

THE DOCTRINE OF MAN

(DE ANTHXOPOLOGIA)

A Look at What the Bible Says By
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THE DOCTRINE OF MAN

What the Bible tells us about man falls into two divisions: a) man before the fall into sin, and b) man after the fall into sin.

A. MAN BEFORE THE FALL

1. MAN CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

When God created Adam, the words, “**God saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was very good,**” tell us that at that time Adam’s nature was not corrupted by sin (Genesis 1:31). The words, “very good” in that passage stand out in stark contrast to Genesis 6:5, “**God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually**”. A comparison of those verses tells us that God did not create man with a heart that “was only evil continually,” so that change must have taken place when Adam fell into sin. Therefore, when the Bible tells us that, “**God created man in His own image... male and female He created them,**” it is describing Adam and Eve before the fall (Genesis 1:27).

In the creation record the Bible uses the terms “image” and “likeness” as synonyms, and the use of plural pronouns in the phrase, “**Let us make man in our image, after our likeness,**” tell us that Adam was created in the image of the Triune God, not just the image of Christ (Genesis 1:26). Moreover, since the words, “**Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God,**” tell us that God is invisible; we know that the terms “image” and “likeness” are not talking about outward appearance (1Timothy 1:17).

The words, “**When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you set in place; what is man, that you are mindful of him? And the son of man, that you visit him? For you**

made him a little lower than the angels, and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him to have dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet,” speak of God’s original intent for man (Psalm 8:3-6). And, the fact that man was given real dominion over all of the beasts suggests that before the fall all of them would have served man willingly, as eagerly as some dogs still do.

2. THE IMAGE OF A RIGHTEOUS GOD

The fact that Adam was a finite being tells us that the divine image did not consist of an infinite nature. And, the fact that Adam and Eve were deceived by Satan tells us that they were not all-wise or all-knowing. In addition, the fact that Satan (who was **not** created in the image of God) has an intellect and is able to speak tells us that the divine image did not consist of such things. What Adam had that constituted the divine image was a righteous nature. That is why the Bible says, **“Put on the new nature, which after *the image of God is created in righteousness and true holiness*”** (Ephesians 4:24). Furthermore, because Adam had a righteous nature, he could look into his own heart and **know** the heart of God. That is why the Bible says, **“Put on the new man, who is renewed in knowledge after the image of the One who created him,”** (Colossians 3:10). That knowledge is why those who come to faith in Christ no longer see God as a harsh taskmaster, but as a loving Father.

The words, **“God has made men upright; but they have sought out many inventions,”** tell us that man did not have a sinful nature when he was created (Ecclesiastes 7:29). And, the words, **“The woman said to the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden, but of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, God has said, You shall not eat of it,”** tell us that before Satan set to work Adam and Eve were perfectly willing to do what God told them to do (Genesis 3:2-3).

The words, **“Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them, and whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name,”** tell us that far from being a brute, Adam was created with a good intellect (Genesis 2:19). And, the words, **“God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, over the cattle, over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. So God created man in His own image... and God said to them... have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and**

over every living thing that moves upon the earth,” tell us that God created man to have dominion over the earth and all of the animals (Genesis 1:26-28).

Since God originally intended for man to live forever, and since man was created to have dominion over the entire earth the immediate results of the divine image were immortality and dominion. Whether Adam and Eve would have lived forever on earth had they never sinned, or whether God would (in time) have translated them to a higher plain of existence as He did Enoch, the Bible does not say (Genesis 5:24). However, God knew that they would sin, and the words, **“The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world,”** tell us that He planned from the beginning to provide salvation for us (Revelation 13:8).

3. THE DIVINE IMAGE AND THE NATURE OF MAN

Once we understand that righteousness is central to the image of God, the words, **“God created man in His own image,”** tell us that the original righteousness that man had before the fall was a part of his created nature, not some sort of gift that was added on (Genesis 1:27). That means that the fall into sin brought about a change in man’s nature. A change from having a righteous heart to having a heart that is, **“Deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked,”** (Jeremiah 17:9). And, that fact tells us that fallen man no longer has the image of God. At most, all that remains of the divine image is a trace or impression, like the impression on paper of words that have been erased.

Because of that impression, fallen man seems to sense instinctively that there must be a God, even though he does not know who God is, and often prefers to believe that God does not exist. And, the words, **“That which may be known of God is known to them; for God has shown it to them,”** tell us that God makes men aware of His existence (Romans 1:19).

Likewise, fallen man seems to recognize a difference between right and wrong, even though that difference is often blurred in his mind, rationalized away, and ignored. And, the words, **“When the Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, they... show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness,”** tell us that the conscience of the lost tells them that they have done things that deserve condemnation (Romans 2:14-15).

Those passages tell us that if the lost would take that knowledge of God seriously, and call upon their creator, confessing their sins and seeking His mercy they could be saved. However, do not expect that to happen, because

the Bible tells us that **“The natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness to him: and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned”** (1Corinthians 2:14). For, **“The fleshly mind is hostile to God: for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be”** (Romans 8:7). However, as hopeless as that sounds, God’s remedy is to be found in His Word. As it is written, **“Since... the world through its wisdom did not know God, it pleased God to save those who believe through the foolishness of preaching”** (1Corinthians 1:20-21).

There are two passages that are sometimes cited by those who do not realize that man lost the image of God through the fall. As you read them, notice that neither of them say that man now bears the image of God, both say only that man was created in the image of God. The first passage is, Genesis 9:6, **“Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for God made man in His own image”**. The second is, James 3:6 and 9, **“The tongue is a world of evil... With it we bless our God and Father; and with it we curse men, who were created in God’s image”**.

The words, **“Remember that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world,”** tell us that the unregenerate, those who have no knowledge of God’s promise of forgiveness in Christ, are without God and without hope (Ephesians 2:12). And, the words, **“The things that the Gentiles sacrifice are sacrificed to devils, and not to God,”** in complete contrast to the false claim that all religions lead to God, tell us that in their blindness (without the image of God) the religions of this world honor Satan, not God (1Corinthians 10:20).

Although the seat of the divine image (righteousness and knowledge of God) was the soul, not the body, because body and soul are a unit the body shared in the divine image. And, the body also shared in the loss of the divine image through sin. That loss resulted in man’s loss of immortality, and that brought with it physical death and all that death entails. The words, **“But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you may not eat of it: for in the day that you eat of it you will surely die,”** were God’s warning to Adam and Eve that death would result if they disobeyed (Genesis 2:17). The words, **“Just as sin entered the world by one man, and death by sin; so death passed upon all men, because all have sinned,”** tell us that Adam’s sin not only resulted in his death, but in the death of all of his descendants. (Romans 5:12). And, the words, **“The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is**

eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord,” make it clear that death is not in the world because it is a natural property of matter but because of sin, and faith in Christ is the remedy (Romans 6:23).

In theology a distinction is made between: **absolute immortality**, which is experienced not only by the saints in heaven, but also by the damned who will be conscious forever in hell; and the **conditional immortality** that Adam and Eve enjoyed before the fall. The fact that the Bible speaks of hell as the “second death” and of heaven as “everlasting life,” tells us that all of the pains and suffering that we associate with death (and more) will be experienced by those in hell, “Where their worm does not die, and the fire is never put out” (Mark 9:44).

The words, **“LORD, cause me to know my end, and how many days I have left; so that I will know how fleeting my life is. Behold, you have made my days as short as a handbreadth; and my life is as nothing in your sight: truly every man at his best is merely a breath. Selah. Surely every man walks about like a mere shadow: surely they are troubled over nothing: each one heaps up riches, and does not know who will get them,”** speak of the futility of life because of man’s loss of the divine image, death being the result (Psalm 39:4-6).

The words, **“To the woman He said, I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in sorrow you will bring forth children; and your desire shall be to your husband, and he will rule over you,”** tell us that before sin entered into the world, Adam and Eve did not experience painful and destructive sufferings (Genesis 3:16). And, the words, **“I will greatly multiply... your conception,”** suggest that the entrance of death into the world necessitated an increase in the sex drive.

The original condition of man was therefore one of supreme happiness; for a) his soul was wise and holy; b) his body was free from suffering and death; c) his condition of life was most blessed; and d) his condition of habitation was most pleasant, since God placed him into a garden of pleasure, called Paradise, to dwell there and enjoy His goodness forever (Genesis 2:8-15). (John Theodore Mueller, “Christian Dogmatics,” pages 207-208)

4. THE DIVINE IMAGE AND WOMAN

At this point I want to focus specifically on the fact that the words, **“So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him;**

male and female He created them,” tell us that Adam and Eve were both created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). At the same time, the words, **“God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him,”** and the words, **“Neither was man created for woman; but woman for man,”** tell us that from the beginning Eve’s role was that of a helper (Genesis 2:18, 1Corinthians 11:9).

God’s words to Eve, **“Your desire shall be to your husband, and he will rule over you,”** tell us that before the fall, even though Eve was subject to her husband, and he was her leader, he did not **“rule over”** her (Genesis 3:16). At least not in the way the words **“rule over”** are understood in a sinful world. That tells me that God intended for man and wife to be a team, who work together in love, as friends, not rivals each fighting for their own way. When God’s blessing is on the home, marriage and home life can be the closest thing to heaven that you can experience in this life. However, without God’s blessing on the home, marriage and home life can be the closest thing to hell that you experience in this life. For that reason all Christians should seek God’s blessing as fervently as Jacob sought it when he wrestled with the angel (Genesis 32:24, 26).

The words, **“Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord... Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it,”** (Ephesians 5:21, 22, 25) tell us that **“This divine order must not be subverted; for it is the will of God that the woman should not usurp authority over the man by ruling over him. But, on the other hand, the woman should not be tyrannized or made a slave.”** (John Theodore Mueller, **“Christian Dogmatics,”** page 209)

While the words, **“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus,”** tell us that men and woman are equal before God, and therefore equal in regard to salvation: the words, **“A woman should learn in silence with all subjection. But I do not allow a woman to teach, or to have authority over a man, but to remain silent. For Adam was first formed, then Eve,”** tell us that just as God has given men and women different roles in the home, He has given them different roles in the church, and those roles should be respected (Galatians 3:28, 1Timothy 2:11-13). [See Gen. 2:21-22, Eph. 5:21-33, Titus 2:3-5, Proverbs 1:24-33, Titus 2:3-4.]

Although Adam and Eve knew the love of God before they fell into sin, they did not know God's plan to provide redemption for all mankind, or of the "seed" that would crush the serpents "head", for that was not yet revealed (Genesis 3:15). So even though they were not lost before they sinned, it would be inaccurate to say that they were saved, because someone has to be lost before they can be saved, and they have to trust in Christ. As it is written, **"The Son of man has come to seek and to save that which was lost"** (Luke 19:10).

B. THE STATE OF CORRUPTION

The words, **"By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin,"** tell us that there was no sin in the world before Adam and Eve disobeyed God (Romans 5:12). And, because there was no sin, Adam and Eve were righteous and holy in the sight of God. Therefore, contrary to the lie Satan told (Gen. 3:4-5), Adam and Eve's fall into sin was not something good, but the greatest evil that man has ever committed. It is the greatest evil, because every evil that has come into the world since, including Christ's betrayal and murder, are the result of that sin. All of the millions who have died in war, the millions killed by the Communists and Nazis, and the millions being murdered today by abortion suffer the consequences of Adam's sin.

If Adam and Eve had not sinned, the heart of man would not be **"Deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked,"** (Jeremiah 17:9). And, the heart of man would not be producing, **"Evil thoughts, murder, adultery, immorality, theft, false witness, blasphemy"** (Matthew 15:19).

Because the words, **"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,"** and the words, **"Put on the new nature, which after *the image of God is created in righteousness and true holiness,*"** tell us that Christ came into the world to save us from our sins and restore us to the image of God; the doctrine of sin is an essential part of theology (1Timothy 1:15, Ephesians 4:24). And, we will deal with it under three heads: a) Sin in General; b) Original Sin; and c) Actual Sins.

a. OF SIN IN GENERAL

1. FALLING SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD

The words, **“God saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was very good,”** tell us that before sin entered the world the will of man was in complete conformity with the will of God (Genesis 1:31). The words, **“Be perfect, even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect,”** tell us that God does not have a double standard, but requires the same perfection from man that man had when he was created (Matthew 5:48). And the words, **“All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God,”** tell us that anything short of that high standard is sin (Romans 3:23).

A comparison of the words, **“Whoever sins breaks the law, for sin is a violation of the law,”** with the words **“Be perfect, even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect,”** tell us that anything short of the perfection God requires is **SIN** (1John 3:4, Matthew 5:48). **“All unrighteousness is sin”** (1John 5:17). And, that includes the unrighteousness of a heart that is, **“Deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked”** (Jeremiah 17:9).

