

# *Studies in the Nature and Being of God*



*A Collection of sermons preached by  
W. E. Best*

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October 2014

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# *The Being of God--Part One*

W.E. Best

“And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him” (Heb. 11:6 NASB).

“Because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse” (Rom. 1:19, 20 NASB).

Christianity confronts the people on earth with heaven and brings eternity to bear on time. The message by the man of God must be timeless and timely. Religionists have surrendered the once lofty concept of God and substituted a belief so low and ignoble that their god is unworthy of thinking and worshipping saints. With the loss of the sense of Majesty has come the further loss of awe and consciousness of the Divine Being. The words “Be still and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10 KJB) mean nothing to the self-confident, so-called worshipper in this century.

The word “being” refers to existence as opposed to non-existence. The Greek verb *eimi* means to be or to exist; therefore, the great eternal, independent, and self-existent “I AM” is the first cause. His purpose and actions spring from Himself without foreign motive or influence. He is absolute in dominion, purity, and spirituality. God is not only the cause of created life, but He is also the Sustainer of all things. God’s immensity is illimitable; His mode of existence is inconceivable; and His holy essence is indescribable. He is fully known only to Himself, because an infinite mind can be comprehended by itself alone. The eternal, holy, and self-existent Being does what He pleases, because He acts according to His own law, which is superior to all man-made laws.

Theology, the science of God, demands attention from every person. The word “theology” is a combination of *theos* (God) and *logos* (rational expression). Therefore, theology is the rationale that deals with the study of God. It is defined as the study that pertains to God and His relationship to His creation.

The word “systematic” in the study of theology is derived from *sunistano*, signifying to place together. The English interpretation of the Greek word means to organize Biblical data into a system of theology. Students of Scripture understand that the Holy Spirit has not reduced the truths of the Bible into any system or order in giving the Scriptures. The nearest thing to order is recorded in Romans and Ephesians. All the facets of some particular doctrine are not

methodically given under the same heading. Doctrinal truths are dependent on one another for support; therefore, they may be correlated into an order for Christian edification. This reveals the reason unsaved people cannot understand the Scriptures.

Truths have power on the minds of men not only from the truths themselves, but also from their position in Scripture. Then, they are impressed on minds and hearts by the indwelling Spirit of regeneration. The gift of teaching elders, those who have the gift for finding and formulating truths for the spiritual benefit of the assemblies, is given to the assemblies for systematically correlating Scriptures (Eph. 4:11-16; II Tim. 3:14-17). There is no perfectly accurate man-made system of theology. Since interpretation is in the human realm, the appropriate title for every work on systematic theology should be "A [not the] Systematic Theology." Systematic theology indicates that serious effort was made to systematically set forth Biblical data concerning God.

Theology should be divided into naturalistic theology and Biblical theology, because the human family is divided into saved and unsaved. Naturalistic theology is found within the range of reason. Apart from revelation, reason is the highest capacity in man. God speaks to every man through nature. However, Biblical theology surpasses the revelation of God in nature. Reason and revelation are united factors in gathering and classifying Biblical data; but Scripture surpasses reason, as the thoughts of God surpass the thoughts of men (Is. 55:8-10). Although men possess the ability to reason, separate from the Spirit of God in regeneration, their reason lacks the capacity to classify and understand Biblical theology (I Cor. 2:14).

Natural knowledge of God apart from the revelation of Scripture is both sufficient and insufficient. This is not a contradiction; it is a statement that must be understood in the light of the context of Romans 1:19-20. The revelation of God in nature is sufficient to render every man without excuse. Nevertheless, it is insufficient to convert a regenerated person, because the gospel of Christ is not revealed in nature (Rom. 1:16, 17).

Some demand forms of evidence for God's existence that are not found in the scope of scientific endeavor. Their questions concerning God's existence presuppose a sort of omniscience on their part. Their failure to see God in the light of the things that are made is due to their presupposition (Rom. 1:20). They have determined that God shall have no place in their thoughts. Paul plainly revealed that the knowledge of God's existence is made known in all men: "because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them" (Rom. 1:19 NASB). This knowledge of God is manifest in them, because the manifestation of truth to men presupposes the spirit of man—that part of man that knows what goes on within himself (I Cor. 2:11).

Man's history began with the knowledge of God, but his religious history is marked by devotion instead of evolution. The knowledge of God was handed down from Adam to his children. After the destruction of the antediluvian world by water, Noah began the new world by erecting an altar to God. With their knowledge of God, the new race through Noah and his sons began to manifest ingratitude to God and ceased to glorify Him. Consequently, man's apostasy from God is not the act of an ignorant intellect. It is the act of a depraved will that is determinately set against both the eternity of God and the eternity of His power.

Naturalistic theism is made known apart from Scripture. A natural knowledge of God is manifested in all men without exception: "...that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them" (Rom. 1:19 NASB). This verse reveals that some knowledge of God is in all men without exception, whether or not the gospel of Jesus Christ ever reaches them.

The expression "evident within them" must not be confused with man's conscience: "For when the Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them" (Rom. 2:14, 15 NASB). The external revelation of God in nature has made a permanent imprint on the consciousness of every man. The culminative aorist tense of the verb "made it evident [*phaneroo*] to them" emphasizes the existing results (Rom. 1:19).

A natural knowledge of God is insufficient to save a person from the knowledge of his guilt, because that which is known about God is manifested in him. Romans 1:19 places limitation on man's knowledge of God. The content of his knowledge is revealed in Romans 1:20. The visible creation makes manifest the invisible perfection of God as the Creator. Invisible things can be seen by the visible. For example, we can see the Bible that we read and study, but we do not see the writers, printers, or binders. Although we do not see them, we cannot deny that they existed. A person can go further and say that their souls are seen. Man can know the hidden world of his likes, dislikes, hopes, and fears with greater clarity than he can know external appearances. These things can never be ascribed to our physical nature, but they are living realities. Man is guilty of perverseness when he sees his mind in his own works but refuses to see the mind of God in His works.

God's attributes of eternality, omnipotence, and Deity are revealed in nature; but His attributes of love and grace are withheld from this revelation. God who reveals Himself has the right to hide Himself. Man may be known by his outward appearance, but he retains the right to hide his name and identity. God, who is known in His power and Godhead by the things He made, retains the right to hide His attributes of love and grace and make them known to the elect in His special work of regeneration.

A natural knowledge of God is sufficient to accomplish the end intended, "...so that they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20 NASB). This verse proves that enough has been revealed to make all men inexcusable before the sovereign God. There is enough knowledge revealed in nature to condemn every man. Dr. Barnhouse told about a student who said to his professor, "I cannot see an atom; therefore, I will not believe in it." The young man flunked the course because he would not submit to evidence. He complained to the professor. However, he was without excuse, because that which may be known of atoms is manifest. Physical investigation has revealed it. The invisible things of atomic energy are clearly seen, being understood by the effects that are manifest, so that the student was without excuse. This vividly illustrates Romans 1:19-20.

The visible creation is the creation of God, and it is kept by His invisible authority. Consider the earth, which is man's habitation. There are two forces working on earth, which revolves around the sun. One force tends to draw the earth from the sun and the other toward it. These powers are known as centrifugal and centripetal forces. These two forces must be in perfect balance, or the earth would be either destroyed by the heat of the sun or drawn away into darkness and chaos. There are other things just as important to consider. When a person thinks about the disposition of land and water, the atmosphere, the seasons, and the structure of the human body, he should give honor to the God of providence.

The natural knowledge of God condemns the popular expression, "It is not the sin but the Son question about which man should be concerned." Naturalistic theology has nothing to say about the Person and Work of Jesus Christ, but there is enough truth about God to render all men inexcusable before Him.

Naturalistic theism indicts all men (Rom. 1:18-32). The witness of God in creation and conscience renders all men responsible to God (Rom. 1:19, 20; 2:14, 15). If men were not responsible to God, there could be neither guilt nor punishment. These Scripture references refer to the Gentiles, but Paul went on to show that the Jews are in agreement with the Gentiles (Rom. 2:1-3:8).

Man's reason is involved when he reflects on the work of God in creation. Both power and Deity are viewed in God's handiwork. Power refers to God's supremacy and Deity to His Being. The Greek word for "Divine nature (*theiotes*)" of Romans 1:20 (NASB) reflects the quality of God as He is revealed in creation. The Creator of all things has to be Divine. The Greek word for "Deity (nominative genitive singular of *theotes*)" of Colossians 2:9 (NASB) speaks of the essence of God, which is revealed bodily in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. All the fullness of Deity dwells in the Son of God bodily in contrast to types and shadows. The argument used by Paul in Romans 1 is cosmological; therefore, the conclusion is that every effect must have a cause. This argument is especially prominent in the gospel of John. (Study John 10:37, 38; 15:24, 25.)

The conscience of man is contrasted with the external revelation of God in creation. Man's conscience operates by native instinct. It is the faculty in man whereby he is able to distinguish right from wrong. The conscience bears witness to the existence of a high moral code and acknowledges that it does not completely live up to it.

The responsibility of all men to God makes them guilty before Him. Guilt is manifested by man's failure to glorify God or give Him thanks for His benevolence (Rom. 1:21). The word "but (*alla*)" is the strongest conjunction in the Greek: "...but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened" (Rom. 1:21 NASB). This verse proves that man began with a natural knowledge of God derived from creation, but his depraved mind led him to the vanity of his own reasoning. When man refuses to follow the truth that is revealed, he wanders in the darkness of his own imagination and investigation.

Apart from grace, vain imagination of the mind enters into the heart, which is the seat of man's moral nature and the center of his personality. Error enters the mind and reaches the will through the heart. This describes reprobation (Rom. 1:18-32). The truth of the gospel must enter the mind and reach the will through the heart. This describes true conversion (Rom. 6:17).

All guilty men must be punished by the righteous God (Rom. 1:32; 2:2-6). Guilt stands between responsibility and punishment. Responsibility makes guilt possible, and responsibility and guilt make punishment certain. In order to properly understand punishment, the attitude and action of God in relation to guilt must be contemplated. In Romans 1:18, God's attitude is expressed in the word "wrath." Wrath is God's inherent antagonism toward everything that is evil. The present tense, "is revealed," proves that God continually uncovers or brings to light man's irreverence toward Him and his denial of God's holy standard for man. God's action, which is a manifestation of His attitude, is stated in the expression, "God gave them over" (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28 NASB). Therefore, this is the Divine verdict on such reprobates: "...those who practice such things are worthy of death..." (Rom. 1:32 NASB).

# *The Being of God -- Part Two*

W.E. Best

“For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened” (Rom. 1:21 NASB).

Many philosophers deny that the existence of God can be proved by arguments. They suggest that knowledge of God is intuitive; therefore, it cannot be proved. In contrast, the apostle Paul stated that there is a subjective knowledge of God in every man (Rom. 1:21). Since the subjective knowledge of the existence of God is an objective fact, it must be revealed and established by evidence.

Men do not have the knowledge of God’s holiness, justice, mercy, and love by intuition. The knowledge of these attributes is by the Spirit of regeneration. Intuitive knowledge, which is universal, is the sense of a Divine Being on whom all men depend and to whom all men are responsible. There is no way to account for man’s belief in God’s existence except that it is founded on the constitution of his nature.

Objection to the atmosphere that sustains man illustrates that an individual assumes that God exists while he argues that He does not. A man once began his argumentation against the existence of God by saying, “I am an atheist, God knows.” As a person acknowledges his own existence by doubting it, he admits the existence of God by questioning it. Anyone who denies that God is personal can be likened to the man who went outside of his house, looked through a window, and declared that no one lived there, because he saw no one inside.

A rationalist has been defined as a person who substitutes human reason for Divine revelation. To be classified a rationalist a person must have received and rejected some revelation from God. Such men are described by Paul in Romans 1:18-32. The student of Scripture would profit by observing in this passage of Scripture the references to the revelation of God and also those to the mental nature of man.

1. The following are references to the revelation of God in Romans 1:18-32 (NASB): (1) “For the wrath of God is revealed...” (v. 18). (2) “because that which is known about God is evident within them...”(v. 19a). (3) “...for God made it evident to them” (v. 19b). (4) “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen...” (v. 20a). (5) “...being understood through what has been made...”(v. 20b).

2. The following are references to man’s mental nature in Romans 1:18-32 (NASB): (1) “because that which is known about God is evident within them [the



spirit of man, which is capable of understanding, I Cor. 2:11 NASB]...”(v. 19a). (2) “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen...” (v. 20a). (3) “...being understood [understanding of the mind] through what has been made...” (v. 20b). (4) “For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God...”(v. 21a). (5) “...but they became futile in their speculations...” (v. 21b). (6) “...and their foolish heart [the center of moral understanding, will, and activity] was darkened” (v. 21c). (7) “And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge [memory] God any longer...”(v. 28). (8) “and, although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death...”(v. 32a).

Incorrect thinking leads to improper loving, and incorrect loving leads to wicked living. This is witnessed today as never before in human history. No true philosophy casts aside theology—the science of God. Education that does not give God His rightful place is worthless. The following indictment can be found in the ashes of every civilization: “For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen” (Rom. 1:25 NASB).

Romans 1:18-32 proves that the general revelation of God is both objective and subjective. Subjective knowledge was given with the image of God in which man was created. Objective knowledge comes from the world of created things around man. John spoke of subjective knowledge when he declared that Christ “...was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man” (John 1:9 NASB). This verse does not refer to the grace of illumination to all men without distinction, but to the common light of nature, which is far less than saving faith. The Psalmist spoke of objective knowledge when he said, “THE heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands” (Ps. 19:1 NASB). The subjective and objective aspects of knowledge constitute the general revelation of God that He has given mankind. The effect of this general revelation is that all men are without excuse.

Naturalistic theism has its place in the study of theology. The Christian is grateful to know that the success of the gospel is not dependent on argument, but on the sovereign Spirit alone. A regenerated person does not stagger in the dark. He walks in the light. This does not indicate that clear-cut arguments in the realm of naturalistic theism are not valuable. Intuitive truths belong to both man’s intellect and moral nature. An intuitive truth is that every created effect must have a cause, and the part of a thing is less than the whole. Therefore, man possesses the mental capacity for understanding basic truths as soon as they are presented. The mind is also capable of recognizing the veracity of moral truths. Every man acknowledges good and evil to some degree; therefore, he agrees that evil deserves punishment (Rom. 1:32).

Contentions alone do not prove the whole doctrine of theism. Nevertheless, each naturalistic argument proves some particular element of that doctrine: (1) The

cosmological argument proves the existence of a necessary and eternal Being. (2) The teleological argument emphasizes that such an eternal Being is intelligent. (3) The anthropological argument stresses that such an intelligent Being possesses moral attributes. (4) The ontological argument leads to an ideal conclusion.

FIRST—The cosmological argument proves the existence of a necessary and eternal Being. The word “cosmological” comes from the Greek word *kosmos*, which means world or orderly arrangement. This branch of philosophy deals with the origin and general structure of the universe. The basic principle on which the cosmological argument advances to its conclusion is that every effect must have a cause. To maintain that anything caused itself to exist is to assert that it acted before it existed. Such a declaration would be absurd. A cause is a real entity; therefore, it is a substance. A nonentity cannot act. Nonexistence cannot produce existence.

The cosmological argument has imperfections. The principle of causality does not require that everything have a cause. If men affirm that everything has a cause, the same principle would apply to God. The principle of causality should be stated differently. It is proper to say that existence itself does not demand a cause. However, the coming into being of that which was non-existent demands a cause. As far as man can see, everything that has a beginning had a cause. Therefore, the universe owes its existence to a cause outside of itself.

The cosmological argument has value when it is properly applied. Every finite object implies original non-existence. Creative power is demanded to cause a nonentity to become an entity. Consequently, the quality of the cause is superior and older than the effect. Scriptures justify the cosmological argument. (Study John 1:1-3; 10:37, 38; 15:24, 25; Heb. 3:4.) John proved that God, the efficient cause of things in time, existed before time. The difference between the Creator and His creation is the principle by which an endless series of causes is avoided.

SECOND—The teleological argument emphasizes that the eternal Being is intelligent. The word “teleological” comes from the Greek word *telos*, which means end or design. This argument treats the subject of cause as an intelligent Being. Intelligence in the effect proves intelligence in the cause. To believe the Bible was written by chance is as unreasonable as to believe that the universe was brought into existence by chance. As every book has an author, the universe has an intelligent Creator.

The intention of the argument is to show that there is design in every part of the universe. All the organs of the human body and all the species of life in the universe are purposive. Each species is modified to meet its particular environment and necessities. There is instinct in all transmitted life. A biology professor said, “Instinct is inherited memory.” Will this stand the test of logic? If an insect learns things from the preceding generation, the first insect had to

figure it all out by its own self. The answer is simple. Instinct is imparted wisdom. One of the most decisive proofs of intelligence is prevision. Everyone should bow before the intelligent Creator when he considers that the earth was prepared for man, and sustenance is provided for the young before they are born.

The teleological argument is not without defects. It does not prove a personal God. It has been said that the order of the universe may be only the changing phenomena of an impersonal intelligence, such as pantheism supposes. The teleological argument must be supplemented by the anthropological argument. The argument more properly concerns God's existence than the relation of the intelligent Being to the world. Placing of the intelligence is not the question of this argument.

The teleological argument has value when it is properly applied. This argument, like the cosmological, must not be confined to the material world. It should be extended to the intellect. The proper application of the teleological argument may be illustrated by the instance of an atheistic professor relating his visit to Hoover Dam to a Christian. He told him about his wife observing the rock formations surrounding the Dam and repeatedly saying, "What wonderful works of God!" The atheist was so well pleased with his ten-year-old son's reply to his wife that he related it. The boy said to his mother, "Well, Mom, the rocks had to fall somewhere, didn't they?" The Christian asked, "When you saw the dam with all the materials and their arrangement, did you say to yourself, well, these things had to fall somewhere, didn't they?" To this the atheist gave no reply.

