

A Simple Guide to the Basic Teachings of the Bible

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Preface

This book is part of a series, and this is the second book in that series. The entire series can be found on my website. While I am thrilled if anyone reads any of my books, and I would certainly hope that anyone who reads this book without having read the first book in the series would still gain a great deal of benefit from it, it must be said that a lot in this book may be confusing to many without having read the first book in the series. This book flows from the book that came before it, and the reader should be aware of this. The first book in this series is titled *A Simple Guide to the Basics of the Bible*. With all of that said, I hope and pray this book will be a huge help to you in your walk with God!

Before diving into the meat of this book I want to give you the opportunity to receive Jesus. If you have never received Jesus as your God and Savior, please do so now. You do not know what can happen even in the next few moments, and so there is

no time to wait. If you are not ready at this time, but become ready at any time you are reading through this series, please return to this section and receive Him. When you are ready, pray the prayer below sincerely from your heart and you will become a true Christian. It is very, very important to understand that merely saying the words of this prayer will not save you. There is no ritual, whether it be a prayer or anything else, that saves us. You must actually and sincerely mean these words or they will be of no help to you.

“Dear Lord Jesus, I believe that you are God Almighty and the only Savior. I recognize that I am a sinner and I have come to hate my sin. I ask that you come into my life so that I can have an eternal relationship with you, your Father, and your Spirit. I ask that you forgive all of my sins based on what you did on the cross and through your bodily resurrection from the dead. I ask that you cover me with your righteousness. I ask that you give me your Spirit so that you will become number one in my life, far above all else, and so that I will be completely changed. I want to live my life for you from now on, and I can only do that through your Spirit. I understand that I will continue to sin until I die or you come back, so please give me the strength through your Spirit to always seek your help and to continue to ask for your forgiveness. I now know I will spend all eternity with you. I now love you and worship you, and I am so thankful and grateful to you for saving me. Amen.”

Chapter 1: God

What is God Like?

Before saying anything super concrete regarding what God is like, it is so important to emphasize how mysterious God is. All people instinctively know this. No matter what the Bible tells us about God, we must always remember that it is only giving us the slightest and faintest glimpse into what God is like. At all times, Christians must approach the knowledge of God with awe, reverence, and deep humility. With that said,

it must also be strongly emphasized that what God reveals to us about Himself from common sense, nature, and most importantly the Bible, is still very real and true information. It is indeed very limited, but it is true and we have no right to say that God is other than what He says He is. This principle is true for all of theology, but most especially true when we are talking directly about what God is like in His nature as we are about to do.

The Bible makes it clear that we can know many basic things about God from common sense and nature, such as that God exists, that He is supremely good, and that He is supremely great (Romans 1:18-20). But the Bible tells us that God has a number of core characteristics that we will briefly go over here. These characteristics are often called *God's attributes* by theologians. These characteristics are the infinitude of God; the glory of God; the immutability of God; the eternality of God; the invisibility of God; the omnipresence of God; the omnipotence of God; the omniscience of God; the holiness of God; the love of God; the truthfulness of God; the mercy of God; and the grace of God. This is not a complete list. The Bible talks about a large number of characteristics that God has throughout its pages. However, any characteristic of God not listed above is implied by one or more of the characteristics in this basic list. For example, the Bible often talks about the patience of God. But this characteristic is clearly implied by the love of God.

The infinitude of God refers to the fact that God has no limitations. This can also be called *God's perfection*. Many things are perfect in some ways, like a perfect right angle, but only God is perfect in all ways. Everything other than God is finite and dependent upon Him. The glory of God refers to the fact that humans and angels were created to worship and glorify God far above all else. The immutability of God refers to the fact that God cannot change. The eternality of God refers to the fact that God has no beginning and He will have no end. The invisibility of God refers to the fact that God is spirit and in His essence cannot be seen. But God can manifest Himself in created things, and this is often seen throughout the Bible. God is often said to be in heaven, and this means that He most often manifests Himself in a glorious light in heaven (1 Timothy 6:13-16). The omnipresence of God refers to the fact that God is everywhere. The omnipotence of God refers to the fact that God is all-powerful. This does not mean

that God can do anything. God cannot sin; He cannot lie; He cannot die; He cannot change; and He cannot do absurdities like blatant contradictions. It does mean that God has absolute control over all that He created; He could have not created at all; He could have created far less than He did; and He could have created far, far more than He did. The omniscience of God refers to the fact that God knows all things.

The holiness of God refers to His mysteriousness and to the fact that God is completely separate from sin. God is always just and righteous, and therefore never lets sin completely off the hook. Sin must be punished. The love of God refers to the fact that God is love and He is loving toward all things. Even when He is punishing sin, He still loves the one being punished. The truthfulness of God refers to the fact that God only says that which is in accord with reality. The mercy of God refers to the fact that God often does not give the full punishment that is deserved. While He will never let any sin go completely unpunished, God often lessens the punishment. The only time God completely erases the punishment for sin is with Christians when they receive Jesus for salvation. But even here, the punishment is transferred to Jesus Himself on the cross. The grace of God refers to God giving good gifts to His creatures that they have not earned. The ultimate gift is the gift of salvation to Christians.

The infinitude of God is taught in Psalm 145:3 and Romans 11:33-36. The glory of God is taught in Matthew 10:37-39; Philippians 4:19-20; and Revelation 4:9-11. The immutability of God is taught in Malachi 3:6 and Hebrews 1:10-12. The eternity of God and the invisibility of God are both clearly taught in 1 Timothy 6:13-16. The omnipresence of God is taught in Psalm 139:7-10. The omnipotence of God is taught in Matthew 19:26. Matthew 19:26 is not implying that God can do anything. The Bible is clear that He cannot (for example, He cannot change, as we have seen). The passage means that apart from obvious absurdities, everything is possible with God, which clearly means God is all-powerful. The omniscience of God is taught in Psalm 147:5. The holiness of God is taught in Exodus 34:5-7; Isaiah 6; and Habakkuk 1:13. The love of God is taught in 1 John 4:16. The truthfulness of God is taught in Titus 1:1-4. The mercy of God and the grace of God are both powerfully taught in Matthew 5:7, and in the same chapter in verses 43-48.

Don't get confused by the way the Bible uses the term *light*. It uses this term in many different ways and this can be confusing sometimes to those new to the Bible. Sometimes the term is used to describe God's revelation because He is bringing light to our minds as He reveals Himself to us. Sometimes it is used figuratively for God's purity. And other times it is used to describe the glorious light of God that He reveals Himself in. While God normally manifests Himself in this light in heaven, He does at times do so on earth. Moses got glimpses of this light and it actually would somehow stick to him and the Israelites saw this.

It is very important to realize that many passages in the Bible at times seem to contradict these characteristics of God. This is because God often speaks to us figuratively so that we can better understand Him. For example, when Adam and Eve, as recorded in Genesis 3, rebelled against God and hid from Him, God asked Adam where he was. At first glance, this can sound like God did not know where Adam was and thus God is not actually omniscient. But it is clear from the narrative that God was only saying this so that Adam would admit that he hid. God of course knew where Adam actually was. Be very careful about false teachers who try to use passages of this nature to deny God's fundamental characteristics.

One of the primary ways false teachers try to say that God does not have these fundamental characteristics, especially omniscience (particularly knowledge of the future), is by pointing to conditional promises in the Bible. Often in the Bible, God will promise rewards to certain people or groups, or will threaten punishments to certain groups or people, but then later "change" His mind based on the changed behavior of these people or groups. At first glance, it can seem that God does not actually know how these people are going to act. But that clearly isn't the case as this would plainly contradict the passages above, and it would also blatantly contradict Numbers 23:19 and 1 Samuel 15:29. When God makes these conditional promises it is like when a parent says to a toddler who has been promised ice cream, but is now misbehaving, "Ok, we are not getting ice cream." The toddler then gets it together and the parent takes him to ice cream. The parent knows how the child is going to respond, but says this to get the attention of the child. Neither God nor the parents are being dishonest; they both mean it when they say that if the behavior doesn't stop, punishment will take

place. But, both still know the final result nevertheless. Some take this principle and try to argue that what God says about the end times and hell is not actually certain from our perspective. They say that God knows how He will end things, but from our perspective, these are only warnings. This is not the case. The Bible is God's final word and He is not going to leave us in the dark concerning such an important topic.

Before moving forward, it needs to be said that some Christians, including a minority of Confessional Presbyterians sadly, say that God does not actually love all people because there are passages in the Bible that talk about how He hates sinners. They say that God does do loving things towards them, but they say that overall He does not love them. In my opinion, there is no way to reconcile such a teaching with a lot of the Bible, but especially Matthew 5:43-48. The passages about God "hating" sinners are in my opinion using exaggerated language that is intended to show us how seriously God hates sin, and that He will punish sinners for all eternity if they do not repent.

God's name and titles also help us greatly understand what God is like. God possesses many, many titles and we cannot cover them all here. But the two most common in the Bible are the titles *God* and *Lord*. The first of these emphasizes that God is the judge of all the angels and humans. The second of these emphasizes that God is sovereign over all things. The term *sovereign* means "power, authority, and control." Sometimes the titles of God are so closely associated with God that they are said to be His name. But technically speaking, the actual name of God is *Yahweh*. Because this word is not easily translated into English, it is translated into most English Bibles throughout the Old Testament by using the word *Lord* in all caps. So whenever you see LORD throughout the Old Testament, that is actually God's name in the original Hebrew. God's name refers to the fact that God simply exists, nothing created Him, and nothing gives Him His power or characteristics. He has eternally been God. The name Yahweh comes from when God told Moses that He is I AM (Exodus 3:13-15).

What Does God Do?

God does three primary things. They are predestination, creation, and providence. Predestination refers to God's choice of how He was going to bring everything about. This means that everything, even those things that seem small and insignificant to us, were chosen to take place by God before He created anything. This includes even the allowance of sin. This does not mean that God likes sin, or does not care about sin, or worse, causes sin. We have seen that He hates it. But God does allow sin because it is part of His broader plan that will bring Him glory. Think about it. What was the greatest sin ever committed? It was putting Jesus to death. And yet God used that horrible evil to bring about the greatest good and His greatest glory, namely the salvation of His people. This is a very unpopular teaching, even among most Christians. All Christians believe in predestination to one degree or another because it is so clearly taught in the Bible. But most say that God has only predestined some things. This does not seem to be what is taught in the Bible. Think about it: if God knows all things, and He is all-powerful, then clearly God knows what is going to happen before it happens if He wills to allow it to happen. And if God did not want it to happen on any level, then clearly God would stop it and He obviously has the ability to stop it. Therefore, everything that happens must be willed by God on some level. And this seems to be exactly what is taught in Ephesians 1:1-11, especially in verse 11. This is why Confessional Presbyterians reject limiting God's predestination.

An objection is often raised here. It is often said that if God chose everything to take place exactly as it does, then this must mean God wills everything and that would mean that God wills even sin. But, the Bible is clear that sin goes against God's will. Therefore, God must not have predestined all things. Many Christians accept this line of thinking, but Confessional Presbyterians don't buy it. The Bible seems to us to be clearly talking about God's will in two different senses. God does not will sin in this sense: it is disgusting to Him because it violates His law. But He does will to allow sin for His greater purposes. The second sense is what is being talked about in the Ephesians passage above.

A lot of verses in the Bible at first glance seem to be saying that God actually does cause sin (Ezekiel 14:9; 2 Thessalonians 2:11; and Revelation 17, especially verse 17). It is important to be aware of these passages. But they are not teaching that

God literally causes sin as that would blatantly contradict common sense and so much of the rest of the Bible. God is using very strong language in these passages and similar ones to emphasize His complete control over all things, even human actions. So, while these passages do not teach that God literally and directly causes sin, they do strongly support the Confessional Presbyterian position that God has chosen how all things, even human sin, will come about.

God's work of creation refers to the fact that God is the creator of all things from His power alone. This means that God did not merely organize already existing material and/or spirit outside of Himself. It means that God alone existed before He created anything, and then God brought about the universe by His power. This teaching is often referred to as creation from nothing. This does not mean there was nothing and then God or the universe popped into existence. It only means that God alone created. Whenever we create something, we are only doing so in an indirect or secondary sense. We take existing materials and use them to reshape something new. You might say, "God clearly did not create every chair or car in existence right?" This is so. But God did create all of the raw materials that were eventually used to make such things. God brought about the universe in an instant, but then He took a week to fill out and shape things on the earth. This week is referred to in the Bible as part of His creative activity and is distinguished from His providence. And technically it was not a full week as God rested on the seventh day. God does not need to rest, but did this to set us an example.

All true Christians believe in the teaching that God created everything from nothing because it is so clearly taught in the Bible (John 1:1-4 and Colossians 1:15-16). Unfortunately, not all Christians agree on the particulars of the creation week. Some take most of the details of this week, as recorded in Genesis 1-2, figuratively and believe in what is known as theistic evolution. They believe that after God brought the universe into existence, He used the process of evolution to fill out the universe that eventually led to Adam and Eve. God then placed souls within Adam and Eve and they were the first true fully human beings. And then the more literal historical narrative picks up in Genesis 3. Others do not believe in the full-blown theory of evolution, but do believe that the universe is billions of years old. Some of these teachers take most or all

of Genesis 1-2 figuratively. But most of these teachers read Genesis 1-2 literally for the most part, with the exception of the repeated references to the word *day* found throughout these chapters. They take these references figuratively and believe that the word is being used figuratively to describe very long ages. Very few Confessional Presbyterians believe in theistic evolution, but a lot believe in a very old universe.

Most Confessional Presbyterians hold to the young universe view, and that is my position. This view believes that the universe is at least six thousand years old, but in comparison to the two positions above, we believe that the universe is fairly young. This position states that Genesis 1-2 should primarily be read literally. Some details are taken figuratively, but for the most part the chapters are read in a very straightforward manner. This position is taken for a number of key reasons. Genesis 1-2 certainly sounds like historical narrative, it seems very arbitrary to all of a sudden start interpreting Genesis more literally in Genesis 3, and most importantly, the two positions above have to say that death, carnage, and decay all existed before the fall of Adam and Eve and that does not seem to be the biblical doctrine. As Christians, we certainly don't want to be against science. However, the theories of evolution and an old universe are not absolute facts of science, and so we should be very careful about interpreting the Bible in ways that seem like a stretch in order to accommodate these current positions of many scientists.

Providence refers to God's actions in orchestrating all things, at all times, so that everything comes about exactly as He planned according to His predestination before the beginning of time. This doctrine is taught in many places throughout the Bible, but it is also most clearly taught in Ephesians 1:1-11. As was the case with predestination, many Christians try to limit God's providence to only the really big events of history. But this does not seem to jibe with many verses, especially the Ephesians verse above. And at the very least, it seems impossible to say that the cross was not predestined and providentially brought about by God (Acts 2:22-23 and Acts 4:27-28). And if it was, then the grave sins associated with it must also have been predestined in some sense and providentially brought about. Therefore, limiting God's predestination or providence does not appear to be the biblical viewpoint. Because God's providence extends to the

smallest of things, this means that He is sovereign over every minute detail of life. This is why you will often hear Confessional Presbyterians talk about the sovereignty of God.

The Trinity

The doctrine of the Trinity refers to the biblical teaching that God exists in three persons. All true Christians believe in this doctrine because it is so clearly taught in the Bible. The doctrine states that there is only one true God, but that He mysteriously exists in three persons. This does not mean that God exists in three parts. God is infinite spirit and therefore cannot be split up into three parts. The doctrine does not teach that God is known by three primary names or roles. These are serious errors that have been taught by false teachers throughout church history. The doctrine is saying that all of God fully exists in each person. These persons are not three “gods,” but they do share the same nature or being because each of them are the one true God. And yet each of the three persons are distinguished from each other. They are not the same person. God fully exists in each of these distinguished persons that have an infinite, eternal, perfect, loving relationship with each other. There is no contradiction here. We are not saying that God is one God and yet three “gods.” We are not saying that God is one person and yet three persons. We are saying there is only one true God, who mysteriously exists in three persons. God is one and three in two distinct senses.

These three persons are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father is not the Son and vice versa. The Father is not the Holy Spirit and vice versa. And the Son is not the Holy Spirit and vice versa. They are three distinct persons. The Father is not part of God. On the contrary, in His entire person He is the one true God. The same is true of both the Son and the Spirit. And yet they are not three “gods,” because there is only one true God that fully and mysteriously exists in each person. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are also not merely names, titles, or roles for God. Each of the persons has His specific role, but these terms do not describe the three roles of God the way we would call a person a dad, a son, and a husband. In that scenario, the dad is the son. He is a dad in a very different way than he is a son, but the same person is both. That is not the case with the Trinity. As said, the Father is not the Son. The Father

loves the Son as a distinct person and vice versa. It is the role of the Father to oversee the works of God, it is the role of the Son to do the works of God, and it is the role of the Spirit to complete the works of God. For example, the Father oversees creation, the Son actually creates, and the Spirit at all times sustains the creation in its existence.