The words, **“Being filled with unrighteousness of every kind, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; whisperers,”** tell us that sin involves not only wicked deeds [fornication, murder], but also wicked words [strife, deceit], and wicked thoughts and desires [covetousness, envy] (Romans 1:29). The words, **“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness,”** tell us that we should never excuse our sins, or hope that God will not notice, but should be willing to confess our sin to God (1John 1:9). The words, **“The LORD is near to those who are of a broken heart; and saves those who are of a contrite spirit,”** assure all who are contrite [sorry for their sin] of God’s mercy (Psalm 34:18). And, the words, **“The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us of all sin,”** is God’s promise of forgiveness to all who repent (1John 1:7).

2. THE DIVINE LAW AND SIN

Since **“sin is a violation of the law,”** we need to know what the law says (1John 3:4). And, the words, **“There is only one lawgiver and judge, the one who is able to save and to destroy,”** tell us when it comes to sin, God’s Law is the only law that counts (James. 4:12).

The words, **“You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor shall you take anything from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you,”** warn God’s people not to add to or take from what His law says (Deuteronomy 4:2). That coupled with the words, **“Nor are you to be called masters: for**

you have one Master, even Christ,” tells us that no church, no matter how large, has any authority to create new laws that are binding on God’s people, or do away with those God has given us. (Matthew 23:10).

The words, **“Not one letter or stroke will pass from the law, until everything has been fulfilled,”** tell us that the Law is still in place (Matthew 5:18). And, the words, **“The law is not meant for a righteous man, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinful, for the irreverent and profane, for those who strike or kill their fathers or mothers, for murders, for those who sin sexually, for sodomites, for kidnapers and slave traders, for liars and perjurers, and for any other thing that is contrary to sound teaching,”** tell us that **the unrepentant are still under the law** (1Timothy 1:9-10).

At this point let me digress from explaining the law in order to explain what the Bible says about freedom from the law.

It is important to know that those who trust in Christ have been freed from the law. As it is written, **“We have been released from the law, having died to that which once bound us; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter”** (Romans 7:6). For that reason, one of Satan’s greatest attacks on our faith is aimed at confusing people as to what freedom from the law entails. On one hand Satan leads people to wrongly assume that if they are free from the law they are free to sin. But, the words, **“The law is not meant for a righteous man, but for those who are lawless and rebellious,”** tell us that those who use Christian freedom as an excuse to sin, wind up placing themselves back under the law and its condemnation (1Timothy 1:9). On the other hand, Satan leads people to react to Christian freedom by assuming that faith is not enough. **Those under that delusion place themselves back under the law by seeking righteousness through the law.** Against that error Paul warned, **“Stand fast in the liberty for which Christ set us free, and never again allow yourselves to be ensnared by the yoke of slavery... those of you who seek righteousness by the law; you are fallen from grace”** (Galatians 5:1,4).

Many people have a hard time understanding the freedom we have in Christ because they assume that the law makes them righteous. And, because they think that the law makes them righteous, they wrongly assume that freedom from the law is freedom to sin. However, nothing could be further from the truth! As it is written, **“No one will ever become righteous in God’s sight by the deeds of the law: because the knowledge of sin comes by the law”** (Romans 3:20). Moreover, the words, **“All of our righteousnesses are like filthy rags,”** tell us that, apart from faith in Christ,

the law condemns everything we do (Isaiah 64:6). In other words, far from making us righteous, it is the law that makes us sinners! And, it is only as we realize that the law is what condemns us that we can understand that freedom from the law is not freedom to sin, but the freedom to be righteous. **Because the purpose of God's law is to expose our sin, only those who acknowledge their sins and look to Christ for forgiveness are keeping God's law.** And, if keeping God's law involves condemning ourselves as sinners then freedom from the law is freedom from condemnation. In other words, freedom in Christ is not the freedom to sin, but the freedom to be a good citizen, a faithful husband, and a godly father without constantly being condemned by God's law. As it is written, **“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death”** (Romans 8:1-2).

The Ceremonial Law

By the time of Christ's sojourn on earth Greek culture had spread over much of the Middle East, and many Greeks had embraced the God of Israel. In the book of John we read, **“Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the feast”** (John 12:20). The book of Acts tells us that **“In Iconium, Paul and Barnabas went to the Jewish synagogue together, and spoke so effectively, that a great number of Jews and Greeks believed”** (Acts 14:1). However, even though these Greeks worshiped the God of Israel, accepted the moral law of the Old Testament, and were living by the Ten Commandments; many of them had not become full-fledged Jews, (which involved keeping all of the Old Testament laws). These converts were referred to as **“proselytes of the gate”**. And, when many of them embraced the Gospel and turned to Christ, the Apostle Paul saw no reason to require them to be circumcised and keep all of the ceremonial laws (those forbidding certain foods, and requiring ceremonial washings etc.). [See Acts 17:12 and 18:4.]

In the third chapter of Galatians the Apostle Paul explains why he did not require converts to become Jews by saying, **“Before faith came, we were imprisoned by the law, kept under guard by the law for the faith that would be revealed. Therefore, the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be declared righteous by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster, for you are all the children of God through faith in Christ Jesus”** (Galatians 3:23-26). Now, before going further let me make it clear that it was not the moral law that was being done away with, but the ceremonial law. When Paul was told of

sexual sin in the Corinthian congregation he said, **“Among you one hears of immorality, and of a kind of immorality that does not even occur among the Gentiles, that one has his father’s wife. And, you are still puffed up. Shouldn’t you rather have been filled with sorrow, and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this”** (1Corinthians 5:1-2)?

The ceremonial law created a cultural barrier between Jews and gentiles. During the Old Testament era that was important. However, after Christ’s resurrection it hindered the spread of the gospel. That is why God inspired Paul to say, **“If you died with Christ to the elemental things of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules, Do not touch; do not taste; do not handle” // “Do not let anyone judge you by what you eat, or drink, or in regard to a holyday, or the new moon, or the Sabbath day”** (Colossians 2:20-21 and 2:16). That is why Peter said, **“I now realize how true it is that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation those who fear Him, and do what is right, are accepted by Him”** (Acts 10:34-35). And, that is why the Council of Jerusalem said to the gentile converts, **“It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these essential things: That you abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these things you will do well”** (Acts 15:28-29). And, no church has the authority to reinstitute what God has abolished.

In addition to what was just said, the book of Hebrews explains to the Jewish believers why animal sacrifice should be abolished, saying, **“The law being only a shadow of good things to come, and not the actual embodiment of those things, can never make those who come perfect by offering the same sacrifices continually year after year... Thus He does away with the first covenant, that He may establish the second. And by that will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all”** (Hebrews 10:1,9,10).

Walking In Newness of Life

So, what law should we live by? Jesus answered that when He said, **“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest 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). So, **“Give to all men what you owe them: taxes to whom taxes are due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor. Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he who loves**

his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For this, You will not commit adultery, You will not kill, You will not steal, You will not bear false witness, You will not covet; and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, namely, You will love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no harm to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law” (Romans 13:7-01). Those words tell us that **love should never be twisted into an excuse to break God’s commandments** [See 1John 5:3.]

The words, **“That we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty,”** tell us that the freedom we have in Christ is not the freedom to sin, but the freedom, **“to do what is right, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God”** (1Timothy 2:2, Micah 6:8).

The words, **“Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness,”** warn us that a Christian should never excuse or justify wrongdoing (Isaiah 5:20). The words, **“We are buried with Him [Christ] by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life,”** tell us that we should walk in newness of life; **conducting ourselves as if sin has been removed from our nature** (Romans 6:4). The words, **“A bishop must be blameless,”** tell us that a Christian should conduct himself in a way that is **above reproach** (1Timothy 3:2). The words, **“Put aside all filthiness and every hint of naughtiness,”** tell us that we should not do anything that looks shady (James 1:21). And, the words, **“We are motivated by the love of Christ; because we are convinced, that if one died for all, then all died: And He died for all, so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died for them, and rose again,”** tell us that our motivation in doing this should be our love for Christ, not some vain attempt to make ourselves righteous (2Corinthians 5:14-15). [See Romans 9:30-32 and 10:3-4] **“The fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth,”** and we should conduct ourselves accordingly (Ephesians 5:9).

Government

The words, **“Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except by God, and those that exist are established by God,”** tell us, not only that we should obey the law of the land, but that rulers are given their authority by God (Romans 13:1). However, any laws enacted by men are binding only if God Himself has given men authority to make them. And, **God has never given any ruler the authority to promote homosexuality or any other form of wickedness. Nor has He given them the authority to require us to send our children to**

schools that attack their faith and teach them the false religion of secularism. In understanding how to deal with a government that actively promotes evil, the words, **“You need to be subject, not only to avoid wrath, but also for conscience sake,”** tell us that we need to work for reform in a way that will not bring down the wrath of government upon ourselves, or other Christians, and can be done with a clean conscience (Romans 13:5). If rulers actively try to force us to act contrary to God’s Word, the rule is that, **“We ought to obey God rather than men”** (Acts 5:29).

Parents

Paul tells us that the words, **“Honor your father and your mother: that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God gives you,”** // **“is the first commandment with promise”** (Exodus 20:12, Ephesians 6:2). However, the words, **“All the promises of God in Him [Christ] are yea, and in Him Amen,”** tell us that God’s promises can only be received through faith in Christ (2Corinthians 1:20). That fact tells us that the purpose of this commandment is not to make children our slaves, but to warn them to take our instruction seriously, so that they have a tender conscience before God, do not rationalize sin, and trust in His promise of forgiveness. On the other hand, **any father that teaches his son to sin ceases to be the child’s father, and becomes an agent of Satan, who is trying to alienate the child from his true Heavenly Father.**

Conscience

The words, **“I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. But if your brother is grieved because of what you eat, you are not walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food, him for whom Christ died,”** stress the importance of doing nothing that you cannot do with a **clean conscience** (Romans 14:14-15). I realize that when it comes to conscience people often either harden their conscience to the point that many sins do not bother them, or torment themselves over things that God has not forbidden. For that reason, it is important for every believer to train his or her conscience so that it condemns what God condemns, without either excusing sin or forbidding what God has not forbidden, while **“Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ”** (2Corinthians 10:5).

3. THE CAUSES OF SIN

While Satan is the primary cause of sin in the world, the words, **“Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed,”** tell us that the efficient cause of sin is man’s own corrupt will and sinful heart (James 1:14).

The words, **“God saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was very good,”** tell us that God did not create sin, nor was it part of His original creation (Genesis 1:31), while the words, **“Sin entered the world by one man, and death by sin,”** tell us that sin entered the world through the sin of Adam (Romans 5:12). Furthermore, the fact that man was created without a sinful nature tells us that God did not create man with an inclination to sin. On the contrary, as originally created Adam and Eve had no desire to sin. It was because they would not even think of lying to someone that they did not question what the serpent said (Genesis 3:4-5).

The words, **“In all this Job did not sin, or accuse God foolishly,”** tell us that those who blame God for the sin in the world, or for their own troubles are foolish (Job 1:22). And, the words, **“Do not let anyone say when he is tempted, I am tempted by God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, nor does He tempt anyone,”** tell us that those who excuse sin by claiming that God is tempting them are deluding themselves (James 1:13). The words, **“So these three men stopped answering Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes,”** tell us that God did not allow trouble to come upon Job to tempt him, but to humble him, and cure his self righteousness, so that he would not lose his salvation (Job 32:1). As it is written, **“Now to Him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before His glorious presence with great joy, To the only wise God, our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever”** (Jude 24-25).

The words, **“For you are not a God who has pleasure in wickedness: nor will evil dwell with you. The foolish will not stand in your sight, you hate all who do evil,”** tell us that God never approves of wickedness, or of those who do evil (Psalm 5:4-5). Those who condemn God for allowing wickedness to continue, foolishly assume that if God eliminated all evildoers they would be the exception, and that is just another form of self-righteousness. Most of the suffering in the world is caused by men, and the suffering caused by storms etc. is in the world because of sin. So for God to eliminate sin, He would have to judge the world, and destroy it. And, that will come to pass. However, the words, **“Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance; God now commands all men every where to repent,”** tell us

that God has not eliminated sin because He is giving you a chance to repent (Acts 17:30).

4. THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN

Because Adam disobeyed God, his sin brought with it guilt and condemnation. The words, **“But you may not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for in the day that you eat of it you will surely die,”** tell us that the immediate consequence of Adam’s sin was death (Genesis 2:17). However, **there are three aspects to death.** The **first aspect** is **spiritual death**, and that is the death spoken of in the words, **“He has given you life, who were dead in trespasses and sins”** (Ephesians 2:1). The **second aspect** is **physical death**, and that is the death spoken of in the words, **“In the sweat of your face you will eat bread, till you return unto the ground; for out of it you were taken: for you are dust, and to dust you will return”** (Genesis 3:19). And, the **third aspect** is **eternal death**, and that is the death spoken of in the words, **“Who will be punished with unending destruction away from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His might”** (2Thessalonians 1:9).

