GOD’S PROVIDENCE
&
Human Responsibility
The Means God Uses to Shape Our Souls

Stacy W. Tyson
Truth Seekers Fellowship
Summer Bible Study
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www.tsfmemphis.org

aware | alive | awake | free | faithful | fruitful
## Providence and Responsibility

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THE OBJECT OF THE EXERCISE:
In this first lesson, we will explore the larger picture of the tension and harmony that exists between God’s providence and human responsibility. We will be asking and answering three basic questions:

1. What is the providence of God?
2. What is the sovereignty of God?
3. What is human responsibility?
4. Why does understanding these ideas make any real difference to our everyday lives?

1.1 Seeing the Larger Picture

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how fathomless his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? Or who has first given to God, that God needs to repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him, be glory forever! Amen. Romans 11:33-36 NET

The Demise of Ahab: 1 Kings 22 and 2 Chronicles 18 (Appendix 8.1)
Read and reflect on this story. What do we see in this Story?

? What formed Ahab and Jehoshaphat to be the type of men they were to make the choices that they did?

1.2 Defining Our Terms

PROVIDENCE: God’s sovereign superintendence and sustaining of all things, which guides them toward His predetermined ends in a way this is consistent with their created nature, all to the glory and praise of God.
**SOVEREIGNTY:** God’s supreme power, free from external control or coercion, by which He rules His creation according to His will and His pleasure.

**RESPONSIBILITY:** The ability of a person to act in way consistent with his/her nature resulting in accountability to God as the liable agent in both thought and action.

### 1.3 What Will We Accomplish In This Study?

“The sovereignty-responsibility tension is not a problem to be solved; rather, it is a framework to be explored.”

D. A. Carson, Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility

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Ecclesiastes 3:11

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<td>God has made everything beautiful in its time.</td>
<td>God has made everything fit beautifully in its appropriate time,</td>
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<td>Also, he has put eternity into man’s heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.</td>
<td>but he has also placed ignorance in the human heart so that people cannot discover what God has ordained, from the beginning to the end of their lives.</td>
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<td>True, God made everything beautiful in itself and in its time-- but he’s left us in the dark, so we can never know what God is up to, whether he’s coming or going.</td>
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In the final analysis, the full relationship between divine providence and human responsibility will remain a mystery hidden in God’s holiness.

“... God causes all things that happen, but He does so in such a way that He somehow upholds our ability to make willing, responsible choices, choices that have real and eternal results, and for which we are held accountable. Exactly how God combines his providential control with our willing and significant choices, Scripture does not explain to us. But rather than deny one aspect or the other (simply because we cannot explain how both can be true), we should accept both in an attempt to be faithful to the teaching of Scripture.”

(Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, 321)
God desires that we know and understand what He has revealed about Himself, even if we cannot fully comprehend all the issues.

Jeremiah 9:23-24 ESV
Thus says the LORD:
“Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom,
Let not the mighty man boast in his might,
Let not the rich man boast in his riches,
But let him who boasts boast in this,
That he understands and knows me,
That I am the LORD who practices steadfast love,
justice, and righteousness in the earth.
For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.”

We cannot limit God by reducing Him through our own experience. Every human analogy that helps us to understand the issues is going to be faulty because what God does in His infinity cannot be equated with what we do in our limited nature.

1.4 The Reasons for This Study and Its Importance

1.4.1 Confusion and Misunderstanding

1.4.2 Dependence on Tradition and Culture rather than what God has revealed in His Word.

* Our views on these issues have largely been shaped by the history and course of our nation and so we tend to see God’s universe as a “democratic republic.”

* The issues of this study have been shaped by an age old theological debate that has solidified into a “two party” argument in our times – The Calvinists vs. Arminians. (It is beyond the scope of this study to deal with these issues)

* In our present post-modern culture, there is rejection of and a rebellion against all ideas that establish authority and control of life outside individual choice. This is especially true as it relates to God.
“As Augustine saw clearly, God being God offends human pride. If God is running the universe and has first claim on our lives, guess who isn’t running the universe and does not get to have things as they please.”

(Dallas Willard, Renovation of the Heart, 45)

1.4.3 Accepting God’s Providence is the foundation for Hope.

* If we diminish God’s Omnipotence, we challenge His ability to prevail.

* If we diminish His Omniscience, we challenge His ability to act ever wisely.

* If we diminish His Omnipresence, we challenge His intimate concern.

* If we diminish His Sovereignty, we challenge His faithfulness.

* If we diminish His Providence, we destroy hope.

1.4.4 Accepting our Responsibility is the foundation for true Freedom.
Preparing for the Next Discussion: PROVIDENCE

For Next Week, read the following passage and then consider the following questions:

Acts 17:24-31 NET
24 The God who made the world and everything in it, who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by human hands, 25 nor is he served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives life and breath and everything to everyone.

26 From one man he made every nation of the human race to inhabit the entire earth, determining their set times and the fixed limits of the places where they would live, 27 so that they would search for God and perhaps grope around for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 28 For in him we live and move about and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we too are his offspring.’ 29 So since we are God’s offspring, we should not think the deity is like gold or silver or stone, an image made by human skill and imagination.

30 Therefore, although God has overlooked such times of ignorance, he now commands all people everywhere to repent, 31 because he has set a day on which he is going to judge the world in righteousness, by a man whom he designated, having provided proof to everyone by raising him from the dead.”

1. What is revealed about God in vv. 24 and 25?
What does it mean that God does not need anything?
What is God’s relationship to life?

2. What do we learn about God’s purposes for humanity in v. 26?
What does v.27 reveal about the reason God has set “limits” on humanity?
Explain v.28 in your own words.

3. In v.30, what does it mean that God “has overlooked such times of ignorance”?
What does God now command all people to do?
How do you think He proclaims this command? In other words, how would people know that this is what God desires?
What is the significance of the coming judgment revealed in v.31?
How should this knowledge motivate someone toward a proper response to God?

What does this passage as a whole reveal about God’s larger purposes for humanity?
THE OBJECT OF THE EXERCISE:
In this discussion, we will explore what the Bible reveals about God’s providing, sustaining, and governing of all things. God has created all things and He is concerned about what is happening in His creation as He moves all things toward His good and glorious conclusions.

As we study these issues, there are two core questions we all struggle with in one way or another that rise to the surface:
1. If God is really in control, then am I really free?
2. Can I trust God to be fully in control of all things?

PROVIDENCE: God’s sovereign superintendence and sustaining of all things, which guides them toward His predetermined ends in a way this is consistent with their created nature, all to the glory and praise of God.

“Gratitude of mind for the favorable outcome of things, patience in adversity, and also incredible freedom from worry about the future all necessarily follow upon this knowledge (of God’s providence)... Ignorance of providence is the ultimate of all miseries; the highest blessedness lies in the knowledge of it.”

John Calvin, Institutes, 1:219-25

2.1 PROVIDENCE: Providing
God has provided all things in creation by His creating work. There is nothing that exists that has not been created by God. God also provides all that the creation needs to continue on as He intends.

2.1.1 God is the Creator and everything comes from Him.

Genesis 1:1 NET.
In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

2.1.2 Christ is the Agent of creation.

Colossians 1:15-16 NET
He (Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation, 16 for all things in heaven and on earth were created by him - all things, whether visible or invisible, whether thrones or dominions, whether principalities or powers - all
things were created through him and for him.

2.1.3 God provides the necessities of life for all people.

Matthew 5:44-45 NET
But I say to you, love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be like your Father in heaven, since he causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

2.2 PROVIDENCE: Sustaining
God also preserves and sustains all creation, carrying it along so that His greater purposes are worked out in and through history.

2.2.1 Christ is the Agent through whom God holds together the universe and guides all things toward His ends.

Hebrews 1:3 NET
The Son is the radiance of his glory and the representation of his essence, and he sustains all things by his powerful word, and so when he had accomplished cleansing for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

* In this passage, the word for “sustains” is often used in the New Testament with the sense of “carrying something from one place to another.” The idea here is not that Christ is just passively “holding all things up,” but that He is actively carrying them toward His ends and conclusions.

Colossians 1:17 NET
He himself (Christ) is before all things and all things are held together in Him.

2.2.2 All things are working toward God’s conclusions.

Isaiah 41:4 NET
Who acts and carries out decrees?
Who summons the successive generations from the beginning?
I, the LORD, am present at the very beginning, and at the very end. I am The One.

Ephesians 1:7-10 NET
7 In him (Christ) we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace 8 that he lavished on us in all wisdom
and insight. 9 He did this when he revealed to us the secret of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, 10 toward the administration of the fullness of the times, to head up all things in Christ - the things in heaven and the things on earth.

2.3 PROVIDENCE: Government

God’s governing of His creation must be defined by His sovereignty. We must remember that God’s universe is not a democracy. God is always presented in the Bible as the King of all creation who accomplishes His will and His desire for the sake of His glory and pleasure.

**SOVEREIGNTY:** God’s supreme power, free from external control or coercion, by which He rules His creation according to His will and His pleasure.

* When God acts for the sake of His glory, it always results in the greatest good, especially for His children.

2.3.1 God is not coerced by things external to Himself - things He has created.

Acts 17:24-25 NET
The God who made the world and everything in it, who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives life and breath and everything to everyone.

2.3.2 God works all things according to the counsel of His will.

Ephesians 1:11-12 NET
(God) accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will 12 so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, would be to the praise of his glory.

2.3.3 God’s authority is established over all things.

Psalms 103:19 NET
The LORD has established his throne in heaven; his kingdom extends over everything.
Daniel 4:34-35 NET
But at the end of the appointed time I, Nebuchadnezzar, looked up toward heaven, and my sanity returned to me. I extolled the Most High, and I praised and glorified the one who lives forever. For his authority is an everlasting authority, and his kingdom extends from one generation to the next. 35 All the inhabitants of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he wishes with the army of heaven and with those who inhabit the earth. No one slaps his hand and says to him, ‘What have you done?’

John 19:10-11 NET
So Pilate said, “Do you refuse to speak to me? Don’t you know I have the authority to release you, and to crucify you?” 11 Jesus replied, “You would have no authority over me at all, unless it was given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of greater sin.”

2.3.4 Christ now has all authority in Heaven and on Earth.

Philippians 2:8-11 NET
He humbled himself, by becoming obedient to the point of death even death on a cross! 9 As a result God exalted Him and gave Him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Matthew 28:18-19 ESV
And Jesus came and said to them (the 11 Apostles), “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

2.3.5 God sets the bounds and limits for everything He has created.

Acts 17:26 NET
From one man he made every nation of the human race to inhabit the entire earth, determining their set times and the fixed limits of the places where they would live,…

* Mankind’s freedom is bound by our creation. We do no exist in and of our selves. Our existence came about through the purpose and intention of another – God our Creator. We exist only within the boundaries which God has established in His created order of things.

Job 14:1-6 NET
1 “Man, born of woman, lives but a few days,
and they are full of trouble.
2 He grows up like a flower and then withers away;
he flees like a shadow, and does not remain.
3 Do you fix your eye on such a one?
And do you bring me before you for judgment?
4 Who can make a clean thing come from an unclean?
No one!
5 Since man's days are determined,
the number of his months is under your control;
you have set his limit and he cannot pass it.
6 Look away from him and let him desist,
until he fulfills his time like a hired man."

2.3.6 Even Evil is the under the sovereign rule of God.

Isaiah 45:7 NET
I am the one who forms light and creates darkness;
the one who brings about peace and creates calamity.
I am the LORD, who accomplishes all these things.

Proverbs 16:4 ESV
The LORD has made everything for its purpose,
even the wicked for the day of trouble.

Q1. If God is sovereignly superintending all things to accomplish His purposes doesn't this in some way limit human freedom?

2.4 Does God Have a Plan?

Isaiah 46:9-11 NET
Remember what I accomplished in antiquity!
Truly I am God, I have no peer; I am God, and there is none like me,
Who announces the end from the beginning
and reveals beforehand what has not yet occurred,
who says, ‘My plan will be realized,
I will accomplish what I desire,’
who summons an eagle from the east, from a distant land,
one who carries out my plan.
Yes, I have decreed, Yes, I will bring it to pass;
I have formulated a plan, yes, I will carry it out.
Romans 11:36 NET
For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things.
To Him be glory forever. Amen.

Romans 8:28 NET
And we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose...

2.4.1 Omniscience, Omnipotence and Omnipresence.

Job 37:16 NET
Do you know about the balancing of the clouds,
That wondrous activity of Him who is perfect in knowledge?

Jeremiah 32:17 NET
Oh, Lord GOD, you did indeed make heaven and earth by your mighty power and great strength.
Nothing is too hard for you!

Jeremiah 23:23-24 NET
“Do you people think that I am some local deity and not the transcendent God?” the LORD asks.
“Do you really think anyone can hide himself where I cannot see him?” the LORD asks.
“Do you not know that I am everywhere?” the LORD asks.

2.4.2 Righteousness and Grace

**RIGHTEOUSNESS:** God’s justice which demands that 1) the right things be done, 2) in the right way, 3) with the right motivations, 4) at the right time for the sake of his glory and praise.

**GRACE:** God’s unmerited favor (mercy, love, faithfulness, etc.) granted to His people in His unlimited power for the sake of His glory and pleasure.

* Specifically Planned

* Purposefully Allowed
EXERCISE: Considering the Fall of Adam

Think for a minute about what happened at the Fall in Genesis 2 and 3. Read those chapters and meditate on them for a few minutes. Pay very close attention to what actually happened. Now, consider these questions:

1. When God created Adam, did He know that Adam was going to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil?
2. Was it God’s desire that Adam eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil? (Consider the command He gave Adam)
3. Could God have stopped Adam from eating from the Tree? If He could have, why didn’t God stop Adam?
4. If God knew that Adam was going to eat from the Tree, why did He place the Tree in the Garden anyway?
5. Did God plan for Adam to eat from the Tree, or did He simply allow Adam to eat from the Tree?

2.5 What Difference Does this Make?

“It is love of God, admiration and confidence in his greatness and goodness, and the regular experience of his care that free us from the burden of ‘looking out for ourselves.’