If you are feeling very confused about now, do not worry, you are in excellent company. All Christians, even the greatest minds throughout church history, have struggled with this doctrine. But we all believe it because the Bible teaches it.

The Bible teaches emphatically that there is only one true God (Deuteronomy 6:4; 1 Kings 8:60; Isaiah 43:10; Romans 3:30; 1 Timothy 2:5; and James 2:19). The Bible does often call Satan; the demons; idols; and even people; “gods” sometimes as a way of mocking them for trying to act like “gods.” Many false teachers take these verses out of context and try to say that lesser “gods” exist. The section of the Bible they are most fond of using in this regard is John 10:34-36, because at first it can sound like Jesus is teaching that there are lesser “gods.” But they are taking this verse badly out of context. Jesus is quoting from Psalm 82:6 and if you continue on and read verse 7 of this Psalm, it is clear God is indeed mocking the leaders being addressed for acting like “gods.” Jesus’ point here is to say that if God called these leaders “gods” as a way of mocking them, but they were shown not to be “gods” by their actions, Jesus’ enemies needed to point to His actions to prove that His claim to be God was false. Some false teachers go so far as to say that we can become “gods” or that we are “gods” as Christians. Some say that Jesus is not God, but is a “god,” and some say the same about the Holy Spirit. All true Christians must completely shun these blasphemous teachings.

The Bible teaches that the one God exists in three distinct persons, and these persons are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19-20). The Bible teaches that the Father is God (Matthew 6:9; John 20:17; Galatians 1:1; and 1 Peter 1:2-3); the Son is God (John 1:1-18; Acts 20:28; Romans 9:5; Philippians 2:5-11; Titus 2:13; and 2 Peter 1:1); and the Holy Spirit is God (Acts 5:3-4 and 2 Corinthians 3:17-18).

Some false teachers say that the Son cannot be God because the Bible seems to say Jesus became the Son of God. They base this on Psalm 2:7, which is quoted in

Acts 13:32-33; Hebrews 1:5; and Hebrews 5:5. Similar language is also used in the second part of Hebrews 1:5 as well, which is quoting from 2 Samuel 7:14 and 1 Chronicles 17:13. But once again, they are taking these words badly out of context. These words do not mean that Jesus literally became the Son of God, but that He was shown to be the Son of God, as well as God's ultimate high priest, in an official sense when He rose from the dead. Both the Acts passage and the Hebrews passage in Hebrews 5:5 make this clear, and this truth is clearly taught in Romans 1:3-4. Jesus is called "the Son of God" well before His resurrection throughout the Gospels, demonstrating beyond all doubt that He did not literally become the Son of God at His resurrection. Many false teachers will also point out how Jesus is called *the firstborn*. This title in no way means that the Son was the first of God's children and so He had a beginning. This title in the ancient world was one of authority because the eldest child was almost always put in charge of the family estate. And the title is used of Jesus in this sense alone. He has authority over all things because He is God.

Jesus can only be said to be the child of God in a very unique fashion. All of God's other children are only such because of adoption. They do not share the same nature of God. But Jesus is the Son of the Father because He shares the same nature as His Father. It is extremely important to understand that the Bible is using all of these titles in a manner of speaking and we are not to take them too far. Even though Jesus shares the same nature as His Father, this does not mean that the Father gave birth to the Son or had a wife that gave birth to the Son. Such teachings are radically unbiblical for a number of reasons. And when human parents adopt children, they still share the same nature as them as humans. Further, their adopted children are loved equally and given the same status with their biological children if they have biological children (and they are good parents of course). This is not the case with the Son and God's adopted children. The Father loves the Son far above His adopted children as we will discuss in a moment. And while biological children share the same nature as their biological parents, and directly receive their DNA from them, they are not identical with their parents. The Father and the Son are identical as far as their attributes are concerned, as we have seen.

With all that said, there is a clear difference between biological children and adopted children. Biological children share the DNA of the parents in a way that adopted children clearly do not. The analogy between the Father and the Son and biological children and biological parents is only intended to show that just as there is a stark difference between biological children and adopted children, the same is true regarding the Son and all of God's other children, who are adopted unlike Jesus.

It is extremely important to understand that the love the persons of the Trinity have for each other is far above the love God has for all else, even His own beloved adopted children. This is why God so passionately seeks His own glory. He is not a selfish monster, but He is the one and only Triune God of all. The Father loves the Son and the Spirit above all else and demands that they be honored. The Son loves the Father and the Spirit above all else and demands that they be honored. The Spirit loves the Father and the Son above all else and demands that they be honored. This teaching at first glance seems to contradict John 17:23. But that passage is saying that the Father will outwardly show the same love to us that He showed to Jesus during His journey on earth. It is not saying that the Father loves us as much as he loves the person of His Son.

The three persons of the Trinity are constantly distinguished from each other throughout the New Testament, but nowhere is this distinction more clear than at the baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3:16-17). John 1:1-14 makes it abundantly clear that the persons of the Trinity have eternally existed with each other, and have eternally been distinguished from each other. Sometimes the Bible talks about how the persons of the Trinity are one. These verses are referring to the fact that the persons are one in being and nature, and are not teaching that they are the same person. And some false teachers point to Isaiah 9:6, where Jesus is called "Everlasting Father," in an attempt to say that He is the Father. But this phrase in the original Hebrew means *Father of Eternity*, and is pointing to the fact that Jesus is eternal as God. And the fact that the persons of the Trinity all have an intimate loving relationship with each other is taught in Luke 3:21-22; John 5:20; John 16:13-15; and John 17.

The roles of the persons are seen all over the Bible, especially throughout the New Testament. But some key passages in this regard are Genesis 1:1-2; John 1:1-4;

and 1 Corinthians 8:4-6. Throughout the New Testament, the Father is usually called *God*; the Son is usually called *Lord*; and the Spirit is usually called *the Holy Spirit* or a similar title. Keep this in mind, otherwise some of the language of the authors of the New Testament can seem confusing. They are not saying that the Father is not the Lord, or that the Son is not God, or that the Spirit is not God or the Lord. All three are both God and the Lord. The passages above make this very plain. This pattern is used as a convenient way of regularly distinguishing between them.

Chapter 2: Humans/Angels and Jesus

Humans and Angels

Humankind

Human beings are the pinnacle of God's creation. While the angels technically have more powers than humans, humans are capable of having an intimate relationship with God in ways that not even the angels can. This is why humans are the second primary focus of the Bible. They are a distant second to God, but they are second nonetheless. Humans alone are said to be made in the image of God in the Bible. This does not mean that humans are little "gods" or share the nature of God, as is so unfortunately taught by many false teachers today and throughout church history. It means that humans are the peak of God's creation and can be closer to God than anything else in creation. Because all humans are made in God's image, all human beings are equal. This does not mean that all human beings are the same, or that they have the same roles, or that they all have the same gifts from God. But it does mean that in an overall sense, all humans are equal with each other. All of these doctrines are clearly taught in Genesis 1.

Human beings have free will and are responsible for their actions. This may seem to contradict the fact that God has predestined everything that happens, but while

God sovereignly orchestrates all of life's circumstances, including the allowance of sin, this does not change the fact that the individual is still freely choosing to sin in the moment of disobedience. This does not completely explain how both can exist as this is extremely mysterious, but no blatant contradiction is being taught by the Bible. The Bible teaches that humans are made up of a body and a soul. It is true that our souls can be separated from our bodies, but this does not mean that we should say that humans are souls with bodies the way some Christian teachers unfortunately say. It is more correct to say that we are souls that are supposed to be connected to our bodies. This is not true of God and the angels. While God and the angels often manifest themselves in created things, there is nothing unnatural when they choose not to do so. When our souls are separated from our bodies, there is a real sense in which our souls long to be reunited to our bodies. Some Christians believe that humans have a body, a soul, and a spirit, but this does not seem to be the biblical teaching. Finally, God creates the human soul of every person at the moment of conception. Many Christians believe that God does not create the soul distinctly from the body. They say that both body and soul are brought about through normal human procreation. This also does not seem to be the biblical teaching.

The fact that humans have free will is implied all over the Bible. If we did not have free will, we could not be responsible for our actions. There are two passages that seem to teach that humans have a body, a soul, and a spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:23 and Hebrews 4:12). However, the Bible seems to usually use the terms *soul* and *spirit* as two words that describe the same thing. And this is made abundantly clear when Jesus said that He was giving up His human spirit into the hands of the Father as He was dying on the cross (Luke 23:46). As we will see soon, Jesus was and is fully human. So, if He had both a soul and a spirit, He would have said that He gave up both into the hands of the Father. But He didn't. Therefore, the two passages above are probably looking at our spiritual side from two different angles, like our emotions and our intellect, which are both aspects of our souls, and the verses are emphasizing both aspects. The fact that we are not merely souls with bodies is taught by the fact that humans are never called *spirit* or *spirits* the way God and the angels are, and by the fact that God will resurrect the bodies of all people on the last day (John 5:28-29). The Bible over and

over again distinguishes between the physical and the spiritual, therefore it does not seem possible for our bodies to be able to produce our souls through normal procreation. Finally, that a full human being is present from the moment of conception is taught in Psalm 51:5.

The Angels

Many false teachers either ignore the biblical doctrine of the angels or don't believe in it altogether. The angels, including the fallen ones, are referred to so often in the Bible that this approach is a blatant denial of the authority of the Bible itself. Many other false teachers are obsessed with the angels and greatly exaggerate their importance. This approach is a blatant twisting of the Bible. The doctrine of the angels is a very important doctrine, but our focus should never be on the angels, it must be on Jesus. The angels are spirits like God. They are not infinite spirit, but they are like God in that in their core nature they are invisible spirits. Like God though, they can manifest themselves in physical created forms. This is why the descriptions of angels throughout the Bible are so varied. The primary purpose of the angels, like humans, is to worship, glorify, and enjoy God far above all else. But their calling is to help humans. Around one-third of the angels fell and became Satan and the demons. These angels are completely evil and hate God. They seek to harm humans, especially God's people, however they can. It is hard to tell when exactly the angels were created and when exactly the fallen ones actually fell. But it is clear that both had taken place by the time of the fall of Adam and Eve.

The fact that angels are spirits like God whose primary calling is to help humans is clearly taught in Hebrews 1:14. The fall of Satan and his angels is clearly taught in 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 1:6; and Revelation 12:3-4. The 2 Peter passage at first glance seems to be saying that the demons are already in hell. But the rest of the Bible is quite clear that is not the case. Therefore, Peter is saying that the demons will end up in hell and therefore as far as God's judgment is concerned, it is like they are there already. The Book of Revelation is a very hard book to interpret and therefore we should be very cautious when trying to understand it. Having said that, knowing about how many of the

angels fell is an extremely important detail for us as Christians to know and nowhere else in the Bible does God ever give us an answer to this question. Because angels are figuratively called *stars* in the Bible (Job 38:7 and Revelation 1:20), this passage from Revelation 12 does seem to be answering that question for us. Because Revelation is so figurative and symbolic in its language, it is probably safer to say that we don't know if the exact number was precisely one-third. But it does seem that it was around one-third of the angels, otherwise this verse from Revelation does not make a lot of sense and we are left completely in the dark regarding about how many angels fell to become the demons. And it is clear from the Book of Revelation as a whole that Satan is the dragon. Finally, the fact that the angels had already been created and the fallen ones had fallen by the time of the fall of Adam and Eve is made clear in Genesis 3.

Sin

Sin is the breaking of God's law. Only angels and humans are capable of sinning. The law of God is made up of God's commandments. Much more will be said about God's law in the next book of this series, but for now it is important to understand this. There are two types of sins: sins of commission and sins of omission. Sins of commission are when God's law says "don't" do something and we do it anyway, and sins of omission are when God's law says "do" something and we fail to do it. Sins of commission are often called *transgressions* in the Bible. Sins of omission are often merely called *sins* in the Bible. But often either term is used as a blanket term to cover both concepts. This is an important distinction in the Bible because it emphasizes that it is never enough to only avoid what is being forbidden in the "don't" commandments. We must always seek to actively do what is right as well.

It is very important to distinguish between original sin and actual sin. Actual sins refer to the actual sins we commit. Original sin refers to where these actual sins come from. Actual sins flow from our sinful natures. Our natures, both body and soul, are deeply corrupted. From this nature flows our evil desires, and from these desires flow our evil thoughts; aspirations; feelings; choices; words; and deeds; all of our actual sins. Technically, even our evil desires are considered actual sins in God's eyes. We have

this polluted nature from the moment of our conception. We receive this nature because of the actions of Adam and Eve. Adam was the representative for all humankind, but more specifically that of men, while Eve was more specifically the representative of women. This is why all humans are punished for the actions of Adam and Eve, but men and women are not punished in the same ways. This may seem unfair. How can we be punished for the actions of others? The Bible is clear that we are as guilty as Adam and Eve because if we were in their position, we would have done the exact same thing.

All sin, no matter how horrible, can be forgiven with one exception. This exception is known as the unpardonable sin. This is where someone knows beyond any doubt that Jesus is who He says He is, and yet turns around and says that His work is of Satan. This sin is also called “the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit,” because the truth of Jesus has been shown to this person through the power of the Holy Spirit, and yet this person has the nerve to say that the work of Jesus is done through the power of Satan. Once this sin has been committed, a person can never be forgiven. What is important to know about this sin, is that the person who commits it will never seek forgiveness. So, if a person desires to receive Jesus for salvation, such a person does not need to worry about whether he or she has committed this sin or not.

That sin is the breaking of God’s law is plainly taught in 1 John 3:4. The distinction between sins of commission and sins of omission is taught all over the Bible, but especially in James 4:17. The distinction between original sin and actual sins is taught in Romans 7:14-25; Psalm 51:5-6; Psalm 58:3; Genesis 3; and Romans 5:12-14. And the unpardonable sin is taught in Matthew 12:22-32; Hebrews 6:4-6; Hebrews 10:26-31; and 2 Peter 2:20-22.

Jesus

God and Human

We have already seen that Jesus is God Almighty. We have also seen that He is the Son of God, meaning that He is the second person of the Trinity. And in the plan of God, the second person of the Trinity was to become a full human being in order to

save God's chosen people. The Son did this by adding a human nature to His person and becoming Jesus Christ. This human nature was a full human nature. Jesus was not kind of human, or mostly human, or human in a manner of speaking. He was and is fully human. If Jesus was not fully God, He could not have paid the full penalty for our sins on the cross. If Jesus was not fully human, He could not be our substitute. Therefore, He was both, and this is one of the most important teachings of the Bible. God becoming human is often called *the incarnation* by theologians. The incarnation does not mean that God morphed and changed into a human being. Remember, God cannot change. It means that the unchangeable Son added a human nature to His person. In His essence, the Son as God did not change. None of His attributes or characteristics were even slightly modified. This means that from the incarnation forward, Jesus is one person with two natures. These two natures are His God nature and His human nature. These two natures were permanently and perfectly united together.

The fact that the God nature of Jesus did not change in the incarnation is an extremely important doctrine. This is because if it did change, it would not be fully God because God cannot change as we have seen. Many false teachers deny this truth. Many will say that they believe that Jesus was and is God, but then they turn around and say that He emptied Himself of some or all of His God characteristics while He was on earth. They base this on Philippians 2:5-7. They are badly misinterpreting this passage. It is important to understand that while God is technically everywhere, He specifically manifests Himself in heaven through a glorious light as we have seen. The Bible is clear that no one can see the fullness of this light in a sinful state. If someone did, he or she would literally die. It is usually the Father who manifests Himself in this glorious light, but we know that the Son often did so as well before His incarnation (Isaiah 6:1-7 and John 12:36-41). Some of the disciples were given a glimpse of this glorious light in the transfiguration of Jesus (Matthew 17:1-8).

Therefore, while God mostly operates behind the scenes, there is a sense in which the angels and the souls of God's followers in heaven get to see God's characteristics in action in a more direct sense to a certain extent. They are also able to worship God in a more direct fashion because of this reality. And this will be the reality for all of God's people on the new earth for all eternity. And it was this that the Son gave

up during His incarnation. He did not give up, modify, or in any way stop using His God characteristics. Such is impossible because, again, God cannot change. It is true that often people would have moments when they would realize who Jesus was during His ministry, and worshiped Him directly accordingly, but these were rare moments. The Bible is quite clear that Jesus did not change in His God nature or in any way give up His equality with the Father (Hebrews 13:8 and John 5:18).

It is very important to emphasize that Jesus was and is only one person. The two natures of Jesus were not loosely connected together so that the Son of God could speak to the human Jesus and vice versa. If this were the case, then only the human Jesus was crucified because the Son of God, while being loosely connected to the human Jesus, would not be on the cross if Jesus was not one person. The Son of God in His person, in both natures, was crucified for our sins.