The words, **“To the woman He said, I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in sorrow you will bring forth children; and your desire shall be to your husband, and he will rule over you. And to Adam He said, Because you have hearkened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree, of which I commanded you, saying, You shall not eat of it: cursed is the ground for your sake; in sorrow you will eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns also and thistles will it bring forth to you; and you will eat the herb of the field,”** tell us that another consequence of Adam’s sin was the loss of God’s blessing, the curse on creation, suffering and toil (Genesis 3:16-18).

The words, **“Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image,”** tell us that as a result of sin, Adam’s descendants do not bear the image of God, but the image of sinful Adam (Genesis 5:3). And, the words, **“Just as sin entered the world by one man, and death by sin; so death passed upon all men, because all have sinned,”** tell us that as a result of Adam’s sin all of his descendants are sinners (Romans 5:12). In fact, if they were not sinners they would never die of natural causes. As it is written, **“I was formed in iniquity; and sinful when my mother conceived me”** (Psalm 51:5).

However, God’s words, **“I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; it will bruise your head, and you will bruise His heel,”** gave Adam and Eve the same promise of

savior (a “seed”) that was later given to Abraham (Genesis 3:15). The Apostle Paul tells us that God’s promise of a “seed” was the promise of a savior, saying, **“God did not say, And to your seeds, as referring to many; but, And to your seed, referring to one which is Christ”** (Galatians 3:16). **“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord”** (Romans 6:23). As it is written, **“If death reigned through one man’s sin; how much more shall those who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through one man, Jesus Christ. Therefore as through the sin of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so through the righteousness of one the free gift abounds to all men bringing justification and life, for as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one many will be made righteous”** (Romans 5:17-19).

Because sinful men continually make up excuses for their sins, deceive themselves, create false gods, and even deny that God exists rather than repent, Christian theologians need to constantly emphasize the importance of repentance. As it is written, **“God now commands all men every where to repent,”** and **“Repentance and remission of sins should be preached... among all nations”** (Acts 17:30, Luke 24:47).

The words, **“Who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another,”** simply describe what we see in everyday life (Romans 2:15). People are quick to accuse others, while excusing themselves. And, the words, **“Who knowing the judgment of God, that those who commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in those who do them,”** describe the stubborn refusal to admit wrongdoing (Romans 1:32). The words, **“Knowing the judgment of God,”** apply to those millions who refuse to give up their immoral lifestyle. And, the words, **“Have pleasure in those who do them,”** apply to the pulpit traitors who condone such wickedness, including those who perform “homosexual marriages”.

All who refuse to repent need to know that Jesus will say, **“Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels”** (Matthew 25:41). Nevertheless, warnings of God’s judgement need to be tempered with His promise of forgiveness, for without God’s assurance of mercy, the terrified sinner may well just try to find a false peace by shutting God out of his mind. The Bible tells us that, **“the goodness of God” is what leads “to repentance,”** but there must be repentance (Romans 2:4).

While every Christian believer needs to take God's warning of eternal punishment seriously, and should never toy with sin, the words, "**But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, so that we will not be condemned with the world,**" tell us that any chastening a believer receives is not an expression of God's wrath, but of His mercy (1Corinthians 11:32). As it is written, "**Blessed is the man whom you chasten, O LORD, and teach from your word**" (Psalm 94:12). "**For the Lord disciplines those He loves**" (Hebrews 12:6). And, the words, "**As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: therefore be zealous, and repent,**" tell us that the reason for God's chastening is to bring us to repentance (Revelations 3:19). Not the false repentance of works righteousness, but **the true repentance that leads one to stop rationalizing sin, stop thinking that God is pleased because of works, and know that it is the forgiveness that is ours in Christ, and that forgiveness alone that cleanses us of all sin,** making us righteousness in the sight of God. As it is written, "**We have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace,**" and "**The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us of all sin**" (Ephesians 1:7 and 1John 1:7)

Because of what is going on in our society, let me add this thought. If anyone has sinful desires for someone of the opposite sex, or the same sex, those sinful desires need to be suppressed and repented of. A quick prayer might be, "Lord forgive me for wrong thoughts and get them out of my mind". Since God did not create anyone homosexual or bisexual, the claim that some people are born that way is an attempt to excuse sinful thoughts and desires instead of repenting. To all who experience such temptation God says, "**Blessed is the man who fears the Lord at all times: but he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity**" (Proverbs 28:14).

b. ORIGINAL (INHERENT) SIN

1. THE NATURE OF ORIGINAL SIN

The words, "**Through the sin of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation,**" tell us that Adam's sin did not just result in us having an inclination to sin, but brought judgment and condemnation "upon all men" (Romans 5:18). The words, "**By one man's disobedience many were made sinners,**" tell us that we are all sinners because of Adam's "disobedience"

(Romans 5:19). The words, **“Behold, I was formed in iniquity; and sinful when my mother conceived me,”** tell us that even those in the womb are sinful (Psalm 51:5). And, the words, **“The wages of sin is death,”** tell us that if infants were not sinners they would never die of natural causes (Romans 6:23).

The change to man’s nature as a result of Adam’s sin is itself sin. The words, **“The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies,”** tell us wickedness is not the result of bad influence, but is deeply rooted in our nature (Psalm 58:3). The words, **“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”** reveal how Adam’s sin has changed our nature (Jeremiah 17:9). The words, **“God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually,”** describe that nature, and tell us that; to a Holy God **evil imaginations and thoughts are sinful** (Genesis 6:5). And, the words, **“Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murder, adultery, immorality, theft, false witness, blasphemy,”** reveal the fruit of a sinful nature (Matthew 15:19).

The words, **“That which is born of the flesh is flesh,”** tell us that we are born with a **“fleshly”** mind (John 3:6). The words, **“The fleshly mind is hostile to God,** for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be,” tell us that as the result of sin, our mind is by nature hostile to God (Romans 8:7). The words, **“I see another law at work in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner to the law of sin that is in my members,”** describes the effect of sin in our nature (Romans 7:23). And, the words, **“Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness,”** tell us that it is only through the shed blood of Jesus Christ that the wickedness of our nature can be forgiven (Hebrews 9:22). As it is written, **“The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us of all sin”** (1John 1:7).

The words, **“The son will not suffer for the sins of the father, nor will the father suffer for the sins of the son: the righteousness of the righteous person will be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked person will be upon him,”** tell us that the sentence of death that “passed upon all men” as a result of Adam’s sin, is not punishment for Adam’s sin, but for the wicked nature passed on to us as a result of Adam’s sin (Ezekiel 18:20). And, the words, **“Do not let anyone say when he is tempted, I am tempted by God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, nor does He tempt anyone, but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own**

lust, and enticed. Then when lust has conceived, it brings forth sin, and when sin is finished, brings forth death,” tell us that all of the wickedness of men flows from that wicked nature (James 1:13-15).

The words, **“Whoever commits sin is the servant of sin,”** tell us that by choosing to sin the unrepentant place themselves under Satan’s control (John 8:34). The words, **“He [Judas] did not say that because he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and would take what was put into it,”** tell us that by making excuses for sin Judas allowed Satan to take control of him (John 12:6). The words, **“Jesus then replied, Have not I chosen you twelve, yet one of you is a devil?”** tell us that by giving Satan control of his life Judas became a devil (John 6:70). The words, **“You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do,”** tell us that the Pharisees’ willingness to excuse sin allowed Satan to take control of them (John 8:44). [See Matt. 26:3-4, Mark 7:7-13, Luke 11:46] And, it is only through faith in Christ that we can escape that bondage (see John 8:31-32).

The words of the angel to Mary, **“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you: therefore the Holy One who will be born of you will be called the Son of God,”** tell us that because of His virgin birth, Christ did not inherit a sinful nature, but was **“the Holy One”** from conception (Luke 1:35). At the same time, Mary’s words, **“My spirit delights in God my Savior,”** tell us that she was a sinner in need of a savior (Luke 1:47).

2. THE CORRUPT MIND AND WILL OF MAN

Since man was created without sin, and, therefore, in perfect harmony with God, the words, **“The natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness to him: and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned,”** are not talking about man as he was originally created, but man as he is now (1Corinthians 2:14). As a result of the fall, and the corruption it wrought, **those without the light of God’s Word, “Walk, in the futility of their mind, Having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart”** (Ephesians 4:17-18). Because of that blindness, **men would rather rationalize their sin than repent,** would rather deny God than seek His mercy, and would rather trust in works than admit that the law condemns them.

The words, **“All who trust in the law are under a curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one who does not continue to do everything that is written in the book of the law,”** and the words, **“There is none righteous, no, not one,”** tell us that the law of God condemns all who trust in it (Galatians 3:10, Romans 3:10). Moreover, the words, **“It is clear that no man is declared righteous in the sight of God by the law,”** tell us that no one can ever escape God’s judgment through keeping the law (Galatians 3:11). Still, the sin-blinded heart of man continually leads men to seek God’s favor through the law. That blindness exists because **our “heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked”** (Jeremiah 17:9). And, because of that blindness, before God brought us to faith in Christ, **we “were dead in trespasses and sins... walked according to the way of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience... and were by nature the children of wrath,”** (Ephesians 2:1-3). Nevertheless, God in His mercy sent Christ to die for our sins, and caused the Gospel to be preached in order to open our eyes and turn us, **“From darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God,”** that we might **“Receive forgiveness of sins”** (Acts 26:18).

The words, **“We do speak a wisdom among the perfected: but not the wisdom of this world, or of the rulers of this world, who will pass away. On the contrary, we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom that God ordained before the world to our glory. Which none of the rulers of this world knew, for had they known it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man, the things that God has prepared for those who love Him,”** tell us that the truth of the Gospel cannot be discovered by sinful man, and is alien to the sin-corrupted wisdom of this world (1Corinthians 2:6-9). And, the words, **“Because God, who once commanded light to shine out of darkness, made His light shine in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ,”** tell us that it is only by the grace of God that we have been delivered from that darkness (2Corinthians 4:6). **“For you were once darkness, but now are light in the Lord: walk as children of light”** (Ephesians 5:8). Therefore, **hold fast to the truth of God’s word at all times, “Lest any man take you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, after the tradition of men, after the basic principles of this world, and not after Christ... Do not let any man swindle you out of your reward through a false humility and the worship**

of angels, intruding into things that he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind” (Colossians 2:8 and 18).

3. THE CAUSE AND UNIVERSALITY OF ORIGINAL SIN

In understanding original sin, it is important to keep in mind the words, **“God saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was very good,”** and the words, **“By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for all have sinned”** (Genesis 1:31, Romans 5:12). Those words tell us that sin is not in our nature because God made us that way, or because of what we are made of, but because our nature has been corrupted. That corruption not only produces blindness and ignorance of the truth, but actively fights against the truth. We find that taught in the words, **“I see another law at work in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner to the law of sin that is in my members,”** and in the words, **“The flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and they are opposed to each other”** (Romans 7:23, Galatians 5:17).

The Bible tells us that the cause of sin is not God, who, **“Cannot be tempted with evil, and does not tempt anyone,”** but the devil, and our first parents who listened to the devil (James 1:13). The words, **“The serpent deceived Eve through his craftiness,”** compared with the words, **“That old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, who deceives the whole world,”** tell us that it was Satan working through the serpent who deceived Eve (2Corinthians 11:3, Revelation 12:9). The words, **“Adam was not the one deceived, but the woman being deceived led in transgression,”** tell us Eve’s part in man’s fall into sin (1Timothy 2:14). And, the words, **“Therefore, just as sin entered the world by one man, and death by sin; so death passed upon all men, because all have sinned,”** tell us that it was through the sin of Adam that death entered the world, and all men die because all have sinned (Romans 5:12). And, when the Bible says **all**, it means **ALL**. The words, **“I was formed in iniquity; and sinful when my mother conceived me,”** tell us that the word **“ALL”** includes infants (Psalm 51:5). And, the words, **“The wages of sin is death,”** tell us that if infants were not sinners, they would never die of natural causes (Romans 6:23).

Since this section deals with the universality of original sin, I need to point out again that Christ is the one exception. The words, **“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses; but**

one who was in all points tempted just as we are, yet without sin,” tell us that Christ had no sin (Hebrews 4:15). And, the words, **“The Holy One who will be born of you will be called the Son of God,”** tell us that Christ did not inherit a sinful nature, but was without sin **“holy”** from the very beginning (Luke 1:35).

