

What You Should Know About **GOD**



by J. W. Jepson, D.Min.

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God Is Not A Spring Bean

In a small Sunday School in Lemon Cove, California, a teacher asked her class of junior boys, "Who is God?" Immediately one bright young fellow responded confidently, "God is a spring bean."

The teacher stared at him for a moment, an expression of bewilderment written across her face. What on earth could he mean? Recovering her presence of mind, she asked him to explain himself, which he did gladly. He had heard God referred to as the Supreme Being, but in his young mind "spring bean" was as close as he could come to that majestic term.

We smile at the lad's childish understanding. But do we ourselves really know who God is?

Of course, none of us would refer to God as a "spring bean." But what do such terms as: "the higher power," "the ground of being," "the cosmic life force," and "the man upstairs" reveal about one's concept of God?

Some people's impression of God is physical, like Michelangelo's old man with a long, flowing beard. Of course, God is nothing like that.

Then, who *is* God? Is He near or far off? Is He directly involved in human experience, or aloof from the world? Is He essentially a stern Judge? a doting old grandpa? a good luck charm, or a "genie" to call on only when in need of help?

Each of us should ask himself or herself: "Is God of primary importance to me? Is He truly the Supreme Being in my life, or is a formal nod toward Him now and then about the extent of my recognition of Him?"

To most people God is so vague that He seems like a dream, like a character in a fairy tale. Many doubt that He really exists.

This is a matter of utmost practical importance because *our understanding of God is the basic determining factor in our lives*. The very meaning of life itself, our attitude toward ourselves and others, our concept of sin and salvation—everything of real importance—is ultimately the result of our concept of God. So then the very nature of the inquiry urges us to proceed seriously. As we do, let us keep three things in mind:

(1) by His very nature, God is infinitely greater than any attempt to study Him, greater than all that can be said about Him. So *we must confine our consideration of God to His revelation of Himself*. If we do not, we will drift into speculation and error. We will be like the Samaritans, who did not know what they were worshiping (John 4:22).

We will be like the little boy who was scribbling on a piece of paper.

"What are you drawing?" his mother asked.

"A picture of God," he replied confidently.

"But, dear, nobody knows what God looks like," the mother responded.

"They will when *I* get through," he announced.

So it is with speculative theology.

(2) the second thing to keep in mind is that what is revealed about God applies to all three Persons of the Godhead—the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit—with particular application to the Father because of the Father's primacy.

(3) thirdly, no one can truly know God merely by studying about Him. God is a Person, and He is truly known only by a personal relationship with Him. So then, if we gather all the information we can about God, yet fail to meet Him personally in Jesus Christ, we will miss everything. Also, we can truly *know* God in Jesus Christ, even if we know very little *about* Him at the moment. Relationship is established by an encounter; it grows by fellowship.

So, depending fully on the illumination of the Holy Spirit, Who is God guiding us to Himself, let us begin our exploration.

Who Is God?

GOD REVEALS HIMSELF

During a psychology class at Chabot College, in California, discussion turned to the subject of constructs. In psychology, a "construct" is a group of mental impressions put together in a specific form to aid the imagination in its speculation. A construct does not exist in objective reality. It is only a mental form, the product of one's own mind. It is useful only as a mental "scaffold" to help build more concrete understandings. Once it outlasts its usefulness, it can be discarded.

During the discussion a student asked the instructor, "Is God only a construct?"

In a display of candor regarding spiritual matters uncommon in secular classrooms, the instructor replied that the subject of the existence of God is beyond the scope of the scientific method. Science deals only with physical observation and experimentation. Being non-physical and non-observable as to His Person, God is outside the jurisdiction of science.

The instructor was correct.

Does this mean that God has not made Himself known? By no means! On the contrary, God has provided a full range of compelling evidences of Himself—His existence, His nature, His will and His purposes. In fact, when properly and fully considered, the honest inquirer will discover them to be conclusive.

"But I must have absolute proof!" the atheist demands.

And what kind of proof does he or she require? The answer of course is *physical* proof. The evidence must fit the unbeliever's own specifications in order to meet his or her personal criteria for belief. In other words, the unbeliever assumes the prerogative to set the rules of inquiry and to demand that God follow them. Having arrogated sovereignty to himself, the secularist proceeds to dictate the epistemological terms. Instead of giving serious and objective consideration to the existing evidence, he insists on other empirical data as a pre-condition for personal faith.

This is highly presumptuous and unfair. It is also sheer nonsense. The Creator will not reveal Himself on any terms that presuppose the creature's ultimate sovereignty or right of ultimate determination in the inquiry. It should be obvious that this is inherent in the very nature of the inquiry.

God will not concede ultimate authority to man. He is too wise for that. His regard for His honor, the integrity of His moral government and the well-being of His creation prevent such a degrading proceeding. God will not climb onto anyone's laboratory

table, fit into anyone's test tube, slide under anyone's microscope and play "specimen" for any *homo sapiens* who insists on being a "validator of Deity," smug in his own self-defined and self-ruled cosmos.

Of all the challenges to the human mind, this one more than any other requires and should produce humility in the inquirer. But it is the one that elicits the most untempered pride, the one where humility, objectivity, and the due degree of diligence are most wanting. The reason for this is that it confronts the person himself or herself most directly and totally—the ego, the lifestyle, the value-system, the basic issue of who is going to occupy first place in the heart. Thus for most unbelievers there is a subjective vested interest in avoiding an encounter with the truth of God and the God of truth. The bias is not merely intellectual, but moral.

In view of the very nature of the inquiry itself, if we are to know God, God must reveal Himself to us and we must accept His self-revelation. We must follow God's rules, including the indispensable conditions of humility and faith—reasonable faith, faith demanded by the evidence.

When we consider honestly the full testimony that God has given to us concerning Himself, we must ask, What more can God say to us without yelling at us? What more can He do without forcing Himself on us? Does the agnostic want God to come and forcibly crush all his cavils? Will additional evidence convince the person who does not want to believe? What good is "proof" to the one who does not really want proof? Will the person who refuses to give due consideration to the evidence now available examine further evidence?

Are most unbelievers investigating this subject with a diligence commensurate with its vital importance? No. They are not seeking after God. Their quest is for a rationale for avoiding Him. They do not like "to retain God in their knowledge" (Romans 1:28).

Truly it has been said that people are not seeking after a lost God; God is seeking after lost people.

Certainly God has revealed Himself to us. In a myriad of ways He is telling us things about Himself, communicating so that everyone who will listen can hear. For that reason the Bible does not attempt to "prove" the existence of God. It needs no proof. God's own testimony is proof enough for the honest heart.

Nature

God is speaking to us through nature, saying to us that He really is and that He has unlimited power and intelligence. "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse" (Romans 1:20 NIV).

We look at the natural world around us. Then we think of the material universe

beyond us. We consider the massiveness, complexity, purposeful design, order, detail. Where did it all come from? Could it all have just happened? Is matter eternal, with no beginning, no source, no cause? Can blind forces produce what obviously requires supremely intelligent planning and skill? Could all the good that nature and natural laws tend within themselves to secure be the product of accidental, non-intelligent, amoral processes?

Think!

Nothing cannot create something. The universe must have an adequate first cause. Intelligent, purposeful design demands an intelligent purposeful Designer.

Materialistic theories of origins are intellectually and morally bankrupt. They are inadequate to account for the data and they provide no moral basis for human society.

There is only one adequate alternative: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1).

The natural creation indicates how great and how intelligent God must be. From the beauties, bounties and balance of nature we see that God dearly loves us and designs everything for our good. This is evident in spite of the fact that because of man's sin, God has had to limit the human life span on earth by introducing into the ecosystem the process of deterioration. Nature is no longer perfect (see Romans 8:19-23).

God is; God is great; God is good. This is the clear testimony of creation. "The heavens are declaring the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands" (Psalm 19:1 NASB). "The heavens declare His righteousness, and all the peoples have seen His glory" (Psalm 97:6 NASB). "He left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:17 KJV).

Man

Man (both male and female) is a mystery. He cannot be accounted for by naturalistic explanations. Secular theories fail to explain him. The whole is far more than the sum of the known parts.

We carry within ourselves the image of God. We are free moral agents, possessing reason and will. We are capable of perceiving values and of making intelligent value-decisions. Also, we know the moral character of our decisions.

We have within us an awareness of the eternal. No evolutionary mechanism can account for this. Man reaches for the heavens, just as an eagle raised in a chicken coop longs to soar the heights. And we cannot accept the finality of death without forfeiting something distinctly human within ourselves.

Universally, the human race has had a native consciousness of the existence of God

that does not depend on sensory perception. Take away a person's five senses, and the inner consciousness of personhood remains undiminished. That person is just as aware as before that he or she is, that space and being are, that God is. Although we can learn more about these things, we do not need to be informed of their existence before we are conscious that they are. We are. Being is. God is. We know these things intuitively and we cannot deny them without denying ourselves. Let a person argue ever so eloquently to the contrary. When he has fully presented his case, he walks away carrying within himself a reality that demolishes all his specious sophistry.

The Bible

Although God is ineffable (He cannot be fully expressed in human language) all we need to know about Him for life, salvation, and godliness *can* be expressed in words; and He has chosen to reveal that to us in words, words that we can understand. Here is a book that tells with total accuracy about events centuries before they happen; a book that is demonstrated to be accurate by historical and archaeological research; a book that contains a system of theology and morality so perfect that it cannot be the product of mere human thought or culture; a book that records the only possible plan of salvation that is morally and governmentally sound; a book that alone answers with complete satisfaction the basic questions of human origin, nature and destiny; a book that has endured all attacks against itself; a book that has revolutionized whole societies for good, laying the foundation for human freedom and dignity.

Who alone can be the ultimate author of such a book? The answer is God. God is talking to us in the Bible, telling us about Himself, revealing His Person, His character, and His purposes.

For an accurate, authoritative, all-sufficient, verbal revelation of God to us, read the Bible.

Jesus Christ

In the Bible God reveals Himself in words and events. In Jesus Christ God reveals Himself in Person.

Jesus not only told us about God; He showed us God. He is God revealed in the flesh, the "living photograph" of God.

Jesus said to Philip, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9 NIV). "God ... has spoken to us by his Son ... the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being" (Hebrews 1:1-3 NIV).

Jesus Christ is God's highest, most eloquent revelation of Himself. No one will find God as long as he or she continues to reject Jesus Christ. The person who rejects God's testimony about His Son is rejecting God's revelation of Himself. If we want to know God, we must meet Him in Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6).

Human experience

God's revelation of Himself in The Scriptures and in Jesus Christ is a perfect and complete revelation to us. Yet, it is not merely a past revelation; neither is it a passive revelation. What God has revealed Himself to be He is demonstrating Himself to be right now in human experience. He is the God of transformed lives, the God of answered prayer, the God of ordered circumstances (Providence), the God of miracles. God is now.

The true Christian experiences personal fellowship with God. This is more than emotion, though it involves the emotions. It is more than mental impression, though it involves the mind. It is conscious soul-communion with a real Person. It is the witness of the Spirit with the believer's spirit (Romans 8:16), the inner testimony of God.

Subjective? Yes, but not private. Each believer is aware that this same personal fellowship with God is experienced by all other believers, though not all to the same degree. Fellowship with God is the basis for fellowship among believers.

"Jesus answered and said to him, 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and my Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him'" (John 14:23). This is the most personal revelation of God.

GOD IS A PERSON

God has revealed Himself in the Bible as a Person. He is not a mere idea or concept. He is not an abstract quality such as "goodness" or "wisdom." When the Bible says that God is love (1 John 4:8 and 16), it does not mean that God is a "thing" called "love." If that were the case, it could equally read, "Love is God." That would be saying that truth is anything that reads backward as well as forward. That would be nonsense. When the Bible says that God is love, it is summing up His moral character. Every purpose and act of God is motivated ultimately by a design to secure the highest good.

Also, God is not a mystic principle such as "Universal Mind" or "Cosmic Consciousness." He is not a philosophical abstraction such as "the Ground Of Being." He is not an impersonal energy or force. He is not nature or merely the force of nature.

God is a Person, with all the qualities of conscious personhood, including choosing, thinking, and feeling. He can communicate personally, intelligently and verbally. God's qualities of personhood are infinite. He is infinite in knowledge and wisdom, infinite in love, and infinite in His personal capacity for happiness.

God Is One

God reveals Himself to be One—the only true and living God. He is not one "god" among many "gods" (polytheism). He is not the chief "god" among several "gods" (henotheism). He is One, alone—the only God that is (monotheism).

"The LORD Himself is God; there is none other besides Him" (Deuteronomy 4:35).

"The LORD our God, the LORD is one!" (Deuteronomy 6:4).

"You are great, O Lord GOD. For there is none like You, nor is there any God besides You" (2 Samuel 7:22).

"You alone are God" (Psalm 86:10).

"I am He. Before Me was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me. I, even I, am the LORD, and besides Me there is no Savior" (Isaiah 43:10 and 11).

"I am the LORD, and there is no other" (Isaiah 45:18).

"I am God, and there is no other" (Isaiah 46:9).

Yes, God is one; yet the One God exists in, and reveals Himself in, three distinct Persons: the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three Persons are the One God. They are not three separate "gods." A belief in three gods is an error called tritheism.

Neither is each Person in the Godhead "one-third" of God. Each Person is totally God and fully represents the Godhead as a whole.

The question has been raised, "how can one plus one plus one equal one?" The answer is, it cannot. But that is beside the point. The fact is that God cannot be expressed or understood by a mathematical equation. The attempt to do so is an effort to reduce God down to the categories of our own comprehension. But a completely explainable God could not and would not be God. A God small enough for us to comprehend fully would not be big enough to be God. He would be limited to the parameters of our understanding. The moment that we believe that we can explain God fully is the moment that we miss Him. God is reasonable, yes; explainable, no.

Even if God could be expressed by a mathematical formula, the formula would be one times one times one equals one.

God is not a committee of three separate individuals. I remember very clearly a statement by an instructor in a Bible class many years ago. He asserted, "The Father wants to destroy the world, but Jesus won't let Him do it." That is nonsense, of course. God is One, existing in three Persons indivisibly and harmoniously in essence, qualities, and will. We call this tri-unity of God the Trinity.

The Trinity is a sublime mystery, inscrutable, ineffable. Nevertheless, it is the truth, because this is what God has revealed Himself to be.

The term "God" can be applied in its true meaning only to the One True God. Only

God is God, and He is fully God in each and all of His three Persons.

God declares, "Besides Me there is no God" (Isaiah 44:6). Here God is speaking in His tri-unity, the indivisible One in Three, because anyone who is not included in this Scripture cannot be God in any proper definition of the word.

Jesus Christ is God (John 20:28; Hebrews 1:8). He cannot be merely a god, because God is God alone (Psalm 86:10), and besides Him there is no God (Isaiah 44:6). So then, Jesus Christ, being God, must partake of and share in the very essence of the One indivisible God.

"Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

"To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:1).

It is a well-established rule of New Testament Greek that when the definite article (the) is followed by two nouns of the same case connected by *kai* (and), both nouns refer to the same person. So then "our great God and Savior" (Titus 2:13) both refer to "Jesus Christ." The same is true in 2 Peter 1:1. The literal Greek rendering is "in righteousness of the God of us and Savior Jesus Christ." "God" and "Savior" both refer to Jesus Christ (see also 2 Peter 2:20).

"There is no other God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us there is only one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live" (1 Corinthians 8:4-6).

In this passage the Lord Jesus Christ is not spoken of apart from God. He is included in the very essence of "one God," just as the Father is included in the very essence of "one Lord." "One Lord Jesus Christ" cannot mean that the Father is not also Lord. Just so, "one God, the Father" cannot mean that Jesus is not also God. in view of Romans 9:5 and Colossians 2:9. The contrast here is between mythical "gods" on the one hand, and the Father and Jesus Christ together on the other.

"Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen" (Romans 9:5).

"For in Him [Jesus Christ] dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 2:9).

In 1 Timothy 2:5 we read, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus." Jesus is the Mediator because He is both God and man.

Even though the word "Trinity" itself is not found in the Bible, the truth expressed by

it most certainly is. The tri-unity of God is woven throughout the fabric of The Scriptures.

In the Old Testament the Persons of the Trinity speak to each other (Genesis 1:26; Psalm 110:1). In the New Testament Jesus spoke of the Father and of the Holy Spirit as Persons distinct from Himself and from each other. At our Lord's baptism, the Father spoke from heaven and the Holy Spirit rested upon Him in the form of a dove.

In Matthew 28:19 Jesus said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Thus our Lord clearly declared the fact of the Trinity; yet He was careful to teach also the unity of God.

The Trinity is commonly expressed as "God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit." An even more precise way is: "The Father and The Son and The Holy Spirit—God."

Several comparisons have been used in an attempt to illustrate the Trinity: a simple musical chord (three notes, one sound), three glasses of water poured together to form one body of water, a triangle, a tripod, even the tri-unity of man (spirit, soul, body). The most that can be said about these comparisons is that they somehow vaguely hint at the general concept of unity in diversity, and diversity in unity. That is all.

Whenever we say that God is "like" something, we immediately reduce God down to the level of the object to which we compare Him. God is infinitely greater than any attempt to explain or illustrate Him. Any attempt to illustrate what He is "like" misrepresents Him.

The attempt to represent God in some form or likeness results in idolatry, the degrading of God. For that reason God forbade Israel to make any likeness of God in the form of anything created (Exodus 20:4). God is not "like" anything. He is the "unlike anything" One.

When people say, "I like to think of God as ...," they are forming a mental image of God. But a *mental* image of God can be a false god just as much as a *metal* image.

A common mistake is to build a concept of God out of the raw material of one's own experiences or the experiences of others. If things go well, God is good. But if rough times come, or if tragedy strikes, God is mean, or He has failed. This is the way many form their ideas of God, and thus create a distortion of Him.

God is not made out of the clay of subjective experiences, emotions and impressions. He is not someone for us to mold according to our personal tastes or standards. He is Who He is—beyond definition. Words, including inspired words, cannot communicate Him totally. This is why it is impossible to explain the Trinity. The Bible does not explain the fact of the Trinity, but only declares it.

Some passages of Scripture emphasize the essential unity and equality of the Persons in the adorable Godhead. Others teach that in the sustaining of relationships and in the allocation of administrative roles, some members in the Trinity occupy positions and exercise functions that are subordinate to the greater whole. This is a well-known principle that holds true even when all participants are equals. Functional subordination and essential equality—both truths are taught in The Scriptures and must be recognized if we are to have a proper understanding of the nature of and relationships in the Holy Trinity.

If the full mystery of God could be comprehended within the framework of our finite minds, He would not be God. A God who could be fully understood by the human mind would be a very limited God. In that case He would not be God, because the terms "limited" and "God" are self-contradictory and mutually exclusive. Let it be emphasized—a God who is small enough for us to comprehend completely would be too small to be God.

The person who refuses to believe in God beyond the limits of his own human reason is not believing in God at all, but in his own reason. This is not to say that God is contrary to reason, or that belief in Him is anti-intellectual. Everything that God has revealed about Himself is in full harmony with reality and reason. Also, true intellectualism leads us to the conviction that there must be in the infinite God that which is beyond the limits of our reasoning capability. It is pseudo-intellectualism that leads to the folly described in Romans 1:21-25.

"Although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen."

Only the Divine reason is co-extensive with the Divine being. That is, only God fully understands Himself. The only intellectually and morally acceptable course for us is to humble ourselves before Him and accept Him by faith as He has revealed Himself to be. Even though we cannot know all about Him, through Jesus Christ we can know Him. This is our life and our joy.

What Are God's Essential Qualities?

You might have noticed that "qualities" rather than "attributes" is used in the title of this chapter. The choice is deliberate. Attributes are what we *think* about God. That is, if we start from ourselves, what we conclude about God would be His attributes. They might or might not be true.

But we are not starting from ourselves. We are starting from God and His self-revelation. We are studying what God says about Himself and what God says about Himself He really is. So "qualities" is used because qualities are what something really *is* as distinct from what we say about it. We want to know God's revelation of Himself so exactly that what we ascribe to Him is true and correct.

Of course, God is beyond our comprehension. We cannot know Him totally, but we can know Him and know Him correctly. What God has revealed about Himself is accurate and sufficient, and has been communicated to us by appropriate media and in intelligible forms.

This reminds us again of the necessity to approach God with all humility, confining our thinking about Him to what He says about Himself. Any departure from this principle becomes a point from which theology proper degenerates into the subjectivism and caricaturization for which human "god-makers" are so notorious. Therefore, we do well to focus our attention on what God has said about Himself.

God Is A Spirit

Jesus said, "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). God is a spirit-being, an intelligent Person without a physical body. The artist has depicted Him as an old man with a long white beard. Of course, that is only the product of a creative imagination.

God is a spirit Being, not in an abstract, impersonal sense but in the definite and personal. "The Lord is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:17).

The Bible does speak frequently about God's eyes, hand, arm (even feathers!), but these are representative terms, meant to teach something about God in figures that have specific meaning for us. They do not teach that God has physical eyes, hands, or arms (much less feathers). We will consider these anthropomorphisms later.

God Is Invisible

Because God is a spirit-being, He is invisible. Physical eyes see physical things. God is not physical; therefore the physical eye cannot see Him. When Moses requested to see the full glory of God, God replied, "You cannot see My face; for no

man shall see Me, and live" (Exodus 33:20).

John 1:18 says, "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." Jesus Christ is "the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15). God is "the King eternal, immortal, invisible" (1 Timothy 1:17), "whom no man has seen or can see" (6:16).

God Is Eternal

Because He is "the King Eternal," there never was a time when God was not, and there never will be a time when He will not be. God has no beginning and no ending. He always was, is, and forever shall be. He is eternally self-existent and the same (immutable as to His being). He declares, "I live forever" (Deuteronomy 32:40). He announces Himself as "the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy" (Isaiah 57:15).

"The Lord shall endure forever" (Psalm 9:7). "You, O Lord, remain forever; Your throne from generation to generation (Lamentations 5:19). "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End," says the Lord, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty'" (Revelation 1:8).

The concept of no beginning and no ending is beyond our comprehension now because we think in a linear mode—straight backward into the past and straight forward into the future. We live in time and space. Although God works and acts in time and space, He exists eternally outside of time and space. "The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deuteronomy 33:27).

God Is Omnipresent

God is everywhere present at once. The inspired psalmist asks,

"Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me" (Psalm 139:7-10).

God asks, "'Can any hide himself in secret places, so I shall not see him?' says the LORD. 'Do I not fill heaven and earth?' says the LORD" (Jeremiah 23:24).

Although He fills His creation, God is a Person distinct from His creation. God fills nature, but God is not nature and nature is not God. Who God *is* is one thing; what He fills is something else. We must beware of pagan pantheism ("God is everything; everything is God"), posing as a system of religious and/or metaphysical "science." Pantheism confuses God with His creation. It subjectivizes God and reduces Him down to abstractions. Such systems de-personalize God and therefore miss Him altogether. This is one of the errors of the so-called "New Age" philosophy. We do not find God by rummaging around in our psyche.

When the Bible says that God is love (1 John 4:16), it does not mean that God is composed of "love," or that love is God. It is simply describing God's moral character. Interpreting a predicate adjective as a predicate nominative is a mistake. "Everywhere" is not God; but God is *present* everywhere.

God not only fills the heavens and the earth, but the heavens and the Heaven of heavens cannot contain Him (1 Kings 8:27). On a clear night focus your attention on a distant star on the horizon. Then in one steady sweep take in the grand panorama of the heavens, resting your gaze at last on a distant star on the opposite horizon. Consider how far it is from the one star to the other, keeping in mind that all that the naked eye can see is but a tiny part of what is out there! Then pause to reflect on the fact that God is so infinite, so limitless, that the entire universe cannot contain Him. How great, how awesome is God!

Still, in His omnipresence He is immediately present with each of us. No other person can be as close. He is not far from every one of us (Acts 17:27). He is "a very present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1).

God Is Omniscient

God is all-knowing and all-wise. All facts are before Him. He totally comprehends each one, and all of them together. He knows in Himself, not by process. He fully knows the potential outcome of every possible course of action, and He always wills what is best, all things being considered together. God sees everything and He pays total attention to everything He sees. Here is the testimony of Scripture:

"Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5).

"For His eyes are on the ways of man, and He sees all his steps" (Job 34:21).

"Would not God search this out? For He knows the secrets of the heart" (Psalm 44:21).

"The eyes of the LORD are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good" (Proverbs 15:3).

"For My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from My face, nor is their iniquity concealed from My eyes" (Jeremiah 16:17 NASB).

"I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to every one according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds" (Jeremiah 17:10 NASB).

[God's] "eyes are open to all the ways of the sons of men, to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings" (Jeremiah 32:19).

"Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cries out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth" (James 5:4. "Sabaoth" means "Hosts").

"There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13).

"He who planted the ear, does He not hear? He who formed the eye, does He not see?" (Psalm 94:9 NASB).

God is not a casual observer. As the moral governor of the universe, He witnesses every act and He knows every motive. But, although He must and will punish sin, judgment is not the primary purpose of God's superintending view. "For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers" (1 Peter 3:12, quoting from Psalm 34). And in 2 Chronicles 16:9 we read, "For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him."

God sees the sparrow fall, and the hairs of our head are all numbered in His sight (Matthew 10:29, 30). Every time you run a comb or brush through your hair and pull out a few, God notices the change in the total. That is how closely He watches over each one of us.

God has been watching over us from the moment of our conception. "Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Thy book they were all written" (Psalm 139:16 NASB).

They who commit abortion disregard the fact that they and the helpless little people they kill are under the watchful eye of the Creator.

The very limited scope of our personal human observation moves us at times to great sorrow and at other times to great joy. How greatly then must God be moved, both in sorrow and in joy, by all that He sees.

God's omniscience extends to every detail. Even our innermost thoughts are known to God. "The LORD searches all hearts, and understands all the intent of the thoughts" (1 Chronicles 28:9). "You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off" (Psalm 139:2). God says, "I know the things that come into your mind" (Ezekiel 11:5).

God's omniscience includes complete and perfect foreknowledge. It is according to His foreknowledge that He established His purposes and His decrees.

Some deny the absolute foreknowledge of God on speculative grounds. Their reasoning is that if God foreknows everything, why does He not prevent evil from happening? They assume that evils happen because God did not know they would happen, and therefore He is not to be blamed for not preventing them. Thus they

attempt to "salvage" the character of God.

But in no way does God's foreknowledge discredit His goodness. Although He foreknows every evil, God does not prevent many of them simply because to do so would require measures that would not be wise in the situation. This is a period of probation, of human choice, a time for the testing and formation and expression of human character. One of its foremost features is divine forbearance and longsuffering (2 Peter 3:9). God has no intention of establishing a "police state" in this present gospel age. Judgment will come later.

It is interesting to note in passing that the very ones who blame God for not stopping others from sinning resolutely resist Him when He commands them to repent of their own sins. How they insist on their own freedom of choice! How they view any divine restraint upon their rebellion as interference with their rights!

In support of the notion that God has limited omniscience (a self-contradictory term), Genesis 22:12 is sometimes quoted: "now I know that you fear God." But the Hebrew verb here is "have known."

The attempt to qualify, or place a limit on, God's foreknowledge misrepresents Him. In effect it denies His full deity. God foreknows absolutely, and His foreknowledge conditions His purposes and decrees. This does not mean that God's purposes are only reactions to what He foreknows. God acts, not reacts. It means simply that in His sovereignty God acts in full accord with all of His qualities, including His wisdom. Knowing this prevents us from erroneously ascribing to God an arbitrary fatalism.

"Known to God from eternity are all His works" (Acts 15:18). (However this verse reads in the modern versions, the core truth of divine foreknowledge remains).

Referring to Jesus Christ, Peter declared, "Him, being delivered by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death" (Acts 2:23. See also 3:18).

Without the foreknowledge of God there would have been no Calvary. God did not gamble when He gave His Son to die on the cross. It was a deliberate act of His "counsel and foreknowledge." It is important to note that this verse also assumes human responsibility. Both divine sovereignty and human responsibility are recognized in Scripture.

Believers are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" (1 Peter 1:2). Most of the controversy over the relationship between divine sovereignty and human will results from not recognizing the proper role of God's foreknowledge. We are not foreknown according to God's *election*, but elect according to His *foreknowledge*. God's foreknowledge is a wise condition of His sovereign election. This is not foreknowledge merely of what *we* would do, but of what *He* could do with us consistent with wisdom. Foreknowledge and election are one unit in the eternal mind of God. One does not precede the other. With God they are simultaneous. God's character and His works

maintain a beautiful and complete consistency throughout.

God foreknew those in Israel who would be saved. "God has not cast away His people whom he foreknew" (Romans 11:2).

Were it not for His foreknowledge, God could not be certain that anyone would accept His mercy through Jesus Christ. God did not send His Son to die on the cross hoping that somebody would believe and be saved, and planning to figure out afterward what to do with them. Of course not. From eternity God has foreknown what His redemptive act in Christ would accomplish.

"For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His son" (Romans 8:29).

Jesus clearly stated that the Father foreknows the day and the hour of the Son's return: "But of that day and hour no one knows, no, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only" (Matthew 24:36).

Our heavenly Father knows what things we need before we ask Him (Matthew 6:8). So, before we call He will answer, and while we are yet speaking He will hear (Isaiah 65:24).

Nothing can come into our lives that God has not fully anticipated. Before the worlds were created, God knew every situation that you would face and everything that people would do to you; and He has known all along exactly what to do about it and how to make it work together for your good if you will trust and obey Him. Because God knows how to make all things work together for the good of those who love Him, nothing and nobody can prevent the believer from succeeding. God has so many ways of handling the situation that the believer cannot lose. So trust God and let Him work things out for your good.

Let us remember that God is omniscient. He is perfect not only in His knowledge and foreknowledge, but also in His wisdom and understanding.

"Great is our Lord. and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite" (Psalm 147:5).

"The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding He established the heavens" (Proverbs 3:19 NASB).

"Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable (Isaiah 40:28 NASB. See also Isaiah 28:29).

"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" (Romans 11:33)

"To God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen" (Romans 16:27).

No thought, word or act can be hidden from God. He knows our hearts, our motives, our secrets; and some day He will reveal it all. Yes, the Father sees in secret (Matthew 6:4, 6).

God Is Omnipotent

God is all-powerful.

"Yours, O LORD, is the greatness, the power, and the glory, the victory and the majesty; for all that is in heaven and in the earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and You are exalted as head over all. Both riches and honor come from You, and You reign over all. In Your hand is power and might; and in Your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all" (1 Chronicles 29:11, 12).

"Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for You" (Jeremiah 32:17).

"Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me?" (verse 27).

Jesus said that with God all things are possible (Matthew 19:26). He prayed, "Father, all things are possible for You" (Mark 14:36).

