; Numbers 17:8-10; Hebrews 9:4), it seems that somewhere along the line the latter two items were lost, and only the tables of stone remained (1 Kings 8:9). It was above the Ark that the Lord said that He would commune with Moses (Exodus 25:22) and where the presence of God was said to be (1 Samuel 4:4). Access to the Holy of Holies was limited to the high priest on one day each year, the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29-34); the chamber was separated from the rest of the sanctuary by a veil (Exodus 26:33), thus signifying the holiness of Jehovah into Whose presence the high priest would come only by following a carefully prescribed routine (Leviticus 16:2, 11-16). The tables of the Ten Commandments were continually in the presence of Jehovah in the Holiest – they remained central to Israel’s atonement for sin and reconciliation with God.

4. When a lawyer of the Pharisees sought to test Jesus by asking Him to identify the “great commandment in the law,” Jesus said: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind [Deuteronomy 6:5]. This is the first and great commandment. And the second *is* like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself [Leviticus 19:18]. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:36-40). Jesus quoted two commandments, identifying the first one as the *great commandment*, but went on to name the second as being of equal worth (*like unto it*).³¹² However, beyond that He declared that *all the law and the prophets* are dependent (*hang*) upon these two commandments; in other words, every instruction that God has given to mankind sprang from these two commands: the Mosaic Law, with all of its tremendous complexity, and all of the words of all of the OT prophets were held by these two commands. In essence, this is a summation of the Law of God: the first four Commands deal with our relationship with God and the last six address our attitude toward our fellow man; within these two all-encompassing commandments, Jesus expressed the essential relevance of the Law of God and the foundation for the Laws of Moses and the messages of the OT prophets.

5. When Jesus died, the veil before the Holy of Holies was torn apart thereby showing that the Way into the presence of Jehovah was now open, and thereby ending the work of the high priest and the significance of the temple. The night before, as Jesus sat with His disciples at their last meal together, He made this statement: “This cup *is* the new testament [covenant] in my blood, which is shed for you” (Luke 22:20); what Jesus declared to be instated with the shedding of His blood was a New Covenant.³¹³ This came in fulfillment of the Lord’s word to Jeremiah: “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make [*have cut* (perfect tense – a completed past action)] a **new covenant** with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah ... After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jeremiah 31:31, 33). As we noted earlier, the covenant at Mt. Sinai came in two parts: the first was a covenant for all of mankind (the Ten Commandments written by God upon two tables of stone), which Israel was to bring to the peoples of the world as the priests of Jehovah; the second part was a much longer elaboration that was based upon the first but intended specifically for the children of Israel – it included the construction of the tabernacle that was to be the center of their worship of Jehovah, the functioning of the priesthood, the numerous details regarding the system of sacrifice that Israel was to observe, and many social and

³¹² Friberg Lexicon.

³¹³ Strong’s Online.

legal ordinances that would guide the priests in administering justice among the people. You will recall that when Jehovah made the covenant with all of Israel at Mt. Sinai, the people agreed to it: “And he [Moses] took the book of the covenant [this is the Lord’s covenant specifically with the children of Israel, not the Ten Commandments], and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient” (Exodus 24:7). The Lord, through Jeremiah, spoke of a day that was coming when He would make a *new covenant* with Israel and Judah: “In that he saith, A new *covenant*, he hath made [declared] the first old [obsolete]” (Hebrews 8:13a).³¹⁴ In essence, the Lord said that this *new covenant* would replace the *first* that He had made with the children of Israel – not the Ten Commandments, but the Mosaic Law (the statutes and ordinances intended specifically for Israel). Jeremiah was a prophet sent to Judah (the nation of Israel had divided and the northern ten tribes, which retained the name Israel, were already scattered into exile for their disobedience to the Lord), so the Lord identified both Israel and Judah in order to show that this *new covenant* would render the Mosaic Law (which was intended for all of Israel) obsolete, or ended. How do we know that the Ten Commandments were not included? The Lord also said through Jeremiah: “I will put **my law** in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts ...” (Jeremiah 31:33); this *new covenant* would see God placing **His Law** into our minds and writing it on our hearts – the Law of God is nothing other than the Ten Commandments that He first wrote upon two tables of stone, but, under this *new covenant*, He will write them upon our hearts!

It is this New Covenant, which made the Mosaic Covenant obsolete, that Jesus told His disciples would be put into place through His shed blood, and the unmistakable sign that this took place was that the veil of the temple, which stood before the Holy of Holies, was torn apart from the top to the bottom. Even as the torn veil was of no further use, so all that the temple, the priesthood and the sacrifices represented was fulfilled and ended in the Lord Jesus Christ. “Think not [You should not suppose] that I am come to destroy [annul, do away with] the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy [annul, do away with], but to fulfil [bring to fulfillment, to make complete]” (Matthew 5:17).³¹⁵ All of the foreshadowing of the Mosaic Covenant was completed in the Lord Jesus; He did not declare it to be void but, rather, everything that it foreshadowed was fulfilled in Him. It was replaced by the New Covenant because everything that it stood for had been accomplished: the Mosaic Covenant holds no further value (Ephesians 2:15). “Having therefore, brethren, boldness [confidence] to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new [literally: *freshly killed* (His sacrifice)] and living [unlike other sacrifices – He is alive!] way, which he hath consecrated [opened] for us, through the veil [an allusion to the temple veil], that is to say, his flesh ...” (Hebrews 10:19-20).³¹⁶ Jesus fulfilled the purposes of the Levitical priesthood and sacrificial system through His death on the cross.

This is the *grounding* that the Lord gives to us when we place our faith in Him for salvation: both His Spirit and His Laws are placed within us. Moreover, Jesus said, “If ye love [are loving, (present tense) a conditional present statement of fact] me, keep [a command] my commandments” (John 14:15); however, He also said it the other way: “If ye keep [*having kept*, a conditional

³¹⁴ Friberg Lexicon.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

statement of future probability] my commandments, ye shall [*will* (future tense)] abide in my love ...” (John 15:10).³¹⁷ In the first case, the word *keep* is a command to carefully obey His commandments if we are loving Him, and, in the second, Jesus tells us that we must choose to live in careful obedience to His commands if we desire to remain in His love.³¹⁸ The importance of obedience to the Lord cannot be overstated. To the Romans Paul wrote: “For they that are after [living according to] the flesh do mind [are intent on] the things of the flesh; but they that are after [living according to] the Spirit [are intent on] the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded [to live according to the flesh] *is* death; but to be spiritually minded [to live according to the Spirit] *is* life and peace. Because the carnal mind [the mind that is intent on the things of the flesh] *is* enmity [hostility] against God: for it is not [an absolute negative] subject [submissive] to the law of God ...” (Romans 8:5-7).³¹⁹ Paul carefully explains that unless we are living in submission to the Spirit of God **and** the Law of God, we actually stand in opposition to Him; Jesus said that if we are not *with* Him, then we are *against* Him (Matthew 12:30). The obvious conclusion is that we must be submitting to the leadership of the Spirit of God and living in faithful obedience to the Law of God; if this is not how we are living, then we are standing in opposition to the Lord. This is the *grounding* that the Lord provides for our faith in Him; however, He will not force us to live in submission and obedience – that must be our choice!