What remarkable changes this introduces into our day-to-day life! Personally, at the beginning of my day – often before arising – I commit my day to the Lord’s care. Usually I do this while meditatively praying through the Lord’s Prayer, and possibly the twenty third Psalm as well. Then I meet everything that happens as sent or at least permitted by God. I meet it resting in the hand of his care. This helps me to ‘do all things without grumbling or disputing’ (Philippians 2:14), because I have already ‘placed God in charge’ and am trusting him to manage them for my good. I no longer have to manage the weather, airplanes, and other people.”

(Dallas Willard, Renovation of the Heart, 70)
Preparing for the Next Discussion: LOST

Carefully read through the following passage then consider the questions:

Romans 1:18-32 NET
18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of people who suppress the truth by their unrighteousness, 19 because what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.
20 For since the creation of the world his invisible attributes his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, because they are understood through what has been made. So people are without excuse.
21 For although they knew God, they did not glorify him as God or give him thanks, but they became futile in their thoughts and their senseless hearts were darkened. 22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for an image resembling mortal human beings or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles.
24 Therefore God gave them over in the desires of their hearts to impurity, to dishonor their bodies among themselves. ...
32 Although they fully know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but also approve of those who practice them.

1. Against what two qualities/activities of people does God reveal His wrath from Heaven? (v.18)
What do these people do with the Truth?

2. In verse 19, are these people ignorant about the truth of God?
In verse 20, how has God revealed Himself?
What has God revealed about Himself?
How are people held responsible for this knowledge?

3. What is the response of fallen humanity in verse 21?
What happened to their thoughts?
What happened to their hearts?
What is the result of this rejection of Truth in vv. 22 and 23?

4. How does God respond to this rejection of the truth? (v. 24)

5. What attitude is set in these people who suppress the truth in verse 32?
3 | LOST

THE OBJECT OF THE EXERCISE:
In this discussion, we will explore God’s original purposes for humanity and how the Fall of Adam has affected our nature and destiny. Before we can make any progress in our spiritual growth, we must realize that apart from God our lives are useless and we are enslaved by all that is opposed to His truth, goodness and glory.

3.1 What God Intended For Us

3.1.1 Why Did God Create Us?

Genesis 1:26 NET
Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness, so they may rule …”

Psalms 8:3-6 NET
When I look up at the heavens, which your fingers made, and see the moon and the stars, which you set in place, Of what importance is the human race, that you should notice them? Of what importance is mankind, that you should pay attention to them, and make them a little less than the heavenly beings? You grant mankind honor and majesty; You appoint them to rule over your creation; you have placed everything under their authority …

3.2 How Did God Design Us?

As we begin to discuss how God has designed us, we must realize that we are dealing with “deep” aspects of ourselves that we do not fully understand. We speak about our desires, our wills, our intellect as if we really know and fully comprehend that which we are speaking about. The Bible reveals a great deal about our human design, but even with this, it is hard to know exactly how all the pieces of the puzzle that make up human psychology fit together. We deceive ourselves if we think that we can truly analyze and define the specifics of how we work as spiritual beings. We are indeed “fearfully and wonderfully made” and this reverence
for the mystery of our existence should lead us to worship our Holy Father who created us.

1. The Spirit (Non-Physical Aspect)

2. The Soul (Non-Physical Aspect)

3. The Mind

4. The Heart

5. The Body (Physical Aspect)

* For more detail about these issues, see Appendix 8.2 “More About Our Divine Design”
3.3 **Circumstance > Choice > Consequence**

Genesis 2:15-17
The LORD God took the man and placed him in the garden in Eden to care for it and to maintain it. 16 Then the LORD God commanded the man, “You may freely eat fruit from every tree of the garden, 17 but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will surely die.”

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<tr>
<th>CIRCUMSTANCE &gt;</th>
<th>CHOICE &gt;</th>
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<td>(Context)</td>
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3.3.1 Choice: Test or Temptation?

James 1:13-15 NET
Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one. 14 But each one is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desires. 15 Then when desire conceives, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is full grown, it gives birth to death.

“Choice is where sin dwells…”
Dallas Willard, Renovation of the Heart, 46

3.3.2 What is the power of “contrary choice”?

Genesis 3:6-7 NET
When the woman saw that the tree produced fruit that was good for food, was attractive to the eye, and was desirable for making one wise, she took some of its fruit and ate it. She also gave some of it to her husband who was with her, and he ate it. 7 Then the eyes of both of them opened, and they knew they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Q2. **Is it the power of “contrary choice” that makes us free?**
3.4 Freedom and Choice in the Eternal Perspective

3.4.1 In “eternity past” God existed in a loving and glorious relationship as Father, Son and Holy Spirit – the blessed Trinity.

John 17:1-5 NET
When Jesus had finished saying these things, he looked upward to heaven and said, “Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, so that your Son may glorify you just as you have given him authority over all humanity, so that he may give eternal life to everyone you have given him. Now this is eternal life that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you sent. I glorified you on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me at your side with the glory I had with you before the world was created.

John 17:22-24 NET
The glory you gave to me I have given to them, that they may be one just as we are one. I in them and you in me that they may be completely one, so that the world will know that you sent me, and you have loved them just as you have loved me. Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, so that they can see my glory that you gave me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

Q3. In Eternity past, when the Father, Son and Holy Spirit lived in glory and love, did they have the power of “contrary choice”?

3.4.2 In “eternity future” we will live with God in sinless perfection and glory.

Revelation 21:3-5 NET
And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying: “Look! The residence of God is among human beings. He will live among them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death will not exist any more or mourning, or crying, or pain, for the former things have ceased to exist.” And the one seated on the throne said: “Look! I am making all things new!” Then he said to me, “Write it down, because these words are reliable and true.”

Philippians 3:20-21 NET
But our citizenship is in heaven and we also await a savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform these humble bodies of ours into the likeness of his glorious body by means of that power by which he is able to subject all things to himself.
Q4. **In Eternity Future, when we have been glorified – conformed to the pattern of Christ’s perfection – will we have the power of “contrary choice”? Or to ask the question another way, will we be able to sin?**

* The ability to choose does not necessarily make us free.

True freedom comes only from choosing the right things, the things that God Himself would choose, things which are true, good and glorious.

John 8:31-36 NET
Then Jesus said to those Judeans who had believed him, “If you continue to follow my teaching, you are really my disciples 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” 33 “We are descendants of Abraham,” they replied, “and have never been anyone’s slaves! How can you say, ‘You will become free’?” 34 Jesus answered them, “I tell you the solemn truth, everyone who practices sin is a slave of sin. 35 The slave does not remain in the family forever, but the son remains forever. 36 So if the son sets you free, you will be really free.

It seems to me, that even a cursory reading of human history might lead one to the self-evident and nearly incontrovertible conclusion that the cultural and political movements that have stressed and fought for the sovereignty of choice and unlimited freedom without responsibility have led to some of the greatest terrors and atrocities against humanity that have ever been known. The current “pro-choice” movement is no exception. When the foundation of truth (which is inextricably linked to the sovereignty and holiness of God) is denied, then all forms of non-truth are acceptable. This is the guaranteed result of the “disapproved,” “dysfunctional,” “worthless” mind about which Paul speaks.
3.5 RESPONSIBILITY: The Consequences of Adam’s Choice

Romans 5:12-20 NET So then, just as sin entered the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all people because all sinned ... many died through the transgression of the one man ... judgment, resulting from the one transgression, led to condemnation, ... by the transgression of the one man, death reigned through the one, ... Consequently, ... condemnation for all people came through one transgression, ... through the disobedience of the one man many were made sinners, ...

3.5.1 We were subjected to Guilt, Condemnation and Death.

Imputed Guilt – When Adam sinned, his guilt was accredited, imputed, to each of his descendants. Everyone is born guilty of sin's penalty.

Inherited Corruption – At the Fall, sin entered the “human experience” through Adam and so the human race inherited the ability and the proclivity to sin. This corruption is what Paul is referring to in Romans 7 as the “sin that lives within me.” We sin because we are born sinners, with the power of sin living within us.

These two aspects of our sinfulness are brought together in Davids’ one statement: "Look, I was guilty of sin from birth, a sinner the moment my mother conceived me.” (Psalms 51:5 NET)

Ephesians 2:1-3 NASB
Now you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

3.5.2 We were subjected to the tyranny of the “god of this Age” who blinds the minds of unbelievers.

2 Corinthians 4:3-4 If our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

3.5.3 We were confirmed as enemies of God, hostile to Him by our very nature and therefore helpless and hopeless.
Ephesians 2:11-12 NET Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh ... that you were at that time without the Messiah, alienated from the citizenship of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

Ephesians 4:17-19 NET So I say this, and insist in the Lord, that you no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding, being alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardness of their hearts. Because they are callous, they have given themselves over to indecency for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.

1. The Heart is Darkened (Romans 1:21; Ephesians 4:18)
2. The Soul and Spirit are Dead (Ephesians 2:1, 5; Colossians 2:13)
3. The Mind is Held Captive and Made Futile (2 Corinthians 4:4)

3.6 **Hopeless: The Point of Departure**

3.6.1 Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount by devastating His audience sense of self-righteousness - self-sufficiency.

Matthew 5:3, 20 NET.
“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to them....
...For I tell you, unless your righteousness goes beyond that of the experts in the law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

3.6.2 Paul begins the Letter to the Romans by “leveling the field” showing that everyone is helpless and hopeless apart from God.

Romans 3:9-18, 23
What then? Are we better off? Certainly not, for we have already charged that Jews and Greeks alike are all under sin, just as it is written:
“There is no one righteous, not even one,
There is no one who understands,
There is no one who seeks God.
All have turned away,
Together they have become useless;
...Ruin and misery are in their paths,
...and the way of peace they have not known.
“There is no fear of God before their eyes...”
for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

3.6.3 We must begin our journey of spiritual transformation with the realization and acceptance that we are at birth, by nature, apart from God - utterly ruined.

“The biblical, prophetic illumination of the human soul in its lostness is emphatic, starkly clear, and repeated over and over, from Moses and Samuel to Jesus, Paul, and John. The only path of spiritual transformation today still lies through this illumination. It must be gratefully and humbly accepted and applied, to oneself above all. When the prophet Jeremiah, for example, says, ‘the heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick: Who can understand it?’ we recognize from our heart that we are the ones spoken of, that, indeed, I am the one described. Only then is a foundation laid for spiritual formation into Christlikeness.

The initial move toward Christlikeness cannot be toward self-esteem, because of confusion about what self-esteem means, and because, realistically, I’m not okay and your not okay. We’re all in serious trouble. That must be our starting point. Self-esteem in such a situation will only breed self-deception and frustration – as is now increasingly recognized, by the way... A high opinion of ourselves will only make those consequences more difficult to deal with.”

(Dallas Willard, Renovation of the Heart, 49)
Preparing for the Next Discussion: REBORN

Read the following passage then answer the following questions.

“... the condition of lostness is not the same as the outcome to which it leads. We’re not lost because we are going to wind up in the wrong place. We are going to wind up in the wrong place because we are lost.

To be lost means to be out of place, to be omitted. “Gehenna,” the term often used in the New Testament for the place of the lost, may usefully be thought of as the cosmic dump for the irretrievably useless. Something that is lost is something that is not where it is supposed to be, and therefore it is not integrated into the life of the one to whom it belongs and to whom it is lost.

When we are lost to God, we are not where we are supposed to be in his world and hence are not caught up into his life.

...When we are lost to God, we are also lost to ourselves: we do not know where we are or how to get where we want to go. We may know we are lost or we may not. Many a driver is lost long before he knows he is – though rarely before his wife knows it. Many are lost before God but do not know it. They sincerely believe that they know where they are, where they are going, and how to get there; but in fact they do not, and they often find out too late.

Lost persons, in Christian terms, are precisely the ones who mistake their own person for God...

But their orientation toward self leads them to become the kind of person for whom away-from-God is the only place for which they are suited. It is a place they would, in the end, choose for themselves, rather than come to humble themselves before God and accept who He is.

...But the fundamental fact about them will not be that they are there (in hell), but that they have become people so locked into their own self-worship and denial of God that they cannot want God.”

(emphasis mine, Dallas Willard, Renovation of the Heart, 55-57)

1. How does this fit with what we studied in our last lesson LOST?

2. Reflect on Willard’s comment, “Lost persons, in Christian terms, are precisely the ones who mistake their own person for God…”
Does this square with Scripture?

3. Does this passage resonate with you in terms of your own spiritual journey? If so, how? If not, how?
THE OBJECT OF THE EXERCISE:

In this discussion, we will look at what the Bible reveals about God as the initiator in all things, particularly the process of salvation. We will deal primarily with two questions:

1. Who acts first, God or man?
2. Is my will “free”?

“We must now consider whether God’s plan or human action is logically prior. While Calvinists and Arminians are agreed that human actions are included in God’s plan, they disagree as to what is the cause and what is the result. Do people do what they do because God has decided that this is exactly how they are going to act, or does God first foresee what they do and then on that basis make His decision as to what is going to happen?” (M. Erickson, Christian Theology, 354)

4.1 The Blessing of The New Covenant

We are living in the age in which God deals with His people on the basis of His promises as revealed in the New Covenant. In this covenant, God vows Himself to initiate, sustain and complete the work of saving and transforming His people.

Jeremiah 31:33 NET. “But I will make a new covenant with the whole nation of Israel after I plant them back in the land,” says the LORD. “I will put my law within them and write it on their hearts and minds. I will be their God and they will be my people.

Ezekiel 36:24-28 ESV I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. 25 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. 26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. 28 You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.
4.1.1 God, working in Christ through the Holy Spirit, initiates our salvation (past):

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

4.1.2 God, working in Christ through the Holy Spirit, sustains our salvation (present):

1 Corinthians 1:8-9 NET
He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful, by whom you were called into fellowship with his son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

4.1.3 God, working in Christ through the Holy Spirit, completes our salvation (future):

Philippians 1:6 NET
For I am sure of this very thing, that the one who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

4.2 What Would We Choose?

Jeremiah 17:9-10
The human heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? I the LORD search the heart and test the affections, I deal with each person according to how he has behaved. I give them what they deserve based on what they have done.