4. THE EFFECTS OF ORIGINAL SIN

The words, **“But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you may not eat of it: for in the day that you eat of it you will surely die,”** tell us that death is the primary effect of the first sin (Genesis 2:17). The words, **“She who lives for pleasure is dead while she lives,”** tell us that a person can be alive physically, but dead spiritually (1Timothy 5:6). And, the words, **“He has given you life, who were dead in trespasses and sins... when we were dead in sins,”** tell us that before we came to faith in Christ we were all dead spiritually (Ephesians 2:1,5). Therefore, one immediate consequence of mankind’s first sin was that Adam and Eve died spiritually.

The words, **“By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin,”** and the words, **“And all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years: and he died,”** tell us that the second effect of the first sin was to begin the aging process that results in physical death (Romans 5:12 and Genesis 5:5). While the words, **“Then He will say to those on His left, Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire,** prepared for the devil and his angels,” and the words, **“Who will be punished with unending destruction away from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His might,”** tell us that, apart from faith in Christ the final effect of original sin will be eternal damnation (Matthew 25:41, 2Thessalonians 1:9).

The words, **“The woman saw that the tree was good for food,”** and that fact that Adam and Eve did not die physically until centuries later, tell us that death did not come because the fruit was poison, but because Adam and Eve disobeyed God (Genesis 3:6). The Bible does not tell us why God did not make another commandment the test of Adam and Eve’s obedience. Some theologians believe that since the moral law was **“written in their hearts”** God chose to forbid something that would not appear to them as evil (Romans 2:15). However, when it comes right down to it, only God knows, and where the Bible has not spoken we should never profess ourselves **“to be wise”** (Romans 1:22).

In addition to all of the sorrows that have come into the world as a consequence of man's sin, **every specific sin that came after the first sin, is part of the effect of that first sin.** The words, **"We are consumed by your anger, and terrified by your fury. You have set our sins before you, our secret sins in the light of your face. For all our days ebb away under your wrath: we end our years like a story that is finished,"** describe the sorrows that have come into the world as a result of man's first sin (Psalm 90:7-9). And, the words, **"From within, out of men's hearts, proceed evil thoughts, adultery, fornication, murder, Theft, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and defile a man,"** tell us that specific sins are the outgrowth of original [inherent] sin (Mark 7:21-23).

The words, **"You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness: nor will evil dwell with you... you hate all who do evil"** tell us that God does not take sin lightly (Psalm 5:4-5). And, the words, **"The LORD tries the righteous: but He hates the wicked and anyone who loves violence,"** tell us that God will not overlook wrongdoing (Psalm 11:5). However, those statements are warnings of God's law, and, **"We know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law... because the knowledge of sin comes by the law"** (Romans 3:19-20). And, God wants us to know our sin, so that we will see our need for His forgiveness, repent, and look to Christ for mercy; for, **"As through the sin of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so through the righteousness of one the free gift abounds to all men bringing justification and life"** (Romans 5:18).

c ACTUAL (SPECIFIC) SINS

1. THE NATURE OF ACTUAL SIN

Since we have a **"Nature that is corrupt according to deceitful lusts"** actual sin consists of every transgression of the divine Law in desire, thought, word, and deed, that a heart **"Deceitful above all things and desperately wicked,"** produces in us (Ephesians 4:22, Jeremiah 17:9)

The words, **"Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murder, adultery, immorality, theft, false witness, blasphemy,"** tell us that sinful thoughts, words and deeds are evil in the sight of God (Matthew 15:19). And, the words, **"I am telling you, that whoever looks on a woman to lust after**

her has already committed adultery with her in his heart,” condemn evil thoughts in no uncertain terms (Matthew 5:28).

The words, **“Who knowing the judgment of God, that those who commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in those who do them,”** condemn those who, even without engaging in certain sins, encourage and take pleasure in those who do commit them, [and that includes those who excuse homosexuality] (Romans 1:32). And, the words, **“Whoever knows what is right, and does not do it, sins,”** condemn all who fail to do what is right (James 4:17).

The words, **“Abraham journeyed from there toward the south country, and settled between Kadesh and Shur, and lived for a time in Gerar. And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister: and Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah, but God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, you are a dead man, because of the woman that you have taken; for she is a man’s wife... restore the man’s wife; for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you, and you will live: but if you do not restore her, know that you will surely die, you, and all who are yours,”** tell us that God condemns sins that we are not even aware of (Genesis 20:1-3 and 7). However, the words, **“And that servant, who knew his lord’s will, and did not get ready, and did not do what his master wanted, will be beaten with many lashes. But the one who does not know, and committed deeds worthy of flogging, will be beaten with few lashes. For to whom much is given, much will be required: and from one who has been entrusted with much, more will be asked,”** tell us that God punishes willful sin far more harshly than sins of ignorance (Luke 12:47-48). And, the words, **“Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no self-deception,”** tell us that God does not impute sin to those who do not rationalize sin, deceiving themselves by making excuses for sin, but humbly look to Christ for mercy (Psalm 32:2, Romans 4:6).

The words, **“The works of the flesh are obvious, which are; Adultery, fornication, sexual filthiness, sensuality,”** refer to actual sins as “works of the flesh” (Galatians 5:19). The words, **“Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them,”** refer to actual sins as “works of darkness” (Ephesians 5:11). The words, **“Do not lie to each other, seeing that you have put off the old man with his deeds,”** refer to actual sins as the deeds of “the old man” (Colossians 3:9). The words, **“For that just man while living among them day after day, felt his righteous soul tormented by the lawless deeds he saw and heard,”** refer to actual sins

as “lawless deeds” (2Peter 2:8). And, the words, “**How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?**” refer to actual sins as “dead works” (Hebrews 9:14)

2. THE CAUSES OF ACTUAL SIN

Every specific sin flows from a heart that is corrupt according to deceitful lusts, lusts that reflect the nature of Satan. And, those lusts are inflamed, encouraged and promoted by Satan, the world, and our own flesh.

The words, “**It is no longer something that I do, but sin that dwells in me,**” tell us that the cause of actual sin is our corrupt nature (Romans 7:17). The words, “**Put off everything having to do with your former way of life, the old nature which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,**” identify sinful lusts with the corruption in our nature (Ephesians 4:22). The words, “**You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do,**” tell us that those lusts reflect the will of Satan (John 8:44). And, the words, “**I was formerly a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and violent: but I was shown mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief,**” describe the spiritual ignorance that results from the sin within us (1Timothy 1:13).

The words, “**And while Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the maids of the high priest came... and said, You were also with Jesus of Nazareth. But he denied it,**” give us an example of fear leading to sin (Mark 14:66-68), as do the words, “**For before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles: but once they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision.**” (Galatians 2:12). And, the words, “**Upon hearing this, everyone in the synagogue became furious, and got up, and pushed Him out of the city, and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, in order to throw Him down the cliff,**” give us an example of anger leading to sin (Luke 4:28-29).

However, the words, “**Nor is there salvation in any other,**” make it clear that neither our ignorance, nor our passions are an excuse for sin (Acts 4:12). The apostle Paul sinned in ignorance [see 1Tim. 1:13], yet the words, “**Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am the worst,**” tell us that he was saved through faith in Christ (1Timothy 1:15). So ignorance is no excuse. The words, “**Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or a leopard his spots? If so you might be able to do what is good, you who in whom evil is ingrained,**” are not being critical of the skin of an Ethiopian

or the spots of a leopard, but are telling us that it is just as impossible for us to be sinless as it is for us to change our skin (Jeremiah 13:23).

The words, **“You formerly walked according to the way of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience,”** tell us that Satan is at work in those who are not saved (Ephesians 2:2). The words, **“Then Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel,”** and the words, **“The Lord said, Simon, Simon, Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat,”** tell us that Satan works to seduce believers (1Chronicals 21:1, Luke 22:31). And, the words, **“He turned, and said to Peter, Get behind me, Satan: you are tempting me to sin: for you are not thinking as God thinks, but as men think,”** tell us that Satan sometimes uses other people to tempt us (Matthew 16:23).

The words, **“Make note of those who cause divisions and *soul destroying* offences contrary to the doctrine that you have learned; and avoid them, for such people are not serving our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly,”** tell us that Satan tempts us through those who spread false doctrine and cause division (Romans 16:17-18). The words, **“Their teaching will spread like gangrene,”** warn us against those who teach falsely (2Timothy 2:17). And, the words, **“Do not be deceived, bad company undermines good behavior,”** warn us against keeping company with those who tempt us (1Corinthians 15:33).

The words, **“The things that the Gentiles sacrifice are sacrificed to devils, and not to God: and I do not want you to have fellowship with devils,”** tell us that Satan is behind all false religion, and those who worship false gods are worshipping devils (1Corinthians 10:20). The words, **“There were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will privately introduce damnable heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. And many will follow their destructive ways; and because of them the way of truth will be portrayed as evil. And in their covetousness they will use deceptive words to swindle you: their condemnation has not been idle all this time, and their damnation is not asleep,”** warn us of the danger posed by those who teach contrary to the Word of God (2Peter 2:1-3). And, the words, **“They changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creation more than the Creator... For that reason God gave them up to vile affections: for even their women exchanged the natural use for that which is contrary to nature: And**

likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men doing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error that was fitting,” tell us that God draws all who worship Him to repentance, but gives those who reject Him up to serve their own degenerate lusts (Romans 1:25-27).

The words, **“I form light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create disaster: I the LORD do all these things,”** tell us that all of the disasters this world experiences are a judgment on sin (Isaiah 45:7). However, God is at work in all He does. Therefore, even those disasters can bring His mercy. For example, if a tank is coming toward a home, and a woman inside it is praying “God save me, God save me,” she is calling on God to deliver her from evil. Furthermore, the words, **“The Lord disciplines those He loves, and scourges every son that He receives,”** tell us that God’s chastening of believers is that of a loving father (Hebrews 12:6). And, the words, **“We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose,”** assure us that all we suffer works together for our good (Romans 8:28). As it is written, **“We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God”** (Acts 14:22).

3. THE DOCTRINE OF OFFENSE

Just as it is a sin to do evil, the words, **“He who bids him God speed is a partaker of his evil deeds,”** tell us that it is a sin to bless those who do evil, for those who do so are encouraging them to do evil. And, when the Bible warns against giving offence, it is a warning against doing or saying things that encourage others to do evil, lead them to sin, harden their hearts, or result in their damnation.

The words, **“Make note of those who cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine that you have learned; and avoid them,”** tell us to avoid associating with those who cause division and offence (Romans 16:17). Christ’s words, **“It is inevitable that offences will occur: but woe to him, through whom they come! It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea, with a millstone tied around his neck, than for him to cause one of these little ones to fall away,”** are a stern warning against giving offence; and the words, **“Cause one of these little ones to fall away,”** apply to every teacher and professor who ridicules the Christian faith (Luke 17:1-2). [See Matthew 18:6 and Mark 9:42.] What Christ said about Judas, **“Woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It would be better for that**

man if he had never been born,” applies to all who turn people away from Christ (Mark 14:21).

While encouraging others to sin or hardening them in unbelief is a serious matter, the Bible speaks of another way of giving offence. That is giving offence by leading others to go against their conscience. We find that in the words, **“Receive him who is weak in faith, but not to doubtful disputations. For one is confident that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eats only vegetables... There is nothing unclean of itself, but if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. But if your brother is grieved because of what you eat, you are not walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food, him for whom Christ died. Do not allow your good be spoken of as evil... He who doubts is under condemnation if he eats, for his eating is not of faith: for whatever is not of faith is sin”** (Romans 14:1-2, 14-16 and 23).

However, there is a difference between avoiding something perfectly harmless because it may give offence, and being told that you must avoid it. For example, if someone from a Jewish background comes to faith in Christ, but is troubled in conscience by the thought of eating ham, we should not push him to go contrary to his conscience. At the same time, if someone in the congregation begins to insist that everyone must give up ham, then he is a false teacher, and must be dealt with as such. In that situation the words, **“Do not let anyone judge you by what you eat, or drink, or in regard to a holyday, or the new moon, or the Sabbath day,”** apply (Colossians 2:16).

In Scripture we also see a distinction between giving offence, and taking offence. If we do something wrong, and someone else follows our example we have given offence. But if we are doing something that is not wrong (such as eating ham) and someone who sees us takes offence, then they are in the wrong. The Pharisees took offence at the words of Jesus when He said, **“It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a man; but that which comes out of the mouth, that defiles a man,”** we know they took offence because the Bible says, **“His disciples came to him, and asked, Do you know the Pharisees were offended, when they heard you say that?”** (Matthew 15:11-12).

