Security in Christ

"God's solid foundation stands firm,
Sealed with this inscription:

'The Lord knows those who are His,' . . . "

(2 Tim. 2:19)

(Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the NIV)

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Introduction

There was a time in my life when I was desperately seeking security in Christ. I felt an intense need for rock-solid assurance that I *really was* going to make it safely to God's kingdom rather than burn in the Lake of Fire (Mt. 25:34; Rev. 20:11-15).

I felt this desperate need for security because I had been through many difficult times in my life – times that I had, for the most part, brought upon myself. During these times, I often felt that my strength and my faith would fail, for I often believed that I could find more comfort and fulfillment in a path of sin and rebellion than a path of sanctification and holiness.

I knew this was all delusion, but, unfortunately, I was *prone* to delusion!

And I was prone *weakness* as well!

I thus needed a rock-solid assurance that God would protect me (even *me!*) from abandoning myself to the frailties of my sinful condition. I didn't want everything to depend upon my fickle nature and my wavering will because I had been through enough hard times in my life to know that, if it did, then I was surely doomed.

The bottom line for me was this: I needed assurance that I *truly was* God's child with nothing left to prove by enduring any future times of trial and adversity. I needed to know that God *Himself* would protect me from my own weakness and delusion through all forthcoming crises simply because I *truly was* an object of His love and not His wrath.

Knowing that I was an object of God's love may seem so simple and so basic, but it really was the heart of the issue for me. I needed to know that God *loved* me. I also needed to know that His love for me was an *everlasting* love that was powerful enough – not only to *draw* me (Jer. 31:3, KJV) – but also to *keep* me (Ps. 121:7, 8).

Even *me!*

One may say, “There are many Bible promises that speak of God’s love for His sons and daughters in Christ. You could have simply claimed one of these by faith.”

The problem for me was that I had reached a point in my Christian experience where no amount of repeating or claiming standard Bible promises was of any help. I had reached this point because – although I knew many Scripture verses that speak of God’s love for His children – I also knew many others that speak of His desire to see heartfelt obedience and lasting perseverance from these same children. These “obedience and perseverance” texts would discourage me because I often doubted that my obedience was truly from my heart, and I also doubted that my perseverance was enough to get me through to the end.

I experienced authentic peace and communion with God through His forgiveness in Christ, so I believed I was born again – but was this enough to guarantee safe arrival in God’s kingdom?

I didn’t know.

What I *did* know was that I could be *very* wayward in my thinking and actions, and this waywardness often caused me to doubt my final salvation.

Some examples:

- I wanted salvation, sure – but I also wanted to keep certain sins in my life because they provided such a “comforting” release.
- I loved and respected Jesus more than any other man, and I surely knew Him in a deeply personal way as my Savior and my God. Nevertheless, I always had a place of reserve in my heart that wanted its own way regardless of what I knew Jesus wanted.
- Last, but certainly not least: I had let Christ down so many times in the past, so my future alliance with Him seemed a bit murky, at best. I thus had powerful doubts about my ability to persevere to the end as a good soldier of the cross.

Because of all this double-mindedness in thought and deed, I naturally hungered for an assurance of God's *final deliverance* from my carnal body of sin and death. I knew God had promised to bring His work in me "to completion" (Phil. 1:6), but I could not rest my full weight upon this promise because – for every text like this that reassured me – there was another text that discouraged me.

The one who stands firm to the end will be saved.
(Matt. 24:13)

Could I be sure that I would stand firm to the end?

My righteous one will live by faith.
And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back.
(Heb. 10:38)

Could I be sure that I would live by faith and not shrink back?

What I needed (*really needed!*) was the type of rock-solid assurance that Christ gave to the thief on the cross. You will recall that Christ assured this man that he would be with Him in Paradise (Lk. 23:43).