The angel Gabriel assured Mary, "For with God nothing will be impossible" (Luke 1:37).

Jesus assures us, "My Father ... is greater than all" (John 10:29). God is greater than we can possibly comprehend. We cannot begin to imagine how great He really is. He is infinite in His greatness and power. This fact He has revealed to us in creation and in the Scriptures.

Our comprehension of God's greatness will always be far less than the full reality of that greatness. As believers, our awareness of the greatness of God can and will continue to grow without any fear that it will ever surpass the reality.

Yes, God is greater than we think. And think we should. God wants us to think about Him, to think Biblically about Him, to think BIG about Him. God wants to expand our awareness of His greatness, because the measure of our faith depends on the measure of our correct awareness of His greatness.

God wants to be bigger in our lives than we have allowed Him to be. How big is God to you? That is how big your faith is. That is how big you have allowed Him to be in your life. God will be just as big in our lives as our faith allows Him to be, and that depends largely on how much we become aware of His true greatness.

The fullness of God's ability is revealed in the Scriptures. The three Hebrews were

confident that "our God whom we serve is able to deliver us" (Daniel 3:17). John the Baptist told the people that "God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones" (Luke 3:8). Romans 4:21 records that Abraham was "fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform."

"God is able to make all grace abound toward you" (2 Corinthians 9:8). God "is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24).

God is able to make the weak brother stand (Romans 14:4). He is able to save to the uttermost (completely and forever) those who come to God through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 7:25). Paul declares, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day" (2 Timothy 1:12). He "is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us" (Ephesians 3:20). And in Philippians 3:21 the word of God proclaims that "He is able even to subdue all things to Himself."

No matter what the need or the situation, GOD IS ABLE. The Lord God omnipotent is our strength. Hallelujah!

In Heaven the combined voices of God's servants thunder like the sound of many waters: "Alleluia!: For the Lord God Omnipotent [the *Pantokrator*] reigns!" (Revelation 19:6).

"God is my strength and power" (2 Samuel 22:33).

"God is our refuge and strength" (Psalm 46:1).

"The LORD is my strength and song" (Exodus 15:2).

"The LORD is their strength, and He is the saving refuge of His anointed" (Psalm 28:8).

"My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Psalm 73:26).

"Blessed is the man whose strength is in You" (Psalm 84:5).

Now, only He Who possesses these three natural qualities—omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience—can be God. A limited God is a contradiction, an absurdity. Paganism has a hierarchy of "gods" of varying degrees of power. But they who have received God's revelation of Himself know that the term, "God," by the very nature of the concept, can be applied truly only to an unlimited, infinite Being, and that only God in His three Persons possesses these qualities. *Only God can be God.*

By His spoken word, God created billions of stars and set them in motion in their orbits. He spoke, and the foundations of the earth were laid. He set the boundaries of

the seas and the limits of the oceans. He pushed up the mountain ranges and scooped out the valleys. He then took the finest of the clay and shaped it. He released His breath, and man became a living soul, created in the image of God!

God keeps the universe in perfect synchronization. He guides the courses of the heavens, directing the gigantic spheres of galaxies both known and as yet undiscovered by man! He watches over the forces and movements that cause galaxies to collide and their elements to reassemble into newly formed astral objects.

And God, Who made and directs it all by the word of His power, stands ready now to bring the power of His word—the power that moves the heavens—into your life to meet your need, fulfill His promises, save your soul, heal your body, lift you up, set you free, and make you more than a conqueror through Jesus Christ!

Yes, "The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." Trust Him. Believe His word. He cannot fail!

The Name Of God

"What's in a name?" asks the old saying. A rose by any other name smells just as sweet. So it is with names that only identify. But names that have qualitative content and significance in themselves are a different matter.

This is especially true with God. Both in itself and in all of its various forms and expressions, God's name stands for the reality of Himself—His Person, position, nature, character, purposes, and works.

These forms and expressions of God's name in Scripture do not indicate that the covenant people worshiped different "gods" at different periods of their history. Neither do they signify that their concept of God "evolved." True, revelation in Scripture is progressive; but it is progress in divine revelation, not merely the development of human religious understanding. It is progress *in* truth, not *into* truth. That is, as God revealed Himself, what was revealed was (and still is) all truth, but it was not all of the truth. More remained to be revealed. The progress was from truth to truth. Nothing else is true revelation.

The variety of forms and expressions of the name of God demonstrates the multiplicity and scope of the qualities and actions of the one true and living God.

In the Old Testament God is seen more as Judge than as Father. In the New Testament the reverse is true. This does not mean that God has changed. He cannot change. Neither does it mean that the God of the Old Testament is different from the God of the New Testament. It is a matter of emphasis and relationships. God is both Judge and Father throughout the Bible.

God's name expresses His nature and works. It reveals His qualities and character.

In the Hebrew language of the Old Testament, the name of God takes three basic forms: *El*, *Yahweh*, and *Adonai*. *El* signifies power and authority. It often takes the plural form, *Elohim*. Frequently it joins another word, as in *El-Shaddai* (God Almighty).

"The LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, 'I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be blameless'" (Genesis 17:1 NASB. Also 35:1-1).

"The Mighty One, God, the LORD, has spoken, and summoned the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting" (Psalm 50:1 NASB).

In Revelation 4:8 the four living creatures "do not rest day or night, saying, 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come.'"

When God spoke to Hagar in the wilderness, she called Him *El-Roi*, "God is seeing"

(see Genesis 16:7-14).

Adonai means "Lord," and "Master." It emphasizes God's authority and our corresponding responsibility to Him. In this authority-responsibility relationship we experience care and intimacy.

Yahweh is derived from the sacred tetragram, YHWH. The ancient Hebrew scribes held this Name in such high reverence that they avoided pronouncing it, saying *Adonai* instead. As a result, the original pronunciation has been lost. The scribes attached the vowel points of *Adonai* to the four consonants. This was not done to indicate a new pronunciation of the sacred Name, but to provide a visual reminder when reading the Name, to see YHWH but say *Adonai*. This accounts for the variations in spelling. One could just as correctly say "Yahvah" as "Yahweh." "Jehovah" is the usual form in the King James Version of the Bible and in some modern versions. It is usually translated "LORD" (capital letters).

The "Y" (*yod*) is commonly translated as a "J" (*i.e.*, Jacob, Joseph, Joshua, Jeremiah, Joel). We call *Yeshua* Jesus. So we may also call *Yahweh* Jehovah.

In the third chapter of Exodus we read that God called Moses to bring Israel out of Egypt. Moses prayed, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I shall say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, 'What is His name?' What shall I say to them?" (verse 13 NASB). God's answer to Moses is a profound self-revelation:

"And God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM'; and He said, 'Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, I AM has sent me to you.' And God, furthermore, said to Moses, 'Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations'" (verses 14, 15 NASB).

The Name, Jehovah (*Yahweh*), comes from the same verb, being the third person, singular of "I AM." God says "I AM." We respond, "HE IS." This means that God is Who He is in Himself, and He is who and what He chooses to be in relationship to His creation, particularly to us. God exists and is active here and now in intimate involvement with His covenant people however He chooses to be and however we need Him to be.

"And God spake unto Moses, and said unto him, I am the LORD; and I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them" (Exodus 6:2, 3 KJV).

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were aware that "Jehovah" is God's name, but they did not know the full covenant relationship embodied in His Name.

"I am the LORD; that is my name, and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images" (Isaiah 42:8).

God's covenant name signifies who He is in specific, practical ways to all who are in covenant relationship with Him. He is who He chooses to be and what we need Him to be in every life situation. The gracious provisions of God toward us expressed in the hyphenated forms of His name are part of His immutable nature. That is, the elements of God's name are unchanging qualities of His very nature. In the familiar words of the King James Version, God is:

Jehovah-jireh, the God who sees (provides), the Providing God. "And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh; as it is said to this day, In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen [provided] (Genesis 22:14).

Jehovah-nissi, the Lord our Banner. When God gave Israel victory over Amalek, "Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovah-nissi" (Exodus 17:15).

Jehovah-shalom, the Lord our peace. When God called Gideon to deliver Israel from oppression, "Gideon built an altar there unto the LORD, and called it Jehovah-shalom" (Judges 6:24).

Jehovah-sabaoth, the Lord of Hosts. "Our Redeemer, the LORD of hosts is his name, the Holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 47:4). "The Great, the Mighty God, the LORD of hosts, is his name" (Jeremiah 32:18).

Jehovah-rohi, the Lord my Shepherd. "The LORD is my shepherd" (Psalm 23:1). This is a beautiful revelation of God's personal relationship to us. He lovingly, carefully, tenderly watches over us. He leads us, feeds us, protects us, and brings His own into His house there to dwell forever.

Jehovah-m'qadesh, the Lord who sanctifies. "And you shall keep my statutes, and do them; I am the LORD which sanctify you" (Leviticus 20:8).

Jehovah-shammah, the Lord who is present. "The name of the city from that day shall be, The LORD is there" (Ezekiel 48:35).

Jehovah-rapha, the Lord who heals. "I am the LORD who heals you" (Exodus 15:26). He is the healing God. It is His very nature to heal. No dispensational considerations can change that fact because they cannot change Him. He is immutable.

Jehovah-tsidkenu, the Lord our Righteousness. "...and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Jeremiah 23:6. See also Jeremiah 33:16). This is a direct reference to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus means "Jehovah our Savior." "And she shall bring forth a son, and you shall call his name JESUS, for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

Jesus Christ is the Second Person in the Holy Trinity. All that Jehovah is dwells in Jesus Christ, and is mediated to us through Him. "In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him" (Colossians 2:9, 10). "Nor is there

salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men, by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Who is Jehovah? He is "my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold" (Psalm 18:2). "The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" (Psalm 27:1). "I will say of the LORD, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God; in him I will trust'" (Psalm 91:2). "But the LORD has been my defense, and my God the rock of my refuge" (Psalm 94:22). "The LORD is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation" (Psalm 118:14).

Jehovah is our everything. HE IS! Whatever you need Him to be, that is who and what He is—right now. So, come to Him. Trust Him. Open up by faith to the fullness of who He is and what He wants to be in your life. "Trust ye in the LORD forever, for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength" (Isaiah 26:4 KJV). In the Hebrew, "strength" is "rock"—everlasting, eternal Rock, the Rock of Ages!

He is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome" (Deuteronomy 10:17).

He is the eternal God. "The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deuteronomy 33:27).

He is the Most High. "I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High" (Psalm 9:2). "The LORD thundered from heaven, and the Most High uttered His voice" (2 Samuel 22:14; also Psalm 18:13). "That men may know that You, whose name alone is the LORD [JEHOVAH, KJV], are the Most High over all the earth" (Psalm 83:18). "The Most High rules in the kingdom of men" (Daniel 4:17).

He is the Holy One. "To You will I sing with the harp, O Holy One of Israel" (Psalm 71:22). "For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior" (Isaiah 43:3). He is "the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy" (Isaiah 57:15).

His name is Jealous. "For you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God" (Exodus 34:14). Believers in Christ are God's covenant people, His bride. His heart belongs to us and our hearts belong to Him. Because He loves us, He will tolerate no unfaithfulness, no flirting with sin and the world. Let us be true to Him, because He is a jealous God. What a joy it is to know that He loves us that much.

He is the Judge. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:25).

He is the living God. "Hereby you shall know that the living God is among you" (Joshua 3:10). "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God" (Psalm 42:2. See also Psalm 84:2). "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31). David said, "who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the

living God?" (1 Samuel 17:26).

God honors His name, and we are required to do the same. God honors the covenant commitments of His name. He is faithful to us for His name's sake. "For the LORD will not forsake His people, for His great name's sake" (1 Samuel 12:22). "He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake" (Psalm 23:3). "For Your name's sake, O LORD, pardon my iniquity" (Psalm 25:11).

"For Your name's sake, lead me and guide me" (Psalm 31:3). "Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Your name" (Psalm 79:9). "Nevertheless He saved them for His name's sake, that He might make His mighty power known" (Psalm 106:8). See also Isaiah 48:9-11 and 63:12-14.

Remember that when we are referring to God, the name is the reality. Psalm 111:9 says that His name is holy and reverend (awesome). God solemnly commanded, "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain" (Exodus 20:7 and Deuteronomy 5:11). In Leviticus 18:21 He warned, "nor shall you profane the name of your God; I am the LORD." See also Leviticus 19:12.

In Leviticus 24:10-16 we read the sobering account of what happened to a man in Israel who blasphemed "The Name." It cost him his life and his soul.

The cursing, swearing and blasphemy that swirls around us and reaches the ears of God as an abusive roar is nothing short of sheer madness! What insane folly! Thoughtlessly, recklessly, people play the fool before the Majesty in the heavens! How the angels must look on with horror. See that madman flippantly calling on God to damn everything in sight? He seems totally oblivious to the dreadful frown of the One Who sees his every thought and hears his every word. He cares not about the condemnation that is piling up against him daily in the court of Heaven for the insult and injury that he continually heaps upon the Lord God JEHOVAH!

If we have a proper awareness of the holiness of God and a true regard for the honor of His name, profanity should always shock and outrage us.

We who name the name of Christ must be so very careful how we speak His name. Let us never use "God," "Lord," or any other form of the holy Name as a by-word or a mere exclamation. Let the profanities that pour like sewage from profane hearts and mouths never occupy our sanctified tongues! Even slang words—"minced oaths"—seem totally out of place in His holy presence.

Also, our *actions* can either honor or dishonor His name. In 1 Timothy 6:1 we read: "Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be not blasphemed."

As professed Christians, we carry the honor of God's name with us everywhere. May God's honor be safe with us at all times.

The highest and most noble motive in intercessory prayer is concern for the glory of God and the honor of His name. When Israel was defeated at Ai because of sin in the camp, Joshua interceded on their behalf: "For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear of it, and surround us, and cut off our name from the earth. Then what will You do for Your great name?" (Joshua 7:9).

King Solomon's dedicatory prayer included this petition: "Hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and do according to all for which the stranger calls to You, that all peoples of the earth may know Your name, and fear You, as do Your people Israel..." (1 Kings 8:43).

Jesus expressed it simply and perfectly when He prayed, "Father, glorify Your name" (John 12:28). And the Father's answer should bring joy and anticipation to everyone who truly loves God: "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again."

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name" (Matthew 6:9). If that is the expression of a pure heart, it will also be the rule of a pure life.

We can trust God's name. It is our defense and our victory. When David came against Goliath with only a sling and five stones, he was relying totally on the name of the Lord. Remember, David was putting his life on the line. The name of the Lord was more than just a religious term to David. It embodied the very reality of God's presence and power in his life. That is why he could say to the Philistine with settled confidence, "You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied" (1 Samuel 17:45).

This personal, experiential knowledge of God is expressed in the psalms. "May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble; may the name of the God of Jacob defend you; ... In the name of our God we will set up our banners ... Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the LORD our God" (Psalm 20:1, 5, 7). "For our heart shall rejoice in Him, because we have trusted in His holy name" (Psalm 33:21). "Through Your name we will trample those who rise up against us" (Psalm 44:5). "Save me, O God, by Your name" (Psalm 54:1). "I will wait on Your name, for it is good" (Psalm 52:9). "Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth" (Psalm 124:8). "Those who know Your name will put their trust in You; for You, LORD, have not forsaken those who seek You" (Psalm 9:10).

When the Ethiopians came against Asa, king of Judah, "Asa cried out to the LORD his God, and said, 'LORD, it is nothing for You to help, whether with many, or with them who have no power; help us, O LORD our God, for we rest on You, and in Your name we go against this multitude'" (2 Chronicles 14:11). And so God gave Judah a great victory. God always honors His name, and He will always honor faith in His name. So, if we truly *know* His name, our hearts and minds can be at ease because our trust rests solidly in Him.

Again we read the testimony of the psalms: "Your wondrous works declare that Your name is near" (Psalm 75:1). "You have magnified Your word above all Your name" (Psalm 138:2).

When we sign a contract or an agreement, we put our name on the bottom line. In this way we legally establish everything above our name, and pledge ourselves to it. Just so, God has given us His written word and has put His name to it. The word of the Lord is guaranteed by the name of the Lord. It is backed up by the full reality of all that He is. For this reason we can safely put our complete trust in His word.

Speaking of the person who dwells in the secret place of the most High, Psalm 91:14 says, "Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore will I deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name." God's name is a safe refuge, for it represents His saving and keeping power. Proverbs 18:10 assures us, "The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe."

There is salvation in His name. Quoting the prophet Joel, Peter declared on the day of Pentecost, "...whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21). The same promise is repeated in Romans 10:13.

In His high-priestly prayer for us, recorded in John chapter seventeen, our Lord prayed, "Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one, as We are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name" (John 17:11, 12).

The name of the Lord is the ground of our confidence. By putting our trust in God through Jesus Christ, we lock in by faith to all that God is and all that He can do. Our commitment of faith is backed up by all the resources of Heaven. The name of the Lord keeps us, upholds us, and will see us through. We can trust Him. His name will not fail us, because His name embodies and represents all that He is. And God cannot and will not fail.

We are to proclaim the name of the Lord. Moses said, "I proclaim the name of the LORD" (Deuteronomy 32:3). The psalmist said, "I will make Your name to be remembered in all generations" (Psalm 45:17). Jesus said, "I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it" (John 17:26). He commanded us to baptize new disciples "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). There is power in the proclamation of His name in the act of water baptism. It declares that we have eternal life because we know the Father and the Son (John 17:3).

Glorify His name. "Give unto the LORD the glory due to His name" (Psalm 29:2). "Blessed be His glorious name forever! And let the whole earth be filled with His glory" (Psalm 72:19). "All nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord, and shall glorify Your name" (Psalm 86:9). "I will glorify Your name forevermore" (verse 12). "Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but to Your name give glory" (Psalm 115:1). "Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name?" (Revelation 15:4).

Exalt His name. "Blessed be Your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise" (Nehemiah 9:5). "Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His name together" (Psalm 34:3).

Fear His name in loving reverence. "You have given me the heritage of those who fear Your name" (Psalm 61:5). "But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings" (Malachi 4:2).

Love His name. "Let those also who love Your name be joyful in You" (Psalm 5:11).

Remember His name. "I remember Your name in the night, O LORD, and I keep Your law" (Psalm 119:55).

Give thanks to His name. "Surely the righteous shall give thanks to Your name" (Psalm 140:13).

Bless His name. "Sing to the LORD; bless His name" (Psalm 96:2). "Enter into His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him and bless His name" (Psalm 100:4). "Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me bless His holy name" (Psalm 103:1). "I will extol You, my God, O King; and I will bless Your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your name forever and ever" (Psalm 145:1, 2).

Praise His name. "According to Your name, O God, so is Your praise to the ends of the earth" (Psalm 48:10). "Let the poor and needy praise Your name" (Psalm 74:21). See also Psalm 44:8; 54:6; 99:2, 3; 113:1-3; 135:1-3; 148:13; 149:3.

Sing praises to His name. "I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High" (Psalm 9:2). "Make a joyful shout to God, all the earth! Sing out the honor of His name; make His praise glorious" (Psalm 66:1, 2). See also Psalm 7:17; 18:49; 61:8; 68:4; 69:30; 92:1.

First Chronicles chapter sixteen contains a psalm that David gave on the occasion of the transfer of the Ark of the Covenant to the place that he had prepared for it. This psalm includes a four-fold praise to the name of the Lord. "Oh, give thanks to the LORD! Call upon His name; make known His deeds among the peoples" (verse 8). "Glory in His holy name" (verse 10). "Give to the LORD the glory due His name" (verse 29). "Save us, O God of our salvation; gather us together, and deliver us from the Gentiles, to give thanks to Your holy name, to triumph in Your praise" (verse 35).

Psalm 63:3 and 4 reads, "Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise You. Thus I will bless You while I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name." Let us do so. It is Biblical.

The name of the Lord is as lovely perfume to those who know and love Him. "Your name is as ointment poured forth" (Song Of Solomon 1:3).

"The desire of our soul is for Your name and for the remembrance of You" (Isaiah 26:8). "O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth!" (Psalm 8:1 and 9).

The name of the Lord shall endure forever. Earthly names rise and then fade, but the name of the Lord shall shine forever. There shall be no diminishing of its glory. "Your name, O LORD, endures forever, Your fame, O LORD, throughout all generations (Psalm 135:13).

Psalm seventy-two is a prophecy of the kingdom of Christ. Verse seventeen says, "His name shall endure forever; His name shall continue as long as the sun."

"For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; in every place incense shall be offered to My name, and a pure offering; for My name shall be great among the nations,' says the LORD of hosts" (Malachi 1:11).

In this gospel age God is calling out a people for His name (Acts 15:14). He is calling us out of sin, out of darkness, out of bondage, out of the lusts of this present world-system. He is calling us to Himself, to eternal life, to walk with Him in the light. He is calling us into a personal relationship with Himself through Jesus Christ, a relationship of love and holiness. He is calling us to complete and eternal compatibility with Himself in love. He is calling us to victory, to be overcomers by His grace over the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Jesus declared from heaven, "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name" (Revelation 3:12).

In Revelation 14:1 we view the triumphant scene. There on the mount Zion stands the victorious Lamb, "and with Him a hundred and forty four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads." What a prize! What a high calling! What a glorious hope!

How exalted is the name of God! His name is so great and all-encompassing that many nominatives are required to embrace it. O Father, hallowed be Your Name!

Let us call upon His name with all our heart and with all our soul. Call upon Him in all sincerity and truth. Call upon Him in faith, for "whoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

The psalmist expressed it in such beautiful simplicity: "What shall I render to the LORD for all His benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD" (Psalm 116:12, 13).

Symbols Of God's Person And Presence

As was noted earlier, the moment we say or imply that God is *like* something, distortion sets in. Because God is not *like* anything, the attempt to liken Him to something tends to limit Him in our thinking to the limitations of the thing we use as a comparison.

Nevertheless, the Bible does use symbols in referring to God, their built-in limitations and dangers notwithstanding, because they are useful up to a point and their potential for meaning is greater than their potential for misunderstanding. It should be emphasized, however, that such references are specific and are made within the total body of Biblical teaching about God. If they are understood within the full context of the Scriptures, they will be understood correctly.

The Scriptures employ several symbols to express the Person and works of God. These symbols in themselves are not part of the Divine essence. That is, they are not what God *is*. They are used because something about each symbol conveys to our understanding something about God.

Although God is a Spirit-being, the Bible at times speaks of Him in human, physical terms. He is spoken of as having hands, arms, eyes, ears, a face, and so forth. These references to God in human, physical terms are called *anthropomorphisms*. They do not by any means teach that God has physical arms, hands, and so forth, except as Jesus Christ now possesses a glorified body. This form of speech is employed in the Bible only to make the character and works of God more vivid and meaningful to us by relating them to human features and actions that express themselves in and through a physical body. God is a Person functioning without a physical body. We are persons functioning in and through physical bodies. The use of anthropomorphisms makes His Personhood more understandable to us by comparing it with ours.

It should be noted at this point that God is sexless. He is a Spirit-being, and spirit-beings are sexless. He is our heavenly Father, and the masculine pronoun is used in reference to Him throughout the Bible. But masculinity does not necessarily imply sexuality. Masculinity in this sense is defined as that which acts upon, as distinct from that which is acted upon. Masculinity initiates action; femininity receives the action, processes it, and produces the result. This is true both in nature and in our spiritual relationship with God. So we use such terms as Heavenly Father, and Mother Earth. Christ is the Bridegroom; believers are the Bride.

A number of years ago I heard a minister relate a personal experience on this very point. It seems that he had been around a group of Christians who were constantly receiving what they believed to be "divine guidance" in the details of living (what suit to wear, what to cook for dinner, etc.). At first it all sounded very spiritual, and he began to wonder why he was not close enough to God to receive such up-to-the-minute

directions in his own life. And so he went to prayer and sought the Lord earnestly about it. He asked God why He did not guide him in such daily matters. The answer came clearly to his mind, "Because I am your *Father*, not your *mother*!"

Sometimes the Biblical symbol is taken from nature or the forces of nature. At other times the reference is to an inanimate object, or something functional. We have already noted this in some of the names of God (e.g., Rock, Fortress, Shield). We see, then, that the names of God themselves embody much symbolism. In this chapter, however, we are focusing on specific objects and how they are useful in teaching us about God.

Fire

Fire signifies judgment, purification, stimulation, illumination. In Exodus 3:2 through 4:17 God appeared to Moses in a burning bush. Also, on the Day of Pentecost tongues of fire accompanied the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:3). When associated with the Holy Spirit (the Third Person of the Holy Trinity), fire indicates illumination, conviction, purification, and stimulation. Fire also speaks of judgment. "For our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29).

Wings

Wings symbolize speedy deliverance and protection. God said to Israel, "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself" (Exodus 19:4).

Boaz said to Ruth, "The LORD repay your work, and a full reward be given you of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings you are come for refuge" (Ruth 2:12).

In Psalm 17:8 the psalmist prayed, "Hide me under the shadow of Your wings." And in Psalm 36:7 the psalmist worships God in these words: "How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings." Also, Psalm 91:4 promises, "He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge."

Of course, these Bible verses do not teach that God has physical wings (much less feathers!). They convey the truth of the overshadowing protection of God. They are metaphors intended to help us understand more fully God's loving care for His people.

Voice

"The LORD will cause His glorious voice to be heard" (Isaiah 30:30). The prophet Ezekiel records: "And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east. His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory" (Ezekiel 43:2).

Voice signifies personality and communication. Only persons truly speak. God is not a quality or an idea. He speaks. He is a Person. The fact that God communicates

implies that He is immediately concerned with human affairs, and that He designs that His will be known and obeyed. Adam and Eve heard the voice of the LORD God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day (Genesis 3:8). On Mount Sinai "Moses spoke, and God answered him by a voice" (Exodus 19:19).

Later, Moses said to Israel, "Did any people ever hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and live?" (Deuteronomy 4:33). "Out of heaven He let you to hear His voice, that He might instruct you; and on earth He showed you His great fire, and you heard His words out of the midst of the fire" (verse 36).

God communicated with Elijah in "a still small voice" (1 Kings 19:12).

The ancients compared the authority of God's voice to the booming of the thunder. Elihu said, "He thunders with His majestic voice ... God thunders marvelously with His voice" (Job 37:4, 5). Later, God Himself asked Job, "Have you an arm like God? Or can you thunder with a voice like His?" (Job 40:9). It was in this context that the psalmist declared, "The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty. The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars, the LORD splinters the cedars of Lebanon" (Psalm 29:4, 5).

On the mountain when Jesus was transfigured before some of His disciples, "a voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!'" (Matthew 17:5). Peter, an eye-witnesses of this glorious event, wrote many years later, "For He received from God the Father honor and glory, when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased'" (2 Peter 1:17).

When Jesus prayed to the Father, asking that the Father's name be glorified, the voice of God answered, "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again" (John 12:28).

In Hebrews 12:25-and 26 we are warned, "See that you do not refuse not Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape, if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth."

The voice of God is the voice of authority, of rebuke, and of warning. It is also the voice of comfort and of promise.

Eyes and ears

The meaning of these symbols is obvious. God sees and God hears. He is all-wise and all-knowing. Nothing escapes His attention. He is not a casual observer but knows all things thoroughly and purposefully. And it should be emphasized that God does not know by process. He knows in Himself.

"For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly

support those whose heart is completely His" (2 Chronicles 16:9 NASB).

"The LORD is in His holy temple; the LORD's throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids test the children of men" (Psalm 11:4).

"The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry. The face of the LORD is against those who do evil" (Psalm 34:15, 16. Peter quotes this passage in 1 Peter 3:12).

"The eyes of the LORD are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good" (Proverbs 15:3).

"Your eyes are open to all the ways of the sons of men" (Jeremiah 32:19).

"In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried to my God. He did hear my voice from His temple, and my cry entered into His ears" (2 Samuel 22:7).

"Indeed, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth [Hosts]" (James 5:4).

Arm

The arm of the Lord is an oft-used metaphor that represents the *extension* of God's power and protection. God assured Israel, "I will redeem you with an outstretched arm" (Exodus 6:6).

Isaiah 63:12 reports that God led His people "by the right hand of Moses, with His glorious arm." Think of the guiding hand of Moses as an "extension" of God's right arm! This can be said of all who faithfully shepherd God's sheep.

Referring to ancient Israel's deliverance, the apostle Paul said, "The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He brought them out of it" (Acts 13:17). See also Deuteronomy 5:15.

God asked Job, "Have you an arm like God?" (Job 40:9). In Psalm 89:13 the psalmist said to God, "You have a mighty arm; strong is Your hand, and high is Your right hand." And Psalm 98:1 urges, "Oh, sing to the LORD a new song! for He has done marvelous things; His right hand, and His holy arm, have gained Him the victory."

In Isaiah 51:5 God declares, "My arms will judge the peoples; the coastlands will wait for Me, and for My arm they will wait expectantly" (NASB). Here "arms" signify God's ability both to judge and to uphold.

In a prophetic reference to God's saving power in Jesus Christ, Isaiah 53:1 says, "To whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?"

God's arms also signify His integrity. Isaiah 62:8 says, "The LORD has sworn by his right hand and by the arm of his strength."

The "arm" of the Lord represents His strength, assistance, security, the removal of obstacles, and His firm but gentle guidance. It signifies His extended power and ready assistance—real, actual, and not just potential. It is the assurance of His present provision. God's power extends to our need right where we are, no matter where that might be. We do not stand alone and defenseless. The arm of the Lord—His present, all-powerful, committed assistance—is constantly undergirding and sustaining all who trust Him. "The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deuteronomy 33:27).

Hand

The arm of the Lord symbolizes the *extension* of His power; the hand of the Lord symbolizes the *application* of that power. It is the power of God working in behalf of human need.

In Isaiah 48:13 God affirms that His power in creating the universe was direct, not indirect: "Indeed My hand has laid the foundation of the earth, and My right hand has stretched out the heavens." The psalmist confessed, "Your hands have made me and fashioned me" (Psalm 119:73).

The hand of the Lord signifies God's direct action in judgment, chastisement, and conviction for sin. God said, "I will stretch out My hand, and strike Egypt..." (Exodus 3:20 NASB). "And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the sons of Israel from their midst" (Exodus 7:5 NASB).

Referring to Israel's forty-year wandering in the wilderness, Deuteronomy 2:15 says, "For indeed the hand of the LORD was against them." How prone we are to blame God when things go against us, when instead we should rest in God's love, wisdom and providential care to make all things work together for our good (Romans 8:28).

In her discouragement Naomi complained, "the hand of the LORD has gone out against me" (Ruth 1:13).

"The hand of the LORD was heavy on the people of Ashdod, and he ravaged them" (1 Samuel 5:6). Both for His honor and for the good of these Philistines, the God of Israel gave them a painful lesson.