“What does it mean to say that I am free? It means that I am not under constraint. Thus, I am free to do whatever pleases me. But am I free with respect to what pleases me and what does not?...I make all my decisions, but those decisions are in large measure influenced by certain characteristics of mine which I am not capable of altering by my own choice... In that respect my freedom is limited. I do not know whether it is my genes or environmental condition that has caused my (likes and dislikes), but it is apparent that I cannot by mere force of will alter this characteristic of mine.

There are, then, limitations upon who I am and what I desire and will.” (M. Erickson, Christian Theology, 357)
4.2.1 What Is the Will?
The Will is that aspect of our spiritual selves that enables us to choose to think and act in a way that is consistent with our intellect and desires.

\[ \text{WILL} = \text{ABILITY} + [\text{KNOWLEDGE \& DESIRE}] \]

4.2.2 Is the Will “Free”?

“An absolute “freedom,” totally free of God’s control, is simply not possible in a world providentially sustained and directed by God Himself.” (Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, 331)

When dealing with the issue of the “freedom of the will” the question is not really whether or not we have the ability to choose in certain way, but whether or not we would choose to do one thing over another.

* The will is bound by knowledge.

1 Corinthians 2:14-16 NET
The unbeliever (the “natural” or “soulish” man) does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him. And he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. 15 The one who is spiritual discerns all things, yet he himself is understood by no one. 16 For who has known the mind of the Lord, so as to advise him? But we have the mind of Christ.

* The will is always “bound” by desire.

John 3:19-21 ESV
And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. 21 But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been carried out in God.”

* In our natural, fallen state, our wills are bound by the desires of sin – all that is contrary to God’s goodness, beauty and truth.
4.2.3 Christ came to save us and heal us.

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

Luke 19:10NET

Luke 4:17-19NET
...the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him (Jesus). He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, 18 “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and the regaining of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Romans 5:6-11NET
For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 (For rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person perhaps someone might possibly dare to die.) 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, because we have now been declared righteous by his blood, we will be saved through him from God’s wrath. 10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, how much more, since we have been reconciled, will we be saved by his life? 11 Not only this, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received this reconciliation.

1. Christ died for us while we were helpless.
What does “helpless” mean?

2. Christ died for the ungodly.
What does “ungodly” mean?

3. God reconciles us while we were enemies.
What is an enemy?

* For more background on the “savability” of humanity, see Appendix 8.3 The “Intrinsic Greatness” of Fallen Humanity

Q5. Is there anything that we can do in our fallen state to initiate our salvation or our turning to God?
* When God saves us, He does not so much restore our “ability” to respond to Him, as He does our “willingness,” by which I mean our DESIRE, to respond to Him. Of course ability and desire are so interrelated that what happens in one always affects the other.

4.3 PROVIDENCE: Spiritual Birth

4.3.1 Spiritual Birth is accomplished by God’s will alone.

John 1:11-13 NASB

11 He (Jesus, the Word, the Light) came to His own (the nation of Israel, the Jews), and those who were His own did not receive Him. 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

* “not of blood” refers to “family lineage.”

* “nor the will of the flesh” refers to “human will” in general.

* “nor the will of man” may be better translated as “the will of a husband,” which indicates that this birth does not come about by human parenting.

* “but of God” – God is the one who causes the spiritual birth.

In John’s larger framework, the analogy of spiritual birth / natural birth is apt and instructive. Just as no one has any “control” over their physical, natural birth, so also they are not responsible for their spiritual birth.

Q6. Which comes first: faith of spiritual birth?

4.3.2 Without spiritual rebirth (from above), a person cannot even “see” the Kingdom.

John 3:1-3 NET

Now a certain man, a Pharisee named Nicodemus, who was a member of the Jewish ruling council, 2 came to Jesus at night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs
that you do unless God is with him.”

3 Jesus replied, “I tell you the solemn truth, unless a person is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

4.3.3 Without spiritual rebirth by the Spirit, a person cannot enter the Kingdom.

John 3:4-10 NET

4 Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter his mother's womb and be born a second time, can he?”

5 Jesus answered, “I tell you the solemn truth, unless a person is born of water and spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6 What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not be amazed that I said to you, ‘You must all be born from above.’

8 The wind blows wherever it will, and you hear the sound it makes, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” 9 Nicodemus replied, “How can these things be?” 10 Jesus answered, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you don’t understand these things?

* the phrase “from above” is a wordplay in Greek. The preposition used by Jesus here can mean either “again” or “from above.” Jesus is introducing an ambiguous statement to push Nicodemus to struggle with the ideas. He uses a similar word play with “spirit” which is the same word in Greek for “wind.”

4.3.4 Without the work of the Holy Spirit, a person cannot accept the Lordship of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:3 NET

So I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus is cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.

** An important concept in Scripture is the idea that God’s grace and provision precedes everything else. In other words, God always takes the initiative and his creation always responds. The first step in our spiritual growth is realizing that everything we have has been given to us. We are contingent beings, which is to say that we exist only by the will and determination of someone else – God. We did not will our being born, we did not will the circumstance into which we were born, and we cannot will how long we will live. The larger framework of our lives is beyond our control.

What God has granted us is the ability and the responsibility to use the time that He has given us. The choices that we make within this framework do have eternal consequences and this should push us to know and live according to the desire of our Creator and Judge.
4.4 PROVIDENCE: God’s Calling / Drawing

4.4.1 God is the One who has called us for His purposes.

Romans 8:28 NET
And we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose, ...

2 Timothy 1:9-10 NET
(God) is the one who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not based on our works but on his own purpose and grace, granted to us in Christ Jesus before time began, 10 but now made visible through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus. He has broken the power of death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel!

4.4.2 God’s drawing us to Christ is necessary for our responding properly to Christ.

John 6:35-44 NET
Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. The one who comes to me will never go hungry, and the one who believes in me will never be thirsty. 36 But I told you that you have seen me and still do not believe. 37 Everyone whom the Father gives me will come to me, and the one who comes to me I will never send away. 38 For I have come down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of the one who sent me. 39 Now this is the will of the one who sent me that I should not lose one person of every one he has given me, but raise them all up at the last day. 40 For this is the will of my Father for everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him to have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”

41 Then the Jews who were hostile to Jesus began complaining about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven,” 42 and they said, “Isn’t this Jesus the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven’?”

43 Jesus replied, “Do not complain about me to one another. 44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.
Preparing for the Next Discussion: REDEEMED

Read the following passage then answer the following questions.

2 Corinthians 5:11-21 NET
11 Therefore, because we know the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade people, but we are well known to God, and I hope we are well known to your consciences too. 12 We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to be proud of us, so that you may be able to answer those who take pride in outward appearance and not in what is in the heart.
13 For if we are out of our minds, it is for God; if we are of sound mind, it is for you. 14 For the love of Christ controls us, since we have concluded this, that Christ died for all; therefore all have died. 15 And he died for all so that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised. 16 So then from now on we acknowledge no one from an outward human point of view. Even though we have known Christ from such a human point of view, now we do not know him in that way any longer.
17 So then, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; what is old has passed away look, what is new has come! 18 And all these things are from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and who has given us the ministry of reconciliation. 19 In other words, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself through Christ, and who has given us the message of reconciliation.
20 Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making His plea through us. We plead with you on Christ's behalf, “Be reconciled to God!” 21 God made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we would become the righteousness of God.

1. In verse 11, what does Paul do and what motivates him?

2. In verse 14, what controls Paul?

3. In verse 15, how should the death of Christ motivate people?

4. In verse 17, what happens to people who are “in Christ”?

5. In verse 18, who “caused” the reconciliation that is spoken of?

6. In verses 20-21, explain in your own words what Paul means by calling himself an “ambassador” for Christ.
5 | REDEEMED

THE OBJECT OF THE EXERCISE:
Now we will turn to see what the Bible reveals about God accomplishing His purposes in and through His creation. We will see that nothing lies outside of God's determination and will. We will also explore the part that we play in God accomplishing His purposes, especially in the proclaiming of the Gospel.

5.1 PROVIDENCE: Concurrence
God accomplishes His purposes in and through His Creation. This is what theologians refer to as concurrence. Here we see that God does not accomplish His purposes in spite of what His creatures think and do, but He actually accomplishes His purposes in and through their thoughts and actions.

5.1.1 Our entire existence is contained by God.
For in Him we live and move about and exist,... Acts 17:28 NET

5.1.2 God’s works through inanimate creation to accomplish His purposes.
Psalms 135:6-7 NET
He does whatever he pleases in heaven and on earth,
in the seas and all the ocean depths.
7 He causes the clouds to arise from the end of the earth,
makes lightning bolts accompany the rain,
and brings the wind out of his storehouses.

5.1.3 God even accomplishes His purposes through the “chance” or “random” events of life.
Proverbs 16:33
ESV The lot is cast into the lap,
LORD. but its every decision is from the
NET The dice are thrown into the lap,
LORD. but their every decision is from

Q7. From the Biblical perspective, is there any such thing as “chance”? 
5.1.4 God accomplishes His purposes through the actions and choices of human beings.

Proverbs 19:21 ESV
Many are the plans in the mind of a man,
but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand.

Jeremiah 10:23 NET
LORD, we know that people do not control their own destiny.
It is not in their power to determine what will happen to them.

Proverbs 21:1 NET
The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD like channels of water;
He turns it wherever he wants.

* In the OT prophets, it is clear that God even accomplishes His purposes through pagan kings. Pharaoh is raised up so that God can display his glory and terror through him. The Babylonians are raised up to take Israel into exile. Cyrus is raised up by God to bring Israel back to the land. In the NT the Romans are set in place to crucify Christ and thus accomplish God’s greater purposes.

5.1.5 God has been intimately involved in the formation of individuals.

Psalms 33:13-15 NET
The LORD watches from heaven;
he sees all people.
From the place where he lives
he looks carefully at all the earth’s inhabitants.
He is the one who forms every human heart,
and takes note of all their actions.

Psalms 139:13-17 ESV
For you formed my inward parts;
you knitted me together in my mother’s womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.
My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes saw my unformed substance;
in your book were written, every one of them,
the days that were formed for me,
when as yet there were none of them. 
How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! 
How vast is the sum of them!

“God knows all the infinite possibilities. He chooses which of these He will actualize. And by meticulously selecting the very individuals He brings into existence, individuals who will respond to specific stimuli exactly as He intends, and by making sure these specific factors are present, He renders certain the free decisions and actions of those individuals. Where our view differs (from a deterministic and deistic view) is that we see the decisions of God as completely free in this matter, not in any sense determined. Furthermore, in rendering human action certain God does not merely choose to bring a being into existence and then leave him to function in a mechanistic, determined world. God is actively at work within this world, influencing what takes place. (M. Erickson, Christian Theology, 359)

**Q8. Are you a product of chance, or of intelligent and meaningful design?**

“All of these passages, reporting both general statements about God’s work in the lives of all people and specific examples of God’s work in the lives of individuals, lead us to conclude that God’s providential work of concurrence extends to all aspects of our lives. Our words, our steps, our movements, our hearts, and our abilities are all from the Lord.” (Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, 321)

**Q9. Do things happen because they “must” happen, or do things happen because God has made it certain that they will happen?**

“At this point we must raise the question of whether God can create genuinely free beings and yet render certain all things that are to come to pass, including the free decisions and actions of those beings. The key to unlocking the problem is the distinction between rendering something certain and rendering it necessary. The former is a matter of God’s decision that something will happen; the later is a matter of His decreeing that it must occur. In the former case, the human being will not act in a way contrary to the course of action that God has chosen; in the latter case, the human being cannot act in a way contrary to what God has chosen. What we are saying is that God renders it certain that a person who could act (or could have acted) differently does in fact act in a particular way (the way that God wills). (M. Erickson, Christian Theology, 357)
5.2 PROVIDENCE: Christ’s Work

5.2.1 In God’s eternal and providential purposes, Christ’s death and resurrection, were a necessary part of God’s plan.

John 3:14-15 NET
Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.”

Acts 4:24-28 ESV
And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, “Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, 25 who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, “’Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? 26 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed’ - 27 for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

5.2.2 God’s predetermined purposes were carried out by the actions of responsible human beings.

Acts 2:22-23 NET “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man clearly attested to you by God with powerful deeds, wonders, and miraculous signs that God performed among you through him, just as you yourselves know 23 this man, who was handed over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you executed by nailing him to a cross at the hands of Gentiles.

5.3 PROVIDENCE: The Gospel

2 Corinthians 4:6-7 NET
For God, who said “Let light shine out of darkness,” is the one who shined in our hearts to give us the light of the glorious knowledge of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that the extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.

5.3.1 Christ is the only person through whom God saves the lost.

Acts 4:12 NET And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among people by which we must be saved.”
5.3.2 The Gospel is God’s power for salvation.

Romans 1:16-17 NET For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is God’s power for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel from faith to faith, just as it is written, “The righteous by faith will live.”

5.3.3 The Gospel is the means God uses to bring understanding and change desire.

Acts 16:13-14 NET On the Sabbath day we went outside the city gate to the side of the river, where we thought there would be a place of prayer, and we sat down and began to speak to the women who had assembled there. 14 A woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, a God-fearing woman, listened to us. The Lord opened her heart to respond to what Paul was saying.

5.4 RESPONSIBILITY: Proclaiming the Gospel

5.4.1 The Gospel must be preached in order for people to believe and trust in Christ.

Romans 10:13-17 NET For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. 14 How are they to call on one they have not believed in? And how are they to believe in one they have not heard of? And how are they to hear without someone preaching to them? 15 And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How timely is the arrival of those who proclaim the good news.” 16 But not all have obeyed the good news, for Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our report?” 17 Consequently faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the preached word of Christ.

5.4.2 Paul endured great suffering for the sake of God’s people.

2 Timothy 2:8-10 NET Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David; such is my gospel, 9 for which I suffer hardship to the point of imprisonment as a criminal, but God’s message is not imprisoned! 10 So I endure all things for the sake of those chosen by God, that they too may obtain salvation in Christ Jesus and its eternal glory.