Note that Christ did not give the thief a *conditional* assurance. That is, He did not impose conditions to His statement of assurance by saying something like, "*If* your faith in Me endures through this suffering ordeal – hanging naked on a cross, having your legs brutally broken – *then* you will be with Me in Paradise." No, Christ simply assured the thief that he would be with Him in Paradise. It is thus clear from the short biblical dialogue that the thief had *already fulfilled* the only conditions necessary for salvation – namely, the recognition that Christ *truly was* who He claimed to be and the exercise of saving faith in Him as his only hope of salvation (Lk. 23:42).

The thief could thus know *with certainty* that he would be with Christ in Paradise; therefore, he could know *with certainty* that he would stand firm to the end and not shrink back.

One might respond by saying, "It was possible for the thief to fall away and be lost because – like all of us – he had free will; therefore, he could have chosen to curse God and die at any point in his suffering."

We must remember, however, that Christ had *already* assured the thief that he would be with Him in Paradise. And Christ prefaced His assurance with the words, "*Truly*, I tell you" (Lk. 23:43).

Clearly, then, the thief could know *with certainty* that he would be with the Savior in God's kingdom, so his certain knowledge of salvation was therefore (somehow!) consistent with his free will (which, of course, he had).

I will provide clarity in all these areas in the present study. I will address the issues of salvation and free will, and I will make sense of these issues in relation to the eternal security of the believer. Furthermore, I will provide biblically-based support for the believer's eternal security that cannot be refuted because it is grounded in the very nature and being of God.

The end result of this analysis will be that all of us who are presently comforted by our saving relationship with Christ will be able to rest in the full assurance of final salvation.

I will also provide a practical, biblically-based analysis on what it means to be born again. Anyone who has doubts about his or her *present* state of salvation will thus learn what it means to have a true saving relationship with Christ.

- We will thus know *with certainty* that Christ is our personal Savior.
- And we will know *with certainty* that God is our Father.
- Finally, we will know *with certainty* that we will arrive safely to our Father's kingdom.

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To God be the glory, great things He has done.

1. Why *"I AM"*?

During my desperate search for rock-solid assurance of final salvation, I remember reading countless books and articles on eternal security.

The more I studied, however, the more confused I became.

In other areas of study, my experience was quite different. I remember once wondering, for example, if Jesus was truly God. My experience in this area was simple and predictable: the more I studied the Bible, the more I became convinced that Jesus was truly God.

In the area of eternal security, however, the Bible contained clear statements that seemed contradictory.

God's word states, for example, that His children are "sealed" with the Holy Spirit for "the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30). The Bible also states that this sealing is the "guarantee" of their inheritance until they "acquire possession of it" (Eph. 1:14).

I would thus think, "I certainly experience intimate communion with God through the agency of the Holy Spirit; therefore, I am *sealed* for the day of redemption with a *guarantee* of my inheritance in Christ."

And I would feel secure.

The Bible also states that all whom God justifies, He also glorifies (Rom. 8:30).

I would thus think, "I have confessed my genuinely-felt need of a savior and placed my faith in Jesus Christ. I experience the promised deliverance from guilt and shame, so I know I am forgiven and justified before God in Christ. And God's Word states that all whom God justifies, He also glorifies."

And, once again, I would feel secure.

But there were other texts that painted a very different picture.

The two I have already mentioned are good examples:

The one who stands firm to the end will be saved.

(Matt. 24:13)

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My righteous one will live by faith.
And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back.

(Heb. 10:38)

Texts like these would cause me to feel far from eternally secure – even though I experienced peace with God through forgiveness in Christ. I thus felt the need to go deeper in my analysis of eternal security, for only in this way could I hope to get "underneath" all the apparent contradictions in Scripture and find a foundation of coherent and consistent truth.

(I now believe all Scripture that seems to imply *in*security in Christ can be understood in the context of eternal security – but I certainly did not believe this way during the time of my struggles.)