It is also extremely important to emphasize that the two natures of Jesus can never be blended together. If they were, Jesus' God nature would no longer be God because it would have changed into a God-human hybrid, and the human nature would no longer be truly human because it also would now be a God-human hybrid. Therefore, we must never separate the two natures, but we must also always carefully distinguish between the two natures. Failure to fully grasp this truth can lead Christians to needlessly becoming terribly confused over many passages. Jesus, in His God nature, knew all things, was all-powerful, was everywhere, etc. Jesus, in His God nature, was and is completely equal with the Father in every respect. Jesus, in His human nature on the other hand, did not know all things; was not all-powerful; could only be in one place at one time; was less than the Father; worshiped the Father because as a true human He had to worship God; etc. And all of these things are still true of Jesus and will be true of Him for all eternity. It is true that Jesus' human nature has of course developed a great deal since the beginning of the incarnation, and will continue to do so for all eternity, but none of that changes what was said above. This is all very mysterious because these strong distinctions make it sound like Jesus was actually two persons, but the Bible is clear that is not the case. How the two natures interact with each other while being so clearly distinguished is a great mystery.

You are probably asking right now how Jesus suffered and died for our sins in both natures if God cannot die. Only the human nature of Jesus directly suffered and died on the cross. When, for example, Jesus' dead body was pierced in His side, the God nature of Jesus was not directly pierced because it is impossible for it to be pierced. And Jesus' God nature as God, of course never stopped being alive. A helpful way to try to understand all of this is to think of the union of our bodies and souls. This comparison is not perfect because our bodies and souls are not full natures. They are the two core dimensions of our human natures. And the two can be temporarily separated, whereas this is not the case with the natures of Jesus. But the Bible teaches, as we have seen, that our bodies and souls are sharply distinguished while being tightly united at the same time. And in that sense, they are very similar to the two natures of Jesus. And if someone were to punch you, this person would only be directly hitting your body. Your soul is incapable of feeling physical pain. And yet, it would not be like your soul is off to the side watching what is happening to your body. Your soul is intimately connected to your body throughout the ordeal. And we would not say that this person merely hit your body, we would say he hit you. In the same way, only the human nature of Jesus directly suffered and died on the cross, but it was the person of the Son that was ultimately crucified for us. Before moving forward, you should understand that often theologians, pastors, and Bible teachers will refer to the God nature of Jesus as His divine nature. So, if you hear that, you won't be confused.

That the Son of God became a full human being in Jesus is plainly taught in Hebrews 2:17. That the incarnation is a perfect and permanent union is taught in John 1:14. Human beings are not immortal like God. If God wanted to annihilate humans, He certainly had every right to do so. However, the Bible is clear that God has chosen to make it so that humans will never be snuffed out of existence. We will see this very clearly later in this book. Therefore, if the Son truly became human, the human nature of Christ can never be discarded, otherwise it was never truly a human nature to begin with. That the two natures of Christ were not mixed and must always be distinguished is clearly seen in Romans 9:5. If Jesus was fully human, this means that He had both a human body and a human soul, and this is seen in Luke 23:46. When Jesus refers to His spirit here, don't get this confused with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of

the Father, and He is the Spirit of the Son. But this is referring to the intimate relationship the Spirit has with the Father and the Son. He is not God's spirit the way we have spirits or souls. In that sense, God does not have a spirit, He is spirit (John 4:24), and that applies equally to all three persons of the Trinity. In Luke 23:46, Jesus is clearly talking about His human spirit. Finally, that the Son remains one person after the incarnation is taught in Acts 20:28.

The Life of Jesus

The life of Jesus was glorious indeed and fully revealed to us what God is truly like. The human nature of Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary. Some false teachers have taught that Jesus was in the womb of Mary the way water is in a cup. In this way of thinking, Mary was only a vessel for Jesus and was not His biological mother. But this means that Jesus would not truly be a descendant of king David as prophesied throughout the Bible. Therefore, this is a serious error. Jesus took half of His genetic code from Mary in the normal fashion, while the Holy Spirit supernaturally and miraculously supplied the other half of Jesus' genetic code. The egg in the womb of Mary would have been cleansed of its corruption before the Holy Spirit performed this miracle. Hence, Jesus had no sinful nature and remained sinless throughout His life. And He will remain sinless for all eternity.

Jesus was born to Mary and her husband Joseph. Joseph was the stepfather of Jesus. Mary remained a virgin until after the birth of Jesus, and then she and Joseph engaged in a normal marital relationship, having many more children, both boys and girls. These children were the half brothers and sisters of Jesus. When Jesus was twelve years old, He powerfully engaged with the Jewish leaders at the temple. When Jesus was around thirty years of age, He began His ministry.

During this time Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist; He was tempted by Satan; He performed miracles unlike any that had been seen before; He healed many; He anointed His twelve disciples as the original twelve apostles; He preached and taught God's word; He deeply loved and cared for people; He challenged the corrupt religious leaders who had become false teachers among God's people; He was

gloriously transfigured; He rode triumphantly into Jerusalem; He instituted the Lord's Supper; He was betrayed by Judas; He was arrested, illegally tried, tortured, and brutally crucified by the Jewish and Roman leaders in Israel; He died upon the cross; He was pierced in His side that led to blood and water flowing out that proved He was truly dead; He was buried in a cave tomb; He rose from the dead; He appeared to His disciples and over five hundred witnesses; He instituted Christian baptism; and He ascended into heaven where He is now. It is extremely important to understand that the resurrection of Jesus was not just another miracle of His. This was His way, and the Father and the Spirit's way, of saying that the work of Jesus on the cross had been fully accepted by God. This is why the resurrection of Jesus is called our victory.

The vast majority of these teachings are taught throughout all four Gospels. The sinlessness of Christ is clearly implied by the fact that Jesus is God and is also explicitly taught in many passages outside of the Gospels (2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:21-22; and 1 John 3:5). Some false teachers say that Jesus had a sinful nature, but He chose to never give into it. I've even heard the phrase, "Jesus was a sinner, who never sinned." Such an awful teaching cannot be reconciled with the passages above. You may be wondering right now how Jesus can be sinless when He was fully human. It needs to be remembered that humans did not need to sin, but chose to do so. So it is not essential to human nature to be sinful, and thus Jesus could be sinless and fully human. The fact that Jesus specifically appeared to over five hundred witnesses after His resurrection is taught in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7.

Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, two of the largest and oldest false religions that claim to be "Christian" today, both teach many terrible doctrines in regard to Mary. In the list I am about to give, not all of the doctrines are taught by both groups, but they are all taught by one or both of them, or they are at the very least taught by many within one of these groups. Mary is said to be sinless; perpetually virgin; the spouse of the Holy Spirit; the mother of the church; it is said she was assumed into heaven; she is the queen of heaven; she is omnipotent; she is our advocate; she is co-mediator with Jesus; and she often appears to people on earth to be glorified. While both of these groups deny this, she is in all reality blatantly worshiped by both of these religions. These horrific teachings are nowhere taught in the Bible and they are

contradicted by a number of passages (Exodus 20:4-5; Deuteronomy 6:13; Matthew 1:24-25; Mark 3:20-35; Mark 6:1-6; Luke 2:5-7; Luke 4:8; Luke 8:19-21; Luke 11:27-28; Romans 3:23; and 1 Timothy 2:5). Mary herself would be the first to be repulsed by these doctrines. All true Christians must shun them.

Having said all of that, many true Christians do call Mary “the mother of God,” while many others believe that such a title sounds too similar to the false teachings (heresies) found in the religions above. Most Confessional Presbyterians, myself included, believe the title is valid when properly used and understood. This is because not only was Mary the actual biological mother of the human nature of Jesus, the person inside of her was the Son, the second person of the Trinity. Think of it this way: even though we only receive half of our genetic code from our mothers, we don’t say that our mothers are only the mothers of half of us. They are simply our mothers. So, while we are not saying that Mary was literally the mother of God in the sense that she created or generated God, which would be ridiculous as she herself was created by God, it is still true that the person within her womb was fully God. Even though she did not generate Jesus’ divine nature, and even though she did not generate half of Jesus’ human nature (the half generated by the power of the Holy Spirit), she was and still is the mother of Jesus, who was and is fully God. So we believe the term is appropriate, but that it should be used sparingly and only with careful instruction. And those who believe we should avoid the term altogether should be respected as long as they agree with us on the basic concepts I have laid out in this paragraph.

Before moving to the next chapter, a word must be said about the miracles of Jesus. Many false teachers and, unfortunately in my opinion, far too many true Christians to a much lesser extent, overly obsess about miracles. By doing this, they greatly take away from the glory and uniqueness of the miracles of Jesus. Miracles are supernatural acts of God that He usually does through one of His servants. They are also acts that are clearly visible to witnesses. God is working supernaturally behind the scenes at all times. There is a constant interplay between the natural and the supernatural, and God uses this interplay to providentially fulfill His predestined plan for all things. It is important to remember though, that even the natural laws of nature were created, designed, and are sustained by God. So, for example, the wind by and large

functions according to natural laws that can be studied by scientists. But, God at any time can supernaturally cause the wind to go a different direction without anyone knowing He intervened. A miracle is where God intervenes supernaturally, but He does so in a way where humans witness this intervention in a powerful way.

Miracles are very rare occurrences. If they were not, there would be nothing special about them. And despite what so many mistakenly think who are not very familiar with the Bible, the Bible plainly teaches this very truth. The Bible details for us a period of history that lasted roughly two thousand years from about 2000 BC to AD 100. 2000 BC is about when Abraham came on the scene, and AD 100 is around the time the last apostle to die, the Apostle John, wrote his last book and passed away. The Bible does record for us some very key events before the time of Abraham, most importantly creation, Noah and the flood, and the tower of Babel. But it is hard to know exactly when these events took place and by Genesis 11 we are already to Abraham. In this roughly two thousand year period, there were only three major clusters when God was performing many miracles on a regular basis for a short time. These three clusters were the ministry of Moses, the ministry of Elijah and Elisha, and the ministry of Jesus and His apostles and prophets. The ministry of Moses was around 50 years long, from around 1500 BC to 1450 BC. The combined ministries of Elijah and Elisha lasted about 75 years, from around 875 BC to 800 BC. The combined ministries of Jesus and His apostles and prophets lasted about 70 years, from AD 30 to AD 100. All combined, that is about two hundred years. That is only ten percent of the entire history that is primarily being detailed for us in the Bible.

Obviously, many miracles occurred, as recorded in the Bible, outside of these three periods. But they were always the exceptions that prove the rule. Further, we must remember that Satan and the demons can perform miracles. Genuine miracles are found in other religions and we must conclude that these are performed by dark forces. And while the overwhelming vast majority of claims to hauntings; ghosts; aliens; predictions by psychics; etc.; are fraudulent, a thorough study of these things reveals this is not always the case and again, dark forces are behind some of these genuine realities. This does not mean that ghosts or aliens exist, or that psychics have special abilities. *Paranormal* activity is not real, at least not as most people understand that

term. What it does mean is that dark forces often perform supernatural acts to deceive people into believing things that are not taught in the Bible. This does not mean that Satan and the demons have power like God. They cannot create from nothing, and they have only a very limited ability to manipulate nature. But they do have this power to some extent.

With all of that said, Christians should be very, very careful regarding miracle claims and how focused they become upon them. If miracles are rare and only occurred in large numbers during only ten percent of the time of biblical history, we should certainly not expect them to be common today now that the Bible has been finished. And not all miracles are from God and so that means we must be all the more cautious about them. Most importantly, we should always magnify the miracles of Jesus more than any of the other miracles in the Bible or throughout church history. What made Jesus' miracles so special was not only because of how supernatural and amazing they were, but most specifically because of the way He performed them. He always performed them with such love, compassion, mercy, and grace, in ways that no other religious leader throughout history has ever done, including the true heroes in the Bible. When we overly focus on miracle claims today, we take away from the miracles of Jesus.

Most Confessional Presbyterians have taken this view throughout church history. Some have even gone so far as to say that no miracles have occurred since the completion of the Bible. That position seems to go way too far to me. With that said, many Confessional Presbyterians today throughout South America, Africa, and Asia do believe that miracles should be highly emphasized in the present. I disagree with this position for the reasons said above, but even if you take the opposite position of me on this point, I would still strongly urge caution because many problems have occurred in otherwise godly churches in these regions because they have gotten carried away.

That God is always working supernaturally behind the scenes is taught all over the Bible. No one disputes this. Therefore, it is important not to equate miracles with God's supernatural activities. They are a very specific type of God's supernatural work. That Satan and the demons can perform miracles is clearly taught in Exodus 7:10-12; Job 1; and 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10. The verse that is most often used to teach that

miracles should be a regular occurrence in the church today is John 14:12-14. This passage is being badly taken out of context. Obviously, we cannot do the exact works Jesus did or greater works than Him in all ways. It is blasphemous to say otherwise. We cannot receive worship, and we cannot die for the sins of the world. And no person in church history has ever done the miracles Jesus did, not even close. Jesus is clearly primarily talking about how His ministry of spreading His message was very limited. He came only to directly preach to the people of Israel for the most part (Matthew 15:24). The church though, after His ascension, is called to take Jesus' message all over the world and it has done so for the past two thousand years. Finally, many false teachers say that they won't even recognize a ministry unless it has miracles. They say that miracles are the proof that a ministry is really from God. This attitude comes from Satan and all true Christians must shun this attitude (Matthew 16:1-4).

Chapter 3: Salvation Part 1

What are We Saved From?

Before we dive into the work of salvation God has performed on our behalf, we must first answer this question: from what does God save us? As odd as it sounds at first, ultimately God saves us from Himself. It is God's anger towards sin that comes from His holiness that leads to the need for Him to punish sin. And God saves us from every element of this punishment, but it is so important to emphasize where the need for this punishment comes from. So, what is the punishment for our sin? It is death.

Death in God's eyes is multifaceted. There are three key elements to the biblical concept of death. They are physical death, spiritual death, and eternal death in hell. The fallen angels were only punished with spiritual and eternal death because they are not physical beings. Having said that, it is highly likely that in hell, God will have them take physical forms at times in order to experience physical punishments. Physical death does not only refer to the deaths of our bodies. It includes that, but it also refers to all of

the physical and emotional pain, suffering, and discomfort we experience in this fallen world. Therefore, it very much also touches our souls, but we call it *physical death* because it affects our physical bodies directly, and then touches our souls deeply indirectly. This suffering includes all of the suffering we receive at the hands of Satan and the demons. While those beings are spiritual beings, they do have a strong impact upon the physical world, that in turn harms us a great deal.

Spiritual death does not mean the death of our souls. Remember, God has decided never to literally kill our souls. Spiritual death refers to our natures becoming fallen and sinful. There is a sense in which our bodies control our souls, and there is a sense in which our souls control our bodies. When you feel the desire to go to the bathroom for example, that is a bodily function and your body is telling your soul to tell your body to get up and go to the bathroom. For the most part, our soul listens to our bodily cues without a great deal of thought. But, the soul ultimately controls the body as it must actually tell the body to get up and go to the bathroom. If you are in a work meeting that is about to wrap up, your soul will probably tell your body to wait.

When it comes to sin, this same interplay is always going on. Most of our sinful desires come from our bodies. This is why sometimes in the Bible, in some versions, our sinful natures are called *the flesh*. Often the term *flesh* is referring to our human nature or our physical bodies. But sometimes, in certain contexts, it is referring to our sinful natures. This does not mean that our bodies were created evil or that physical matter in general is inherently evil. Be very careful here because that is exactly what a lot of false teachers say. But God created physical matter and He directly created the bodies of Adam and Eve, so we must not say this. When the Bible talks about our sinful natures by using the concept of the flesh, it is merely pointing to the fact that most of our sinful desires come from our bodies after the fall. It is only using the term as a summary term for our sinful natures. With all that said, it is important to understand that both our bodies and our souls are fallen, and ultimately our souls must listen to our bodies for us to commit an actual sin beyond our mere bodily desires. Remember, the desires of our sinful natures are sinful, but the actions we commit beyond these desires are even more sinful. And because our souls are fallen as well, they seek to please and satisfy our bodily sinful desires. Therefore, when the soul gives in to our sinful bodily desires, we

are committing the greater sins and we do this all throughout the day. This is why the Bible teaches that our natures becoming sinful is spiritual death.