The second word that Paul uses to describe our continuance in the faith of the Lord is *settled*, and it means to be steadfast and immovable. To the Ephesians, Paul said that the Lord has provided various spiritual gifting among the saints so that they might not be “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Ephesians 4:14). An apt illustration is that of a flag on a flagpole: with every gust of wind, the flag changes in keeping with the direction of the wind but the flagpole doesn’t move; we are not to be like the flag (*tossed to and fro*), changing to follow the latest spiritual fad invented by crafty deceivers, but we must be like the flagpole – immovable (*settled*) in our faith in the Lord.

If we desire to be *holy*, *unblameable* and *unreproveable* in the sight of God through the sacrifice that the Lord Jesus made for us, then these are the two things that must characterize how we live: in accordance with the *grounding* that the Lord has placed within us (His Spirit and His Law), and we must remain steadfast in our faith in the Lord. Paul now goes on to describe what we must **not** do in order to retain this remarkable position: we must “not [be] moved away from the hope of the gospel.”

Moved away is in the passive voice; this means that someone/something is moving you away – you are not actively seeking for something different but are being moved nonetheless. To the Galatians, Paul wrote: “I marvel that ye are so soon **removed from** [middle voice; they were doing this to themselves] him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another [a different] gospel” (Galatians 1:6).³²⁰ The Galatians were beginning to turn to the gospel of the Jerusalem Jews, who claimed that it was necessary to add some Jewish traditions to their faith in Christ in order to be truly saved (Acts 15:1). Paul forthrightly explains that they are about to replace saving faith in

³¹⁷ https://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/conditional_sentences.htm#CONDITIONAL_PDF

³¹⁸ Strong’s Online.

³¹⁹ Friberg Lexicon.

³²⁰ Ibid.

Christ with a lifeless message, and pronounces God's condemnation upon these Jews (Galatians 1:9). Let's consider these two similar phrases very carefully, using the Galatian situation as an illustration. To the Colossians, Paul used the word *metakineo* (*met-ak-ee-neh'-o*); the prefix *meta* means to exchange or to transfer, and *kineo* means to move from a place.³²¹ To the Galatians, Paul used *metatithemi* (*met-at-ith'-ay-mee*); the prefix is the same but *tithemi* means to set in place or establish; the Galatians were moving from the truth of the Gospel to being established in a teaching that was not the Gospel (a false gospel) – Paul was dealing with a specific error within the Galatian community where they were exchanging the Gospel for something that was a perversion of it (Galatians 1:7). However, to the Colossians, Paul is simply warning them (and us) against being drawn into replacing the Gospel with anything else; there is a greater sense of a general warning to the Colossians and a strong sense of a very specific warning to the Galatians. Knowing this, if we consider the English carefully, then we can actually catch a glimpse of this in the use of the words *moved away* (a moving from something) and *removed from* (a more confirmed, having left something). The more general warning (*moved away*) is made against becoming *removed from* the truth and carried into apostasy; following the admonition to remain steadfast (*settled*), it must be taken as a warning against being drawn from the truth into apostasy by those who, with great eloquence, proclaim a false gospel.

After having looked carefully at what we are to do and what we are to guard against doing, we must take a moment to consider the object of these warnings: *the hope of the gospel*. *Gospel* comes from a Greek word meaning good tidings or good news, and, as it is used within the NT, it consistently speaks of the salvation that comes only through the Lord.³²² Earlier in this letter, Paul spoke of the *hope* that is laid up in heaven for the saints (v. 5) – a *hope* that comes through the Good News of Jesus. The Psalmist also knew hope: “For in thee, O LORD, do I hope [verb; to wait for]” (Psalm 38:15), and “For thou *art* my hope [noun; the basis for hope; expectation], O Lord GOD” (Psalm 71:5).³²³ For the OT saints, their *hope* was in the promises of God and that He would fulfill them – a hope that was fueled by their faith in the Lord to accomplish what He had promised (the Messiah). The NT saints' *hope* rests in the finished work of Christ (the fulfilled promises of God regarding the Messiah) and includes the anticipation of eternal glory with Him; yet here, too, that hope finds its life through faith in the Gospel message of the New Covenant.

Early in His ministry, Jesus told His disciples: “Unto you it is given [*has been given* (perfect tense – a completed past action with ongoing results, passive voice – we have received this from God)] to know the mystery of the kingdom of God ...” (Mark 4:11),³²⁴ and, as we come to the teachings of Paul, he speaks of this *mystery* that had been hidden from the OT saints but has been revealed unto us. To the Ephesians, he identified the *mystery* that had been hidden from the *beginning of the world* as the coming together of Jew and Gentile into one Body: “That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel” (Ephesians 3:6, 9) – this was a significant change brought about through Jesus' work on the cross (Ephesians 2:11-17). To the Colossians, he identifies this *mystery* that has been hidden from *ages*

³²¹ Strong's Online.

³²² Friberg Lexicon.

³²³ Strong's Online; BDB.

³²⁴ Strong's Online.

and generations as simply: *Christ in you, the hope of glory* (v. 27). We'll consider this more fully later, but suffice it to say that couched within these two phrases is all that is necessary for salvation. Through our study of the Scriptures, we have learned that Jesus is the only way to the Father (John 14:6); as we place our faith in His saving work and live faithfully for Him, He will abide within us: "If a man love [*is loving*; present tense this is the condition for what follows] me, he will keep [attend carefully to (indicative mood; a statement of fact)] my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and [will] make our abode [staying] with him" (John 14:23).³²⁵ If we are loving Him, then we will be obeying His Word and, as a result, the abiding presence of the Father and Jesus will be with us. Earlier Jesus clarified that obedience to His commands is a required product of our love for Him (John 14:15) – if love is present, then so is obedience; if there is no obedience, then there is no love. Notice carefully that this is a conditional promise; the presence of Christ in us is directly dependent upon our willing obedience to His Word. Therefore, when we read the phrase *Christ in you*, all of what we have very briefly reviewed must be in place – we are living in faithful obedience to the Lord. It is this relationship with the Lord that provides *the hope of glory*. John wrote of this coming glory: "Behold, the tabernacle [dwelling place] of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, *and be their God*" (Revelation 21:3).³²⁶ As Jesus spoke of end-time events with His disciples, He affirmed that it is the one who remains faithful through trials right unto the end of life on earth, who will be saved (Matthew 24:13); *faithfulness*, by its very definition, requires obedience to the One in Whom we have placed our *faith*.