See 2 Corinthians 11:23-28 for a list of all the things that Paul endured for the sake of God’s people.
5.4.3 Paul’s entire life was motivated by his desire to be faithful to God’s calling through the preaching of the Gospel.

1 Corinthians 9:19-27 NET
For since I am free from all I can make myself a slave to all, in order to gain even more people. 20 To the Jews I became like a Jew to gain the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) to gain those under the law. 21 To those free from the law I became like one free from the law (though I am not free from God’s law but under the law of Christ) to gain those free from the law. 22 To the weak I became weak in order to gain the weak. I have become all things to all people, so that by all means I may save some. 23 I do all these things because of the gospel, so that I can be a participant in it. 24 Do you not know that all the runners in a stadium compete, but only one receives the prize? So run to win. 25 Each competitor must exercise self-control in everything. They do it to receive a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one. 26 So I do not run uncertainly or box like one who hits only air. 27 Instead I subdue my body and make it my slave, so that after preaching to others I myself will not be disqualified.

5.5 PROVIDENCE: Faith

5.5.1 Our faith is granted to us as a gift of God’s providence:

Ephesians 2:8-9 NET
For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 it is not from works, so that no one can boast.

Philippians 1:29 NET
For it has been granted to you not only to believe in Christ but also to suffer for him, ...

2 Peter 1:1 NET
From Simeon Peter, a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ, have been granted a faith just as precious as ours.
Textual Note from the NET Bible on the term “granted”

The verb “to grant” means “obtain by lot,” “receive.” It is used in collocation with the term “lot” frequently enough in the Septuagint (LXX) to suggest the connotation of reception of a gift, or in the least reception of something that one does not deserve. H. Hanse’s statement (TDNT 4:1) that “Even where there is no casting of lots, the attainment is not by one’s own effort or as a result of one’s own exertions, but is like ripe fruit falling into one’s lap” is apt for this passage. The author’s opening line is a reminder that our position in Christ is not due to merit, but grace.

5.5.2 Our faith is best seen as the “evidence” of our spiritual birth:

1 John 5:1 NET
Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been fathered by God, and everyone who loves the father loves the child fathered by him.

5.5.3 Our faith is the very means of God’s power that He uses to protect us and sustain us to the completion of our salvation.

1 Peter 1:3-5 NET
Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he gave us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, that is, into an inheritance imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. It is reserved in heaven for you, who by God’s power are protected through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.
Preparing for the Next Discussion: BLESSED

Read through the following passage very carefully, meditate on what Paul says, then answer the following questions.

Ephesians 1:3-14 NET.
3 Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ. 4 For he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world that we may be holy and unblemished in his sight in love. 5 He did this by predestining us to adoption as his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the pleasure of his will 6 to the praise of the glory of his grace that he has freely bestowed on us in his dearly loved Son.
7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace 8 that he lavished on us in all wisdom and insight. 9 He did this when he revealed to us the secret of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, 10 toward the administration of the fullness of the times, to head up all things in Christ the things in heaven and the things on earth. 11 In Christ we too have been claimed as God’s own possession, since we were predestined according to the one purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will 12 so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, would be to the praise of his glory. 13 And when you heard the word of truth (the gospel of your salvation) when you believed in Christ you were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is the down payment of our inheritance, until the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of his glory.

1. To what extent has God blessed us in verse 3?

2. What did God do for us in verse 4?
   When did He do this? What was the purpose of this?

3. What did God do for us in verse 5?
   Through whom did He do this?
   Why did He do this?

4. What do we have “in Christ” in verse 7?
   How did God provide this for us in? (v.8)

5. In verse 11, what has God done for us? Why did He do this?

6. In verse 13 what do we do in all of this?
   What is the result of this?
THE OBJECT OF THE EXERCISE:

In this discussion we will explore what the Bible reveals about God’s work “behind the scenes,” beyond time, in Eternity as it relates to election and predestination. In this lesson, we will cultivate the attitude that God is worthy of our trust and worship, even through we do not comprehend Him in His holiness.

* When God acts for the sake of His glory, it always results in the greatest good, the greatest blessing, especially for His children.

6.1 PROVIDENCE: Knowledge / Foreknowledge

Romans 8:28-29 NET
And we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose, 29 because those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters...

FOREKNOWLEDGE: When used in reference to God this means that He has “set His mind” or “set His affections” on someone by his intimate knowledge of them as the basis for His setting them apart or choosing them for His purposes.

6.1.1 In the Hebrew Scriptures, the idea of “knowledge,” when used in personal contexts, usually carries the idea of “intimate knowledge.”

Genesis 4:1 ESV
Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD.”

6.1.2 In the Hebrew Scriptures, God’s knowledge of someone is often identified with His choosing them for His purposes.

Genesis 18:17-19 NASB
The LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, 18 since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations
of the earth will be blessed? 19 “For I have chosen [lit. known] him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him.”

Amos 3:1-2 NASB
Hear this word which the LORD has spoken against you, sons of Israel, against the entire family which He brought up from the land of Egypt: 2 “You only have I chosen [lit. known] among all the families of the earth; Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.”

6.1.3 God’s foreknowing individuals is usually that basis for His setting them apart for specific purposes.

Jeremiah 1:4-5
Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, And before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

Galatians 1:13-16
For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; 14 and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions. 15 But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, was pleased 16 to reveal His Son in me so that I might proclaim Him among the Gentiles. . .

6.2 PROVIDENCE: Election / Choosing

ELECTION: God’s sovereign right to choose whom He will save based on His love, wisdom and counsel.

6.2.1 God chooses before the foundation of the World.

Ephesians 1:4 NET
For he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world that we may be holy and unblemished in his sight in love.
6.2.2 Believing and receiving the Gospel gives evidence of God’s choosing or appointment.

Acts 13:44-49 NET
On the next Sabbath almost the whole city assembled together to hear the word of the Lord. 45 But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy, and they began to contradict what Paul was saying by reviling him. 46 Both Paul and Barnabas replied courageously, “It was necessary to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we are turning to the Gentiles. 47 For this is what the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have appointed you to be a light for the Gentiles, to bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’ “ 48 When the Gentiles heard this, they began to rejoice and praise the word of the Lord, and all who had been appointed for eternal life believed. 49 So the word of the Lord was spreading through the entire region.

1 Thessalonians 1:2-7 NET
We thank God always for all of you as we mention you constantly in our prayers, 3 because we recall in the presence of our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and endurance of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. 4 We know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 in that our gospel did not come to you merely in words, but in power and in the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction (surely you recall the character we displayed when we came among you to help you). 6 And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, when you received the message with joy that comes from the Holy Spirit, despite great affliction. 7 As a result you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

6.2.3 Believers are referred to as those “chosen” or “elect.”

Titus 1:1-2 NET From Paul, a slave of God and apostle of Jesus Christ, to further the faith of God’s chosen ones and the knowledge of the truth that is in keeping with godliness, 2 in hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the ages began.

1 Peter 1:1-2 NET From Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those temporarily residing abroad (in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, the province of Asia, and Bithynia) who are chosen 2 according to the foreknowledge of God the Father by being set apart by the Spirit for obedience and for sprinkling with Jesus Christ’s blood. May grace and peace be yours in full measure!

Colossians 3:12-13 NET Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with a heart of mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, 13 bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if someone happens to have a
complaint against anyone else. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also forgive others.

“Because it is God alone who saves, those who are saved are seen to be the ones whom God has chosen (or elected) to be saved. This does not mean that were not in some way involved in their salvation, but it does mean that God took the initiative, effected the plan, provided the grace, and deserves all the credit for the salvation of His people. None who is ultimately redeemed can boast that they saved themselves of that they added anything to the salvation that they received through Jesus Christ” (Walter Elwell, “Elect, Election,” Theological Dictionary of the Bible)

* In the Bible, the title of “elect” is only given to those whom God shows special favor. (It is interesting to note that even the angels that did not fall in the rebellion of Satan are referred to as “elect angels” cf. 1 Timothy 5:21).

My point is that those who will wind up in the Lake of Fire are not referred to as the “elect to destruction” or some other term. The reality is that every human after Adam was set on the path that leads to destruction. God in His grace and mercy chooses to save some who are on this path by redeeming their hearts and minds. All others are left to the destiny that Adam choose and is accepted and confirmed by the desires and choices of those who reject the truth.

6.3 PROVIDENCE: Predestination

PREDESTINATION: God’s predetermination that His chosen people will arrive at certain conclusions, namely 1) being adopted as “Sons of God,” and 2) being conformed to the pattern of Christ’s perfection.

6.3.1 God makes certain the destiny of His chosen people.

* The following passages are addressed to believers as a means to encourage them with God’s love and provision and to remind them that things don’t happen by chance.

Ephesians 1:4b-6 NASB
In love He (God Our Father) predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.
Romans 8:28-30 NASB
And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

6.3.2 God is active in the spiritual formation of the saved and the lost.

Romans 9:19-24 NET
You will say to me then, Why does he still find fault? For who has ever resisted his will?” 20 But who indeed are you a mere human being to talk back to God? Does what is molded say to the molder, “Why have you made me like this?” 21 Has the potter no right to make from the same lump of clay one vessel for special use and another for ordinary use?

22 But what if God, willing to demonstrate his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the objects of wrath prepared for destruction? 23 And what if he is willing to make known the wealth of his glory on the objects of mercy that he has prepared beforehand for glory 24 even us, whom he has called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?

* Here Paul is alluding to several passages from the Hebrew Scriptures which refer to God as the “Potter”.
Isaiah 29:15-16; 41:25; 45:9

“…here we recall that all people undergo a process of spiritual formation. Their spirit is formed, and with it their whole being. As I said earlier, spiritual formation is not something just for especially religious people. No one escapes. The most hardened criminal as well as the most devout of human beings have had a spiritual formation. They have become a certain kind of person.”
(emphasis mine, Dallas Willard, Renovation of the Heart, 45)

* Here again, there is no specific terminology in the Bible that refers to people who are “predestined to hell.” In reality those who will be consigned to eternal torment are there by God’s allowance and their choice.

This is not to say however, that God does not take some role in their spiritual formation as well. God is forming His people according the image of Christ so that they might inhabit eternity with Him. For those who reject the truth, God is
fitting them so that they will be equipped for their existence in eternity apart from Him. This is probably what Paul is referring to in Romans 9:22 when he speaks of “vessels of wrath prepared for destruction.”

In all of this, God delights in giving people exactly what they desire. In fact, his whole system of justice seems to be based on this principle. This concept has been referred to as talionic justice (based concept of lex talionis, or the law of retribution which is displayed in the Mosaic Law as “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth …”). God is pleased to deal with people in a way that mirrors their own desires and actions:

Psalm 18:24-27 NET
The LORD rewarded me for my godly deeds;
he took notice of my blameless behavior.
You prove to be loyal to one who is faithful;
you prove to be trustworthy to one who is innocent.
You prove to be reliable to one who is blameless,
but you prove to be deceptive to one who is perverse.
For you deliver oppressed people,
but you bring down those who have a proud look.

6.4 PROVIDENCE: Perfection

GLORIFICATION, (COMPLETE) REDEMPTION, (FINAL) ADOPTION:
The completion of God’s work in the believer in which they are finally conformed to Christ’s image and perfected for eternity.

Philippians 1:6 NET
For I am sure of this very thing, that the one who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

6.5 God’s Desire vs. God’s Will

6.5.1 God does desire that all people be saved.

1 Timothy 2:1-4 NASB First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. 3 This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.
2 Peter 3:9 NASB
The Lord is not slow about His promise (to return), as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

6.5.2 God takes no pleasure in the destruction of the wicked.

Ezekiel 33:11 NASB
“Say to them, ‘As I live!’ declares the Lord GOD, “I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?’

6.5.3 God will consign those who do not know Him, and have no desire to know the truth, to eternal destruction.

Revelation 20:11-15
11 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. 13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. 14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

2 Thessalonians 1:6-9 NET
6 For it is right for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, 7 and to you who are being afflicted to give rest together with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels. 8 With flaming fire he will mete out punishment on those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will undergo the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his strength….

6.5.4 God will be glorified in the salvation of His people.

2 Thessalonians 1:10 NET
10 ... when he comes to be glorified among his saints and admired on that day among all who have believed and you did in fact believe our testimony.
Ephesians 2:4-7 NET
But God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us, 5 even though we were dead in transgressions, made us alive together with Christ by grace you are saved! 6 and he raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 to demonstrate in the coming ages the surpassing wealth of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

6.5.5 God will be praised for the punishment of the Wicked.

Psalms 76:10 NET
Certainly your angry judgment upon men will bring you praise; you reveal your anger in full measure.
Preparing for the Next Discussion: RESPONSIBLE

Read and reflect on the following excerpt from Dallas Willard’s Renovation of the Heart then answer the following questions.

“First there is surrender. When we surrender our will to God we consent to his supremacy in all things.…
We may not be able to do his will, but we are willing to will it…. The center of the self, the heart or spirit, is now willing for God to be God – even if with little hope or enthusiasm.…
…if grace and wisdom prevail in the life of the one who only surrenders to God’s will, he or she will move on to abandonment. Then the individual is fully surrendered. There is no longer any part of himself or herself that holds back from God’s will.…
But still there is more. Beyond abandonment is contentment with the will of God: not only with his being who he is and ordaining what he has ordained in general, but with the lot that has fallen to us. At this point in the progression toward complete identification with the will of God, gratitude and joy are the steady tone of our life. We are now assured that God has done, and will always do, well by us – no matter what!
But we are not done! Beyond contentment lies intelligent, energetic participation in accomplishing God’s will in our world. We are no longer spectators, but are caught up in a vivid and eternal drama in which we play an essential part. We embrace our imposed circumstances, no matter how tragic they seem, and act for the good in a power beyond ourselves. “We are reigning – exercising dominion – in life by One, Christ Jesus (Romans 5:17 par.), looking toward and eternity of reigning with God through ages of ages (Revelation 22:5). We take action to accomplish the will of God in his power. Our tiny “willpower” is not the source of our strength. We hardly notice any exercise of it, though it is dedicated to carrying out God’s purposes in every respect. But we are carried along by the power of the divine drama within which we live actively engaged. So far from struggling to resist sin, we are devoted to the realization of righteousness all around us. This is the real meaning of “Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.” “The strongest human will is always the one that is surrendered to God’s will and acts with it.”
(emphasis mine, Dallas Willard, Renovation of the Heart, 152)

1. What is your “gut reaction” to this passage?
   Does it square with what Scripture teaches?

2. List the key attitudes that Willard addresses in this passage.
   Would you like for your life to look like this?
THE OBJECT OF THE EXERCISE:
In this last lesson we will focus on the issue of our responsibility before God. God has designed us to love Him, love others and therein display His glory. The reality of our giving an account to Christ at the Final Judgment establishes the importance and significances of the choices we make in this life – they will have eternal consequences. All of this should push us to absolute dependence on God, relying on Him, calling on Him to give us what we need out of His grace, mercy and goodness.