Eternal death refers to us being sent to hell, both body and soul, for all eternity. With the fallen angels, it refers to them being sent to hell as spirits for all eternity. More will be said about hell later in this book, but for now it is important to say that hell is an actual place, and those being punished in it will be conscious and aware of their punishment for all eternity. Unbelievers go to hell only in their spirits after they die before the return of Jesus. But this is only temporary. When Jesus comes back, He will raise their bodies from the dead, reunite them to their souls, and send both to hell for all eternity. It is extremely important to make clear that all people, other than Jesus, deserve hell. Even those like babies and the severely mentally disabled who have never committed an actual sin, still deserve hell because they would have done the same thing as Adam and Eve. I'm not saying God actually sends babies and the mentally disabled to hell. I discuss this difficult theological point in my *Doctrine: Going Deeper*. With all that said, it is important to understand that if God did send them to hell, He would be acting in accordance with His justice.

This may seem harsh at first. How can God send people to hell for only one sin? Most people, including most Christians, don't understand the full weight of sin, not even close. Sin is saying to God, "Go away, I don't need you or want you, I will do my own thing." And when we sin, we are sinning against all three persons of the Trinity. The Father will not tolerate His Son and Spirit being insulted. The same is true for the other persons of the Trinity. Think of how angry it makes you when someone insults, I mean really and blatantly insults, someone you deeply love. Now times that by infinity and you have an idea how God feels about sin. You may be wondering how babies and the severely mentally disabled don't commit actual sins if their natures are corrupt. Their natures do have sinful desires, but they are not aware of them or do not understand them very well and thus God does not hold them accountable for these desires. But they are guilty and held accountable for original sin.

That death in the Bible includes physical death is implied by the word itself. While the word in the Bible often has a broader meaning, it still clearly means physical death. That physical death in the Bible includes all of the suffering we endure in this life is seen

in the fact that when we fell, creation fell with us. Creation was cursed with us. This clearly shows that all that we go through in this life, including all that Satan and the demons do to creation, is part of our punishment. This is all taught in Romans 8:18-25; 2 Corinthians 4:4; and Luke 4:5-7. That death includes all three aspects that we have been discussing is taught in Genesis 3; Romans 5; Ephesians 2:1-3; John 3:1-6; Matthew 25:31-46; and Revelation 20:11-15. That everyone other than Jesus has sinned and is guilty for even one sin is plainly taught in Romans 3:23. That death is the punishment for our sin and this punishment is rooted in God's anger is taught in Romans 6:23; Romans 3:21-26; John 3:36; and Ephesians 2:3. Finally, the fact that most of our sinful desires come from our bodies and our souls must choose whether or not to give in to them is taught in Matthew 26:41.

The Work of Salvation

Now that we have clearly seen what God saves us from, we can look at the work God did to save us. The work of salvation is the work of all three persons of the Trinity. This is so important because many false teachers make it out like the members of the Trinity are at odds with each other in the work of salvation. Many teach that the Father is angry with us and sweet Jesus comes to rescue us from Him. Others teach that the Father set the Son free and He chose to die for us to set us an example of sacrifice, and the Father didn't even know what the Son was going to do until after the crucifixion. These are all horrific teachings. All three persons of the Trinity are united in hating our sin, and all three persons are united in saving those God has chosen to save. It is true that only the Son died on the cross for us, but this is because it is His role in the Trinity to accomplish the works of God.

It is so important to properly understand and emphasize the roles of the persons of the Trinity: it is the role of the Father to oversee the works of God, it is the role of the Son to do the works of God, and it is the role of the Spirit to complete the works of God. Salvation is a part of God's providence. In fact, it is the most important part, and all other aspects of providence serve this ultimate aspect of God's providence. The Son actually did the core work of salvation in His incarnation. The Father was at all times

guiding the angels from heaven so that they would protect and watch over Jesus in His human nature so that He could fulfill His work. The Spirit was at all times sustaining the existence of all things, but specifically of Jesus' human nature and the angels so that Jesus could do His work. We have already seen how the Spirit created the human nature of Jesus in the womb of the virgin Mary. Further, the Holy Spirit anointed the human nature of Jesus with power at His baptism so that He would have the strength and miraculous abilities needed to carry out His mission. Even further, the Holy Spirit applies the work of the Son to us in our lives according to the predestined plan of God. But we will look at this aspect of the Holy Spirit's completing work of salvation in the next chapter.

With all of that laid out, we can now focus in on the work of the Son in salvation as His work forms the core of God's saving work. The Son added a human nature to His person in order to become the promised Messiah. The term *Messiah* means "anointed one." Throughout the Old Testament, from the earliest part, God predicts the coming of a deliverer. Many titles and descriptions are given of this future person. One such prophecy comes from Psalm 2. At first, this Psalm may seem to be talking about king David, but at the very end of the Psalm, at the very end of the last verse (verse 12), it says that we are to take refuge in this person. But we are only to take refuge in God and so this Psalm cannot be referring to David, but must be referring to the future God-man deliverer. This Psalm calls this future deliverer "the anointed one" in verse 2. In the Old Testament, God anointed specific people when they were appointed by Him to be set apart for a certain task. Lots of people were anointed throughout the Old Testament period. But here God is saying that this deliverer will be God's ultimate anointed one and therefore this term became the primary summary term that was used to encompass all of the future work of this deliverer. Hence, the Jews waited in great anticipation for their future Messiah.

Messiah is a Hebrew word that is translated into Greek as the word *Christ*. The nation of Israel, made up of the Jews, were God's chosen people from an ethnic standpoint. They were made into an independent and strong nation by God and they spoke Hebrew. But they rebelled and were conquered by the Assyrians in the North and by the Babylonians in the South. Eventually God returned many of His people back to

the land of Israel, but they were repeatedly conquered by foreign foes after this. After the Babylonians, the Jews were ruled by the Persians, then by the Greeks, then by the Romans at the time of Jesus. By the time of Jesus, most Jews in Israel spoke Aramaic, but many still knew Hebrew and the Scriptures were still in Hebrew for many of them. Many Jews outside of Israel, those who were largely descended from the Jews that did not return to the land of Israel, mostly spoke Greek. They even translated the Old Testament into Greek, a translation that is known as the Septuagint. The Septuagint was even used by many Jews in the land of Israel because many of them spoke Greek as well because that was the language of the Roman Empire. The Romans spoke Greek because they had taken over the vast Greek Empire and adopted a great deal of its culture. Latin was primarily an official language of the government and the military. Later in Roman history, the western half of the Empire mostly spoke Latin, while the eastern half mostly continued to speak Greek.

The New Testament was written in Greek so that it could be read by the Gentiles. A Gentile is someone who is not ethnically Jewish. Gentiles could be saved during the Old Testament period, and many were, but God mostly worked among the Jews during the Old Testament period, while He primarily works among the Gentiles after that period to this day. But Jews can still be saved and there are many Jewish people today who worship Jesus as Christians. They are often called “Messianic Jews” because they recognize Jesus as their promised Messiah. With all that background in place, it is important to understand that the term *Christ* is not Jesus’ last name. Most poor people were not given a last name in an official sense and that was true of Jesus. Often where you were from was used as your last name in a manner of speaking. Hence, Jesus was often called “Jesus of Nazareth.” But when we say “Jesus Christ,” we are actually saying, “Jesus the Christ.” Meaning that He is the true promised Messiah.

Jesus’ role as Messiah has three key components to it. This truth is often referred to as the threefold office of Christ. Notice that I did not say, “offices.” Here the term *office* is being used in the sense of *position*. Jesus does not have three positions, He has one and that is as the Messiah. But His one position has three facets, aspects, or components to it. These correspond to the three major positions seen throughout Old Testament times among the Jews as commanded by God. These three positions were

prophet, priest, and king. There were other positions in Israel during this time, such as elders; judges; prophetic judges (the period of the Judges); the Levites; military positions; queen mother; and others. But the three most prominent by far were prophet, priest, and king. The first two of these were ordained by God in a positive manner, but the position of king was only made because of the Israelites' disobedience. But God took that negative situation and turned it into good by anointing the godly David to be king, and by promising that one of his descendants would be the Messiah and the ultimate and final king over God's people and the world.

Prophets were responsible for giving the word of God to His people. Many people have the misconception that prophets only predicted the future. This is not correct. Prophets engaged in both foretelling and forthtelling. Foretelling is the predicting of the future, while forthtelling is declaring God's truth in general. Foretelling is certainly God's truth, but its predictive element makes it different from forthtelling. Both come in various ways. Foretelling is often very straightforward, while at other times God uses highly symbolic language that is often only discerned after the prophecy has come true. Forthtelling comes in law; historical narrative; poetry; song; parables; allegories; and sometimes in very straightforward letters (or epistles). The apostles were prophets, but with additional gifts and responsibilities. On top of being prophets, they were also evangelists (those who preach the gospel on a regular basis), and were the official governmental leaders of the early church. An apostle had to have seen the risen Jesus (Acts 1:12-26). Even though the Apostle Paul did not see Jesus in His risen state while Jesus was still on earth before His ascension, Paul did see the risen Jesus in a vision. Paul makes it clear that he was the last person to be appointed an apostle (1 Corinthians 15:3-11). Hence, when people say that there are still official apostles in the church today, they are either very confused or they are false teachers.

While the priests had many responsibilities, they had two primary ones. These were to offer sacrifices for the sins of God's people and to intercede for them as well. They were mediators between God and His people. This did not mean that God's people could not pray directly to God. They certainly could and did. But it did mean that God would only accept these prayers if they were in a right relationship with God, and part of being obedient to God within this relationship was to submit to the work of the

priests. The animal sacrifices offered by the priests did not actually pay for sins, but were reminders to the people that sin needs to be punished. The language of the Old Testament often makes it sound like these sacrifices did indeed pay for sins, but we know from the New Testament that this was not the case. Therefore, this language should not be taken literally, but should be seen as strong language used by God to remind the people that their sins must be punished. Ultimately these sacrifices were pointing to the future sacrifice of Jesus. The intercession of the priests meant praying on behalf of the people in a very official capacity. The kings of Israel were the absolute rulers and protectors of God's people, and were responsible for making sure God's people were in submission to God's law. Most of them failed to fulfill their duty.

Jesus is God's ultimate prophet. Not everything prophets said was the word of God. If they were sitting around talking about fishing with their families, for example, not everything they said was the word of God. It was only when they were speaking in their official capacity as prophets that they spoke or wrote the pure word of God. Not so with Jesus. Every word that came from His mouth was the pure word of God because He is God. This is why the Bible literally calls Him *the word* from all eternity. Jesus is God's ultimate king. Jesus is already king of all things as God, but through His incarnation He is specifically the God-man king over His people. Jesus rules over His church, even with all of its many flaws, always growing it, protecting and caring for it, and leading it back to obedience.

Jesus is God's ultimate high priest. Jesus intercedes for us by praying for us from heaven. It may seem odd that God prays, but Jesus does indeed do so in His human nature, and He always prays perfect prayers through the power of the Holy Spirit that God always answers. Finally, as God's ultimate high priest, Jesus offered Himself to God as the sacrifice for our sins. Jesus was not a martyr, and He did not die to set us a great example or motivate us as many false teachers say. His sacrifice does set us a glorious example and certainly must motivate us to love God, His people, and our fellow humans so much more, but these are all secondary fruits of Jesus' sacrifice. At its core, Jesus' sacrifice paid the penalty for our sins. This is why Jesus' mediation as our ultimate high priest is very different from the Old Testament priests. In the Old Testament period, the people entered into a relationship with God and from there

submitted to the mediation of the priests. But for us to even come into a relationship with God, we must have the mediation of Christ first. This is why no one can be co-mediator with Him, Mary or otherwise. The people of God during the Old Testament period also had to have the mediation of Christ before coming to truly know God, but they did not fully understand how that was working at that time. More is said about this in my *Doctrine: Going Deeper*.

A lot of people get confused about the substitution aspect of Jesus' sacrifice. If Jesus took our place, it would seem He would need to take on every element of our punishment, but He did not have a sinful nature, and He certainly did not spend eternity in hell. But a substitute does not have to be an exact equivalent in all ways, the substitution merely has to be of equal or greater value. So, for example, in most justice systems throughout history there have been multiple possible punishments for the same crime, all basically equal in value. One of the most common forms this takes is where a criminal can either do prison time, community service, or pay a hefty fine. And Jesus' sacrifice was of infinite value because He is God and is therefore more than adequate to cover the penalty for our sins. A lot of people argue that the cross doesn't make any sense because no one can pay the penalty for another person. But this isn't so at all. People pay the penalty for other people all the time. The most common way this is done is when people pay the fine for someone else. My kids have gotten traffic tickets and the penalty for this crime was a fine. And in many instances I paid the fine on their behalf. What is immoral is to force someone to pay the penalty for someone else against her or his will. But Jesus voluntarily offered Himself up for us. His will is always one with the Father. God's justice demanded this punishment if God was going to save us because God in His holiness can never leave any sin completely unpunished.

A lot of people also get confused over the statements in the Bible that refer to the sacrifice of Jesus as a ransom. They wonder who the ransom is being paid to. It would seem odd that God would pay a ransom to Himself. And so the only other viable candidate seems to be Satan, because the Bible does talk about us being under his control and being freed from him by the cross. Some Christians have unfortunately taught this, but they are never very clear as to how exactly this would work. This certainly seems to be an incorrect position and Confessional Presbyterians have always

rejected it. God owes nothing to Satan or anyone else. God allows Satan and the demons to harm us as punishment for our sin, but He does not owe anything to the dark forces. As odd as it may sound at first, God is clearly paying the ransom to Himself. Remember, God saves us from Himself and so this actually makes sense. We owe God a debt to His justice, a debt we cannot pay. So God pays it through Jesus on our behalf. This is why the cross is the perfect expression of the perfect balance between God's love and holiness. God's love caused Him to save us, but He does not compromise His holiness. The cross fulfills God's holiness so that we can have the relationship with Him He desires according to His love.

A lot of people wonder why God needs a sacrifice at all. Why can't God graciously forgive our sins the way we as humans often forgive each other without punishment? But, we as humans don't fully forgive each other without punishment over the big things. If someone steals from us, we expect him to give back what he stole with his apology. All reasonable people would be angered at the suggestion that murder, rape, child molestation, etc., should be let off the hook. Even when people, including often true Christians, mercifully tell the worst criminals at hearings that they forgive these criminals for the wrong that has been done to them, they still do not expect the punishment to be completely taken away. And no reasonable person believes that this punishment is only to reform the criminal or to keep others from doing the same. We all instinctively understand that justice demands punishment for the really big sins. And when it comes to God, all sin towards Him is of the biggest deal because we are insulting the persons of the Trinity, and this will not be tolerated.

The sacrifice of Jesus fully frees us from the penalty of sin, from every aspect of death that we discussed earlier. Those who receive Jesus will never go to hell. Those who receive Jesus will not ultimately physically die because God will raise our bodies and souls unto perfection, and they will both spend eternity with God reunited to each other. This perfection will include moral perfection and so our spiritual death will also be taken away. And there will be no more physical or emotional suffering, including the suffering caused by Satan and the demons. This is why the cross is often described as being our victory over the dark forces. You may be asking right now, "How does this work because even after we receive Jesus we still have our sinful nature, we still suffer,

Satan and the demons actually come after us more, and we still die?” God allows all of these things to continue in order to draw us closer to Himself. He is doing these things as our Father and not as our judge. As our judge, God has been completely satisfied by the cross of Jesus. When He disciplines us now when we sin, it is as our Father and is only intended to help us grow, He is not punishing us as our judge. And all of these things are temporary, they will all disappear when we die or Jesus returns. This is not the case for unbelievers.

The work of the Father in overseeing the work of salvation is taught in Psalm 91:11-12; Matthew 4:5-7; Matthew 26:53; and Mark 1:12-13. We have already seen the role of the Spirit in creating the human nature of Jesus and because the Holy Spirit is the sustainer of all creation (Genesis 1:2), His sustaining work would have taken on added significance regarding the work of the Son. And the fact that He anointed Jesus with power at His baptism is taught in Matthew 3:16 and John 3:27-34. This does not mean that Jesus was indwelt or filled with the Spirit like us. Jesus is sinless and so there would be no need for this. And this also does not mean that Jesus became the Messiah at His baptism. There is a sense in which the Son was the Messiah before creation. As soon as God made His choice as to what reality He was going to bring to pass, the Son was the Messiah as it is His role to execute the works of God. But, Jesus was officially anointed with power at His baptism. His ministry officially began at that point.

The nature of a prophet and the fact that Jesus is God’s ultimate prophet is taught in Exodus 4:14-17; Exodus 7:1; Deuteronomy 18:15-22; John 1:1-4; John 3:19-27; and Acts 3:17-26. The role of an Old Testament king is spelled out in Deuteronomy 17:14-20; 1 Samuel 10:1; 2 Kings 18:1-4; and Psalm 78:70-72. That Jesus is God’s ultimate king, especially of the church, is taught in Revelation 17:14 and Ephesians 5:22-24. We also saw through His life how He cared for people, especially those that were His true followers.