The *hope of the gospel* rests securely in Christ; therefore, the warning that Paul has issued is that we must continue steadfastly in Christ and not turn away from Him for anything or anyone. The Gospel message is Christ and what He has accomplished to reconcile mankind to God. We have reviewed the Scriptures carefully in this regard so that there is no misunderstanding of what He requires of us.

Paul, once again, identifies this *Gospel* as the message that the Colossians had heard (he also did so in v. 5) and this is the same message that has been proclaimed to every creature. Paul's letter to the Galatians makes it obvious that there were other *messages* out there, but what is being emphasized here is that the true, life-giving message of Christ as the Redeemer of mankind has gone out to all regions – the Gospel has been proclaimed everywhere! It is to this glorious message that Paul declares himself to be a *minister*, a *diakonos* – one who executes the commands of another.³²⁷ Paul was obsessed with proclaiming the Gospel of Christ to everyone! "For though I preach the gospel [*for if I should be proclaiming the Gospel*], I have nothing to glory of [*to me it is not a justification for boasting*]: for necessity is laid upon me [*for a compelling obligation is being laid upon me*]; yea, woe is unto me [*and woe to me*], if I preach not the gospel [*if I should not be proclaiming the Gospel*]!" (1 Corinthians 9:16).³²⁸ Paul's zeal was a natural part of who he was, but his compulsion to proclaim the Gospel was greatly influenced by his past. To the

³²⁵ Friberg Lexicon; Strong's Online;
https://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/conditional_sentences.htm#CONDITIONAL_PDF .

³²⁶ Liddell-Scott Lexicon.

³²⁷ Strong's Online.

³²⁸ Stephanus 1550 NT; Liddell-Scott Lexicon; Friberg Lexicon.

Galatians, he explained: “For ye have heard of my conversation [conduct] in time past in the Jews’ religion [Judaism – Paul was a Pharisee], how that beyond measure I persecuted the church [ekklesia] of God, and wasted it” (Galatians 1:13).³²⁹ To the Philippians, Paul describes himself as being circumcised the eighth day (his early years were in keeping with the Law of Moses), of Israel (a true descendent of the Patriarch Jacob), and of Benjamin (he knew his heritage), a Hebrew of Hebrews (his ancestry was pure – no foreign blood and no proselytes), and, concerning the Law of Moses, he was a Pharisee (it was as a zealous Pharisee that he persecuted the followers of Christ) – within the Jewish community of that day, his credentials were impeccable (Philippians 3:5). However, after listing the various aspects of his strong Jewish heritage, he says, “What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ” (Philippians 3:7) – he turned away from everything that gave him acclaim within Judaism and embraced the life that comes only through Christ. Paul left behind his elite place within the sect of the Pharisees and became a *minister* of the Gospel for the Lord Jesus Christ – he went from “Who art thou, Lord?” to “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” (Acts 9:5-6). The Lord had assigned him a task, and, with humility, he zealously accepted it under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, for he recognized his own vulnerability: “But I keep under [discipline] my body, and bring *it* into subjection [bring under control; *doulagogeo* – literally, to lead into slavery]: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway [disqualified, fail to pass the test]” (1 Corinthians 9:27).³³⁰ Paul realized his dependency upon the Lord, yet this did not reduce his determination to remain faithful and proclaim the full Gospel to the glory of God (Acts 20:27; Titus 2:14).

24. Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body’s sake, which is the church:

We might well wonder at the first phrase since it is evident that, at the time of this letter, Paul had not visited Colossae – he *heard of* their faith in the Lord but he was not the one who brought the Gospel to them (Colossians 1:4, 7). The Lord’s primary purpose for Paul, which He revealed through Ananias, was for him to be His *chosen vessel* to take His name (in other words, His Good News) to nations (*Gentiles*), *kings* and *Israel* (Acts 9:15) – Paul took this calling to heart. To the Romans, he identified himself as being a *minister* (*leitourgos* – a public servant or a worker for the people) of Jesus specifically to the Gentiles, serving as a priest (*ministering*) of the Gospel so that the Gentiles might be an acceptable offering having been sanctified by the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:16).³³¹ To the Galatians, Paul explained that the Gospel message that he brought was nothing that he had learned through consulting with men (his point was that he did not get his Message by consulting with the Jerusalem Jews), but it was revealed to him by the Lord Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:12). Not only was Paul completely committed to bringing the Gospel to the Gentiles, but he was very aware that the Jews of Jerusalem were not nearly as interested in taking the Message to the *nations* as they were in maintaining their close-knit Jewish circle and traditions (Galatians 2:6-9). It could be said that Paul took upon himself the responsibilities of a spiritual

³²⁹ Strong’s Online.

³³⁰ Strong’s Online; Friberg Lexicon.

³³¹ Ibid.

parent to the Gentile Christians; it became his all-consuming passion to ensure that all of the Gentiles heard the Gospel, and that what they heard was accurate (Galatians 1:9). Therefore, everything that came into his life was somehow related to the Good News being taken to those non-Jews who had not heard; as a result he could say, *I am rejoicing in my sufferings on behalf of you* as a part of the Gentile audience, even though he had never been to Colossae.³³²

The rest of this verse can be somewhat difficult to understand; consider a more literal rendering of the Greek: *and I am filling up the lack of tribulations of Christ in my flesh on behalf of His Body, which is the ekklesia* (called-out ones).³³³ As Jesus began His ministry, He said: “Blessed are ye, when *men* shall [may (*revile* is in the subjunctive mood: a possibility, but not a certainty *)] revile [insult] you, and [may *] persecute *you*, and shall [may *] say all manner of evil [*any evil word*] against you falsely [*by lying*], for my sake [on account of Me]. Rejoice [imperative mood (a command)], and be exceeding glad [*rejoice exceedingly* (imperative)]: for great *is* your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you’ (Matthew 5:11-12).³³⁴ Jesus made it clear that to follow Him will almost certainly result in negative reactions from those about us and, in that, we are to take joy; however, we must be careful to recognize that these