7.1 RESPONSIBILITY: The Priority of Love

7.1.1 The Greatest Commandment

Mark 12:28-31 NET
Now one of the experts in the law came and heard them debating. When he saw that Jesus answered them well, he asked him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?”
29 Jesus answered, “The most important is: ‘Listen, Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ 31 The second is: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

7.1.2 How Do We Love?

1 John 4:7-19 NET
Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been fathered by God and knows God. 8 The person who does not love does not know God, because God is love.
9 By this the love of God is revealed in us: that God has sent his one and only Son into the world so that we may live through him. 10 In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.
11 Dear friends, if God so loved us, then we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God resides in us, and his love is perfected in us. 13 By this we know that we reside in God and he in us: in that he has given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world ….
19 … We love because he loved us first.
The Ability to choose does not necessarily enable us to love.

Love is something that is learned and empowered through experience and imitation. We are able to love because God has loved us.

Our ability to choose only serves our desire in love.

7.2 The Reality of our Choices

“But we must guard against misunderstanding. Here also, as with the lower creation, God’s providential direction as an unseen, behind-the-scenes, ‘primary cause,’ should not lead us to deny the reality of our choices and actions. Again and again Scripture affirms that we really do cause events to happen. We are significant and we are responsible. We do have choices and these are real choices that bring about real results. Scripture repeatedly affirms these truths as well. Just as a rock is really hard because God has made it with the property of hardness, just as water is really wet because God has made it with the property of wetness, just as plants are really alive because God has made them with the property of life, so our choices are real choices and do have significant effects, because God has made us in such a wonderful way that He has endowed us with the property of willing choice.”

(Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, 321)

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<th>Circumstance &gt;</th>
<th>Choice &gt;</th>
<th>Consequence &gt;</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>(Context)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Test &amp; Temptation</strong></td>
<td><strong>(Outcomes)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is usually beyond my control.</td>
<td>This is my area of responsibility.</td>
<td>This too is beyond my control.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Is this from the “voice” of God, or from some other competing voice?
2. Is this the right thing to do or merely what is easy?
3. Will this result in long-term significance, or merely short term satisfaction?
7.2.1 Men will be held accountable for their actions.

Isaiah 66:3-4 ESV
“... These have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations; 4 I also will choose harsh treatment for them and bring their fears upon them, because when I called, no one answered, when I spoke they did not listen; but they did what was evil in my eyes and chose that in which I did not delight.”

Jeremiah 25:9, 12 NET So I, the LORD, affirm that I will send for all the peoples of the north and my servant, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and all the nations that surround it. I will utterly destroy this land, its inhabitants, and all the nations that surround it and make them everlasting ruins. I will make them objects of horror and hissing scorn....’But when the seventy years are over, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation for their sins. I will make the land of Babylon an everlasting ruin. I, the LORD, affirm it!

7.2.2 We will each stand before Christ to give an account of how we have lived.

Romans 14:9-12 NET For this reason Christ died and returned to life, so that he may be the Lord of both the dead and the living. But you who eat vegetables only - why do you judge your brother or sister? And you who eat everything - why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee will bow to me, and every tongue will give praise to God.” Therefore, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

2 Corinthians 5:6-10 NET Therefore we are always full of courage, and we know that as long as we are alive here on earth we are absent from the Lord for we live by faith, not by sight. Thus we are full of courage and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So then whether we are alive or away, we make it our ambition to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be paid back according to what he has done while in the body, whether good or evil.

7.2.3 God will evaluate us on the basis of our faithfulness.

1 Corinthians 3:21-4:5 NET So then, no more boasting about mere mortals! For everything belongs to you, 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future. Everything belongs to you, 23 and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

One should think about us this way as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. 2 Now what is sought in stewards is that one be found faithful. 3 So
for me, it is a minor matter that I am judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. 4 For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not acquitted because of this. The one who judges me is the Lord. 5 So then, do not judge anything before the time. Wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the motives of hearts. Then each will receive recognition from God.

7.3 RESPONSIBILITY: Walking with Christ, Following God

Matthew 20:26-28 NET
”… Instead whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

John 5:30 NET
I (Jesus) can do nothing on my own initiative. Just as I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I do not seek my own will, but the will of the one who sent me.

Philippians 1:20-21 NET
My confident hope is that I will in no way be ashamed but that with complete boldness, even now as always, Christ will be exalted in my body, whether I live or die. 21 For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain.

“The only haven of safety is to have no other will, no other wisdom, than to follow the Lord wherever He leads. Let this, then, be the first step: to abandon ourselves, and devote the whole energy of our minds to the service of God.” John Calvin

7.4 God’ Desire, God’s Effort

Based on all that we have seen, we must remember that God is the One who is ultimately working in and through our efforts.

Colossians 1:28-29 NET
We proclaim him by instructing and teaching all people with all wisdom so that we may present every person mature in Christ. 29 Toward this goal I also labor, struggling according to his power that powerfully works in me.
Philippians 2:12-13 NET
So then, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence but even more in my absence, continue working out your salvation with awe and reverence, 13 for the one bringing forth in you both the desire and the effort for the sake of his good pleasure is God.

Ephesians 2:10 NET
For we are his workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works that God prepared beforehand so we may do them.

7.5 RESPONSIBILITY: Prayer

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 NET Always rejoice, constantly pray, in everything give thanks. For this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.

“If we were really convinced that prayer changes the way God acts, and that God does bring about remarkable changes in the world in response to prayer, as Scripture repeatedly teaches that he does, then we would pray much more than we do. If we pray little, it is probably because we do not really believe that prayer accomplishes much at all.” (Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, 377)

7.5.1 The Bible tells us that prayer is effective.

James 5:16 NET
So confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great effectiveness.

7.5.2 Our Lord Jesus instructs us in how to pray, and that God does hear and respond to our prayers.

Matthew 6:7-13 NET
When you pray, do not babble repetitiously like the Gentiles, because they think that by their many words they will be heard. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

So pray this way: Our Father in heaven, may your name be honored, 10 may your kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us today our daily bread, 12 and forgive us our debts, as we ourselves have forgiven our debtors. 13 And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.
Luke 11:9-10 NET
“So I tell you: Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

7.5.3 If the Lord Jesus considered prayer to be a vital part of His relationship with God the Father, should we expect to get away with less?

Luke 6:12-13 NET
Now it was during this time that Jesus went out to the mountain to pray, and he spent all night in prayer to God. 13 When morning came, he called his disciples and chose twelve of them, whom he also named apostles…

Hebrews 5:7-10 NET
During his earthly life Christ offered both requests and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death and he was heard because of his devotion. 8 Although he was a son, he learned obedience through the things he suffered. 9 And by being perfected in this way, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, 10 and he was designated by God as high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

7.5.4 In the letters of the New Testament, the authors never take a “whatever will be will be” attitude; In all things prayers are made for God’s blessing and help.

Romans 1:9-10 NET
For God, whom I serve in my spirit by preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness that I continually remember you 10 and I always ask in my prayers, if perhaps now at last I may succeed in visiting you according to the will of God.

Philippians 1:9-11 NET
And I pray this, that your love may abound even more and more in knowledge and every kind of insight 10 so that you can decide what is best, and thus be sincere and blameless for the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

Colossians 1:9-10 NET
For this reason we also, from the day we heard about you, have not ceased praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so that you may live worthily of the Lord and please him in all respects bearing fruit in every good deed, growing in the knowledge of God,...
7.6 Some Practical Applications

7.6.1 Give up on managing and manipulating —follow God and trust Him.

Proverbs 3:5-8 NET
Trust in the LORD with all your heart,

and do not rely on your own understanding.

Acknowledge him in all your ways,

and he will make your paths straight.

Do not be wise in your own estimation;

fear the LORD and turn away from evil.

This will bring healing to your body,

and refreshment to your inner self.

7.6.2 Do all things for the glory and pleasure of God.

1 Corinthians 10:31 NET
So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.

7.6.3 Since nothing happens by chance, look for the possibility of “divine appointments.”

John 4:5-10 NET Now Jesus came to a Samaritan town called Sychar, near the plot of land that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob’s well was there, so Jesus, since he was tired from the journey, sat right down beside the well. It was about noon. 7 A Samaritan woman came to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give me some water to drink.” ...

“... Jesus saw this as an opportunity providentially sent by the Father, and hence an opportunity to be utilized... The wise Christian will be similarly alert to the opportunities that come in what seem at first glance to be a accidental circumstances. That life is pregnant with divinely sent possibilities gives us a sense of expectancy and joy.” (Millard Erickson, Christian Theology, 401)

7.6.4 Since God does work in and through us, live diligently giving all praise to God.

1 Corinthians 3:5-8 NASB
What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. 7 So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is
anything, but God who causes the growth. 8Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

1 Corinthians 15:58 ESV
Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.
8 | APPENDICES

8.1 The Text of 1 Kings 22 and 2 Chronicles 18

1 There was no war between Syria and Israel for three years. [1 Jehoshaphat was very wealthy and greatly respected. He made an alliance by marriage with Ahab.] 2 In the third year King Jehoshaphat of Judah came down to visit the king of Israel. [2 Ahab slaughtered many sheep and cattle to honor Jehoshaphat and those who came with him ... ] 3 The king of Israel said to his servants, “Surely you recognize that Ramoth Gilead belongs to us, though we are hesitant to reclaim it from the king of Syria.” 4 Then he said to Jehoshaphat, “Will you go with me to attack Ramoth Gilead?” Jehoshaphat replied to the king of Israel, “I will support you; my army and horses are at your disposal.”

5 Then Jehoshaphat added, “First seek an oracle from the LORD.” 6 So the king of Israel assembled about four hundred prophets and asked them, “Should I attack Ramoth Gilead or not?” They said, “Attack! The sovereign one will hand it over to the king.” 7 But Jehoshaphat asked, “Is there not a prophet of the LORD still here, that we may ask him?”

8 The king of Israel answered Jehoshaphat, “There is still one man through whom we can seek the LORD’s will. But I despise him because he does not prophesy prosperity for me, but disaster. His name is Micaiah son of Imlah. Jehoshaphat said, “The king should not say such things.” 9 The king of Israel summoned an official and said, “Quickly bring Micaiah son of Imlah.”

10 Now the king of Israel and King Jehoshaphat of Judah were sitting on their respective thrones, dressed in their robes, at the threshing floor at the entrance of the gate of Samaria. All the prophets were prophesying before them. 11 Zedekiah son of Kenaanah made iron horns and said, “This is what the LORD says, ‘With these you will gore Syria until they are destroyed.’” 12 All the prophets were prophesying the same, saying, “Attack Ramoth Gilead! You will succeed; the LORD will hand it over to the king.”

13 Now the messenger who went to summon Micaiah said to him, “Look, the prophets are in complete agreement that the king will succeed. Your words must agree with theirs; you must predict success.” 14 But Micaiah said, “As certainly as the LORD lives, I will say what the LORD tells me to say.”

15 When he came before the king, the king asked him, “Micaiah, should we attack Ramoth Gilead or not?” He answered him, “Attack! You will succeed; the LORD will hand it over to the king.” 16 The king said to him, “How many times must I make you solemnly promise in the name of the LORD to tell me only the truth?” 17 Micaiah said, “I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains like sheep that have no shepherd. Then the LORD said, ‘They have no master. They should go home in peace.’”

18 The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, “Didn’t I tell you he does not prophesy prosperity
for me, but disaster?” 19 Micaiah said, “That being the case, hear the word of the LORD. I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, with all the heavenly assembly standing on his right and on his left. 20 The LORD said, ‘Who will (entice/seduce/deceive) Ahab, so he will attack Ramoth Gilead and die there?’ One said this and another that. 21 Then a spirit stepped forward and stood before the LORD. He said, ‘I will (entice/seduce/deceive) him.’ The LORD asked him, ‘How?’ 22 He replied, ‘I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouths of all his prophets.’ The LORD said, “(entice/seduce/deceive) and overpower him. Go out and do as you have proposed.’ 23 So now, look, the LORD has placed a lying spirit in the mouths of all these prophets of yours; but the LORD has decreed disaster for you.”

24 Zedekiah son of Kenaanah approached, hit Micaiah on the jaw, and said, “Which way did the LORD’s spirit go when he went from me to speak to you?” 25 Micaiah replied, “Look, you will see in the day when you go into an inner room to hide.”

26 Then the king of Israel said, “Take Micaiah and return him to Amon the city official and Joash the king’s son. 27 Say, ‘This is what the king says, “Put this man in prison. Give him only a little bread and water until I safely return.”’ 28 Micaiah said, “If you really do safely return, then the LORD has not spoken through me.” Then he added, “Take note, all you people.”

29 The king of Israel and King Jehoshaphat of Judah attacked Ramoth Gilead. 30 The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, “I will disguise myself and then enter into the battle; but you wear your royal robes.” So the king of Israel disguised himself and then entered into the battle.