Scripture justifies the teleological argument. The Psalmist said, "He who chastens the nations, will He not rebuke, Even He who teaches man knowledge" (Ps. 94:10 NASB). The marks of design in the human intellect infer that an infinite, designing mind created it.

THIRD—The anthropological argument stresses that the intelligent Being possesses attributes. The word "anthropological" comes from the Greek word *anthropos*, which means man. This argument goes from the mental and moral nature of man to the existence of the Author, Lawgiver, and Judge. Man differs from animals by what anthropologists call culture. Man's behavior is learned, not instinct-born. The intellectual, moral, and emotional nature of man requires an intellectual and moral Being for its Author. Man's mind cannot evolve from matter or his spirit from flesh. There are several kinds of existence, but they are distinct. For instance, vegetable life never develops into animal life, and animal life never advances to intellectual life.

The moral nature of man proves the existence of a holy Lawgiver and Judge. If this were not true, the conscience could not be explained (Rom. 2:14, 15). Why is man possessed with fears, tortures of a guilty conscience, and dread of a future state? Cain, under the terrors of an evil conscience, thought that every man was his slayer (Gen. 4:14). Man's moral nature involves a sense of responsibility. He

knows that he must answer for what he is and does (Rom. 1:32). Man's emotional nature requires a Being for its Author who can satisfy his desires. Ecclesiastes proves the truth that finite things can never satisfy. Man's heart is too large for a finite object. The infinite God alone can satisfy man's emotional nature (Ps. 17:15).

The anthropological argument has weak points. It cannot prove the existence of the infinite God, because it argues from the finite. This argument points to a Being of supreme and holy qualities, but it does not compel belief in a God of infinite perfection. The idea of good and bad exists in human culture. However, apart from the revelation of God in Scripture, this idea is without a complete objective standard.

The anthropological argument has value when it is properly applied. The following is the manner in which Augustine properly applied it: "God is more truly thought than He is described, and exists more truly than He is thought." The subjective idea of God is less real than the objective fact. This means that God has more of existence than the thought of Him has. Man's conscience indicates self-knowledge. Relative goodness abiding in the conscience of natural man is compared to that which is worse. Out of man's moral conscience proceeds the restraint of evil. Conscience not only recognizes that man was made in the likeness of God, but also that he is God's opposite.

FOURTH—The ontological argument leads to an ideal conclusion of God's existence. The word "ontological" is based on the Greek participle *on*, present active participle nominative neuter singular of the verb *eimi*, which means to be or exist. This argument is derived, as the etymology denotes, from the concept of absolute distinguished from imperfect being. It reasons from God as the first cause of all things to the things He caused. Specifically, it refers to the inherent thought that God exists. A person may logically conceive of the non-existence of the finite, but he cannot logically form a thought of the non-existence of the Infinite. Absolute nonentity is unreasonable; therefore, the ontological argument has the approval of Scripture. "...I AM WHO I AM..." (Ex. 3:14) denotes necessity of existence. Therefore, the objective existence of God is more real than a person's subjective belief of it.

The ontological argument is not without defects. This argument confounds ideal existence with real existence. The absolutely perfect Being includes more than the idea of His existence. Man's notion is not the measure of external reality. God is not an idea; therefore, knowledge of Him cannot be derived from thoughts. The fact that an infinitely perfect Being cannot be derived from imperfect and finite things confounds the notion of combining the Infinite with the finite.

The ontological argument has value when it is properly applied. Every mental impression in cultures has some cause. For example, there must be some explanation for a contemplation of something foreign to an individual's

environment. Suppose a tribe of heathen who had never been taught electronics were told by a visitor to their island about television. The thought of television must have a source from outside the island where such untutored heathen live.

The logical argument for the existence of God is given by Paul in Romans 1:19-20. The evidence is so strong that Paul was justified in saying that those who do not embrace it are without excuse. God is more than an idea. No person could have any perception unless someone created a creature capable of having a thought. This is a logical argument for the existence of God. Arguments in themselves are not so much a bridge as they are cables to hold firm the great suspension bridge of intuition by which we pass the gulf from man to God.

## *The Being of God--Part Three*

W.E. Best

“For in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, For we also are His offspring” (Acts 17:28 NASB).

Paul’s message in Athens furnishes a good closure to the messages on “The Being Of God” for all who desire to give the transcendent God the honor and glory He deserves. The subjects of origin, value, and purpose cannot be defined apart from the knowledge of God’s self-existence. All theology must begin and end with God. The problem with religious societies in any age is their lack of knowledge of God’s self-existence and sovereignty. Unless God is recognized as the Author of life, no value will be placed on life. If people do not value their own lives, they do not value the lives of others. Some concept of value is necessary before a person can have any thought about the purpose of life.

Paul began his message where the philosophers concluded: “...TO AN UNKNOWN GOD...”(Acts 17:23 NASB). People become very religious when they turn their backs on the true God. In Acts 17:22, the Greek adjective translated “too superstitious” (KJB) and “very religious in all respects” (NASB) is *deisidaimonesterous* (comparative adjective accusative masculine plural of *deisidaimon*). This adjective is a compound word made up of *deido*, which means to fear or reverence, and *daimon*, which means demon or evil spirit. A combination of the two words means reverence for demons or evil spirits. This explanation fits the context of Acts 17:16-21, and it includes all present day religious philosophers.

Both philosophy and religion revolve around self, thus making self the center, which is the essence of idolatry. The knowledge of God is the foundation of all knowledge. A mere definition of something is inadequate. The necessity of a person being able to give the value and purpose of a defined object presupposes the fact of the self-existing God. About this God, Paul said, “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen” (Rom. 11:36 NASB).

Philosophical explanations may have two sides, but truth has only one side. Truth is a path too narrow and rigid for the unregenerate mind. Philosophy is the rational investigation of the principle of being, knowledge, or conduct. It requires three factors: (1) first cause, (2) knowledge of first cause, and (3) knowledge of man. An individual must look above man to find true philosophy (Col. 2:1-12). This is possible only in Jesus Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; I John 5:20).

Paul began his message with the philosophers’ belief in immanence. Immanence is the doctrine that the ultimate principle of the universe should not be

distinguished from the universe itself, that God dwells in all things and permeates the spirits of men. “For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. What therefore you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you” (Acts 17:23 NASB). The apostle proceeded from immanence to transcendence in the next four verses: “The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things; and He made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:24-27 NASB).

The apostle reverted to immanence in verse 28—“For in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, For we also are His offspring” (NASB). Following this statement, Paul closed his message by showing the overwhelming transcendence of God: “Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature (*theios*) is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world (*oikoumene*, inhabited earth) in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead” (Acts 17:29-31 NASB).

The Athenians were well versed in polytheism (the doctrine of many gods). Therefore, they assumed that any new form of worship was merely another propagation of demon or evil spirit worship similar to their own. At Athens, Socrates (Athenian philosopher 469?-339 B.C.) and Aristotle (Greek philosopher 384-322 B.C., a pupil of Plato, and tutor of Alexander the Great) philosophized. Regardless of their greatness in the eyes of men, when these philosophers turned their backs on the subjective and objective revelations of God, they became occupied with reverence for evil spirits (Acts 17:22).

Christianity differs from false religions on two points: (1) Christianity is a revelation that radiates light. False religion has nothing but darkness and mysteriousness. (2) In revealed Christianity, God seeks man. However, in false religion, man seeks a god. In his own seeking, he wanders farther and farther from the true God. As Christianity has but one God whose essence includes Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, false religions have gods, christs, and spirits of their own making (II Cor. 11:1-4).

Religion is Satan’s greatest sphere of opportunity. Since he is the father of lies (John 8:44), Satan has only to give his lies a religious atmosphere, quote a few verses of Scripture out of context, and he has a ready and gullible audience.

Christians should dread Satan as a lion (I Pet. 5:8), fear him as a serpent (II Cor. 11:3), and most of all dread him as an angel of light (II Cor. 11:14). Paul said of religionists, "For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their deeds" (II Cor. 11:13-15 NASB). Scripture clearly states that Satan cannot touch the value of Christ's work on the cross or mar the perfection of His eternal glory. However, he can hinder the fruitfulness of God's people.

False ministers are unprincipled men who cash in on their so-called gospel. Most preachers today are professional panhandlers. From the pulpit, radio, and television, they beg money from their listeners. All their listeners not versed in Scripture become fertile ground for falsehood and a good fleecing (depriving people of money by fraud). Money given to false teachers is not an offering to the Lord. It is support for false teachers.

Paul's ministry may be contrasted with that of false ministers. He did not preach to the unregenerate with the expectation of support. His attitude concerning remuneration was manifested: "For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God" (I Thess. 2:9). He was moved by love to preach Christ (Acts 17:1-9). His enemies responded with jealousy and caused an uproar in the city. Proclamation of truth has been and will always be opposed by enemies of the truth.

Unlike Paul's messages in Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens, most sermons heard today humanize God, materialize blessings, and socialize the gospel. Paul never told lost people that God loved them and had a wonderful plan for their lives. The word "love (agape)" is never used in The Acts of the Apostles, the very book that gives the norm for New Testament evangelism. False ministers teach that faith is of human origin, the same kind as that human trait that causes people to put their money in a bank. People are told to transfer their belief from worldly objects to God, and the result will be salvation. Such teaching has proven to be a successful system, and who can argue with success? God can! More emphasis is placed on the method than the Savior, self than God, and the means than the object. In man's system, salvation is a work of merit. In the word of God, it is the gift of grace. This brings up an important question: If a man's faith saves his soul, what saves his body or perfects his spirit?

### **Observe how Paul characterized God in his message to the philosophers:**

1. Paul characterized God as the Divine Creator: "The God who made the world and all things in it..." (Acts 17:24a NASB). This proves that God is distinct from nature. The orderly universe and everything in it proves the eternal existence of God. Something does not come from nothing. Existence itself does not demand a



cause, but coming into existence of that which did not exist demands a cause. When the objective is formulated, the subjective will harmonize with it.

2. God is represented as the universal Lord: "...He is Lord of heaven and earth..." (Acts 17:24b NASB). God is over nature because He was before it. The Lord does not create something He does not control.

3. God is the bountiful Giver: "...He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things" (Acts 17:25 NASB). This declaration sheds light on God Himself, because He is underived, eternal, and the source of all other life throughout the universe. Physical life is given to all men without exception, but spiritual life is given to only the elect. "Breath" (pnoe, wind, Acts 2:2; everything that breathes, Acts 17:25), the condition and means of sustaining physical life, is singled out. Even the atmosphere was shown to be the first necessary gift for the sustenance of physical life. There is a certain mixture of oxygen, nitrogen, and other gases that form the atmosphere around the earth. Pressure also has its boundaries for man's existence on planet earth. All things for the existence and sustenance of life are from God: "Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow" (James 1:17 NASB).

4. God is declared the Almighty Ruler: "...He made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation" (Acts 17:26 NASB). The Old Testament teaches that the nations should be placed and governed in relation to Israel: "When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, When He separated the sons of man, He set the boundaries of the peoples According to the number of the sons of Israel. For the LORD'S portion is His people; Jacob is the allotment of His inheritance. He found him in a desert land, And in the howling waste of a wilderness; He encircled him, He cared for him, He guarded him as the pupil of His eye" (Deut. 32:8-10 NASB). The land is God's (Lev. 25:23, 24). The Lord will not enjoy the land until His people enjoy it. The Lord's people are strangers with Him on earth. Christ had no place to lay His head. He came here to be with a disinherited remnant and to have them with Him. He was Emmanuel—God with His people.

God's people should be humbled when they think about Jesus Christ, who is owner of everything, being here as a stranger. Since Christ does not possess His rights on earth, His joint-heirs are strangers and sojourners with Him (I Pet. 1:1; 2:11). The position of strangers and sojourners has been and always will be faith's place until Christ comes the second time to establish His kingdom.

Since the fall of man, men try to unite what God separated (Gen. 11). The statement "...let us make for ourselves a name..." (Gen. 11:4 NASB) has been the cry of depraved mankind since the tower of Babel. This disease cleaves to the unregenerate. Christ said, "How can you believe, when you receive glory

from one another, and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God” (John 5:44 NASB).

The only great name is the one God makes great. Following the Babel (confusion by mixing) experience, God said to Abram, “...And I will bless you, And make your name great...” (Gen. 12:2 NASB). The act of leaving Ur and going to the land of Canaan would give Abram the other name of Hebrew (Gen. 14:13). “Hebrew” signifies one who has crossed over. Abraham (father of a great multitude) is the name that is bound up with the promises of God. The Christian who analyzes the Abrahamic covenant will observe that certain sure promises were made by grace to Abraham. These promises were individual, national, and universal. The latter will encompass all nations.

The Bible clearly reveals that at the end of this age, the age of grace, the nations of the world will be bound together in one world government. Therefore, the three basic things represented by the tower of Babel will be repeated by God’s enemies according to God’s permissive will: (1) the purpose of universal union, (2) the program of united effort, and (3) the principle of human glory. The iron of totalitarianism and the clay of socialistic democracy will mix, but never really unite (Dan. 2). There will be a confederation instead of a great conquest. Think of the number of international organizations already existing! All of this is in defiance against God’s authority expressed in Scripture. The world will witness Satan and his followers at their worst before the saints of God experience Christ’s victory and glory when He establishes His eternal kingdom.

5. The unobserved Holy Spirit alone enables men to seek God: “that they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:27 NASB). The word “seek (*dzetein*, present active infinitive of *dzeteo*)” means seek, search, or look for; examine, or investigate. When Paul spoke to the unregenerate, he said, “...there is not one who is seeking [*ekdzeton*, present active participle of *ekdzeteo*, to seek or search diligently] after God” (Rom. 3:11—translation). On the other hand, Christ said, “...seek [*dzeteite*, present active imperative, predictive future of *dzeteo*], and you shall find...” (Matt. 7:7 NASB). Correct interpretation is necessary to understand the meaning of seeking. The immediate context, as well as Scripture as a whole, enables us to make proper judgment.

Necessity is laid on every person without exception to seek God. Man’s subjective and objective knowledge makes him inexcusable (Rom. 1:19, 20). Therefore, man’s depravity does not cancel his obligation to seek, repent, and believe. Man is the cause of his spiritual inability. Natural ability and spiritual inability differ. Lydia had natural ability to go to the prayer meeting where Paul was speaking. However, she lacked spiritual ability to understand what he said, until the Lord opened her heart to pay close attention to the things being spoken by him (Acts 16:13, 14). If spiritual inability cancelled obligation, Satan, with his depravity, would be under no obligation to do right. His enmity toward God and

men would not be sinful. This principle applied to sinners would lift them above the moral law.

Some argue that God commanding men who are unable to respond to repent mocks them (Acts 17:30). The Arminians who take this view say that such teaching destroys the very nature of a commandment. W. E. Gladstone said, "The most solemn of all reflections is that man is personally responsible to God." Ignorance of the law is no excuse for transgressing it. God's commands are in order to convince the elect of their weakness and inability, and to persuade the chosen ones to look to God for repentance and faith.

There are three ways in which something may be said to be impossible: (1) Simple impossibilities are that God cannot lie, Christ could not sin, and the sinner cannot participate in his regeneration. (2) Natural impossibility is that man cannot work above natural causes. (3) Spiritual impossibility is that depraved man cannot perform spiritual acts, because he lacks spiritual life. The sinner cannot intrude into the office of the Spirit and exalt himself as the agent of the new birth.

6. Paul represented God as the One from whom mankind is the offspring: "...For we also are His offspring. Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature [*theios*, Divine Being—used here and II Pet. 1:3, 4] is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man" (Acts 17:28b, 29 NASB). The Greek word for "offspring" is *genos*, which means descendant. Paul was telling the philosophers that human beings are descendants of God, the very Person to whom the philosophers erected an altar with the inscription, "TO AN UNKNOWN GOD." To Paul, the philosophers were nothing more than blind men groping in the darkness of heathenism. Therefore, he did not make sport of their blindness. He began where they concluded and showed them their responsibility in the light of their subjective knowledge, with the added objective truth that the apostle was proclaiming. Do you think Paul might have given some thought to that from which he had been delivered as a Pharisee of the Pharisees?

7. Paul concluded his message by presenting God as the righteous Judge: "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead. Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said, We shall hear you again concerning this" (Acts 17:30-32 NASB). God's commands do not tell us what He will do for us. They inform us what we should do for Him. His commands are in order to convince men of their weakness and inability and excite the chosen ones to look to God for repentance and faith: "For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation; but the sorrow of the world produces death" (II Cor. 7:10 NASB).

God commands for the purpose of convincing men of their inability and driving them to Christ. Commands are not the measure of our power. Neither are they the rule of God's decree. If they were, His commands would not be a directory to show us what we should do. Instead, they would be a law to God Himself, telling Him what He must do. God was not obligated to choose anyone to be regenerated and converted.

The transcendent God surpasses both His creation and time. Psalm 19 records the revelation of God in nature (vv. 1-6), the Scriptures (vv. 7-11), and human experience (vv. 12-14). That which a person learns experientially, after his head is filled with objective knowledge, is the knowledge that really counts. Scripture clearly distinguishes between the universality and the particularity of God's revelation (Rom. 1:19, 20; John 6; 10; 17). God's existence, from man's perspective, reaches out of the unlimited past—"Before the mountains were born, Or Thou didst give birth to the earth and the world, Even from everlasting..." (Ps. 90:2a NASB). It extends into the unlimited future—"...to everlasting, Thou art God" (Ps. 90:2b NASB). Therefore, this is the correct way to speak of God—He exists; He is God. Eternity is incommunicable and proper to God. A person might say of a created creature that he was, he is, or he shall be; he is not the same that he was, and he will not be the same that he now is. However, God is the same now that He was, and He will be the same that He now is (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8; James 1:17).