Bill Bright and his “Four Spiritual Laws”

adverse responses are because of bearing His name and **not** because we have been inconsiderate or offensive. Paul wrote: “For verily [even], when we were with you, we told you before that we should [*are about to* (indicative mood – a statement of fact)] suffer tribulation [be afflicted]; even as it came to pass, and ye know” (1 Thessalonians 3:4).³³⁵ A part of the Gospel message that Paul brought to the Thessalonians was the fact that suffering would be their lot if they chose to follow the

Lord Jesus; this is completely contrary to modern Evangelical teaching. In 1952, Bill Bright of Campus Crusade encapsulated the modern spiritual tone in his *Four Spiritual Laws* outreach booklet that focused on God’s *love* and a *wonderful plan* for your life, and that has become the standard for most Evangelicals today.³³⁶ No mention is made of suffering for Christ or facing tribulation because of Him; undoubtedly this led to many expressing joy in receiving Jesus as their Savior, only to turn away from Him when something less *wonderful* came into their lives: they *receive the word with joy* but in a time of trial they fall away (Luke 8:13). God’s *wonderful plan* for us is that we will suffer for bearing the name of Christ: “Yea, and all that will live godly [*all who are desiring to live in a godly manner*] in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution [*will be*

³³² Stephanus 1550 NT.

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon.

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ <https://campusministry.org/docs/tools/FourSpiritualLaws.pdf>;
<http://www.mesacc.edu/~thoqh49081/handouts/bright.html>;
https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Four_Spiritual_Laws

persecuted]” (2 Timothy 3:12).³³⁷ Peter understood this principle as well: “Beloved, think it not strange [do not be amazed] concerning the fiery trial [painful suffering] which is to try [test] you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of [have a share in] Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad [rejoice] also with exceeding joy” (1 Peter 4:12-13).³³⁸

As we consider these words regarding the trials of living for the Lord, first of all it is evident that we are to rejoice in our sufferings for the Lord as it is a normal and expected part of walking with Him. “If ye be reproached [are suffering insult (present tense)] for the name of Christ, happy *are ye* [you are blessed]” (1 Peter 4:14);³³⁹ that may not be what we would consider a blessing, yet the Scriptures are filled with evidences that a life that is lived in faithfulness to the Lord will also be one that includes sufferings. Jesus explained that it is the one who “shall endure [*hupomeno* – to remain faithful through trials (sufferings)] unto the end, the same [this is the one who] shall be saved” (Matthew 24:13).³⁴⁰ Nowhere do we find the Gospel to be a doorway to a life of ease; a much clearer picture is painted of it being a life of struggles and trials. Additionally, we see that Paul’s focus was on the growth of the Body of Christ, and he was prepared to suffer many things in order to see that accomplished in the lives of those to whom he ministered. Paul never forgot what he had done to those who were a part of Christ’s Body; four times in his letters he makes reference to the days when he sought to decimate the early believers: 1) he calls himself the least of the apostles because of it (1 Corinthians 15:9), 2) to the Galatians he notes that it was under Judaism that he persecuted the Body of Christ (Galatians 1:13), 3) his persecution of Christians came from his religious zeal as a Pharisee (Philippians 3:6) and 4) his checkered past and his present ministry provided an illustration of what the grace of God can do in the life of a willing believer (1 Timothy 1:12-14).

Within this small letter, we have two very clear statements that the Body of Christ IS the *ekklesia*, the assembly of called-out ones (v. 18 and here). To the Ephesians, Paul explained that it was through the death of the Lord Jesus upon the cross that the Jews and Gentiles were both *reconciled* to God in *one body* (Ephesians 2:16). This parallels Jesus’ comment that He would be the Shepherd of only ONE *flock* made up of those who were of Israel and those who were *not of this fold* (John 10:16). The writer of Hebrews clarified that the OT saints would not be complete without the NT saints (Hebrews 11:40); this makes it very evident that the Body of Christ will be made up of all of His saints from all ages (including OT, NT and the millennium). It is important that we understand this, for there are many today who do not believe it and will strongly dispute this truth – it is their contention that the *ekklesia* is only made up of those who come to faith between Pentecost and the coming rapture. Although this might fit well within their dispensational theologies, it does not fit at all with the Scriptures that we have briefly considered (and, incidentally, Scriptures that they tend not to look at). It is for the growth of this Body that Paul was made its *minister* and for which he willingly suffered.

³³⁷ Stephanus 1550 NT.

³³⁸ Friberg Lexicon.

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ Strong’s Online; Friberg Lexicon.

25. Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God;

Whereof (of which) refers to the *ekklesia (church)* that was mentioned at the end of the previous verse. This is now the second time that Paul mentions being a *minister* within the space of three verses. *Am made* is in *middle* voice (the subject is the recipient of his own action), which is generally translated as the active voice (the subject carries out the action) but includes a personal component; in this case, Paul *became* a minister (*diakonos* – a servant) of the *ekklesia* as an indirect result of ministering to them – he actively served the *ekklesia* and thereby became their *minister*. In other words, he became a *minister* by *ministering*; he was not given a position as a *minister*.

Paul's role as a servant of God's called-out ones was in accordance with God's plan for him. *Dispensation*, as it is used here, comes from a Greek word (*oikonomia*) that speaks of the actions of a steward (*oikonomos*), someone who bears the responsibility for managing a household – the guardian of the family.³⁴¹ The steward would oversee the work force and the dispensing of supplies within the house, and often bore the responsibility for the financial welfare of what was in his charge.³⁴² Paul became a *minister* to God's people because God, as the wise Overseer, first captured his heart so that he might become His obedient servant (*diakonos* – *minister*), and then provided him with the Gospel message so that he could take it to the Gentiles. God changed a zealous Paul from a persecutor into an Apostle of the people (Romans 11:13) and so he wrote: "Nevertheless, brethren, I have written the more boldly unto you ... because of the grace that is given to me of God, That I should be the minister [*leitourgos* – a public servant, thereby emphasizing the people being served; *diakonos* (as in our verse) looks more to the One Who is being served] of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering [serving as a priest of] the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified [made holy] by the Holy Ghost" (Romans 15:15-16).³⁴³ It is interesting to note that during Paul's traveling ministry, he would consistently begin his preaching in the Jewish synagogues (Acts 13:5, 14, 44-47), which inevitably ended badly when the Jews who refused to accept the Gospel would raise opposition to Paul and his message. It was because the Gospel was intended for all peoples that the unbelieving Jews were so frequently incited against Paul; although Paul always yearned for his people to embrace the Good News (Romans 9:1-3), he gloried in the reception that it had among those to whom the Lord had specifically sent him (Acts 9:15; 1 Thessalonians 2:20).