31 Now the king of Syria had ordered his thirty-two chariot commanders, “Do not fight common soldiers or high-ranking officers; fight only the king of Israel.” 32 When the chariot commanders saw Jehoshaphat, they said, “He must be the king of Israel.” So they turned and attacked him, but Jehoshaphat cried out. [31 The LORD helped him; God lured them away from him.] 33 When the chariot commanders realized he was not the king of Israel, they turned away from him.

34 Now an archer shot an arrow at random, and it struck the king of Israel between the plates of his armor. The king ordered his charioteer, “Turn around and take me from the battle line, because I’m wounded.” 35 While the battle raged throughout the day, the king stood propped up in his chariot opposite the Syrians. He died in the evening; the blood from the wound ran down into the bottom of the chariot. 36 As the sun was setting, a cry went through the camp, “Each one should return to his city and to his homeland.” 37 So the king died and was taken to Samaria, where they buried him. 38 They washed off the chariot at the pool of Samaria (this was where the prostitutes bathed); dogs licked his blood, just as the LORD had said would happen.

[2 Chronicles 19:1-3 NET.
When King Jehoshaphat of Judah returned home safely to Jerusalem, 2 the prophet Jehu son of Hanani confronted him; he said to King Jehoshaphat, “Is it right to help the wicked and be an ally of those who oppose the LORD? Because you have done this the LORD is angry with you! 3 Nevertheless you have done some good things; you removed the Asherah poles from the land and you were determined to follow the LORD.]
8.2 More About Our Divine Design

8.2.1 The Spirit (Non-Physical Aspect)
Our Spirit is that part of us that has the deepest likeness to God Himself because He is spirit. Dallas Willard, in speaking about God as Spirit, describes this fundamental nature of God as “unbodily, personal power.” God is not confined to a physical body. But God is alive and powerful and able to have contact with other persons. Humans have spirits as well, but in a “smaller” sense in comparison to God. This spirit is at the center of our personhood, and in one sense circumscribes our existence.

Even though we are confined to physical bodies, it is our spirit that allows us to have contact with God and others. Our spirit may simply be described as the “power” that allows us to live and share life with other beings. The spirit is also the vehicle for the Soul as we speak, as we pray, as we communicate with others.

* This spirit that is a natural part of every human must not be confused with the indwelling presence of God’s Holy Spirit which is given only to believers.

8.2.2 The Soul (Non-Physical Aspect)
In Scripture, it seems that the Soul is the collection of all the shared immaterial, spiritual parts (Intellect, Desire, Emotion - common to every human) make us unique individuals. The two largest “components” of the Soul are the Mind and Heart.

8.2.3 The Mind
The Mind exists as the collection of our intellect, desires, and emotions that make us unique. Scripture indicates that our Minds are the one part of our spiritual selves that we in some degree have control over.

The Mind is primarily “analytical” in that it tends to deal with particulars, the pieces of thought, feeling and desire. The Mind serves primarily as the “gatekeeper” or “guard” for the Heart.

* The Intellect is stirred and satisfied by truth. (order and coherence)

* Desire is stirred and satisfied by goodness.

* Emotion is stirred and satisfied with beauty.
The Mind can be “opened”

Then [Jesus] opened their minds so they could understand the scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it stands written that the Messiah would suffer and would rise from the dead on the third day...

Luke 24:45-46 NET

The unregenerate mind is depraved (subject to futility), corrupt and reprobate (cf. Eph 4:17, 1 Tim 6:5, 2 Tim 3:8).

And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what should not be done. Romans 1:28 NET

Having the Mind of Christ distinguishes the spiritually mature.

The one who is spiritual discerns all things, yet he himself is understood by no one. For who has known the mind of the Lord, so as to advise him? But we have the mind of Christ.

1 Corinthians 2:15-16

8.2.4 The Heart

The Heart is the deepest part of our spiritual selves. It is the place from which our life flows (Proverbs 4:23). It is that part of us that was created to have the closest contact with God and with one another. It is the deep place within us where our intellect, desire, and emotion all come together to form the deep reality of our identity. Therefore, the Heart is “poetic” in that it tends to see things holistically – it is able to see who the “big picture” fits together because it alone has access to all the pieces of our souls. The Heart is the place of our dreaming and intuition.

There is an old saying which states, “Only God can change the heart.” This is truer than most people realize. The heart is so ‘deep’ that not even we ourselves have full access to what goes on there. In the NT, it seems that if you look at all the evidence, the heart is that place deep within us where Christ dwells (Eph. 3:16-17), it is the place where God does all of His work. And this is important.

As I have already said, we do not have direct access to our hearts. This is God’s area. We do have access to our minds, and this is where we are called to do all of our work – “therefore allow yourselves to be transformed by the renewing of you minds…” (Romans 12:2).

The Heart is viewed as the “source” of life.

Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

Proverbs 4:23 ESV
The Unredeemed heart is wicked and darkened and its ways are inscrutable.

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? “I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.” Jeremiah 17:9-10 ESV

For although they knew God, they did not glorify him as God or give him thanks, but they became futile in their thoughts and their senseless hearts were darkened. Romans 1:21 NET.

The “hardened” or “darkened” heart speaks of a heart that cannot understand or respond appropriately to God.

And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened. Mark 6:51-52 ESV

For the heart of this people has become dull; they are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes, so that they would not see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’ Matthew 13:15 NET

God, alone, looks at the heart.

But Jesus said to them, “You are the ones who justify yourselves in men’s eyes, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly prized among men is utterly detestable in God’s sight. Luke 16:15 NET

But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.” 1 Samuel 16:7 ESV

God cleanses and renews the heart at conversion and this becomes the basis of our confidence.

And God, who knows the heart, has testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made no distinction between them and us, cleansing their hearts by faith. Acts 15:8-9 NET.

And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will
remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.  

Ezekiel 36:26-27 ESV

...let us draw near with a sincere heart in the assurance that faith brings, because we have had our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water.  

Hebrews 10:22 NET

**God's Spirit indwells our Hearts, and thus Christ resides there by faith.**

And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, who calls “Abba! Father!”  

Galatians 4:6 NET

I pray that according to the wealth of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner person, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, ... so that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.  

Ephesians 3:16-19 NET

8.2.5 The Body (Physical Aspect)

In Scripture, our bodies are viewed as the “vehicle” or the “instrument” of our souls (the mind and heart). It is composed of our “members” – (ears, eyes, mouth, hands, feet) that can either be used as “weapons of unrighteousness” (by the power of indwelling sin) or as “weapons of righteousness” (by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit).

8.3 The “Intrinsic Greatness” of Fallen Humanity

“‘Strangely, it is precisely the intrinsic greatness of the person that makes it in its ruined condition ‘a horror and a corruption such as you now meet…only in a nightmare.’ If we were insignificant, our ruin would not be horrifying. G. K. Chesterton somewhere says that the hardest thing to accept in the Christian religion is the great value that it places upon the individual soul. Still older Christian writers used to say that God has hidden the majesty of the human soul from us to prevent our being ruined by vanity.

This explains why even in its ruined condition a human being is regarded by God as something immensely worth saving. Sin does not make it worthless, but only lost. And in its lostness it is still capable of great strength, dignity, and heartbreaking beauty and goodness – enough so to hide from the unenlightened, or those who do not wish to understand, the horror it has become and is becoming.”  

(Dallas Willard, Renovation of the Heart, 46)

When we think about the human race, even its fallen state, we cannot deny that it still reveals
some of the greatness of God the Creator. Many of the great composers of the “classical era” of music were godless and reprobate men. Nevertheless, they were still able to create glorious works of music. Many humanitarian efforts that exist today are established and maintained by people who are atheists or agnostics. Still, the greatness of charity and mercy is shown forth in their efforts.

But the opposite is also true. As Willard, quoting C.S. Lewis, above reminds us, the fact that we were created with such great and glorious potential makes what we have become in our falliness such a terror and horror in some instances. Dogs have never laid plans to eradicate the cats completely. This is not true of humanity. If Mozart displays some aspect of the glory of God in his fallenness, then sure Hitler exemplifies the terror of what man can become in his lostness.

We must consider the reality that when Adam fell, the mechanism, the design which enabled him to reflect God’s glory was severely damaged, but the “mechanism” itself was not destroyed, removed or eradicated. Although Adam would continue to think, desire and feel, these things would not be captivated, corrupted by sin. And this points to the greatest problem of all – fallen man is unwilling and therefore incapable of placing God at the center of life in order to live solely for His glory and His pleasure.

In this sense, fallen humanity is entirely useless to God. This is to say that in our natural, fallen state, we cannot accomplish the purposes for which we were made. In His work of redemption, God heals and restores and renews all that was broken by the Fall of Adam and our own sinfulness.

God saves fallen humans because they are still valuable to Him. As I said, in our fallen natural state we are useless to God, but we should not confuse this with being worthless. Whatever else we may say, we must place emphasis on the reality that God was willing to pay an unnamable and immeasurable price in the sacrifice of His One Unique Son Jesus in order to redeem those who are lost. It is the “intrinsic greatness” of humanity – the fact that we were created particularly and specially by God – that sets us apart from all other creation and renders us savable.

8.4 A Story of Providence and Responsibility
The following takes place during Paul’s journey to Rome as a prisoner. His boat is battered in a storm and adrift, lost at sea. God tells Paul that all will go well, IF the men do certain things.

Acts 27:22-39 NET.
And now I advise you to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only the ship will be lost. 23 For last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve came to me 24 and said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul! You must stand before Caesar, and God has graciously granted you the safety of all who are sailing with you.’ 25 Therefore keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will be just as I have been told. 26 But we must run aground on some island.”

27 When the fourteenth night had come, while we were being driven across the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors suspected they were approaching some land.
28 They took soundings and found the water was twenty fathoms deep; when they
had sailed a little farther they took soundings again and found it was fifteen fathoms
deep. 29 Because they were afraid that we would run aground on the rocky coast, they
threw out four anchors from the stern and wished for day to appear.

30 Then when the sailors tried to escape from the ship and were lowering the ship’s
boat into the sea, pretending that they were going to put out anchors from the bow, 31
Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, “Unless these men stay with the ship, you
cannot be saved.” 32 Then the soldiers cut the ropes of the ship’s boat and let it drift
away.

33 As day was about to dawn, Paul urged them all to take some food, saying, “Today
is the fourteenth day you have been in suspense and have gone without food; you
have eaten nothing. 34 Therefore I urge you to take some food, for this is important
for your survival. For not one of you will lose a hair from his head.” 35 After he said
this, Paul took bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all, broke it, and began
to eat. 36 So all of them were encouraged and took food themselves.
37 (We were in all two hundred seventy-six persons on the ship.) 38 When they had
eaten enough to be satisfied, they lightened the ship by throwing the wheat into the
sea. 39 When day came, they did not recognize the land, but they noticed a bay with a
beach, where they decided to run the ship aground if they could.

8.5 Aristotle’s Categories for Cause and Change

1. **Material cause** defines and delimits the elements out of which something is
created. This seeks to explain how a whole thing is composed of its various parts.
(The Part/Whole causation)

2. **Efficient cause** speaks to the means by which something is created. This
encompasses the originator of the change and the agents of change.

3. **Formal cause** addresses the expression of what something is. This aspect of
causation helps us to see the order and coherence of the parts that make up the
whole thing.

4. **Final cause** addresses the purpose or the end for which something exists.
This cause defines the telos or the end (purpose) that something is supposed
to serve. It is here, in the mental realm, that we address issues of desire and
motivation.
8.6  A Dialogue on God’s Sovereignty in Salvation for the Struggling Mind and Heart

Wow, this material is really heavy.

Yeah, like I said at the beginning, we are looking into issues that we will probably not be able to comprehend fully. It really stretches our minds and our hearts.

I have followed most of what you are saying, but let me run some things past you and see if we are on the same page.

That would be great. Let’s hear it.

Okay, if we are stepping back and looking at the big picture, you say that God initiates our salvation, He sustains our salvation, and He completes our salvation. It seems like God is doing all the work.

Yes, that is what I have said, but I would clarify a little by saying that it is not so much that God does all the work, but that it is that God gives us both the desire and the energy to do the things that are pleasing to Him. So, we do, in a very real sense, do things that cooperate with God’s work in and through us.

Okay, I that is making a little more sense to me, can you explain this a little further.

Sure. Think back to the passage that we looked at earlier from Philippians 2. There, Paul says, “So then, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence but even more in my absence, continue working out your salvation with awe and reverence, for the one bringing forth in you both the desire and the effort for the sake of his good pleasure is God.”

Now notice very carefully what Paul says here. First of all the saints in Philippi have been a praiseworthy church. They have exhibited the virtues of Christ in their faith, hope and love. Paul praises them for this in the first chapter, and this is what he is referring to when he says that they have been obedient – they have done and are doing the things that are pleasing to God.

But then notice what he says to them – “continue working out your salvation with awe and reverence.” It is important to note that the “you” here is plural. If Paul had been from the South he could have said, “continue working out Yall’s salvation…” The point, however, is that this “working out of salvation” is something that the whole community of believers must be doing. We need one another to encourage one another and build one another up. It is hard following Christ, and we would soon get consumed by the World if we did not band together as brothers and sisters
of the Lord.

But again, the point that Paul makes is that these believers do certain things to “work out their salvation.” Paul is not telling them to “work for” their salvation – it has already been provided for them by God’s grace and Christ’s sacrificial work. But as they have accepted this great gift by faith, it is difficult to “live out” or “work out” the results of that salvation in day to day living.

Okay, hold it right there for just a minute. I can really relate to that. So what you are saying is that even if God is the one who is pretty much “gives” us our salvation, it can still be very hard to “live out” the responsibilities that come with the gift.

Well said. A phrase that Dallas Willard uses and has been helpful to me is “God’s grace is contrary to earning, but not effort.” We cannot earn what God gives us freely in Christ, but once we have received the gift of new life, it does take effort to live responsibly as good stewards of God’s grace.

That is where the whole responsibility issue comes in, right?

Right. Remember how I said that responsibility is the ability to respond appropriately to God’s grace. If you think about all of the letters written in the New Testament most of them contain passages that remind believers of their responsibility to live wisely and virtuously by God’s grace, or to correct them when they are living in a way that is not in line with God’s righteousness.