There is another aspect of taking offence, and that is those who take offence at the Gospel. Regarding such offence, Jesus said, **“Blessed is he, who does not take offence at me”** (Matthew 11:6). The words, **“We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews,”** speak of Christ as a “stumbling block” (1Corinthians 1:23). The words, **“Israel, that followed**

after the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they did not seek it through faith, but through the works of the law, for they stumbled at that stumbling-stone. As it is written, **Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling-stone and rock of offence: and whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame,**” Use, “stumbling-stone” and “rock of offence” as synonyms, and reveal that the Jews were offended at Jesus because they sought righteousness through the Law (Romans 9:31-33). The words, **“He [the LORD of hosts] will be a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence, and a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of Jerusalem,”** reveal that Christ [the rock of offence] is God (Isaiah 8:14). And, the words, **“Behold, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone: and he who believes on Him will never be put to shame,”** assure all who trust in Christ that they will never be condemned (1Peter 2:6).

4. THE DOCTRINE OF OBDURATION

The word “obdurate” not only describes hardness, but one who is stubbornly wicked, intractable, and unbending in their refusal to repent. We see such a refusal to repent described by the words, **“Even though He had done so many miracles in their presence, they did not believe in Him”** (John 12:37).

The words, **“He [Judas] did not say that because he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and would take what was put into it,”** tell us that Judas had a habit of hardening his heart, by excusing his own wrongdoing (John 12:6). The words, **“Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was one of the twelve,”** tell us that because Judas was unrepentant Satan was able to enter into him, hardening his heart even more (Luke 22:3). And, the words, **“He threw the pieces of silver down in the temple, and left, and after leaving hung himself,”** tell us that because Satan was in control, even when Judas was sorry for what he did he hardened himself more [to excuse self murder] instead of seeking forgiveness (Matthew 27:5). That fact tells us that even though Judas was sorry, his sorrow was not from God. **“For godly sorrow results in repentance leading to salvation, not regret: but the sorrow of this world brings death”** (2Corinthians 7:10).

Whenever men hear the Word of God, (whether it is through preaching, conscience, or some other source) and close their mind to what it says, either by excusing their sin or shutting it out of their mind, they are hardening their heart. The words of Stephen, **“You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart**

and ears, you always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do you,” speak of men hardening their own hearts in resistance to the Holy Ghost (Acts 7:51). And, the Bible tells us that those who heard Stephen’s words **“Were cut to the heart and furious, and they gnashed their teeth because of him”** (Acts 7:54). Now, when the Bible tells us that they were, “cut to the heart,” it is telling us that they were convicted of their sin. However, instead of repenting they became, “furious, and they gnashed their teeth,” hardening their hearts in adamant refusal to admit their sin, repent and seek forgiveness.

When God’s Word places someone under conviction, God is working through that Word to bring them to repentance. However, those who harden their hearts time after time can bring upon themselves God’s judgment, which results in God withdrawing His gift of repentance. The words, **“With gentleness instructing those who oppose their own interest; in the hope that God will give them repentance bringing them to a realization of the truth,”** tell us that repentance is a gift of God (2Timothy 2:25). The words, **“They [the scribes and Pharisees] do not do what they say. For they bind heavy burdens that are hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they will not move them with one of their fingers,”** reveal that even though the Pharisees warned others to keep the law, they made up excuses to get around it. (Matthew 23:2-4). The words, **“He [Jesus] said to them, You completely invalidate the commandment of God, in order to keep your tradition. For Moses said, Honor your father and mother; and, Anyone who curses his father or mother, let him be put to death. But you say, If a man will say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is a gift, by which you might profit by me; he shall be free,”** give us an example of the kind of excuses they used (Mark 7:9-11). And, the words, **“He has blinded their eyes, and hardened their hearts; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, and repent and turn to me, that I should heal them,”** speak of God hardening their hearts as a judgment on them (John 12:40). But, even though the Bible speaks of this hardening as an act of God, it is the devil that carries it out. God simply gives them up to his control. As it is written, **“The minds of those who do not believe have been blinded by the god of this world, that the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, might not reach them”** (2Corinthians 4:4).

The words, **“God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between**

themselves, for they changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creation more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up to vile affections: for even their women exchanged the natural use for that which is contrary to nature,” speak of God rejecting those who have rejected Him (Romans 1:24-26). As long as one worships God, even without understanding the Gospel, the Holy Spirit is at work stirring up their conscience as a call to repentance. And, their conscience keeps them from committing many sins. But, when they turn to a false god, God gives them up.

The words, **“I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt. But Pharaoh will not listen to you, then I will lay my hand upon Egypt, and bring the multitudes of my people, the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments,”** are speaking of a Pharaoh who had already hardened his heart against God by his devotion to false gods (Exodus 7:3). Therefore, the words **“I will harden Pharaoh’s heart”** are not telling us that God hardened Pharaoh against salvation. All they say is that God hardened him against letting God’s people go. After the first plague, Pharaoh could have told the Israelites to go. But, God continually hardened Pharaoh so He could reveal His power. And, although it is doubtful, after seeing that power displayed Pharaoh could have rejected the false gods of Egypt. At least, some of the Egyptian people may have accepted the God of Israel. We do not know, but God loves mercy and He does not cause anyone to be damned. Even though those who are saved are saved by grace alone, those who are lost are lost by their own fault. [Compare John 6:44 with Matthew 23:37.]

5. THE SCRIPTURAL DOCTRINE OF TEMPTATION

While the Bible tells us that, **“God cannot be tempted with evil, nor does He tempt anyone,”** it also tells us that God sometimes tests His children; but when He does so it is always done in love, and for their benefit (James 1:13).

The words, **“You, O God, have tested us: you have tried us, as silver is tried... but you brought us out into a place of plenty,”** speak of the entire nation of Israel being tried during their sojourn in Egypt (Psalm 66:10, 12). Yet as awful as that sojourn was, it welded them together and laid the foundation for their salvation as well as ours.

The words, **“God tested Abraham, and said to him... Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go into the land of**

Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering... And Abraham said to his young men, Wait here with the donkey; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and return again to you,” speak of God’s test of Abraham (Genesis 22:1,2,5). However, those who think this test was nothing more than a test of obedience miss the entire point. When they read the words, **“I and the lad will... return again to you,”** they assume that Abraham was lying. But, nothing could be further from the truth. The words, **“By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called, believing that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead,”** tell us that Abraham acted on “faith,” believing that God would “raise him up, even from the dead” (Hebrews 11:17-19). In other words, Abraham believed that Isaac was the promised “seed” that would die and rise again. And, through that test, God not only clarified and strengthened Abraham’s faith, but uses Abraham’s faith today to point us to Christ.

The words, **“If a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, And the sign or the wonder of which he spoke comes to pass, and then he says, Let us go after other gods, which you have not known, and let us serve them, you must not listen to the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God is testing you, to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,”** warn us not to listen to anyone who venerates other gods (Deuteronomy 13:1). The words, **“There must also be heresies among you, to reveal those who are approved by God,”** tell us that such tests reveal “those who are approved by God” (1Corinthians 11:19). And, one such heresy is Darwinism.

When it comes to the temptation to do evil, the words **“God cannot be tempted with evil, nor does He tempt anyone,”** make it clear that such temptation never comes from God, **“But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed”**(James 1:13-14). However, because lust can be initiated and amplified by the devil and the sinful world around us, we speak of the **world, the flesh and the devil** as the source of temptation.

The words, **“The Spirit led Jesus up into the desert to be tempted by the devil,”** and the words, **“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour,”** speak of temptation by the devil (Matthew 4:1, 1Peter 5:8).

The words, **“Do not love the world, or anything in the world. If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passes away, as do its lusts: but he who does the will of God remains forever,”** and the words, **“Those who are determined to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful desires, that plunge men into ruin and destruction,”** speak of the world as a source of temptation (1John 2:15-17, 1Timothy 6:9).

The words, **“Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed,”** and the words, **“Do not deprive one another, except by mutual consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan may not tempt you through your lack of restraint,”** speak of lust as a source of temptation (James 1:14, 1Corinthians 7:5).

In all temptation it is important to look to God for the strength to resist and overcome. As it is written, **“Let him who thinks that he is standing take heed lest he fall. You have not experienced any temptation other than that which is common to man: but God who is faithful, will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you can bear; but when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out, giving you the ability to bear it”** (1Corinthians 10:12-13).

The words, **“The Lord said, Simon, Simon, Satan has desired to have you... But I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail,”** tell us that Christ prayed for Simon so that he would be delivered from evil (Luke 22:31-32). And, we pray for the same deliverance whenever we pray the words of the Lord’s Prayer, **“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil”** (Matthew 6:13). Therefore, **“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation”** (Mark 14:38). Knowing that, **“We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses; but one who was in all points tempted just as we are, yet without sin”** (Hebrews 4:15). For He **“Knows how to deliver the godly from temptation, while keeping the wicked under punishment for the day of judgment”** (2Peter 2:9).

6. THE CLASSIFICATION OF ACTUAL SINS

Our classification of sins should never be used to excuse wrongdoing, but to reveal God’s righteousness and our need for forgiveness in Christ. As

believers we also need to train our conscience, so that we do not take sin lightly, excuse it, or delude ourselves into thinking that we need no forgiveness, or that we can earn God's favor.

Job asked, **"How can man be righteous before God?"** (Job 9:2). And, the Bible's answer to that question is that, **"No flesh will ever be justified [declared righteous] in God's sight by the deeds of the law: because the knowledge of sin comes by the law"** (Romans 3:20). Nevertheless, because, **"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked,"** it is easy for men to blind themselves to their own faults, thinking that they are righteous when God says that they are not (Jeremiah 17:9).

The words, **"Watch and pray, that you do not enter into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak,"** should remind us of our need to think before we speak or act (Matthew 26:41). And, the words, **"Let him who thinks that he is standing take heed lest he fall,"** warn us of our need for God's help in dealing with temptation (1Corinthians 10:12).

The words, **"Since we have these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from everything that defiles body and soul, following holiness to its goal in the fear of God,"** make it clear that we should never twist God's promise of forgiveness in Christ into an excuse to sin, but should "cleanse ourselves from everything that defiles" (2Corinthians 7:1). And, the words, **"Seeing that we are a part of such a great company of martyrs, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that so easily entangles us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, indifferent to its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God,"** make it clear that we are not alone in our struggle against temptation and persecution, but are one with all believers who have gone before us, and with Christ who suffered for us (Hebrews 12:1-2).

The False Claim That All Sins Are the Same

One of the great heresies of our age is the claim that no one sin is greater than any other. While it is true that every unforgiven sin (no matter how small it seems) will bring damnation; that fact is being twisted around to excuse willful and unrepentant behavior. More than once, I have encountered people who, when confronted with their sin, say, "sin is sin" arguing that since we are all sinners they are no worse than anyone else. Nevertheless they are wrong, and the following passages tell us that they are wrong.

The words, **"If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that is not unto death, he shall ask, and God will give him life for those who do not sin unto death. There is a sin unto death: I am not saying that he should pray**

for it,” tell us that there is a difference between a sin that is “unto death” and sin that is not (1John 5:16).

The words, **“Jesus answered, You would not have any power over me at all, unless it was given to you from above: therefore he who delivered me to you has the greater sin,”** tell us that God regards some sins as greater than others (John 19:11).

The words, **“Keep your servant back from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then I will be upright, and I will be innocent of the great transgression,”** warn against “presumptuous sins” (Psalm 19:13).

The words, **“If we sin willfully or deliberately after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins remains, But only a fearful expectation of judgment and raging fire, that will devour the enemies of God,”** give a stern warning to all who think that they can harden themselves in unrepentance and never have to answer for it (Hebrews 10:26-27).

And, the words, **“I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with those who are sexually immoral: Not meaning that you must cut off all contact with the immoral people of this world, or the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters; for in that case you would have to leave the world. But I am now writing you not to associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler; do not even eat with such a man,”** draw a clear line between those who have a repentant heart and the unrepentant (1Corinthians 5:9-11).

Voluntary and Involuntary Sins

The words, **“You shall appoint cities to be cities of refuge for you; that the slayer, who kills any person unintentionally, may flee there,”** recognize the fact that some sins are unintentional (Numbers 35:11). Likewise, the words, **“Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister: and Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah. But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, you are a dead man, because of the woman that you have taken; for she is a man’s wife. But Abimelech had not come near her,”** also speak of unintentional sin, however, the words “Behold, you are a dead man” tell us that the fact a sin is unintentional is not an excuse. God condemns all sins (Genesis 20:2-4).

The words of the Apostle Paul, **“I was formerly a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and violent: but I was shown mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief,”** tell us that his persecution of Christians was an

unintentional sin (1Timothy 1:13). However, his words, **“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am the worst,”** tell us that without forgiveness in Christ, unintentional sins still merit God’s condemnation and wrath (1Timothy 1:15). In contrast the words, **“He [Judas] was a thief, and had the bag, and would take what was put into it,”** tell us that Judas was doing what he knew to be wrong (John 12:6).