Paul then goes on to identify the purpose that God had in mind in granting him the grace to be His mouthpiece to the non-Jewish peoples: *to fulfil the word of God*. *Fulfil (pleroo)* literally means to make full or complete; however, within this context (in light of what will follow) it means to illuminate (or to make full) the true meaning of God's Word.³⁴⁴ When Jesus commissioned His disciples just before He was taken up, He said: "ye shall be witnesses unto me both [*not only*] in Jerusalem, and [*but also*] in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth"

³⁴¹ Strong's Online; clearly such a position would only be necessary within prestigious and wealthy households.

³⁴² <http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/steward>

³⁴³ Strong's Online; Friberg Lexicon.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

(Acts 1:8b).³⁴⁵ As we read through those early chapters of Acts, we recognize that these eleven disciples of Jesus had an extremely difficult time moving out from Jerusalem; even when Saul was thoroughly persecuting the new Christians and many fled from Jerusalem, the disciples of Jesus remained (Acts 8:1). Philip, who was among those who were scattered by Saul's persecution, took the message to Samaria (Acts 8:5), and Peter, after specific direction and still with great hesitancy, took the Gospel to Cornelius, a Gentile, in Caesarea (Acts 10:19-24). Despite the Lord making it very evident that the Gospel was for the Gentiles as well as for the Jews (Acts 10:44), the core group of disciples remained in Jerusalem. Even those who were scattered abroad by the persecution in Jerusalem shared the Gospel only with Jews – it was through foreign Jews, who were clearly more comfortable around non-Jews, that the Gospel finally broke into the Gentile population in Antioch (Acts 11:19-21). It was into this that Barnabas brought Paul, who caught the vision of what God wanted to do through him among the Gentiles (Acts 11:25-26).

26. Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: 27. To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:

Paul writes here of a *mystery* that has been hidden from those of *ages* and *generations* that are past – a mystery that has now been revealed (*made manifest*) to God's holy ones (*saints*). It is God's desire (*would*) to reveal (*make known*) the fullness (*riches*) of the *glory* of **this** (a demonstrative pronoun in Greek) *mystery among the Gentiles*.³⁴⁶ The focus of the unfolding of *this mystery* seems to be on the Gentiles; the OT revelations were given to Israel and, for those who had eyes to see, God included within them glimpses of what He had planned for all of mankind, not just for Israel. Let's take a moment to look into this *mystery* and consider its revelation in Scripture.

Within one of the many Messianic passages of Isaiah, the Lord declared: "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, *in whom* my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment [justice] to the Gentiles ... I the LORD have called thee [*mine elect*] in righteousness, and will ... give thee for a covenant [prophecy of a coming new covenant] of the people, for a light of the Gentiles" (Isaiah 42:1, 6).³⁴⁷ Jehovah declares that through the Messiah will come a *new covenant* for the people and a *light* for the non-Jews (*Gentiles*); through Jeremiah He proclaimed: "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah," a *covenant* that would not be like the one that He made with Israel at Mt. Sinai, which they broke almost immediately (Jeremiah 31:31-32). When these promises are brought together with the many specific prophecies concerning the coming of the Lord Jesus, the evidence was there that God was going to do something new that would include the Gentiles. However, the religious leaders of Jesus' day simply refused to see what God had declared; they loved their positions of authority over the people and were blind to

³⁴⁵ Gingrich Lexicon.

³⁴⁶ Friberg Lexicon.

³⁴⁷ Strong's Online; BDB.

God's truth and their own sinfulness. It was because of their self-imposed blindness that Jesus said to His disciples: "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand" (Luke 8:10). The Lord will not overrule the choices that we make!

To the Romans Paul wrote: "For I would not [am not desiring], brethren, that ye should be ignorant [unaware] of this **mystery**, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits [*so that you should not be among yourselves wise*]; that blindness [stubbornness] in part is happened to Israel, until [the time when] the fullness [completion] of the Gentiles be come in. And so [*Gentiles should come in and thus*] all Israel shall [will] be saved ..." (Romans 11:25-26).³⁴⁸ This glimpse into the *mystery* comes at the end of Paul's illustration of the wild branches (the Gentiles) being grafted into the Olive Tree (the Lord Jesus Christ) by faith, while some of the natural branches (Israel) were broken off because of unbelief (Romans 11:17, 20-21). After carefully showing that both the Jews and the Gentiles are made partakers of the same life in Christ (the Olive Tree), Paul summarizes by clarifying that the stubbornness of the Jews led to the establishment of the New Covenant and the Way to life being opened to the Gentiles; it was their unbelief that led Christ to the cross so that He might die for the sins of the world and shed His blood for the installation of the New Covenant (Luke 22:20). The capstone of his summary is that when the redemption of the Gentiles should be completed, this will mark the salvation of *all Israel*. Earlier, Paul noted that "they *are* not all Israel, which are of Israel" (Romans 9:6b); in other words, not everyone who is born of the heritage of Israel is a recipient of God's promise – faith (belief) in the Lord is required. It is not that the Jews are now excluded, but they no longer hold a position of being central in God's saving work in the world (Paul shows that the benefit of being a Jew is historical – Romans 3:1-2). When Jesus died, the veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom in order to show that coming to the Lord through the Jewish priests was ended (Matthew 27:51) – the Jews no longer held that central role, for the way had been opened in Christ (Hebrews 4:16). "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are **all one in Christ Jesus**" (Galatians 3:28). The *mystery* that Paul speaks of in this passage is that the Gentiles have now been included alongside of the Jews – something that was prophesied in the OT, but which the religious leaders of Jesus' day were unwilling to acknowledge (due to their *blindness*).

As Paul closes his letter to the Romans, he makes another reference to this *mystery*: "Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the **mystery**, which was kept secret since the world began [*to times eternal having been kept silent*], But now is made manifest [*having been revealed*], and by the scriptures of the prophets [*through the writings of prophecy*], according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith [*in obedience of faith among all the Gentiles having been made known*]" (Romans 16:25-26).³⁴⁹ This provides a time frame of how long this *mystery* has been kept: *since the world began*. Although the Greek makes no reference to *world*, it speaks of *times eternal* and *sigao* (*kept secret*); being in the perfect tense identifies this *secret* as having been made once in the past – from this, the KJV translators felt free to place the establishment of this secret as being before the worlds. However, this *mystery* that was

³⁴⁸ Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon; Gingrich Lexicon.