The Old Testament priests were to intercede on behalf of God’s people (2 Chronicles 30:27). All of God’s people were to pray for God’s people as a whole as often as they felt led to do so. But the priests, with the assistance of the Levites, were to do so in an official capacity. The most important work of the priests though, was to offer

the animal sacrifices for the sins of God's people (Leviticus 4-7). When it talks about God's people sinning unintentionally throughout these chapters, it doesn't mean completely unintentionally. All sin is intentional and this is also made clear in Leviticus 6:1-7. What it does mean is that no true follower of God can brazenly sin. True followers of God sin in moments of weakness, and then later the Holy Spirit brings conviction and we confess it to God. This is why it is often said throughout these chapters that when the people realize their sin, they are to bring the proper sacrifice to the priest. That these animal sacrifices did not actually forgive sins is made clear in Hebrews 7-9. And the reality that Jesus is our great and ultimate high priest is plainly taught in Hebrews 7:23-28.

That Jesus paid the penalty for our sin is taught repeatedly throughout the Bible, especially the New Testament. But two crucial sections that highlight this wonderful truth are Isaiah 53 and Romans 3:21-4:8. Both of these sections also make it plain that when we receive Jesus, we are made right with God and are thus free from any further penalty from God as our judge. That God absolutely required this punishment if He was going to save us because of His holiness is taught in Exodus 34:7. That Jesus offered Himself up voluntarily is taught in John 10:11-18. That God allows us to continue to suffer not as a penalty for our sin, but in order to draw us closer to Himself is taught in Romans 5:1-5. And the fact that God only disciplines us as Christians now as our Father is taught in Hebrews 12:5-11. There is one final and extremely important element to the sacrificial work of Jesus, but we will explore that in more detail in the next chapter.

Don't let the reference to the descendants of Jesus in verse 10 of Isaiah 53 confuse you. If we said that Jesus literally had descendants, we would be dangerously contradicting the rest of the Bible. This is clearly a figurative way of talking about how Jesus will have many followers, who follow Him as a Father. Jesus is not the Father, He is never called "the Father" in the Bible (not even in Isaiah 9:6), but He is God and therefore He is our "Father" in that sense alone, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 4: Salvation Part 2

The Application of Salvation

In order for us to experience the work of salvation on our behalf, it must be applied to us. Without this application, it would be like someone buying a great gift for us and then it not being given to us. Or it would be like me going down to the court to pay my children's ticket fines and the clerk charging my card and giving me a receipt, but failing to properly record that the fine had been paid in the system and so according to the system my children still owe the money. And while the Father and the Son certainly play a role in the application of salvation as we will see, it is primarily the completing work of the Spirit that applies the work of salvation to us.

There are a number of in-depth steps in the application of salvation to us. We cannot cover each of them in a book of this nature. But what we can do is look at the two overarching themes that cover all of these steps. And these two themes are that God saves us from the penalty and from the power of sin. Technically speaking, we can say that God saves us from the penalty of sin because being under the power of sin is one of the penalties of our sin. Having said that, it is important to make this distinction because some false teachers have taught that a person can receive Jesus for salvation and continue to live in sin indefinitely. This is not so. When we receive Jesus for salvation, God declares us to be completely free from the penalty of sin, and He then saves us from the power of sin. Theologians call these two truths from the Bible *justification* and *sanctification*. We will look at each of these, starting with justification.

Justification refers to us being legally united to Jesus. Until the blood and righteousness of Jesus are legally applied to us, we remain under the anger and judgment of God. When we are legally united to Jesus, the Father credits Jesus' blood to our account and He credits the righteousness of Jesus to our account as well. By having Jesus' righteousness, God can now legally grant us all the privileges of salvation without violating His holiness. God forgives us of all our sins (past, present, and future), and frees us from death. He can now give us eternal life, bring us into His kingdom, bring us into His family, and most importantly, we can enter into an intimate and eternal

relationship with Him, bringing us our only true fulfillment. This ties in with what was said earlier about the one more important part to the priestly work of Jesus that I said I was saving for later. We now turn to this point.

Before Jesus could even be eligible to pay for our sins on the cross, He had to perfectly fulfill the law of God. Just as the priests had to do a number of things to be ready to offer the animal sacrifices, so too did Jesus have to do His work of fulfilling the law of God. If Jesus ever sinned, He could not be our perfect high priest and His sacrifice could not have been accepted by God. Further, He had to fulfill the law of God in our place if we were to be fully saved. A lot of Christians unfortunately do not understand this extremely important aspect to salvation. Being right with God in the Bible is never a matter of merely avoiding breaking the “don’t” commands. It is always perfectly fulfilling all of the “do” commands as well. In our sinful state, we cannot do this and this is why Jesus’ righteousness is needed for us. And being right with God is never only a matter of having the punishment for our sins paid for either. If God only applied the blood of Christ to our account, we would only go back to a neutral state. As we will see soon, Adam and Eve had never sinned when they were first created, but at the same time they had not yet earned eternal life and all that comes with it. Therefore, if only the blood of Christ was applied to us, we would only go back to the state of Adam and Eve before they fell. But the Bible is quite clear that we are made right with God, given eternal life, brought into His kingdom, and adopted as His children the moment we place our faith in Jesus.

The Bible describes our union with Jesus like a marriage. A marriage is both legal and spiritual. The two become one physically and emotionally to a large extent. And the two are legally joined as well. This does not mean that they share all things, but they do now legally share a great deal and in most cases, they now share the same last name. This is very similar to what occurs with us and Jesus. His blood and righteousness are credited to our account because we are united to Him. My mother does not have an ounce of Danish blood in her. But her last name is Jensen, a very Danish last name, because of her legal union with my father. She is not a Jensen by blood, but she is a Jensen legally. We did not perfectly fulfill the law of God, and we did not pay for the full measure of our sins. But Jesus did, and these things are credited to

us because we are legally united to Him. When God credits these things to our account, He officially declares us right with Him. And this justification is received by faith alone.

The Bible uses the word *saved* to describe a number of different events and realities. For instance, the Israelites were saved by God from the Egyptians. With that made clear, the term is used most often throughout the New Testament to describe our justification. This is why true Christians so often talk about being saved by faith alone. We understand that the Bible talks about being saved by God in other ways, but we are saying that God specifically and most importantly saves us from the penalty of our sins by faith alone. This is why our salvation is by God's grace alone, based upon the work of Jesus alone, and is therefore to God's glory alone. When we say that we are saved based upon the work of Jesus alone, we are not excluding the Father and the Spirit. We are saying that no other creature saves us, and of course Jesus is no ordinary creature. He is a creature in His human nature, but He is God in His person.

Almost all groups that claim to be "Christian," but are not, deny that we are saved by faith alone as described above. This truth is what separates true Christianity from all other religions, even those that falsely claim to be "Christian." Even those who say they believe in this doctrine that are not truly Christian, mess this teaching up very badly by saying things like a person can receive "Jesus" by faith alone and then proceed to live a sinful life. This is to insult God and all true Christians must shun such teachings. The fact that we are saved by faith alone is what is known as *the gospel*. The term means *good news*, and is referring to the good news of salvation. All other religions teach a false gospel.

These religions will take many, many passages out of context in their efforts to destroy the true gospel. They will often point to verses that are not talking about justification, but about how God saves us in other ways. Two examples would be 1 Timothy 2:15 and 1 Timothy 4:16. The first verse is not saying that women are justified by having babies. This would blatantly contradict so many other passages. It is saying that women will be saved from a less than full life if they are obedient to God, the rest of the verse makes this clear. And while not all women are called to have children (1 Corinthians 7), Paul's point is that most women are called to get married and have

children, and so if they refuse to fulfill this calling, their walk with God will be terribly weakened.

The second passage from 1 Timothy above is not saying we are saved by sound teaching, it is saying that if we are not growing in our understanding of God's word, we will severely hurt our walk with God and God wants to save us from that. Now it is true that sound teaching is a fruit of salvation. All true Christians will to one degree or another become more sound in their understanding of the Bible. But that does not mean that we are technically saved by sound teaching. We are not, we are saved by faith alone. And those who blatantly teach things that are not taught by the Bible, even after they have been given plenty of time and information to be corrected, show that they were never saved in the first place and not that they have lost their salvation.

These false teachers will also often point to passages that talk about how true salvation will always be followed by a life of good works. Or to passages that talk about how at the final judgment it will only be those who did good works who will live on the new earth with Jesus forever. But we are not denying that true salvation will be followed by a life of good works. What we are saying is that these good works can never be the basis on which God justifies us because God only accepts perfection from us, and even in our saved state we are never perfect and never perform perfect works. People in other religions constantly have to worry if they are good enough, and if they have performed enough good works. Not so with Biblical Christianity. In true Christianity, we always proclaim that our salvation is finished in Jesus.

Many of these false teachers will also point to verses where God is calling people out for their hypocrisy, and these false teachers will take these passages badly out of context by saying that they prove that we are saved by our good works. One famous example is found in Mark 10:17-22. The reason Jesus says what He says here is because clearly this rich man thought he could earn his way to salvation. God always says to those who think they can earn their salvation, "Ok, then do it. Perfectly fulfill my law and I will grant you eternal life." But obviously none of us can do that because of our sinful natures. And Jesus eventually pulls this truth out for this man. This is also why Jesus says in this section of the Bible, "'Why do you call me good?' Jesus asked. 'Only God is truly good (NLT).'" These statements of Jesus are found in verse 18 and are also

drawing out the hypocrisy of this rich man. Jesus is basically saying, “Why are you kissing up to me so much?” Only God should be given this level of honor and this rich man clearly did not see Jesus as God. Many false teachers will not only use this section of the Bible to try and deny that we are saved by faith alone, they will also try to use it to say that Jesus is not actually God. In both cases, they are taking this section badly out of context. We are truly saved by faith alone, and we should praise God for this all throughout the day.

Many of these teachers point to the many passages where the Bible seems to say that we are saved through baptism. These passages are also being taken horribly out of context. In the early church at the time of the apostles, most people were saved through the preaching of the apostles and the apostles immediately after baptized them. Today, when someone receives Jesus, she or he is usually led in a prayer to do so. The prayer does not actually save the person, but it is very closely associated with salvation because that is how most people are saved today. What saves someone is only if he or she is truly receiving Jesus in the heart or not. The same was true with baptism in the early church. Baptism was usually the way people said to God, “I am accepting Jesus as my Lord and Savior.” Therefore, the language of the New Testament often reflects this, and most of the baptism passages these false teachers use fall under this category (John 3:5 is a notable exception and we will look at that passage later in this work). This language should never be used to contradict the many, many extremely clear passages that say that we are saved by faith alone. As the church grew and the apostles died out, most people were not baptized the moment they were saved as only leaders in the church are supposed to baptize, and people more and more began to be saved through parents, friends, Christian teachers, etc.

Before moving forward, it needs to be pointed out that many true Christians throughout church history believed that baptism does save us in a manner of speaking. They often said that we are not officially forgiven or fully given the Holy Spirit until baptism. At the same time, they were also careful to say that ultimately faith saves us. So, if someone was unable to be baptized and had faith in Jesus, they would say that such a person still had eternal life. This is extremely important because many false

teachers say that without baptism there is absolutely no way one can have eternal life and that is a blatant false teaching.

Many of those true Christians said if you were baptized at any time in your life, but you did not have faith, you were not saved. And they taught that if you had been baptized, but did not have faith, that when you do come to faith you do not need to be re-baptized, your faith saves you. They said that if someone comes to faith before baptism, God is not going to officially save this person until he or she is baptized if he or she has every opportunity to be baptized. But they were careful to say that some true Christians do not have the opportunity to be baptized and are saved nonetheless because of their faith. False teachers deny this fundamental point. They say that absolutely no one will be given eternal life without baptism.

Many of the true Christian teachers also taught that baptism saves babies and young children who are not old enough to have faith, but that as soon as they are old enough they need to have faith, otherwise they would lose their salvation. None of these teachings were blatant false teachings, but they were deeply unbiblical in my opinion. Very few true Christians hold them today. You may say, "How can they not be considered full false teachings? Don't they deny faith alone?" This is a great question and the answer is that they do come very close, and that is why I believe you should strongly reject these teachings. But technically these true Christian teachers said that if a person has true faith in Jesus, he or she will be given eternal life eventually no matter what (they simply said that God delays actually giving it until a person is baptized if the person is old enough to understand the gospel, has come to faith, and has not yet been baptized), and so these teachers did not fully deny faith alone, but only severely compromised that core teaching.

Finally, the universal favorite passage of all false teachers who deny that we are justified by faith alone is James 2:24. This makes sense because the Bible nowhere explicitly says that we are justified by faith alone, although Romans 3:28 gets pretty close. And James 2:24 at first glance, in many versions, seems to plainly contradict this absolutely crucial teaching. With all that said, James 2:24 is not all that hard to interpret. James 2:24 in the original Greek never uses the word *God* (the NLT is not the best here) and in the context, James is talking about us as Christians showing to the world

that we are true Christians by our actions. We are thus justified to the world through our works and not by faith alone. But we can never be justified before God by our works because even our good works as Christians are imperfect. And this does not mean that the world can ever infallibly know who is truly saved. But it can know with a high degree of certainty who is not saved based upon one's works. No one can know the heart of another person. Someone could be truly saved and have some mental condition that no one knows about (including this person himself), which causes him to act in a non-saved way. However, this is very, very rare. In most cases, when we see someone living in sin for a very long time, this person is more than likely not a true Christian.

You may ask, "What difference does all this make? Both sides agree that Christians will do good works. So, I better get doing good works either way!" But, it does make a huge difference. God is quite clear in His word that He will only accept perfect works. Can you do perfect works? You know the answer. Hence, how dare we ever say that we are saved by our good works. And the unsaved person must strive constantly to do good works in the hope that he or she will do enough to be saved. But, the true Christian does good works freely because he or she has been changed by the Holy Spirit. He or she does not need to force them. Now, we should strive with the help of the Spirit to do more and more good works in order to please God and to receive more rewards from our Father at the final judgment. But, even when we blow it in this area and fail God (as we all do), we never have to worry if we are saved or not precisely because we are not saved by our good works.

While justification is declared by God the Father based upon the work of Jesus, it is the work of the Holy Spirit that causes us to receive justification because He is the one who gives us the faith to receive it. And this faith from the Holy Spirit does not mean only believing the truths of the Bible. One can believe in his or her head every line of the Bible and still hate Jesus. Such a person is definitely not saved. True faith trusts in Jesus to save from the entire penalty of sin, which includes the power of sin. If one does not want to be saved from the power of sin, this is someone who does not have faith in Jesus.

Sanctification refers to where God saves us from the power of sin. This is done directly by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit radically changes our natures from sinful ones

to holy ones. We go from bad trees that produce bad fruit to good trees that produce good fruit. From bad soil to good soil. In justification we are not made righteous, we are made right with God and thus declared fully righteous. In sanctification, we are made righteous and holy, and thus proceed to live a life of good works. It is very important to understand though, that the Holy Spirit leaves a remnant of our sinful nature that we must fight against all throughout the day with His help. This is why the Bible talks about how there is a sense in which we are no longer slaves to sin when we become saved, and yet there is another sense in which we still are slaves to sin even after we become saved. We must not confuse sanctification with justification. Sanctification flows from justification and so the two are closely tied together. But we can never be fully declared righteous in God's sight based on our sanctification because the Holy Spirit leaves a remnant of our sinful nature.

Many false teachers say that sanctification is largely optional for the "Christian." It is an extremely good thing they will say, they will say "god" commands it of us, and they say "god" will punish us if we don't seek it out. But, they will say we still have to make the choice whether we will actually receive it or not. They say that if this was not the case, our salvation would not be by faith alone, but would be by faith and sanctification. This is awful doctrine and is insulting to God, especially the Holy Spirit. We are saved by faith alone, but we receive by faith both justification and sanctification. Both are free gifts. It is true that sanctification lasts our entire lives, and it is true that we grow in sanctification, some more than others. But all true Christians are sanctified, and the degree to which we grow in sanctification has no bearing on whether we will enter heaven or not. Some Christians teach that all true Christians will be sanctified eventually, but that it does not always start at the beginning of salvation. I'm not willing to label this teaching a completely false teaching, but I strongly believe it is not what the Bible teaches based on 1 John.

All that was said about justification is plainly taught in Matthew 5:48; Romans 7:14-25; Ephesians 5:22-33; Romans 1-6; Galatians 1-3; Ephesians 2:1-10; John 3:16; Colossians 1:13-14; John 17:3; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; and James 2. Don't let the Matthew passage above confuse you. Jesus is clearly not saying there that we are to be perfect like God in all ways. We cannot be worshiped for example. But we are to be

sinless as God is sinless. That is always God's requirement. Because we cannot do this after the fall of Adam and Eve, we are always reminded that we are saved by faith alone and should strive with the help of the Holy Spirit to be as holy as possible out of gratitude and to be pleasing to God. It is clear from these passages that we receive eternal life, adoption, and entrance into God's kingdom the moment we have true faith. But this confuses people because there are other passages that make it clear that we receive these things when Jesus returns. All these latter passages are talking about is how we will not fully experience these realities until Jesus returns.