When the Bible describes Peter’s denial of Christ, saying, **“And the Lord turned, and looked at Peter, and Peter remembered the words of the Lord, how He had told him, Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly,”** the words “wept bitterly” tell us that Peter’s sin was a sin of weakness, not a sin of intent (Luke 22:61-62). What Peter did was still a sin. However, the words, **“Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin,”** tell us that unintentional sins are not imputed to those who trust in Christ (Romans 4:8). In contrast, the words, **“David did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, and did not turn aside from any thing that he commanded him all the days of his life, except only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite,”** tell us that when David sinned willfully in the matter of Uriah, that sin was imputed to David (1Kings 15:5). And, the words, **“David said to Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said to David, The LORD has also put away your sin; you will not die,”** tell us that David’s sin in the matter of Uriah was not forgiven until he repented (2Samuel 12:13). There are a number of passages in the Psalms that show us that David’s repentance was sincere. However, because of that sin **David lost the blessing of God that had been on his life and home prior to that sin.**

At this point we need to make a distinction between voluntary sins and willful sins. Peter surely knew that he was lying when he denied that he knew Christ [see Luke 22:55-62]. So his sin was voluntary, and without forgiveness it would have sent him to hell. Yet it was far different from David’s sin. Nevertheless, the difference does not lie in the magnitude of the sin, **“For whoever keeps the whole law, yet fails in one point, is guilty of all”** (James 2:10). The difference lies in the hardness of the heart. When Peter lied about knowing Christ, he acted impulsively and was sorry for it. David hardened his heart many times before and after committing adultery. He hardened his heart when the thought first came to him. He hardened his heart when he sent for Bathsheba. He hardened his heart when he found out she was married. He hardened his heart when he tried to get her in bed. At each of those points he could have stopped, but he did not. The words, **“If we sin willfully or**

deliberately after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins remains,” and the words, **“Her guests are in the depths of hell,”** tell us that if David had died while he was in bed with Bathsheba he would have gone to hell (Hebrews 10:26, Proverbs 9:18). God kept David from losing his salvation, but He kept him by bringing him to repentance, not by letting him sin.

\[NOTE: The words, **“Walk in the Spirit, and you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh, for the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and they are opposed to each other: so that you cannot do the things that you would,”** tell us that before David sinned he had lost the Holy Spirit’s help (Galatians 5:16-17). He may have lost it because he began to think too highly of himself. If a person begins to think that God is pleased with him because of his own righteousness, the Holy Spirit cannot help him to resist sin without helping him to deceive himself.]

Sins of Commission and of Omission

The words, **“Whoever knows what is right, and does not do it, sins,”** are the basis for our distinction between sins of commission and sins of omission (James 4:17). Sins of commission involve doing what God has forbidden. Since God has said, **“You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against thy neighbor. You shall not covet etc.,”** those who do such things commit sin (Exodus 20:13-17). On the other hand, sins of omission involve failing to do something we should. One example is found in the words, **“Whoever stops his ears at the cry of the poor, will also cry out, but will not be heard”** (Proverbs 21:13). Therefore, we need God’s forgiveness, not only for what we have done wrong, but also when we fail to do right.

Sins Against God, Against Our Neighbor, And Against Self

The words, **“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment,”** specifically condemn all sins against the first table of the Ten Commandments as sins against God (Matthew 22:37-38). Nevertheless, the words, **“There is none greater in this house than I; neither has he kept back any thing from me but you, because you are his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?”** tell us that those who commit adultery are also sinning against God (Genesis 39:9). And, the words, **“The children rebelled against me: they did not**

follow my law, or keep my instruction,” make it clear that every violation of God’s Law is a sin against God (Ezekiel 20:21).

Now, the second table of the Ten Commandments is summarized in the words, **“You shall love your neighbor as yourself,”** and those who violate it sin against their neighbor (Matthew 22:39). However, the words, **“Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins that a man commits are outside his body; but he who sins sexually sins against his own body,”** (1Corinthians 6:18). Tell us that those who sin sexually not only sin against God and their neighbor, but also against their own body. Nevertheless, the words, **“Against you, you only, have I sinned, and done this evil in your sight: so you are right when you pass sentence, and blameless when you judge,”** were spoken by David after he committed adultery, and they make it clear that a sin against our own body is not a private matter, but a sin against God who made it (Psalm 51:4).

Grievous and Less Grievous Sins

The words, **“All who trust in the law are under a curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one who does not continue to do everything that is written in the book of the law,”** tell us that every violation of God’s law is rebellion against God (Galatians 3:10). And, the words, **“Whoever keeps the whole law, yet fails in one point, is guilty of all,”** tell us that every unforgiven sin, no matter how small it seems to us will bring damnation (James 2:10). At the same time, the words, **“Jesus answered, You would not have any power over me at all, unless it was given to you from above: therefore he who delivered me to you has the greater sin,”** tell us that God sees some sins as greater than others (John 19:11).

The words, **“Moreover your little ones, which you said would be a prey, and your children, who in that day had no knowledge between good and evil, they will go in there, and I will give it to them, and they will own it,”** and the words, **“That servant, who knew his lord’s will, and did not get ready, and did not do what his master wanted, will be beaten with many lashes. But the one who does not know, and committed deeds worthy of flogging, will be beaten with few lashes,”** tell us that God sees willful sin as more grievous than sins of ignorance (Deuteronomy 1:39, Luke 12:47). Nevertheless, the words, **“If there had been a law given that could have given life, righteousness truly would have been by the law,”** tell us that when it comes to salvation, ignorance of the Law is no excuse (Galatians 3:21). If it was God would have never sent Christ to the cross.

The words, **“Whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become**

guilty before God,” tell us that no one is righteous in the sight of God, all are guilty (Romans 3:19). And, the words, **“He who believes on Him [Christ] is not condemned: but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God,”** tell us that only those who trust in Christ will escape God’s condemnation (John 3:18-19). Therefore, unbelief is the most grievous sin of all.

Sins unto Death and Sins That are Not Imputed

No one who sins willfully is truly sorry for his sin. And, **it is impossible for someone who wants to be a sinner to want to be delivered from sin** for those two wants are contradictory. The words, **“With gentleness instructing those who oppose their own interest; in the hope that God will give them repentance bringing them to a realization of the truth,”** tell us that repentance is a gift of God (2Timothy 2:25). However, because repentance without faith is incomplete and cannot save anyone; **true repentance, the kind of repentance that comes from God, includes both contrition and faith.** Compare the words, **“God will not despise a heart that is broken and contrite [sorry for sin],”** with the words, **“Without faith it is impossible to please God”** (Psalm 51:17, Hebrews 11:6). Those words tell us that faith and contrition [sorrow for sin] go hand in hand. Therefore, when the Bible says, **“If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that is not unto death, he shall ask, and God will give him life for those who do not sin unto death. There is a sin unto death: I am not saying that he should pray for it,”** we know that a “sin unto death” must be a willful sin, a sin that the perpetrator is not sorry for (1John 5:16).

Some think that the “sin unto death” spoken of by John is the sin of **“blasphemy against the Holy Ghost,”** and that truly would be a sin unto death (see Matthew 12:31). I will deal with that sin later. However, the fact that Paul called for an unrepentant man to be delivered, **“Unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh,”** tells me that man was guilty of a sin unto death (1Corinthians 5:5). For that reason, the words, **“The law is good, if one uses it lawfully; Understanding this, that the law is not meant for a righteous man, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinful, for the irreverent and profane, for those who strike or kill their fathers or mothers, for murders, For those who sin sexually, for sodomites, for kidnapers and slave traders, for liars and perjurers, and for any other thing that is contrary to sound teaching,”** tell me that by committing the sins just listed the perpetrators of such sins place themselves back under the condemnation of the Law (1Timothy 1:8-10). And, sins that

place one back under the condemnation of the Law are sins unto death, for the Law brings only death (Rom. 8:2). So if the perpetrator of such sins is unrepentant, the congregation has a responsibility to, **“Deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus”** (1Cor. 5:5).

The idea that once a man comes to faith he can willfully engage in sin and still be saved is straight out of hell. Just as God brings us to faith solely by His grace, He keeps us in faith solely by His grace (1Peter 1:5). However, the words, **“The flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that you cannot do the things that you would,”** tell us that God keeps us from falling by keeping us repentant, not by letting us sin (Galatians 5:17).

In contrast, no sin is ever imputed to those who have a repentant heart; those who like David in his youth walk **“In integrity of heart, and in uprightness,”** trusting in the forgiveness that is ours in Christ (1Kings 9:4). In fact, it is only to those who so trust in Christ that the words, **“Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin”** apply (Romans 4:8). That does not mean that we have no sin. On the contrary, the Bible tells us that, **“All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”** (Romans 3:23). However, **“The righteousness of God apart from the law,”** does not consist of more laws, but of forgiveness (Romans 3:21). That forgiveness is the reason that, **“Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one who believes”** (Romans 10:4). It is that forgiveness that makes us righteous in the sight of God, and because of that forgiveness no sin is ever imputed to those who trust in Christ. That is why the Apostle John could write, **“We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who is born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him”** (1John 5:18).

The False Distinction Between Mortal and Venial Sins

During the middle ages, someone who did not understand the Gospel, tried to rationalize an entire class of sins by claiming that they were too small to bring damnation. I have already explained why that idea is wrong, and why every unforgiven sin will damn. But in the past some have tried to sanctify that error by placing Biblical definitions on the terms “mortal” and “venial”. However, whenever that terminology is used some people twist it to excuse certain sins. If you have ever heard someone use the phrase, “little white lie” they were excusing a sin. For that reason, the terms “mortal” and “venial” should be purged from our theological vocabulary. Of those terms C. F. W. Walther said:

The Word of God is not rightly divided when the preacher speaks of certain sins as if there were not of a damnable, but of a venial nature... The Lord says: *Verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the Law till all be fulfilled. Whosoever, therefore, shall break, one of these least commandments and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven; but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*(Matthew 5:18-19) This is one of the most dreadful sayings found in Scripture. The Lord does not say: “He shall *be* the least,” but: “He shall *be called* the least.” “The least” means the most reprobate, or one whom God does not acknowledge as His own. That will be the *sentence* passed on him in the kingdom of God and Christ. Therefore you should with trembling approach the task of preaching both the Gospel and the Law. Do not speak of one jot of the Law, of one of the so-called least commandments, as of something about which a Christian need not be greatly concerned. (“Law and Gospel,” pages 325 and 326.)

Sins That Cry Out For Judgment

The Bible tells us that some sins **cry** out to God for justice. Look for the words “**cry**,” “**cried**” or “**cries**” in the following passages.

Genesis 4:10, “What have you done? the voice of your brother’s blood **cries** to me from the ground.”

Genesis 18:20, “The LORD said, Because the **cry** of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous.”

Exodus 3:7, “The LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their **cry** because of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows;”

Exodus 3:9, “Now behold, the **cry** of the children of Israel has come to me, and I have seen how the Egyptians are oppressing them.”

Exodus 22:22-24, “You shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If you afflict them in any way, and they **cry** to me, I will surely hear their **cry**, and my wrath will grow hot.”

James 5:4, “Behold, the wages of the workers who reaped your fields, that you kept back by fraud, **cry** out: and the cries of those who did the harvesting have entered into the ears of the Lord of hosts.”

Revelation 6:10, “And they **cried** with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, will you not judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”

Luke 18:7-8, “Will not God avenge his chosen, who cry to Him day and night, though he bears long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily.”

In general, sins that cry out for justice seem to be crimes against the innocent, the poor and the helpless.

Pardonable Sins and Blasphemy Against the Holy Ghost

The words, “**Men will be forgiven every sin and blasphemy: but blasphemy against the Holy Ghost will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of man, will be forgiven: but anyone who speaks against the Holy Ghost, will not be forgiven, not in this world, or in the world to come,**” tell us that every sin is pardonable, except for “blasphemy against the Holy Ghost” (Matthew 12:31-32).

However, the fact that most sins are pardonable should never be twisted into an excuse to sin. The words, “**A broken and a contrite heart, O God, you wilt not despise,**” tell us that forgiveness is only promised to those who are sorry for their sin (Psalm 51:17). In contrast, the man who sins willfully has treated “**The blood of the covenant, by which he was sanctified, as an unholy thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace**” (Hebrews 10:29).