Job begged his friends, "Have pity on me, have pity on me, O you my friends, for the hand of God has struck me" (Job 19:21).

Conviction of sin is likened to the pressure of the hand of God upon the offender. King David remembered vividly how he experienced this when he attempted to keep quiet about his sin with Bathsheba. "When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted

away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me" (Psalm 32:3, 4 NASB). "Thy hand has pressed down on me" (Psalm 38:2 NASB). "Because of the opposition of Thy hand, I am perishing" (Psalm 39:10 NASB).

When Elymas the sorcerer interfered as Paul was preaching the gospel to Sergius Paulus, the Roman official, the apostle rebuked him with these startling words: "And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time" (Acts 13:11).

Certainly, "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31).

God holds our very breath in His hands. Part of God's indictment against Belshazzar, the Babylonian ruler, reads as follows: "And the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified" (Daniel 5:23).

"Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time" (1 Peter 5:6).

God's hand is also a hand of guidance. Concerning Ezra the scribe, Ezra 7:9 reports, "on the first day of the fifth month came he to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him." (See also Ezra 8:18 and Nehemiah 2:18).

God's "hand" is also a hand of encouragement. "The hand of God was on Judah to give them singleness of heart to do the commandment of the king and the leaders, at the word of the LORD" (2 Chronicles 30:12).

It is also a hand of blessing. God provides for all living creatures. "You open Your hand; they are filled with good" (Psalm 104:28). "You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing" (Psalm 145:16).

It is a hand of protection. In Isaiah 51:16 God assures His people, "I have covered you in the shadow of My hand."

His is a hand of salvation. "Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy that it cannot hear" (Isaiah 59:1).

God "stretches out His hand" to heal. During a time of opposition, the early disciples prayed, "Lord, look at their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus" (Acts 4:29, 30).

The "hand" of God is a hand of assistance. The psalmist testified, "Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me; You will stretch out Your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and Your right hand will save me" (Psalm 138:7).

As the early Christians went out preaching the gospel, "the hand of the Lord was

with them; and a great number believed and turned to the Lord" (Acts 11:21).

When the young prophet Jeremiah expressed his self-doubts at God's call, God commanded him not to fear and not to say that he was only a youth. God assured him that He would be with him and protect him. Jeremiah records: "Then the LORD put forth his hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me, Behold, I have put My words in your mouth" (Jeremiah 1:9).

When John the Baptist was but a child, "the hand of the Lord was with him" (Luke 1:66).

The hand of God sustains those who put their trust in Him. In Psalm 37:24 we have this reassuring promise: "Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down, for the LORD upholds him with His hand."

A promise that believers have always found to be especially comforting is found in Isaiah 41:10. "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.").

Jesus assures His sheep, "And I give to them eternal life and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them Me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand" (John 10:28, 29). Obedient sheep remain securely in the hand of the Shepherd. Blessed assurance!

Jesus Christ holds the seven stars (His ministers) in His right hand (Revelation 1:16; 2:1).

On Calvary those very hands in human flesh were nailed to a cross, and forever they will bear the marks of that sacrifice of love. Thus our gracious God says to us, "I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands" (Isaiah 49:16). By faith we are securely protected in those hands.

The Greatness Of God

How big is God? How great is He? No one has the full answer to these questions. No one can. We cannot possibly think of God bigger or greater than He really is. We may think our biggest thoughts about God, think about His greatness to the limits of our minds. The reality is still bigger and greater. God is infinite, limitless.

The human mind is not capable of comprehending fully the greatness and magnitude of God. Even Moses, who had seen His glory in some very spectacular ways, confessed that what he had experienced was only the beginning: "O Lord GOD, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness, and Your mighty hand" (Deuteronomy 3:24).

Overwhelmed with the greatness of God, the prophet Jeremiah prayed: "Ah, Lord GOD,! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for You. You show lovingkindness to thousands, and repay the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them—the Great, the Mighty God, whose name is the LORD of hosts. You are great in counsel and mighty in work, for your eyes are open to all the ways of the sons of men, to give everyone according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings" (Jeremiah 32:17-19).

God Is Unsearchable

The Bible pictures God as dwelling in "the thick darkness." In Exodus 20:21 we read, "So the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was."

Many years later King Solomon said, "The LORD said that he would dwell in the thick darkness" (1 Kings 8:12 KJV). And in Psalm 18:11 it is written, "He made darkness his secret place; his canopy around Him were dark waters and thick clouds of the skies."

We have also the testimony of Psalm 97:1, 2 — "The LORD reigns; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad. Clouds and darkness surround Him; righteousness and judgment are the foundation of His throne."

The motif of darkness in these Bible passages is not intended to convey anything sinister or negative about God. Rather, it represents the inscrutability of God. The human mind in itself cannot penetrate into the mysteries of the person and nature of God. All is darkness beyond what God has revealed to the human intellect.

At the same time, God dwells in the light that no one can approach (1 Timothy 6:16). How can God dwell in the thick darkness and in the unapproachable light at the same time? The answer is this: everything God has chosen to reveal to us about Himself is

light to us. Everything beyond that is now darkness to us. That is where God dwells. To us it is darkness; to God it is perfect and full light, the light we cannot approach now.

Job said, "But as for me, I would seek God, and to God would I commit my cause—who does great things and unsearchable, marvelous things without number" (Job 5:8, 9). He expressed the same idea in chapter 9:1-10.

Later, Elihu added, "Behold, God is great, and we do not know Him; nor can the number of his years be discovered" (Job 36:26). Still later in his speech to Job, Elihu said, "As for the Almighty, we cannot find him" (Job 37:23). If we begin from ourselves and our own abilities, we can never find God. God must take the initiative and reveal Himself to us. That is what God did, and that is how and why we know Him.

Job's three friends said some things about God that did not apply in Job's case and therefore misrepresented God's character and providential workings. But Zophar did ask the right question when he said, "Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty?" (Job 11:7).

The psalmist admitted to God, "Your way was in the sea, Your path in the great waters, and Your footsteps were not known" (Psalm 77:19).

David was inspired to sing, "Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable" (Psalm 145:3). Read also his words in Psalm 139:1-6, especially verse six: "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it."

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

He expresses the same truth in 11:5 — "As you do not know what is the way of the wind, or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child, so you know not the works of God who makes all things."

God Himself puts it this way in Isaiah 55:8, 9 — "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."

The unsearchableness of God is reaffirmed in the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 2:16 the apostle Paul asks, "For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct Him?" (quoting Isaiah 40:13). And in Romans 11:33-36 he exclaims,

"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! 'For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor? Or who has first given to Him, and it shall be repaid to him?' [Job 41:11]. For of Him and through Him and to Him are

all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen." (See also Isaiah 40:12-31).

Yes, God is unsearchable. The human mind, starting from itself and using only its own abilities, is unable to achieve a clear comprehension of the specifics of the person and nature of God. Every effort to do so has resulted in a caricature of God. True, human reason perceives the fact of God's deity and power from the reality and design of nature. This perception imposes moral obligation, and demands humility of us. But the humility thus demanded by reason implies the honest confession that the Being who created such a universe as we know it to be is a Person of infinite intelligence and power, whose qualities are infinite and therefore cannot be perceived in their fullness by the finite mind. What we are to know correctly about God must be revealed by Him. Still, His self-revelation is given to finite minds and, though true and correct, it extends no farther than the capacities of finite minds, even those illuminated by the Holy Spirit. We know God. He has revealed Himself to us. That is a true and correct revelation. It is also a full revelation so far as our needs are concerned. Yet there remains a reality in God that is far beyond us, and in that realization we bow in wonder and adoration!

God Is Sovereign

Simply put, God's sovereignty means that He does not have to ask anyone about what He does, nor does He have to give account to anyone for what He does. He wills. He purposes. He decrees. He acts. In doing so He does not have to ask anyone's permission. Although He has sufficiently good and wise reasons for all that He does or permits to be done, He is under no obligation to explain His actions to anyone. To place Himself under such an obligation would be totally wrong for Him. It would be a denial of Himself.

But, although God is sovereign, He is not arbitrary. He does not act capriciously or despotically. He is infinitely wise and perfectly benevolent. In the exercise of His sovereignty He always acts in accordance with His infinite wisdom and goodness.

God is love (1 John 4:8). The fact that God is perfect in love and wisdom is grounds for full confidence in Him. Moreover, it demands such confidence, and the withholding of such confidence is sin. It is a denial of God's character, hence of God Himself. Knowing that God is good and wise, we can trust Him to exercise His sovereignty in full harmony with all of His natural and moral qualities. How else should we do? To whom would God give account? Who is wiser and more just than He? Who is able to sit in judgment on the purposes and actions of God? The idea is preposterous. God gives account only to His own intelligence, and that is forever perfect and complete.

Yet, God does condescend to commend His purposes and actions to our intelligence; and whenever we perceive them in their true light, we find them to be most reasonable and wise.

Knowing that God is perfect in love and wisdom, our only reasonable course is to trust Him, even when we do not see the wisdom or justice of His ways.

God is in full and absolute authority. His word says so. He is "God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth" (Genesis 14:19). "The LORD shall reign forever and ever" (Exodus 15:18). "Now see that I, even I, am He, and there is no God besides Me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; nor is there any who can deliver from My hand" (Deuteronomy 32:39).

David confessed "Yours, O LORD, is the greatness, the power, and the glory, the victory and the majesty; for all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and You are exalted as head over all" (1 Chronicles 29:11).

Many years later king Jehoshaphat "stood in the congregation of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the LORD, before the new court, and said: O LORD God of our fathers, are you not God in heaven? and do You not rule over all the kingdoms of the nations? and in Your hand is there not power and might, so that no one is able to withstand You?" (2 Chronicles 20:5, 6).

Even in his affliction and adversity Job acknowledged the sovereignty of God: "Were He to snatch away, who could restrain Him? Who could say to Him, 'What art Thou doing?'" (Job 9:12 NASB).

"Why do you contend with Him? for He does not give account of any of His words" Elihu asks Job (Job 33:13).

The psalms also teach the sovereignty of God. "But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases" (Psalm 115:3). "Whatever the LORD pleases He does, in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and in all deep places" (Psalm 135:6).

Proverbs 21:30 says, "There is no wisdom or understanding or counsel against the LORD."

Through the prophet Isaiah God declares His sovereignty in His purposes and decrees: "The LORD of hosts has sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so it shall come to pass, and as I have purposed, so it shall stand" (Isaiah 14:24). "Even from eternity I am He; and there is none who can deliver out of My hand; I act and who can reverse it?" (Isaiah 43:13 NASB).

"I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure, calling a bird of prey from the east, the man who executes My counsel from a far country. Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it'" (Isaiah 46:9-11).

God told the prophet Jeremiah to go down to the potter's house for a revelation. There he observed how the potter used the clay at his own discretion. Jeremiah reports: "Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter? says the LORD. Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel!" (Jeremiah 18:5, 6).

Daniel was in real trouble. King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream, and none of the "wise men" could interpret it. So the king became angry and ordered all the wise men of Babylon to be destroyed. Of course, the decree included Daniel and his companions. So they prayed. There is nothing like a death sentence to get people down to business in prayer! God answered and revealed to Daniel the interpretation of the king's dream. In his prayer of thanksgiving Daniel acknowledged the sovereignty of God: "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, for wisdom and might are His, and He changes the times and the seasons; he removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to those who know understanding" (Daniel 2:20, 21).

Later, king Nebuchadnezzar learned the hard way that God is the true Sovereign in Heaven and on earth. And so he admitted: "He does according to his will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, 'What have You done?'" (Daniel 4:35).

In his epistle to the Romans, chapters nine through eleven, the apostle Paul addresses the issue of the justice of God in His dealings with mankind, in this case with Israel. Just as God asserted His divine sovereignty in His answer to Job (Job 38-41), so the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write: "You will say then to me, 'Why does He yet find fault? For who has resisted His will?' But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Shall the thing formed say to him who formed it, 'Why have you made me like this?' Does not the potter have power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel to honor and another to dishonor?" (Romans 9:19-21).

Now, what is the Bible teaching in this passage? That God is arbitrary, tyrannical, despotic? Not at all! It simply asserts the fact that God is sovereign. He knows people and He knows what to do with them. He invests His mercy wisely according to His perfect knowledge and foreknowledge of each one.

Remember that the character of God is perfect. All of His qualities harmonize. Each is in perfect accord with all the others. God is all-wise and perfect in goodness. So then, He can never act unwisely or unjustly in the exercise of His sovereignty. God's sovereignty is always perfectly consistent with His love, His wisdom, His justice, His holiness—His every virtue. The sovereign God always knows what He is doing. If we knew all that God knows, we would see the wisdom and the necessity of His purposes and actions. We would immediately glorify Him for taking the course that He does, marveling at the wisdom and lovingkindness of His ways.

Because God is sovereign, He is able to make "all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

The Bible teaches both divine sovereignty and human free will. We are free moral agents. We make decisions and those decisions have consequences. God commands us to make the right choices, and He holds us responsible for our choices. "I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and

your descendants may live" (Deuteronomy 30:19).

An over-emphasis on human free will can result in our losing sight of the sovereignty of God. We sin; we blunder; we make wrong choices. Other people, especially people very close to us, say and do things that harm us. Now, if all we see is human free will in action—if we see ourselves only as the product of our own choices and the victims of other people's actions—we can be devastated. As a result, we live in regret, discouragement, resentment, bitterness, even hopelessness.

But if you love God...! Ah, here is where the over-ruling sovereignty of God goes into action! And it operates according to His foreknowledge. Nothing takes God by surprise. From all eternity He has foreknown every choice we would make and every act of others that would affect us, every situation that would come into our lives, and He has already determined how He is going to make them all work together for good for those who love Him. Because He is sovereign, He uses whatever human choices He wills to use and over-rules whatever human choices He wills to over-rule in the process. He is never out of options. If you love God, He has so many ways to make everything work together for your good, *you cannot lose!*

"If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31). This should liberate our faith, lift us out of discouragement, and purify us from resentment and bitterness. "And who is he who will harm you, if you become followers of what is good?" (1 Peter 3:13).

Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery. In Egypt he was lied about and mistreated. It was one "raw deal" after another. But through it all God's sovereign purpose was being worked out. When he finally saw his brothers again, he said to them, "It was not you who sent me here, but God" (Genesis 45:8). You can't keep a person like that down!

God Is The Fullness Of Glory And Majesty

God is "the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; who only has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen" (1 Timothy 6:15, 16. See also Acts 1:7 and 1 Corinthians 15:24-28).

The Bible declares the glory and majesty of God, and describes some occasions when His glory and majesty were displayed. On Mount Sinai "The sight of the glory of the LORD was like consuming fire" (Exodus 24:17).

When Moses asked to see the full glory of God, God replied, "You cannot see My face, for no man shall see Me, and live" (Exodus 33:20). When the tabernacle was completed, "a cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle." (Exodus 40:34, 35).

Many years later king Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem. During the dedication celebration "the cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD" (1 Kings 8:10, 11. Also 2 Chronicles 5:14).

When Solomon finished his dedicatory prayer, "fire came down from heaven ... and the glory of the LORD filled the house [temple]. And the priests could not enter into the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD had filled the LORD's house. When all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the LORD upon the house, they bowed their faces to the ground on the pavement, and worshiped and praised the LORD" (2 Chronicles 7:1-3).

Under such a direct and awesome display of the glory and majesty of God, who would dare trifle? Who would be so reckless as to take His holy name in vain, so perverse as to utter profanity in the presence of Almighty God, the Majesty on High, the Dread Sovereign of the universe! What a contrast to the shocking carelessness of our present rash society—blind to the glory and majesty of God, spiritually dull and insensible, self-righteous and pseudo-sophisticated—that madly plays the fool before the Majesty in the Heavens! Nothing but the impact of the revelation of the awesome holiness of God will shock this secular generation to its senses and bring it to repentance in genuine sorrow for sin! May God grant us such an act of His mercy and grace.

Job 26:11 declares that even the "pillars of heaven tremble, and are astonished at his reproof." How then can mortal man be careless and indifferent to his sins?

"God thunders marvelously with his voice; He does great things which we cannot comprehend... With God is awesome majesty" (Job 37:5, 22).

The glory and majesty of God are extolled in the psalms. "O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth, You who set Your glory above the heavens!" (Psalm 8:1). "The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands" (Psalm 19:1 NASB). "Be exalted, O LORD, in Your own strength! We will sing and praise Your power" (Psalm 21:13). "Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let Your glory be above all the earth" (Psalm 57:5). "May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in His works" (Psalm 104:31). "The LORD is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens" (Psalm 113:4). "Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob" (Psalm 114:7).

One day the prophet Isaiah saw a vision of the Lord sitting on a throne, "lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple." Upon seeing this vision, the prophet cried out immediately, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts" (Isaiah 6:5 NASB).

Oh, that we who name the name of the Lord would receive such a purging, cleansing epiphany of the holiness and majesty of God! Without it there can be no true revival.

Ah, here is God's promise: "And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken it" (Isaiah 40:5 KJV). We rejoice in this glorious assurance.

God asks, "Do you not fear Me?" declares the LORD. "Do you not tremble in My presence?" (Jeremiah 5:22 NASB. See also Jeremiah 10:6-13; Amos 4:13; Nahum 1:3-6; Habakkuk 3:6-15; Romans 1:20; Revelation 4:11).

One night during the first true Christmas, a group of shepherds were in the field, keeping watch over their flocks. Suddenly, "the angel of the Lord came upon them and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid" (Luke 2:9 KJV).

On the road to Damascus, Saul of Tarsus was temporarily blinded and driven to the ground by the power and brilliance of God's glory (see Acts, chapter nine).

What profound changes would such a revelation of the glory of God make in our lives? Certainly we would not—we could not—be the same after such an experience. It would completely re-focus our view of reality. Our values would be corrected immediately, our priorities reordered, and our behavior disciplined from that moment on. May God grant it!

Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1:15 - 23 was placed in the Scriptures by the Holy Spirit as the will of God for believers in all generations. It expresses the will and purpose of God for believers. He wants to give us "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him." He desires that the eyes of our hearts be enlightened that we "may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe"—the power that raised Christ from the dead and set Him at God's right hand in the heavenly places, far above all authority now and forever, with all things under His feet, and established by God as Head over all things to the Church, His body that contains His fullness.

God warns the unrepentant: "Enter the rock and hide in the dust from the terror of the LORD and from the splendor of His majesty" (Isaiah 2:10 NASB). Here is the picture, recorded in Revelation 6:15-17—

"And the kings of the earth, and the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, and every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?'"

Yes, the day is set. The appointment has been made for a personal interview with God. Each of us will face Him, and He will face each of us with the open books that contain the details of our lives, including every idle word that we have spoken.

Think of it! God, Who created the universe by His spoken word—God, Whose glory and presence shook mount Sinai—God, Whose glory and presence in a tabernacle and a temple was so intense that no one could enter, and that drove the people to the ground with their faces flat against the pavement—God, Whose majesty melted Isaiah's heart— God, Whose dazzling glory unveiled will one day melt the galaxies—*the Almighty God will have words with each one of us!*

"Who is able to stand before this holy LORD God?" (1 Samuel 6:20). We need a Savior; oh, how desperately we need a Savior! And God has provided for us the Savior that we need. He is Jesus Christ, God's very own Son. He is our only provision for pardon and reconciliation with God. If you have not done so, flee to Him. Receive Him. Trust Him now. Get reconciled to God.

The Character Of God

If people are mistaken about the *nature* of God, they will be mistaken also about the *character* of God. On the other hand, if we have a true Biblical view of the nature of God, it should not be difficult for us to keep a true Biblical view of the character of God.

It is a common practice by some folk to blame God for what people are doing. This is indeed a strange way of thinking. Some blame God for natural disasters, failing to take into account secondary causes. Some are bitter against God because sickness or tragedy has taken a member of their family; others because of personal or business reverses; still others because of social injustices in the world. And so people take up and carry their inner "causes" against God. The "bottom line" of such an attitude, of course, is the desire for a rationale, an excuse, for personal unbelief and therefore for continued disobedience. But all charges against Almighty God collapse under the revelation of His true nature and character. God is a good God. He is worthy of implicit and total trust.

God Is Perfect

The song of Moses, recorded in Deuteronomy chapter thirty-two, proclaims God's perfection, particularly in verses three and four: "For I proclaim the name of the LORD; ascribe greatness to our God! The Rock! His work is perfect, for all His ways are just; a God of faithfulness and without injustice, Righteous and upright is He!" (NASB).

It is always wrong to attack the character of God. His ways are perfect in every respect. Any denial of the justice or morality of the acts and providences of God comes from unbelief, that is, from an unwillingness to acknowledge the moral perfection of God. This kind of unbelief includes an unwillingness to acknowledge that God sees these events in their true light, and that we do not. God *always* knows and does what is right, just, and best when all factors are considered together. And in most cases only God is able to consider all the factors together. Therefore, even when we cannot understand why God is allowing certain things to happen, we can rest in His moral perfection.

He is the God of truth. God's motives are true; His ways are true; His words are true; His judgments are true. Therefore, to have fellowship with God, our hearts must be true. If our hearts are not true, if we have not received the "love of the truth," if we are not honest with Him, we cannot have fellowship with Him or live in His presence. A heart that is not true is totally incompatible with God. God can accept into fellowship with Himself only those who come to Him with an honest heart. Light cannot have fellowship with darkness. To have fellowship with God, we must "walk in the light as He is in the light" (1 John 1:7 KJV). Only the pure in heart shall see God (Matthew 5:8). "As for God, His way is perfect" (Psalm 18:30). "I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it. God does it, that men

should fear before Him" (Ecclesiastes 3:14).

Referring to the heart of God and to our moral obligation to be sincere of heart, just as God is, Jesus said, "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). This kind of perfection is what is known as subjective perfection, that is, perfection of heart. It means sincerity and honesty of heart. This is not objective perfection. Objective perfection depends on perfect knowledge, and only God has perfect knowledge. God is both objectively perfect and subjectively perfect. Subjective perfection is being true and pure in heart, and we are under a moral obligation to be true and pure in heart, just as God is.

God Is Immutable

God is unchanging. He does not and cannot change. This follows from the fact that He is perfect. God cannot possibly improve; therefore, any change in Him would be a deterioration from absolute perfection, and that would destroy His perfection. That God cannot do because He will not do. Thus, God is immutable, changeless. His person, character, purposes and decrees are unalterable.

Were we to consider the immutability of God primarily as to His *being*, we would have done so in Chapter 3, "What Are God's Essential Qualities?" But because the Bible places the greater emphasis on the immutability of God's *character*, we are considering the subject here.

Because God is immutable, He is dependable. This gives us a solid basis for confidence in Him and in His word. "God is not a man, that he should lie, neither the son of man, that he should repent. Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?" (Numbers 23:19). "And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind" (1 Samuel 15:29 NASB).

It is interesting to note that verse thirty-five of 1 Samuel chapter fifteen goes on to say that "the LORD regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel" (NASB). Other passages of Scripture also speak of God being sorry that He had made man (e.g., Genesis 6:6, 7), and changing His mind (Exodus 32:12, 14). The King James Version of the Bible uses the word, "repent," in these and other like verses; that is, it says that God "repented." But the passages of Scripture that say that God regretted something that He had done or that He changed His mind have nothing to do with His immutability or the immutability of His purposes. They merely refer to the fact that when people either meet certain conditions or violate certain conditions, God often takes a different course of action with them. When the conditions change, God can take a correspondingly different course of action from what His wisdom would otherwise have prescribed. For example, God said through the prophet Jonah, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jonah 3:4). Now, if the city of Nineveh had not repented, it most certainly would have been overthrown, just as God said. But Nineveh did repent, and God spared the city. This is called "conditional certainty." If people today do not repent, they will certainly perish (Luke 13:3). But if we repent and become

reconciled to God by faith in Jesus Christ, we shall not perish (John 3:16). Instances of conditional certainty have nothing to do with God's immutability or the immutability of His eternal purposes. That never changes.

"He is in one mind and who can turn him? And what his soul desires, even that he does. For he performs the thing that is appointed for me" (Job 23:13, 14 KJV).

"The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of His heart to all generations" (Psalm 33:11).

"There are many plans in a man's heart, nevertheless, the LORD's counsel—that shall stand" (Proverbs 19:21).

"For the LORD of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back?" (Isaiah 14:27).

"For I am the LORD; I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, you sons of Jacob" (Malachi 3:6).

God's infinite goodness will never change; neither will the beauty of the many aspects of His perfect love. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning" (James 1:17).

Hebrews 6:17 and 18 speaks about "two immutable things" about God—His promise and His oath:

"Thus God, determining to show to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us."

God assures His people: "You will not be forgotten by Me." (Isaiah 44:21). "Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet will I not forget you. See, I have inscribed you upon the palms of My hands" (Isaiah 49:15, 16). "For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall not depart from you, nor shall the covenant of My peace be removed, says the LORD, who has mercy on you" (Isaiah 54:10).

The assurance of God's faithfulness continues on in the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 1:9 Paul declares, "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." And in 1 Corinthians 10:13 we have this assurance: "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted above what you are able; but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."

After praying that God would sanctify the Thessalonian believers wholly and

preserve their whole being blameless to the coming of the Lord, Paul declares, "He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it" (1 Thessalonians 5:23, 24).

In 2 Thessalonians 3:3 we read, "But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one." And even "if we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself" (2 Timothy 2:13). So then, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering; for He who promised is faithful" (Hebrews 10:23).

Hebrews 11:11 records that Sarah, Abraham's wife, "judged Him faithful who had promised."

They who are suffering persecution for the Lord's sake are instructed in 1 Peter 4:19, "Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator."

Jesus Christ is called "the faithful witness" (Revelation 1:5). Also, in Revelation 3:14 Jesus refers to Himself as "the Faithful and True Witness."

The drama that unfolds in Revelation chapter nineteen, starting with verse eleven, begins as follows: "And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True."

God is the absolutely unchanging, faithful God. We can trust Him. Who and what He is, He always has been and always will be. He will never change His person or His character. He will never change His word. His purposes and His promises are just as sure and steadfast as He is. God cannot fail, and He will not fail!

God Is Love

Love is God's essential moral quality. All other virtues are expressions and applications of love.

Love is a choice, a decision. It is a fundamental commitment to the highest good, including whatever is necessary, wise and useful to secure that good. This commitment called love has many qualities. That is, it is exercised and expressed in many ways. Justice is not a quality separate from or opposed to love. Rather, it is love considered in certain relationships and circumstances. Justice is the commitment to the highest good expressing itself in relationship to wrong-doing, opposing wrong-doing and seeking to prevent it. Justice endeavors to secure what is just, and this includes the punishment of evil-doers. Justice, then, is one expression of love. If God did not oppose evil, if He were not determined to uphold moral order against all who would undermine it, He would not be a God of love. Because God is love, He is just.

Placing God's love over against His justice is a very common mistake. Often it is said, "God is a God of justice as well as a God of love." That statement is faulty. It erroneously considers God's justice to be something outside of His love, even antithetical to His love. Now, it *is* correct to say that God is a God of justice as well as a

God of *mercy*, because justice and mercy do stand over against each other, balancing each other. But both justice and mercy are actions of love. God is both just and merciful *because* He is love.

Be it always remembered that everything God does is motivated by a determination to secure the highest possible good under the circumstances and with all things being considered together in His omniscient mind. This commitment permeates God's whole being, providences, governance, law, and gospel. All of God's moral qualities truly are qualities of perfect love.

"For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing" (Deuteronomy 10:17, 18).

God said to Israel, "I have loved you with an everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31:3).

Most of us know John 3:16 by heart. It is called "the golden text" of the Bible: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Jesus said to His disciples, "The Father Himself loves you" (John 16:27).

Paul the apostle writes, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). The death of Jesus Christ on the cross is conclusive proof both of the fact and also of the greatness of God's love for us. God's love was fully and gloriously exhibited at Calvary and should shut every mouth that would question the fact of His love and settle once and for all any doubts concerning His true character. He is the God of love and peace (2 Corinthians 13:11), "who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us" (Ephesians 2:4).

God's love is not sentimentalism. Rather, it is a rock-solid commitment to our good. At times this commitment requires that He discipline us. After all, believers are the centerpiece of God's eternal purpose, and He is vitally interested in how we turn out. Thus Hebrews 12:6 teaches us, "For whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives" (Hebrews 12:6, quoting from Proverbs 3:11, 12).

"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God" (1 John 3:1). Many ancient manuscripts add, "And we are." Divine love not only redeemed us at the tremendous cost of the death of Jesus Christ; it also elevates us to the status of sonship with God. How great is God's love!

Yes, and the God of the Old Testament is also the God of the New Testament. People who think that the God presented to us in the Old Testament must be of a different character from the God presented to us in the New Testament understand neither the diversity of responsibilities and relationships that God must exercise in the

full implementation of His determination to bring about the highest good, nor the complexity of the ramifications involved in determining the most expedient course in maintaining moral order and hence the highest good.

God's infinite love always directs His infinite power according to His infinite wisdom to secure the greatest possible good. We can rest assured in this fact. It is an absolute certainty. "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16).

God Is Righteous

God is always right in everything. In all His ways He is perfectly conformed to truth. He is correct. He never errs. He is perfectly honest and equitable.

If there is any controversy between God and us, we are the ones in the wrong. God is in complete conformity with truth and reality. The only way for us to be right—to be in conformity with truth and reality—is to give up all controversy with God immediately and confess honestly that He is right in all things. To be saved, we must repent; and repentance implies an open, honest acceptance of blame for wrong-doing. The heart must drop all charges against God. He is the God of truth and righteousness, and therefore He will never compromise with a self-justifying soul.

Elihu said, "I will fetch my knowledge from afar, and will ascribe righteousness to my Maker" (Job 36:3).

Paul's epistle to the Romans chapter nine declares the absolute sovereignty of God. Verse fourteen raises the question, "What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God?" The immediate response is, "*me genoito*" — may it not be; God forbid; certainly not! God always exercises His sovereignty righteously. At times we do not readily see or understand the wisdom or justice of a particular precept or providence of the Father. In such circumstances our obligation is to rest in the assurance that "The LORD is righteous in all his ways, gracious in all his works" (Psalm 145:17).

God says, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9). Some day, either in a closer walk with God here on earth, or in the light of Heaven, we shall see things more as God sees them and rejoice that our confidence in Him has not been in vain.

"His work is honorable and glorious, and His righteousness endures forever" (Psalm 111:3).

"Righteous are You, O LORD, and upright are Your judgments... Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and thy law is the truth" (Psalm 119:137 and 142).

We find assurance and comfort in God's beautiful promise found in Isaiah 41:10— "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand." (NASB).