# *Nature of The Triune God--Part 1*

W.E. Best

“For through Him [Christ] we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father” (Eph. 2:18 NASB).

“For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, Abba! Father! The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if [since, first class condition particle, denoting a fact] children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if [since, first class condition particle, denoting a fact] indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him” (Rom. 8:14-17 NASB).

A study of the triunity of God must not begin with three and subsequently one God (Heb. 11:6). To begin in that manner would give false ideas of God’s nature. The correct foundation for this study is the one true and living God. God explains the one God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Man cannot improve on God’s explanation.

The doctrine of the Triunity is essential to the Christian understanding of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Without it we could not explain salvation, which involves all three Persons in the Godhead. Furthermore, it is indispensable to the Divine purpose of God in the creation of the world. More concisely, the doctrine of the Divine Triunity is requisite to the Christian understanding of God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, salvation, and God’s purpose in the creation of the world. All that is Christian hinges on the truth of the Biblical revelation that God is one, eternal, personal, and triune. If God is not triune, there is no explanation for the incarnation. The Scriptures portray the twin truths that God sent His Son into the world and that God is revealed incarnate in Jesus Christ.

The errors of modalism and tritheism are refuted by the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The coming of the Son of God, sent by the Father into space and time, demands acknowledgment of the New Testament distinction between the Father and the Son. Christians can deny neither the unity of the Godhead nor the Godhead of the Son (John 17:3).

There is no superiority in the three Persons in the Godhead because each is eternal. Neither is there superiority of nature, since the Son is the same substance as the Father, and the Spirit is the same substance as both.

Access to the Father is through the Son in the Holy Spirit (Eph.2:18). The three Persons in the Godhead are involved in salvation and access to the Father in prayer. The Christian prays to the Father because of his relationship by means of the blood of Jesus Christ. He asks in the name of the Son, by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Anyone denying Jesus Christ cannot pray. No one can approach the Father except through His Son: "...I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me" (John 14:6 NASB). Even the regenerate person must be doing God's will in order to be heard: "We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing, and does His will, He hears him" (John 9:31 NASB).

Neither nature nor personality is possible without a person. Furthermore, a future or past without a present, energy or phenomena without motion, and God the Father or God the Holy Spirit without God the Son are impossible. Therefore, without Christ nothing worthwhile can be known or done. Without Him we have nothing, and we are nothing. The person without Christ may be rich, but he is poor. He may be clothed, but he is naked. He may be well, but he is sick. He may be going to "church," but he is going to Hell without God's intervening grace.

The tripersonality of God is exclusively a truth of revelation, but it is not beyond the realm of reason. There is mystery, but no contradiction, in the doctrine. God is too great for our full intellectual comprehension. If not, He would be too small to satisfy our spiritual minds. God is far above comprehension; therefore, we must distinguish between apprehension and comprehension. We can know who God is without knowing all that He is in His eternal existence. For instance, we can touch the earth while being unable to embrace it in our arms. The child of grace can know God (I John 5:20), while the philosopher of himself cannot find out the Almighty God.

In the science of theology, as in all sciences, some technical terms are necessary. The word "trinity" is not found in the Bible, but the idea it expresses is Scriptural. There is no other word that so well expresses the truth of the Trinity. Revelation of a trinity of persons related to one essence does not contradict any truth of Holy Scripture. The truth of the Trinity affirms no more than singularity in one sense and plurality in another. Since plurality and unity are required in human existence, why should they be denied in the Divine existence? Would a person suppose that God might include in the creature what He cannot manifest in Himself?

The elements of the plan of salvation are rooted in the truth of the Trinity, in which exists a trinal distinction of Persons with absolute unity of essence. Three periods of time correspond with and successfully manifest the Father, Son, and Spirit. The Old Testament age manifests the Father. The era of the Gospels manifests the Son. The time of the Epistles manifests the Spirit. Without a Trinity, there would be no incarnation, objective redemption, or subjective salvation.

Two witnesses given by God to the Christian for assurance are the Holy Spirit and the Holy Scriptures. The Spirit in harmony with objective truth subjectively leads the regenerate person. The Spirit of God bears witness with his spirit concerning his relationship with God. He never leads anyone contrary to the Scriptures: “The Spirit Himself bears witness [*summarturei*, a compound verb made up of *sun*, which means with, and *martureo*, which means to bear witness] with our spirit that we are children [*teknon*] of God” (Rom. 8:16 NASB). The Greek word for “children” (*teknon*) is used in Romans 8:16. It denotes relationship. The Greek noun for “sons” (*huios*) is used in Romans 8:14. It denotes the dignity of that relationship. Many who claim to be Christians because they “accepted Jesus” were humanly persuaded to make a profession of faith. An individual must search deeply into the Scriptures and his own conscience in order to know if the Holy Spirit is bearing witness with his spirit. The subjective Spirit leads a person to hear and obey the objective message, because He has committed him to it (Rom. 6:17).

The Spirit of God never assures our spirits without the aid of the Scriptures. The mind would not convey assurance of its own accord. The indwelling Holy Spirit gives the regenerate a Son-consciousness that knows the Father. That one is subjectively led by the Holy Spirit and objectively led by the Scriptures that were given by the Holy Spirit. When a person is enabled to cry, “Abba! Father!” (Rom. 8:15), he has Father-consciousness in affectionate response to Son-consciousness.

The Holy Spirit is the chief witness in a Christian’s assurance of his salvation. Although He is the third Person in the Trinity, He is God (Acts 5:3, 4). He is a distinct Person in the Godhead; therefore, He performs a distinct work. He does the work of neither the Son nor the Father. The Father does the work of neither the Son nor the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is equal with the Father and the Son; therefore, He possesses the same attributes of eternity (Gen. 1:2), omnipresence (Ps. 139:7), omniscience (I Cor. 2:10), and omnipotence (Zech. 4:6).

The work of the Holy Spirit is revealed in many ways. His work is revealed in creation (Job 33:4). It was manifested in miracles performed (I Cor. 12:28). He called and sent the prophets (Is. 48:16) and apostles (I Tim. 1:12), and He is calling and sending God-called elders (Eph. 4:11). In Christ’s incarnation, the Holy Spirit impregnated the Virgin Mary (Luke 1:35). He regenerates the elect (John 3:8). He illuminates the mind of the regenerate (Eph. 1:13-18). He convicts of sin those He regenerates (John 16:8). He gives them the adoption of sons (Rom. 8:15). He bears witness with their spirits (Rom. 8:16).

The Spirit condescends to be our chief witness. When He enters the narrow room of a human spirit, that person must make a diligent study of I Corinthians 2:11-14—“For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who

is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised” (NASB). The spirit in man is that part of him that is able to reason, think, or meditate about God who is Spirit.

The Holy Spirit condescended to enter the person He regenerates as the chief witness in the assurance of salvation. His condescension to submit Himself to the conditions of the human spirit is understood by comparing it with the condescension of the Lord Jesus Christ, when He left heaven and all its glory and came to earth to walk among men. The Father condescended in His willingness to send His Son to walk among men. Christ came into the world as the eternal Son of God; however, the human nature He assumed modified the manifestation of the Deity dwelling within (Phil. 2:5-8). Likewise, the operation of the Holy Spirit in the human spirit is not the same as the Spirit apart from the human spirit. Separate from the human spirit, the witness would shine like the perpetual star. However, in the spirit of the believer, He burns like a flame, which fluctuates from dim to bright. A Christian evidences in his countenance, will, and lifestyle when he is or is not following God’s will. The fifth chapter of I Thessalonians records more than twenty imperatives, one of which is the command to the believer to not grieve or quench the Spirit (Eph. 4:30; I Thess. 5:19).

God confirms what He has done in every regenerate person: “For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:6 NASB). The act of regeneration by the Holy Spirit is succeeded by the act of confirmation. The substance of our conviction is not directed to our feelings about God, but to God’s feelings about us. These convictions are ours because they are God’s. Our spirits possess them, but they did not originate with our spirits. Our great aspect of confirmation is God sending the Spirit of His Son into the hearts of the regenerate: “And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba! Father!” (Gal. 4:6 NASB). This confirmation can never be received on the authority of either men or angels. No one has authority to give assurance to any person who doubts his assurance. Certainty comes from God’s written word. God gives the regenerate person a thirst for God and the things of God. All the preacher can do is teach the Scriptures, which the Holy Spirit uses with the person He regenerated. The Holy Spirit cannot call anything to anyone’s mind about which that individual knows nothing. Men are not born adults. Confirmation comes from the truth the pastor/teacher is responsible to give.

Are eyes opened? The Spirit enlightens: “For God, who said, Light shall shine out of darkness, is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (II Cor. 4:6 NASB). Is the



conscience awakened? The Spirit reproves: “And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment” (John 16:8 NASB). Does the will yield? The Spirit alone can subdue: “Thy people will volunteer freely in the day of Thy power...” (Ps. 110:3 NASB). Is the heart at peace with God? The Spirit seals it: “In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise” (Eph. 1:13 NASB).

## *Nature of The Triune God--Part 2*

W.E. Best

“For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him” (I Cor. 8:5, 6 NASB).

“I and the Father are one” (John 10:30 NASB).

“You heard that I said to you, I go away, and I will come to you. If you loved Me, you would have rejoiced, because I go to the Father; for the Father is greater than I” (John 14:28 NASB).

“For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man” (John 5:26, 27 NASB).

“And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent” (John 17:3 NASB).

There is a special subsisting (existing) between Christians and the one God the Father and the one Lord Jesus Christ. All men are from (ek, ablative of source) God by creation (Acts 17:24-28), but believers are in Christ by (dia, ablative of intermediate agency) His work as Mediator (I Tim. 2:5). Christians reflect the Divine love manifested as the fruit of grace provided for the elect in Christ's redemption. Therefore, they are separated “from all things” and made a special people.

Is there a distinction between “one God” and “one Lord” of I Corinthians 8:6? Should we suppose that “one Lord” is less Divine than “one God”? The statement “...there is but one God, the Father” does not exclude Jesus Christ from being God. Neither does the statement “...and one Lord, Jesus Christ...” exclude the Father from being Lord. Paul was not examining the relationship between the Father and Christ in this portion of Scripture. However, he did state the proposition that there is one God, and he included the Lord Jesus Christ in the Godhead. This one true and living God will not share His glory with other gods, which is Satan's grammar (Gen. 3:5).

Since there is only one God, the oneness of Deity is emphasized throughout Scripture. The word “God” sometimes denotes the entire Godhead. In John 4:24, the one true and living God is distinguished from a falsely understood god who is worshipped at some particular place. Acts 17:24-29 presents the living God as the Creator and Sustainer of all things in contrast with the Athenians' false gods,

who could not create anything and needed support. Jeremiah 23:24 describes God as filling the heavens and earth. The eternity of God contains all time. The being of God contains all being. The infinity of God fills all space. Therefore, no one can escape the presence of God any more than he can escape the air he breathes. That is a comforting thought for Christians, but terrifying for the unregenerate.

The word “God” sometimes denotes Deity, without reference to the Trinity or any particular Person in the Godhead. When the Greek word *theos* is used to designate the Father, Son, or Spirit, it is used in the sense of Deity: “...the Word was God” (John 1:1 NASB). This verse destroys the Arian heresy, which denied that Christ was the same substance as the Father. The statement “...the Word was with God...” (John 1:1 NASB) destroys the Sebellian heresy that denied Jesus Christ of His proper personality.

**The following statements should help to clarify the subject of the Trinity:**

1. God is one God, and He is the only God.
2. When the essence is finite and limited, only one person can be in one essence; however, this is not true of infinite essence.
3. The unity in God is unique. It is the only one of its kind.
4. The one God is simultaneously three Persons, and the three Persons are one God.
5. We do not say the one God is three gods, nor that one Person is three Persons. Instead, there is one God with three distinctions of being. Each Person in the Godhead is God, but there are not three gods. There is one true and living God with the distinctions of Father, Son, and Spirit.

**According to I Corinthians 2:1-5, Christian witness for Christ must consist of the following things:**

1. We must declare the testimony of God: “And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God” (I Cor. 2:1 NASB).
2. We are to determine to know nothing except Christ and Him crucified: “For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (I Cor.2:2 NASB).
3. We are to demonstrate our dedication to God by the power of the Holy Spirit: “And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God” (I Cor. 2:3-5 NASB).

The election by God the Father, the blood of God the Son, and the sanctifying work of God the Holy Spirit can never be separated in Christianity (Eph. 1:3-14).

The Father's love preserved us in Christ for the effectual call: "...to those who are the called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ" (Jude 1 NASB). We are sealed in the Son: "For as many as may be the promises of God, in Him they are yes; wherefore also by Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us. Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge" (II Cor. 1:20-22 NASB). The Holy Spirit seals us: "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Eph. 1:13 NASB). "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30 NASB).

Some acts are affirmed of one Person in the Godhead that are not of the other Persons. The Father sent the Son. However, Scripture never states that the Son sent the Father. Both the Father and the Son sent the Spirit, but the Spirit never sends either the Father or the Son. The Son assumed a human nature in the incarnation. Both the Father and the Spirit were with the Son in the incarnation, yet neither assumed the human nature. Conclusively, (1) God the Father is Deity invisible. (2) God the Son is Deity manifested. (3) God the Spirit is Deity communicated.

The words "Triunity," "unity," and "equality" should be used to discuss the Trinity:  
1. When the word "Triunity" is used, we say that within the Godhead there are three personal centers of consciousness sharing the same basic essential quality of Being: "For There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost [Spirit]: and these three are one" (I John 5:7). (See vv. 6-8.)

2. When the word "unity" is used, we say there is one in three, not three Gods: "And after being baptized, Jesus went up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens, saying, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased" (Matt. 3:16, 17 NASB). "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19 NASB).

3. When the word "equality," is used, we say that each member of the Godhead is co-equal and co-eternal with the others. Therefore, the Father is God: "...Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 1:7 NASB). The Son is God: "But of the Son He says, THY THRONE, O GOD, IS FOREVER AND EVER, AND THE RIGHTEOUS SCEPTER IS THE SCEPTER OF HIS KINGDOM" (Heb. 1:8 NASB). The Holy Spirit is God: "...Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back some of the price of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men, but to God" (Acts 5:3, 4 NASB). What God is now He was and ever will be.

The word “one” in John 10:30 is translated from the Greek word *hen*, a pronominal adjective neuter (not masculine) singular. It is not speaking of one person but one substance or essence. If it were masculine gender, it would refer to one person. “One” is sometimes used in the sense of a compound unity, a unity that involves plurality: “Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor” (I Cor. 3:8 NASB). “For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups [believing Jews and Gentiles] into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall” (Eph. 2:14 NASB). Believers are described as being of one heart and one soul (Acts 4:32). The word “one” is not only in purpose and will, but also in nature, essence, and power. The Lord Jesus Christ was ascribing the preservation of the sheep in John 10:27-29 to not only the purpose of the Father, but also to His power. He then added, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30 NASB), lest someone think He was too weak to keep the sheep. Since the Son is one in essence with the Father, He is one in purpose to preserve the sheep.

Christ spoke as Mediator in His state of humiliation when He spoke of leaving the disciples and going to the Father: “...I go to the Father; for the Father is greater than I” (John 14:28 NASB). He did not indicate that He was less God than the Father. He would soon be exalted out of His state of humiliation into the eternal glory that He shared with the Father before His incarnation. There is a priority of position in Christ’s humiliation, but never an inferiority of nature, because the nature is the same in both the Father and the Son. The priority is not of time, because both are eternal. In John 14:28, Christ spoke in the capacity of Mediator; but in John 10:30, He spoke as God.

The final passage that captures our attention for the present study is John 5:26—“For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself” (NASB). This verse argues neither inequality nor inferiority in the Son of God because He has the same life infinitely, independently, and equally with the Father. Either a derived independent existence or a communicated original power is heresy. The verb “gave” (aorist active indicative of *didomi*) can mean either to deliver into one’s power or to appoint. The Father, as Head of the Mediatorial economy, appointed or gave Christ the authority to confer life, the characteristic property of Deity, which Father and Son equally possess. Since God (absolutely considered) cannot give God (absolutely considered) anything, what the Father gave (appointed) the God-Man to do was for the benefit of the elect. Some things in the Scriptures are affirmed to belong to the God-Man (Mediator) that cannot be affirmed to belong to the Son of God as the eternal Son. The designation “Divine logos” means the Father appoints the Son to hold and exercise the independent power of conferring life. However, if “Son” refers to only nature, that could not be true. The context of John 5:26 proves who He is eternally.

## *Nature of The Triune God--Part 3*

W.E. Best

“There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (Eph. 4:4-7 NASB).

The personality of God exists in the Godhead; therefore, it equally exists in the three Persons in the Godhead. An opinion formed of personality in God separate from an association of equal Persons in the Godhead is impossible. For example, man’s association with animals cannot account for his personality. The evolutionist, in the vain imagination of his twisted brain, thinks his personality—the organized pattern of behavioral characteristics—has evolved over the lower characteristics of his monkey ancestors. If the monkey could understand the depravity of man, it would resent the humanly devised theory of evolution. The monkey is at a greater advantage than the evolutionist because it does not have to worry about what takes place after death. The monkey had a beginning and will have an ending. In contrast, man had a beginning, but he will have no ending. Man’s personality cannot be accounted for by his contact with lower creatures. It is developed in association with fellow human beings.