³⁴⁹ Stephanus 1550 NT; Gingrich Lexicon.

kept hidden for many years, has now been made known among the Gentiles as *obedience of faith*. It is the Gentiles who are the new recipients of this Gospel message of faith and obedience; although this was revealed through the prophets, it was not recognized by the Jews who held and studied the Scriptures. Hosea wrote: “I will say to *them which were* not my people, Thou *art* my people; and they shall say, *Thou art* my God” (Hosea 2:23); this is an expression of the opening of the Good News of God to the Gentiles – a mystery that had been well hidden from the eyes of the religious Jews, yet Simeon knew the truth of the prophets. When he saw the child Jesus being brought into the temple, he proclaimed: “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart [*release Thy slave*] in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people [*peoples*]; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel” (Luke 2:29-32).³⁵⁰ The Lord’s desire for all of the peoples of the earth was seen by only a few among the Jews.

Paul also wrote of this *mystery* to the Ephesians: “... by revelation he [God] made known unto me the **mystery** ... That the Gentiles should be [are] fellowheirs, and of the same body [many parts, one Body], and partakers [together] of his promise in Christ by the gospel” (Ephesians 3:3-6).³⁵¹ Each of these descriptions of the Gentiles (*fellowheirs, same body* and *partakers*) includes the understanding that they must be a part of a broader group. In Ephesians 2, Paul carefully outlined what Christ had accomplished on the cross for the Gentile Christians: formerly they were the *Uncircumcision, without Christ, aliens, strangers, having no hope and without God* (Ephesians 2:11-12); now they are *in Christ, made nigh, fellow citizens* with the OT saints and *of the household of God* (Ephesians 2:13, 19). The *mystery* that remained hidden for ages, Paul says, is that, through the sacrifice that Christ made upon the cross, God has opened the way for all peoples to be reconciled with their Creator. The Lord Jesus Christ died upon the cross, thereby making full payment for sin (Romans 6:23), and rose again, thus filling with life the New Covenant that was established in His shed blood (Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 15:17). Jesus said, “... other sheep I have, which are not of this fold [*aule*, a defined enclosure for keeping the sheep at night; a reference to Israel]: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold [*poimne – flock*], and one shepherd” (John 10:16).³⁵² Jesus made it clear that He would shepherd only one flock that would be made up of the faithful of all peoples and, as Paul explains the *mystery*, it is clear that this *flock* includes the OT saints! After highlighting the faithfulness of a few of the OT saints, the writer of Hebrews declares: “God having provided some better thing for us, that they [the OT saints] without us should not be made perfect [complete]” (Hebrews 11:40).³⁵³ Do not permit the dispensationalists to convince you that Israel is completely separate within God’s economy, that we are now living in the “Church Age,” or that the New Covenant is “God’s promise to convert Israel and forgive her sin and give her a new heart of obedience.”³⁵⁴ Incredibly, it seems that the *mystery*, as Paul so carefully explained to the Ephesians, is still a mystery to many who come to the Bible with their predetermined theologies; too frequently they latch onto an obscure

³⁵⁰ Stephanus 1550 NT.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² Strong’s Online.

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ https://www.wayoflife.org/reports/a_refutation_of_replacement_theology.php

Scripture or two that might seem to support their musings while they ignore the bulk of unambiguous texts that do not.

Now we come to our passage in Colossians where Paul says that the *mystery* that has been hidden for so long has now been revealed (*manifest*) to those who are God's children (*His saints*).³⁵⁵ It is God's desire (*would*) for us to understand (*make known*) the abundance (*riches*) of the *glory* that is *this mystery among the Gentiles*.³⁵⁶ In other words, what has been veiled for so long, God is now explaining so that we might gain a thorough knowledge of what He has done for His holy ones, and He calls it an *abundance of glory*! As Paul explained the inclusion of the Gentiles to the Romans, he wrote: "And that he [God] might make known the riches of his glory [literally: *the abundance of the glory of Him*] on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory ..." (Romans 9:23).³⁵⁷ The immeasurable glory of God will become the inheritance of those who come to know the *mercy* of God that is available only in Christ. Paul expresses this *mystery* succinctly in two phrases: *Christ in you, the hope of glory*. Consider this carefully with me.

Christ in you forms the foundation for all that God has prepared for us. We are told that God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing (*all spiritual blessings*) in *Christ* who is abiding in the heavens (Ephesians 1:3).³⁵⁸ Our access to *every spiritual blessing* that God has prepared for us comes only through being *in Christ*. Notice however, this text says *Christ in you* – the other way around; let's look into this.

Jesus said, "Abide [*meno* – remain; imperative mood (a command)] in me, and I [*I also*] in you. As the branch cannot [*is not able to*] bear fruit of itself, except it abide [*if it should not remain (meno)*] in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide [*should remain – meno* (subjunctive mood; a possibility, but not a certainty)] in me. I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth [*meno* – present tense, active voice: it is my responsibility to continually *remain*] in me, and I in him, the same [this is the one who (a demonstrative pronoun in Greek)] bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can [*are able to*] do nothing" (John 15:4-5).³⁵⁹ What we learn from this simple illustration is that we are commanded to *abide* in Christ and that this *abiding* is likened to that of a branch *in the vine* – the branch is attached to the vine so that the life of the vine flows into it. We understand that the branch is not physically inside of the vine but, rather, it has a living connection with the vine; Jesus explained that, in like manner, we are to have a living relationship with Him so that His life is able to flow into us. Two things are necessary for this: 1) we must first have that living connection, which is made by faith through believing that Jesus is Who He said, and 2) once that living faith-connection has been established, then **we** must remain there. It is as we continue to *abide in Christ* that *He also* will abide in us. Jesus made this equally clear in His continued use of this illustration: "If a man abide not [*if someone should not remain*] in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast *them* into the fire [*they are gathering and*

³⁵⁵ Stephanus 1550 NT.

³⁵⁶ Friberg Lexicon.

³⁵⁷ Stephanus 1550 NT.