All unrighteousness is totally incompatible with God. God cannot tolerate it. To walk with God, we must walk in righteousness because there is where He walks.

"This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5).

"If you know that He is righteous, you know that every one who practices righteousness is born of him" (1 John 2:29).

"Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil." (1 John 3:7, 8).

We see how this theme is carried through the first epistle of John. God is moral light (absolute truth and absolute conformity to truth in character and works). If we live contrary to light (truth), we are in moral and spiritual darkness and do not know God, no matter what we might profess.

"Who is wise? Let him understand these things. Who is prudent? Let him know them. For the ways of the LORD are right; the righteous walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them" (Hosea 14:9).

God's true children are they who are being conformed to His moral character. They walk according to the truth just as God walks according to the truth; therefore they walk with God. They certainly do not have all the light that God has. Only He has all light. But where the light is, there they are, and they are walking in all the light that they possess.

Someone has said, "Where we go hereafter depends on what we go after here." If our hearts are truly "going after" God, we will honestly seek to know more of Him and His ways. We will "cast off" the works of darkness and walk in the light of His word.

"But seek first the kingdom of God and His-righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

God Is Holy

We must distinguish between holiness as the primary attribute of God's *Person* (intrinsic to His being), and holiness as an essential quality of God's moral *character*.

As to His *being*, holiness is God's highest attribute. God is "glorious in holiness" (Exodus 15:11). "There is none holy like the LORD" (1 Samuel 2:2). "Thou art Holy, O Thou who art enthroned upon the praises of Israel" (Psalm 22:3 NASB). "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Proverbs 9:10 NASB). We must hallow His name because, as He Himself is, His name is worthy of the highest reverence, awe and adoration.

As to His *character*, love is God's highest moral quality, encompassing the whole of His moral character. "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16). Love is God's motive in all that He does; therefore God is absolutely and perfectly holy morally. That is because holiness is an indispensable condition of His own well-being and the well-being of the universe. In love God seeks the highest good by the essential condition and means of moral purity. That is true of us as well as of God. Most people do not realize that to be happy we must be holy. Sin destroys happiness. That is why God requires us to be holy (Leviticus 11:44; 1 Peter 1:16).

Holiness is wholeness, spiritually, morally, culturally, socially.

Holiness is moral purity. God is morally pure. God's motives and therefore His character are completely free from every form and degree of moral impurity. Sin cannot stand in His presence. The prophet said to God, "You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness" (Habakkuk 1:13).

"Far be it from God to do wickedness; and from the Almighty commit iniquity" (Job 34:10).

"The LORD is righteous, He is in her [Jerusalem's] midst; He will do no unrighteousness. Every morning He brings His justice to light; He never fails, but the unjust knows no shame" (Zephaniah 3:5).

After they had gone through an experience that taught them that God cannot be trifled with, the men of ancient Bethshemesh cried, "Who is able to stand before this holy LORD God?" (1 Samuel 6:20).

The mighty choirs of Heaven continuously sing of the holiness of God. Part of Isaiah's vision of the exalted Lord was hearing the seraphim cry to one another, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory" (Isaiah 6:3).

In Revelation 4:8 the four living creatures, representing all living creation, take up the refrain: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come."

Finally, before our wondering eyes the grand panorama of the victorious redeemed unfolds. And what anthem fills the vast reaches of Heaven of heavens? It is recorded in Revelation 15:3, 4 — "Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy." (Many modern versions read "King of the nations" or "King of the ages.")

No human pride raises its perverse head there. No unbelief, no cynicism dares question the integrity of the Almighty. That great multitude is made up only of those whose hearts are in full sympathy with all the ways, the wisdom, the works and the providences of the Holy One! The questions of life have been fully answered. The believers' trust during the dark valleys of their earthly pilgrimage has been completely vindicated. The sweet reasonableness of the gracious providences of the Holy One is

now clear and plain. How glad they are that their faith did not fail!

Who are present there? Only they who are redeemed by faith in the blood of the Lamb; only they who have obeyed the Divine command, "Be holy, for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16).

God Is True

Again we remind ourselves that God is a God of truth (Deuteronomy 32:4). "God is not a man, that He should lie" (Numbers 23:19). Also, 1 Samuel 15:29 affirms, "The Strength of Israel will not lie."

Absolute truthfulness is one of God's moral qualities. Romans 3:4 exclaims, "Let God be true, but every man a liar."

God cannot lie (Titus 1:2). God's truthfulness is the indispensable foundation of our confidence. Hebrews 6:18 assures us that we have "strong encouragement," because it is "impossible for God to lie." And yet so many people, including some professed Christians, speak and act as though God is not truthful, as though He was not sincere in His promises, as though His word is not to be relied on.

Is God truthful? Did He mean what He said? Can His word be relied on? *Absolutely*. Let us take any question marks off of our Bibles. Let us believe what God has said. He is eternally and infinitely the God of truth.

God Is Good

"Good" has various kinds and degrees of meaning, depending on the qualities and properties of what we are referring to. We talk about a good meal or a good game. We say that someone is a good musician or a good dentist. But when we say that God is good, we mean that He is infinitely and perfectly so, and that His goodness is absolute. Specifically, God is good in that He is morally excellent in character and therefore in His disposition and acts toward His creation. God's goodness is not acquired, but is an essential and immutable quality of His moral nature. God is a good God. "Good and upright is the LORD; therefore He teaches sinners in the way" (Psalm 25:8).

God's goodness extends throughout all of His works and providences. He reveals Himself in all of His ways as a good God, and we daily experience His goodness. Much of His goodness comes to all through the blessings of life and the provisions of nature. So much more is experienced through faith. So the Holy Spirit invites us through the psalmist, "O taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him" (Psalm 34:8).

God's goodness is revealed in His precepts. That is, because God is good, His word is also good. So Psalm 119:68 teaches: "You are good, and do good; teach me Your statutes."

God's goodness is one reason that we should praise Him. Absolute moral excellence deserves, even demands, praise that is worthy of itself.

"Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good" (Psalm 135:3). Gratitude and thanks to God for His great goodness toward us should spring spontaneously and generously from each of us.

"Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever" (Psalm 136:1).

"Praise the LORD of hosts, for the LORD is good, for His mercy endures forever" (Jeremiah 33:11).

"They shall utter the memory of Your great goodness, and shall sing of Your righteousness. The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger, and in great mercy. The LORD is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works" (Psalm 145:7-9).

"I will mention the loving kindnesses of the LORD and the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD has bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he has bestowed on them according to His mercies, and according to the multitude of His lovingkindnesses" (Isaiah 63:7).

"The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knows those who trust in Him" (Nahum 1:7).

When a young ruler, confident of his own goodness, came to Jesus with a question about eternal life, he addressed the Lord as "Good Teacher." Jesus knew that this young model of religious and financial success did not grasp the concept of true goodness. The young man was only expressing the notions of goodness current in his religious culture. Jesus, God in the flesh, refused to accept to Himself the popular glib, relative definition of goodness. So He confronted the rich young ruler with the only true definition of goodness: "No one is good but One, that is, God" (Mark 10:18). As God in the flesh, Jesus Christ is fully worthy of that definition.

God Is Kind

Kindness (sometimes called "lovingkindness") is a beautiful quality of God's character. Kindness is goodness being gentle. The psalmist said to God, "Your gentleness has made me great" (Psalm 18:35).

"The earth is full of the lovingkindness of the LORD" (Psalm 33:5 NASB). "The lovingkindness of God endures all day long" (Psalm 52:1 NASB). "Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise You" (Psalm 63:3). "Let them give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness, and for His wonders to the sons of men!" (Psalm 107:8, 15, 21, 31 NASB).

Jesus told us to love our enemies, to do good, to lend, for in so doing from a pure heart we would be the moral offspring of the Highest, "for He is kind to the unthankful and the evil" (Luke 6:35). This is a solemn imperative to all who are committed to living according to God's moral character.

The moral character of God is beautifully displayed in His kindness. People ignore Him, insult Him, injure Him, and yet He continues to be kind to them. He gives them rain, and they curse it. He heaps blessings upon them, and they are ungrateful. We marvel that such kindness does not immediately subdue the human heart and turn it to its gentle Benefactor.

"Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" (Romans 2:4 NASB).

"Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off" (Romans 11:22 NASB).

The revelation of God's infinite kindness to us through Jesus Christ will continue to unfold forever. So Ephesians 2:7 assures us: "That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

God Is Compassionate

Compassion is pity toward the suffering. True compassion is more than a feeling. It is a commitment to come to the relief of the suffering, or to prevent their sufferings, by all reasonable means. This beautiful quality of character is fully conspicuous in God. He is full of compassion.

The actual expression of God's compassion is often conditioned on repentance. God forewarned ancient Israel that disobedience would bring chastisement. Then He assured them that if they would return to Him, He would have compassion on them and restore them (Deuteronomy 30:3). We find an instance of this very thing in 2 Kings 13:22, 23—

"But Hazael king of Syria oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz. But the LORD was gracious to them, had compassion on them, and regarded them, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not yet destroy them, or cast them from His presence."

In the last days of the morally and spiritually bankrupt kingdom of Judah, Zedekiah was king Nebuchadnezzar's vassal on what was left of the throne in Jerusalem. Priests and people alike were corrupt. "And the LORD God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place" (2 Chronicles 36:15).

God's compassion toward disobedient Israel is mentioned again in Psalm 78:38—

"But He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them. Yes, many a time He turned His anger away, and did not stir up all His wrath."

"But You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth" (Psalm 86:15).

"The LORD is gracious and full of compassion" (Psalm 111:4).

"Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not" (Lamentations 3:22). But "though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies" (Verse 32).

Jesus Christ is the perfect revelation of God in human flesh. And it is in Him that we see the compassion of God so beautifully displayed. Our Lord touched the leper and made him whole. Seeing the grieving widow, He was moved with compassion and restored her son to life. He healed the lame, the maimed, the blind, the deaf, the mute. Wherever there was human suffering, there the compassion of God was poured out through the heart of Jesus Christ. And Christ is still the same today, because He is God and God is still the same. The great compassion of God reaches out wherever there is suffering, for God yearns to put an end to suffering and to bring joy and happiness instead. Yet, in His wise economy, God can do so only as people open up by faith to Him and to the principles of His kingdom. He will not force the human will.

God Is Impartial

God deals with all people impartially upon the same principles of justice, fairness and equity. He is fair to all. He administers His moral government without partiality or favoritism.

"For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, and the awesome God, who does not show partiality, nor take a bribe" (Deuteronomy 10:17 NASB).

"Now then let the fear of the LORD be upon you; be very careful what you do, for the LORD our God will have no part in unrighteousness, or partiality, or the taking of a bribe" (2 Chronicles 19:7 NASB).

The very idea of "buying God off" seems too ridiculous for anyone even to think of it. Bribe God? Nonsense. But in practice that is exactly what many people try to do.

An officer of a lending institution thinks that he has bought his "ticket" to Heaven because he made a loan to a church. A woman spends long hours doing church work and thinks that thereby she has piled up enough credits to secure her entrance into Heaven. A young man enters the ministry and spends his life helping people because it is so "rewarding," and he feels confident that he is "in solid" with God. The total number of precious people who entertain the delusion that what they offer God will be accepted as an adequate substitute for honest obedience and genuine faith in Jesus Christ must be astronomical. The pernicious persistence of this deadly delusion is an enormous

spiritual tragedy. How to overcome it is one of the greatest challenges facing the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Every attempt to satisfy God short of unconditional surrender is in effect offering God a bribe. The world is full of people who are trying to make a "deal" with God. The great non-Christian religions are based on the premise that we can offer something to God (or to whatever occupies the place of God in their particular system) that will gain His favor. And even in the name of Christianity millions entertain the notion that somehow they can get God and His blessings on their own terms if only they offer Him the right things. This, too, is pagan nonsense. The only morally and governmentally sound condition on which God can offer His grace is full obedience, and that means unconditional surrender to Jesus Christ in faith. Upon that condition alone God freely and impartially grants His grace. It is a free gift, unmerited and unearned. Trying to get it on any other terms is only bargaining with God, and that is trifling with the Almighty. God cannot and will not bargain with the rebellious heart. He demands its immediate and complete surrender.

To assume that God can be induced to partiality is to deny His integrity. To accuse Him of being guilty of partiality is blasphemy.

"He is not partial to princes, nor does He regard the rich more than the poor; for they are all the work of His hands" (Job 34:19).

The apostle Peter had been so conditioned by prevailing prejudices that God had to take dramatic measures to get him to preach the gospel to gentiles. When God saved some of them and filled them with the Holy Spirit, "Then Peter opened his mouth and said, 'In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him'" (Acts 10:34, 35).

Later, Paul wrote, "For there is no distinction between the Jew and the Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him" (Romans 10:12).

Just as with the other qualities of God's moral character, so impartiality also must be part of the character and practice of all who truly are in fellowship with Him. Racism and other forms of prejudice and partiality are completely contrary to the character of God; therefore they have no place in the hearts, attitudes, speech, behavior, and policies of Christ's disciples.

God's impartiality was the basis of Paul's appeal to Christian masters in Ephesians 6:9—"And you, masters, do the same things to them [your servants], giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven; and there is no partiality with Him."

Likewise he writes to bond-servants in Colossians 3:22-25. Verse 25 reads, "But he who does wrong will be repaid for the wrong which he has done, and there is no partiality."

Finally, the apostle Peter writes, "And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time your sojourning here in fear" (1 Peter 1:17).

As God is impartial in His justice, so is He in His mercy. His mercy through Jesus Christ is offered freely to all. If we come to Him, He will not reject us.

God Is Longsuffering

God patiently endures insult and injury for a long, long time. He puts up with a horrible amount of abuse just to give people greater opportunity to repent. God knows whom He will save, and endures them until He saves them. He also endures a lifetime of dishonor from those who never will be saved. Such is the longsuffering of the gracious God!

"The LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression..." (Numbers 14:18). Sometimes the Bible expresses the longsuffering of God by saying that He is "slow to anger." Thus we read:

"...but thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsook them not" (Nehemiah 9:17).

"The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy" (Psalm 103:8). Read also Psalm 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Nahum 1:3).

Paul asks, "What if God, willing to show his wrath and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction...?" (Romans 9:22).

There was a time when "the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah" (1 Peter 3:20). And Peter tells us that in the last days scoffers will point to the seeming delay in Christ's return as support for their unbelief, not realizing that it is due to God's longsuffering love for them, giving them opportunity to repent.

"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness, but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

God Is Forbearing

Because He is longsuffering, God is forbearing. Forbearance is longsufferance in action. It is the restraint of punishment that God exercises because He is longsuffering.

The sins of Sodom and Gomorrah cried for judgment. But Abraham had so locked his heart into the forbearing heart of God that when the patriarch prayed for God to spare the city if only ten righteous persons could be found in it, God agreed to do so. Tragically, it turned out that not even ten righteous could be found. Nevertheless, the

great forbearance of God is clearly demonstrated in those long-ago events, recorded for us in Genesis chapter eighteen.

To unfaithful Israel God said, "For My name's sake will I defer My anger, and for My praise I will restrain it from you, so that I do not cut you off" (Isaiah 48:9).

Through the prophet Ezekiel God reminded the nation of His forbearance toward the rebellious generation that had wasted out their lives wandering in the wilderness. "Nevertheless My eye spared them from destruction. I did not make an end of them in the wilderness" (Ezekiel 20:17). Though the older generation perished, the nation was spared and emerged to possess the land of Canaan because of God's forbearance.

If God were not forbearing, He would not have allowed the human race to continue long enough to reach Calvary. In fact, were it not for His forbearance, God would not have created man in the first place. The same is true of us individually. Concerning redemption, Romans 3:24 - 26 states that believers are "justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at this present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

God Is Merciful

Mercy is the disposition to forgive wrongdoing whenever it is possible to do so consistent with the public good. It is the opposite of justice. Both justice and mercy are expressions of love. Both seek the same end—the highest good—but by opposite means. Justice punishes because the highest good demands it; mercy pardons for the same reason when the conditions of mercy make the exercise of mercy possible. Both harmonize and neither is exercised at the expense of the other, or at the expense of the highest good.

God is merciful. He desires to forgive, and He works to bring about the conditions that make it morally possible for Him to do so. Thus, "mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13). See Luke 6:36; 2 Corinthians 1:3.

Moses said to ancient Israel, "for the LORD your God is a merciful God" (Deuteronomy 4:31).

When King David sinned against God, the Lord sent the prophet Gad to him with three alternatives: seven years of famine, three months of military reverses, or three days of pestilence. David chose the last. "And David said to Gad, 'I am in great distress. Please let us fall into the hand of the LORD, for His mercies are great; but do not let me fall into the hand of man'" (2 Samuel 24:14). David put his trust in the mercy of God because he had confidence in the magnitude of that mercy. He knew that all of God's moral qualities are as vast as God Himself. God's character cannot be less than what He Himself is.

Centuries later, as they led the returned Jewish captives in confession to God, the Levites acknowledged, "You are God, ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in kindness, and did not forsake them" (Nehemiah 9:17). "Nevertheless in Your great mercy You did not utterly consume them nor forsake them; You are God, gracious and merciful" (verse 31).

The mercy of God is celebrated throughout The Psalms:

"For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You" (Psalm 86:5).

"The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy" (Psalm 103:8). "For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him" (verse 11). "But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children" (verse 17).

"Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever" (Psalm 106:1).

"For Your mercy is great above the heavens and Your truth reaches to the clouds" (Psalm 108:4).

"The earth, O LORD, is full of Your mercy; teach me Your statutes" (Psalm 119:64).

Psalm 136 is an antiphonal song in which every verse ends with the response, "for His mercy endures forever."

Isaiah 55:6 and 7 is a summons with a promise: "Seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon."

Through the prophet Joel God urges, "Return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness" (Joel 2:13).

The prophet Micah closed his prophecy with these words of praise to God for His mercy: "Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity, and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy" (Micah 7:18).

In what is called The Magnificat, Mary declared, "His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation" (Luke 1:50).

It is "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit"

(Titus 3:5).

The mercy of God has been brought to us fully in Jesus Christ. How merciful is God? How great is His desire to forgive? Look at the cross of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Look at that scene of suffering and agony. The Lord of glory died for the sins of the whole world to bring redemption to all who will believe.

You do not need to carry your guilt any longer. Jesus Christ carried it on the cross for you. Leave your sins and flee to the Savior. Believe Him. Trust Him. The throne of absolute holiness is also the throne of absolute mercy. The fullness of God's mercy is waiting for you now.

God's Relationship To His Creation

God is not a static force, or a closed system—passive, inactive, non-communicative. God is a Person in the fullest sense. He lives. He loves. He feels. He thinks. He purposes. He chooses. He acts. He communicates.

God has a grand design, and all of His works and administrations are part of that design.

God is supremely active. He is the Great Initiator. What He has begun He will accomplish, and He will do so according to His eternal purpose.

"Many, O LORD my God, are Your wonderful works which You have done; and Your thoughts which are toward us cannot be recounted to You in order; if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered" (Psalm 40:5).

God's works are the most visible demonstration of the magnitude of His power and greatness. It is by "the things that are made" that God's "eternal power and Godhead" is clearly revealed to all humanity in all places and in every age (Romans 1:18-32).

God Is The Creator

By His spoken word God created the physical universe out of nothing. The Scriptures begin with this sublime statement: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). No statement of the origin of things can come close to this majestic declaration. It is simple, yet complete and totally satisfactory. Nothing else is. It is categorical because it is authoritative. It is authoritative because it is true. Reject it, and one begins to move toward the absurd.

Exodus 20:11 likewise declares simply and plainly, "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them."

Job was not a scientist as we define a scientist today, and he lived in what is called a pre-scientific age. Yet in Job 26:7 we have his amazing statement: "He stretches out the north over empty space; He hangs the earth on nothing." This was written long before Copernicus and Galileo. Where did such information come from? There is only one answer—God Himself by His Spirit.

God created everything by His unaided word (Psalm 33:6). He laid the foundations of the earth (Psalm 104:5). The entire physical universe is the product of His command and is subject to it.

God declares, "I have made the earth, and created man on it. It was I — My hands that stretched out the heavens, and all their host I have commanded" (Isaiah 45:12).

"Surely My hand founded the earth, and My right hand spread out the heavens; when I call to them, they stand together" (Isaiah 48:13 NASB).

That God is the Creator of all things is fundamental to our faith and testimony. It was so for the early Church. On one occasion when they were being persecuted, the early disciples prayed, "Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them" (Acts 4:24). They were confessing Exodus 20:11 before God as a confession of faith.

This clear confession stands out in total contrast to pagan polytheism. Greek and Roman mythologies are completely absent here. So also are the speculations of modern evolutionism. The God of the Bible is also the God of scientific fact. Darwinism is on the defensive before the advance of open scientific inquiry, in some cases maintaining itself by dogmatism, authoritarianism, and academic fear and repression.

When the people of Lystra went about to offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas, thinking that they were gods, the apostles cried out, "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these vain things to the living God, who made the heaven, and earth, the sea, and all things that are in them" (Acts 14:15).

To the speculative thinkers of Athens, who by implication admitted to the failure of unaided human reason to know God, Paul confidently introduced Him as the God who "made the world and everything in it" (Acts 17:24). A correct, Biblical cosmogony is essential to the gospel.

The question of origins is unanswerable except by Divine revelation. The event itself is beyond scientific demonstration. True science must limit itself to observation and experimentation, and the resulting hypotheses, theories, and conclusions. The origin of the physical universe was an event that was not observed by human beings and of course cannot be reproduced. For this reason natural (physical) science is limited in what it can say about it. Science can guess, but then it ceases to be science in the strictest sense. How the material universe could come into existence out of nothing is beyond finite reason and therefore is beyond the limits of philosophy as well as science. It is a matter for Divine revelation only. Every honest mind should be grateful that God has given us that revelation. The faith that accepts that revelation will find the knowable data, when truly and fully known, to be in harmony with that revelation. Such a faith is not blind. On the contrary, it is truly enlightened.

"By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible" (Hebrews 11:3).

We should never lose the sense of wonder at the greatness of God displayed in His creation. Every advance in scientific knowledge should increase our sense of humility and awe before the Almighty God.

God Is Owner And Sole Proprietor

As Creator, God is the owner and sole proprietor of His creation. His title reads: "All the earth is Mine" (Exodus 19:5). Psalm 24:1 affirms, "The earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein."

Genesis 14:19 records the blessing that Melchizedek pronounced upon Abraham: "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth."

Moses declared to Israel, "Behold the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the LORD's thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is" (Deuteronomy 10:14 KJV).

God said to Job, "Everything under heaven is Mine" (Job 41:11). And in Psalm 50:10 God says, "For every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills." (Also Leviticus 25:23; 1 Chronicles 29:14; Psalm 95:5; Haggai 2:8).

Consider the tragic failure of humanity's efforts to rule this planet without proper regard for God's jurisdiction over it. How beautiful things would be if the human race would acknowledge with the psalmist, "The heavens are Yours, the earth also is Yours; the world and all its fulness, You have founded them" (Psalm 89:11).

God Is the Creator Of Man

Long ago a thinking man wrote: "When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have made, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?" (Psalm 8:3, 4).

A correct, Biblical cosmogony is essential also to a correct anthropology. A proper regard for God as Creator is necessary for a proper view of man. Without it man inevitably thinks wrongly about himself. Paradoxically, at the same time man both exalts and demeans himself. In his view of himself he becomes either the "supreme animal," or, as is so common in current "new age" pseudo-spirituality, a potential or actual "god." Either way, man becomes a self-contradiction.

Long ago a chastened wise man wrote that God "has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts..." (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

To find the masterpiece of God's creation, we look not at the stars but at that marvelous creature that was created in God's own image—the human being. We are the product of special creation. After the animal kingdom had been brought into existence, God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness" (Genesis 1:26). Verse 27 continues, "So God created man in His own image." Genesis 2:7 gives the specifics: "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (See also Genesis 5:1 and 9:6).

Many centuries ago a devout person was inspired to write, "I will praise You, for I am

fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works; and that my soul knows very well" (Psalm 139:14). In the psalmist's day comparatively little was known about human biology and physiology. Today, in the light of modern science this passage takes on new significance, and each advance in man's knowledge of himself and his biochemistry adds fresh grandeur to this truth. How great is our Creator!

Man is made in the image of God. We are the expression of our Maker. We human beings can never erase the indelible conviction that we are tied to eternity. God is a Trinity in unity; man is a tri-unity (spirit, soul, and body). God is a free moral agent; so is man. Our moral powers, redeemed and sanctified, are the demonstration of our everlasting resemblance to our Creator.

God Is The Owner And Supreme Governor Of The Human Race

In Ezekiel 18:4 God says, "All souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine; the soul that sins shall die." We belong to God not only by right of creation, but also by right of redemption. So Paul affirms in Romans 14:8—"We are the Lord's." This is a fact that the proud, impenitent heart refuses to acknowledge, yet it must be acknowledged if there is to be true repentance, humility and peace.

God governs us and has a right to govern us not only because He is our Creator but also because we need His moral governance. It is necessary to our well-being. For this reason God has a clear right to govern us morally and we have a clear obligation to support His moral authority by our obedience. Declaring ourselves independent of God's moral authority is as contrary to reason as declaring ourselves independent of the traffic laws while driving the freeways. The only difference is the greater amount of havoc and ruin that results from disobedience to God.

God Reveals Himself.

The infinite intelligence of God is demonstrated in the complexity and design of His creation; and behind the intelligent act is an intelligent purpose. God created us for a purpose, and He intends for us to know Him and His purpose. This requires Divine revelation.

Sometimes people are spoken of as "searching for God." The truth is not that people are searching for a "lost" God, but that God is reaching out to lost people. The Bible is not the record of man's struggle to develop a concept of God; rather, it is the record of God's progressive self-revelation to man. God is the self-revealing God. He did not stop at a general revelation of Himself in nature. God is a Person and He purposes to make Himself and His will known. God desires to have a personal relationship with us.

Throughout Biblical history God made Himself known to individuals on various occasions. God communicated directly and personally to Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:9 and 13). Enoch walked with God (Genesis 5:22-24). So did Noah (Genesis 6:9). The Bible records that God "appeared" to Abraham on a number of occasions (see Genesis

12:7; 17:1; 18:1). In fact, Abraham was called "the friend of God" (James 2:23).

God "appeared" to Isaac (Genesis 26:2). He "appeared" to Jacob in a dream (Genesis 28:13). And when Jacob came out of Padanaram, God appeared to him again (Genesis 35:9).

God communicated with Job in a powerful revelation of His sovereignty that straightened out Job's thinking immediately and decisively. (Job chapters 38-41).

One of God's most dramatic appearances to a human being in the Old Testament was when He met with Moses at the burning bush (Exodus chapter three). During that encounter God specifically commanded Moses to declare categorically to the people that God had appeared to him (verse 16). Later, God appeared to Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel (Exodus 24:9, 10). God told Moses that He would meet with him at the mercy seat (Exodus 25:22). And Exodus 33:11 says that "the LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend." Moses caught a glimpse of the "afterglow of God" on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 33:23), and his face shone as a result of that encounter with the Almighty (Exodus 34:29).

God appeared to king David at the threshing floor of Ornan (Araunah) the Jebusite. This was on what was known as Mt. Moriah. Later, "Solomon began to build the house of the LORD at Jerusalem in Mount Moriah, where the LORD had appeared to his father David." (2 Chronicles 3:1).

God appeared to Solomon in a dream (1 Kings 3:5). He appeared to him again after the temple was completed (1 Kings 9:2).

The prophet Isaiah records, "In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple" (Isaiah 6:1). The impact of this encounter with God changed his life and prophetic ministry.

No mortal has ever seen or ever could see God in His fullness, that is, in His unmodified essence. This is stated categorically in John 1:18—"No one has seen God at any time." Our mortal bodies could not stand such a total revelation. God said to Moses, "You cannot see My face, for no man shall see Me, and live" (Exodus 33:20). So then, every "appearance" of God to man must be in a modified form, a mode that would be both possible and comprehensible to us in our present mortal state. But even that is tremendous! Here is how such a visible expression of God affected Job: "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You; therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5, 6). Isaiah felt the same sense of unworthiness when he saw the Lord "high and lifted up." "Then I said, 'Woe is me, for I am ruined! because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts'" (Isaiah 6:5 NASB).

Yes, God truly does love us, and it is His purpose to reveal Himself to us so that we will truly love and know Him, and enjoy personal fellowship with Him now and forever. Such is His joy—and ours.

God's Condescension

By condescension is meant reaching down from a position of superior rank and state of being to an inferior in order to do him or her good. God is so infinitely exalted above all His creatures in being, position and authority that for Him to reveal Himself to us in a personal, intimate way involves supreme condescension on His part. Only God can span the gap between God and man.

Psalm 113:5, 6 asks, "Who is like unto the LORD our God, who dwells on high, who humbles himself to behold the things that are in the heavens and in the earth?" So then, even to look at what is going on in the heavens is an act of condescension on the part of God. How high and lofty He must be! And yet, He "remembered us in our lowly state" (Psalm 136:23). "Though the LORD is high, yet He regards the lowly; but the proud he knows from afar" (Psalm 138:6).

We see the ultimate condescension of God in Jesus Christ. God in the flesh lived among us, experienced poverty, ate with publicans and sinners, washed the feet of His disciples, suffered the abuse of sinners and was crucified on a cross. Oh, the gracious condescension of God, that He, the Highest, would stoop to the lowest to redeem us and make us His very own!

God Is Near

To bring us near to Himself—personal, intimate communion now and forever—this is the yearning of the great heart of God toward us. And in response it should also be the yearning of our hearts toward Him.

The notion that God is a detached, impersonal Being who made the world and then showed little or no concern for humanity is a gross impeachment of His character and a misrepresentation of His very nature. To assert that God acted in creation with no real and wise purpose is to accuse Him of creating us with a need and a longing for Him and then abandoning us. It is a denial that God is love. The charge is really a rejection of God's moral authority by a denial of it.

Whether they will admit it or not, all human beings need God's providence, direction, forgiveness and fellowship. To say that God is not personally concerned about each one of us is to charge Him with the most cruel wickedness. The Scriptures do not reveal God to be such a being. On the contrary, the word of God everywhere assures us of His immediate involvement and care. God is not off somewhere playing "hide and seek" with us, daring us to find Him. He is near.

"For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: 'I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones'" (Isaiah 57:15).

God sees the sparrow when it falls, and He knows the number of hairs on our head

(Matthew 10:29, 30). He is "not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:27). He said to Jacob, "I am with you" (Genesis 28:15). He assured both Moses and the nation of Israel, "My Presence shall go with you and I will give you rest" (Exodus 33:14). We are assured in Psalm 34:18, "the LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit."