Divine nature must be distinguished from human nature. Human nature can exist in more than one person, but not as an indivisible whole. One man is not the identical and numerical substance of another. Two men have the same kind of nature, but it is not identically and numerically the same. Each man has a fractional part of one specific human nature. In human nature, one man exists separate from another. The birth or physical death of one man does not affect that of another. Although Divine nature exists simultaneously and eternally in more than one Person in the Godhead, it exists wholly in each. Divine nature is indivisible.

The distinction of Persons in the Godhead does not divide God’s eternal essence. A person cannot say that Jesus Christ is a part of God. In the Godhead, one Person cannot exist without the others. Jesus Christ said He could do nothing of Himself: “...Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner” (John 5:19 NASB). The statement “can do nothing” does not indicate that Jesus Christ was a weakling incapable of action, but that He could not be isolated from the Father. Instead of inferiority, His perfection or equality is taught in this verse. The Son not only did that which pleased the Father, but He also spoke the Father’s word, did His work, and fulfilled His will. There can be no nature or personality without a person and

no future or past without a present. Furthermore, there can be no God the Father or God the Holy Spirit without God the Son.

The trinity of God cannot be described by either attributes or modes of action. There are distinctions in the three Persons in the Godhead. Each has Divine personality and is capable of hearing, speaking, and loving. All have uncreated Divine nature eternally antecedent to all created creatures. Each Person possesses infinite knowledge, will, and power. All three are inseparably united. Therefore, their knowledge, will, and power perfectly harmonize. As the Lord Jesus Christ always pleases the Father, the Spirit pleases both the Father and the Son. The Father is the Person Who sent the Son. The Son is the Person Who came from the Father. The Holy Spirit is the Person sent by the Father and the Son. Therefore, there are incommunicable operations that are not performed by the three Persons jointly. Subordination in the Godhead pertains to the mode of operation, but it does not imply subservience of one to the other.

Knowing the only true God is eternal life. The Father and the Son are equal in eternal life: "And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent" (John 17:3 NASB). This mode of expression is due to Christ's position as Mediator. In that capacity, He does not call Himself God, but the One sent by God. The one true God is a Trinity; and Jesus Christ, the Mediator, is the manifestation of the Godhead: "For in Him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Col. 2:9 NASB).

Some assume that since Jesus Christ addressed the Father, "the only true God" of John 17:3 applies to the Father and not the Son. They suggest that the Son would not admit His equality with God; therefore, the subordination is not simply in operation but also in nature. Such human reasoning is obnoxious. As life is the perfection of being, eternal life is the perfection of life. The fountainhead of eternal life is God because He is the living God.

The eternal distinctions in God's eternal essence are not different ways in which God manifests Himself. The terms "Father," "Son," and "Spirit" do not express different relations of God to His creatures. They are not analogous to the terms "Creator," "Preserver," and "Benefactor." The distinctions of Father, Son, and Spirit are eternal (Deut. 33:27; Rom. 16:26; Rev. 1:17). Eternal distinctions are necessary because neither Person is God without the others. Each with the other two is God.

**Although there are three eternal Persons in the eternal Godhead, they are inseparable:**

1. They are inseparable in their work of creation. (1) All things are of the Father: "Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him" (I Cor. 8:6 NASB). (2) All things were made by Jesus Christ (the

Word): “All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being” (John 1:3 NASB). (3) The Spirit of the Lord made man: “The Spirit of God has made me, And the breath of the Almighty gives me life” (Job 33:4 NASB).

2. They are inseparable in the incarnation. (1) The Father prepared the Son a body: “...SACRIFICE AND OFFERING THOU HAST NOT DESIRED, BUT A BODY THOU HAST PREPARED FOR ME” (Heb. 10:5 NASB). (2) The Son came to do the Father’s will: “THEN I SAID, BEHOLD, I HAVE COME (IN THE ROLL OF THE BOOK IT IS WRITTEN OF ME) TO DO THY WILL, O GOD” (Heb. 10:7 NASB). (3) Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit: “...The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35 NASB). “...Before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 1:18 NASB).

3. They are inseparable in Christ’s death. (1) The Father gave His Son: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son...” (John 3:16 NASB). “But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand” (Is. 53:10 NASB). (2) The Son laid down His life for the sheep: “...I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again...” (John 10:17, 18 NASB). (3) The Son offered Himself through the eternal Spirit: “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Heb. 9:14).

4. They are inseparable in Christ’s resurrection. (1) God the Father raised Him up: “And God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power....This Jesus God raised up again...” (Acts 2:24, 32 NASB). “...God raised up His Servant...” (Acts 3:26 NASB). (2) Christ resurrected Himself: “Jesus answered and said to them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19 NASB). (3) The Spirit made Jesus Christ alive: “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened [made alive] by the Spirit” (I Pet. 3:18).

5. They are inseparable in the salvation of the elect. (1) The Father elected a certain number to be saved: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestinated us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us



in the Beloved” (Eph. 1:3-6 NASB). (2) The Son purchased redemption for the chosen ones: “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us. In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fulness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory” (Eph. 1:7-12 NASB). (3) The Spirit regenerates those the Father chose and the Son redeemed: “The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8 NASB). “According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure” (I Pet. 1:2 NASB).

6. They are inseparable in their indwelling of the elect. (1) The Father dwells in them: “...God said, I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE” (II Cor. 6:16 NASB). (2) Christ dwells in them: “So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith...” (Eph. 3:17 NASB). (3) The Spirit dwells in them: “...the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you” (John 14:17 NASB ).

7. They are inseparable in supplying progressive strength. (1) The Father strengthens them: “...the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you” (I Pet. 5:10 NASB). (2) Jesus Christ strengthens them: “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13 NASB). (3) The Spirit strengthens them: “That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man” (Eph. 3:16 NASB).

Those who deny the Trinity argue that there are some unanswerable difficulties in the doctrine of Trinitarianism. They question, if Jesus is the incarnation of only one Person of the three Divine Persons, how can an individual be reconciled to the Father and the Spirit? This is one of their arguments: The law of the covenant was, the covenant-maker had to die in order to make the covenant of force; therefore, consistent and logical Trinitarianism would require the death of three Divine Persons. Oneness theologians also question how only one Person in the Godhead knows the time of the second advent (Mark 13:32).

The so-called unanswerable arguments against Trinitarianism are easily answered from Scripture. The Father effected reconciliation by making the Son an offering for sin (II Cor. 5:19-21). In His death, the Son satisfied Divine justice,

thereby enabling the Spirit to apply accomplished redemption to the elect of God. In this manner, the sinner is delivered from sin and guilt and stands in a state of righteousness. Therefore, he who was at variance with God is reconciled to Him. The following things are requisite to reconciliation: (1) The wrath of God must be turned away and all the effects of His enmity removed. (2) The sinner must be turned away from his opposition to God and be brought into voluntary obedience. Until both have been accomplished, reconciliation is incomplete. When reconciliation is effected, the reconciled sinner has access to the Father, through the Son, and by the Holy Spirit (Eph 2:18).

Christ's human nature was not the residential subject of omniscience. Christ spoke of His human nature as that to which all Divine communications were voluntary. Christ resolved not to use, during the days of His flesh, the knowledge that His omniscience affords. The wisdom He used was the illumination of the Spirit given to Him without measure. In His prophetic office, He declared that which lay within His commission; therefore, He was not empowered as a prophet to make known the day or the hour of His coming as King. His first advent was not for the purpose of making known the day or the hour of His second advent.

Christ's praying was in the capacity of Mediator (Heb. 5:7). His learning was experiential. He learned by the things He suffered (Heb. 5:8). His not knowing consisted in the distinction between the existence of knowledge and its manifestation. The omniscient Son of God knows all things. As Mediator (God-Man), He made known only what He pleased to reveal (Deut. 29:29).

The idea of three Calvaries only manifests Biblical ignorance. In the first place, a Divine Person cannot die. The temple of Christ's body was made a sacrifice for sin (Heb. 10:10, 14). Finite man cannot make satisfaction to the infinite God who has been injured by sin. Jesus Christ, the infinite Person, possesses two natures; therefore, He was able to bear the punishment due the elect. In His human nature, He gave His life a ransom for many. In His Divine nature, He went through death and satisfied Divine justice. Therefore, the Son of God satisfied the demands of the eternal covenant (Heb. 13:20, 21) by being put to death in the flesh and being made alive by the Spirit: "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened [made alive] by the Spirit" (I Pet. 3:18). Jesus Christ is the only Testator to make a will, survive death, and execute His own will.

The term "Trinity Of God" is objectionable to some in the realm of professing Christendom. The word "Trinity" is not found in Scripture, but such a word is justifiable on the principle that it is better to preserve the truth of Scripture than what appears to be the mere words of Scripture. Some English words not found in Holy Scripture are used to express Biblical doctrines. For example, the word "vicarious" is used to express the substitutionary work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Would anyone discard the substitutionary work of the Son of God on the cross because the word "vicarious" is not found in the Bible? Christ being made

an offering for sin in the sense of a substitute is clearly stated in Scripture (I Pet. 3:18). The Bible clearly teaches the doctrine of the Trinity (Matt. 28:19; Eph. 1:3-14; 2:18; I John 5:6-8).

The New Testament does not give birth to a new thought of God. The Bible reveals a firmly established concept of God, but it must be studied in the light of both Old and New Testaments. The answer to the seeming problem becomes clear when the truth is understood that the Old Testament was written before God revealed Himself in the only begotten Son, and the New Testament was written subsequent to the incarnation. The two Testaments disclose the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. The Old Testament prepared for His manifestation. The New Testament is the product of that manifestation. The times were not ready for the revelation of the Trinity of Persons in the unity of the Godhead, until the fullness of time had come for God to send His Son into the world as Redeemer and the Holy Spirit as Sanctifier to apply accomplished redemption (I Pet. 1:2, 3).

The creating, governing, and redeeming God is the same God before and after the revelation of the Godhead in Jesus Christ. God is immutable. He cannot be changeable in nature any more than He can be unrighteous in His actions. God's nature is infinite, and infinity is subject to no change. God cannot change for the better, because He is absolutely perfect. He cannot change for the worse, because He is infinitely perfect. In the light of the doctrine of God's immutability, God is now what He ever was, the eternal and immutable "I AM." Since the three Persons are presently the one God, they must have been so from eternity.

# *There Is But One God*

W.E. Best

“Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one” (Deut. 6:4 NASB).

“Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him” (I Cor. 8:6 NASB).

The unity of God can be understood by reason, but the triunity of God is apprehended only by revelation. However, unity is not easily defined. In mathematics, unity denotes the number one or a quantity regarded as one. In literature, unity signifies harmony among the parts or elements of a work producing a single effect. The unity of God means that there is one God. This unity stands in opposition to the claim that there are many gods. Both Moses and Paul talked about the unity of the Divine essence (Deut. 6:4; I Cor. 8:6).

Since there is only one God, the essence of God is one and cannot be divided. We must state that there is a God, unless there is none, and that there is no God, unless there is one. The conclusion is that the nature of God is one; therefore, He is a unity in Himself. The nature of God denotes that His essence is that by which He is what He is—“I AM WHO I AM” (Ex. 3:14 NASB).

Moses stressed the unity of God: “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one” (Deut. 6:4 NASB). The name “Jehovah” (LORD) signifies essence, which was the great confession of Israel: “For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality, nor take a bribe” (Deut. 10:17 NASB). The doctrine of the Old and New Testaments is that one God is three Persons (Gen. 1:2, 26; John 1:1-3, 14, 18). To say that these three Persons is one Person is contradictory, but to say they all subsist in the one essence is not incongruous. If Christ and the Father were the same Person, Christ would have declared, “I and myself are one.” Instead, He said, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30 NASB). If the distinction between the Persons in the Godhead was not personal, Christ would have stated in John 14:16, “I myself will pray, and I myself will give you myself, that he who is not another, but is myself, may abide with you forever.” The Biblical doctrine of the Trinity implies that God is one; therefore, the Trinity of Christian faith indicates a distinction of Persons within one indivisible Divine nature.

Paul taught the unity of God (I Cor. 8:6 NASB). Idolaters have many gods; but Christians have only one God; therefore, they are monotheists. The one true God is entitled “Father” in this text. He is not Father in relation to any Person in the Godhead, but to His creatures. The expression “for us there is but one God” does

not exclude the Son. If by the omission of His name Jesus Christ is eliminated as one God with the Father, the Father is rejected as the one Lord with Jesus Christ, because His name is omitted in the next part of the verse: “and one Lord, Jesus Christ.”

Jesus Christ is not the Son of God by mediation. He is the Son of God by nature. The Lord Jesus Christ was the Son of God before His incarnation; therefore, He is the eternal Son. Both Father and Son coeternally exist. The Divine nature of Jesus Christ is not begotten, because the Divine essence neither begets nor is begotten. One Divine Person within that essence is begotten. More than one Person exists in the Divine essence, but there is only one essence. Since there is nothing that is not eternal in the Divine nature, Jesus Christ is the eternal Son. This is no more of a mystery than a Trinity in unity or a Trinity of Persons in the Godhead. Although there are no perfect finite analogies, the truth of the Trinity of Persons in the Godhead may be illustrated. As man is a mysterious combination of body, soul, and spirit in one person, the one God is a mysterious combination of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Paul distinguished Christian monotheism from the heathen concept of many gods. The title “Father” is ascribed to the one God, and the name “Lord” indicates the Deity of Jesus Christ. Relationship between the Father and the Son was not the burden of Paul’s message at that time. He was emphasizing the one true God, and He included the Lord Jesus in the one God. The apostle stressed that all things originated with the Father and came through the Son as the Agent of creation. As this was true in the creation of the heavens and the earth, it is also true in the new creation in Christ (II Cor. 4:6; 5:17).

The apostle differentiated many gods from the one true God of creation, providence, and redemption. In every age and in every nation, depraved men have sought and are seeking to make gods for their own selves. Some carve gods from stone, silver, gold, and wood. Others fashion gods from their own distorted minds. The gods of money, business, pleasure, lust, and luxury are prevalent today. As many assume the name of God, many adopt the name of Christ. Men seek to multiply gods, and they are multiplying christs. A christ representative of humanity is the spirit that characterizes this apostate age. Everyone desires his own christ, as each heathen carves his own god. Men invent all kinds of christs. They want him to be a social figure. Others are desirous of a christ without a sacrifice. They do not acknowledge any need for salvation from sin. Still others want a christ who is nothing more than a great hero, a super christ. All these concepts of Jesus Christ are heretical. (Study II Cor. 11:4.)

There is nothing in the context of I Corinthians 8:6 that would lead anyone to suppose that “Lord” is less Divine than “God.” The oneness of Deity is emphasized throughout Scripture. Jesus Christ said, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30 NASB). The word “one” is neuter, referring to one substance. The

masculine gender would have referred to one person. The Son and the Father were one not only in purpose, but also in nature and power. There is one Person of the Father, another Person of the Son, and another Person of the Spirit. The context proves that Jesus Christ was ascribing the safety of the sheep to the purpose and power of both the Father and Himself. When He said “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30 NASB), He proved His equality with the Father in purpose and power to protect the sheep. God was Father of the Corinthians in a redemptive sense. Through Christ, believers are separated from all things to God. Therefore, they are unto God in a special sense. They are presented to God as the fruit of Divine grace.

**The following are ways in which the unity of God should not be understood:**

1. The unity of God must not be understood in the sense of subordinationism. Arius (256-336) was a presbyter of the church of Alexandria. He taught that there is one supreme God and two subordinate ones. This teaching reduces Christ to less than the most High; therefore, it is subordinationism. Athanasius exposed Arius by saying, “To say that a father begets a child is one thing, but to say the Father begot the Son is another. The one is temporal, and the other is eternal.”

2. The unity of God must not be understood in the sense of modalism. Sebellius (first half of the third century) taught that God is but one person. Sebellius’ modalistic view states that there are not three Persons in the Godhead, but one who manifests himself in three different modes. To him, the Godhead is one individual monad—an indestructible unit. He said that Father, Son, and Spirit only express three different operations of God, or modes of Divine activity. This theory is expressed in the following manner: As Creator and Lawgiver, God is Father; as Redeemer, God is Son; as Inspirer and Bestower of grace, God is Spirit. Much contemporary theology and preaching are modalistic through preachers’ fear of being accused of tritheism.

The incarnation of Christ is the key to the truth of the Trinity and the answer to all errors against the Trinity. The incarnation demands a distinction between Father, Son, and Spirit. John Bunyan gave a good answer to modalism: “If in the Godhead there be but one, not three, then which of the three is God? If only one be God, the other two are nothing. If the three be but three different manifestations of the Godhead, then one manifestation sent another manifestation—one notion sent another notion—one distinction sent another distinction. Of this error these are the consequences, we are only to believe in notions and distinctions, when we believe in the Father and the Son; and so shall have no other heaven and glory than notions and distinctions can furnish.”

3. The unity of God must not be understood in the sense of tritheism. Tritheism was never a threat to the early church, but modalism and subordinationism were threats to the local aspect of the church. Tritheism transfers the enumeration

from persons to the substance, thus making three essences. To say that God is one and there are three Persons in the Godhead is not contradictory. A term may signify one in one sense and three in another. For instance, the sun is one body, but this one body manifests light, heat, and time. Again, man is one person; but in this one person are soul, spirit, and body.

**The following are ways in which the unity of God should be understood:**

1. There is a trinity of Persons in one God. It has been said that in reference to God, we may not discuss mere and simple unity, or mere and simple trinality; but we must discuss unity in trinality and trinality in unity. God is not one and three, but one in three. The one essence is simultaneously three Persons, and the three Persons are one essence. The Trinity is not a composition of one essence and three persons; neither is it an essence without three distinctions united. The instant we think of trinity, we think of unity. There cannot be three eternal beings or three self-existent gods.