So it is not that we are inactive in our salvation and walk with God, but that we are responding to what God has done and is doing in us.

Yes, I believe that is it. And with that in mind, let’s pick back up with that Philippians passage and notice one more important thing that Paul says there. Look at the last clause, “for the One bringing forth in you both the desire and the effort for the sake of his good pleasure is God.” Do you understand what Paul is saying there.

I think so. He is saying that even though the believers are “working out” their salvation, or responsibly living out their faith, so to speak, it is actually God who is giving them the desire to do this and also the effort to do it.

So this is one of the passages that you use to support the idea that God is the one who “sustains” our salvation.

Yes. We can understand His giving us the desire to do the things that please Him, but notice also that Paul says He gives us the effort as well. That word in Greek
might also be translated as “energy.” God gives us the desire and the energy to do the things that are pleasing to Him.

That is actually very encouraging now that I am starting to understand it a little better.

Yeah, like I said at the beginning, understanding how God works in His grace really gives us right perspective on things, especially when things get hard.

Well, since you brought up things that are hard, let’s go back to that election and choosing discussion. I still have a lot of questions about that.

Yeah. Me too.

If I followed what you are saying, then you believe that the Bible makes it clear that God actually choose some people in eternity past for salvation, right?

Well, I would just repeat what Paul says in Ephesians 1, “For God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world that we may be holy and unblemished in his sight.” He does not use the term “eternity past” but, “before the foundation of the world.” Eternity is really just that “place” where God dwells “outside of time.” As I said earlier, time is irrelevant to God. He is just as present and active in our past as He is in our future as He is in our present. So when Paul says that God chose us “before the foundation of the world,” he is giving us a fixed point in time to understand that the process of our salvation was initiated by God before He created the world.

Why make such a big deal about the “time” element.

Well, I think this is very important for two reasons. First, so that God gets all the glory and praise for His saving work, and second so that we can have assurance of God’s love and concern for us.

Okay I follow what you are saying about God being glorified as Savior, but how does God choosing people before the world was created help us have assurance of God’s love?

Let me give an illustration. When you take the first move to tell someone that you love them, you are risking yourself, because you want the person to say, “I love you” in return. If that person does not return your profession of love, then you are left “on the hook.” That is kind of a trite way of looking at God’s love for us, but it does communicate. When God expresses His love for fallen people through Christ, there is the possibility of the rejection of that love. But God makes the first move, He risks Himself for us, and this gives us assurance that He loves us and cares for us and the things that happen to us are under His watchful care.
I have never really thought about God “risking” anything. That doesn’t seem to fit with what we have been saying about God. I mean if God already knows all that will happen and if He is guiding everything to His conclusions, how does God risk anything?

That is a great question. I used the word “risk” because it does stir our minds to thinking. This issue really touches on another one of those “mysteries” in this study. But if you read through the Story of the Bible very carefully, we see that God is not unmoved or untouched by the suffering of His people. In fact, as we think about what Christ did for us, we have to see that He is taking upon Himself the suffering of the World.

Even though God knew that all of these things were going to happen, this does not change the reality of those things. Think about Christ for just a minute. In his last night in the Garden in Gethsemane He is in extreme anguish and cries out that God, His Father, would spare Him from the “hour” and the “cup” that was coming to Him. In His prayers, Christ knows that He is going to take on Himself the sins of the whole world and the only person who can spare Him is His Father. Christ also knows that He must die and that He will be raised again on the third day. But this knowledge of things to come does not lessen the anguish of His soul. He seems to think that He is putting Himself at risk, and only the Father can rescue Him from what is to come. Does that make a little sense.

Yeah I can see what you are saying. I guess I have never really thought about that before. So, when God offers Christ to the world, and people reject the gift of the Son, the world is really just trampling on the love of God, rejecting Him.

Yeah, and since God does love His creation, it only makes sense that God would desire that people accept Him and return His love for them.

Okay, let’s stop there for just a minute this comes to one of my problems in all of this. If God has chosen who he will save and that implies that He is in a sense choosing those who will ultimately come to love Him, then how can He really be risking anything? Doesn’t He know that some will reject Him if He has not chosen them?

Now you have raised a great and difficult issue. This is really one of those “mystery” issues. Let me just say that we know that God does not desire for any to perish but for all to come to repentance based on 2 Peter 3:9 and some other passages, right.

Yeah. I see that.

But we also know that there are people who will be cast in the Lake of Fire, into eternal destruction along with the Devil and his angels, right.
Yes. I know that the Bible teaches this a well.

So, let me ask you this, when God says that He loves the “whole world,” does that also include those people who wind up in eternal destruction?

I would think so.

I would agree with you. Let me ask you another question then. When Christ came to die for the sins of the whole world, did Christ die for all people, even those who will ultimately go into eternal destruction?

Doesn’t 1 John 2 say that “Christ himself is the satisfying sacrifice for our sins, and not only for our sins but also for the whole world”?

Yes it does. So does that mean that Christ died for even those who will be eternally separated from Him?

Yes, I would think so.

I would agree with you. In fact, this is the whole basis for our preaching the Gospel to all the world. Remember what Paul says in 2 Corinthians about this: “In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting people’s trespasses against them, and he has given us the message of reconciliation. Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making His plea through us. We plead with you on Christ’s behalf, “Be reconciled to God!”

So with that in mind, let me suggest that God does love the whole world. And regardless of God’s choosing and so forth, when people reject the Gospel and Christ, it is in the final analysis a rejection of God’s love and His desire to be reconciled. Would you agree with that?

Well, yes. But it seems like that is playing theological word games. I don’t know that it really answers my question.

Well, it may seem like “word games” but it is really just holding two ideas together that have tension and do not seem to have a clear resolution from our current, limited perspective. This is something that we have to do many times when we are trying to understand God by our limited intellectual resources. He is so far above our thoughts and our ability to comprehend. Remember that D. A Carson said that this area of theology is not a “problem to be solved, but a mystery to be explored.”

In my thoughts, I just have to come back to the conclusion that if God sent His One Unique Son Christ to the Cross because He loved the whole world, that His love must be real and genuine. Then I have to trust that how God deals with each
individual is based on his wisdom and counsel and that He always does what is right, even if I can’t fully comprehend it.

Yeah, I can definitely see that. As we have been talking, I have come to realize that my real issue is one of trust. But there is another issue that is rattling around to, and that is the perception that none of this really seems fair.

I would agree with you, it is not fair. But I would also say that “fair” is not a good category to use in this issue. The Bible doesn’t really speak about “fairness.” Instead, it speaks of righteousness – doing the right things, in the right way, with the right motives, at the right time. God is always just or righteous in what He does, but this may not look particularly “fair.”

When we use the idea of “fairness” we usually mean that people receive what they deserve or that they be given a “fair chance,” right?

Yeah, I would basically agree with that.

Well, if that is the case, then it would have been “fair” for God to have killed Adam immediately after he rebelled, just as He said He was going to do. I mean Adam was given a “fair deal,” a “fair chance” and he choose to rebel against God, he really choose death rather than life. God had made Adam without any flaws, and He also made Adam clearly aware of the consequences of his choice. So, Adam was given a “fair” deal, a “fair” chance, right?

Yeah, I would say so.

So when Adam choose to rebel, God did not give Adam the full consequences of his actions which would have been death, instead God was gracious to Adam and spared him. God

I guess I have never really thought about things that way. So are you saying that God in being merciful to Adam was also being “unfair” to Adam from a point of view?

Yes, in a way. It is more to the point to say that God was “unfair” to Himself and gracious toward Adam. And God’s grace then spreads to all the human race because none of us would be here if God had killed Adam on that day.

I think I understand what you mean when you say that God was gracious to Adam, but what do you mean when you say that God was “unfair” to Himself?

Remember when God gave Adam the instructions about the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, He said, “In the day you eat from it, you will absolutely die.” Yet, when Adam ate from the fruit, he did not die.
But wait, didn’t Adam die “spiritually” that day?

Yes, I think it is appropriate to say that, but it diminishes some of the scandal that this passage is meant to raise. When God says that Adam would absolutely die on the day he ate from the fruit, God does not make the distinction between physical death and spiritual death. The point that God seems to be making is that when Adam ate from the fruit he would drop dead.

So are you saying that it seems that God did not do what He said He was going to do?

Yes, I am saying that is what appears to have happened. But that is what happens when you deal with anyone in grace. When God chooses to spare Adam and not kill him, it calls into question God’s truthfulness and righteousness.

Okay so when you said that God is “unfair” to Himself, are you saying that He is taking the risk that His intentions and actions will be misunderstood or called into question?

Yes that is what I am saying. Do you remember a while back we talked about God’s saving work as “the scandal of God’s grace.” The point that I was making there is that when God saves those who do not deserve to be saved, when He is good toward those who do not deserve His goodness, His actions fly right in the face of “worldly” evaluations of what is fair and just. God’s grace in its fullest expression just doesn’t make logical sense, humanly speaking. What God is doing in the salvation of fallen human beings is something that even mystifies the angels. Remember, Peter said in chapter one of his first letter that the message of the Gospel speaks about things the angels “long to get a glimpse of.”

So we are back to the mystery issue again. It is a little comforting to know that not even the Angels fully comprehend what God is doing in His saving works!!

Yes it is. But before we move on, or back, let me say one more thing about “fairness.” If we are going to talk about what is fair, we must also consider whether it was “fair” for Christ, who was sinless, to die for all of us who are sinful. Was it fair for God to give His One unique Son to die for even those who would ultimately reject His love?

Man, when you put it that way, it really puts things in perspective. I guess “fair” really is not a good way to think about things. That also helps me to understand God’s grace a little more. When He saves us, He provides what is necessary for our salvation, even His own Son. I begin to see what you mean about God “risking” Himself for us.

The Bible often presents God’s saving work as something that really puts Him “on the hook” so to speak. This is where we really need to take the time to meditate upon the reality of the Cross. We have heard, “For God so loved the World, that He
gave His One unique Son...” so much that it has lost its punch. Christ Jesus, God in the flesh, suffered greatly in order to heal us and make us whole again as the greatest expression of God’s love for us.

Wait just a minute, are you saying that God suffers?

Yes. You have to remember that although God has given us our salvation freely, without cause in ourselves, the things that accomplished that salvation came at great cost to God Himself. That is a theme that runs throughout the Bible. God suffers greatly to redeem the treachery and treason of Adam’s fall in the Garden. It comes to a head in Christ on the Cross. This is really one of the unique beliefs of Christianity – we believe in an all powerful, all knowing, all wise God who suffers for His people to save them from their own rebellion and enslavement. That is a radical concept.

When you put it that way, it is a radical idea. I have never really thought about Christ’s suffering in that way.

You know, a lot of the things that we are talking about are very hard to get our minds around. But, I try to bring things back the reality of the Cross because that tends to help put things in perspective. So many times, when we are discussing God’s providence and sovereignty it can seem so cold and harsh. But when we remember that part of this dialogue must take us to Christ, and see His pain and suffering on our behalf, we are reminded that God has not set the universe up to run like a machine. Instead, God himself gets intimately involved in what is going on. This helps to bring a little resolution and comfort to both my mind and heart. Even If I don’t understand and comprehend all that God is doing, I can trust Him. I can trust His wisdom and grace. And I can truly trust Him because Christ has laid down His life for me, and you. It is easy to trust someone who is willing to suffer for you and with you. I think that this is the most important outcome of this study – to come to know God and to love Him and trust Him with all that we are.

Yeah, I can definitely see that. I think it is just hard to accept things that I can’t fully comprehend.

That is hard for all of us. But as I have already said, this is something that we often have to do in theology. That is why faith is the beginning and ending of our walk with God. Faith accepts and welcomes what it cannot “see” because it trusts a God who truly loves us and has our best interest at heart.

I understand. At the beginning of class you said that we all struggle with letting God be God because we want to run the universe our way. As we have been discussing these issues, I see how much that is true. If I am honest, I think my real issue is that I have a hard time trusting
God completely because His perfect wisdom and logic are not in line with my imperfect logic.

Yeah, I have that problem too. It is easy to teach the things that we are talking about but harder to accept them. We all struggle with this.

Could we talk about one more thing that I am having trouble with?

Absolutely.

Okay I get it that God chooses whom He will save before the foundation of the world. But doesn’t this take away freedom? And if freedom of choice is taken away doesn’t this destroy the ability to love?

Those are great questions. They are questions that everyone thinks about in this study. There are really two separate issues here, so let me deal with them separately and then bring them together.

Remember back when we were talking about the issue of freedom, I said that it is not the mere ability to choose that makes a person free, it is choosing the right kinds of things – things that God Himself would choose. Freedom comes from the ability to choose things that are in line with truth and righteousness.

Yeah, I remember that. You said that God is the most free being who exists but his freedom is limited by His righteousness – He cannot sin, etc. So, you said, it makes sense to say that in order to be free we must be totally “enslaved” to righteousness as God Himself is “enslaved” to righteousness. The “paradox” is that this “slavery to righteousness” is the only thing that brings true freedom.

Man, you really got that. Do you want to teach the class next time?

No. Not yet at least.

Now let me add that everyone who has ever lived always has the ability to choose. But we can only choose what we want to choose. Remember, we defined our will as ABILITY + (KNOWLEDGE & DESIRE). We don’t just need the ability to choose, we also need to know the right thing to choose and have the desire to choose it. Remember, Jesus said that “you shall know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

Okay, I can understand that, and I can accept that. But It seems to me the real issue is not just “knowing” the truth, but wanting to live according to that truth.

That’s the issue! - the issue of desire and the “want to.” If we are all born enslaved to sin, held captive by the god of this age, Satan our Adversary, and if our desires are
bent toward the “darkness,” how could we ever choose what God would desire? God must change our desires as part of His saving work.

Yeah, I remember us talking about that, and I am starting to see your point. I just don’t like where it is leading.

I don’t necessarily like it either, but we must always weigh our “likes” and “dislikes” against what God has revealed to us in truth.