Time after time the human heart has trusted God in the hour of difficulty and thus has experienced the reality of God's promise, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you" (Isaiah 43:2).

We are always in God's thoughts. His thoughts toward us are thoughts of love in all of its fullness. The psalmist exclaimed, "How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand..." (Psalm 139:17, 18).

Yes, the God of heaven and earth has focused the infinite resources and power of His thoughts upon the formulation and implementation of marvelous designs for our good. Climaxed at Christ's death on the cross at Calvary and His resurrection, and through that completed redemption extending to all time and eternity, unlimited benefits have been devised by the great heart and mind of God for all who will come in faith to His abundant grace through Jesus Christ. Only the miserable, blind selfishness of man drives him to reject it all and to turn instead to his beggarly trifles and eternal ruin. But the redeemed rejoice in the full blessings of His grace. No finite mind can begin to grasp the potential of the infinite mind of God to devise good things for His people. His grand design for our eternal happiness is at the forefront of His attention. And we shall experience its full development. All praise to the Lamb who has redeemed us and brought us into this inheritance!

Believers are God's personal treasure, made for His close companionship both here and now, and in the eternal ages. And so He has promised, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you" (Deuteronomy 31:6, 8; Hebrews 13:5). "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). God is near, and His all-sufficient grace is ours in the time of need. He bears every burden. He feels every care. He is our Father!

God Leads His People

After many years of wilderness wandering, an aged Moses stood before a new generation of Israelites and solemnly exhorted them, "You shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not" (Deuteronomy 8:2 NASB).

So then, the purpose of God's leadership is the spiritual and moral development of His people. God leads us as He does to build character in us. He does not drive us, but leads us gently, as a shepherd leads his flock, going before us, preparing our way, and choosing our pastures.

Again concerning Israel the psalmist said to God, "You led Your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron" (Psalm 77:20). According to Isaiah 63:14, He led Israel also for the glory of His name: "So You lead our people to make Yourself a glorious name." The same purpose is expressed in the Twenty-third Psalm: "He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake" (verse 3). So then, if we are going to glorify His name, we must follow His wise and secure leadership.

The psalmist prayed, "Teach me Your way, O LORD, and lead me in a smooth path, because of my enemies" (Psalm 27:11).

There are times when we do not understand God's sovereign guidance, or are unaware of His directing influence. Yet we can rest assured that even in such times He is constantly leading us, working out His purpose all the while and through it all. "A man's steps are of the LORD; how then can a man understand his own way?" (Proverbs 20:24).

God Protects and Defends

Moses reassured the panicking Israelites, "The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace" (Exodus 14:14). After God delivered the people from Egypt, Moses gave them a song that went in part: "The LORD is a warrior; the LORD is His name" (Exodus 15:3 NASB).

This fact bothers some people, but only because they do not yet have the full perspective of God's character. Let us keep in mind that "The LORD is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works" (Psalm 145:9). In James 4:1-3 the Bible tells us where wars come from. People start wars. They choose passion and violence over reason and love. Nevertheless, once wars get started, God has at times directly assisted in the defense of the innocent and the cause of right, exercising a providential influence that assures an outcome that is in accordance with His righteous will. God can override the selfishness of tyrants and use their cruel aggression as an occasion to chastise disobedient nations, as was the case when the Chaldeans (Babylonians) violently overthrew the apostate kingdom of Judah, and God did not intervene to stop them. In a few very specific cases in the ancient past some wars were initiated at the direct command of God. Many do not understand this and are perplexed over the wars of judgment recorded in the Old Testament. Some have gone so far as to assert that God (as the Israelites then understood Him) was cruel. Nothing could be farther from the truth. God is always love and He is always wise. And justice is one of the qualities of that love. God mercifully tolerated the horrible iniquity of the inhabitants of Canaan for hundreds of years, particularly during the centuries when the Israelites were in Egypt. A study of the cultures of that time and region reveals how cruel and corrupt they were. In the light of the facts it is a marvel that the mercy of God waited as long as it did before society was purged of these hopelessly wicked cultures. Only God knows the evil and misery that would have resulted had they been allowed to remain to perpetuate and compound their abominations generation after generation. For example, one can only imagine the outcome if Adolf Hitler and the Axis powers had been allowed to prevail. For one thing, the horrors of the holocaust would have

engulfed the whole world. In the case of ancient Canaan, the time came when God could not in wisdom and justice allow such a moral malignancy to continue. God did not delight in the pain and death of those He had to judge, but He did take satisfaction in the fact that the highest good under the circumstances was secured by the administration of justice. The new nation of Israel was God's scalpel in performing major moral surgery on the culture of that day.

Even the innocent infants and young children who were killed in the action were the object of God's mercy. Where would they be today if they had been allowed to grow up, identify with their slain parents, and revert to their own culture? They would have corrupted Israel and also ruined their own souls, which is exactly what happened because some did survive to spawn new generations of idolaters. The Book Of Judges is historical evidence of it. Today the ones who were slain are in heaven, thankful that God received them into His everlasting kingdom and conferred eternal life on them as a free gift. The same principle applies to the innocent infants and young children who died in the Noachian Flood and also in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. God does not see things as man sees them. He views everything from the perspective of eternity.

No, God's love is not short-sighted, although some people think it ought to be. God is not trifling with sin. Sin is the most destructive influence in the entire universe. God is determined to restrain it and eventually put an end to it, even though at times serious measures must be used to do so. It is precisely because He is a God of love that He is determined to do so.

God opposes evil. He resists selfishness. He is determined to inhibit man's destructiveness, at times allowing the use of force, if necessary, to do so. God providentially uses human government as an agency to secure justice and to maintain moral order on earth.

"Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle" (Psalm 24:8). It is worthy of note that this psalm follows the Twenty-third Psalm. God is a Shepherd to all who love and obey Him, but He is fearsome in His dealings with all who disregard Him and His just moral governance.

It is important to keep in mind that God is also the only one who will make wars to cease (Psalm 46:9). Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9). A person who is truly serious about peace will start by making peace with God through genuine repentance from sin and faith in Jesus Christ.

God is our Deliverer. He announced to Moses, "I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows so I have come down to deliver them" (Exodus 3:7, 8).

David declared, "The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold" (Psalm 18:2).

We remember that when God called Jeremiah to be a prophet to the kingdom of Judah, He encouraged the timid youth with these words; "Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD" (Jeremiah 1:8).

God protects. When Jacob and his little family were surrounded by hostile neighbors, "the terror of God was upon the cities that were all around them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob" (Genesis 35:5).

The entire Ninety-first Psalm is a grand and eloquent pledge of God's protection and deliverance. Verse seven says, "A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you."

Jesus promises His disciples, "But not a hair of your head shall be lost" (Luke 21:18).

God defends. "But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You; let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them" (Psalm 5:11).

God is our hiding place. "Keep me as the apple of Your eye; hide me under the shadow of Your wings" (Psalm 17:8). "For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion; in the secret place of His tabernacle shall He hide me. He shall set me high upon a rock" (Psalm 27:5). "You shall hide them in the secret place of Your presence from the pride of man. You shall keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues" (Psalm 31:20). "You are my hiding place; You shall preserve me from trouble; You shall surround me with songs of deliverance" (Psalm 32:7).

This is the sweet experience and the personal testimony of all who walk by faith. Fleeing to God for refuge is not cowardly escapism. Rather, it is a natural thing to do for one who has a living relationship with God. It is people who do not have this relationship who become escapist in times of stress. They escape into alcohol and other drugs, pleasure, or some other unreality. Unbelief and cynicism can make no valid statements of self-sufficiency.

The Christian who rests in God has found the spiritual resources to cope with life's realities. "The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deuteronomy 33:27). "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1). "Be my strong habitation, to which I may resort continually" (Psalm 71:3). God is not a "crutch" for the believer any more than food is a crutch for the hungry or water for the thirsty. No, God is not an "escape mechanism." He is not the last resort; rather, He is our "continual resort." "The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe" (Proverbs 18:10).

Believers everywhere would enjoy much more victory and peace of spirit if only they had a fuller knowledge of God as "a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat" (Isaiah 25:4).

God is a shield of protection. God assured Abraham, "I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward" (Genesis 15:1). We possess the same assurance right now. "He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him" (Proverbs 30:5).

It is important to remember that all of God's provisions for the believer are realized in our lives *by faith*. We must believe. We must put our trust in God. As we exercise faith in God, the gap between His provision and our appropriation narrows. This is the way we move closer to God and enter into His blessings.

God is our Rock (Deuteronomy 32:4). "He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be greatly moved" (Psalm 62:2). "The LORD has been my defense, and my God the rock of my refuge" (Psalm 94:22). A rock signifies permanence, strength and unmovable stability.

God keeps and preserves. At Bethel God said to Jacob, "Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go" (Genesis 28:15). Jesus prayed, "Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me" (John 17:11).

In 1 Peter 1:5 we are assured that believers are "kept by the power of God through faith." The power of God is committed to the defense of the integrity of each believer's confession and commitment. It is made operative by faith. No Christian need fall; our Father is greater than all (John 10:29). In Jude's epistle, verses 24 and 25 we read this doxology: "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen."

God is our strength. It is written in the song of Moses, "The LORD is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation" (Exodus 15:2). David declared, "God is my strength and power, and He makes my way perfect" (2 Samuel 22:33). And in Psalm 28:8 we read, "The LORD is their strength, and He is the saving strength of His anointed."

God is our helper. Isaiah 41:10 has been a source of assurance to God's people for thousands of years: "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand." This promise is ours today: "The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do to me" (Hebrews 13:6, quoted from Psalm 118:6).

God Supplies Our Needs

As the forty years of wandering in the wilderness drew to a close, Moses reminded the new generation of Israelites, "The LORD your God has been with you; you have lacked nothing" (Deuteronomy 2:7).

God used ravens to feed Elijah (1 Kings 17:6). He saw to it that the barrel of meal did not become empty and the cruise of oil did not run out (verse 16). Elijah ate food

and drank water supplied by an angel (19:6).

God did the same for Elisha. In the events recorded in 2 Kings chapter four, the only thing that stopped the miraculous flow of oil was the inability of the widow to find another container.

Jesus told us, "Your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:32, 33). Also, here is the clear promise of Philippians 4:19—"My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

God brings peace

He is the God of peace (Romans 15:33). Paul wrote to the Roman church, "And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly" (Romans 16:20). Paul admonished the Corinthian church, "Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you" (2 Corinthians 13:11). To the Philippians he said, "The God of peace will be with you" (Philippians 4:9). The Thessalonian believers received this benediction: "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly" (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

Real peace comes only from God. Where God is loved and obeyed, where His will is done, where people walk humbly with Him in obedience to His word, there is peace.

God gives us light

"The LORD is my light and my salvation" (Psalm 27:1). "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5).

"Light" is truth clearly perceived in its moral character and practical applications. God is light—that is, God is the source of truth and He is in absolute moral harmony with the truth. If we are to know God and have fellowship with Him, we must come to the light because that is where He is. We cannot have God on our terms. He will not move from the light in order to compromise with us. If we want God, we must have Him on His terms. We are the ones who must move—from darkness to light. This means acknowledging the truth, loving the truth, living the truth. The truly regenerate person has abandoned all deliberate self-deception. He or she has given up all controversy with the truth and with the God of truth. The honest heart loves the truth and conforms to it willingly to the fullest extent that it knows the truth.

Truth comes readily to the person who is walking with God in the light. He or she is surrounded by it. Truth is the believer's natural way of living.

The practical result of a relationship with God in the light is intelligent living. Because he walks in the light with the God of light, the Christian can be certain of his path. When he finds himself in confusing circumstances, he does not have to remain there. "When I sit in darkness, the LORD will be a light to me" (Micah 7:8).

God will be our everlasting light. In Revelation 22:5 we are told that the redeemed will "need no lamp or light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them."

God teaches us

This follows from the fact that God is light. Light is truth revealed, not concealed. Light is the dissemination and the radiation of truth. The fullness of truth is in God. If we have fellowship with God, we have fellowship with the truth. Fellowship with the truth involves the communication of the truth, from God to us and through us to others.

God revealed the truth because He intended for us to know it. Moses said to Israel, "Out of heaven He let you hear His voice, that he might instruct you" (Deuteronomy 4:36).

If we are to be taught of God, we must have reverence for Him. The psalmist said, "Who is the man that fears the LORD? Him shall He teach in the way He chooses" (Psalm 25:12). In Psalm 32:8 God gave us this promise: "I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you shall go; I will guide you with my eye." Happy is the person who can honestly say, "O God, You have taught me from my youth; and to this day I declare Your wondrous works" (Psalm 71:17). The person who takes God as his Teacher from his youth on will never be a failure, neither in this life nor in the next. The wise young person will accept God's instructions and follow them diligently throughout life.

God cares for us as our Father

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus taught us to address God as, "Our Father in heaven" (Matthew 6:9). On the same occasion our Lord also said, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him?" (Matthew 7:11). This spiritual relationship is so unique and sacred that Jesus prohibited us from ascribing the term "Father" as a religious title to any man. "Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven" (Matthew 23:9).

When a person is born again by faith in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit brings the new believer into an awareness of his or her new "sonship." So Romans 8:15 says to us, "You did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father'." "Abba" is an intimate term for "father." See also Isaiah 63:16; 64:8; Luke 12:32; 2 Corinthians 6:18.

As Father over the "household of faith," God exercises paternal authority. As members of that family, believers are accountable to Him for our conduct. At times God corrects us, just as our earthly fathers did. When I was a boy, I could not get by with some of the things other children seemed to get by with. But my father never spanked the neighbor kids. As Christians, sometimes we see unbelievers doing things seemingly without any Divine chastisement. But let the Christian try it, and God will

take him to the woodshed! "Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?" (Hebrews 12:9).

God governs this world

God is the Judge. His is the true Supreme Court. As the moral Governor of the universe, He is the only one qualified to exercise ultimate and final justice. And because ultimate and final justice is a moral necessity, God has a moral mandate to administer it.

Abraham's question concerning this is recorded in Genesis 18:25—"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Of course, the answer to this rhetorical question is "yes." God is a righteous and just God. He is "the Judge of all" (Hebrews 12:23). "He is coming to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with His truth" (Psalm 96:13).

God will judge the world by Jesus Christ (John 5:22; Acts 17:30, 31). Jesus said that we will be judged by His word (John 12:48). So, study your Bible. *There will be a test.*

God is our Redeemer

Redemption is the greatest and most sublime of all of God's acts on behalf of the human race. This He accomplished in His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. If redemption had not been at the forefront of God's eternal purpose and plan, He never would have created mankind. So then, the very existence of the human race is conditioned on this supreme act of God.

The humble, repentant soul has always looked in faith to God as the Redeemer. Job declared, "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that he shall stand at last on the earth" (Job 19:25). And the psalmist prayed, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my redeemer" (Psalm 19:14). The apostle Peter reminds us, "You were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18, 19).

What a marvelous act on the part of Almighty God toward us! We mortals cannot comprehend the magnitude of the love, the wisdom, and the mercy involved in it. But we can come in faith and receive the full blessing of it through our Lord Jesus Christ. To Him be all glory and praise forever!

Our Obligation To God

It is evident to us from God's self-revelation that He did not create us and then abandon us. God is not aloof, standing off somewhere merely observing what is going on. Neither is He negligent, governing the universe in a slap-dash fashion. Somehow a general notion has developed that God is either so careless or so far away that He does not really care how we live or what kind of attitude we have toward Him and His word. Along with that comes the resulting notion that God is irrelevant. Such thinking could never be more wrong. God knows our every thought, word and deed, and the attitude of our hearts is of vital concern to Him.

God is infinitely great. His interests, well-being and happiness are supremely valuable and thus supremely important. Therefore our moral obligation to Him is total and all-inclusive. This is the great essential of life. Jesus made it very clear that God's interests have first claim. Our Lord said, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

God is a jealous God. He zealously guards His divine prerogatives. He is watchful and protective over His honor. His jealousy is a just, righteous, and holy jealousy. He is jealous, not in the selfish sense, but in love. He values His indispensable position and His vital relationship to His creatures. He guards that relationship. He deserves and demands supreme love and exclusive worship. In view of who He is He cannot justly require anything less. In doing this He has our good as well as His own glory in view. Our own vital well-being is inextricably involved in His; therefore our own well-being is dependent upon our rendering to Him supreme love and exclusive worship. Because He loves us, God is concerned that we do not serve other "gods" and thus dishonor Him and ruin ourselves. This fundamental moral principle heads the Ten Commandments.

"You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself any carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God," (Exodus 20:3-5).

Again, in Exodus 34:14 we read, "You shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God." And to the new generation of Israelites Moses solemnly declared, "The LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God" (Deuteronomy 4:24).

When Joshua saw the people's carelessness in contrast to God's integrity, he said to them, "You cannot serve the LORD, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God" (Joshua 24:19).

"You shall not tempt the LORD your God" (Deuteronomy 6:16). "Tempt" here means "put to the test." We must never attempt to "tease" God into giving in to our whims and

desires by trying to make Him jealous. We must not trifle with God or try to play games with Him. "Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?" (1 Corinthians 10:22).

God is worthy of our all. In Revelation 4:11 the "four and twenty" elders, representing the redeemed of all ages, joyfully cast their crowns before God and declare, "Worthy art Thou, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being" (NASB).

The first and great commandment is to love God with all our heart. Can any personal obligation be greater than to love God with all our heart, and therefore to obey, honor, glorify and please Him? Of course not. God made us. Our mental, moral, and physical capacities and abilities were conferred on us by God to be developed and employed for His glory and for our good and the good of others.

Each of us must ask himself, "Do I love God? Is my aim, my supreme motive, to glorify and please Him? Is this my conscious purpose and motive? Do I sincerely and honestly seek to use my capacities, abilities and resources intelligently for His highest well-being and that of His creatures? Or do I constantly defraud God by using them primarily for my own personal gratification?" This is the most important issue. God is infinitely important; therefore He is worthy of our supreme devotion. This clear definition of our obligation to our Maker and lawful Sovereign was embodied in the Mosaic law. We read in Deuteronomy 10:12, 13—

"And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good?" See also Micah 6:8.

Deuteronomy 11:1 gives us this charge: "Therefore you shall love the LORD your God and keep His charge, His statutes His judgments, and His commandments always." Under the law of Moses the people attempted to observe this as a legal requirement, and for this reason they failed. Now under grace the believer in Christ does so naturally because the love of God motivates his heart.

Joshua urged this universal moral obligation upon a later generation of Israelites: "But take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, to love the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, to keep His commandments, to hold fast to Him, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul" (Joshua 22:5).

People who want only enough "religion" to ease their consciences, to gain acceptance in their church and community, and to give them a hope of going to Heaven have missed the whole point. The real, personal issue is this: "What does the Lord my God and my Maker deserve and require of me?" The Lord Jesus defined it very clearly when He quoted from Deuteronomy 6:5 in answer to a question about the greatest commandment: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul,

and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:37-40).

Genuine, honest, sincere, whole-hearted love for God and man is the essential requirement. In fact, genuine love for God and man is the whole of religion and morality. It is the point of beginning, not an ideal that we struggle to attain. It is where self surrenders and Christ takes control. Until this happens there is no true religion in the soul. It is the dynamic of true saving faith.

Included in the obligation to love God is the duty to fear Him. Genuine love for God naturally includes a deep reverence for Him. To recognize that God deserves all our love is to recognize that He deserves our highest regard in every way. God is infinitely great, awesome and majestic. When Moses turned aside to see the burning bush, God said to him, "Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground" (Exodus 3:5).

The Scriptures admonish us to fear the Lord. This is not a slavish, cringing, selfish fear. Rather, it is giving to God in love the solemn, reverential awe and respect that are rightfully His, coupled with a healthy fear of the serious consequences of not doing so. There is nothing inconsistent between loving God and fearing Him. In fact, the person who truly loves God supremely will reverence Him supremely. They who trifle with God neither know Him nor love Him.

"Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him" (Psalm 33:8). "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints and to be had in reverence of all those who are about him" (Psalm 89:7).

The fear of the Lord is realistic and therefore reasonable and wise. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge" (Proverbs 1:7). "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Proverbs 9:10). A proper regard for God is the beginning point of a true education.

Reverential fear is evidence of a proper sense of values and an acknowledgement of our moral obligation. Ecclesiastes 12:13 expresses it this way: "Fear God, and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." People who are not afraid to sin have no true regard for God. With little or no hesitation they disregard His interests and injure His honor. How grossly insensitive they are to God's feelings! One of the two thieves crucified with Christ was so hard and impenitent that he finally drew from the other this rebuke: "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation?" (Luke 23:40).

Sin has to take on the magnitude of a public scandal before many people even regard it to be wrong. But a soul in tune with the holy One is so sensitive to His honor that they recoil from even the thought of disobeying Him.

It is possible to become so accustomed to the sublime that it becomes commonplace to us. The ungodly can camp, hunt and fish in the great outdoors, surrounded by nature's eloquent testimony to the power and majesty of God. But instead of being inspired to worship in awe and wonder, they curse and swear and throw beer cans around. Madness!

The words of Habakkuk 2:20 are for us today: "The LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him." This is not the silence of indifference or estrangement, but the silence of wonder, awe, reverence and adoration. Oh, that we would wake up and realize the awesomeness of approaching the presence of the Majesty in the heavens!

The fear of the Lord has a profound effect on our behavior. In 2 Corinthians 7:1 we are admonished, "Therefore having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." We are admonished also in 1 Peter 1:17, "And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your sojourning here in fear."

Our moral obligation to God also includes the duty and the privilege to glorify Him in all things. The true Christian loves God. This love is more than an emotion, a sentiment. It is a purpose, a commitment to glorify God. This is the motive, the great objective, of all who are truly born again. Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). Jesus said to His disciples, "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples" (John 15:8). A true disciple is primarily concerned about the Father's honor and glory. He goes beyond religious wishful thinking and sentiments. Feelings alone are not enough. The genuine Christian seeks to glorify God directly or indirectly in all things. His heart's desire is found in 1 Corinthians 10:31— "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." Earlier in the same epistle the apostle reminds us, "For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:20).

People who truly love God aim to please Him. It seems to be an assumption with some that the first question in religion is, "How can God please me?" To such people God is a means to an end. But let it ever be remembered that true religion is aimed at pleasing God, not ourselves. God's blessings are great, of course, but we must always serve God for His sake and not just for the sake of the blessings. Let us live to be a source of pleasure and happiness to God and also to others.

Jesus said that He did always the things that please the Father (John 8:29). This is the motive of every truly saved soul. Paul knew what he was living for. He said that he and his co-workers spoke "not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts" (1 Thessalonians 2:4).

Hebrews 11:5 records that "Enoch ... had this testimony, that he pleased God." Ah, here is the real meaning and purpose of life; here is our highest reason for being—pleasing God! One might attain fame, fortune and status in this life; but if that person fails to please God—to make pleasing God the grand aim of life—that person is a failure both for time and for eternity.

Yes, God does open His blessings to those who love Him supremely and therefore live to please Him. In 1 John 3:22 we read this promise: "And whatever we ask we receive from Him because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight."

Another privilege that we have is to praise God. God is worthy of all praise now and forever. "Let the peoples praise You, O God; let all the peoples praise You" (Psalm 67:3). Praise should be as natural to the Christian as breathing. It is the soul's love-language to God. Thus it will be forever, for God has redeemed us for the high calling and privilege of praising Him forever. (Ephesians 5:20; Colossians 1:3, 12; 3:17).

The Bible is a praise book. It gives us the reasons why we should give praise to God, and then tells us how to do it: "Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name" (Hebrews 13:15). God is worthy of total and exclusive worship. All the hosts of Heaven worship Him, and the universal response resonates in the hearts of the redeemed.

Every neglect or refusal to glorify and worship God defrauds Him of what is rightfully His. Every sinner is guilty of continuously cheating God. When Satan suggested that Jesus worship him, the Son of God retorted with the eternal mandate: "You shall worship the LORD your God and Him only you shall serve" (Matthew 4:10, quoting Deuteronomy 6:13).

Real worship is not the heartless recital of mere words, the mechanical performance of church ritual. Jesus said, "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24).

"Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness!" (Psalm 96:9).

God is our highest love and our highest joy. Desire God above all else. Hunger and thirst for God. Seek God. Believe God. Know God. Experience God. Walk with God and talk with God. Worship God. Praise God. Adore God. Enjoy God!

"As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul after You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God" (Psalm 42:1, 2).

"O God, You are my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water" (Psalm 63:1).

"My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God" (Psalm 84:2).

"Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good" (Psalm 34:8).

"Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD our Maker" (Psalm 95:6). Amen and amen.

Appendix A

The Father

As was stated earlier in the book, what is revealed about God applies to all three Persons in the Deity ("Godhead")—The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit—with *particular application to the Father because of the Father's primacy*, that is, His position as first among equals. For this reason the book was intended to be about the Father over all and yet including all.

"God the Father" (John 6:27). "God and Father" (Ephesians 4:6). "God our Father" (Colossians 1:2). "Our God and Father" (Philippians 4:20). These and other references to God as the Father occur numerous times in the Scriptures. This in itself establishes a principle: *unless the Scriptural reference is to all the Trinity or specifically to the Son and/or to the Holy Spirit, "God" means "The Father."*

Also, *when the Scriptures speak of God in relationship to the Son, "God" means "the Father."* For example, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Who loved the world and gave His Son? The Father. Again, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5;1). We have peace with *whom* through our Lord Jesus Christ? The Father. And so throughout the New Testament.

Even though it was assumed that the book would be about the Father over all, it has become clear that attention needs to be given to what is specific to the Father in His Fatherhood. That is the purpose of this Appendix.

It is important to define what is meant by the "masculinity" of the Father. Of course, it has nothing to do with sexuality because God is sexless. God is masculine in the sense that masculinity means "that which initiates, creates, provides, acts upon." All of creation is feminine in the sense that femininity means "that which receives the action, processes it, and gives it back."

Of the equal Persons in the Deity, the Father is the sovereign initiating authority. The Son is the mediating administrator. The Holy Spirit is the functioning agent.

Each Person in the Deity—the Trinity—is not a "part" or "fraction" of God. God is indivisible. Each does not exist apart from God. Each does not act independently of God. They are all in one and one in all. They are of one essence, one nature, one character, one mind and one will. They *are* God. They are *He*. The Trinity is commonly expressed as: "God the Father; God the Son; God the Holy Spirit." The Trinity is even better expressed as: "The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit—God."

What is commonly termed "the Fatherhood of God" is the unique relationship of the Father to: (1) the angelic and physical creation; (2) the Son; (3) mankind in general; and (4) His covenant people in particular. This relationship includes His wise, benevolent

and rightful authority and also His gracious provisions and care.

The Fatherhood Of God To The Angelic And Physical Creation.

When The Scriptures speak of God as the "Father" of the angelic and physical creation, they mean only that He is the creator, sustainer, and sole proprietor of it all with all sovereign rights and authority over it all.

Angelic spirits, both obedient and disobedient, good and evil, are called "sons of God" in the sense that God created them spirit-kind beings as He Himself is a spirit-being, as Jesus said (John 4:24).

"Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD and Satan [adversary, accuser] came among them" (Job 1:6; also 2:1).

God questioned Job, "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? Surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" (Job 38:4 - 7).

Many believe that the "mighty ones" in Psalm 29:1 and "the sons of the mighty" in Psalm 89:6 are angelic beings.

As the creator of the physical universe, God is called "the Father of lights," that is, the heavenly bodies (James 1:17).

"There is only one God, the Father, of [from] whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live" (1 Corinthians 8:6). He "gives life to all things" (1 Timothy 6:13).

The Fatherhood Of God To The Son.

The Scriptures clearly teach that the Persons in the Deity, the Holy Trinity, are co-equal and co-eternal. The Scriptures also teach that Jesus Christ is uniquely the Son of God. The question then that gave rise to the Christological issue in the post-apostolic Church is this: "How can the Second Person in the Trinity be co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and yet be His Son?"

This early controversy took place primarily within the contemporary and prevalent Greek mind-set. That mind-set formed the philosophical milieu that generated and contextualized the Christological controversy itself. In the process it produced the poisonous fruit of Arianism.

The Christological issue was formally settled at the Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325). The decision was affirmed at the Council of Constantinople (A.D. 381). The Nicene Creed became and continues to be the definitive creedal statement of orthodox

Christology.

This also established and gave creedal authority to the doctrine known as "The Eternal Generation Of The Son." Origen (ca. A.D. 185 - 254) was among the first to advance the idea of the eternal generation of the Son. Others followed.

The Eternal Generation of the Son is the doctrine that the Father by an act out of the necessity of His nature eternally generates the person but not the essence of the Son by communicating to the Son the whole and indivisible substance of the Deity. The doctrine has been stated, restated and refined in great depth and elaborate detail. It is firmly established in Catholic and Reformed theology. The Westminster Confession states that "the Son is eternally begotten of the Father" (WCF II:3).

The Nicene Creed itself contains elements of the doctrine, for example in the words "very God *of very God*" (emphasis added). Without the italicized words, it would read simply "very God."

Not all evangelicals accept the doctrine of The Eternal Generation Of The Son. No *undisputed* proof-text for the doctrine exists in the Scriptures. However it is refined and stated, the doctrine tends toward the very error it is intended to prevent. Intricate and abstruse terminology notwithstanding, one can hardly (if at all) escape the doctrine's implication that the deity of the Second Person in the Trinity is a *derived* deity.

One wonders whether or not the Christological controversy would have arisen at all were it not for the existence and influence of the prevailing Greek philosophical milieu that surrounded the post-apostolic Church.

Regarding the Fatherhood of God to the Son, let us consider the following:

(1) The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are co-equal and co-eternal as to their essence, deity and personhood. The Father is primary in position as the sovereign initiating authority and head. The Son and the Holy Spirit are subordinate to the Father *in position and function*. "Father" and "Son" are terms of relationship; relationship is a function of personhood; personhood is a quality of essence (being). The Father is not the source of the essence (being) of the Son; therefore He is not the source of the personhood of the Son. The Father is the source of the *sending* of the Son.

(2) The Second Person in the Deity was and is eternally willed by the Father with the concurrent (united) will of the whole Deity to be the Son. *Yeshua* (Jesus)—Jehovah (Yahweh)-Savior—is His eternal name. This eternal status and designated relationship to the Father was prophesied in Psalm 2:7. "I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, 'You are My Son. Today I have begotten You'." "Today" is a prolepsis (an anticipated future act stated as already existing). It refers to the day when the Second Person in the Trinity would become in time and space history the Son of God by the Incarnation, as He was eternally designated. "He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world" (1 Peter 1:20). We find another prolepsis in Revelation 13:8, where Jesus is called "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." This is the

natural reading. The alternative reading actually presupposes this because no one's name can be "written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world," as stated in Revelation 17:8, unless the proleptic sacrifice of the Lamb had made it possible. Revelation 13:8 makes Revelation 17:8 possible.