2. The unity of God has no equal. It is the only unity of its kind. God is not merely one. He is the only One. He, unlike man, is not one of a species. God is a unity. He is not a unit, like a marble, which is marked by singleness. Mere singleness is incompatible with society. Sabellianism, which denies a distinction of Persons in the Godhead, describes God as a unit. Those who deny the eternity of Jesus Christ are guilty of the same heresy. In the Godhead is I, You, or the subject-object relationship of each to the others. A subject without an object could not experience love, because love is a social attribute. Therefore, the Godhead includes more than a single Person. Personality does not exist in isolation, but in association with other Persons of equal nature.

The one God condescended to reveal Himself. Such condescension transcends man's reasoning. How can man, without arrogant presumption, cherish the thought that he might find acceptance with God? Every hope of acceptance seems to be destroyed by God's greatness and man's insignificance and by God's holiness and man's impurity. How can God condescend to take notice of sinful man? How can such condescension ever harmonize with infinite purity, justice, and dignity?

God's condescension is answered only in His unmerited favor. While there is only one God, there are in the one essence three distinct Persons. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit each fulfill a separate department in the economy of human redemption. Planning, providing, and applying of redemption are all of grace. The reason for His condescension lies only with God.

# *God is Methodical*

W.E. Best

“The LORD of hosts has sworn saying, Surely, just as I have intended so it has happened, and just as I have planned so it will stand” (Is. 14:24 NASB).

“Declaring the end from the beginning And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure” (Is. 46:10 NASB).

“The LORD nullifies the counsel of the nations; He frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the LORD stands forever, The plans of His heart from generation to generation” (Ps. 33:10, 11 NASB).

“Many are the plans in a man’s heart, But the counsel of the LORD, it will stand” (Prov. 19:21 NASB).

“There is no wisdom and no understanding And no counsel against the LORD” (Prov. 21:30 NASB).

“The anger of the LORD will not turn back Until He has performed and carried out the purposes of His heart; In the last days you will clearly understand it” (Jer. 23:20 NASB).

“Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass, Unless the LORD has commanded it” (Lam. 3:37 NASB).

“To do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur” (Acts 4:28 NASB).

“He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him” (Eph. 1:9 NASB).

“This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph. 3:11 NASB).

Many years before the bottom fell out of civilization, we heard much about the inevitability of progress. The only thing that seems unavoidable now is destruction. When the wiseheads of the twentieth century look for dungeons in which to hide from their own inventions, they evidence that the only progress made is in reverse. Instead of creating a millennium, modern civilization is contriving a madhouse. Present day conditions should cause professing Christendom to lead the way in a new examination of God’s sovereignty.



Although alarming cries are heard, God is not alarmed. Population explosion, air and water pollution, and ecological imbalance are not taking God by surprise. All things are moving in accordance with His purpose; therefore, they are under His immediate control. Warnings about communism, totalitarianism, Y2K, etc., do not cause God to be apprehensive. The omniscient God has full knowledge of human activities. Men could accomplish nothing without God granting them power (John 19:11; Rom. 13:1). Although they are unaware of it, men are accomplishing God's purpose in the world. They are ruled by a power behind their manifested power. The Person more than human is behind all who are simply human.

God is in full control of every situation. He sits supreme. By His determination of purpose, He makes even those things opposed to Him serve His purpose. The sovereign God harnesses Satan's wicked schemes to the wheel of His unchangeable purpose. An example is found in Joseph's answer to his brethren: "...Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive" (Gen. 50:19-20 NASB).

Many acknowledge the truth of prescience (foreknowledge), but they deny the Biblical truth of foreordination. When his brethren sold Joseph, he was in the place God appointed. His brethren designed their act for evil, but God ordained it for the good of many people. The predetermined death of Jesus Christ reveals the truth of foreordination: "This Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death" (Acts 2:23 NASB). No matter what man may devise, God executes His own purpose: "Many are the plans in a man's heart, But the counsel of the LORD, it will stand" (Prov. 19:21 NASB). "The plans of the heart belong to man, But the answer of the tongue is from the LORD" (Prov. 16:1 NASB). "But you have exalted yourself against the Lord of heaven...But the God in whose hand are your life-breath and your ways, you have not glorified" (Dan. 5:23 NASB).

The word "decree" is a technical term adopted by men to convey a number of ideas by a single term. A decree is a determination, rule, or an edict. It is an order by one with supreme authority who decides what should be done. God's purpose is eternal because He is eternal. An alteration in the Divine purpose would necessitate an alteration in the Divine mind, which would suppose a changeable God. God's immutability exposes the heresy of supposing that His will can be altered or changed. God's purpose and the purposes of men differ. Man's purposes are distinct from himself, but God's purpose is not distinct from Himself.

Since God has one all-inclusive plan, the term "decree of God" is used in the singular. God sees all things simultaneously. He calls those things that are not as though they were (Rom. 4:17). For the convenience of our finite minds, the

features of God's eternal purpose may be called "the decrees of God." However, we must never make the mistake of thinking that the infinite understanding of God advances by steps. With God, there is one immutable purpose embracing in itself every detail, even to the falling of a sparrow and the number of hairs on a person's head (Matt. 10:29, 30). God's eternal purpose is the Divine understanding from all eternity: "SAYS THE LORD, WHO MAKES THESE THINGS KNOWN FROM OF OLD" (Acts 15:18 NASB). "Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel And His Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: I am the first and I am the last, And there is no God besides Me. And who is like Me? Let him proclaim and declare it; Yes, let him recount it to Me in order, From the time that I established the ancient nation. And let them declare to them the things that are coming And the events that are going to take place" (Is. 44:6, 7 NASB).

God's purpose is eternally formed. He executes it in time. God intuitively knows all the parts of His purpose. These parts are independent of any reasoning process. On the other hand, the execution of the parts of God's purpose is successive. For example, the earthly mission of Jesus Christ was seen in one conception because God is in one mind (Job 23:13). However, the thirty-three year interval of His life on earth was included in the execution of God's purpose.

Many parts to God's purpose were manifested between the birth and death of Jesus Christ. Of the Lord's death, Peter said, "For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you" (I Pet. 1:20 NASB). Things successive to men are not successive to God. Future things in time do not coexist with God, but God coexists with them. Since God is eternal, there is no time with Him. Eternality does not denote only pre-temporal. It also signifies co-temporal and post-temporal. As the present "I AM" of the Divine excellence fills heaven and earth, the present "now" of Divine duration comprehends all time and eternity. The purpose of God accompanies, follows, and precedes its fulfillment. God's purpose cannot be regarded as a lifeless foreordination. It is as alive and relevant today as it was yesterday and will be tomorrow.

God's purpose carries with it many parts; but like His perfection, in itself it is one and supreme. God has many attributes, but there is only one God. There are many parts to God's eternal purpose, but He has only one purpose. As God reveals Himself through His many attributes, He manifests His purpose in many parts. From man's perspective, God's purpose covers everything from eternity past, through time, and into eternity future. Eternity and time cannot be compared with two parallel lines, one of which is shorter and exists for a while and the other longer and extends indefinitely. Eternity is the unchangeable center that sends out rays to cover the whole contour of time. Time, like a rainbow, disappears into eternity at both ends. We can imagine neither a beginning nor an ending to time. During the period that men call time, the many parts of God's purpose are executed.

## **Consider the following things concerning God's purpose:**

### **FIRST—God's purpose is eternal (Eph. 3:11).**

1. God is in one mind (Job 23:13). As there are many pages but one book, there are many parts to God's plan but one purpose. In all the acts of providence, God has a fixed and settled purpose. He neither creates nor sustains His creatures without a purpose: "For He performs what is appointed for me... (Job 23:14 NASB). (Study Rom. 8:28; II Tim. 1:9; Acts 26:16.)
2. God's one mind is eternally the same. Whatever God purposes, He eternally purposed. God's determinate counsel underlies all His acts. He can have no new thought or intention any more than there can be a new God. God is eternally the same (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8). He saw all His work brought to completion before He began it: "SAYS THE LORD, WHO MAKES THESE THINGS KNOWN FROM OF OLD" (Acts 15:18 NASB). "...His works were finished from the foundation of the world" (Heb. 4:3b NASB).
3. All things are eternally present to God. Things that are future to men are present to God. He is eternal. There is no time with Him. With God, all things simultaneously have both a known and a real existence. Although real things that are future do not coexist with God, He coexists with them. The Divine duration must be considered as wholly permanent and ever present. God's eternity is not capable of division into parts any more than the Divine existence itself.

### **SECOND—God's purpose is infallible.**

1. Nothing can turn God (Job 23:13). God's great design cannot be overthrown. His purpose was not thrown out of order by the fall, neither was the death of Jesus Christ a Divine expedient (Rom. 5:12; I Cor. 15:22; Acts 2:23; 4:28). At the consummation, the picture will be exactly as God decreed it. The dark strokes of the brush in God's providential execution of His plan will be overshadowed by the glorious consummation of His eternal purpose.
2. God's immutability protects His purpose (Mal. 3:6; James 1:17). God's purpose in both the incarnate Word and the written word will be accomplished.

God's purpose in Christ will be fulfilled. As all the prophecies concerning the first advent of Christ have been fulfilled, the prophecies relating to His second advent will be fulfilled. Although the Devil through Herod tried to destroy Jesus Christ when He came the first time, he failed in his attempts: "And the Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him" (Luke 2:40 NASB). "And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:52 NASB). "...for those who sought the Child's life are dead" (Matt. 2:20b NASB).

All who try to run counter to God's purpose are at the same time fulfilling a minute part of that purpose. Little did proud Rome know, cultured Greece imagine, religious Israel suspect, and poor Nazareth dream that from the little village of Nazareth the greatest good known to mankind would come. The fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form in Jesus Christ (Col. 2:9).

God's written word will not return void: "For as the rain and snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth, And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; So shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it" (Is. 55:10, 11 NASB). Herod, who sought to destroy Christ, died; but the Lord Jesus grew and waxed strong. Another Herod tried to thwart God's message. He also died, but God's message lives on: "And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died. But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied" (Acts 12:23, 24 NASB).

3. God receives glory as He works out His purpose. As the rain and the snow may become a curse instead of a blessing, God's word may harden and condemn instead of saving: "But thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things" (II Cor. 2:14-16 NASB). God always leads His own to triumph in Christ. They are a fragrant odor of Christ among the ones being saved and among the ones perishing. That which is a fragrant odor to one person is a deadly stench to another. God receives glory from both election and reprobation.

**The following are contrasts between the ones being saved and the ones perishing:**

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|--|--|
| (1) Those being saved are elected (Eph. 1:4).                        | (1) The reprobated are the non-elect (Rom. 9:13).  |
| (2) The vessels of honor are the elect (Rom. 9:21).                  | (2) The vessels of dishonor are the non-elect (Rom. 9:21).                               |
| (3) God loves the chosen (Rom. 9:13).                                | (3) God hates the non-chosen (Rom. 9:13).  |
| (4) God keeps the chosen until they are effectually called (Jude 1). | (4) God puts in the minds of the non-chosen to fulfill His purpose (Rev. 17:17).         |
| (5) God finishes what He began in the elect (Phil. 1:6).             | (5) God gives the non-chosen the operation of error to believe the lie (II Thess. 2:11). |

Since Paul's message of II Corinthians 2 was being denied, he avoided any reference to himself in victory. The victory was in Christ. A person may be humanly energetic without being Divinely energized. Paul closed his argument in verse 17 by emphasizing that he was not peddling God's message for profit or adulterating it for popularity.

### **THIRD—God purposed what His soul desired.**

1. The depraved mind supposes that God acts arbitrarily in doing what He pleases. That mind does not know that God is His own law and standard.
2. God is lawful to do what He pleases: "Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous" (Matt. 20:15 NASB). "Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were created" (Rev. 4:11 NASB).
3. In responses to the proclamation of God's purpose, decree, predestination, election, reprobation, or sovereignty, depraved men accuse God of arbitrariness. The characterization of arbitrariness becomes known in the actions of an individual who decides or chooses without taking into account any standard or law above him. Human arbitrariness is always without a standard. In it, an individual thinks his decision is above every standard. For this reason, man's mode of thinking about arbitrariness is objectionable.

Scriptural testimony proves that God's sovereignty rules out and condemns all arbitrariness by His absolute sovereignty in all things. There is no standard or law above God by which His sovereignty can be limited, because there is no law or standard that can call God to account. He is His own standard or law.

Paul closed the doctrinal section of Romans by giving the God of our deliverance the honor He alone deserves: "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen" (Rom. 11:33-36 NASB). The word "counselor" in verse 34 is the Greek word *sumboulos*. This compound noun is made up of the preposition *sun*, which means with, and *boule*, which means plan or decision—one who shares his counsel based on decision, or plan. This sharing is impossible for man with reference to God. Due to this truth, some do not hesitate to speak of divine arbitrariness. However, God is not lawless. He is a law to Himself.

# *God's Changing Providence--Part 1*

W.E. Best  
(Eccl. 3:1-12)

Does the average professing Christian speak of God's providence only when he has been blessed physically, monetarily, spiritually, etc.? Does he ever attribute disadvantages, suffering, adversity, etc., to God's blessing in providence? Biblical characters were tested by God's providence and through it received blessing. The following are a few of them: Job was deprived of all he had, but his latter end was better than his beginning (Job 42:12). Ahab and Jezebel persecuted Elijah. He was accused of being a troublemaker, but he remained faithful in proclaiming God's word. God revealed Himself through miracles that He enabled Elijah to perform (I Kings 18:17-46). Shimei cursed David, but in God's providence David was not deterred (II Sam. 16). Asaph suffered adversity and was jealous of the wicked until he saw their latter end (Ps. 73). John the Baptist introduced the Savior, but he was beheaded (Matt. 14). Paul was falsely accused (Acts 24) suffered imprisonment, etc.; nevertheless, he was used of the Lord more than any of the other apostles.

Providence is purpose in execution. There is a time for the execution of each aspect of God's purpose. Time is finite duration in which God's eternal purpose will be fulfilled. Time, which began with creation, will be completed when God's purpose regarding His creation and its inhabitants is fulfilled. When God's purpose is fulfilled, finite duration will cease. Time never has been in eternity, and it will not go into eternity. Eternity is an eternal now, but we are living in a finite duration.

Solomon recorded the upside and downside of God's providence: "THERE is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven—A time to give birth, and a time to die; A time to plant, and a time to uproot what is planted. A time to kill, and a time to heal; A time to tear down, and a time to build up. A time to weep, and a time to laugh; A time to mourn, and a time to dance. A time to throw stones, and a time to gather stones; A time to embrace, and a time to shun embracing. A time to search, and a time to give up as lost; A time to keep, and a time to throw away. A time to tear apart, and a time to sew together; A time to be silent, and a time to speak. A time to love, and a time to hate; A time for war, and a time for peace. What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils? I have seen the task which God has given the sons of men with which to occupy themselves. He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning to the end. I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one's lifetime; moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor—it is the gift of God. I know that everything God does will remain forever;

there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take from it, for God has so worked that men should fear Him”(Eccl. 3:1-15 NASB).

Who governs the universe? Who directs its course? Once started, does it direct itself? The real Ruler of the universe generally and over His people specifically is the sovereign God. He controls not only the universe, but also the assembly He is continuing to build. He has not abdicated His throne.

Everything that occurs in time was purposed in eternity. The time for the execution of God’s eternal purpose is effectuated by God’s providence. There is an appointed time for everything connected with mankind’s practical life in this world. There is also an appointed time for everything connected with the spiritual life of God’s elect from among mankind.

The Savior was born at God’s appointed time (Gal. 4:4-6). That time was preceded by 4,000 years of preparation. During the ministry of our Lord, He told His followers that the time of His death had not yet arrived (John 8:20; 16:25). Christ’s last words to His own should be carefully scrutinized (John 13-17). Matthew recorded that Christ’s soul was under the load of anticipated eminent death, as Jesus Christ alone could know it (Matt. 26). Death had not at that time lost its sting. When Christ said His time was at hand (Matt. 26:18), He knew Peter needed a lesson concerning self-confidence (vv. 33-35). Peter had the humbling experience of having his sin and restoration predicted by the Lord.

Consider the difference between Christ and the Christian martyr. The Father forsook Christ, but the Christian martyr had the Father’s presence. Christ had the wrath of God imputed to Him on behalf of all the elect, but the Christian martyr had the comfort of God’s love that had been shed abroad in his heart. Christ had the weight of all the sins of all the elect on Him, but the believing martyr was released from the weight of his own sins.

There was a time for sealing the prophecy given to Daniel (Dan. 12:4). However, the time for fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy, which was given to John, is unsealed (Rev. 1:3; 22:10). That which was sealed to the prophet Daniel is now opened for our inspection. The information contained in Revelation is for our profit and learning. The time is near for confirmation of the covenant spoken of in Daniel 9:27.

Solomon, the author of Ecclesiastes, spoke of an appointed time for everything connected with man’s practical life (Eccl. 3:1-15). The word “Ecclesiastes” means “the preacher.” The preacher was Solomon, whose wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the sons of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt [Egypt typifies the world]. Wisdom is not the same as talent, ability, sagacity, sense, or prudence. It is more rare than a high order of genius. It is that exercise of reason into which the heart enters, a structure of the understanding rising out of one’s spiritual nature (I Cor. 2:11-14; I John).