All that was said about sanctification is clearly taught in John 3:1-8; throughout the entire book of 1 John; Romans 6; and Romans 7:14-25. Be careful not to misinterpret some of the really strong statements in 1 John that at first glance sound like John is saying Christians are sinless. He is obviously using hyperbolic language in order to strongly make the point that true Christians cannot live in sin. If he was saying we as Christians are sinless after coming to know Jesus, he would be blatantly contradicting what he explicitly said earlier in 1 John 1:8-10.

Finally, some Christians object to saying that the righteousness of Jesus must be credited to us for us to be saved. They say this adds to the work of the cross, and they even point to passages that seem to say that the cross alone saves us. But the righteousness of Jesus does not add to the cross, the cross alone pays for our sins. The righteousness of Jesus is the other half of our justification. As far as those passages, they are either referring to the cross as an umbrella summary for our salvation as it was the final step in the work of Jesus before His resurrection, or they are talking specifically about how the cross alone pays for our sins. When we say or sing in worship songs that we are saved by the cross alone, we are talking about how the cross alone pays the penalty for our sin. We do not mean to exclude the righteousness of Jesus, or any of the other elements of salvation that are done by the persons of the Trinity.

The final item I want to clear up in this section before we move forward is the fact that we are not saved by sound teaching. I know I already touched upon this a bit above, but it is important for me to more fully clarify this here. Because I have so emphasized the necessity and importance of sound teaching throughout this series, it may seem to some that I am implying that we are saved by sound teaching. But, we are

saved by faith alone as stated above. With that made very clear, it is extremely important to understand that sound teaching is a fruit of faith. All true Christians will be growing in this area of the Christian life to one degree or another. And like all other areas of the Christian life, we will all be growing throughout our lives. But throughout this growth, we are still saved because we are saved by faith alone.

However, there are certain habitual sins that show that a person is not saved. If a person is a serial murderer, that person is clearly not filled with the Holy Spirit and is not saved (1 John 3:15). The same would be true of a chronic adulterer. It is not that people lose their salvation by engaging in serial murder and/or chronic adultery. And it is not that people gain their salvation by avoiding those states of being. It is that anyone living that way has shown that he or she does not have the Holy Spirit. The same is true with heresy. To embrace heresy is to blatantly show that one is not saved. But, we must be careful here. Someone may believe in something heretical temporarily because he or she doesn't know any better. If this person is open to correction from the Bible, he or she has not truly embraced heresy. But, if someone persistently embraces heresy in an unrepentant and unteachable fashion, this is not a brother or sister in Christ.

The Covenants

Having really looked at salvation from an on the ground level perspective, in this subsection and in the next chapter we will examine salvation from more of a bird's eye view perspective. The first place to start in this regard is with the biblical concept of covenant. Throughout the Bible we see that God makes many, many covenants. It is obviously an extremely important concept to God. The doctrine of covenant is one of the richest and most complicated doctrines in the Bible. Therefore, unfortunately, we cannot fully examine it in a book of this nature. But what we can do is look at the two most important and overarching covenants in the Bible. These two covenants are the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. A covenant is a pact or agreement between two or more parties. When God makes a covenant with people, He does not do so on equal terms. He does not ask if we want to make the covenant with Him. He

authoritatively makes the covenant with us and we have the choice of whether to obey the terms of the covenant or not.

The covenant of works is where God said to humankind that if we obeyed His law perfectly, He would adopt us as His children, declare us righteous, and give us eternal life. It is impossible to know how long Adam and Eve would have had to obey before God rewarded them with these things as the Bible nowhere specifies this, but they were clearly given this testing period. After fulfilling this test, humankind through them would have been declared righteous and they would have proceeded to populate the earth without the possibility of sin entering the world. After the earth had been populated, humankind would have lived with God on the earth forever. Failure to fulfill this covenant would result in death. The covenant of grace is where God comes to humankind and says that God has fulfilled the covenant of works through Jesus, and if we receive Jesus for salvation, God will declare that we have fulfilled the covenant of works in Jesus. Failure to fulfill this covenant would result in remaining under the condemnation of the covenant of works.

It is very important to understand that God did not discard the covenant of works. God does not make mistakes. God wants us to understand that eternal life with Him is not a laughing matter. God is not going to give this out in a casual manner. Eternal life must be earned. God is a holy God. You may say, "Wait what?! You have pounded home that eternal life is a free gift!" Yes it is for us in our sinful state. But it was earned by Jesus Christ on our behalf. It had to be earned and this is why Jesus did that for us. And this is what makes the covenant of grace so beautiful. God does not compromise His holiness in any way. Jesus earns eternal life for us by fulfilling the covenant of works in our place. Because of this, God can be both just and gracious. The biblical gospel is truly unlike anything seen in any other religion.

The covenant of works is taught in Genesis 2-3 and Hosea 6:7. While Genesis chapters 2-3 never use the term *covenant* to describe what God set up between He and Adam, the Hosea passage makes it clear that it was indeed a covenant. At first glance it may not seem that an actual testing period is being taught in Genesis 2-3. It can seem that Adam and Eve had life and they would have remained in life with God forever as long as they did not sin. It seems that no definitive end to this arrangement is

specifically talked about in Genesis 2-3. This is seen to not be the case for several reasons. The most crucial piece of evidence in this regard is what is said in Genesis 3, verses 22-24. Here God makes it very clear that if Adam and Eve reached out to partake from the tree of life, they would live forever. And this is in keeping with how God describes eternal life throughout the Bible, especially in the New Testament. Namely that when God gives us eternal life, it is indeed eternal and cannot be lost. This clearly shows that Adam and Eve were not yet allowed to partake of the tree of life before they fell, otherwise they would not have been able to fall. It is plain then, at some point they would have been able to partake of the tree of life and live forever, thus establishing the testing period.

It may be objected that God clearly only forbade Adam and Eve from eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But this must have only meant that they were never allowed to eat from this tree. The tree of life was only temporarily forbidden to them, and was technically very open to them if they obeyed God and fulfilled their obligations during the testing period. After they broke the covenant of works, God made it so they would not even be able to try to reach out for the tree of life. Further evidence that the Confessional Presbyterian position is correct is that Adam and Eve could not have been children of God when they were created. The Bible is clear that the children of God cannot stop being the children of God (John 8:35). Therefore, because being adopted as children of God is part of eternal life according to the New Testament, Adam and Eve must have only been able to receive this full blessing after their trial period.

Even further evidence of this trial period is the fact that Adam and Eve did not start having children until after they fell (Genesis 4:1). They were created without any flaws and therefore they would have been able to become pregnant right away if God had so allowed. The fact that this was not the case shows that they were not to begin fulfilling God's command to populate the earth until after their testing period. This may not seem to be the case since God gave them that command before they fell. But almost all of the commands God gave to them were intended to carry over beyond their fall or their testing period. They must have understood God's command to be fulfilled after their trial period. And this is in keeping with what we saw regarding the New Testament teaching that they were our representatives. If Adam and Eve had children

before they fell, those children would have been responsible for their own sin and righteousness as they grew older. It is clear therefore, that Adam and Eve stood for all humankind and they were only allowed to have children after they passed or failed their test, and humankind would have passed with them or fell with them. And we know which one took place.

The final key piece of evidence of this trial period is that the angels clearly also had a similar trial period. The good angels who did not follow Satan in his fall could not have been fully the children of God before Satan and the demons fell. This is because if the angels were created as the children of God, then none of them could have fallen as we have seen. But many of them did fall as we know. And the good angels are clearly the children of God after the fall of Satan because there is no evidence of any angel ever falling after that time. Therefore, it is plain that they had a testing period as well and when they passed they were rewarded with eternal life, which includes becoming the children of God. Satan and the demons are not given a second chance because God is not obligated to give second chances. This is something more Christians should keep in mind, as it causes us to be all the more grateful for our very undeserved salvation.

With all that said, it is clear that if Adam and Eve had followed the law of God perfectly for the entire period of their testing, they would have been declared righteous and given eternal life. This is why it is so important to understand that Jesus fulfilled the law of God in our place. This is why He was baptized even though He had no sins of His own. Many Christians say that Jesus only did this to set us an example. But that is not the case. It was one of God's commandments at the time of John the Baptist to be baptized to prepare for the Messiah, and so Jesus followed this command even though it did not directly apply to Him. Some Christians object that God did not give His law until Moses, and so Adam and Eve could not have fulfilled the law of God. Some also object that God only said they would die if they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, not if they broke any of His commands. There are good reasons to believe that these Christians are not correctly interpreting the Bible.

First, Adam and Eve were given commands beyond the command to not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. On top of that command, they were told to

rule over the earth and it is implied that they were to honor the Sabbath (Genesis 1:28 and Genesis 2:1-3). It cannot be argued, in light of Romans 6:23, that if Adam and Eve had broken these commands they would not have died. God focused on the commandment not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because He knew that would be the command they would be most likely to break. And it is clear from Romans 5:12-14 that Adam and Eve were under God's law and broke it. The term *the law* is used in many different ways in the Bible. Often it means the law of God in general, namely whatever commandments are required for God's people at that time. Many times it refers to the Bible itself, as even the portions of the Bible that are not giving us commandments are still the law because they are to be believed. To not believe them is to disobey God. And often the term is referring very specifically to the law of Moses because that is where God gives the fullness of His commandments.

The covenant of grace is taught from everything we have seen from the doctrine of salvation so far, and specifically in Galatians 4:21-31. This section also shows that the covenant of works and the covenant of grace are God's two primary and overarching covenants. At first glance, this passage seems to be teaching that the first covenant Paul is talking about here is not the covenant of works, but is the covenant God made with the Israelites through Moses. However, a closer look reveals this is not completely the case. The covenant God made with the Israelites through Moses was to be a blessing to those that were truly saved (Romans 3:1-2 and Romans 9:1-5). Hence, it was certainly not to be a curse in all ways as the Galatians passage above seems to imply.

What Paul is driving at here in Galatians is the very close connection between the covenant of works and the giving of the law through Moses in regard to unbelievers. The law of Moses is extremely detailed and could only be a blessing to those filled with the Holy Spirit in submission to the priests. It was the full time job of the priests to study all of the details of the law so that they could help the people obey it properly. But to all unbelievers, it is a curse because they are still under the covenant of works. And so when they arrogantly say to themselves that they can earn their way to heaven, God says to them, "Well, here is my law, go fulfill it in every detail and do so perfectly." They cannot do this and so it is a curse to them. In this sense, the fullness of the covenant of

works came with the giving of the law to Moses. The covenant of works did not have to be a curse for us, but it is, precisely because we disobeyed God and this fact is most on display through the law of Moses. And all religions that teach a works based salvation, which is most of them, are under this curse.

Unfortunately, it was especially a curse to the vast majority of Israelites because most of them refused to believe in God and because they had such close access to the full law of God given to Moses. This does not mean that Jews are more immoral than the rest of us. It is very important to remember that the vast majority of Gentiles also reject God and if they were put in the same place as the ancient Israelites, they would have acted no differently. And as we will soon see in the next chapter, we ourselves as Christians, whether Jew or Gentile, would have been no different apart from God choosing to save us.

Chapter 5: Salvation Part 3

The Doctrines of Grace

All true Christians believe that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone. However, many Christians are inconsistent with this belief because they will then turn around and say that we choose to come to Jesus. They will be careful to say that the Holy Spirit must soften our hearts first, but ultimately, we choose whether or not we will receive Jesus for salvation. But this means that our salvation is not truly by grace alone. We contribute to it to some degree, even if only a very small degree. This is because it would be obvious that those who choose Jesus have chosen the far, far holier choice to give their lives to God than the choice of unbelievers to reject Him. This is why all Confessional Presbyterians have taught the doctrines of grace. These are the doctrines that make it clear that we only come to Jesus because He first chose us. There are five doctrines of grace and they are often known by the acronym *tulip*. The first letter stands for the doctrine of total depravity. The second stands for the doctrine of unconditional

election. The third stands for the doctrine of limited atonement. The fourth stands for the doctrine of irresistible grace. And the last letter stands for the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints.

The doctrine of total depravity does not teach that all humans are as bad as they can possibly be like the demons. We all know unbelievers that are wonderful people. But unbelievers are rejecting God and that is no small thing. What the doctrine is saying is that people are so corrupt from original sin that they will never come to Jesus on their own, not even after God has softened their hearts. We don't need softened hearts, we need changed hearts. And by *heart*, I mean our souls, that is how the Bible often figuratively talks about our souls. Until the Holy Spirit changes our souls, we will always reject Jesus.

You may be saying, "Wait a minute, don't we have free will? You even said we have free will as humans earlier in this book." That is true, we do have free will. But sin is like an extremely addictive drug. Before moving forward, I want to say that none of what is said in this analogy is meant to be insensitive or judgmental to those who are struggling with addiction, or have struggled in the past, or know some that are struggling or have struggled. I fully understand that often people become addicted to various things at young ages, or due to very, very rough circumstances. My grandfather was a raging alcoholic, and I partied heavily in my early college years. If not for certain circumstances in my life, I could have ended up like him. The analogy is only used because most of us have at least some understanding of the power of the really hard drugs. And Adam and Eve, and all of us in them, were more like a spoiled person in his mid-twenties who has had everything handed to him and still chooses to shoot up. Beforehand, he was clearly warned of the drug's immediate effects and that he has a genetic predisposition to addiction. And he shoots up anyway.

With all that said, we can unpack the analogy a little further. The drug addict had free will when he first chose to shoot up. And we had free will in Adam and Eve. But after the drug addict becomes an addict, his free will is severely mangled. He still has it. When he goes to Taco Bell, for example, he can still choose between a burrito or a taco. But when it comes to his addiction, he cannot stop. Even here though, he still has free will in a manner of speaking. No one is forcing him to shoot up. And no one forces us to

reject God. But the addict is a slave to his addiction. And we are completely slaves to sin before we come to Jesus. Now, it is true that many addicts eventually overcome their addiction. This is all merely an analogy, it is important to remember that. We in our sinful state are like an addict who can never overcome the addiction without serious intervention. And when we come to Jesus, God is not forcing us to come to Jesus. A lot of people misunderstand the doctrines of grace very badly, and think that is what is being taught. We come to Jesus freely and joyfully, but only because the Holy Spirit changes our souls radically so that we now want to come to Jesus.

Now, you may be saying, "Earlier you said that the Holy Spirit changes us in sanctification, which you said flows from justification, which you said flows from our faith. So the Holy Spirit changing us must come after our faith. I'm so confused!" This indeed can be a very confusing point if you don't understand all that the Bible is teaching here, and I didn't want to cover this distinction earlier in the work because it is more fitting to do it here. Technically, the Holy Spirit changes us before we have faith, and this is in fact what causes us to have faith. If you remember, I did say that the Holy Spirit gives us the faith that leads to our justification, and that is why we can say that justification is the work of the Spirit. But, this change of our souls does not become our permanent legal possession until God has declared us righteous in Jesus. So there is a sense in which we receive this change before faith, and there is a sense in which we receive it after faith, and the Bible talks about both senses. Further, sanctification does not only refer to this change of our souls, but to the entire life of good works that flows from this change. And that life of good works does come after faith and justification. The actual literal change of our souls before faith is called *being born again* in the Bible. Confessional Presbyterian theologians often use the more fancy term *regeneration*, which means the same thing. And so you will often hear Confessional Presbyterian theologians and pastors talk about how regeneration is before faith. This is a core doctrine that distinguishes us from most non-Confessional Presbyterian Christians.

The Bible teaches that God has not chosen to give regeneration to all people. I understand that this is a very hard teaching to swallow at first. You may not be able to accept it. Most Christians can't. You may accept it for now because I will soon show why we believe the Bible teaches this, but you may not like it. It is so important to

understand that God is not obligated to save us or give us a second chance. Remember what was said about the demons. They were not even given the chance to be saved and God was doing nothing wrong here. If God chooses to leave people in their sins to magnify His holiness and His justice, He is free to do so. While this doctrine may upset you, ultimately it should humble us. We are no different than any unbeliever even though we often like to flatter ourselves by saying in our hearts, "Well, at least I chose Jesus." But you only did so because God first chose to give you regeneration. This is the doctrine of unconditional election. God chose us to believe in Jesus unconditionally, and not because He knew we would have faith as is taught by most non-Confessional Presbyterian Christians.

It is so important to understand that this choice is not the same as what was said much earlier in this book about how God has chosen to bring everything about exactly as it happens. This choice is certainly part of that overall choice. But God could have chosen to bring to pass a reality where He left enough good in us where we could choose Jesus on our own. We would still be saved by grace, just not by grace alone. That is not what we are saying though. We are saying that God chose to bring about a universe where the only people who would come to Jesus would be those He gives regeneration.