Now we come to the question of what constitutes “**blasphemy against the Holy Ghost**”. In order to answer that question let us first consider the words of Nicodemus who, when he came to Jesus by night said, “**Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God: for no one could do these miracles that you do, unless God is with him**” (John 3:1-2). Those words of Nicodemus tell us that the Pharisees **knew** that Jesus performed miracles by the power of God. Therefore, when the Bible tells us that, “**The scribes that came down from Jerusalem said, He is possessed by Beelzebub, and casts out devils by the prince of the devils,**” we know that those scribes had so hardened themselves against Christ that they would rather claim that His miracles were done by the power of Satan than admit their own sin (Mark 3:22). That being the case, the fact that “**Jesus called them to Himself, and said to them in parables, How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand,**” tells us that Jesus was still reaching out to them, still trying to bring them to repentance (Mark 3:23-24). And, if they had already blasphemed the Holy Ghost that would have been a waste of time since they could not get forgiveness anyway. Therefore, His warning, “**I tell you truly, All sins will be forgiven to the sons of men, and all blasphemies they utter: But whoever will blaspheme against the Holy Ghost will never be forgiven,**”

was aimed at keeping them from blaspheming the Holy Ghost (Mark 3:28-29). However, His warning tells us that **those who blaspheme the Holy Ghost are those who are so hardened against the truth of the Gospel that they portray everything the Holy Spirit does to bring them to faith as the work of Satan.** In short, “**blasphemy against the Holy Ghost**” involves a **total hardening of oneself in unbelief.** And, if that is the case, a person who is truly guilty of that sin will have no desire for Christ, or the forgiveness that is available through His death on the cross.

In the past there have been many Christians who have been tormented by a fear that they might blaspheme the Holy Ghost. If you are one of them, instead of worrying you need to entrust the safekeeping of your soul to God’s grace, believing that you are “**kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation**” (1Peter 1:5). God’s grace is fully able to keep us from that sin. As it is written, “**I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day**” (2Timothy 1:12).

Hidden Sins and Open Sins

The distinction between hidden and open sins is useful to pastors in dealing with matters of church discipline. For example, if one member of a family is guilty of a certain sin, to avoid bringing shame to the entire family a pastor might follow the steps of Matt. 18:15-18 while keeping the matter private (at least until the last step — see verse 17). If the sin is already known, then it can be dealt with publicly.

In Matthew 18 we read, “**If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone: if he will hear you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not listen, then take one or two others with you, so that every word may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church: but if he refuses to hear the church, let him be to you as a heathen man and a publican. I tell you truly, Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven: and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven**” (verses 15-18).

The words, “**Rebuke those who sin before all, that others also may fear,**” tell us that open sin by a member of the church needs to be dealt with swiftly and openly (1Timothy 5:20). And, the words, “**Among you one hears of immorality, and of a kind of immorality that does not even occur among the Gentiles, that one has his father’s wife. And you are still puffed up. Shouldn’t you rather have been filled with sorrow, and have**

put out of your fellowship the man who did this?" command churches to put those who are **immoral yet unrepentant** out of their fellowship (1Corinthians 5:1-2).

Personal Sins and Sins in Whose Guilt We Share

Personal sins are sins that we are guilty of. However, the Bible also speaks of those who share in the guilt of sins committed by others. We partake in the sins of others whenever we command someone to sin, advise them to sin, help them to sin, or help them to cover up a sin.

The words, **"Anyone who is partner with a thief hates his own soul: he is put under oath, but discloses nothing,"** call those who know of a crime, but refuse to testify, a "partner" in that crime (Proverbs 29:24). In an American court of law, someone who helps cover up a crime is guilty of being an "accessory after the fact".

The words, **"If anyone sins, by hearing a public call to give sworn testimony, and is a witness, whether he has seen or learned of it; if he does not speak, then he shall bear his iniquity,"** again condemn those who have knowledge of a sin but refuse to testify (Leviticus 5:1).

The instructions that David gave to Joab, **"Set Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and withdraw from him, so that he will be struck down and die,"** made David guilty of murder even though he did not commit the act (2Samuel 11:15).

The words, **"Come out of her, my people, so that you do not share in her sins,"** and the words, **"Do not be hasty in laying hands on any man, and do not share in the sins of others: keep yourself pure"** warn us against sharing in the sins of others (Revelation 18:4, 1Timothy 5:22).

The words, **"If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed, for he who bids him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds,"** warn us against encouraging those who spread cultic doctrines and pervert the Gospel (2John 10-11).

The words, **"Who knowing the judgment of God, that those who commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in those who do them,"** warn against friendship with evildoers (Romans 1:32). The words, **"Do not be deceived: bad company undermines good behavior,"** warn us against evil influence (1Corinthians 15:33). The words, **"Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them,"** warn us against fellowship with evil (Ephesians 5:11). And, the words, **"Blessed is the man who does not walk in the**

counsel of the ungodly, or stand in the way of sinners, or sit in the seat of the scornful.” with the words “I have not sat with those who deceive, nor will I fellowship with hypocrites. **I hate the company of evil doers, and will not sit with the wicked,**” tell us what our attitude toward sin should be (Psalm 1:1 & 26:4-5).

THE FREEDOM OF THE WILL

In the past there has been a great deal of controversy regarding freedom of the will, much of which stems from a failure to distinguish between freedom of the will from man’s viewpoint, and freedom of the will from God’s perspective. Man was created with a free will, and it appears to us like we still have it. In fact, when it comes to everyday choices, such as what we will wear or eat etc., we do have a free will – up to a point. I say “up to a point” because we cannot choose to wear or eat what we do not have. So even in everyday matters our freedom of choice is limited. However, the words, **“No one can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost,”** and the words, **“No man can come to me, unless the Father who has sent me draws him,”** tell us that from God’s point of view we are no longer free to chose in spiritual matters, and no man can come to faith in Christ apart from the work of the Holy Spirit (1Corinthians 12:3, John 6:44). Having said this, the words, **“I will never turn away anyone who comes to me,”** tell us that Christ is never going to turn away someone who truly wants to be saved (John 6:37). It is just that no one will want to be saved unless the Father “draws him”.

Likewise, no one should ever be afraid that God does not want to save him. On the contrary, the words, **“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is patient with us, not wanting anyone to perish, but all to come to repentance,”** tell us that God does not want any one to be lost (2Peter 3:9). It is just that God works through His word to bring people to salvation. As it is written, **“Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”** (Romans 10:17). And, all you have to do is look around you to see that the lost, for the most part, care nothing for God’s Word

Much of the controversy regarding the doctrine of freedom of the will is generated by those who, on the basis of some passages, draw conclusions that contradict other passages. Then, when they realize that their conclusions contradict other passages, instead of rejecting their conclusions they reject

what the Bible says by explaining it away. That is rebellion against God. And, the words, **“If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them,”** warn us against listening to those who contradict what the Bible says (Isaiah 8:20). **The doctrine that God wants us to learn is the doctrine He has plainly stated in the words of Scripture, “line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little”** (Isaiah 28:10).

The words, **“There will be a bridle in the jaws of the people, causing them to err,”** and the words, **“I will put my hook in your nose, and my bridle between your lips, and I will turn you back the way you came,”** tell us that from God’s point of view men are controlled by spiritual influences just as a horse is controlled by a bridle (Isaiah 30:28, Isaiah 37:29).

The words, **“You are of your father the devil, and you will do what your father desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and did not abide in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks on his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it,”** tell us that those who are not children of God are children of the devil, and will do his will (John 8:44). That does not mean that everyone who is lost will commit crimes like murder. However, if they do not commit such crimes it is only by the grace of God. In some cases God is reaching out to them through their conscience. In other cases He is protecting believers. In still other cases they are seeking righteousness through works. But, they are all guilty of the sins that stem from a fallen nature. They all lie, lust, and have imagined murdering someone they are angry at etc. And, the words, **“That they may come to their senses and escape from the devil’s snare, having been taken captive by him to do his will,”** tell us that Satan is able to take control of them (2Timothy 2:26).

The words, **“The natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness to him: and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned,”** tell us that because of original sin it is contrary to nature for those who are lost to accept the things of God (1Corinthians 2:14). And, the words, **“The fleshly mind is hostile to God: for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be,”** tell us that when it comes to the Law of God, we do not have a free will (Romans 8:7).

The words, **“I know that you are Abraham’s seed; but you want to kill me, because My Word has no place in you,”** tell us that God’s Word is what works in us to change our hearts (John 8:37). The words, **“I am the vine, you are the branches: He who remains in me, and I in him, produces much fruit: for you can do nothing without me,”** and, the words,

“We are not adequate in ourselves to think that we can accomplish anything in our own strength; but our ability is from God,” tell us that we are not able to accomplish anything spiritual in our own strength (John 15:5, 2Corinthians 3:5). As it is written, **“It is God who works in you both to will and to do His good pleasure”** (Philippians 2:13).

The words, **“You formerly walked according to the way of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience,”** again speak of those who are lost being under the influence of Satan (Ephesians 2:2). The words, **“They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is no one who does good, no, not one,”** tell us that no one can make himself righteous in the sight of God (Romans 3:12). The words, **“The light shone in the darkness; and the darkness did not comprehend it,”** tell us that without the help of the Holy Spirit the lost do not understand (John 1:5). And, the words, **“He has rescued us from the power of darkness, and transferred us into the kingdom of His dear Son,”** tell us that we are saved by what God does, not by what we do (Colossians 1:13).

The Apostle Paul was not saved because he chose Christ, or because he resisted less than others, but because God chose him. At the time of Paul’s conversion Christ said, **“I have appeared to you for this reason, to make you a minister and a witness not only to the things that you have seen, but also to the things that I will let you see. I will deliver you from your people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom I now send you, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among those who are sanctified through faith in me”** (Acts 26:16-18).

Speaking to Timothy, Paul said, **“The Lord’s servant must not quarrel, but must be gentle toward all, able to teach, and patient when wronged. With gentleness instructing those who oppose their own interest, in the hope that God will give them repentance bringing them to a realization of the truth. That they may come to their senses and escape from the devil’s snare, having been taken captive by him to do his will”** (2Timothy 2:24-26). Those words remind us that those who are lost, having been taken captive by Satan, oppose their own interest [i.e. salvation], and repentance is a gift of God.

A number of passages are commonly cited to support the idea that man has some part in his salvation. However, as you will see, that idea is not in the text, it is being assumed.

The words, **“Come to me, all you who labor and are carrying a heavy burden, and I will give you rest,”** invite all who are lost to come (Matthew 11:28). The words, **“The kingdom of God is at hand: repent, and believe the gospel,”** call on people to repent and believe (Mark 1:15). And, the words, **“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved”** were the words of Paul and Silas to the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:31). However, the words, **“The natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness to him: and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned,”** and the words, **“No one can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost,”** tell us that just because the Bible calls upon men to believe does not mean that they have the ability to believe (1Corinthians 2:14 and 12:3). Without the power of the Holy Spirit working through His Word they could never believe. Their sinful flesh would destroy faith before it got started by filling them with doubt

The words, **“He (Christ) is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world,”** tell us that salvation is available to everyone (1John 2:2). However, the words, **“The minds of those who do not believe have been blinded by the god of this world, that the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, might not reach them,”** and the words, **“The world through its wisdom did not know God,”** tell us that without God’s Word the lost have no idea that they are lost, or that salvation is available (2Corinthians 4:4, 1Corinthians 1:21).

The words, **“It pleased God to save those who believe through the foolishness of preaching.” // “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God,”** and **“No one can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost,”** then tell us that God works through His Word to bring multitudes to faith, in spite of their resistance (1Corinthians 1:21). And, the words, **“You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people valued by God; that you should show forth the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light,”** tell us that we have not chosen Christ, He has chosen us (1Peter 2:9).

THE GRACE OF GOD TOWARD FALLEN MANKIND

1. THE NECESSITY OF DIVINE GRACE

The words, **“Sin entered the world by one man, and death by sin; so death passed upon all men, because all have sinned,”** tell us that everyone who is going to die is a sinner (Romans 5:12). The words, **“The wages of sin is death,”** tell us that the very reason that we are going to die is because we are sinners (Romans 6:23). And, the words, **“No flesh will ever be justified in God’s sight by the deeds of the law: because the knowledge of sin comes by the law,”** tell us that no one will ever escape death by doing what the law says, because the Law is what condemns us (Romans 3:20). That is why Divine grace is necessary.

How then can we be saved? The Bible answers that question with the words, **“Now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed... Even the righteousness of God which comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all and upon all who believe”** (Romans 3:21-22). **“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life”** (John 3:16). Therefore, **“God has done what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh. Sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, as an offering for sin... That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us”** (Romans 8:3-4). So **“We have redemption through His [Christ’s] blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace”** (Ephesians 1:7). **“And the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us of all sin”** (1John 1:7). **“For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one many will be made righteous”** (Romans 5:19). **“All the prophets testify of Him, that through His name whoever believes in Him will receive forgiveness of sins”** (Acts 10:43). **“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).

[Note: believing that Christ died for our sins is more than just believing that He died. It is believing that He died for your sins, and that because of His death you have forgiveness and eternal life.]