Only the regenerated person can understand spiritual things. Four things are essential before anyone can arrive at a saving knowledge of truth: (1) Divine illumination is necessary in order to understand. Without light no one can see. (2) God-given faith in the heart is essential to believing. (3) Godly fear must be in the conscience. Without fear no one can reverence God. (4) Heavenly love must be in the affections. Without agape love no one can embrace Jesus Christ who is truth incarnate.

The East was famous for its wisdom (I Kings 4). The wise men of Matthew 2 were wise indeed. They turned their backs on the seat of human wisdom and came to bow before Him who is the wisdom of God (I Cor. 1:24). They came from afar to worship and give. True wisdom does not make unbelievers. Who gave the wise men the disposition of heart and mind to come to Jerusalem and not to Bethlehem? The following are some characteristics of true wisdom: (1) It recognizes in the humble infant the Christ the Son of the living God who was born King of the Jews. (2) It worships Christ, not His mother. The order in Matthew 2 is the young Child and His mother, not the mother and the young Child. (3) True wisdom knows that no earthly potentate is ever born a king, but Jesus Christ was born King. (4) It leads not only to worship but also giving. (5) This wisdom's confession is given in Matthew 2:11—"And they came into the house and saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell down and worshipped Him; and opening their treasures they presented to Him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh" (NASB).

Christ's star guided the wise men to the house where Jesus Christ was. He was in neither Bethlehem nor a stable. The following sequence of events proves the time was not immediately after the Lord's birth: (1) Upon the departure of the wise men from the house, Joseph was told to take the Child and His mother and flee into Egypt (Matt. 2:13-15). (2) Six weeks after the birth of Christ, Mary and Joseph were in Jerusalem (Luke 2:22-24). This is the fulfillment of Leviticus 12:1-3. (3) Immediately after that event, Mary and Joseph returned to their city of Nazareth (Luke 2:39). The order of these occurrences proves the wise men could not have gone into Egypt until several weeks after Christ's birth. Undoubtedly, Mary and Joseph were not living in Bethlehem when the wise men came. This spoils all those Christmas cards that portray the Magi at the stable in Bethlehem.

Solomon's message in Ecclesiastes describes the insufficiency of human wisdom. In Proverbs, he set forth the sufficiency of Divine wisdom. Ecclesiastes portrays mankind under the sun, not in the Son. The reason for the dissatisfaction portrayed in Ecclesiastes is that it sets forth human wisdom. The expression "under the sun" is used twenty-nine times in the twelve chapters. The word "vanity" is used thirty-seven times. The statement "upon the earth" is used seven times, and the statement "under the heaven" is used three times.

Ecclesiastes presents the world at its best without any satisfaction. Satisfaction is only in loving and serving God, and no one can love and serve Him apart from



grace. Satisfaction is impossible apart from the new birth. The covenant title of “Jehovah” is not found in Ecclesiastes. The name “God” appears, but not as the covenant God, because the book shows man in relation to his Creator under the sun.

Two peoples are described in both the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament reveals that all people without exception have a Creator relationship and that the chosen have a covenant relationship. The covenant relationship taught in the Old Testament had two parts—a national relationship and a chosen spiritual group of people within that national relationship. Distinction must be made between a chosen nation and a chosen people within that chosen nation. People within the chosen nation constitute a re-creation within a creation. The same principle is taught in the New Testament. Christians are not merely under the sun. We are above the sun because we have been accepted in the Son of God. Therefore, we have been raised up to sit together with Christ in the heavenlies (Eph. 2:6).

The book of Ecclesiastes has three divisions: (1) The first is the problem—What advantage is man’s work under the sun? (1:1-3). (2) The second is the experiment—Where is the satisfaction in science (1:4-11), wisdom (1:12-18), pleasure (2:1-11), materialism (2:12-26), fatalism (3:1-15), deism (3:16-4:16), religion (5:1-8), wealth (5:9-6:12), or morality (7:1-12:12)? (3) The third is the conclusion—“The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil” (12:13, 14 NASB).

The language of man under the sun is “all is vanity” because it refers to all earthly and worldly things. Labor in Christ is not dissatisfying. Therefore, vanity is with reference to the sin and folly of man. The things God created are not in themselves vain, but they become vain when they are not used for God’s glory. Man in his fallen nature misuses everything that is pure.

## *God's Changing Providence--Part 2*

W.E. Best  
(Eccl. 3:1-15)

Confusion over the Biblical doctrine of providence has become a stone of stumbling to this religious generation. People are asking where one point of purpose is in the radically ungarnished life of our times. How can the terrors of our time with their sufferings, corruptions, immoralities, and injustices be a reflection of God's guidance or protection? What is the cause of our crisis? The answer is found in Romans 1:18-32, John 19:10-11, and II Thessalonians 2:11. The cause of our present crisis is men's preaching grace without judgment, love without justice, and forgiveness without regeneration. God in His providence has given up many religionists, or He is sending them a working of error for them to believe the lie (II Thess. 2:11).

Christians love to reflect on God's grace, but they are hesitant to talk about God's providential dealings in judgment with them. God gives the promises, and providence provides for their fulfillment. In His providence, God manages the most minute and ordinary affairs of the Christian's life. All things work together for the good of God's people (Rom. 8:28).

Foes make us look to God for strength and protection in time of need. We may not see the need David experienced, but we face similar wretched social conditions. In his need, David experienced the blessed exercises of praying, trusting, and resolving. Christians experience spiritual exercises in their pilgrimage on earth.

David compared his enemies with lions: "My soul is among lions..." (Ps. 57:4 NASB). This reminds us of Paul's last words before his execution: "...I was delivered out of the lion's mouth" (II Tim. 4:17 NASB). Scripture mentions deliverance from literal lions, as in the case of Daniel (Heb. 11:33). The lion refers figuratively to the Devil, who as our adversary goes about as a roaring lion seeking someone he may devour (I Pet. 5:8). Lions are symbolical of present deplorable conditions. Although Christians reside in these despicable immoral conditions, they have contentment. David's heart was prepared; therefore, he was content while enduring such affliction: "BE gracious to me, O God, be gracious to me, For my soul takes refuge in Thee; And in the shadow of Thy wings I will take refuge, Until destruction passes by. I will cry to God Most High, To God who accomplishes all things for me. He will send from heaven and save me; He reproaches him who tramples upon me. Selah. God will send forth His lovingkindness and His truth. My soul is among lions; I must lie among those who breathe forth fire, Even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, And their tongue a sharp sword. Be exalted above the heavens, O God; Let thy glory be above all the earth. They have prepared a net for my steps; My soul is bowed down; They dug a pit before me; They themselves have fallen into the

midst of it. Selah. My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises!" (Ps. 57:1-7 NASB).

According to Ecclesiastes, man in himself cannot transcend his orb under the sun. Therefore, his wisdom is nothing more than human political science. That science can do no more than recognize the vanity of man's effort to turn the earth into a heaven without God. Man cannot make the crooked straight or the defective perfect (Eccl. 1:13, 17, 18). Ecclesiastes portrays the heart as too large for the object. Consequently, there is no satisfaction under the sun. In contrast, the Song of Solomon reveals the Object (our Beloved) as too large for the heart. All eternity will be required to know Jesus Christ as He is.

Solomon concluded that there is nothing new under the sun (Eccl. 1:8-10). New colors are only old ones duly mixed. New fashions are modified old ones. New automobiles are redesigned old ones. The word "new" should be viewed relatively instead of absolutely. Men under the sun hunt new nothings, and they lose themselves in the chase.

Paul's message to the Athenians in Acts 17 was addressed to the same kind of people to whom Solomon preached. All the Athenians and strangers visiting Athens spent their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new. The so-called new idea is frequently only a revised old error. History teaches that progress is as likely to consist in getting back to old standards as in creating new ones. The restlessness of people in general displays the craving for new things. The majority does not like the old doctrines that have wrought glorious changes for the better in the realm of morals. They want something new, and the minister who gratifies them is sure to have a large following. We do not need a new message, but our minds need to be renewed to the old message. We need to look deeper into the old message that has been committed to our trust and return to the ancient paths: "Thus says the LORD, Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, Where the good way is, and walk in it; And you shall find rest for your souls..." (Jer. 6:16 NASB).

Consider the word "new" in an absolute sense. The Christian is a new creature (Gal. 6:15; II Cor. 5:17). He has been given a new commandment (John 13:34; I John 2:8). He is under a new covenant (Jer. 33; Heb. 8). He has been given a new spirit (Ezek. 36:27). He has a new way—Jesus Christ is the new and living way (Heb. 10:20). The believer is assured of a new name (Rev. 2:17; 3:12). He is promised a new body (Phil. 3:21). He will have a new mansion (John 14:2). He will be living in a new environment (Rom. 8:19-23; Rev. 21:5).

Man's dissatisfaction is the result of his depravity: "Behold, I have found only this, that God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices" (Eccl. 7:29 NASB). Depravity is not total inability but total spiritual inability. The totality has reference to man's motive, not his works. Adam was free to do either good or evil. His descendants are free to do only evil. Fallen men are spiritually dead

(Eph. 2:1). Their understanding has been darkened (Eph. 4:18; I Cor. 2:14). They are physically mortal (Heb. 9:27). The redeemed and regenerated are free to do well, but they also have some freedom to do evil. Regenerated men are spiritually alive (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 2:4-10). They are renewed in mind (Eph. 1:18; Rom. 12:2). They are promised a glorified body (I Cor. 15; II Cor. 5:8; I John 3:2). Redeemed men in heaven are free to do only good. Depraved men on earth may do good on a horizontal anthropological plane: "And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same" (Luke 6:33 NASB). Regenerated men alone can do well on a vertical plane because faith is given by the Father, channeled through the Son, and made effective through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Consider the following questions and their answers: (1) How can man be responsible to do what he cannot do? Man was the cause of his own depravity. (2) Why does God command man to do what he cannot do? He does so because God's requirement, not man's ability, is the measure of man's duty. (3) What is the correct balance between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility? Man's depraved condition is his own fault. Man's salvation is by God's grace. The first is entirely of man. The second is entirely of God. (4) How does depraved man try to cover his sins? He attempts to cover his transgression by blaming God.

The third chapter of Ecclesiastes begins with an appointed time for everything and an appointed time for every event under heaven. This was written in the interest of God's hand controlling and executing the clock of His eternal purpose. Nothing can be added to or taken from God's purpose. God is never surprised. Nothing is either new or old to Him. He acts in the eternal now. All things—future, present, and past—are under His all-seeing eye. That which has been is now, and that which is to come has already come. It is impossible for us to presently understand all about God's management of His clock, which measures all events both great and small. Nothing is too large and nothing too small for God. Some rulers may consider themselves absolute and unaccountable to any person, but God overrules them: "THE king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes" (Prov. 21:1 NASB).

Those so captivated by the environment and endangered species must be warned. Furthermore, all who name the name of Jesus Christ should be warned. We must never be guilty of asking God why He permits what He does. Solomon's statement in Proverbs 21:1 gives the answer. Man will not find out the work God has done from the beginning to the end. God does what He does and permits what He permits according to His eternal purpose.

God executes His eternal purpose by providence in time. He fulfills His purpose for everyone: "I will cry to God Most High, To God who accomplishes all things for me" (Ps. 57:2 NASB). The apostle Paul recognized that God works in providence to fulfill His purpose for everyone and everything: "And we have known [perfect active indicative of oida, which means we have permanently

known] that all things [*panta*, pronominal adjective accusative case neuter gender and plural number, which means every kind of thing whether prosperity, adversity, joy, or sorrow] are working together [present active indicative of *sunergeo*] for good, to the ones loving [present active participle of *agapeo*] God to the ones being called [present active participle of *kaleo*] according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28—translation). This verse teaches that God controls all things of circumstances. God bestows all things of blessing: “Who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up on behalf of us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (Rom. 8:32—translation). God overpowers all things of suffering: “But in all these things we are more than conquerors through the One having loved us” (Rom. 8:37—translation).

Romans 8:28 amplifies Psalm 57:2—“I will cry to God Most High, to God who fulfills His purpose for me” (Owen). Contrast Jacob’s rash cry “...all these things are against me” (Gen. 42:36 NASB) with Romans 8:28. God controls these things by working them together for our good. Does the good of Romans 8:28 refer to our physical health, ease, and comfort, or does it apply to our eternal instead of our temporal good? Are our obedience and disobedience in God’s providence? Is our ultimate good before us? The Holy Spirit and the manifold providence of God (all things) work on behalf of the elect (Rom. 8:26-28).

There are five aorist active verbs in Romans 8:29-30—foreknew, predestined, called, justified, and glorified. Anyone not in one of these is not in any. God’s purpose in Romans 8:28 is a closed purpose. Purpose, foreknowledge, and predestination occupy the affection of God’s heart. Calling, justification, and glorification engage His activities on behalf of the elect. The Greek word *kai* is not used in verse 29 as an ordinary connective (and). It is used as an adverb. This refutes the teaching that election is based on foreknowledge. The text does not state that God knew they would believe, but that He foreknew them and predestined them to be conformed to the image of His Son.

Jesus Christ will continue finishing every stage of the Christian life until the final completion at glorification in the day of Christ: “Being permanently persuaded [perfect active participle of *peitho*, which means to persuade or convince] of this very thing, that the One who began a good work in you [this is subjective; Paul is dealing with what takes place in the heart of an individual] shall finish [progressive future active indicative of *epiteleo*, which means to accomplish, complete, or bring to an end] it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6—translation). Here is God’s providence in His elect.

Glorification is God’s conclusion of everything. Man is having his day, but Jesus Christ is having and will have His day. Christ presently has all power in heaven and on earth. However, the Son of Man will in His day openly exercise His power and outwardly manifest His exaltation. He will visibly bring all things into subjection to Himself and on earth complete all that He promised.

God's Sabbath, the first one observed by God on the seventh day when He rested from His creating activity, was the Sabbath of an accomplished purpose. Therefore, He saw that the work was very good. What assurance! As every effect has a cause, true faith is the gift of God by the work of the Holy Spirit on the foundation of Christ's redemptive work. Philippians 1:6 records three things of importance: (1) God is at work on behalf of the elect. (2) They are assured that He is continuing to complete what He started. (3) They are promised the work's completion or absolute perfection. He is fulfilling His purpose. The first day of creation guaranteed the five following days and the day of rest, which crowned the week. Likewise, the initial work of grace in the hearts of the elect guarantees God's subsequent progressive work in them until their perfection in glorification in the kingdom, which will crown all of God's work.

"Church" members who claim they have nothing for which to live are only "church" members. They do not know the first thing about grace. The hunger for God's truth by assembly members who are truly saved will never be satisfied until they have been schooled in the eternal truths of Romans 8. Paul climaxed the doctrinal section of Romans with Romans 11:36—"For from [*ek*, ablative of source] Him and through [*dia*, ablative of agency] Him and to [*eis*, accusative of goal] Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen" (NASB). No man of God wants any human glory. Paul magnified God's absolute sovereignty. Men reprehend what they do not comprehend, or they actually make light of what they do not understand. In this manner, they exchange God's excellence for their depraved thoughts and speeches because they do not know the One about whom they speak. Man's understanding is not the measure of God's excellence. Furthermore, God's freedom is absolute because His sovereignty is absolute. He is in control and directs all things.

God not only created the universe, but He also sustains it by providing what is needed to keep it going. This providing is providence. Since the universe did not create itself, it is not self-sustaining: "All things have been created [perfect passive indicative of *ktidzo*] by [ablative of agency] and for [*eis*, accusative of goal or object] Him; and He is before all things and all things have held together" (Col. 1:16, 17—translation). Some Greek theologians believe *ktidzo* is in the middle voice, but that will not work. It is in the passive voice. He upholds all things by the word of His power (Heb. 1:3). God is continually involved in His creation. He is not an absent landlord or a balcony observer.

Some say that sustaining and preserving all things suggests continuous creation. However, creation is first, and providence is second. As to the animate universe, God gives to all life, breath, and all things (Acts 17:25). In Him we are living, being moved, and existing (Acts 17:28). Since the verbs are present tense, providence is now. Every breath drawn is dependent on God. The Lord preserves man and beast (Ps. 36:6). He gives life to all of them (Neh. 9:6).

God created nature. It is the visible universe. It is opposite to the spiritual universe. The term “mother nature” should never be used except in ridicule. That concept is the same as the concept of mother earth, which is pantheistic (a heretical notion that all is God and God is female). God is not nature, and He is not a female goddess.

God created mathematics, physics, chemistry, all the laws involved in them, gravity, thermodynamics, quantum physics, and all the rest. They do not exist as laws in and of themselves any more than the things of the universe are self-existent. Creation has order because God is a God of order (I Cor. 14:40). This truth gave rise to modern science, beginning with Isaac Newton. Before then, nature was seen only as chance or fate. The Muslims believe in providence, but their belief is fatalistic. God has power over both the animate (possessing life) and inanimate (lifeless). He who created the universe now governs it and is constantly at work maintaining all things in order and preparing them according to His eternal purpose. God reminds us that we cannot exist a moment in time unless He supports us. This universal control is none other than providence.

God performs His work of providence in His creatures by causing them to serve His goodness, justice, and judgment when He desires to help His servants, punish the wicked, try the patience of the faithful, or chastise His own paternally. That which the heathen ignorantly assign to chance or fate Christians attribute to Divine providence. Creatures are only second causes that God uses to accomplish His eternal purpose. He accomplishes His purpose through men and demons. He used the Egyptians to afflict His people, Israel, and later raised up the Assyrians as a scourge for Israel’s shortcomings. God employed the Devil to harass Saul (I Sam. 16:14), deceive Ahab (I Kings 22:22), pass judgment on the wicked when need be, or test the faithful as He did in the lives of Job, Peter, and others.