Because God did not choose to save everyone, Jesus did not die to pay for the sins of all people. Again, I know this is all probably not what you have heard. But, if God did not choose everyone, He is clearly not going to have Jesus die to pay for the sins of everyone. And even God's choice aside, think about it: if Jesus literally paid for the sins of everyone on the cross, then no one would go to hell because there would be no punishment for them to endure because Jesus endured it all for them. But that is certainly not what the Bible teaches. This is the doctrine of limited atonement. The word *atonement* is a fancy theological word that refers to Jesus paying for our sins. And the atonement was limited to His people. When God gives us regeneration, we immediately come to Jesus. We are not forced to do so, but God has so radically changed us, that we want to do so. In this sense, coming to Jesus is irresistible and this is known as the doctrine of irresistible grace.

Finally, because God has chosen us, we can never lose our salvation. This is the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. The term *saints* refers to all true Christians, and not to the very best Christians as in Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. The term *perseverance* is used to describe Christians here because it distinguishes the Confessional Presbyterian doctrine from false teachers, who say that we can never lose our salvation and so “Christians” can live in sin. That is a horrible teaching. What the biblical doctrine is teaching is that true Christians will always have the Holy Spirit because God has chosen us, we did not choose to be saved, and we do not choose to stay saved. God makes sure we stay saved.

The doctrine of total depravity is taught all over the Bible, but probably the clearest passage is John 6:44. Some argue that Jesus in the very next verse says that people can indeed come to Him, that if they listen and learn from the Father they will come to Him. Jesus is clarifying there that those who already knew God would automatically come to Jesus because they were already saved. Before Jesus’ ministry, those who placed their faith in God and His future Messiah were saved like the rest of us (more is said on this in my *Doctrine: Going Deeper*). Today, no one can be saved unless he or she places their faith directly in Jesus (except for babies and the severely mentally disabled).

Others argue that God only draws those He knows will receive Jesus, but they do have to be softened or “drawn” first. But this would contradict unconditional election and as we will soon see, Jesus makes it abundantly clear in the clearest language possible that we only choose Jesus because He first chose us. Others point to the fact that Jesus says in this verse that He is going to raise up those that are drawn to Him, but everyone, including unbelievers, will be raised up at the return of Jesus. But, in John 6, being raised up plainly refers to being raised up unto final salvation (John 6:40). Finally, others point to John 12:32, where it says that Jesus is going to draw everyone to Himself. But in that context, Jesus is clearly not referring to every individual person, but to the fact that God is going to draw both Jews and Gentiles to Himself. Read the entire chapter and this will be clearly seen.

Unconditional election is also taught all over the Bible, but one of the clearest verses is John 15:16. Many argue that Jesus is only talking about how He chose the

apostles. But it is very clear from the chapter that He is talking about salvation, and not specifically about the eleven remaining disciples as apostles. Limited atonement is taught by all that was said above and very plainly by John 17:9. Jesus says these words in a lengthy prayer only hours before He was to be crucified. If Jesus was about to pay for the sins of all people, why does He specifically say here that He is not praying for all people?

Irresistible grace is taught by the fact that God chooses us, and is made clear in John 3:1-8. Notice the similarity of Jesus' language in verse 5 here with John 6:44. In both cases, Jesus makes it clear that we cannot come to Him unless we are drawn or born of the Spirit. Clearly then, being born of the Spirit is the same as being drawn to Jesus. Don't get confused when Jesus says we must be born of water and the Spirit. He is not talking about baptism there. He is saying that we must be born from the water of the womb and from the Spirit if we are to be saved. We must have this double birth. The context makes this very clear.

Some object to this interpretation and say that Jesus is not talking about how we enter into the kingdom the moment we have faith here, but He is talking about us entering into the kingdom when Jesus returns. But this cannot be the case because while it is true that unbelievers won't be allowed to enter the kingdom of God at the end of time, they will certainly have the physical capacity to enter. Jesus does not say that no one will enter or no one will be allowed to enter, He says no one can enter. The word *can* speaks of ability, not of being allowed to do something. Often in America today, a child will ask his mother, "Can I go outside?" When he does, he is technically using bad grammar. He should say, "May I go outside?" And in the original Greek, it is quite clear that Jesus is talking about ability. He is saying that we do not have the ability to come to Him because of our sin in John 6:44; John 3:3; and John 3:5.

And the Bible makes it quite clear that unbelievers can see the kingdom of God when Jesus returns (Luke 13:28). In John 3:3, Jesus is clearly talking about seeing the kingdom of God for the beauty that it is. And He makes it clear that no one can do so until he or she is born of God. We do not first see the beauty of the kingdom of God and run to Jesus in order to be born again as most non-Confessional Presbyterians teach.

No, we must first be born again and only then can we see the beauty of the kingdom of God and run to Jesus accordingly.

Perseverance of the saints is taught by all of the previous doctrines of grace and specifically in Matthew 7:22-23; John 10:27-30; Romans 8:38-39; and 1 John 2:19. And all of the doctrines of grace are taught in Romans 9. I highly recommend prayerfully reading through that chapter slowly, carefully, and repeatedly. Do so without bias as best as you can. Don't read it trying to force it to say what you want it to say. Allow it to speak for itself. If you do so, it will be very hard not to come to the Confessional Presbyterian conclusion. Don't let the language about God hardening hearts throw you off. It is clear from the rest of the Bible that this does not mean that God makes people more sinful. What it does mean, is that God leaves people in their sin and so they continue to reject Him. You might be saying, "Ok, well I bet non-Confessional Presbyterian people have good explanations for Romans 9." I encourage you to read them and/or listen to them because they are often very convoluted.

Many non-Confessional Presbyterian Christians offer a number of objections to the doctrines of grace, but none of them are very convincing. They will point to the many passages talking about how God loves all; the world; all men; all people; everybody; and everyone. They will also point to the many passages that say Jesus died for all; the world; all men; all people; everybody; and everyone. They will also point to the fact that the gospel is offered by God to everyone. But I am not saying that God does not love all people, or that the gospel is not offered to all people. God absolutely loves all people and does indeed offer the gospel to all people. But there is a sense in which God loves even Satan and the demons. God hates all that they do and stand for, but He loves all of His creation, even its most fallen parts. And all unbelievers think on some level that they could accept God's salvation if they wanted to do so. So God says to them, "Then please do so, I will not turn you away." No one will be able to say to God at the final judgment, "You didn't give me enough time to repent or you just hate me." God does not take any glee in sending people to hell. It is true that He rejoices in His holiness and justice being magnified, but God does not send people to hell to enjoy punishing them.

As far as the many passages that talk about Jesus dying for or God giving salvation to all; the world; all men; all people; everybody; and everyone; all these

passages are talking about how God does indeed offer salvation to all people. In that sense Jesus did die for them. But that does not mean that God actually paid for their sins on the cross or that God makes sure that they will receive the offer of salvation. We must be very careful not to take these verses too literally because if we do so they often sound like they are teaching universalism. Universalism is the doctrine that God eventually saves all people. And as we will see in the next chapter, universalism is certainly not the doctrine of the Bible.

One of the primary arguments most Non-Confessional Presbyterian Christians will make against the doctrines of grace is to point to the concept of foreknowledge. They will say that God chose us because He knew we would choose Him. It is important to understand that God has foreknowledge in two senses. The first is that God knew all possibilities. God knew every single potential reality that He could create (or He could have chosen not to create anything at all). But once God made His choice, He knew in advance how everything was going to actually come about based on this choice. And this would include His intimate knowledge of His future children. Every time the Bible uses the word foreknowledge (or the similar word *foreknew*) in many versions, it seems to be using it in the second sense. Therefore, from these uses we cannot decide if the Confessional Presbyterian position is correct or not. It is true that God could have chosen a reality where He left enough goodness in humans that they could choose His salvation or not. And if He had chosen such a reality, He would be choosing His children based on who would choose Him and who would not. So, if the Bible ever said anything like, "God chose us because He knew we would choose Him," then yes, the Confessional Presbyterian position would be proven wrong. But, we find no such statement anywhere in the Bible, and such a statement would blatantly contradict John 15:16.

You may be saying to yourself, "Wait, if God knew all possibilities and then had to choose which one to bring about, then clearly there was a time when He didn't know everything because He wouldn't know what was actually going to happen until He made His choice. That sounds like God didn't know everything and actually changed once He made His decision." It is important to remember though, that God is eternal. There is no

moment to moment reality in God. God's choice is an eternal choice, there was no moment when He was without it. But it was still a real choice.

Many non-Confessional Presbyterian Christians will also point to the many warnings about falling away from God. They will also point to examples of people who seemed to be saved, but then fell away, such as Balaam and Judas. But these verses are warning against thinking you are saved, when you are not. It is true that most people who seem to be truly Christian outwardly, fall away in the end. If you are a new Christian, prepare yourself for the horrible disappointment of watching many "Christian" friends fall away over the course of the rest of your life. These people are even considered by God to be part of the church in a manner of speaking before they fall away. Because of this, before they fall away they experience much of the grace of God because they are part of the community of grace. But they are dead branches that are outwardly joined to the vine and only seem to be true Christians. But they do not produce true fruit because they do not feed off of the nourishing sap of the Holy Spirit, and so in the end they are cut off (they fall away) and are finally burned (they go to hell; see John 15:1-8). The Bible warns us again and again to make sure that this is not us. This can be scary because we still sin so much as Christians, but by doing this throughout our Christian walk, God comforts us and shows us more and more that we are truly saved, and this strengthens our relationship with Him.

All Christians, even the most strong in their faith, will have moments, days, and even phases where we strongly doubt our own salvation because of remaining sin in our lives. This is very normal and should not freak you out. The cure for this is prayer and lots of it. But know that you must be sincere in these prayers. When we pray these prayers in sincerity, the Holy Spirit will give us a stronger sense that we are truly the children of God (something we already know deep down from the internal testimony), but God will also weed out more and more sin in our lives. It is this remaining sin that often causes so many of these doubts. And Satan loves to get in our heads and remind us of these sins. The problem is that a lot of lukewarm Christians do not actually want God to strongly change them much further. A lukewarm Christian is not someone who lives in sin. As we have seen, this is impossible. A lukewarm Christian is a true Christian. He or she loves Jesus above all else and walks with Him. However, the

lukewarm Christian only does the bare minimum in the Christian life. Hence, often when lukewarm Christians pray to God to help them with their doubts over their salvation, they only want God to strengthen the internal testimony and God is not going to do that. This is why many lukewarm Christians often struggle with chronic doubt concerning their own salvation.

Many non-Confessional Presbyterian Christians also point to Acts 7:51 and say that this passage proves that we can in fact resist the Holy Spirit. But we are not saying that we cannot resist God in all ways. Irresistible grace only specifically refers to regeneration. Regeneration is irresistible, but many other works of God's grace are indeed resisted all of the time, by both believers and unbelievers. The Holy Spirit is constantly pouring out His grace outwardly to people. Even unbelieving Israelites, whom Stephen is addressing here, were a very protected people because they were God's chosen ethnic people during the Old Testament period. But far from this softening them, they often only stubbornly resisted God all the more.

Many non-Confessional Presbyterian Christians will point to passages such as 1 Corinthians 7:16; 1 Corinthians 9:19-23; and 1 Peter 3:1-2. They will say that these verses show that we as Christians can lead people to Christ, and that people do not need to be regenerated before faith. This does not follow. We are not saying that God regenerates people out of nowhere. If there is someone in a remote part of the world that has never heard the gospel or anything about Christianity at all, God is not going to regenerate this person in that state. He or she would be changed and want to serve God, but would have no idea how to accept Him. That makes no sense. And even in places where people have some idea of Christianity, they are often so shaped by their background and experiences that they are unable to really grasp the gospel even from an intellectual standpoint. Sometimes, for some people, all it takes is one sermon or one conversation to get to this point of understanding, but for most others it takes a lot more. It is our job to witness to and love such people so that they can understand the gospel, and if it is God's will, He will regenerate them when they come to this point. And Paul and Peter are alluding to this truth in these verses.

Many non-Confessional Presbyterians will point to 2 Peter 2:1 as a clear example of their belief that Jesus died for every individual. Again though, if this passage is

pressed too far, it would teach universalism. This is because being bought by Jesus clearly results in salvation (1 Corinthians 6:20). All Peter is getting at here is a general statement that some of these false teachers are of the elect, and will therefore receive Jesus down the line. They were therefore bought by Him and didn't realize it at that time. And this makes their denial all the more appalling and they of course assuredly came to see this when God actually regenerated them.

Finally, many of you are probably saying to yourself, "Ok, but the idea that God wants everyone to go to heaven and no one to go to hell on some level, while still not choosing everyone, is a bit confusing." It is important to realize that this tension is true for all Christians and not only those that accept the doctrines of grace. God did not have to create anything at all. So, when He created He knew that many would reject Him. Therefore, even those Christians who say God does not directly choose us still have to grapple with the fact that God willingly chose to create this reality knowing full well that many would reject Him and go to hell. The best way to think of all this is to think of a judge sentencing a criminal to a long sentence for a horrible crime. If the judge is a good person, she will of course not be happy that this person is going to prison for a long time. Obviously, on some level, the judge would prefer this person to be free to enjoy his life. But the judge knows that justice must be done and so still gives out the sentence. God does not enjoy sending people to hell, but He has chosen to magnify His justice for His glory and so He does indeed send them and in fact chose not to save them. God is not doing anything cruel or unfair in any of this. They are getting what they deserve.

Chapter 6: The End Times and Conclusion

The End Times

Jesus is Coming Back

Most Christians today have a very distorted view of the end times. Many false teachers have absolutely bizarre views of the end times. Many of the prophecies concerning the end times are some of the hardest passages in the Bible to interpret. We will not fully understand many of these passages until they are being fulfilled. Instead of interpreting these passages as best we can in light of the very clear passages, far too many, including far too many Christians unfortunately (including many Confessional Presbyterians), will try to twist and contort the very clear sections on the end times to make them fit with their particular interpretations of the difficult passages. With all due respect to my Christian brothers and sisters, this is wrongheaded.

The extremely clear sections of the Bible on the end times are found in Matthew 7:13-14; Matthew 10:28; Matthew 13:24-30; Matthew 13:36-43; Matthew 24-25; Mark 13; Luke 21:5-26; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:14-15; Romans 8:18-25; Romans 11; 1 Corinthians 15; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; 2 Thessalonians 1-2; 2 Peter 2:4; 2 Peter 3:1-13; Jude 1:6; Revelation 20:10-15; and Revelation 21:3-4. This does not mean that every verse found in these sections is easy to interpret, but it does mean that for the most part these sections are very clear. Nor does it mean that there are no other clear passages in the Bible about the end times. But those passages are for the most part short verses that mostly confirm what is taught in the sections above. Not everything about these sections will be discussed here, some of the key elements are examined in my *Doctrine: Going Deeper*. With that said, we will go over a number of the key teachings found in this section now.

These key teachings are that for a short time before Jesus returns there will be a chaotic period that will be ruled over by the antichrist; this antichrist will claim to be God and will rule over the unbelieving world; this antichrist will persecute Christians; during this period the Jews will become Christians; at the end of this period, Jesus will return to earth from heaven with all of the good angels and all of the souls of those who have believed in God from the beginning of time but have physically died; Jesus will first stop in the sky and resurrect the bodies of all these souls, and their bodies and souls will be reunited; these souls will have already been perfected in heaven, and their bodies will be perfected at this resurrection; then Jesus will resurrect the bodies and souls of all true Christians that are still alive (even though they are alive, they will be resurrected in

the sense that they will be taken up to the sky); these Christians will be taken up to the sky by the good angels to be with Jesus and His people; at this time, their bodies and souls will be perfected; Jesus will then continue to the earth with His angels and people; Jesus' descent to the earth will be in His whole person, His divine nature and human nature (both body and soul); Jesus' descent to the earth will be visible; once to the earth He will wipe out all of the living unbelievers; Jesus will then resurrect all of the unbelievers that have ever lived, reuniting their bodies and souls; the bodies and souls of the unbelievers will not be perfected; then Jesus will reign over the final judgment, sending all unbelievers to hell (the good angels will transport them to hell), and all believers will enter into His kingdom (not only legally and spiritually, but literally); at this time Satan and all of the demons will also be sent to hell; Jesus will then create the new earth, making it perfect; then all of the good angels and God's true people will live with God on the new earth for all eternity.