Absolutely. So this is where we discussed the “new spiritual birth,” or “the birth from above” that enables us to “see” and “enter” the Kingdom as Jesus discussed with Nicodemus.

Yes. Part of what God does to save us is give us a spiritual rebirth that enables us to see and choose the things that are pleasing to God. He transforms our desires through the power of the Gospel.

If that is true, then isn’t he forcing us to love Him? And if He is forcing us to love Him, doesn’t this negate the love?

Just because someone helps another person do something or enables another person to do something does not mean that they are forcing them. But wait. Let’s address some ideas that seem to be in the background of your thinking and some assumptions about love that I believe are faulty. Do you believe that in order to love we must first have the freedom to choose?

Yes, I believe that is right.

Well let me ask you to give that idea a “test drive.” Let’s put in a real world scenario and see how it plays out.

Yeah, that sounds good.

Let’s think about this together. I have two daughters. They were born, not by their choice or their will, but by the choice and will of me and my wife and God, of course. Since they did not choose to enter into a relationship with us, does that mean that they will not be able to love their mother or me?

Well, no.

Why do you say no? If love is conditioned on choice, then we would have to say that my daughters could not come to love me because they were not given any initial choice. Right?

Okay, I am starting to see your point. So choice is not necessary for love?
Wait, I am not saying that. Choice is necessary for love, but we must put it in its proper place.

So how does it fit?

First, let's try to understand what enables anyone to love. Remember what John said about God's love for us in his first letter? — “In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the satisfying sacrifice for our sins....We love because God first loved us.”

I believe that we love, not simply because we have choice, but because we have experienced someone else's love for us. Going back to our “test drive” with my daughters, my daughters will be enabled to love their mom and me because they have experienced our love for them.

Okay, now I can see the point you are making. This is kind of related to our discussion of freedom and choice isn’t it?

Yes. We must know the right things to choose, and we learn these things by first experiencing them from others. This is why the starting point for our theology is the love of God. Before God created anything else He existed as love, in the loving relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So, we learn to love because God shows us what that is. He did not create us because He needed someone to love. I believe that He created us to share in the love that He already experienced in the blessed Trinity.

Wow, I can see what you are driving at now. That is really kind of heavy. It is God’s love for me that teaches me how to love God and love others.

You got it.

So how does choice play in to this? Don’t I still have to choose whether or not I will love?

Yes, absolutely. But you choose to love because you first experience love. Choice does not cause us to have the ability to love, it sustains our ability to express what we have experienced. Does that make sense?

I think so. So even our love is something that falls in the realm of our responsibility?

Yes, in a sense. Our love is only a response to something that God has done first.

That brings us back to the main problem that is at the center of this whole discussion – we could not do what we do if God had not initiated towards us.
That’s right. That is what I believe the Bible teaches. He is the Creator and Sustainer of all things. Remember all the passages that we looked at about Christ’s creating, sustaining and completing creation?

Yeah, that makes sense. But if God has shown His love for the whole world in the death of Christ, why don’t all people respond to that love with love?

Good question. I will simply say, because they do not want to. They have no intention or desire of loving God. They exercise their option of contrary choice – they choose to do what God would not desire for them.

Do you remember the story of the student I had in class who told me that he believed that the message of the Gospel that I had shared with him was true, and the right way, but that he could not, and that he would not accept it?

Yeah, that was a powerful story. So the issue comes back to desire.

Yes. We can only choose what our knowledge and desire will allow us to choose. Remember that we saw how Paul said in 1 Corinthians two that the “natural” person cannot accept the things of God’s Spirit because they require the work of the Spirit to accept them. And remember that Jesus told Nicodemus that people would not come to Him because they loved the darkness rather than the light.

That brings us back to the new spiritual birth, without a new birth through the work of God’s Spirit, then no one can accept God’s truth or love.

Yes. I believe that is what the Bible teaches.

And that brings us back to the issue of freedom. We are not absolutely free, especially in our lost state, “dean in Adam.”

Yes. That is why we speak of God’s salvation as salvation. He is not saving us like a man who throws a life-line to someone who is drowning at sea; He saves us as people who have already drowned, died, that he brings to the surface, and brings us back to life.

That brings us back to God’s choice. He is the one who really does the most important choosing and that is choosing whom He will save.

Yes.

That really brings up a hard question, “Why doesn’t God save everyone?”.

I believe that is something that we will simply have to trust to God. I believe this is
another part of the mystery of God’s saving work. But if we explore that question, we also have to explore the question, Why does God save anybody?”

*Back to God’s grace, right. He saves because He chooses to save, or maybe because He wants to save.*

I would even go so far as to say that He saves because it is part of His very nature. I mean, think about it, if God would send His Son to die for us, that seems to indicate that His desire to save us in our fallen state is pretty important to His plans and desires, right?

*Yeah, I would assume so. But this just goes back to God’s right to choose what He will do doesn’t it?*

*Yes. This is His sovereignty – God rules the Universe the way He desires according to His love, justice and grace. Again, we trust Him in this.*

*I think I am starting to see the point of all of this – trust God! But, since, you mentioned justice, let me ask one last thing.*

*Of course.*

*If God chooses those whom He will save, how can He really judge anybody for rejecting His love? I mean if I understand our dialogue up to this point, God wants us to love Him but we cannot do that unless He saves us through the new spiritual birth. But that is something that God wills and so it would seem that we cannot do something that God has not willed. It just seems like a big circular argument.*

*That is what it seems like. But we know that we are on the right track if that is the seeming conclusion.*

*What do you mean?*

*In Romans 9, Paul is talking about some related issues – God choosing certain people for His certain purposes. God chooses to display His favor in a person like Jacob, but chooses to use Pharaoh to display His severity. After Paul makes this argument, he introduces a dialogue with a “pretend opponent” and this is what the opponent says, “Why does God still find fault? For who has ever resisted his will?” In other words, the opponent is asking Paul, “How can God judge anyone, especially if that person could not do anything contrary to His design and desire?”*

*Paul gives an answer that we do not like. He says, “But who indeed are you a mere human being to talk back to God? Does what is molded say to the molder, “Why have you made me like this?” Has the potter no right to make from the same lump*
of clay one vessel for special use and another for ordinary use?” In other words, Paul is saying that this is not a proper question; we have no right in our finite understanding to question our Creator who has the right to do as He wishes with His creation. God does not have to submit Himself to our definitions of what is just and right.

*I see what is being said, but it still seems harsh.*

It is somewhat harsh, but you must understand that questions like this are calling God’s character into question. This is another one of those areas that when we ask such things, we are really saying, “God because I don’t understand You, I don’t trust You to do what is right.” The issue is not so much with our understanding as it is with our trust. As our Heavenly Father, God calls His children to trust Him first and foremost. That is related to His love for us. The first step in accepting God’s love for us is in trusting that it is real.

*But what about the people who reject it? It just doesn’t seem that they have had a fair chance if God does all of His choosing and such before they are even born?*

*Wait a minute, you used that word “fair” again. I thought we settled that.*

*Yeah, you’re right. It doesn’t seem right or just then.*

OK, we can deal with that. Let me raise an issue that always lingers in the background of this discussion and clouds the waters a little bit. The Bible reveals several things about lost human beings. In the Acts 17 passage that we looked at earlier, Paul said that “From one man he made every nation of the human race to inhabit the entire earth, determining their set times and the fixed limits of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope around for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.” Do you remember this?

*Yes, this is where we talked about God revealing His existence to us.*

Right, and notice what Paul says here – God has placed us in our particular place so that we will search for God. I believe that everyone is searching for God.

*Yeah, I will go along with that.*

The problem, however, is that no one wants to find the one true God. Paul, who said these things in Acts 17 is the same man who said in Romans 1 that fallen, unrighteous people suppress the truth of God in their unrighteousness. It is not that God’s existence cannot be know, and even that certain truths can be known about Him, but that this knowledge is held down, suppressed by fallen people.
He goes on to say that even though God can be known, people reject this true knowledge of God and replace it with idolatry. In chapter three of Romans he concludes by saying that, “there is no one who seeks after God,...they have all become useless.” Do you follow what I am saying.

I think so. Although mean and women are searching for God, they will accept any other “god” other than the one true God.

Yes. That’s it. So let me ask you a question then: what enables someone to truly search after God so as to find Him in the person of Jesus Christ?

OK, this is where we come back to God’s calling through the Gospel and so forth, right?

Right. But what allows someone to accept the truth of the Gospel of Christ?

And now we are back to the new spiritual birth, God’s work, right?

Right. But let me bring all of this back to your question, and that relates to the idea that God has not been just, because everyone has not had a fair shake. Paul makes it clear in Romans that God has made Himself known through creation. But what do people do with that knowledge?

They reject it, or suppress it.

Right. So if they reject that truth, is God obligated to give them anymore of His truth?

Well, I guess the answer would be no.

I would agree with that. I would even go so far as to say that God was never obligated to do what He has chosen to do. Ever since Adam’s fall He has been operating out of His grace and mercy. Does that make sense?

Yes it does. But it is hard to keep in mind. But if people never hear the truth of the Gospel, do they have any chance of being saved?

The hard answer to the question is, no. And that is why God desires that the truth be spread to all the World. But let me say that if someone responds to the truth that they do have, then God will give them more of His truth. Again, we just trust God to do what is right in these situations because this is His responsibility.

But they could not respond unless God “opens their eyes” and so forth - back to the circular argument.

Yes, but again, we just trust God in this.
I understand what Paul is saying about questioning God, but still it just does not seem right that God would use people for His purposes and then judge them when they do what is not pleasing to Him.

That is a hard question. But let me suggest something. Let me suggest that since God is the Creator, perfect in wisdom and knowledge, then He can use His creation without violating the justice of His creation.

What do you mean?

Well lets take Pharaoh for instance or the King of Assyria. Both of these men were “raised up” by God’s purposes to do his will – enslave Israel. But God also holds these men responsible for the evils that they commit. But when they are doing what they do, it is not as if they are saying, “Man, I would love to let you go, but God is twisting my arm and I must do this…” No. They do what they do because they want to do it. Would you agree with that?

Yes. But they aren’t they doing the things they do because God has created them the way they are?

Yes, in one sense, but they are also the people that they are because the have responded to their circumstance they way they have. When God “knits them together” he doesn’t remove any of the consequences of Adam’s fall – indwelling sinfulness – and so these men are born into spiritual death and slavery because that is what Adam chose for his family.

Back to Adam messing it up for us all. God honors the choice that Adam made, in a sense.

Right. You see how complicated this issue really is.

I thought that was the first thing that we proved!!!

Yeah, definitely. But let me bring that last issue to a resolution. I would suggest that we just trust God to used His creation, even fallen human beings, in a way that does not violate the justice of creation. God uses Pharaoh to do exactly what He wants Him to do, and what God wants Pharaoh to do is exactly what Pharaoh wants to do. Does that make sense?

It makes sense, but it is hard to understand.

I totally agree with you.

Let me ask one last thing then. Could there be such a thing as a person who responds to God’s truth in a right way, but they cannot be saved because God has not chosen them to be saved?
That is a question that many people have in the back of their thinking on this issue. I would say, no, this is not a possibility. Those who have the desire to know God truly and to respond to His love have this because it has been granted to them.

And that comes back to the issue of even our faith being granted to us by God’s grace.

Yes. Remember, I said that our faith is the evidence of God’s work in our lives. Just as a baby cannot breathe unless it is born, unless comes out of the mother’s womb, so also it cannot live unless it breathes. Our faith is like our breathing. We have faith because God has given birth to us by His spirit, but our faith is the very thing that sustains our life with God.

That is all starting to click now. I guess I just have a hard time letting this whole process of salvation being something that is pretty much God’s business.

It is hard. And we struggle with these things because we all have people that we love who are still lost and need to come to the knowledge of the truth in Christ. We want them to have eternal life and to be spared from the judgment to come.

Yeah, that is where all of this really hits home. All this talk of election and such just seems to say that we have no way to help these people, that it is all up to God.

Well it is all up to God, and He has given us a vital role in the process. We pray for these people because we ultimately know that it is God alone who can save, right?

Yeah. I guess I have never really thought about it that way.

Well, when you pray for those who are lost are you not, in a sense, asking God to do the things that you cannot do? I mean if saving the lost were only a matter of sharing the truth of the Gospel then praying to God would be unnecessary, right? What are you asking God to do when you pray for those who are lost?

Well, I guess based on our discussion we are asking Him to remove the blindness of their minds, and bring about the new spiritual birth by His spirit, to transform their desires and so forth.

Absolutely. But we don’t stop there, we share the truth with them, we love them, we do whatever we can to try and convince them of the truth of God in Christ. Remember, what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5 about how he constantly tried to persuade people to be reconciled to God?

Yeah, but how do we know who God has chosen and who He hasn’t? I mean if I don’t know that God has chosen a person, then I don’t know it my loving them and sharing the truth with them is going to make any difference.
But wait a minute, you can’t really think that way. It may be that God will use your praying and loving and sharing as the very means to call that person to Himself and bring about the new spiritual birth. Remember, the spoken Word of the Gospel is God’s power for salvation. God uses our efforts to bring about His will and desire.

So are you saying that this issue of election and all is really not something that we have to worry about? We simply do what God desires for us to do?

That is exactly what I am saying. We do what we know will be pleasing to God and trust Him with the consequences and the outcomes.

Back to trusting God.

Yes, that is always the conclusion. But let me add that if you have such a great desire to see those who are lost become saved, where do you think that desire comes from?

Well, if God is transforming my desires to be more like His, I guess the desire comes from God.

I think that is right on target. If we are concerned about those who are lost, don’t you think we can trust that God is just as concerned for them as their Creator?

Well that makes sense.

In all of this just keep three things in mind: 1) God is absolutely sovereign, 2) we are absolutely responsible, 3) God is always worthy of our trust because His goodness and love will ultimately prevail.

I can accept that.

Good. My mind is hurting and I am ready for a nap.

Me too.

Let’s just keep exploring the mystery together so that we can encourage one another to live according to the things that are pleasing to our Father. And above all, lets love Him with all that we are and trust Him with even the things that we don’t fully understand.

Agreed.