Satan and the heathen are not instruments of God to the extent that they are devoid of power to act for themselves. God does not work through sinful men as He would a stone or an inanimate object. His working through sinful men does not prevent them from acting in their own capacity. By removing all restraint, God allows wicked men to work according to their depraved natures (Rom. 1; II Thess. 2). When Job learned of his loss, he recognized that God had visited him. However, he was also aware that Satan prepared the stew in which he found himself. Furthermore, he did not excuse the Devil, because the affliction came from God through the Devil. Job was able by the grace of God to make proper distinctions.

# *God's Changing Providence--Part 3*

W.E. Best

(Jer. 1:4-10; Luke 1:12-16; Gal. 1:13-16)

Jeremiah, John the Baptist, and Paul had something in common. God knew Jeremiah before he was formed in the womb (Jer. 1:4-10). John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit while in his mother's womb (Luke 1:12-16). Paul was set apart from his mother's womb (Gal. 1:13-16). God knows all men before they are formed in the womb.

The Lord knew Jeremiah before he was formed in the womb: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, And before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations" (Jer. 1:5 NASB). Jeremiah's name means "Jehovah will send forth." He was a tenderhearted man chosen by God to deliver a stern message of judgment. Therefore, he carried on a dangerous ministry. His people were besieged, captured, and enslaved. In return for his faithfulness, the prophet received nothing but threatening, persecution, and ultimately death. When he looked at his circumstances caused by God's providence, he wanted to flee. On the contrary, when he looked to God, he was satisfied with his lot in life. (Study Jer. 17.) The prophet was aware of the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of the human heart. A puritan who was facing martyrdom was also cognizant of this truth, and he wrote to his wife, "Take heed of the Devil and the world, but especially of your own heart." He explained, "When we understand the wickedness of our own hearts, to some degree, we will never look on the lewd life of another person without crying, Lord, have mercy on me, for in my vile heart remains that sin which, without restraining grace, I, too, would commit."

John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit while in his mother's womb: "...he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, while yet in his mother's womb" (Luke 1:15 NASB). No one was greater in the eyes of the Lord than His forerunner (Matt. 11:11). What is greatness? Reference to King Herod's greatness is recorded in the first chapter of Luke. The Bible does not use the word "great" to describe King Herod, but secular history refers to him as Alexander the Great. The Greek word mega means either large or great. Some would associate greatness with power, others with courage, and some with eloquence. More would associate it with wealth. However, greatness is more than any of these. Christ said that John the Baptist was the greatest born of women until His time. John was the first person recorded to be born of woman. John was a poor man living in the wilderness. His apparel was made of camel's hair. He introduced the Lord Jesus. This great man was beheaded. This is a strange kind of greatness. A great man is one who can be satisfied with nothing less than that which is Scripturally correct. He is content to count all things loss to attain a spiritual aim and fight for



it against all enemies. He deems truth the breath of life and makes its pursuit his daily labor. This is a great man.

Paul was separated from his mother's womb: "...He who had set me apart, even from my mother's womb, and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him..." (Gal. 1:15, 16 NASB). Although Paul was set apart before he was born, he was not in the same class with Jeremiah because he was for a long time a religious Pharisee. Furthermore, he could not relate with John the Baptist on that particular point because John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb.

Like Jeremiah and John the Baptist, Paul proved that no man could be a Christian without being a controversialist. In the Epistle to the Romans, Paul presented the flesh in its irreligious state (Rom. 1:18-32; 3:9-18). In Galatians, he described the same flesh in a religious cloak (Gal. 4). The truth of God should be revealed objectively to all (Matt. 28:19, 20), subjectively by the sovereign Spirit in the elect (Gal. 1:15, 16), and reflectively through the chosen ones (Matt. 5:16). Objective and subjective revelations differ: (1) Although both proceed from God, one is in a general way. The other is particular by special grace. (2) One is by outward things in the means by which they are wrought. The other is by the internal agency of the Holy Spirit. (3) One reaches the head. The other reaches the heart. (4) That which is revealed to man may be lost (II Pet. 2:20-22). That which is revealed in man is permanent and cannot be lost. All who believe salvation can be lost deny that salvation is of God. Humanism is the theory that man is well. Arminianism is the theory that man is sick. Christianity is the theory that man is dead in trespasses and sins, and the sovereign God alone can quicken him.

Much of the wisdom of providence appears in fitting the instrument to the work to which he has been called. All preparation is to meet the One who chose the individual before the world began. Preparations are often confusing. There are unsettling times that are full of disorder and apparent contradictions until the end comes and explains it all to us.

JEREMIAH—The Lord told Jeremiah not to fear those from whom he would receive opposition: "Do not be afraid of them, For I am with you to deliver you, declares the LORD. Then the LORD stretched out His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me, Behold I have put My words in your mouth. See, I have appointed you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms, To pluck up and to break down, To destroy and to overthrow, To build and to plant" (Jer. 1:8-10 NASB). Observe the people's reaction: "BUT it came about, as soon as Jeremiah, whom the LORD their God had sent, had finished telling all the people all the words of the LORD their God—that is, all these words—that Azariah...and Johanan...and all the arrogant men said to Jeremiah, You are telling a lie! The LORD our God has not sent you to say, You are not to enter Egypt to reside there; but Baruch...is inciting you against us to give us over into

the hand of the Chaldeans, so that they may put us to death or exile us to Babylon” (Jer. 43:1-3 NASB).

Jeremiah’s death did not occur until he finished what God appointed him to do. A person might wonder how what the Lord said to Jeremiah in the first chapter harmonizes with all the afflictions and things to which he was subjected in life and then in death. They would want to know where deliverance was in all those afflictions. The Lord did not promise Jeremiah deliverance from all those afflictions. His final deliverance is the important thing.

The Israelites to whom Jeremiah was sent devised devices against him: “But I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter; And I did not know that they had devised plots against me, saying, Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, And let us cut him off from the land of the living, That his name be remembered no more. But, O LORD of hosts, who judges righteously, Who tries the feelings and the heart, Let me see Thy vengeance on them, For to Thee have I committed my cause. Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the men of Anathoth, who seek for your life, saying, Do not prophesy in the name of the LORD, that you might not die at our hand” (Jer. 11:19-21). Christians are as sheep brought to the slaughter. Jeremiah was prophesying to the Israelites, God’s covenant people. Most of the covenant people were unregenerate. There was a spiritual Israel within a national Israel (Rom. 9:5, 6). Jeremiah’s call for vengeance arose from his pure zeal for God (Jer. 11:20). This corresponds with Paul’s language in Galatians 1:8 and I Corinthians 16:22. God’s cause was Jeremiah’s cause, and the prophet was zealous for it.

Jeremiah was opposed by his own brethren: “For even your brothers and the household of your father, Even they have dealt treacherously with you, Even they have cried aloud after you. Do not believe them, although they may say nice things to you” (Jer. 12:6 NASB). The context shows that Jeremiah told the people that the Chaldeans would overrun them; and if they did not do as he told them, they would be taken into Babylonian captivity (vv. 1-5). The Lord said that many shepherds had ruined His vineyard (v. 10). Jeremiah had to submit to being without friends, and he must also experience friends who would become foes. The question is often raised, how can we account for righteousness suffering so much when a righteous God governs the world? Like Jeremiah, Christians need all the experiences God gives them. Therefore, practical lessons can be learned from Jeremiah.

The Israelites smote Jeremiah with their tongues and did not give heed to any of his words. They tried to place the blame for their affliction on Jeremiah: “Then they said, Come and let us devise plans against Jeremiah. Surely the law is not going to be lost to the priest, nor counsel to the sage, nor the divine word to the prophet! Come on and let us strike him with our tongue, and let us give no heed to any of his words” (Jer. 18:18 NASB). Jeremiah plead with the Lord to hear their threatening, because they had dug a pit for his soul (vv. 19, 20).

Jeremiah was constantly hampered by traps and devices laid against him by his people (Jer. 20:1-11). Pashhur, the son of the priest and chief governor in the house of the Lord, smote Jeremiah and put him in stocks. Jeremiah felt that he was deceived and his persecutors were greater than he. His thought was that the word of the Lord was made a reproach to him, and he said he would not make mention of the Lord or speak any more in His name. The prophet became very depressed and cursed the day he was born (Jer. 15). What a sudden change in Jeremiah. The best of men have their outbursts. There is something in the best of men to condemn. However, Jeremiah could not refrain from speaking because the Lord was with him, and he knew that his persecutors could not prevail.

False prophets opposed the true prophet (Jer. 23). False prophets in any age carry on their work with the approval of false believers. The instant man's reason and God's truth are placed on the concept of equality the distinction of separation is forgotten. False teachers promise security to the impenitent and flatter people in their sinful practices. Therefore, they are all on the road to destruction: "There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death" (Prov. 14:12 NASB). False teachers and false believers hug their own brains until they are strangled. They think their own wit is better than God's wisdom. There are many ways of death, such as willful ignorance, tradition, formality, doing one's best, self-righteousness, etc. Those who make a bridge of their own shadows are sure to drown. (Study Rom. 10:1-4.) False religion may have a joyful appearance, but it leaves the heart sorrowful and heavy: "Even in laughter the heart may be in pain, And the end of joy may be grief" (Prov. 14:13 NASB). A man may feast in prison before his execution or dance on the way to the electric chair, but that does not indicate that he is rejoicing in the God of choice, redemption, and regeneration.

The priests, prophets, and all the people told Jeremiah that he would surely die: "And when Jeremiah finished speaking all that the LORD had commanded him to speak to all the people, the priests and the prophets and all the people seized him, saying, You must die!" (Jer. 26:8 NASB). This was their attitude toward the person God appointed to give them the message. "Thus says the LORD, Stand in the court of the LORD'S house, and speak to all the cities of Judah, who have come to worship in the LORD'S house, all the words that I have commanded you to speak to them. Do not omit a word!" (Jer. 26:2 NASB). Prophesying smooth things in a sinful world is being false to God and the people to whom the person speaks. The true prophet must not water down God's message regardless of how unpopular, unpleasant, or personal it may be. While Ignasius was on his way to be thrown to the lions he wrote from Ephesians 3:7ff., "Come, fire; come, rattling of wild beasts cutting and mangling and wrenching of my bones; come, hacking of my limbs; come, crushing of my whole body; come, cruel torture of the Devil to assail me. Only be it mine to attain to Jesus Christ." The early Christians understood what we have forgotten—we are opportunists who cry as cringing cowards and effeminate time-servers in this soft, sensuous, hypocritical age.

Jeremiah was cast into a dungeon: “Then they took Jeremiah and cast him into the cistern of Malchijah the king’s son, which was in the court of the guardhouse; and they let Jeremiah down with ropes. Now in the cistern there was no water but only mud, and Jeremiah sank into the mud” (Jer. 38:6 NASB). The next two verses speak of a courageous slave of the king who defended Jeremiah when the prophet’s brethren did not: “But Ebed-melech, the Ethiopian, a eunuch, while he was in the king’s palace, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern. Now the king was sitting in the Gate of Benjamin; and Ebed-melech went out from the king’s palace and spoke to the king, saying, My lord the king, these men have acted wickedly in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet whom they have cast into the cistern; and he will die right where he is because of the famine, for there is no more bread in the city” (Jer. 38:7-9 NASB). All the bastard patriots sneered at Jeremiah in the same manner as bastard “church” members today sneer at God’s faithful ministers. They no doubt thought he was being paid by the Chaldeans to give his message. However, Jeremiah was delivering God’s message. The king, a politician, “commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, Take thirty men from here under your authority, and bring up Jeremiah the prophet from the cistern before he dies (v. 10 NASB). Ebed-melech did as the king said, and Jeremiah was delivered (vv. 11-13).

When Jeremiah finished what God appointed him to do, he was taken to Egypt and there put to death at God’s appointed time: “BUT it came about, as soon as Jeremiah whom the LORD their God had sent, had finished telling all the people all the words of the LORD their God—that is, all these words—that Azariah the son of Hoshaiah, and Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the arrogant men said to Jeremiah, You are telling a lie! The LORD our God has not sent you to say, You are not to enter Egypt to reside there; but Baruch the son of Neriah is inciting you against us to give us over into the hand of the Chaldeans, so they may put us to death or exile us to Babylon.... and they entered the land of Egypt (for they did not obey the voice of the LORD) and went in as far as Tahpanhes.... He will also come and strike the land of Egypt; those who are meant for death will be given over to death, and those for captivity to captivity, and those for the sword to the sword” (Jer. 43:1-3, 7, 11 NASB). All the experiences along the way were for Jeremiah’s training.

The good things of providence concerning Jeremiah are recorded in Jeremiah 1:5-10 (NASB). (1) He was elected—“I knew you” (v. 5). (2) As described in Psalm 139:13-16, he was brought into being—“I formed you” (v. 5). (3) He was dedicated to a particular service—“I consecrated you” (v. 5). (4) He was assigned to a position—“I have appointed you a prophet to the nations” (v. 5). (5) He was commissioned—“I send you, you shall go” (v. 7). (6) He was commanded—“You shall speak” (v. 7). (7) He was comforted—“I am with you to deliver you” (v. 8). (8) He was given the words to speak—“I have put My words in your mouth” (v. 9). (9) He was immediately appointed—“I have appointed you this day” (v. 10).

In God's providence, Jeremiah had some advantages. He was the son of Hilkiah (name means portion of the covenant of Jehovah, the covenant God). He lived in the days of Josiah (name means sustained by Jehovah) who reigned thirty-one years (II Kings 22:1, 2; II Chron. 34, 35). His association with Hilkiah, the high priest, and Josiah, the last good king in Israel, makes it easy to understand why the lost book of the Law of the Lord given by Moses was found (II Chron. 34:15). The difference between then and now is that the Bible can be lost while it is within our reach. Therefore, the condemnation is greater now than then because we have the completed word of God.

If Hilkiah the priest had not been attempting to set wrong things right, he would not have found the Law of the Lord in its dark hiding place. Was this a mere coincidence, or was it an act of Divine providence? History proves that it was no coincidence that the puritans found the truth of God's objective standard. No one can disprove the truth that God's objective message has been lost by those who neglect, disbelieve, or disobey the completed "faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3 NASB). Scripture records that Josiah sought the God of David after four hundred years of separation (II Chron. 34:3ff). He who depends on his own strength has a feeble motive to exertion because his strength is only weakness. However, he who depends on God has the most powerful motive for action because he realizes that the sovereign God enables him to operate. God empowers him to labor vigorously and perseveringly in the face of appalling obstacles. In view of God's bounty (II Pet. 1:1-4), believers are exhorted to look to their own duty (vv. 5-11).

Satan corrupts through falsehood, but God sanctifies His people through the truth: "Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth" (John 17:17 NASB). Observe that He does not sanctify through impressions, excitements, visions, sacraments, or traditions of men.

From man's perspective, the good things of providence have been considered, but there is another side to the coin of providence. In Jeremiah's call and commission, the other side of providence that was necessary for his development and usefulness in the service is revealed. Frustration can come from two causes. It can rise from the sense of inability, or it can come from the unresponsive circumstances in which a man labors. Jeremiah appears to have conquered the first, but he had some difficulty with the latter for a time. The Lord described the unresponsive circumstances to Jeremiah: "An appalling and horrible thing Has happened in the land: The prophets prophesy falsely, And the priests rule on their own authority; And My people love it so! But what will you do at the end of it?" (Jer. 5:30, 31 NASB). The best method of reading is not to turn to the end of a book to see its conclusion, but this was what Jeremiah wanted the Jews to do. The answer is found in Asaph's conclusion in Psalm 73. Asaph was envious of the wicked when he saw their prosperity until he came into God's sanctuary and perceived their end.

When Jeremiah looked at his circumstances, he longed to flee; but when he looked to God, he was satisfied with his lot in life. The Lord blesses the man who trusts in Him: "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD And whose trust is the LORD. For he will be like a tree planted by the water, That extends its roots by a stream And will not fear when the heat comes; But its leaves will be green, And it will not be anxious in a year of drought Nor cease to yield fruit" (Jer. 17:7, 8 NASB).

Jeremiah's was a dangerous ministry. False prophets and teachers were deceiving his people. He was continually hampered with opposition from the Jews. His enemies watched for his wavering. The following is a list of trials that Jeremiah experienced: (1) His own brethren opposed him (12:6). (2) He was like a lamb before the slaughter (11:18, 19). (3) Jerusalem conspired against him (18:18). (4) He was beaten and imprisoned (20:1-11). (5) False prophets opposed him (23). (6) An angry mob attacked him (26:8). (7) He was thrown into a slime pit (38:6). (8) His countrymen carried him into Egypt where he was stoned to death (43:1-7; Lam. 3:53).

In Jeremiah's complaint to the Lord, the discouragements and supports of true ministers as well as their rash resolutions are viewed (Jer. 20:7-18). Jeremiah was strongly tempted to give up his God-called office of prophet, but his temptation never came to fruition. The prophet did not carry out his thoughts because as soon as he said, "I will not remember Him Or speak anymore in His name, Then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire Shut up in my bones; And I am weary of holding it in, And I cannot endure it" (Jer. 20:9 NASB), God said, "And I will make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; and I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from Me. And I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will faithfully plant them in this land with all My heart and with all My soul. For thus says the LORD, Just as I brought all this great disaster on this people, so I am going to bring on them all the good that I am promising them" (Jer. 32:40-42 NASB).

Since God's whole heart is for His people, how can He accept anything less than the whole hearts of His people? No one can imagine that within the holy place there would be an altar, part of which would be used for sacrifices offered to God and another portion for victims presented to idols. When the heart of a person is united to Christ by grace, he lives for a single Object. Therefore, as Jesus Christ is our one way to the Father, He is our one truth by which to live the one life (John 14:6).