2. THE NATURE OF DIVINE GRACE

Because the Bible says, **“You are saved by grace through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast,”** we need to let the Bible tell us what grace is and what faith is (Ephesians 2:8-9). And, the Bible tells us what grace is through the words,

“He saved us, not by works of righteousness that we have done, but in keeping with His mercy” (Titus 3:5). Notice that in Ephesians Paul says that we are saved by **grace**, in Titus he says that we are saved by **mercy**. That tells us that even though the word “grace” is a little broader in meaning than the word, “mercy,” when it comes to salvation **grace and mercy can be viewed as synonyms**. Notice also that both passages emphasize the fact that grace or mercy is given **without works**. And, saying that God’s **grace is unmerited** is another way of saying that grace is given to us without works.

The words, **“Whoever finds me [wisdom] finds life, and will obtain favor from the LORD,”** define grace as **“favor” unmerited favor** (Proverbs 8:35). [Christ is the “the wisdom of God.” 1Cor. 1:24]

The words, **“I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation,”** tell us that David was saved by trust [faith] in God’s mercy [grace] (Psalm 13:5 KJV). And, because the Bible uses **mercy and grace** as synonyms, that passage could be translated, **“I have placed my faith in your grace, my heart shall rejoice in your salvation”** (Ps. 13:5).

The words, **“God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life,”** speak of us being saved through God’s love, thus defining **divine grace as love**. (John 3:16).

The words, **“The kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared... according to His mercy He saved us,”** define God’s grace as **kindness, love and mercy** (Titus 3:4-5).

The words, **“To give His people the knowledge of salvation by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God;”** define the grace that saves us as **forgiveness of sins** (Luke 1:77-78). And, the words translated “tender mercy” could be translated as “bowels of compassion;” thus further **defining God’s grace as compassion**.

The words, **“He [Jahweh] said, Surely they are my people, children who will not deal falsely: so He was their Savior... in His love and in His pity He redeemed them,”** speak of God’s deliverance of Israel from Egypt (Isaiah 63:8-9). However, since that deliverance is a prophetic type of our deliverance, it further **defines God’s grace as pity**.

The words, **“In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace,”** again define **God’s grace as the forgiveness of sins** (Ephesians 1:7).

The words, **“Scripture, having foreseen that God would justify the heathen through faith, proclaimed the gospel to Abraham in advance, saying, In you shall all nations be blessed,”** tell us that Abraham knew and

believed the gospel (Galatians 3:8). And, what is the gospel? The Apostle Paul answers that question by saying, **“I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you... that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures”** (1Corinthians 15:1-4). Therefore, what Galatians 3:8 is telling us is that **Abraham understood and believed that his seed [descendant] would die for our sins, and rise again (Heb. 11:19)**. That being understood, when the Bible tells us that, **“Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness,”** it is telling us that **Abraham was justified by believing the same gospel that we believe. That defines saving faith as believing that Christ died for our sins, and rose again the third day. As it is written, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, receiving the curse in our stead, for it is written, Cursed is every one who hangs on a tree, that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Jesus Christ, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith... My point is this, the covenant concerning faith in Christ, that was confirmed by God at the time of Abraham, cannot be nullified by the law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, so as to make the promise of no effect, for if the inheritance comes by the law, it is not given by promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise”** (Galatians 3:13,14,17,18).

The words, **“We have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand,”** tell us that faith in **God’s promise of forgiveness in Christ** [the gospel] is the hand that receives God’s grace (Romans 5:2). And, the words, **“You are saved by grace through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God, not of works,”** tell us that even our faith is not something that we do, but is a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8-9). As it is written, **“Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”** (Romans 10:17).

Those who oppose and compromise the gospel sometimes cite the words, **“Neither circumcision, or uncircumcision counts for anything; but faith which produces works through love,”** in a vain attempt to make faith include works (Galatians 5:6). However, those words are not saying that faith consists of works, but that **faith produces works** through love — in contrast to the Law which produces works through fear.

Those who oppose the gospel also often cite the words, **“By works a man is justified and not by faith only,”** and place those words in opposition to the words, **“A man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law”** (James 2:24, Romans 3:28). However, that is totally wrong. Because both statements are the Word of God, both statements are true. And, we cannot be

faithful to the Word of God without accepting both of them without explaining either one of them away.

A careful examination of what James is saying makes it clear that Paul and James were talking about two different things. When Paul spoke of works **he was referring to “works of righteousness” (Titus 3:5)**. In contrast, James was talking about not treating the wealthy that came to worship better than the poor (James 2:1-5). Furthermore, when James said, **“Was not Rahab the Harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way,”** he was not referring to works of righteousness that Rahab had performed, for she was a pagan harlot. However, her words, **“I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen on us,”** reveal the faith she acted on, and it was not faith in Christ (Joshua 2:9). Therefore, James was not saying that faith in Christ is not enough, but that what we believe will affect the decisions we make, and if we have faith in Christ it should make a difference in the way we treat people.

3. ATTRIBUTES OF JUSTIFYING GRACE

The words, **“We have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace,”** and the words, **“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men, by which we must be saved,”** tell us that the grace by which we are saved is not ours because of a primal decision, but because Christ took our sins upon Himself and died on the cross to obtain it for us (Ephesians 1:7, Acts 4:12). Therefore, **the first attribute** of justifying grace, is that it is available to us through Christ alone.

The words, **“John saw Jesus coming to him, and said, Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world,”** and the words, **“He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world,”** tell us that Christ did not just die for a few, but for all men (John 1:29, 1John 2:2). Therefore, **the second attribute** of justifying grace is that it is available to all. As it is written, **“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life”** (John 3:16).

The words, **“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets, and stone those who are sent to you, how often I longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you would not,”** and the words, **“You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do**

you,” tell us that God does not ignore the lost, but earnestly works through His Word to bring them to repentance (Matthew 23:37, Acts 7:51). Therefore, **the third attribute** of justifying grace is that **God actively works to bring men to repentance and faith** — so those who are lost are lost through their own fault, not because God wanted them to be lost. As it is written, “As I live, says the Lord GOD, **I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but want the wicked man to turn from his way and live**” (Ezekiel 33:11).

Salvation is Available Through Christ Alone

The words, “**When the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, To redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons,**” tell us that Christ came to redeem us (Galatians 4:4-5).

The words, “**Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, receiving the curse in our stead: for it is written, Cursed is every one who hangs on a tree,**” tell us that Christ redeemed us by taking upon Himself the curse that we deserved (Galatians 3:13).

The words, “**Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,**” tell us that the forgiveness Christ obtained for us is given to us freely (Romans 3:24).

The words, “**God has done what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh. Sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk after the flesh, but after the Spirit,**” tell us that Christ died as an offering for sin (Romans 8:3-4).

And, the words, “**God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not counting their sins against them; and has committed to us the word of reconciliation,**” tell us that we are reconciled to God by the forgiveness Christ won for us through His death on the cross (2Corinthians 5:19).

The words, “**It was fitting that we should have such a high priest, who is holy, blameless, pure, separated from sinners, and risen higher than the heavens; Who does not need to daily offer up sacrifice, as do other high priests, first for his own sins, and then for the people’s: for He did this once, when He offered up himself,**” tell us that Christ is our high priest, and that His death was the sacrifice for our sins (Hebrews 7:26-27).

The words, “**In Christ Jesus you who once were far away are made near by the blood of Christ. For He is our peace, who has made both Jew**

and Gentile one, and has broken down the wall of hostility that separated us. Having abolished in His flesh the law of commandments contained in ordinances; in order to make of the two one new body in Him, so making peace. And that He might reconcile both to God in one body by the cross, having thereby put the hostility to death,” tell us that we are reconciled to God through Christ’s death on the cross (Ephesians 2:13-16).

The words, **“Although you were previously alienated from Him [God the Father], and antagonistic in mind through your wicked works, He has now reconciled you, through the death of Christ’s physical body, to present you holy, without fault and beyond reproach in His sight,”** tell us that God the father has reconciled us to Himself through Christ’s death on the cross (Colossians 1:21-22).

And, the words **“In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace,”** tell us that we have forgiveness through Christ’s death on the cross [“His blood”] (Ephesians 1:7). As it is written, **“The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us of all sin”** (1John 1:7).

Salvation is Available to All

The words, **“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life,”** the words, **“This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; Who wants all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth,”** the words, **“God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance unto life,”** and the words, **“The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men,”** tell us that Christ died for the sins of all men (John 3:16, 1Timothy 2:4, Acts 11:18, Titus 2:11).

The words, **“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is patient with us, not wanting anyone to perish, but all to come to repentance,”** the words, **“Say to them, As I live, says the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked,”** and the words, **“I have no pleasure in the death of him who dies, says the Lord GOD: therefore turn from sin, and live,”** and the words, **“God... has made of one blood all nations of men... So that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him, and find Him, although He is not far from any one of us,”** tell us that God does not want anyone to be damned (2Peter 3:9, Ezekiel 33:11, Ezekiel 18:32, Acts 17:26-27).

The words, **“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets, and stone those who are sent to you, how often I longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you**

would not,” the words, **“You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do you,”** and the words, **“But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will privately introduce damnable heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves,”** tell us that God does not want those who ultimately reject the gospel to be lost (Matthew 23:37, Acts 7:51, 2Peter 2:1).

God Earnestly Reaches Out to the Lost

The words, **“To Israel He says, All day long I have stretched forth my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people,”** tell us that God earnestly reaches out to the lost (Romans 10:21)

The words, **“Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to everyone,”** and the words, **“Teach all nations... Teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you,”** tell us that God wants the gospel proclaimed to all men (Mark 16:15, Matthew 28:19-20).

The words, **“Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Ghost,”** the words, **“I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; and your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions,”** and the words, **“I will give them one mind, and I will put a new spirit in them; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes, and keep my ordinances, and do them: and they will be My people, and I will be their God,”** promise God’s Spirit to all who believe (Acts 2:38, Joel 2:28, Ezekiel 11:19-20).

The words, **“Being confident of this, that He who has begun a good work in you will continue it until the day of Jesus Christ,”** the words, **“Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation,”** the words **“Him that is able to keep you from falling,”** and the words, **“Looking to Jesus the author and finisher of our faith,”** tell us that God not only begins, but also finishes the work of His Spirit in those who believe (Philippians 1:6, 1Peter 1:5, Jude 24, Hebrews 12:2).

4. ACCURATELY DESCRIBING THE DIVINE WILL OF GRACE

Although we are saved by God’s love, when we are describing that love, or the fact that God **“Wants all men to be saved,”** we should never give people the impression that **God’s love and salvation are available apart**

from faith in Christ. As it is written, **“There is no other name under heaven given among men, by which we must be saved”** (Acts 4:12). [See John 3:16, 1Tim. 2:4.] Likewise, we should never describe God’s desire to save sinners in a way that leads men to believe that by praying a prayer the unrepentant and unbelieving can continue in sin without any danger of eternal punishment. As it is written, **“Don’t you know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor sex perverts, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor foulmouthed revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.”** // **“He who believes on the Son has everlasting life: and he who does not believe the Son will not see life; but God’s wrath remains on him”** (1Corinthians 6:9-10, John 3:36).

Although God offers salvation to all who trust in Christ, and reaches out to the lost through His Word, **we should never give people the impression that faith is something they do to save themselves.** The words, **“You are saved by grace through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God,”** tell us that even our faith is a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8). And, the words, **“Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God,”** tell us that God gives us that gift through His Word (Romans 10:17).

Christ Himself said, **“No man can come to me, unless the Father who has sent me draws him”** (John 6:44). However, we should never give people the impression that that God might not want to save them. Christ’s words, **“I will never turn away anyone who comes to me,”** assure us that Christ’s arms are open to all (John 6:37). On the other hand, even if it looks to you like you have chosen Christ, the words, **“No one can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost”** make it clear that apart from God’s grace you would never have made the right choice (1Corinthians 12:3).

The words, **“I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but want the wicked man to turn from his way and live,”** tell us that it is not God’s will for anyone to be lost (Ezekiel 33:11). However, the words, **“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be damned,”** tell us that it is also His will for unbelievers to be damned (Mark 16:16). **Neither of these truths should be construed in a way that contradicts the other.** If these two facts seem contradictory to our puny finite minds, we need to accept what the Bible says without trying to manufacture explanations. When the Bible says, **“Do not add to His words,”** that includes making up explanations and teaching them as doctrine (Proverbs 30:6). The

words, “**Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,**” apply to all who think that they can discover spiritual truths that God has not revealed (Romans 1:22). And, the words, “**How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out,**” reveal the impossibility of discovering God’s “hidden will” (Romans 11:33).

**SCRIPTURE ALONE
GRACE ALONE
FAITH ALONE**