"For to which of the angels did God ever say, 'You are my Son, today I have become your Father [begotten you]'? Or again, 'I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son'? And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, 'Let all God's angels worship him'" (Hebrews 1:5, 6 NIV). This states that the Second Person in the eternal Trinity would become in *fact* as well as in *designation* the Son of God in Jesus, the Christ, both Son of God and Son of Man in the hypostatic union of the Incarnation. Notice the future tense of the emphasized words of the ancient prophecies: "I *will be* to Him a Father." "He *shall be* to Me a Son." "The day" arrived when the hypostatic union of God and man was accomplished by the Father with the Holy Spirit in the miraculous conception of Jesus Christ in the womb of the virgin Mary (Luke 1:30 - 35). Please ponder the words of this profound announcement, especially verse 35: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore [*for that reason*], also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God." Jesus is called the Son of God because of the Incarnation. Nine months later God brought the firstborn [*prototokos*] into the world (*oikoumene*) in a manger in Bethlehem; it was then that "a multitude of the heavenly host" broke into praise (Luke 2:1 - 14).

At Jesus' baptism, "suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased'" (Matthew 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22). Later, on the Mount Of Transfiguration, a cloud overshadowed them and a voice came out of the cloud: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" (Matthew 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35). Later, Peter wrote, "For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased'" (2 Peter 1:17).

(3) The Second Person in the Trinity will always be the only begotten (*monogenes*) and firstborn (*prototokos*) Son of God in *fact* as well as in designation, fully God and fully man (Son of God/Son of Man). Jesus Christ will forever be united with our redeemed humanity, our Brother. There is a *Man* in the glory—"the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5).

God will *not* "open the Trinity and let us in." God did *not* "become man that we might become God," another notion that emerged out of the ancient Greek mind-set. God will always be God; we will always be humanity—redeemed.

(4) The Second Person in the eternal Trinity is and always has been fully God and the *Logos* (Word) of God. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (John 1:1-3). See also 1 John 1:1, 2; Revelation 19:13. He is the verbal expression of God. God spoke the worlds into existence through Him—the *Logos*, the Word. When the *Logos* became flesh as the incarnated Son of the Father (John 1:14), He—the living Word—became

the spoken Word of God to us. "God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son..." (Hebrews 1:1, 2)

(5) The diversity in unity of the persons in the Trinity is a divine mystery, known only to God and revealed by God to man only to the extent that God has willed to reveal it. Even before the Second Person became the Son of God in fact as well as in eternal designation, the Father loved Him with the absolute love that exists eternally within the Deity. Jesus acknowledged this when He prayed to the Father, "You loved Me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24). Jesus said, "I and My Father are one" (John 10:30). "The Father is in Me, and I in Him" (John 10:38).

The Father was the source of Jesus' teachings. He said to the puzzled Jews, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me" (John 7:16). He said on another occasion, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as the Father taught Me, I do these things" (John 8:28). The Father anointed Him with the Holy Spirit for His works as well as His teaching. "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him" (Acts 10:38). The Father is the ultimate source of our salvation. Paul wrote, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19).

The Second Person in the Trinity had an eternal glory with God the Father. He laid this aside when He became the Son in the Incarnation (Philippians 2:7). Just before His crucifixion He prayed, "And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was" (John 17:5). He requested that upon the completion of His earthly mission the Father would restore to Him His pre-incarnate glory.

"Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father" (Romans 6:4). "God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name" (Philippians 2:9). "When He had by Himself purged our sins, [He] sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Hebrews 1:3). He is "in the bosom of [in intimate union with] the Father" (John 1:18), receiving from the Father all the fullness of God and filling us with that fullness by His Spirit (Ephesians 3:19; 5:18). He is "at the right hand of the Father," making intercession for us (Romans 8:34). When He returns, He will come "in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels" (Luke 9:26; also Matthew 16:27; Mark 8:38).

(6) As fully God, the Second Person in the Trinity is co-equal with the Father in eternal *essence*. As the incarnate Son of God He is subordinate to the Father in *position* (as is also the Holy Spirit). This distinction must be kept in mind; otherwise, people mistake Jesus' statements about Himself and His relationship to the Father as the Son. Jesus said, "The Father is greater than I" (John 10:29;14:28). Notice, He did *not* say, "The Father is *better* than I." The Son is not a lesser deity. He is not inferior in being (essence).

"In the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him" (Hebrews 5:8 - 10). The Son never disobeyed the Father. He did always the things that please the Father (John 8:29); yet, as the Son made flesh, He Himself went through the experience of human temptation and suffering. He learned first hand from *our* standpoint what it is and how to handle it in obedience to the Father. He can sympathize with our weaknesses because He "was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). This perfected (fully qualified) Him to be our "merciful and faithful High Priest" to God (Hebrews 2:17).

Paul wrote, "The head of Christ is God" (1 Corinthians 11:3). "You are Christ's, and Christ is God's" (1 Corinthians 3:23). God is "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:31; 1 Peter 1:3), "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory" (Ephesians 1:17). On the cross Jesus cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46, from Psalm 22:1). God the Father addressed the Son as God and at the same time referred to Himself as the God of the Son. Quoting verses six and seven of Psalm 45, the author of The Epistle to the Hebrews quoted God as saying to the Son, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions" (Hebrews 1:9). Jesus said to the disciples, "And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me" (Luke 22:29). When the end comes, Jesus Christ will deliver the kingdom "to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power" (1 Corinthians 15:24). "Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all" (verse 28).

After His resurrection Jesus said to Mary Magdalene, "I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God" (John 20:17). As the Son, Jesus Christ forever honors the higher position of the Father. Even from heaven He said, "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name" (Revelation 3:12).

Jesus Reveals The Father.

To know God, we must confine ourselves to His self-revelation; otherwise, we drift into speculation and error. God has chosen to reveal Himself in and by His Son. Jesus made this very clear in His statement: "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son wills to reveal Him" (Matthew 11:27). He said, "I do know Him and keep His word" (John 8:55). John wrote, "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him (John 1:18). "And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an

understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life" (1 John 5:20). Only the Son can reveal the Father because only the Son truly and fully knows the Father.

Later, in Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus said to Peter, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 16:13 - 17). Also, Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would testify of Him (John 15:26).

So then, by the Holy Spirit *the Father reveals the Son so that the Son will reveal the Father*. Jesus said that the Father has hidden these things from the wise and prudent and has revealed them to babes. So it seemed good in the Father's sight (Matthew 11:25, 26).

Because no one can *know* the Father except the person to whom the Son reveals Him, it follows logically that no one can *come to* the Father except through the Son. Jesus made this also very clear in His statement: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). Jesus Christ is the only way to know God and the only way to come to God. There is no other way. This is the exclusiveness of the gospel. It offends human pride and evokes its hostility. Nevertheless, it is the truth. The gospel is the only answer to man's sin and guilt. Believe or perish.

Some things the Son did not revealed to us. In the Olivet Discourse Jesus said to the disciples, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. But of that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mark 13:31, 32). After His resurrection, He said to the disciples, "It is not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority" (Acts 1:7).

Jesus showed us the Father by: (1) who He was (and is); (2) what He said; (3) what He did.

(1) Who He was (and is).

As a twelve year old child, Jesus knew who He was and who His real Father was. He said, "I must be about My Father's business" (Luke 2:49).

On one occasion Jesus said to the Pharisees, "You know neither Me nor My Father. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also" (John 8:19).

Just before His crucifixion, Jesus was addressing His disciples. When He said to them, "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him," Philip interrupted Him: "Lord, show us the Father and it is sufficient for us." Jesus replied, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you

say, 'Show us the Father?' Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves" (John 14:7 - 11).

Earlier, we looked at Hebrews 1:1, 2. As we go into verse 3 we read that the Son is the brightness of God's glory and the express image of His person. "Express image" means "exact representation," or as we might say, the "living picture" of God.

(2) What He said.

Jesus said, "I speak what I have seen with My Father" (John 8:38). To His disciples He said, "All things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you" (John 15:15).

Jesus said much *to* the Father and *about* the Father. As we examine His words, we learn more about the Father. In doing so we keep in mind that even though we learn much *about* the Father through Jesus' words, we can truly *know* the Father only through a personal relationship with His Son, Jesus Christ.

Jesus never addressed God as "our Father." He taught us to do so, but He never included Himself in that collective prayer. In speaking to others about the Father, Jesus used the plural, "your Father." Yet, at least on one occasion, in the Sermon On The Mount, Jesus used the singular. "Your [singular, Thy (KJV)] Father who sees in secret" (Matthew 6:4, 6, 18).

Sometimes He said "the Father." He spoke to the Father as *His* Father. He addressed God "Father" in prayer. In speaking of the Father, Jesus usually said "*my* Father."

The classic example of Jesus' prayers to the Father is His high-priestly prayer just before His crucifixion, recorded in John 17. He prayed that the Father would keep us through His name (verses 11 - 16); sanctify us by the truth (verses 17 - 19); perfectly unite us together in Him and the Father by the *delegated* (not pre-incarnate) glory that the Father gave to Him and He in turn delegated to us, so that the world will know that the Father sent the Son and that He loves us just as He loves Jesus (verses 20 - 23); and bring us "home" to Jesus at last so we can behold His eternal pre-incarnate glory (verse 24). He concluded His prayer, "And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them" (verse 26).

Jesus gave us a true picture of the Father in what He taught and what He did. Jesus did not express the grace and compassion of the Father to the exclusion of the justice of the Father. In the Sermon On The Mount He said, "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14, 15). Later, in the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant, where the king forgave the servant's

multi-million dollar debt but the servant would not forgive the few dollars that *his* fellow-servant owed *him*, the king reinstated the first servant's life-devastating debt. Jesus concluded: "So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses" (Matthew 18:23 - 35). Sobering words.

Jesus said, "The Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him" (John 5:22, 23). "For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted to the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man" (verses 26, 27).

Paul made clear that God will judge the world by Jesus Christ (Acts 17:31). Therefore, everyone will stand before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10, 11).

Jesus told us many things about the Father. He said to the disciples, "The Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God" (John 16:27). He said "your Father knows what things you have need of before you ask Him," and that He knows *before* we ask Him (Matthew 6:8, 32; Luke 12:30). "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!" (Matthew 7:11; Luke 11:13).

Jesus assured us that the Father sees the sparrow when it falls and knows the number of hairs on our head (Matthew 10:29 - 31). He knows more about you than you know about yourself. That is how closely, personally and tenderly He watches over you.

Jesus assured us, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and My Father are one" (John 10:27 - 30).

Jesus concluded The Parable of the Lost Sheep by saying, "Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish" (Matthew 18:14. Also Luke 15:4 - 7).

In the Parable Of The Lost Son Jesus showed us clearly the depth of the yearning heart of the Father over every wayward soul (Luke 15:11 - 32).

In His last instructions to His disciples before He was crucified, Jesus told them that in the gospel age after His resurrection, ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit, He would tell them plainly about The Father (John 16:25). This He did by the Spirit to the apostles and other New Testament writers.

(3). What He did.

Jesus said to the Jews, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working" (John 5:17). "Most assuredly I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son does also in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will" (Verses 19 - 21). Later He said to them, "Many good works I have shown you from My Father" (John 10:32).

Peter declared: "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him" (Acts 10:38).

What did Jesus do?

He healed the dying son of a desperate nobleman.

He spoke healing for a dying servant of a centurion at Capernaum.

He expelled demons by His spoken command and restored their victims to health, sanity and society.

He destroyed the infection in Peter's mother-in-law that had laid her low with a fever.

He cleansed lepers.

He gave sight to the blind.

He healed the lame, the maimed, the paralyzed.

He restored the severed ear of Malchus.

He went throughout Galilee healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease.

He raised a widow's son from the dead at Nain and turned the funeral into a celebration.

He reconstituted the decaying body of Lazarus and restored him to life with a single command: "Lazarus, come out!"

He raised Jairus's young daughter from the dead. On the way, he felt power flow out of him and heal a hemorrhaging woman when she touched the hem of His garment.

He stilled the storm on the Sea Of Galilee.

He filled the disciples' net with fish.

He fed thousands with a few loaves and a few little fish.

He forgave the woman who had been caught in adultery.

He took the children up in His arms and blessed them.

He laid down His life for us and took it up again. This command He received from His Father.

He is highly exalted at the right hand of the Father as our Great High priest.

He is coming again in power at the command of the Father.

These are the works of the Father, done by the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit.

These are the works of God.

The Fatherhood Of God To Mankind.

God is the Father of all mankind *by creation*. We go to the book of the prophet Malachi, chapter 2, verse 10. "Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us?" This rhetorical question demands one answer: *yes*. Although the prophet is addressing the nation of Israel, he speaks of God as our universal Father by creation, not by His covenant relationship with Israel.

Luke 3:23 - 38 traces the physical lineage of Jesus through His mother, Mary, from Joseph's legal father-in-law, Heli, working back progressively son-to-father all the way to Adam. The passage concludes by identifying Adam as the son of God because he was created by the direct action of God and thus became the progenitor and head of mankind.

As the apostle Paul was in the Areopagus in Athens proclaiming the one true God (whom they admitted not knowing) and exposing the folly of idolatry, he quoted from their own poets (Aratus of Soli and Cleanthes): "For we are also His offspring." Paul affirmed this statement of God's Fatherhood of our common humanity and drove the point "home." "Therefore since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature [Deity] is like gold or silver or stone, shaped by art and man's devising." He then went on to make his appeal. (See Acts 17:28 - 31).

Moses addressed God as "the God of the spirits of all flesh" (Numbers 16:22; 27:16). Likewise, the author of The Epistle To The Hebrews calls God "the Father of spirits," referring to our human spirit (Hebrews 12:9).

The Biblical references to God as the Father of mankind include:

(1) His act of creating us. We are created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26, 27).

(2) His providential care. He is "a father of the fatherless" (Psalm 68:5a). Jesus said that the Father "makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45). Paul said to the idol worshipers at Lystra, "[God] did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:17). He affirmed in the Areopagus that God "gives to all life, breath, and all things" (Acts 17:25). The Scriptures are full of statements that speak of our Father's care of all of His creatures, especially His human children. He is good to all.

(3) His governance, including His right and duty to judge. Psalm 68:5b says that He is also "a defender of widows." Even though "the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son" (John 5:22), that authority came from the Father (verse 27). God is the Judge of all (Hebrews 12:23). "God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ" (Romans 2:16).

(4) His being the initiator and the ultimate source of the plan and provision of salvation. It was the Father who "so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

(5) His unique Fatherhood to His covenant people. "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives" (Hebrews 12:5, 6; from Proverbs 3:11, 12).

The Fatherhood Of God To His Covenant People.

Israel: The Old Covenant.

Even before the children of Israel were delivered from bondage in Egypt, God identified them collectively as His son. God commanded Moses to say to Pharaoh, "Israel is My son, My firstborn" (Exodus 4:22).

God said through the prophet Hosea, "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son" (Hosea 11:1). The immediate and direct reference of this divine statement was to the nation of Israel. Its ultimate and highest reference is to Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God (Matthew 2:15).

In this statement through Hosea, God called the Israelites His "child" and affirmed His love for him even when they were still growing and increasing in Egypt. Upon their deliverance, God adopted them as His son. This established a special covenant relationship with them and marked them off from all other people and nations as uniquely His by adoption.

For this reason they were forbidden to engage in the cultic practices of other nations and cultures. Moses reminded the post-wilderness generation: "You are the children of the LORD your God; you shall not cut yourselves nor shave the front of your head for the dead" (Deuteronomy 14:1).

This covenant relationship was the basis of God's appeals to the nation in their backslidings.

"Do you thus deal with the LORD, O foolish and unwise people? Is He not your Father, who bought you? Has He not made you and established you?" (Deuteronomy 32:6).

"Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! For the LORD has spoken: 'I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me'" (Isaiah 1:2).

God spoke through the prophet Malachi: "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I then am the Father, where is My honor? And if I am a Master, where is My

reverence?" (Malachi 1:6).

In his prayer for the nation, the prophet Isaiah appealed to God for His mercies on the basis of His covenant relationship to them as their Father. "Doubtless You are our Father, though Abraham was ignorant of us, and Israel does not acknowledge us. You, O LORD, are our Father; our Redeemer from Everlasting is Your name" (Isaiah 63:16). "But now, O LORD, you are our Father" (Isaiah 64:8).

In Isaiah 43:5 - 7 God promised a future ingathering. He said to Israel, "Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your descendants from the east, and gather you from the west; I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' And to the south, 'Do not keep them back!' Bring My sons from afar, and My daughters from the ends of the earth—everyone who is called by My name, whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him."

We find the same promise in Jeremiah 31:7 - 9. "For thus says the LORD, 'Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout among the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, "O LORD, save Your people, the remnant of Israel!" Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the ends of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, the mother with child and the one who labors with child, together; a great throng shall return there. They shall come with weeping, and with supplications I will lead them. I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters, in a straight way in which they shall not stumble; for I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is My firstborn'." "Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For though I spoke against him, I earnestly remember him still; therefore My heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him,' says the LORD" (verse 20).

God established a special covenant with David and his royal line. In 2 Samuel 7:11 - 16 God spoke to David through Nathan the prophet. "Also the LORD tells you that He will make you a house, When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever."

The promises of this Davidic Covenant were ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the son of David *and* the Son of God.

In Psalm 89:26, 27 God said about David, "He shall cry to Me, 'You are my Father, my God, and the rock of my salvation.' Also I will make him My firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth." This part of the Davidic Covenant also had its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

The Church: The New Covenant.

It would be easy for this section to become more about the sonship *of* believers than about the Fatherhood of God *to* believers because so much is written about believers' part in the relationship. However, our focus here is primarily on God as our Father and only secondarily on believers' corresponding sonship and its privileges and responsibilities.

Jesus made clear that there are two *spiritual* "fatherhoods." He spoke of God as the Father of His covenant people. He also said to the disobedient, "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do" (John 8:44).

When Elymas the sorcerer withstood Barnabas and Saul, Saul (Paul) said to him, "O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all unrighteousness, will you not cease perverting the right ways of the Lord?" (Acts 13:10). The apostle John wrote, "In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother" (1 John 3:10). This is the sure test with obvious results.

We all know that we had no choice whatever in becoming children of God by creation. That was the result of natural conception by our parents with the impartation of "the image of God" by the Holy Spirit. "There is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty gives him understanding" (Job 32:8). "Breath" here means more than the air in our lungs—air does not give us understanding. It stands for the special infusion of personhood that comes by the creative action of the Holy Spirit. Some translate it "inspiration." God asked Job the rhetorical question, "Who has put wisdom in the mind [literally, inward parts]?, or who has given understanding to the heart?" (Job 38:36). All of us can and should say, "The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life" (Job 33:4). As was mentioned earlier, Paul affirmed in the Areopagus that God "gives to all life, breath, and all things" (Acts 17:25).

By contrast, we *do* have a choice in becoming children of God by redemption and adoption. Faith in Jesus Christ is an essential condition of becoming a child of God. He gave us this authority and privilege upon our receiving Jesus Christ by faith. "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" (John 1:12).

God is the initiator and prime agent of the new birth. The truth—His word—is His instrument. "Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures" (James 1:18). God sent His Son to redeem us; He gave us the gospel in His word; He sent the Holy Spirit to draw us to Jesus Christ; through faith in Christ we are reconciled to Him to live a new life joyfully in fellowship with Him in the Spirit. That is the new birth.

We are born again of the Holy Spirit (John 3:3 - 8), and by the witness of the Spirit we become aware of our sonship. We are born again of the Spirit to live in the Spirit. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God. For you did not

receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together" (Romans 8:14 - 17).

Paul wrote, "I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named" (Ephesians 3:14, 15). (Note: the absence of the definite article in verse 15, *pasa patria*, does not necessitate the alternate translation, "every family." See, e.g., Ephesians 2:21; Matthew 2:3; Acts 2:36; 7:22). God is the Father of the whole family of born-again believers, including those who are now in heaven and those who are still on earth.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved" (Ephesians 1:3 - 6).

"Whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified" (Romans 8:29, 30).

To conform us to the character image of His Son, The Father has the right to discipline us. My father never spanked the neighbors' kids. His concern was to make sure how I grew up. To be born-again children of God subjects us to His discipline. Our Father is determined to make us just like Jesus. We can either come the easy way or come the hard way. The choice is ours.

"My Son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges [*mastigoi*, "whips"—ouch! *Put that disobedience on your "never-again" list*] every son whom He receives [from Proverbs 3:11, 12]. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then are you illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:5 - 11).

It is all for our good. In Matthew 10:29, 30 Jesus said that our heavenly Father sees the sparrow when it falls. He knows at every moment the very hairs of our head. That is how closely, carefully and tenderly our Father watches over each and every one of us. He knows more about us personally than we know about ourselves, and He cares

more about our personal well-being than we ourselves often do.

The Father loves you. He wants you to know Him. Do not let fear keep you from Him. Come to Him through His Son, Jesus Christ, *and live*.

Appendix B

The Fear Of God

A carload of young people drive by and gun down a pedestrian.

A man living with a woman and her daughter abuses the girl sexually.

A corporate executive conceives a scheme to swindle hundreds of people out of their life savings.

A college professor ridicules a Christian student in front of the class.

Someone publicly spues out a stream of blasphemy and obscenity, then walks away laughing.

A judge arrogantly strikes down a law that defends genuine, traditional marriage and mandates relationships that mock God's holy institution.

A prominent couple in a church divorce; each marries someone else in the congregation; then they act (and expect others to act) as though it was nothing.

These true-life scenarios and many others like them all have something in common. They are fruit of a common root. They are glaring proof that something is fundamentally wrong with our culture's perception of reality. An essential component is missing from human thinking.

What is it?

We find it at the conclusion of the analysis of the human spiritual and moral condition recorded in Romans 3:10 - 18—"there is no fear of God before their eyes" (from Psalm 36:1).

People who are not afraid to sin have no proper regard for God. They do not love and reverence Him because they do not know Him. They do not know Him because "they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD" (Proverbs 1:29).

As he went to live in Gerar, Abraham was worried. Later he confessed: "I thought, surely the fear of God is not in this place." Genesis, Chapter 20 gives us the whole story.

In Exodus 1:17 we read that because the midwives feared God, they would not kill the newborn baby boys. What would have happened to those children had the fear of God been missing from those women's hearts? Does this say something to us today?

Why do people kill, steal, lie, curse, commit immoral acts, perpetrate injustices, and practice every kind of evil? *Because they do not fear God.* "Because they do not change, therefore they do not fear God" (Psalm 55:19).

What *is* the fear of God, and what does it mean to fear God?

God must be taken seriously because of who He is. He deserves reverence and awe. He requires it. Reason demands it. Divine revelation commands it. God's own self-revelation shows us that He is not someone to be trifled with or dismissed lightly, but to be held in the highest awe and reverence.

The fear of God can be, and often is, the guilty fear of divine consequences on oneself. That is the very first fear experienced by man. After Adam sinned, God called to him: "Where are you?" We notice the progression in Adam's pathetic response: "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself." (see Genesis 3:9, 10).

"Who knows the power of your anger? For your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you" (Psalm 90:11 NIV).

In Genesis 31:42 and 53 God is called "the Fear of Isaac."

Moses said to the people, "The LORD your God, the great and awesome God, is among you" (Deuteronomy 7:21). "The LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, awesome and mighty" (Deuteronomy 10:17).

Nehemiah addressed Him: "LORD God of heaven, O great and awesome God." (Nehemiah 1:5).

"With God is awesome majesty" (Job 37:22).

"The LORD Most High is awesome; He is a great King over all the earth" (Psalm 47:2).

This Hebrew word for "awesome" is also translated "terrible," "dreadful," "fearful," "reverend."

If we are morally obligated to love other human beings as ourselves because their intrinsic value is equal to our own, then we are morally obligated to love above all others (including ourselves) the one Person whose intrinsic value is infinitely greater than that of any other being (including ourselves).

Also, God created us as moral beings and therefore morally-*obligated* beings. As such, we need moral governance and guidance. This necessity is the basis of God's right and also His moral obligation to provide that governance and guidance.

Further, because of the qualities of His being, God is the one and only Person qualified to govern and guide us with ultimate authority. This is also the reason for our moral obligation to obey Him. In this, both God and man are obligated by love—a commitment to the highest good of all.

As the supreme ruler and universal moral authority, God's own honor and our well-being depend on our willing obedience to the universal moral law and moral obligations that He has revealed to us and that He administers over us for our good.

For these reasons God has the right to exercise moral authority and maintain moral order—including just and appropriate rewards and penalties—and we have the moral obligation to obey.

So then, for the well-being of all—and also because of who God is—all moral beings are obligated to love God; to honor Him; to hold Him in the highest respect, reverence and awe; to take seriously His moral authority; to realize the magnitude of His love in His opposition to evil, His outrage at sin, and the wrath of His love; and to recoil in horror at even the thought of dishonoring or disobeying Him.

The wholesome fear of God is a reverential awe of Him and His authority. People who love God have a healthy fear of Him born out of a desire to please Him coupled with a corresponding abhorrence of disobeying Him. They hate sin. Even the thought of sinning scares them. "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil" (Proverbs 3:18).

Also, the fear of God includes reverence for His name. "Holy and awesome is His name" (Psalm 111:9). We must be careful how we use the words "God" and "Lord" in daily conversation.

This is the fear of God.

A divine command and a universal moral obligation.

Over thirty times in The Scriptures we are commanded to fear God. This universal moral obligation is based on: (1) who God is, (2) His moral authority, and (3) our need of Him and His moral governance and guidance.

It should be self-evident that the fear of God is a universal moral obligation. This obligation is stated, reiterated and emphasized throughout The Scriptures. Here are samples of the biblical commands.

"Therefore you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him" (Deuteronomy 8:6. See also Deuteronomy 10:12, 13).

"You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice, and you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him" (Deuteronomy 13:4).

"Commandments" means *commands*. People take the word "commands" more seriously than "commandments." "The general has issued a command" carries far more weight with the troops than "the general has issued a commandment."

"Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling" (Psalm 2:11). Our rejoicing in God must never be frivolous; our God is an awesome God.

"Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him" (Psalm 33:8).

Under both law and grace we are to maintain a healthy fear of God. This is an essential part of our love for Him. "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be held in reverence by all who are around Him" (Psalm 89:7). God is held in reverence by the angelic host around Him; therefore He most certainly must be feared among believers .

Peter wrote, "And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your sojourning here in fear" (1 Peter 1:17).

"Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness! Tremble before Him, all the earth" (Psalm 96:9).

"Do not let your heart envy sinners, but live in the fear of the LORD always" (Proverbs 23:17 NASB).

"The LORD of hosts, Him shall you hallow; let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread" (Isaiah 8:13).

"Who would not fear You, O King of the nations? For this is Your rightful due" (Jeremiah 10:7).

Jesus said, "And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him! (Luke 12:4, 5).

Paul warned the gentile believers not to "boast" against unbelieving Jews. Using the metaphor of the olive tree and its branches, he wrote, "You will say then, 'Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.' Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear" (Romans 11:20).

"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12, 13).

Believers are to submit themselves to one another in the fear of God (Ephesians 5:21). The fear of God replaces pride with humility and fosters mutual submission in love.

Many early Christians were slaves with harsh task-masters. How did the fear of God relate to their situation, and what applications can we make to employer-employee and other relationships today?

Here is what Colossians 3:22 says: "Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God" (See also Ephesians 6:5). A proper, healthy fear of God is liberating. The fear of God transcends, overcomes and displaces all selfish fears. It overcomes the slave's fear of his master and the employee's fear of "the boss." It provides the right motive for serving and inspires God-given confidence, releasing us to serve joyfully in love.

"Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king" (1 Peter 2:17).

A universal necessity.

The fear of God is also a universal necessity.

We hear it said that society is changing. So it is, but not in all ways for the better. Also, the change is not taking place peacefully. People who demand freedom to do as they please are deliberately assaulting the spiritual, moral and cultural foundation of a stable, free and blessed society. People who are awake to the danger must rise up and defending that foundation. It is the age-long war of good against evil.

Liberty and freedom are not exactly the same. Liberty to do what we *ought* is *not* the same as freedom to do whatever we *want*. Liberty will not survive where there is unconstrained freedom. For society to have liberty, freedom must be constrained by morality. Liberty must have mutually recognized and mutually supported spiritual and moral constraints. Where the fear of God is absent, unconstrained freedom will degenerate into anarchy, and anarchy will bring about stern law—and that will be the end of both liberty *and* freedom. Only the Judeo/Christian revelation provides the morality that will support and guarantee liberty.

It is folly to believe that we can have a strong structure of economic liberty built on a corrupt and weak moral foundation. Moral collapse will result in the collapse of liberty, including economic liberty. The person who supports economic liberty but says "I don't care who people sleep with" is deluded.

The absence of the fear of God.

What happens to a society where the fear of God is absent? That society degenerates spiritually, morally and culturally. Remember, the analysis of the human moral condition recorded in Romans 3:10 -18 states the cause: "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

"The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes" (Psalm 36:1 KJV).

"Because they do not change, therefore they do not fear God" (Psalm 55:19).

God said to the apostate people of Judah in Jeremiah's day, "Know therefore and see that it is an evil and bitter thing that you have forsaken the LORD your God, and the fear of Me is not in you" (Jeremiah 2:19). "Do you not fear Me?" says the LORD? "Will you not tremble at My presence...?" (Jeremiah 5:22). Because they refused to fear God, they suffered the bitter consequences.

We began with a sampling of the daily doings of people who have no fear of God. No doubt you can add to the list from your own experiences and observations. The Scriptures also give us some instructional examples.

Violence and anger.

"God said to Noah, 'The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them'" (Genesis 6:13).

Where God is not recognized as our Creator, human life is at risk. If you live with apprehension in a crime-ridden section of a major city, think of living in Noah's day in the constant, daily dread of either being killed yourself or killing someone else in self-defense.

When Abraham went south to sojourn in Gerar, he was so afraid that someone might kill him to get his wife that he said that she was his sister (a "half-truth"). When asked why he did this, he confessed, "Because I thought, surely the fear of God is not in this place" (Genesis 20:11).

In Exodus 1:16, 17 (also verse 21) we read that the Pharaoh of Egypt ordered the midwives to kill all the newborn Hebrew baby boys. "But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the male children alive." Think what would have happened to the nation of Israel had the fear of God been absent from the hearts of those midwives. Does this speak to us today?

Physicians and others in the health professions need to stand together against the growing pressures to engage in practices that violate the Hippocratic oath and that disregard human exceptionalism, even if it calls for mass non-compliance. They deserve our prayers and support.