This straightforward view of the end times has been the view of the overwhelming vast majority of Christians throughout church history. Unfortunately, in the past two hundred years, a number of other views have arisen. Many Christians believe, based on Revelation 20:1-10, that after Jesus returns and sets up His kingdom, He will reign on the earth for a thousand years. During this time Satan will be bound, and then after this time he will be let out again. Satan will then lead a short rebellion, and after that God will set up the full eternal state. There are many, many problems with this view, and I cannot cover all of them here. But we will look at one key verse that shows this view certainly does not seem to be the biblical view. This passage is Matthew 13:40-43, especially verse 41. This section is clearly talking about Jesus' return and the final judgment. And in verse 41 Jesus makes it quite clear that at this time He will weed out of His kingdom all that causes sin and all who do evil. According to the thousand years view, Jesus will leave babies alive at His coming, who will eventually populate the earth during these thousand years. And many of the descendants of these babies will take part in Satan's rebellion. But Jesus makes it quite clear that all that causes sin will be removed, which would plainly include babies with original sin.

Again, it seems terribly wrongheaded to me to interpret Revelation 20:1-10 literally in light of the fact that the book of Revelation is clearly a book that is full of

figurative language, and a literal interpretation of this section seems to blatantly contradict the clear sections on the end times, especially Matthew 13:41. You may say, “Wait a second, you reference the book of Revelation.” I’m not saying that we shouldn’t read and be blessed by Revelation. I’m not saying we should not use it for teaching. I’m saying we should do so carefully and always in light of the rest of the Bible because of how figurative Revelation is. Therefore, when I referenced Revelation 20:11-15 earlier in this work for example, I was not being inconsistent. I don’t interpret all of that section literally. I don’t believe there will be a literal lake of fire, based on the rest of the Bible. Having said that, this section is clearly describing the final judgment and it calls people being sent to eternal punishment (a clear reference to hell) *the second death*. This shows that hell is part of the punishment of death.

You may be saying, “Well ok, then how do we interpret Revelation 20:1-10?” I cannot completely answer that very difficult question in a book of this nature, but I will say that there is very strong evidence that Revelation is not only extremely figurative, but that it is talking about both the return of Jesus as well as AD 70. I will discuss AD 70 more in a moment. Some Christians believe that Revelation is only talking about the return of Jesus, and some believe that it is only talking about AD 70. Both of these approaches are mistakes in my opinion. I think the book is talking about both and that can make the book very difficult to interpret at times, but for the most part I think it is fairly clear when it is talking about the one, and when it is talking about the other, although I think at times the two overlap. But when it is plainly talking about the return of Jesus, I think we can and should interpret accordingly, while still being very careful to watch out for clear figurative language.

Many other Christians not only believe this thousand years doctrine, but they also believe that Jesus’ return will be split into two parts. When Jesus comes back and stops in the sky and resurrects believers, they call this *the rapture*. They say that this is different from His full coming. They call the chaotic period spoken of above *the tribulation or the great tribulation*. I don’t have a problem calling this period by those names as that language is used in the Bible, but I generally avoid those terms so as not to be confused with these positions that I think are incorrect. They are insistent that this period is exactly seven years long. There are verses in the Bible that seem to teach this,

and so they may very well be right on that front, but it is hard to tell how literally those verses should be taken. And in none of the clear sections above is this exact seven year number mentioned. These Christians say that the rapture comes before this chaotic period, and that Jesus' full return takes place after this period when He will set up His thousand year kingdom. Some say that the rapture will take place in the middle of this period, but most say that it will happen before. They base this view on a number of passages, but the three most important are 1 Thessalonians 5:9; 2 Thessalonians 2:7; and Revelation 3:10.

There are also major problems with this view, and we can't cover all of them here. But I can say a few things to show that this view does not seem to be the biblical teaching. First, the Bible over and over again throughout the New Testament calls Jesus' return His *coming*. It never talks about Him returning twice. Further, this view seems impossible to reconcile with Matthew 24:37-51. This section is clearly talking about the return of Jesus. And it never talks about two returns or His one return being split into two parts. So, if the above position is correct, this section must be talking about either the rapture or the full coming of Jesus, it cannot be talking about both without completely ruining the flow of this section. But verses 40-41 are clearly talking about the rapture, when Jesus will take the believers who are still alive on the earth to Himself, while leaving the unbelievers behind. And yet verses 50-51 are plainly talking about the full return of Jesus as He descends to the earth. If this section is talking about the rapture only, then the unbelievers would be left on earth to go through the tribulation and would not at that time be sent to hell as verses 50-51 state. Some try to say that verses 40-41 are not referring to the rapture, but that is quite a stretch.

As for the three passages above (1 Thessalonians 5:9; 2 Thessalonians 2:7; and Revelation 3:10), their interpretations again seem like a huge stretch to me. They say that the 1 Thessalonians passage is saying that God will never pour out His anger upon us, and therefore we cannot go through the tribulation. But Paul is clearly talking about hell in that passage. They say that the 2 Thessalonians passage must be talking about the Holy Spirit who indwells the church, and since it says He will be removed, that must mean the church will be removed before the tribulation can begin. This is a really bad interpretation in my opinion. The church is the body of Christ, made up of all those who

are united to Jesus (John 15:1-8; 1 Corinthians 12:31; Ephesians 5:22-24). Hence, if people will be becoming Christians during the tribulation, then the church will exist during the tribulation. And everyone agrees, based on 2 Thessalonians 1 and other passages, that there will be Christians when Jesus fully returns to the earth. Therefore, at least some people will become Christians during the tribulation. This verse from 2 Thessalonians 2 is talking about how the antichrist cannot come on the scene until God steps out of his way and allows him to do so. As for the Revelation passage, they say that because it says God will protect us from the tribulation, this must mean that He will remove Christians altogether. But the passage nowhere implies this. It only means that God will protect us from falling away during the tribulation, as Jesus promised in Matthew 24:24.

Next, many Christians agree with me that there will be no thousand year period after Jesus returns, and that the coming of Jesus will not be split into two parts. But they say that before Jesus returns, the church will grow and grow before it becomes dominant in the world. After the church has gone through a long period of this domination, Jesus will return. Some say that after this period of domination, things will go south for a short time with the chaotic period and the antichrist. Then Jesus will return.

Others say that the passages that talk about the chaotic period and the antichrist are referring to AD 70. This is when the Romans conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the temple. They say that this was a coming of Jesus in a manner of speaking to judge the Jews for their rejection of their Messiah. And they say that the antichrist was Nero, the Roman emperor at the time right before AD 70, who heavily persecuted Christians. To be clear, these are true Christians and believe in the full return of Jesus. And they are not saying, like the previous position, that Jesus' return will be split into two parts. They do not believe that AD 70 was the first part to the return of Jesus, but they believe it foreshadows the actual return of Jesus.

To be fair, there is biblical evidence that AD 70 and Nero do foreshadow the antichrist and the actual return of Jesus. But that doesn't mean that Nero was the actual antichrist or that any of this fully proves this overall position. Most Confessional Presbyterians reject all of these positions. A fair number of Confessional Presbyterian

Christians do take the thousand year position, and less (but still a chunk) take the return of Jesus being split position; but they are both small minority positions among Confessional Presbyterians. However, many Confessional Presbyterians do take this position concerning the church becoming dominant on the earth (even though it is not the majority position). And I think that is really too bad.

Those who defend this position point to passages in the Old Testament that talk about a great kingdom of God on earth, the passages in the New Testament that talk about the growth of God's kingdom and the church, and to the Great Commission found in Matthew 28:18-20. Those who say that the chaotic period and the antichrist refer to Nero and AD 70 point to Matthew 24:34 and other passages like it. They say that Jesus clearly says in this passage that the chaotic period and His return (in some manner) must take place in the same generation as when Jesus said these words. And the only thing that could fulfill those words is the events surrounding AD 70. They then use this interpretation to interpret most of the clear sections I referenced earlier as referring to AD 70. They are careful to say that there are a few passages in the New Testament that make it clear that Jesus will fully return, but they say most of the passages concerning the coming of Jesus refer to AD 70. They also point to the many passages in the New Testament that say Jesus is coming soon. They say that since it has been two thousand years since the time of Jesus, these passages must be referring to AD 70. Finally, they also point to Matthew 16:28 to support their view.

In my opinion, none of this works. The passages about God's kingdom on earth from the Old Testament are either referring to the great return of the Israelites to their land after their exile, or to the new earth after Jesus returns. The context always makes this clear. It is true that often exaggerated language is used in these sections for effect, but the context makes it clear that these sections are referring to one of these two realities and nothing else. As far as the growth of God's kingdom through His church, the church has been growing ever since the time of Jesus. When Jesus went to heaven, there were hardly any people that truly followed Him. Today, there are a minimum of 200-300 million people who follow Him, spread out all over the world, from every nation and ethnic group. None of this means, and none of those passages mean, that the church will ever become dominant on the earth. As far as the Great Commission, this

does not mean that all the countries of the world will end up following Jesus. Often the word *nations* at the time of Jesus was used to describe all of the different ethnic groups. That is clearly how Jesus is using it in the Great Commission in light of what the clear passages teach on the end times. This is clearly what is being talked about in Revelation 7:9-10. Christians will come from all the nations and ethnic groups, that is what we have seen happen throughout church history, and Jesus in the Great Commission is saying to His church, "Go make this happen."

As far as those who say that most of the end times passages in the New Testament are referring to AD 70, I think this is really bad biblical interpretation. To take Matthew 24:34 and the few passages like it and set them against all the clear sections on the end times I referenced, is a major mistake in my opinion. I think anyone who reads those sections in an unbiased manner will see that they are clearly referring to the actual return of Jesus. Matthew 24:34 is saying that the generation that is present at the time of Jesus' return will not pass away. Jesus' point here is to say that the chaotic period will be fairly short. He makes this clear in Matthew 24:22. As far as the passages saying that Jesus is returning soon, all they mean is that there are no major prophetic events that must take place before the chaotic period begins, and so be ready! The chaotic period could begin at any time, and Jesus will return very shortly after this period has started. And Matthew 16:28 is clearly referring to the transfiguration in the context.

Finally, this entire position is refuted by Matthew 7:13-14 in my opinion. Those who take this position say that what Jesus says here will be true for most of church history, but not at the end of church history when the church will become dominant. I don't think this interpretation comes close to doing justice to Jesus' words here.

Eternity with God

As we have seen, all unbelievers will be sent to hell forever. Satan and the demons will also be joining them. Many false teachers say that Satan and the demons are the ones doing the punishing in hell. No, they will be punished in hell; in fact, even more so than the human unbelievers. This is clearly taught in 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 1:6;

Revelation 20:10-15; and Luke 12:47-48. And it is so important to understand that God is the one that will be doing the punishing. It is His anger that will be poured out in hell (Matthew 10:28).

Many Christians often talk about how hell is being separated from God. There is some truth to this as those in hell will not be on the new earth experiencing God in His fullness. On the new earth, we will see God in a manner of speaking. Remember, we cannot see His actual essence, but we will see the fullness of the glorious light that He often manifests Himself in, and we will see the human nature of Jesus, and Jesus in His person is God. This is why Jesus said that true Christians will see God (Matthew 5:8). Unbelievers will be totally separated from all of this. But it is a grave mistake to think that unbelievers will be separated from God in all ways. God is everywhere and so He will be running hell. And God will be doing the punishing as we saw. In this sense, unbelievers will experience God forever and ever; they will experience His anger and punishment. Hell is an actual place, it is not an abstract reality. It is most likely outside of our universe. It was created when the fallen angels rebelled, but there is clearly plenty of room for human unbelievers (Matthew 25:41; Matthew 10:28; and Revelation 20:10-15).

Many false teachers say that hell will only be temporary. They say that the word *eternal* in the Bible does not always mean fully eternal. They also point to the passages that talk about how the Bible says God will destroy unbelievers in hell, or similar language. As much as we all want to believe this, this is not what the Bible teaches. It is true that the word *eternal* in the original Greek does not always mean *forever*. But the New Testament almost always uses the word in this way. This is the word that is used again and again to describe our eternal life, and everyone agrees that eternal life is forever according to the Bible (John 3:16; John 10:27-30; Romans 6:23; 1 Corinthians 9:25; and Revelation 21:3-4). And in Matthew 25:46, Jesus uses the exact same word to describe both eternal punishment and eternal life. The idea that He is using the same exact word in two different senses in the same verse is ridiculous. Further, the Greek word for *unquenchable* is used three times to describe the punishment of hell (Matthew 3:12; Mark 9:43; and Luke 3:17). Hell will be forever. As to the verses that describe God as destroying unbelievers in hell, these verses are pointing to the despair that will take

place for those in hell. When someone says, “My life has been destroyed,” we all understand that he or she is still alive and conscious. He or she means that his or her life has been ruined. And the ultimate ruin will come to unbelievers in hell for all eternity.

The Bible uses extremely graphic and exaggerated language to describe hell in order to help us understand how awful hell will be. But this language should not be taken literally. First of all, if you look at all of the descriptions of hell all through the Bible and take all of them literally, you run into very serious contradictions. Further, God is a most merciful God. The Bible makes this clear again and again. Therefore, He is not going to literally roast people without pause for all eternity. But the punishment will be real and it will be eternal.

Many false teachers also say that no one will actually end up in hell forever. They say that hell is a real place; created for Satan and the demons; that it certainly would be eternal for anyone that never receives Jesus; and God threatens to send us there if we don't believe in Jesus; but, they say, in the end God makes sure that all people will in fact believe in Jesus, either in this life or the next. This clearly contradicts all that we have seen so far, especially Matthew 7:13-14. It also can in no way be reconciled with Hebrews 9:27-28.

You might be saying right now, “Ok, but if many of the descriptions of hell are to be taken figuratively, why can't we take the descriptions of eternity in regard to hell figuratively as well?” Believe me, everyone wishes this could be done. But again, we should see some evidence of this and there is simply no way to interpret Matthew 25:46 in that fashion. This is why all true Bible-believing Christians for two thousand years have interpreted hell as being eternal, in spite of how hard it is to accept that doctrine.

Many false teachers also claim that they have visited heaven, or hell, or both, and go into great detail about all that they allegedly saw and experienced. There is zero evidence in the Bible, none whatsoever, of anyone ever going to hell and then returning. While there is evidence of people going to heaven and returning, or of having visions of heaven, their descriptions are always highly figurative or not very detailed at all. For example, Isaiah had a vision of heaven and in that vision he had his lips burned with a hot coal by an angel (Isaiah chapter 6, especially verse 6). If that literally happened, Isaiah would not have been able to talk right after this took place, and yet he does.

Clearly this was a vision and not everything he saw was literally happening. This does not mean he did not see God in a sense, and the angels, he clearly did. If he didn't, the vision makes no sense and would plainly contradict John 12:37-41. But a lot of the details are clearly figurative.

And Paul says that he did not merely see a vision of heaven, but was actually caught up to heaven (2 Corinthians 12:1-4). He only says that he doesn't know if he went in his soul alone, or in both body and soul. He does call this experience "visions and revelations," but he does not mean a vision in the traditional way that word is used in the Bible. He means visions in the sense that he actually saw heaven because he literally went there. And what does he say about this experience? He says that he cannot talk about it. If the Apostle Paul cannot talk about what he saw in heaven, then no one else can either. These false teachers are liars.

Finally, as we have seen, true Christians will spend all eternity with God on the new earth. When Christians die before Jesus returns, they go to heaven and I have more to say about this in my *Doctrine: Going Deeper*. But after He returns, we will spend all eternity with God on the new earth in our glorified (perfected) bodies and souls. Some Christians teach that God scraps the current earth, and will create an entirely new one when Jesus comes back. This is not a massive mistake in my opinion, but I don't think it is what the Bible is teaching. It seems to me that this would contradict Jeremiah 33:19-21. In that verse Jeremiah talks about how night and day will always occur. Even if night and day occur on a completely different earth for all eternity, it certainly seems it would be a different night and day than the one we experience now, precisely because it would be taking place on an entirely different planet. I think it is better to say that God burns the surface of the earth when Jesus returns, and then creates the surface afresh in a perfect manner. Most Confessional Presbyterian Christians have taken this position over the centuries.

Many Christians try to go into great detail about the new earth. Many of them base this on the last few chapters of Revelation. But if Paul couldn't even talk about heaven because it was too magnificent for us to take, all the more so is this true about the new earth. I think most of the descriptions at the end of Revelation are figurative. It is enough to know that we will be there, it will be perfect, and that we will be with God

forever. All true Christians have always agreed on these truths because they are so plainly taught in the clear sections on the end times that I referenced earlier. There is no way to interpret many of the passages in those sections figuratively without negating them altogether. This is our ultimate hope as Christians. It is our comfort, it is our motivation, it is our longing. We want to be with God forever, free from all sin, suffering, discomfort, and distance from God.

Conclusion

As I said in the preface, I hope and pray this book has been a blessing to you as you seek to strengthen your walk with God. As has been said, the next book in this series will be on the Christian life (*A Simple Guide to the Basics of the Christian Life*), and I also sincerely hope and pray that this final book will bless you in huge ways as well!