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ Strong's Online; Stephanus 1550 NT.

casting them into fire], and they are burned [*it is being burned*]” (John 15:6).³⁶⁰ The branch that no longer remains (*abides*) in the Vine will find its place in the fire; the one who ceases to remain *in Christ* will find himself in the torments of eternal fire (Revelation 20:15). Jesus stated very explicitly that it is the one who remains faithful to Him through the trials of life who will be saved (Matthew 24:13). This fits perfectly with the Vine-branch illustration that He used: the branch that does not retain its living “faith-connection” with the Vine will dry up and be burned. What we must not fail to understand is that our union with the Vine is not necessarily permanent: it is established in faith; by faith we believe that Jesus is the way to life (we become partakers of the life of the Vine), and it is by faith that we remain in Him, thereby bearing spiritual fruit. In other words, if my faith in the Lord ceases, then my connection to His life is also gone; “Take heed, **brethren**, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief [*apistia* – literally, *no faith*; faithlessness], in departing [becoming apostate] from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12).³⁶¹

Therefore, when Paul writes *Christ in you*, he is picking up on the second part of Jesus’ words: *and I in you*; as we have just seen, the Lord’s presence within us is dependent upon our *abiding* in Him. Hence, this phrase (*Christ in you*) that might appear to be so simple, is really the expression of a living and faithful relationship with the Lord. The Word of God that finds life in someone with a rocky heart, flourishes until the appearance of a trial, and then his faith (the basis for his life with God) dies and his walk with the Lord ends (Luke 8:13). Likewise, Paul explained to the Romans that we, as wild olive branches, have been grafted into the good Olive Tree (Jesus) by faith; however, if we permit our faith to die, then we will be stripped away as dead branches (Romans 11:17-21) – Jesus told us that His Father is the Husbandman Who removes the branches that are not bearing fruit; a faithless *branch* will not yield fruit because faith is what brings the life of the *Vine* into the *branch* (John 15:1-2). If *Christ in you* is descriptive of our spiritual situation, then we are living faithfully for the Lord in accordance with the leading of His Spirit and in keeping with His Law – we are among the Lord’s *overcomers* who will *inherit all things* in the new heaven and earth (Revelation 21:7).

The second phrase, *the hope of glory*, affirms the reality for those who remain faithful to the Lord in all things. Jesus said, “... he that shall endure [*hupomeno* – remain faithful through trials] unto the end [when the Lord returns or we die], the same [a demonstrative pronoun in Greek that says, “This one!!”] shall [*will* – *saved* is future tense] be saved” (Matthew 24:13).³⁶² We are *in Christ* by faith and He will abide within us as long as that faith remains; do not be deceived, our salvation is only eternally secured when we have **faithfully** come to the *end*. The *glory* that awaits the Lord’s faithful slaves is this: “Behold, the tabernacle [*dwelling place*] of God *is* with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, *and be* their God. And God shall wipe away all tears [*every tear* (both words are singular in Greek)] from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away [have departed]” (Revelation 21:3-4).³⁶³ When

³⁶⁰ Stephanus 1550 NT; as to who *they* are who gather and toss the dead branches into the fire, we are not told specifically, but according to Matthew 13:40-42 it might well be the angels of the Lord.

³⁶¹ Strong’s Online; Gingrich Lexicon.

³⁶² Friberg Lexicon; Stephanus 1550 NT.

³⁶³ Gingrich Lexicon; Stephanus 1550 NT.

the Lord is prepared to judge all who are not already with Him in glory, the present earth and the heaven will disappear (*fled* away) – at that moment, the *former things* are gone forever (Revelation 20:11);³⁶⁴ His judgment will bring an eternal separation between evil and good because only those whose names are written in the Book of Life (the *overcomers*, those who have *remained* faithful to the Lord) will enter into the glory of the new world (Revelation 20:15; 21:7). The glory of the new heaven and earth will be the presence of God among those who have been redeemed through living faith in the blood of Jesus – man, created in the image of God, communing with His Creator for eternity! *Christ in you, the hope of glory* for all of eternity!

28. Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus:

Whom refers back to *Christ*; the central message of Paul and Timothy (the *we* of this letter) is the Lord Jesus Christ. However, that was not the extent of their message, for they were also continually *warning* and *teaching* (both are present tense) everyone in *all wisdom*. *Warning* (from the Greek *noutheteo*) means to admonish (a mild form of reproof for a fault or failure), exhort (to call to one’s side in order to encourage and inspire to live favorably before God) and instruct (to impart knowledge).³⁶⁵ *Teaching* (*didasko*), on the other hand, speaks specifically to providing instruction to someone in an area where they have little or no knowledge.³⁶⁶ *Wisdom* (*sophia*) is the right use of knowledge in making the best choices and determining the most beneficial application for those choices.³⁶⁷ The Psalmist said, “The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom [the Greek translation shows this as *sophia*]: a good understanding have all they that do *his commandments*” (Psalm 111:10); a proper *fear* of the Lord is where *wisdom* begins. Paul and Timothy used their God-given wisdom to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and they did so through admonition, exhortation and instruction (*warning*). What part do these three ingredients play in preaching today?

Ecumenical thinking undermines all three of these essentials that Paul used in his ministry. *Admonition* can only take place when there is an understood right way and correct doctrine; the ecumenical mind refuses to comply with the *narrow way* and makes room for many different understandings of Biblical doctrine, and through accommodation, has sufficiently blurred the line between right and wrong so that even gentle reproof (*admonition*) is considered to be inappropriate – after all, in the name of love I cannot say that you are wrong! *Exhortation* requires inciting or encouraging someone to correct action, but (the ecumenical mind reasons) my understanding of a matter might not work for someone else and, therefore, it is more loving to allow everyone to express himself as he feels most comfortable. *Instruction* is really very difficult to do without causing *my brother* offense, the ecumenical mind thinks; it is much more appropriate to allow “the Spirit of God” to open each heart to the truth that works for them – that way, no one’s self-esteem will be damaged. If this seems to be farfetched to you, consider this description of the view held

³⁶⁴ Gingrich Lexicon.

³⁶⁵ Strong’s Online; <http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary>.

³⁶⁶ <http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/teach>

³⁶⁷ Strong’s Online; <http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/wisdom>.

by the pioneers of the Evangelical Free Church: “If Scripture alone is the rule, and Scripture is open to various interpretations, and believers are free in conscience to interpret it as they feel ‘led’ by the Holy Spirit, it follows that they may be led to different views.”³⁶⁸ They, very simply, set aside the *narrow way* to life in favor of the more expedient broad road to destruction; they opened the door to accommodation and sought to place the responsibility for the variance in beliefs on the Spirit of God! Despite this, they remained convinced that they still had a hold on the truth of God – at least some of it. This is the subtlety of justification in action!