Moses said to a new generation of Israelites, "Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you were coming out of Egypt, how he met you on the way and attacked your rear ranks, all the stragglers at your rear, when you were tired and weary; and he did not fear God" (Deuteronomy 25:18).

Where the fear of God is absent human life itself is devalued. We see this happening from the womb to the tomb. Abortion, infanticide, murder, genocide, "quality of life" versus "sanctity of life" rationalization, euthanasia, suicide.

Knowingly, willingly and deliberately choosing to end one's own life is the ultimate act of defiance. It is saying to God, "I will have the ultimate say in my own life." People

who say "whose life is it, anyway" do not want to know the answer. Yet some people who publicly end their own lives are celebrated by a godless society.

Many people who have been tempted to take their own lives in times of suffering and depression have been restrained from doing so by a healthy and life-saving fear of God. They chose rather to live by faith and overcome by the grace of God. *They* are the truly brave ones.

Tyrants do not value the lives of their own people. They recklessly throw their young men into battle to be slaughtered. Wrong theology (including atheism) results in wrong anthropology with all of its cruel and dehumanized manifestations.

Injustice.

We observe the absence of the fear of God in the various injustices that the ungodly perpetrate on people. If people do not have a proper regard for God, they cannot have a proper regard for their fellow human beings. It takes the fear of God to foster a proper value of human beings. It is impossible to have a high regard for humanity if we have a low regard for God. If God is not our Creator, we are only matter; and *if we are only matter, we do not matter*. We are exploitable and expendable.

God commanded through Moses, "You shall not defraud your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of him who is hired shall not remain all night with you until morning. You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind, but shall fear your God: I am the LORD. You shall do no injustice in judgment" (Leviticus 19:13 -15a).

"Therefore you shall not oppress one another, but you shall fear your God; for I am the LORD your God" (Leviticus 25:17).

"I am the LORD." That is the ultimate authority that demands and defends human justice.

God spoke through the prophet Malachi and named some of the sins and injustices that result when people do not fear Him, and what will happen to the offenders. "'I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness against sorcerers, against adulterers, against perjurers, against those who exploit wage earners and widows and the fatherless, and against those who turn away an alien—because they do not fear Me,' says the LORD" (Malachi 3:5). These sins are wide-spread in contemporary society, and for the same reason—the absence of the fear of God.

Jesus gave us an example of this in His parable of the unjust judge, recorded in Luke 18:1 - 8. It begins, "There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, 'Avenge me of my adversary.' And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I do not fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.'"

Although the subject of this parable is prayer, it does point out the fact that the judge did not fear God and therefore did not regard man. The connection is obvious. Where God is not regarded, human rights are disregarded. This speaks to every modern judicial system. A society that thinks low of God cannot think high of man. Justice begins with the fear of God.

Just before his death, king David said, "The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spoke to me: 'He who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God'" (2 Samuel 23:3, 4).

We notice in these commands that the focus is on the individual person. What is termed "social justice" is in reality justice to the individual, extended to all the people. We cannot truly say "the people are important" until first we have said "the *person* is important." If the person is a "zero," seven billion "zeroes" are still "zero." That is the difference between socialism and biblical principles. If social programs benefit "the people," but ignore the intrinsic value of the person as created in the image of God, the person becomes expendable. Individuals "fall through the cracks" of the collective system.

We naturally affirm our human exceptionalism and the value of each person every time we expend huge amounts of money and effort to rescue just one person who is trapped in a mine or stranded on a mountain, or to get a heart-attack victim to immediate medical help. We are affirming that each person is just as valuable as one among billions as he or she would be if that person were the only person on earth.

The intrinsic value of the individual person is not derived by dividing that person by the total number of other persons. One person among two is not half as valuable. One person among seven billion is not one seven-billionth as valuable. What humanity is, the person is. Each one carries the *Imago Dei*.

Jesus taught this in some of His parables. He focused on the *one* lost sheep, the *one* lost coin, the *one* lost son. To Him the multitudes were made up of individual persons, and He loved and related to them as such.

The preface of the United States Declaration Of Independence affirms that all human beings are created equal in our personhood and rights, and that our inalienable rights are an endowment by our Creator (not conferred on us by government). Abraham Lincoln said that any tyrants who might arise in this nation would find that "a hard nut to crack." That is the foundational truth that eventually led to the abolition of slavery and the enactment of all civil rights legislation since. It has influenced western civilization with its liberating truth.

Sexual immorality.

All the sexual immorality and perversions of human sexuality that run rampant in this "adulterous and sinful generation" (Mark 8:38) are an arrogant affront to the Creator and demonstrate a complete absence of any proper fear of Him and His word.

"We will do what we will do, and we will make God, the Bible and the Church agree with us—or *else!*" That is the spirit of the age. It pervades all levels and institutions of society, infiltrating and corrupting even some in the Church.

What a contrast this is to the spiritual and moral integrity of Joseph in Egypt. When Potiphar's cheating wife tried her utmost to seduce this young Hebrew house slave, his main concern was not for himself—what might happen to *him* if he were found out. Even though his natural hormones were no doubt running strong, Joseph resolutely said, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9). That is what mattered to him. Joseph's value system had the essential component—the fear of God.

Later, in a different context, Joseph gave us the reason for his integrity in this and in all of his dealings. He declared, "I fear God" (Genesis 42:18).

Some Christians say, "After all, fornication and adultery are no worse than other sins." That ignores the plain statement in 2 Peter 2:9, 10, "The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lusts of uncleanness and despise authority." *Especially.*

I personally heard a "spiritual" woman in a church say, "The sins of the flesh don't matter because the flesh is going to be destroyed anyway." Horrible! Wrong philosophy leads to wrong theology and thus to wrong living. It is the doctrine of Balaam—so said "He who has the sharp two-edged sword" (Revelation 2:12, 14). The antidote for philosophical, theological and behavioral corruption is *the fear of God!*

Confusion, deception, delusion.

Where the fear of God is absent, an adequate epistemology is impossible. That is, without the true knowledge of God and His rightful authority, we would have no ultimate reference point for truly knowing and understanding with certainty. We would have no ultimate reference point for truly knowing what is intrinsically valuable that ought to be chosen and pursued for its own sake; therefore we would have no way of knowing by what means to pursue it.

We know some of these things *intuitively*, that is, in their own light; but without the ultimate reference point in God and His self-revelation, it is impossible to offer a logical reason for what we intuit to be intrinsically valuable.

Again, if we are only matter, we do not matter. If God is not who He is, we cannot be who we are. We know *that* we are, and we know *who* we are—only because God is who He is. What we know *intuitively* about who we are we know *factually* and therefore *reasonably* by divine revelation. Intuition, reason and fact unite in divine revelation.

In our advanced information and technology we know much about the "know *what*" and the "know *how*," but we are lacking in the know *why*. Apart from God and His self-revelation, nothing makes sense that reason tells us *ought* to make sense. The absence of the fear of God leaves society floating without an accurate compass in a turbulent sea of subjectivism and relativism.

Confusion leaves people open to *deception*, and *deception* leads people into *delusion*. Worst of all, the people who have been drawn into delusion are not even aware that they *are* in delusion. Many imagine that they possess advanced enlightenment. They are like the idolater who holds an idol in his hand. "He feeds on ashes, a deluded heart misleads him; he cannot save himself, or say, 'Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?'" (Isaiah 44:20 NIV).

The list goes on: pride, lying, cheating, war, destruction, exploitation, spiritual and moral ignorance and error, meaninglessness and nihilism, and much more—the long litany of selfish human attitudes and behavior. The effects of the absence of the fear of God are seen and experienced everywhere, from crime and conflict in society to carelessness and corruption in the Church.

The beginning of knowledge and wisdom.

That is why "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of both knowledge and wisdom" (Psalm 110:10; Proverbs 1:7; 9:10). When we acknowledge who God is and revere

Him accordingly, we have the foundation and starting point of meaningful knowledge and true wisdom. Such wisdom is "the wisdom that is from above" in contrast to "earthly, sensual, demonic" so-called wisdom (James 3:13 - 18).

The fear of God is the only correct starting point that, when followed logically and consistently, will lead of necessity to the correct conclusions. Any other starting point is "earthly, sensual, demonic," and, when followed "logically" and consistently, its trajectory will lead of necessity to wrong conclusions.

Think of the highly skilled surgeon who successfully operated on the wrong leg! *The correct starting point is absolutely essential.*

A person who does not have a reverential awe and fear of God has missed the vital and necessary key to *all* knowledge and wisdom. Such a person can have a very high I. Q., a broad knowledge of facts and philosophies and the whole range of worldly "wisdom" as described in James 3:13 - 18. Nevertheless, that person will adopt a world view that is sensual, ego-centric and demonic, and will end up with a skewed and restricted perception of reality. That person can know the *what* and *how* of many things but cannot know the ultimate *why* of anything. Set God aside, and nothing makes sense; acknowledge the centrality of God as He has made Himself known, and everything comes into focus.

Until we come to know the fear of God, we truly know nothing and we are devoid of true wisdom. We do not know the answers to the great questions of life and therefore we do not know how to live. Because this positive, wholesome reverence of God is the only valid reference point for a correct understanding of reality—*of everything*—it alone corrects and establishes our values, properly orders our priorities and produces wholesome behavior.

After asking "From where does wisdom come? and where is the place of understanding?" Job goes on to say, "God understands its way, and He knows its place." Then he says that God saw wisdom, declared it, and said to man, "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding" (Job 28:20 - 28).

Later, after a lifetime of observation, keen insight, and personal experience, Solomon wrote, "Furthermore, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil, and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives. Afterwards they go to the dead" (Ecclesiastes 9:3 NASB).

Notice, the insanity is in their hearts, not their intellect. This has nothing to do with one's I.Q, education, or skill in choosing shrewd and effective means to achieve one's ends. It is not about a person's mental ability, but how one uses his or her mental ability.

Mental insanity is not usually the fault of the person. Moral insanity always is. It is choosing a totally unreasonable supreme end in life—self-gratification—and using one's intelligence to devise and carry out means to achieve that unreasonable end. It is making self the supreme being in one's self-created world, the center around which everything and everybody else ultimately revolves. This is pride. It is irrational. No one can logically defend the proposition that one's self-interest/self-gratification is more valuable, more important than the supreme honor and happiness of God and the equal well-being and happiness of others. It is contrary to fact and therefore contrary to reason; yet that is the thinking, the character and the lifestyle of every sinner.

If the end is contrary to reality and reason, all the means and actions used to achieve that end are also contrary to reason, even if they are intelligently chosen and shrewdly used to achieve it. Sinners live as though they have lost their mind. They are "crazy in the heart." They are fully responsible for their moral madness. The sinner's first truly sane act is to repent—turn completely to God from sin—and be reconciled to God through faith in Jesus Christ. That is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom.

And what a blessed and delightful beginning it is!

The fear of the Lord must be learned and taught.

This new life, this new beginning of knowledge and wisdom, this fear and reverence for God and all things sacred, must be nurtured. It must be learned in its practical relationships and practical applications. To be *learned*, it must be *taught*. To be taught, it must have people willing and eager to learn. That takes persuasion, human and especially divine.

David prayed, "Teach me Your way, O LORD; I will walk in Your truth; unite my heart to fear Your name" (Psalm 86:11).

"Who, then, is the man that fears the LORD? He will instruct him in the way chosen for him" (Psalm 25:12 NIV).

"My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you, so that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver,

and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding; He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly; He guards the paths of justice, and preserves the way of His saints. Then you will understand righteousness and justice, equity and every good path" (Proverbs 2:1 - 10).

If you have that determination, "then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God" (verse 5).

The psalmist prayed, "Establish Your word to Your servant, who is devoted to fearing You" (Psalm 119:38).

"The fear of the LORD is the instruction of wisdom, and before honor is humility" (Proverbs 15:33).

First and foremost, we must be taught who God *is*. This is absolutely essential. All else depends on it. All else is determined by it. All else follows from it. All else results from it. A correct understanding of the person and character of God, if followed consistently, will lead to a correct understanding of all else. Wrong thinking about the person and character of God will lead to misunderstanding and error in all else.

How do we learn the fear of God? By what means are we taught to fear Him?

God's creation.

All people throughout all times and in all places have had the revelation of God's deity and power displayed in the physical creation. Romans 1:20 reminds us, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse."

This is called "natural revelation" and "natural theology." Looking at all of nature that surrounds us and what can be seen of the universe with the naked eye (to say nothing of what can be seen by powerful telescopes) should leave no doubt in the mind of any intelligent person that God is, that He is all-powerful, and that He possesses all wisdom and intelligence.

What is said of the macrocosm is said also of the microcosm. Both the telescope and the microscope reveal God's deity and power.

This universal display has evoked the awe and wonder of mankind throughout the millennia. It should result in the fear of God, including worship and obedience. When it does not do so, the cause is the perverse determination of the stubborn heart to hold on to one's pride and follow one's passions.

This natural recognition of God and of His power revealed in the creation is not the result of "primitive, pre-scientific ignorance." Rather, it is intelligent and demanded by reality and reason. It was perverted into idolatry by people "who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen" (Romans 1:25). Idolatry gave them gods of their own making that would serve their purposes and sanction their passions.

The same pride and passions are the driving force behind the stubborn refusal by modern man to recognize the theological witness of the creation. Macro-evolution and Darwinism are intellectually and morally bankrupt. Their materialistic cosmogony/cosmology collapses completely before the twin scientific impossibilities: (1) everything out of nothing, and (2) purposeful, detailed design and complexity apart from intelligent, mind-derived, organized and applied information.

Materialism makes divine creation unnecessary; scientific progress is making materialism increasingly untenable. The progress of science itself is crowding mankind into a teleological corner, and the God-deniers are desperately and irrationally resisting the emerging realities. Their minds are blinded by the insanity that is in their hearts.

God's Works.

God's sovereignty as seen in His works should instill in man a holy and healthy fear. God's works include His providences, His miracles, and His judgments. These show His power, His authority over nature and in human events, and His involvement in our personal lives. All of this should command our awe and utmost respect for Him.

In Genesis 35:5 we read an interesting comment that illustrates the divine protection that accompanied Jacob and his family in their journey from Shechem to Bethel. "As they journeyed, the terror of God was upon the cities that were all around them, and they did not pursue the sons of Jacob."

We find another interesting event in 1 Samuel, Chapter 11. The men of Jabesh Gilead were in a desperate situation. The Ammonites threatened to gouge out the eyes of all the men of the city. They appealed to king Saul. Immediately the Spirit of God came on Saul and he issued a draft notice to all the men of Israel with this warning: whoever did not respond would have his oxen slaughtered. "And the fear of the LORD

fell on the people, and they came out with one consent" (Verse 7). Of course, the men of Jabesh Gilead were rescued. *The fear of God gets results!*

God parted the Red Sea for Israel and closed it again against Pharaoh's army. "Thus Israel saw the great work which the LORD had done in Egypt; so the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD and His servant Moses" (Exodus 14:31).

After the miracle of the parting the waters of the Jordan river that allowed the Israelites to cross on dry ground, Joshua said to the people, "The LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed over, that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty, and that you may fear the LORD your God forever" (Joshua 4:23, 24).

The "Preacher" wrote, "I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it. God does it, that men should fear before Him" (Ecclesiastes 3:14).

When Israel demanded a king like all the nations, the prophet Samuel reminded them of the times that the Lord Himself had delivered them without a king, and warned them of the oppressions that a king would bring on them. But instead of waiting for God's time and God's man (David), the people insisted on having a king immediately. So God gave them Saul for the next forty years.

This was during wheat harvest. As a rebuke and chastisement for their lack of faith and reverence, "Samuel called to the LORD, and the LORD sent thunder and rain; and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel" (1 Samuel 12:18).

A man named Uzzah impulsively put his hand on the ark of God. For reasons known only to the just and holy God who alone knows the human heart, "the anger of the LORD was aroused against Uzzah, and God struck him there for his error; and he died there by the ark of God." Immediately king David became angry because of what the LORD did, but when he had time to reflect on the matter, "David was afraid of the LORD that day; and he said, 'How can the ark of the LORD come to me?'" (2 Samuel 6:6 - 9; also 1 Chronicles 13:9 - 12).

In Psalm 40:1 - 3, David testified of God's mercies to him and the positive effect this would have on all who would witness it. "I waited patiently for the LORD, and He inclined to me, and heard my cry. He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps. He has put a new song in my mouth—praise to our God; many will see it and fear, and will trust in the LORD."

See. Fear. Trust. That is the instructive process and the powerful, positive result.

In Solomon's prayer of dedication of the temple recorded in 1 Kings 8:22 - 53, the king asked for God's mercies upon the people when they sin and when they face adversities of various kinds. The purpose was "that they may fear You all the days that they live in the land which You gave to our fathers" (verse 40). The purpose included all foreigners who dwell among them, and also "that all the peoples of the earth may know Your name and fear You" (verses 40, 43).

"God shall bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him" (Psalm 67:7).

"According to their deeds, accordingly He will repay, fury to His adversaries, recompense to His enemies; The coastlands He will fully repay. So shall they fear the name of the LORD from the west, and His glory from the rising of the sun" (Isaiah 59:18, 19).

In the days of Jehoshaphat, after God had given Judah victory over an invading army, "the fear of God was on all the kingdoms of those countries when they heard that the LORD had fought against the enemies of Israel" (2 Chronicles 20:29).

When the ship that was carrying Jonah went through near shipwreck because of the prophet's disobedience, the crewmen cried out to their own gods. When they found out that Jonah was the cause, then "they cried out to the LORD." "So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the LORD, and offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows" (Jonah 1:4 - 16).

When king Darius witnessed how God had protected Daniel by shutting the lions' mouths, Darius announced: "I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom men must tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for He is the living God, and steadfast forever; His kingdom is one which shall not be destroyed, and His kingdom shall endure to the end. He delivers and rescues, and He works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, who has delivered Daniel from the power of the lions" (Daniel 6:26, 27).

When Jesus forgave and healed the paralytic, the ones who witnessed the miracle "were all amazed, and they glorified God and were filled with fear, saying, 'We have seen strange things today'" (Luke 5:26).

The same thing happened when Jesus raised the widow's son from the dead. "Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God" (Luke 7:16).

Sometimes the works of God correct peoples' theology, including their Christology. At the cross, "when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, 'Truly this was the Son of God!'" (Matthew 27:54).

At the Day of Pentecost, about three thousand were converted. "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles" (Acts 2:42, 43).

When Ananias and Sapphira died because they lied to the Holy Spirit, "great fear came upon the church and upon all who heard these things" (Acts 5:11).

"Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested" (Revelation 15:3, 4).

All nations! The children of Israel shall "fear the LORD His goodness in the latter days" (Hosea 3:5). "So the nations shall fear the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth Your glory" (Psalm 102:15).

"The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever" (Psalm 19:9).

God's word.

So how are we taught about God's person and character? The main instructional instrument is the word of God. The Bible's special, verbal revelation is correct and undistorted. People who truly know the Bible know who God is.

The fear of God includes a fear of His word. If we take God seriously, we will take what He says seriously. The psalmist said to God, "My flesh trembles in fear of you; I stand in awe of your laws" (Psalm 119:120 NIV). "My heart stands in awe of Your word" (Psalm 119:161). God says, "But to this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word" (Isaiah 66:2).

"By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household" (Hebrews 11:7). What moved Noah with godly fear? God's specific word to him. He acted in faith on God's word alone, and we are here as a result.

Back when Israel was at Horeb (Mount Sinai), God said to Moses, "Gather the people to Me, and let them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children" (Deuteronomy 4:10).

Later, a new generation of Israelites were commanded to learn the word of God so that they would learn the fear of God (Deuteronomy 6:2; 21:12). In Deuteronomy 14:22, 23 they were instructed to tithe as a part of learning to fear God.

Deuteronomy 28:58 says that Israel was to observe to do all that is written in the Law so that they may "fear this glorious and fearful name: THE LORD YOUR GOD." It also graphically describes what would happen to them as a people if they refused.

Just before his death, Moses wrote the Book of Deuteronomy and delivered it to the priests, with this command: "At the end of every seven years, at the appointed time in the year of release, at the Feast of Tabernacles, when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Gather the people together, men and women and little ones, and the stranger who is within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear the LORD your God and carefully observe all the words of this law, and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and fear the LORD your God as long as you live in the land which you cross the Jordan to possess" (Deuteronomy 31:10 - 13).

David said, "Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD " (Psalm 34:11).

After the Assyrians had conquered the northern kingdom of Israel, they brought people from other lands and placed them in the cities of Samaria. These foreigners did not know God and His word; so some of them were killed by wild beasts. That got their attention. So they asked the king of Assyria to bring back a priest from among the Jewish captives to teach them "the rituals of the God of the land." One of the priest among the captives came to Bethel, "and taught them how they should fear the LORD" (2 Kings 17:24 - 28).

When some of the Jews who returned from captivity intermarried with the ungodly pagans, Ezra went into mourning. Later he recorded the response. "Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel assembled to me, because of the transgression of those who had been carried away captive" (Ezra 94). What a different society we would be living in today if everyone took God's word that seriously.

Much of the absence of the fear of God, both in society and in the Church, is the result of not knowing the word of God. People who know the word of God should know the fear of God.

God's presence.

The Scriptures record many events when the manifest presence of God filled people with His holy fear. At times it brought them to their knees and even prostrated them on the ground.

God appeared to Jacob in a dream as he was on his way to Haran. "Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.' And he was afraid and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!'" (Genesis 28:16, 17).

When God appeared to Moses in a burning bush, "Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God" (Exodus 3:6). When Stephen was before the council, he mentioned this very event and said, "Moses trembled and dared not look" (Acts 7:32).

At the giving of the Law, the glory of God descended on Mount Sinai in all of its fearsome display. "When the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off" (Exodus 20:18). Surrounded by the awe-inspiring demonstrations of God's power, Moses exclaimed, "I am trembling with fear" (Hebrews 12:21 NIV). When he reported this to the new generation, he said, "For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure with which the LORD was angry with you, to destroy you" (Deuteronomy 9:19).

On a particular occasion, "Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of meeting, and came out and blessed the people. Then the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people, and fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar. When all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces" (Leviticus 9:23, 24).

When Solomon prayed at the dedication of the temple, "the glory of the LORD filled the temple. And the priests could not enter into the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD had filled the LORD's house. And when all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the LORD on the temple, they bowed their faces to the ground on the pavement, and worshiped and praised the LORD, saying, 'For He is good, for His mercy endures forever'" (2 Chronicles 7:1 - 3).

Under such a direct and awesome display of the glory and majesty of God, who would dare trifle? Who would be so reckless as to take His holy name in vain, so

perverse as to utter profanity in the presence of Almighty God, the Majesty on High, the Dread Sovereign of the universe!

What a contrast to the shocking carelessness of our present rash society—blind to the glory and majesty of God, spiritually dull and insensible, self-righteous and pseudo-sophisticated—that madly plays the fool before the Majesty in the heavens!

When Elijah the prophet called down fire from heaven on the sacrifice, the people saw it and "fell on their faces; and they said, 'The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God!'" (1 Kings 18:38, 39).

When God gave the prophet Ezekiel a vision of the new temple, he saw the glory of God and fell on his face (Ezekiel 43:3; 44:4).

When Saul of Tarsus was on his way to Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven shone on him and the men who were with him. Immediately Saul and all the rest fell to the ground (Acts 9:4; 22:7; 24:26:14).

The apostle John recorded what happened to him on the island of Patmos when he saw the glory of the risen, glorified Son of God. "When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead" (Revelation 1:17).

The *presence* of the Lord should produce in us the *fear* of the Lord. The closer we get to God and the deeper our prayer life and our personal communion with God become, the greater should be our awareness of His majesty and holiness. People who walk closely with God have learned the reverential and blessed fear of God. Only people who are not close to God yell at Him.

In summary, seeing the *works* of God should lead us to hear the *word* of God, to learn the *fear* of God, to *love* God, to live in the *presence* of God, walk in the *ways* of God, to *serve* God, and teach our children and others to do likewise.

The fear of God is for our good.

Believers in Christ have an awe-inspiring hope. Because we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, "let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:28, 29).

This fear is not the self-centered, slavish fear common to so much "religion." Rather, it is the natural outflow of a living relationship with the true and living God. It is for our good as well as for His honor and glory.

The fear of God keeps us from sinning.

"Tremble, and do not sin" (Psalm 4:4 NASB).

People who are not afraid to sin neither love God nor fear Him.

People who have a proper view of *both* God's holiness *and* His grace realize that sin is the worst thing that can happen, the ultimate evil (think of Adam's sin and what it caused). We will abhor and reject sin above all else. Remember Joseph: "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9). Sin is a "great wickedness."

Job feared God and shunned evil (Job 1:8).

Moses said to the people, "God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning" (Exodus 20:20 NIV). We need that "Exodus 20:20 vision" of God's holiness.

"Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and depart from evil" (Proverbs 3:7).

"The fear of the LORD is to hate evil" (Proverbs 8:13).

"By the fear of the LORD one departs from evil" (Proverbs 16:6).

When Nehemiah was the governor over the Jews who had returned from captivity, he saw some of the Jews oppressing other Jews. Nehemiah "called a great assembly against them." In his rebuke he said, "Should you not walk in the fear of God?" He recalled that the former governors and even their servants oppressed the people. "But I did not do so, because of the fear of God" (see Nehemiah, chapter 5). "Social justice" begins with the fear of God.

Nehemiah wrote, "I gave the charge of Jerusalem to my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the leader of the citadel, for he was a faithful man and feared God more than many" (Nehemiah 7:2). Excellent qualifications; excellent leadership choice.

The fear of God keeps people honest and prevents political corruption. How we wish that all who are in positions of authority feared God!

The fear of God: The New Covenant.

Now, what about the New Testament? Believers have been justified by faith and have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1). Does the fear of God have any place in believers in Christ?

The Lord declared to Jeremiah the prophet that He was going to make a new, everlasting covenant with His people, and that those who are under the New Covenant will fear Him forever. He said, "They shall be My people, and I will be their God; then I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them and their children after them. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me" (Jeremiah 32:38 - 40).

Remember, Jesus Himself said that we are to fear God rather than those who would kill us (Matthew 10:28 - 31; Luke 12:4 - 7).

Believers are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8). But grace means little or nothing to the person who has not trembled at the holiness of God and the wickedness and guilt of sin. The cross stands as a permanent demonstration of the wrath of God on sin—*our* sin—and the divine penalty under which Jesus Christ suffered and died in our place.

"There is forgiveness with You that You may be feared" (Psalm 130:4).

Christ showed us qualities of God's character that had not been fully revealed under the Old Covenant. Indeed, those qualities are beautiful. In Christ, believers have a new relationship with God. We are justified. We have intimate fellowship with God. But the New Covenant in Christ did not change God. God is forever the same, and He is no one to trifle with.

God's grace toward us in Jesus Christ should inspire in us a holy reverence for our holy and just Judge who became our gracious Redeemer.

Every genuine spiritual awakening has two essential characteristics: the fear of God and the abhorrence of sin. Without the awareness of the majesty and holiness of God and the corresponding conviction of the evil and guilt of sin there can be no genuine revival.

Under both law and grace we are to maintain a healthy fear of God. This is an essential part of our love for Him. "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be held in reverence by all those who are around Him (Psalm 98:7).

"Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:28, 29).

After a composite review of God's wonderful promises that He would walk with His people and be their Father, coupled with the divine command and necessary condition to separate ourselves from all moral corruption (2 Corinthians 6:16 - 18), the apostle Paul continues:

"Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1).

When the church at Corinth finally disciplined one of its members who had committed a most perverse sin, Paul wrote: "For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed after a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication!" (2 Corinthians 7:11).

The apostle Peter urges us, "If you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your sojourning here in fear" (1 Peter 1:17).

Believers are to submit to one another in the fear of God (Ephesians 5:21). We are to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12).

The fear of The Lord overflows with blessings.

God said concerning Levi, "My covenant was with him, one of life and peace, and I gave them to him that he might fear Me; so he feared Me and was reverent before My name" (Malachi 2:5). We read the results in Numbers 25:10 - 13 and Deuteronomy 33:8 - 10.

"The secret of the LORD is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant" (Psalm 25:14). People who stay close to God in love and reverence come to know His purposes, His plans, and all of His covenant provisions and blessings.

"Wisdom and knowledge will be the stability of your times, and the strength of salvation; the fear of the LORD is His treasure" (Isaiah 33:6). It is God's treasure *and ours*.

"For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him." "As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him." "But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him" (Psalm 103:11, 13, 17).

"Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who delights greatly in His commandments" (Psalm 112:1). The LORD will bless those who fear Him, "both small and great" (Psalm 115:13).

"Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His mercy, to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine" (Psalm 33:18, 19). They who fear the Lord lack nothing (Psalm 34:9). "He has given food to those who fear Him; He will be ever mindful of His covenant" (Psalm 111:5).

"The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them" (Psalm 34:7). Every one who fears the Lord and walks in His ways will be blessed and happy, have plenty to eat, and will enjoy a stable home life. It is right there in Psalm 128:1-4.

So let us who live in the wholesome fear of the Lord stop worrying and start enjoying His blessings.

To keep this in balance, consider Proverbs 15:16, "Better is a little with the fear of the LORD than great treasures with trouble."

"He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He also will hear their cry and save them" (Psalm 145:19).

"Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh and strength to your bones" (Proverbs 3:7, 8).

"The fear of the LORD prolongs days" (Proverbs 10:27). People who live in the fear of God tend to respect their bodies as the temples of the Holy Spirit and to be careful to glorify God in their bodies (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20). *A biblical lifestyle is a healthy lifestyle.*

"In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence, and His children will have a place of refuge. The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, to avoid the snares of death" (Proverbs 14:26, 27).

"The fear of the LORD leads to life; then one rests content, untouched by trouble" (Proverbs 19:23 NIV).

We find a practical passage in Ecclesiastes 7:15 - 18. It teaches us to avoid extremes. One can be "overly righteous" and "overly wise" and end up harming oneself. This is the lesson of Psalm 37:8, "Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; do not fret—it only causes harm." We can become so full of "righteous indignation" that we stress ourselves out. Lot was an example of this. He oppressed and tormented his righteous soul daily by seeing and hearing about the filthy conduct and unlawful deeds of the wicked people of Sodom (2 Peter 2:7, 8). People can be so outraged over evil that they over-react, even do harmful and unlawful things and suffer the consequences. Although we need to stay informed and take appropriate and timely action, we must avoid "information over-load." It is wise to stay balanced and avoid watching too much news. Also, a person who is determined to be wicked would do well to avoid dying young. *A person who fears God will stay away from all wickedness, will obey Psalm 37, and thus will escape all the consequences of either wickedness or misdirected righteous zeal.*

"Though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and his days are prolonged, yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him. But it will not be well with the wicked; nor will he prolong his days, which are as a shadow, because he does not fear before God" (Ecclesiastes 8:12).