God's coin of providence has more than one side. The reality of the Christian life is not continuous rejoicing in victory without trials. Peter said we "are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, being

more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (I Pet. 1:5-7 NASB).

JOHN THE BAPTIST—Jesus Christ said that John the Baptist was the greatest man among those born of women: “Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist...” (Matt. 11:11 NASB). Christ’s most precious words about His own are said in their absence. The greatest of the old regime will be least in the new regime: “...yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he [John the Baptizer]” (Luke 7:28 NASB). This greatest among men became a martyr after thirty years of training and one year of service. The key to John’s greatness is threefold: (1) His position was last of the prophets. (2) He was independent of all human religions. (3) He lived a simple life. John was not only a prophet, but also the subject of prophecy (Is. 40:3; Mal. 3:1).

The greatness of John the Baptizer was not manifested by his wealth, power, or eloquence (Matt. 11:11). It was revealed in his message that prepared the way of the Lord. John’s message was not political or social. It was spiritual. It included repentance, faith, baptism, and a changed life. His proclamation of that message cost him his life. However, John the Baptizer’s voice was not silenced by the executioner’s hand. His message continued haunting all he condemned who died in their sins. They are now in a place where the gifts of repentance and faith will never be experienced. Furthermore, when his message is proclaimed and properly interpreted, it will be a “...fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing” (II Cor. 2:15 NASB).

Compared with the record of Jeremiah and Paul, little of John the Baptist’s ministry is recorded. It has been written in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The Baptist clearly stated in Matthew 3:11 and John 1:19-34 that he would declare his subordination to the One he had been called to introduce. He was content with his God-given commission to be the mere voice to introduce the Messiah, Jesus Christ the Lord. His contentment was manifested in his answer to the ones sent to question him: “...A man can receive nothing, unless it has been given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but, I have been sent before Him. He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears Him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. And so this joy of mine has been made full. He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:27-30 NASB).

John assumed the position of a star that loses its radiance of reflecting light in the glory of the rising sun: “He must increase, but I must decrease.” The present active indicative of the Greek verb *dei* introduces a subject of great importance. The impersonal verb means it is binding, proper, necessary, or inevitable. It is derived from the Greek verb *deo*, which means to bind or find, to impel or compel. In the Greek, the first clause reads *ekeinon dei auxanein*. The first word

*ekeinon* (accusative of *ekeinos*) is a pronominal adjective used demonstratively. It means that One. The second word is a present active indicative of the verb *dei*, which means it is necessary or proper. The third word is a present active infinitive of *auxano*, which means to increase or become more important.

Since the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form in Jesus Christ, there is a sense in which He cannot increase. He who is the wisdom of God cannot increase in wisdom, but He increased in fame and reputation among some by His teaching and miracles. Since the nature of God is indivisible, only a portion of the Godhead cannot indwell Christ. Godhead speaks of the very essence of God, the totality of all that enters into the conception of the fullness of Deity (Col. 2:9). Christ's increasing in fame and reputation was assured by the truth that the sheep hear His voice and will not follow the voice of strangers (John 10:4, 5).

The second clause of John 3:30 has three words in the Greek text—*eme de elattousthai*. The first word is *eme*, accusative of *emos*, an adjective meaning my or mine. The second word is *de*, an adversative conjunction. The last word is a present passive infinitive of *elattoo*, a verb meaning to make lower (Heb. 2:7). Passively, it means to be made less (Heb. 2:9; John 3:30). The Greek reveals that it was proper or inevitable that Jesus Christ become greater and John the Baptist decline in importance. This involves a subject that outside the realm of grace a person has little or no religious understanding of man's place in Christ.

An exalted opinion of oneself is like casting a shadow that is always longest when the sun is at its greatest distance. The sun approaches, and subsequent to its rising, a shadow shortens until it becomes no shadow when the sun stands directly overhead. Men's highest opinion of themselves is when the influences of the Son of righteousness are at their greatest distance from them. Once a person grants that the greater should be subordinated to the lesser he is on the road to disaster. All vain and conceited philosophers demonstrate this error. To speak of cooperation between the sinner and God is like speaking of cooperation between the clay and the potter. The religious philosopher says, "Free grace makes man nothing more than a puppet on a string." The recipient of grace replies, "That is better than the religionist making God a puppet on the string of man's free will." John the Baptist was subordinate (a lower order or rank) to Jesus Christ. He was not super-ordinate (a higher degree in condition or rank) to or even coordinate (same order or rank) with Him. He was in a subordinate role because he was the forerunner of the eternal Son of God who was infinitely greater than he. He declared this truth in his message of repentance: "...He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals..." (Matt. 3:11 NASB).

The last section of John 3 records the contrast between John's and Christ's positions. John, who was living for Christ, was the faithful friend of the Bridegroom. The Bridegroom is Christ to whom the elect belong. Christ declared that John was great (Matt. 11:11). Nevertheless, he was an earthly man (John 3:31). On the other hand, Jesus Christ was from heaven and above all. Although John's gift and calling were from heaven, he spoke of earthly things. Christ not



only came from heaven, but He also spoke of heavenly things. John was thankful to be only a friend of the Bridegroom.

The bride belongs to Christ. The word “bride” in John 3:29 refers to a company of regenerated Israelites, spiritual Israel within national Israel. “He who has the bride” is a statement that must be interpreted. As John went forth preaching in the wilderness (desert) of Judea, he said “...do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, We have Abraham for our father; for I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham” (Matt. 3:9 NASB). Subsequent to John, Paul confirmed the truth that God is able to raise up children to Abraham: “...for it [the gospel] is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH” (Rom. 1:16, 17 NASB).

“He who has the bride...” is Jesus Christ, the Redeemer and Intercessor for the elect (John 10, 17). His possession must be viewed from the standpoint of the eternal covenant of grace (Heb. 13:20, 21; John 6:37; 10:16; 17:1-24; Eph. 1:4; I Thess. 1:4; I Pet. 1:1-3). Christ came first to the Jews and then the Gentiles (John 10:16; Rom. 1:16). Election is used in a twofold sense: (1) Election is God’s eternal decree (II Tim. 1:9; Eph. 1:4; Heb. 13:20, 21). (2) It is the actual selecting out from among mankind in time those who were eternally His (John 6:37, 44-47; 10:16; I Pet. 1:1-3; I Thess. 1:4-7; II Tim. 1:9, 10). Christ is the Bridegroom, and the bride is the general assembly of the firstborn, which is made up of both Jews and Gentiles (Heb. 12:23).

The “friend” of the Bridegroom in John 3:29 is John the Baptizer. John was Christ’s groomsman. In Judea there were two groomsmen, one for the bridegroom and the other for the bride. Before marriage they acted as intermediaries between a couple. The duty of the friend of the bridegroom was to present him to his bride. John the Baptist was Christ’s groomsman who introduced Him to the regenerated Israelites who were the first members of the assembly (Matt. 16:18, 19; 18:15-20; Acts 2).

Consider three things stated about John the Baptizer in John 3:29—(1) John “stands” (perfect active participle of *histemi*, who is standing). The verb is used several ways—stand firm (Eph. 6:14), offer resistance (Eph. 6:11), hold one’s ground (Rom. 14:4), stand speechless (Acts 9:7; 26:6). (2) He “hears” (present active participle of *akouo*, who is hearing or listening). This denotes a person’s ability to distinguish the voice of the true Shepherd from false shepherds (John 10:3). (3) He “rejoices” (present active indicative of *chairo*, to rejoice or be glad) greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. This is the life-sustaining voice of the One in whom we live, move, and exist (Acts 17:28). This is true physically of every human being, but it is true in a unique (no like or equal, incomparable) way of the ones who are chosen, redeemed and regenerated. Paul had this in mind when he said, “For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our

hope [perfect active indicative of *elpidzo*, based] on [*epi*, upon] the living God, who is the Savior [soter, preserver] of all men, especially [*malista*, a superlative, which means above all] of believers” (I Tim. 4:10 NASB).

The Rabbinical view of Exodus 19:17 was that Moses was spoken of as the friend of true followers of God at Sinai: “And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain” (Ex. 19:17). Any interpretation of a passage of Scripture in the New Testament that excludes grace from the Old Testament is heretical. Since grace is a unilateral covenant, God’s covenant at Sinai presupposes grace. (Study Rom. 9:4-16.) Three great truths are learned from the Mosaic Law: (1) the knowledge of sin, (2) the perfection of Christ, and (3) the true character of the person in Christ.

After John the Baptizer’s introduction of Jesus Christ as the Redeemer of the elect, nothing other than his imprisonment and death are recorded (Matt. 14:3-12). John was an uncompromising proclaimer of God’s truth. Therefore, “... when he saw many of the Pharisees [ritualists] and Sadducees [rationalists] coming for baptism, he said to them, You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance; and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, We have Abraham for our father; for I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham” (Matt. 3:7-9 NASB). It is already factual that many in America would be glad if there were a law to stop God’s servants from exposing people’s sins. Observe what John said to the hypocritical establishment of his day: “Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance” (Matt. 3:8 NASB).

Faithful proclamation of truth will either profit or provoke. There is no third result. Herod imprisoned John the Baptist to stop his preaching that Herod was living in sin. He wanted to kill John, but he feared public reaction. This manifests the politics of our day. John told Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have her [his brother’s wife]” (Matt. 14:4 NASB). On his birthday, the daughter of Herodias danced before the revelers, and the ruler of the fourth part of the Roman Empire promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. The daughter, who had been prompted by her mother, requested “...Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist” (Matt. 14:8 NASB). A guilty person may stop the mouth of a faithful servant of God, but he cannot silence his conscience that continually haunts him with the Biblical statement “...fornicators and adulterers God will judge” (Heb. 13:4 NASB).

The Christian who serves as a little child surpasses John the Baptist in privileges. Since wicked people are bold in their sinning, men of God must boldly expose and reprove them. Everything men see or hear today must be scrutinized and judged, even though it may cost Christians their lives. (See Rom. 8:26-39.)

PAUL—Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, authored more of the New Testament books than any other inspired writer. He did not receive his apostleship from

man, and man did not teach him. His apostleship and teaching were given to him through the revelation of Jesus Christ: "PAUL, an apostle (not sent from men, nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead).... For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ. For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:1, 10-12 NASB). The very man who had profited in the religion of the Jews before Jesus Christ was revealed in him became the apostle to condemn that religion. Paul experientially learned that human works could not supplement the completed work of Christ.

Jeremiah, John the Baptist, and Paul capture the attention of the spiritual mind. Although all three had much in common in their births and deaths, references to their mothers' wombs encompassed different things: (1) God knew Jeremiah before He formed him in his mother's womb, and He consecrated him before he was born: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, And before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations" (Jer. 1:5 NASB). (2) John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit while in his mother's womb: "...he will be filled [future passive indicative of *pimplemi*, be under full influence] with the Holy Spirit, while yet in his mother's womb" (Luke 1:15 NASB). Instead of "while yet in his mother's womb," the King James Version translates it, "...even from his mother's womb." When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, John the Baptist leaped in her womb: "And it came about that when Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.... For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy" (Luke 1:41, 44 NASB). The verb for "leaped" is aorist active indicative of *skirteo*, meaning stir, move, or leap for joy. Subsequent to John's birth, he was not always filled with the Holy Spirit. The command to Christians is that they be filled with the Holy Spirit: "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled [present passive imperative of *pleroo*] with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18 NASB). Was John the Baptist filled with the Spirit when he sent his disciples to inquire whether Christ was the expected One or if he should look for another? (Matt. 11:2-6). (3) Jesus Christ appeared to Peter, the twelve, more than five hundred at one time, James, and all the apostles. He also appeared to one (Paul) untimely born: "and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time...then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as it were to one untimely born, He appeared to me also" (I Cor. 15:5-8 NASB). His appearance to Paul qualified him for apostleship: "...Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord" (I Cor. 9:1, 2 NASB).

Paul's commonality with Jeremiah and John the Baptist concerned his birth. God set him apart from his mother's womb: "But when He who had set me apart, even from my mother's womb..." Gal. 1:15 NASB). Unlike Jeremiah and John the Baptist, there is no record of Paul's parents. Some information concerning his training under Gamaliel is recorded in Acts 22:3.

The sovereignty of God had its proper place in Paul's theology; therefore, he said, "But when He [God] who had set me apart, even from my mother's womb, and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood" (Gal. 1:15, 16 NASB). Between verses 19 and 20 of Acts 9 is a period of three years of history. The immediacy of Paul's beginning to preach Christ followed three years of instruction at the feet of Gamaliel. Election was the foundation of setting Paul apart in purpose from the womb. It was also the foundation of his regeneration, conversion, and obedient life.

After his regeneration and conversion, Paul was no longer a slave of Satan or of religion. He was a slave of Jesus Christ for the purpose of proclaiming the word primarily to the Gentiles. God called him to proclaim the gospel to many people in many places. This man of God taught those who were regenerated and converted and established assemblies of Christ. He instructed God-called men who became pastors of the assemblies. Children of God continue to be instructed by the Lord through Paul's writings.

Paul was appointed not only to proclaim the gospel, but also to defend it (Phil. 1:7, 17). He gave a verbal defense for what he believed in Acts 22. He defended what he believed in court (Acts 25:16). He replied to those who sat in judgment over him (I Cor. 9:3).

The apostle Paul persevered through many trials brought about by God's providence because he had a hope produced by faith that would never disappoint him. A confirmation of the gospel was manifested in Paul's bonds, which means that he suffered for no human reason. He suffered for the Lord who alone rewards. This man of God encountered many things inside and outside of prison and the assembly of Christ (*ekklesia*). His enemies and his so-called friends mistreated him. Opposition from so-called friends was more disturbing than that from his avowed enemies.

God willed that Paul go to Rome, and the apostle desired to go to Rome. However, he knew nothing of the circuitous route by which God's providence would lead him there. He was imprisoned in Rome (Acts 28). His imprisonment at that time was considered a house arrest because he was allowed to have visitors. Paul was taken captive in his second Roman imprisonment. This time he was awaiting persecution (II Tim. 4:6-8).

His ministry that began on the Damascus road when he was arrested and commissioned by the sovereign Spirit was coming to a conclusion in a Roman

prison. He who had been instrumental in the martyrdom of followers of Christ was himself about to become a martyr for Christ. When he was called to the ministry, the Lord told him He would show him what great things he would suffer for His sake: “for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake” (Acts 9:16 NASB). Paul’s life had been a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1). In death, his martyrdom would be an offering to set a final seal on his sacrificial life (Phil. 2:17).

Paul had fought a good fight, finished his course, and kept the faith: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith” (II Tim. 4:7 NASB). He experienced the thrill of competition, the glory of completion, and the peace of consistency. He battled with evil powers: “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12 NASB). The sons of Ephraim demonstrate that anything short of completion is spiritual treason: “The sons of Ephraim were archers equipped with bows, Yet they turned back in the day of battle. They did not keep the covenant of God, And refused to walk in His law; And they forgot His deeds, And His miracles that He had shown them” (Ps. 78:9-11 NASB). In spite of God’s blessings, they continued sinning against Him: “Yet they continued to sin against Him, To rebel against the Most High in the desert. And in their heart they put God to the test By asking food according to their desire... Because they did not believe in God, And did not trust in His salvation” (Ps. 78:17, 18, 22 NASB). The goal of the Christian racer is to gain the highest spiritual perfection consistent with his earthly duties and responsibilities. The apostle kept the faith. He did not compromise to conquer. Victory can never come at the expense of truth.

While imprisoned the second time in Rome at the conclusion of his ministry, Paul’s six fellow-soldiers and Demas forsook him: “for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service. But Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus.... Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds” (II Tim. 4:10-14, NASB). Some deserted Paul. Others were dispatched to other places. Nevertheless, the Lord did not desert Paul: “At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, in order that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was delivered out of the lion’s mouth. The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen” (II Tim. 4:16-18 NASB).

Demas was singled out among the absent ones for condemnation. Paul referred to Demas as his fellow-worker in Philemon 24 and mentioned his name without any formal expression of praise in Colossians 4:14. Two years later Paul wrote that Demas had deserted him. Demas was an apostate. Others had deserted

Paul, but they returned, even John Mark. Tradition, not Scripture, has lifted its curtain and stated that Demas became a priest in a heathen temple. Demas illustrates the extent to which a person may profess Christianity without vital union with Christ. In contrast, Paul represents the degree a person may seek in religious profession and then be lifted from its depths by the irresistible grace of God (Phil. 3:4-10).

God sees things in His eternal purpose. Faith sees them in Scripture promises. Paul's faith in God and His word enabled him to persevere through all of God's providences. Through faith the patriarchs saw at a distance the promises of God's overflowing love and care for His own: "Behold, the former things have come to pass, Now I declare new things; Before they spring forth I proclaim them to you" (Is. 42:9). Jesus Christ is the object of hope (Titus 2:13). The end of hope is the Lord Jesus Christ and His kingdom. (1) Our one hope is based on the past. Its foundation is in God's eternal purpose. (2) It is based on the present. Christ and Holy Scripture confirm it. (3) Hope is based on the future, Christ's second advent, for its perfect realization.

Jeremiah was continually subjected to great dangers because of the spiritual condition of the Israelites to whom he ministered. In return for his faithfulness to God, he received nothing but persecution. John the Baptizer was beheaded not only because he called the religious Jews a "brood of vipers" (Matt. 3:7), but also because he told Herod the tetrarch that it was not lawful for him to have his brother's wife in an adulterous relationship (Matt. 14:4 NASB). Paul was martyred for the cause of Christ. He tells us that all who live godly in Christ will be persecuted: "And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (II Tim. 3:12 NASB). In reference to himself, he said, "But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished" (Gal. 5:11 NASB).

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