Paul urged the Thessalonians to “know [*oida* – primarily means to know, and the perfect tense means that this knowledge came in the past; additionally, it can mean to have respect for, but we cannot disassociate that from its primary meaning] them which labour [are expending great effort (spiritually speaking)] among you, and are over [*stand before*] you in the Lord, and **admonish** [*noutheteo*] you; and to esteem [regard] them very highly ...” (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13a).³⁶⁹ The elders within the assembly at Thessalonica bore the responsibility to *admonish* the people as necessary. Then the responsibility is broadened: “Now we [the authors of the epistle: Paul, Silvanus and Timothy] exhort [to encourage to action] you, brethren [this is addressed to the assembly in general], warn [*noutheteo*] them that are unruly [*ataktos* – undisciplined or lazy] ...” (1 Thessalonians 5:14).³⁷⁰ Paul tells the Thessalonians that an integral part of their proclamation of the Gospel is warning those who are not living in accordance with the commands of the Lord, whether that is because they are undisciplined or simply too lazy. As we have already seen, obedience to the Lord is essential in order for us to have His abiding presence (John 15:10), and a lack of discipline and laziness are simply not *reasons* for blatant disobedience or the accommodation of error.

Consider one of Paul’s final instructions to Timothy: “Preach the word; be instant [stand ready] in season, out of season [whether it’s convenient or not]; reprove [identify someone’s error with repentance in view], rebuke [*noutheteo* is a gentle warning; this is *epitimao* and is a sharp warning], exhort [*parakaleo* – literally, to call to one’s side; describes urging/encouraging someone in a right way] with all longsuffering [*makrothumia* – steadfastness/quietness of spirit in the face of difficulties] and doctrine [teaching]” (2 Timothy 4:2).³⁷¹ There are five commands given here: *preach the word*, *stand ready*, *reprove*, *rebuke* and *exhort*, and Timothy was to make all of these a part of his ministry. Paul follows this strong exhortation with an apt description of today’s professing “Christian”: “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine [preaching *the word* will no longer be accepted]; but after their own lusts [desires] shall they heap to themselves [accumulate or surround themselves with] teachers, having itching [desiring something pleasant] ears; And they shall turn away [active voice; the people will *turn away*] *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned [passive voice; having rejected the truth, they will succumb to untruths (all that is left)] unto fables [myths; that which is untrue – lies]” (2 Timothy 4:3-4).³⁷² Paul told Timothy that *the time will come*, and it surely has. Many preachers today endeavor to

³⁶⁸ David V. Martin, *Trinity International University 1897-1997*, p. 19.

³⁶⁹ Strong’s Online; Friberg Lexicon.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Strong’s Online.

help people to feel good about themselves; after all, there are enough problems in the world without adding to the emotional load of the average pew-warmer – if everyone leaves the service feeling encouraged, then the preacher has accomplished his task. Should the preacher actually teach from the Scriptures, it will be words of encouragement that will be spun in such a way that everyone’s self-esteem will be strengthened; yet Paul’s instructions (commands) to Timothy include *reprove*, *rebuke* and *exhort* – all of these correspond with Jesus’ declaration that the Way to life is *narrow* (Matthew 7:14), but none of these fit well with the modern intent to coddle the parishioners into spiritual apathy. Modern preaching fits more favorably within the broad road of acceptance, accommodation and entertainment; unfortunately, there are many who sit under such teaching who are oblivious to their downward spiral into spiritual ruin – they never hear the truth so that they might understand that they are on the broad road, and they are not motivated to study the Scriptures on their own.

Paul then reveals the purpose for including *warning* and doctrinal instruction within their proclamation of the Gospel: it is so that *we might make everyone complete, or mature, in Christ Jesus*.³⁷³ That’s the reason that Paul specifically instructed Timothy to *reprove*, *rebuke* and *exhort* – it is only as these are included with the Gospel message and the working of the Spirit of God that those who hear are able to mature in their walk with the Lord. Remember that the *warning* and *instruction* are expressed through godly *wisdom* – they are imparted under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. To the Corinthians Paul said: “And my speech and my preaching *was* not with enticing [persuasive] words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Corinthians 2:4).³⁷⁴ Paul had been given the Gospel of the New Covenant, and his passion was to ensure that everyone heard the full message without deviation (Galatians 1:8); he revealed the core of his message to the Corinthians: “For I determined not to know any thing among you, save [except] Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2).³⁷⁵ Paul did not teach confusion but clarity of Who Jesus is and what He accomplished for mankind; to the Colossians, he affirms that they (Paul and Timothy) continue to preach Christ, and that they do so with a view to the spiritual maturity of those whom they are instructing.

29. Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.

Whereunto is translated from two Greek words that come together to mean *to this end*.³⁷⁶ This is a direct reference back to the reason that the preaching of Paul and Timothy centers on Christ and includes both warning and instruction (verse 28): so that those who hear the message might become mature in Christ. It is with this goal in mind that Paul says that he is growing weary through striving (*labour*), making every effort (*striving*) *according to His working* that is working in me in power (*dunamis*).³⁷⁷ Paul is not content to say that the Lord is working to bring spiritual maturity;

³⁷³ Stephanus 1550 NT; Gingrich Lexicon.

³⁷⁴ Friberg Lexicon.

³⁷⁵ Strong’s Online.

³⁷⁶ Friberg Lexicon.

³⁷⁷ Friberg Lexicon; Strong’s Online.

rather, he is expending all of his energy, even as the Lord is at work in him, so that his hearers might become complete in Christ.

As we look back at this first chapter of Colossians, we recognize Paul's strong instruction on Jesus as eternal God and the necessity of remaining faithfully in Him. Rather than viewing this as his effort to set the Colossians straight on some error that they were harboring, we must acknowledge the many times that Paul commends them for their walk in the Lord. It is because Paul took his commissioning by the Lord very seriously that he is using this letter to review and expound on the central doctrines of the Gospel. There were other gospels in circulation at this time and Paul is endeavoring to make sure that the Colossians Christians *continued grounded and settled* in the true Gospel as he had received it from the Lord. When living in the midst of error and humanistic philosophy, it is critically important for the child of God to be well grounded in the truths of God's Word – that is what Paul was ensuring was possible for the faithful in Colossae. Instead of trying to visualize Colossian error behind every instruction given, we would be far better off to take heed of the fundamental instruction that is provided in this letter so that we are able to stand and withstand in this day of spiritual darkness and compromise.