Proverbs 22:4 declares that "by humility and the fear of the LORD are riches and honor and life." How many "success" manuals and seminars tell us that?

"Blessed is the man who always fears the LORD, but he who hardens his heart falls into trouble" (Proverbs 28:14 NIV).

How many glamour magazines quote Proverbs 31:30? "Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised" (NIV).

"To you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings" (Malachi 4:2).

"Oh, how great is Your goodness, which you have laid up for those who fear You, which You have prepared for those who trust in You in the presence of the sons of men!" (Psalm 31:19).

David testified, "You have given me the heritage of those who fear Your name" (Psalm 61:5).

"Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him, that glory may dwell in our land" (Psalm 85:9). The people who fear God are the hope of our land.

"You have given a banner to those who fear You, that it may be displayed because of the truth" (Psalm 60:4).

"He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He also will hear their cry and save them" (Psalm 145:19).

"The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His mercy" (Psalm 147:11).

After the conversion of Saul (Paul) and his escape from a plot to kill him, "the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were edified" (Acts 9:31). The fear of the Lord is an essential feature of a healthy, growing church.

"His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation" (Luke 1:50).

The fear of God: *it's the good life!*

It must come from the heart.

It is interesting to note that even after the northern kingdom of Israel had been conquered by the Assyrians and much of the population deported, "They feared the LORD, yet served their own gods" (2 Kings 17:32, 33). It is recorded that they continued "practicing the former rituals," but did not fear the LORD" (verse 34). "So these nations feared the LORD, yet served their carved images" (verse 41).

We see here an example of two kinds of "fear." The first kind is merely the nominal and formal observance of national, cultural, and family tradition. It is cozy and comforting, and provides people with a false assurance of a religious identity. It "plays around the head but does not come near the heart." The second kind is the real reverence for God that comes from the heart and is lived out in the life.

Also, the fear that is motivated only by "enlightened self-interest" falls far short of genuine godly fear.

The positive, fear of God is a quality of love for God. Otherwise, it is "a fearful expectation of judgment" and falling into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:27, 31). It is the negative fear that comes from a guilty conscience. That fear involves torment (*echei kolasis*, punishment). When a person repents and is justified from sin by faith in Jesus Christ, perfect love drives out that fear (1 John 4:18). The heart is right and the conscience is clear.

The positive fear of God comes from the pure in heart. It is the wholesome fear that comes from the heart of the forgiven. "There is forgiveness with You that You may be feared" (Psalm 130:4).

People who love God desire to live in reverent fear of Him. David prayed, "unite my heart to fear Your name" (Psalm 86:11). A united heart is a single heart, a heart united in perfect love.

Centuries later Nehemiah prayed, "O Lord, I pray, let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your name" (Nehemiah 1:11).

The fear of God determines our companionships. The psalmist said, "I am a companion of all those who fear You, and of those who keep your precepts" (Psalm 119:63). People who fear God from the heart worship together and fellowship with one another.

The fear of the Lord is an essential component of true worship. God is "glorious in holiness, fearful [awesome] in praises, doing wonders" (Exodus 15:11). David wrote, "In fear of You I will worship toward Your holy temple" (Psalm 5:7). "You who fear the LORD, praise Him!" (Psalm 22:23). Psalm 135:20 says "You who fear the LORD, bless the LORD!" Revelation 19:5 records, "Then a voice came from the throne, saying, 'Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!'"

"Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who feared the LORD and who meditated on His name" (Malachi 3:16).

Salvation and evangelism.

The fear of God prepares people for salvation.

The fear of God should move people to repentance and prepare them for the gospel. Nevertheless, the fear of God by itself will not save us. We find an example of this in Acts 10.

"There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always" (Acts 10:1, 2).

In a vision, an angel told Cornelius to send for Peter (verse 6). When Peter arrived, Cornelius told Peter that the angel had instructed him to send for Peter, "who will tell you words by which you and your household will be saved" (Acts 11:13, 14).

We notice that, even though Cornelius and his household were devout, feared God, and gave generously to the needy, *they were not yet saved*. Their religious devotion, their fear of God, and their gifts of charity prepared their hearts for salvation but did not provide a basis for faith for the forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God. *That* is provided only by the gospel—the good news that Jesus died for us and was raised up the third day, and that, "through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43).

When Peter said that, everything happened all at once. They received and believed the word even as it was being spoken, were saved, and were baptized in the Holy Spirit—all in rapid succession. No wonder Peter and the other Jewish believers were astonished to realize that when God poured out His Spirit on the day of Pentecost, it was on the Gentiles also (Acts 10:45; 11:18).

The fear of God is one of the most powerful motives for evangelism.

Paul affirmed this. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Knowing therefore the fear of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Corinthians 11). Some versions translate "fear" as "terror," because it is indeed a terrifying fear.

"Enter into the rock, and hide in the dust, from the terror of the LORD and the glory of His majesty" (Isaiah 2:10). "They shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, from the terror of the LORD and the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake the earth mightily" (verse 19).

Fast forward to Revelation 11:18. "The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great, and should destroy those who destroy the earth."

This is followed by Revelation 15:4. "Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested."

We are to snatch some people out of the fire, having compassion with fear (Jude 23).

The fear of God should impel people to repentance. Two thieves were crucified with Jesus. For a while both thieves verbally abused Him. Eventually one had a change of heart and rebuked the other, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation?" (Luke 23:40).

"God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe in Him is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18).

"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

It is time to get serious about God.

Appendix C

The Wrath Of God's Love

God Does As God Is.

Before we can come to a correct understanding of God's attitudes and actions, we must first know His character. God's attitudes and actions are based on His character; they are determined by His character; they are consistent with His character; they demonstrate His character.

"God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16). In that terse statement, "love" is not a predicate nominative; that is, it does not define the essence of God's *being*. It is a predicate adjective; that is, it is the all-inclusive statement of God's moral *character*. It means that His and our highest well-being is God's ultimate objective in all that He does and allows to be done, all things being considered together.

As the ultimate moral and governmental *authority*, God has the ultimate moral and governmental *obligation* to uphold universal moral law and order. Moral law and order are the necessary means and conditions of the highest well-being of all, including God Himself. God has this necessary obligation because He is the only one naturally and morally qualified. God's supreme love compels Him to govern.

This moral obligation to govern includes the right and therefore the responsibility to enforce the penalty of violating moral law. Moral law without a penalty would be only advice.

It is incorrect to say that God is a God of justice as well as a God of love. That sets God's justice outside of His love and in contrast to His love. It implies that God is not acting out of love—that is, for the highest good—in executing the penalty of the moral law.

It *is* correct to say that God is a God of justice as well as a God of *mercy*, because both justice *and* mercy are qualities and actions of God's love. They are different means to the same end. God acts with justice; when He can justly do so, He acts with mercy. God willingly grants mercy rather than impose justice whenever the conditions of mercy are met. Whenever mercy can be granted without violating justice, "mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13). Any judge or governor who forgave everyone unconditionally would be a fool; and *God is no fool*. Most people are rejecting God's mercy by rejecting its necessary conditions: repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

God sees and hears everything. "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good" (Proverbs 15:3). "All things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13).

Evil, pride, injustice, oppression, violence, war, greed, immorality—the constant drama of human selfishness and rebellion; the roar of cursing, blasphemy, false accusations, insults—God allows Himself to endure it all *right to His face!*

"The dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty" (Psalm 74:20). How would any of us react if we watched someone sexually abusing a child? raping a woman? stabbing someone to death? cheating an older couple out of their life savings? or any of a thousand other cruelties? How would we feel? *Outraged. Angry.*

God loves people. People hurt people. People hurt God. God sees people hurting and ruining themselves and one another. God suffers all of that along with the victims. How must *He* feel?

God created human beings in His image, according to His likeness (Genesis 1:26, 27). God is a person, and He created us as persons. Our ability to feel joy and happiness, grief and sorrow, inner hurt and anger implies that our Creator also has that ability. How much greater must be God's capacity to experience these feelings? If we feel indignation, outrage and anger at sin, how much more must God feel it? Think how passionately He must abhor sin.

At times people allow these feelings to get control of them, leading them to irrational outbursts and actions. God does not do that. Even though His emotional capacities are immeasurably greater than ours, God is never controlled by His feelings. He is always in sovereign control of all His qualities, abilities and actions.

God's anger at evil and evildoers is not an irrational reaction, a mindless emotional outburst. God is emotionally moved, but not emotionally motivated. God acts with great feeling, but not merely out of feeling. His judicial wrath is the deliberate, reasonable and proper expression of the righteous indignation of a loving God, who is committed to the highest good in upholding moral law by executing its just and necessary penalty.

So, why doesn't God do something about evil? Why doesn't He stop it *now*? Because God is the Judge, not the "Chief Of Police." According to the Bible [Romans 13:1 - 7], God has committed law enforcement in this present age to civil government, imperfect and often unjust as it is. Sometimes God's judgments are in the earth so that the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness (Isaiah 26:9). God has brought judgment on nations by allowing them to reap what they sowed and also by allowing others to conquer and oppress them. Such judgments are persuasive and corrective. Yet in all of that, God is avoiding uprooting the wheat along with the tares (darnel, weeds); He is allowing them to grow together until the harvest (Matthew 13:29).

In this present age of grace, God is seeking to save people through the gospel, that is, to bring them to repentance and faith in Christ. In doing so God is only postponing final judgment. God's righteous wrath is on hold, yet steadily growing. They who despise God's "goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering" do not realize that the purpose of His goodness is to lead them to repentance. But because of their hardness and impenitent heart, they are only storing up for themselves a massive, dormant but

actively expanding volcano of wrath "in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Romans 2:4, 5, 8).

There Was No Intercessor.

Before the advent of Jesus Christ, God's righteous wrath on incorrigible nations was punitive. After centuries of unrestrained depravity, God's long forbearance ceased to be a virtue. Justice demanded destruction. The Flood is a prime example of this.

God said to Abraham that his descendants would live as strangers in Egypt, then in the fourth generation they would return to Canaan because "the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete" (Genesis 15:16). Hundreds of years of divine forbearance finally came to an end. God said enough is enough. Israel became the agent of God's long-delayed wrath.

Concerning the ancient Amalekites, God said to Moses, "I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven" (Exodus 17:14). King Saul "did not obey the voice of the Lord nor execute His fierce wrath on Amalek" (1 Samuel 28:18). Israel suffered greatly as a result.

Amalek; Edom (Joel 3:19); Moab and Ammon and the Philistines and Tyre (Ezekiel 25); Nineveh (Zephaniah 2:13); Babylon (Jeremiah 51:60 - 64). Those and other nations that put themselves under the sentence of God's judgment—*gone!*

In the days of Jonah, the king of Nineveh called on the people to repent and "cry mightily to God...who can tell if God will turn and relent and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?" (Jonah 3:8, 9). However, it was only a passing repentance. Eventually, Nineveh fell and was destroyed.

The Psalms contain over forty references to God's anger and wrath. In what are called the "imprecatory psalms," David calls down God's wrath on his enemies: "Arise, O Lord, in Your anger; lift Yourself up because of the rage of my enemies, and awake for me to the judgment You have commanded!" (Psalm 7:6). "Shall they escape by iniquity? In anger cast down the peoples, O God! (Psalm 56:7). In Psalm 21:8, 9, he says, "Your hand will find all Your enemies; Your right hand will find those who hate You. You shall make them as a fiery oven in the time of Your anger; the Lord shall swallow them up in His wrath, and the fire shall devour them."

These and others like them do not come out of a selfish desire for personal revenge. They are a call for justice. David's enemies were God's enemies, the enemies of everything right and good. Also, some of these psalms refer prophetically to the enemies of Christ—Psalm 2 for example: "Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed [Christ], saying, 'Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us.' He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision. Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure; 'Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of

Zion'." This and what follows in Psalm 2 should be a sobering warning to all who make, judge, and administer laws. Do not disdain the word of the Holy Trinity.

God had a special covenant relationship with ancient Israel. That covenant included chastisement. For that reason the times of God's anger and wrath toward Israel were intended to be corrective, not destructive. The Old Covenant was a covenant of law, of works. Here is the law. Obey it, and here are the blessings. Disobey it, and here are the penalties. "The law brings about wrath" (Romans 4:15).

Some years ago a man said to me, "I go by the Ten Commandments." I thought to myself, "good luck!" Sometime later he bumped his head and let out a string of profanities. Poor soul.

If you live by the law, be sure you never break it. You will be the first person to succeed before or since Jesus of Nazareth. We have all forfeited that option because "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

Where the conditions of mercy do not exist, the penalties of justice are the only option. Such was the case during the Old Covenant. At times the spiritual and moral condition of the people degenerated to the "trigger point" of divine judgment. God's person, honor and moral authority were treated with contempt. Mercy had long been spurned. Therefore continued mercy became no longer a virtue. The situation demanded justice. Only justice would meet the requirements of moral law and order for the sake of the highest wellbeing of orderly society. For that reason the Old Testament contains about three hundred references to the anger and wrath of the Lord being provoked and ignited ("kindled") in various ways *and to varying degrees* at the disobedience of individuals and nations.

These occasions must be kept in perspective by remembering that they took place over a period of at least several hundred years. Also, most of them were directed toward ancient Israel, particularly at times when the people abandoned themselves to gross idolatry and its sexual immorality. These times include: the forty years in the wilderness; the times of the judges; the apostasy of northern Israel, and the condition of Judah just before the Babylonian Captivity. For the last two reasons, Isaiah, Jeremiah (including Lamentations), and Ezekiel contain over one hundred of the Old Testament references to God's anger and wrath. In the time of Elijah the prophet there were only seven thousand who had not bowed their knees to Baal (1 Kings 19:18).

All this anger and wrath came on Israel because they had sinned so grossly against so much light and so many spiritual privileges. Unlike other nations, they had the miracles, the sanctuary, the sacrifices, the priesthood, the prophets, "the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers," and eventually the Messiah (Romans 9:4, 5).

Before the New Covenant in Christ, very few intercessors arose with the spiritual stature to intercede effectively for the people at those times when spiritual and moral conditions reached the critical point.

The prophet Isaiah declared, "He [God] saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor; therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him; and His own righteousness, it sustained Him" (Isaiah 59:16; also 65:3).

There was no one to intercede. There was no one to provide the conditions that would make mercy reasonable and therefore possible and just. The Hebrew word for "wondered" literally means "stunned." In view of the impending destruction, misery and death that necessary justice would bring, God was appalled, horrified that there was no intercessor.

On occasions certain people who were in covenant relationship with God did succeed in averting impending judgment.

By his intercession Abraham successfully reduced down to ten the minimum required number of righteous people in Sodom so God could and would spare the city—a minimum never met (Genesis 18:22 - 33).

By his intercession Moses succeeded in averting the destruction of the entire nation of Israel (Exodus 32:7 - 35). He appealed to God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He appealed to God's honor and reputation. Then he finally said to God, "Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written" (verse 32). Moses was willing to offer *himself* in place of the people! This upheld the honor of God, because it was honorable for God to answer a prayer so selfless, so noble coming from the spiritual and moral leader of the nation.

Moses's intercession did not change God. It changed the *situation*, creating a condition for the merciful but outraged God to continue mercy and forbearance wisely and safely without undue harm to Himself and His authority, to moral law and order, to the highest good of the universe.

Concerning this occasion, the psalmist stated, "He said that He would destroy them, had not Moses His chosen one stood before Him in the breach, to turn away His wrath, lest He destroy them" (Psalm 106:23).

The apostle Paul approached this level when he said that he was at the point of wishing himself accursed from Christ for his fellow Jews (Romans 9:3).

Besides Abraham and Moses, a few other outstanding individuals also rose to the occasion.

Phinehas was the son of Eleazar and grandson of Aaron the high priest. When thousands of Israelite men engaged in a sexual orgy with the women of Moab, Phinehas took action. A prominent man of Israel brought a prominent woman of Midian to his family publicly, right in the sight of Moses and the people who were crying out to God. Phinehas took a javelin, followed the man into the tent, and with one thrust shoved the javelin through both of them. This stopped the plague that was underway,

but not before 24,000 died, 23,000 of them in one day. God said to Moses, "Phinehas ... has turned back My wrath from the children of Israel, because he was zealous with My zeal among them, so that I did not consume the children of Israel in My zeal" (Numbers 25:11).

When Rehoboam, Solomon's son, became king of Israel, "he forsook the law of the LORD, and all Israel along with him" (2 Chronicles 12:1). Shishak, the king of Egypt, invaded Israel and plundered the temple and the king's house. When Rehoboam and the elders of Israel came together in Jerusalem, the Lord spoke through the prophet Shemaiah, "You have forsaken Me, and therefore I also have left you in the hand of Shishak." When Rehoboam humbled himself, "the wrath of the LORD turned from him, so as not to destroy him completely, and things also went well in Judah" (verse 12).

Much later king Hezekiah, twenty-five years old and in the first year of his reign, announced to the priests and Levites in the temple, "Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with the LORD God of Israel, that His fierce wrath may turn away from us" (2 Chronicles 29:10). Hezekiah made sweeping reforms that lasted during his reign.

Manasseh was Hezekiah's grandson. During Manasseh's long reign, the spiritual and moral condition of Judah became irreversibly corrupt. Josiah, Manasseh's grandson, attempted to revive and reform Judah during his thirty-one year reign. "Nevertheless, the LORD did not turn from the fierceness of His great wrath, with which His anger was aroused against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked Him. And the LORD said, 'I will also remove Judah from My sight, as I have removed Israel'" (2 Kings 23:26, 27). Josiah's reforms were only external and temporary—too little, too late.

During the last days of the kingdom of Judah, Jeremiah was almost alone in warning the nation of coming judgment. The people scorned him and even tried to kill him. After suffering so much seemingly in vain, the weeping prophet changed his prayer and asked God in His justice to send the judgment that had become inevitable (Jeremiah 18:20). As the northern kingdom of Israel had done earlier, Judah went past the point of no return.

God said to the prophet Ezekiel, "Son of man, when a land sins against Me by persistent unfaithfulness, I will stretch out My hand against it; I will cut off its supply of bread, send famine on it, and cut off man and beast from it. Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness" (Ezekiel 14:13, 14).

God's righteous and just wrath came on the people because they themselves had provoked it. Stubbornly, persistently, relentlessly, and in defiance of all divine appeals and remonstrances, they pursued a steady course of self-willed defiance and disobedience. They trampled on God's law, mocked and persecuted His prophets, and spurned His mercy. Would a loving, wise, and just God allow that to continue indefinitely and without retribution? He would be unloving and unjust if He did—unloving and unjust to Himself and to His creation.

So now we understand better why the anger and wrath of God were so prominent during the time of the Law and the prophets. In general there was no intercessor, no one to intercede, to uphold God's honor and thus avoid judgment; so God had to uphold it Himself by the only means left: judgment—the release of His holy indignation, anger, and wrath.

That inevitable alternative to His mercy did not change God. God did not cease being loving and merciful. It changed the course of action that God had to take because His mercy had been stubbornly rejected. God changed His course of action with the utmost reluctance.

God Is Not Angry By Nature.

God said through the prophet Isaiah, "Fury is not in Me" (Isaiah 27:4). It is not natural and normal for God to be angry. He is not "an angry God." His anger has to be provoked. By their persistent sinning, people force the issue. They make the penalty necessary. They outrage God and bring His judicial wrath upon themselves.

God's wrath is temporary. "His anger is but for a moment" (Psalm 30:5); yet, *oh, what can happen in that "moment"!* God said to His covenant people, "For My name's sake I will defer My anger, and for My praise I will restrain it from you, so that I do not cut you off" (Isaiah 48:9). "With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you" (Isaiah 54:8). "In My wrath I struck you, but in My favor I have had mercy on you" (Isaiah 60:10). "'Return, backsliding Israel,' says the LORD, 'and I will not cause My anger to fall on you; for I am merciful,' says the LORD, 'and I will not be angry forever'" (Jeremiah 3:12).

Earlier God said through the prophet Joel, "Return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm" (Joel 2:13).

Many times Israel had provoked God to just and righteous anger. "But He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them. Yes, many a time He turned His anger away, and did not stir up all His wrath" (Psalm 78:38). God holds His wrath in abeyance. It has to be activated, "stirred up." God is only as angry as He has to be in a given situation and only for as long as He has to be.

Hosea was a prophet of God to the northern kingdom of Israel during the time leading up to its fall to the Assyrians in 722 BC. Because of the flagrant immorality of his wife, Hosea's heartbreaking domestic life paralleled God's heartbreak over the spiritual adultery of His people. He was a heartbroken husband speaking for a heartbroken God. At that time the Assyrians were "the rod of My [God's] anger" (Isaiah 10:5). The northern kingdom was often referred to as Ephraim because it was the main tribe. "Ephraim provoked Him [the Lord] most bitterly" (Hosea 12:14). Still, we feel the grief of God in Hosea 11:1 - 9. "How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? ... My heart churns within Me; my sympathy is stirred. I will not execute the

fierceness of My anger..." (verses 8, 9). So God promised future mercy and restoration. "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, for My anger is turned away from him" (Hosea 14:4).

"The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever" (Psalm 103:8, 9; also Psalm 145:8, 9).

At times God completely removed His wrath. The psalmist said to the Lord, "You have taken away all Your wrath; You have turned from the fierceness of Your anger" (Psalm 85:3).

In Proverbs 24:17, 18 we have an interesting insight into God's attitudes. "Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles; lest the LORD see it, and it displease Him, and He turn away His wrath from him."

The prophet Jonah looked forward to God's judgment on Nineveh. When Nineveh repented, God relented. This disappointed Jonah. In his angry prayer, Jonah said to God, "I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm" (Jonah 4:2).

The prophet Micah said that God "does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy" (Micah 7:18).

In the days of Ezra, after the Jewish captives had returned to Jerusalem, a day was appointed for the Levites to stand together for united prayer and confession. Here is part of their confession: "You are God, ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in kindness" (Nehemiah 9:17).

In Nahum 1:2 - 6 we read that God is slow to anger; nevertheless, when it becomes necessary for God to be angry, the results are devastating! "Who can stand before His indignation? And who can endure the fierceness of His anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by Him" (Verse 6).

If God is slow to anger and His anger does not last forever, then why is God "angry [enraged] with the wicked every day" (Psalm 7:11)? From what has been said thus far, we have the essence of the answer. Day and night, billions of sinners are constantly provoking His anger by their sin and their sinning.

According to Romans 9:22, God is willing "to show His wrath and to make His power known." God is willing and therefore chooses to do so because justice demands it as a necessity. The proper and full demonstration of God's wrath and power will serve as an everlasting witness to God's commitment to uphold moral law, and also a perpetual warning of the consequences of sin. God's forbearance demonstrates that He is slow to anger. He endured with great patience those who used His patience only as an opportunity to continue to fit themselves more fully for their foreknown and therefore foreordained destruction.

"The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in ungodliness" (Romans 1:18). We are warned: "Let no man deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience" (Ephesians 5:6. Also Colossians 3:6). That was written to believers!

"One sinner destroys much good" (Ecclesiastes 9:18). This includes "nice" people who live by the norms of society, work hard, raise families, pay their debts, help people, maintain a good reputation, but who do not love God with all their heart and therefore do not truly love others as themselves. This includes people like the professional woman who was raised in church, who boasted that when she was a teenager she told Jesus Christ: "get out of my life!" It includes the "nice" young adult who stood in church and silently shook her head when asked if she would accept Jesus Christ as her Savior and Lord. She said "no" to God just as firmly and definitely as a hardened criminal—just more politely.

All of us have sinned. This fact alone completely cuts the ground out from under all self-righteousness. God has a world of guilty sinners to deal with; and as the supreme moral authority, He is obligated to uphold moral law. That means executing the just penalty on those who have broken the moral law. That includes all of us.

How? Who?

But God is not willing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9). So how can God grant mercy safely and justly? Forgiving sin is the most dangerous thing God can do. It means setting aside the penalty. If even one person can get by with doing wrong, the integrity of moral law is violated. God cannot remove the penalty without acting in reckless disregard for the well-being of the entire universe of moral beings.

If God is going to forgive sin, something must be put in the place of the penalty that will do what the penalty is intended to do. It must say to all once and for all that mercy is not to be misunderstood as laxity. In this and other ways it must satisfy the demands of the broken law.

What can that be? Repentance? Repentance is a necessary *condition* of forgiveness, but our repentance alone will not save us. We have sinned against the Holy One, and only He can save us. Either the guilty must suffer the penalty, or someone who is innocent must suffer and die in place of the guilty.

Who can make such a sacrifice on behalf of sinners? Another mere mortal cannot do it, because we have all sinned. An angel from heaven could not satisfy the demands of the broken moral law on our behalf. Who, then, could be our substitute and make the required sacrifice on our behalf? It must be someone who is innocent, someone of the highest position and authority, someone who would do it solely out of supreme love because he certainly would not owe it to us. Who can do this? Who *would* do this?

There is only One—*God Himself!* And that is exactly what God did. In the Second Person of the eternal God-head, He took upon Himself full humanity. God became one of us to save us. His name is JESUS!

We come now to the cross. The sight shocks us. The life-blood of the Son of God is being poured out for our sins. How great is the guilt of our willful disobedience? How great is God's outraged justice? How great is God's love, demonstrated in His commitment to give *Himself* for us as the only just way to forgive our sin? Look *at our suffering, dying Substitute!*

It is the spectacle of the ages. We see the great offended Lawgiver once and for all upholding the honor and integrity of the moral law by suffering under its penalty in our place. We see God's determination to forgive us only on conditions that will satisfy the requirements of justice and break the power of sin in our hearts and lives. Immediately we realize, "He is suffering because of *my* sin. He is dying under the burden of *my* sin. It cost God everything so I could be forgiven."

Now we see our sin in all of its ugly reality. If the sight of our Creator and lawful Sovereign taking on Himself our humanity to suffer and die in agony and blood on an old rugged cross under the burden of our sins—if that does not break our stubborn hearts, make us love God and hate sin, *then nothing will!*

The Savior looks up. His eyes meet yours. He calls you by name. He says, "I am doing this for you—*because I love you.*" Can you turn around, walk away, and go on living the life and doing the things that nailed Him there? Everything in you should move you to cry out, "My Savior and my God! Forgive me! I believe You! I love You and I will live for You forever!

We Have An Intercessor!

Thank God, the cross was not the end. In three days Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, the Son of the living God, rose from the dead. His resurrection validated His sacrificial, vicarious death.

After careful and thorough research and investigation, Luke, the inspired and proven accurate historian, records: "He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them [the apostles] during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3).

At the end of forty days, Jesus ascended into heaven and was seated at the right hand of God. Jesus Christ is now our exalted High Priest, our Mediator, our Intercessor!

All this fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 53. This prophecy concerning the Messiah, the Christ, states that "He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sins of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:12).

Jesus is the one Mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5). He is our "merciful and faithful High Priest" (Hebrews 2:17). He is "seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens" (Hebrews 8:1). "Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost [completely and forever] those who come to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25).

Now God can be at the same time both "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:26). He offers to all who will repent and believe complete forgiveness, full justification, and personal reconciliation with Himself.

"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). "Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him (verse 9).

Jesus Christ is "our Rescuer out of the coming wrath" (1 Thessalonians 1:10). "For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:9). That is the good news for all who truly believe.

The Wrath Of The Lamb.

Jesus Christ showed us a quality of God's character that had not been fully revealed. But what Jesus Christ showed us and what He did for us did not change God. God cannot change. He declared, "I am the LORD; I do not change" (Malachi 3:6). He is forever the same. The God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament. He is "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 1:3). The Father is just as loving, kind, merciful, as Jesus—and *Jesus is just as holy, righteous, just, as the Father*. The Father and the Son do not have different attitudes toward sin. Jesus showed us God's grace and mercy. *He also showed us God's justice and holy wrath.*

We must not create our own "Jesus." Many people create an imaginary Jesus out of their own presuppositions and speculations. They might use some biblical data, ignoring or even rejecting the rest. The result is a caricature of the real Jesus.

Even many Christians have a real but only partial image of Jesus. The result is an incomplete, somewhat distorted Jesus. The pictures they have are of Jesus blessing the children, carrying a lamb in His arms, knocking at the door, kneeling in prayer, dying on the cross, standing outside the empty tomb. These are all correct. They portray much that is real about Jesus, particularly as He revealed the grace, gentleness, kindness, compassion, and self-sacrifice of God's love. However, they omit something else that is real about Jesus, particularly as Jesus revealed the holiness, justice, and wrath of God's love. They omit how Jesus affirmed and expressed God's righteous indignation against sin.

Just before He healed a man, Jesus saw some Pharisees who were ready to accuse Him of "breaking" the Sabbath. Mark 3:5 records that Jesus "looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts." Yes, *with anger!*

When Jesus saw people selling animals in the temple, He made a whip of cords, drove them all out of the temple with the sheep and the oxen, poured out the exchangers' money and overturned their tables, and ordered them not to make His Father's house a house of merchandise (John 2:15, 16).

In His Olivet discourse, given just before His crucifixion, Jesus declared that "there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people" (Luke 21:23). That is why, on His way to be crucified, Jesus said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children" (Luke 23:28). It happened less than forty years later. The wrath came on them fully (1 Thessalonians 2:16).

The apostle John knew Jesus well when He was on earth. But one day John saw Him portrayed in His resurrected glory, with a sharp two-edged sword coming out of His mouth. John fell at His feet as dead (Revelation 1:12 - 17). It was the same Jesus, but now in His full majesty and power.

Jesus said, "The Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son" (John 5:22). God gave Jesus "authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man" (verse 27). God will judge the world by Jesus Christ (Acts 17:31). Jesus "will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom" (2 Timothy 4:1).

Psalm 2 warns the nations, their people and rulers who reject God and Christ and the moral law: "Now therefore, be wise, O kings; be instructed you judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son [give Him full obedience and homage], lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him" (Psalm 2:10 - 12).

The time will come when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, "in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 1:8).

We watch the coming drama unfold in Revelation 6:12 - 17. Here is part of the horrific scene: "And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!'"

From the wrath of the Lamb! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world is the Lamb who will bring divine wrath on those who rejected Him and His sacrificial love for them.

The gentle Savior who blessed the children, healed the sick, and gave His life blood for us on the cross will one day tread "the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God" (Revelation 19:15). We come to Him now as our merciful Savior, or we face Him later as our righteous and outraged Judge.

John the Baptist said to the crowds coming to him to be baptized, "Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (Luke 3:7). He also said that whoever puts his faith in the Son has eternal life, but whoever refuses to obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him (John 3:36). God has called us to eternal life; lay hold of it with a firm grip and never let it go (1 Timothy 6:12).