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I should probably mention at this point that I have a Ph.D. in philosophy. (Please keep reading in spite of this!) I taught for many years at the university level, but I never acquired (nor did I pursue) a tenured position.

I should probably also mention that acquiring this Ph.D. in philosophy ushered me into one of the biggest trials of my life. Upon completion of my doctoral degree requirements, I found myself thinking, "I have wasted so many years getting a Ph.D in . . . *philosophy!*"

This degree suddenly struck me as completely worthless, and I was sick with remorse. Contrary to God's well-known promise in Jeremiah 29:11, I allowed myself to slip into a frame of mind where I believed I had *no* future and *no* hope.

I was convinced my life was over.

Like Jeremiah, I felt I had been deceived by God (Jer. 20:7). I couldn't understand why He had seemingly inspired me to continue in a path that appeared so worthless and senseless.

(I intend no offense to those who have doctoral degrees in philosophy – really, I don't. This is simply the way I felt at the time.)

Needless to say, I was thoroughly immersed in a victim mentality, and I refused to take ownership for the decisions in my life. I guess the "blame game" was all I was capable of mustering in terms of personal responsibility.

While I was enduring this difficult time, I would often think, "Maybe I'm just not God's child, and maybe my life is reflecting this reality."

If I could have disappeared somehow into thin air during this extremity, then I would have done this in a heartbeat.

I was suicidal for two solid years.

I could write much more about this personal experience, but I think I have conveyed enough to give a sense of my extreme state of desperation and despair. The irony of the ordeal is this: the knowledge and understanding I acquired in my philosophical training were invaluable to me in my eventual search for truth in this area of eternal security (which occurred many years later). During this search for truth, I found myself employing all the "worthless" training I had acquired in my graduate study in order to get "underneath" the various contradictory views I encountered on the topic.

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With regard to the desperate hunger I experienced for security in Christ, I hope it is clear that I did not want to be "once saved" so I could then be "free" to live a life of sin. I knew God's

calling was to a life of purity where I would ultimately be "holy and blameless" before Him (Eph. 1:4), and I genuinely experienced the spiritual hunger for this life of holiness. (I believe anyone who is truly born again will experience this same hunger.)

So, again, I did not desire to be "once saved" so I could live a life of sin. Rather, I desired a foundation of security in relation to my *perseverance* in God's path of holiness. I felt the need for this security because, as I have mentioned, I often believed I would find more comfort and fulfillment in a path of sin – even though I knew this was all delusion.

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Another significant struggle for me at the time was this: since I doubted my ability to "stand firm to the end" (Matt.24:13) and not "shrink back" (Heb. 10:38), I often held back from radical devotion to God's work. I would not commit fully to the cause of Christ because I doubted that I had what it takes to finish the race (1 Cor. 9:24). I thus needed God's assurance in relation to my *final* salvation (not merely in relation to my *present* forgiveness). Only in this way did I feel I could devote myself wholeheartedly to God's cause in the way I knew I should.

Are you beginning to get a sense of where I was and what inspired me to pursue this study?

Once again, the only sensible course of action was to go *deeper*. I needed a more in-depth understanding of my salvation, and I knew this would require a more in-depth understanding of the *God* of my salvation. So I set out to logically derive a coherent set of truths from God's most basic statement about Himself – ***I AM***.

Then, finally, everything began to make sense.

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I started at this rock-bottom level of God's nature because I had done much thinking and studying in this area during my doctoral studies in philosophy, and I knew it held promise for getting underneath all the contradictory rhetoric on eternal security. Also, I felt a "pull" that kept drawing me to God's being and essence, and I believed this "pull" was from God Himself.[1]

I surely knew that if I built upon the sure foundation of God nature, then I could be certain of all the truths that logically followed.

And this was the essence of the personal drive for me: if all the logical deduction and philosophical inference were sound in the derivation of subsequent truths, then I could be *certain* of them – because they would be grounded in the very nature and being of God Himself.

And this is precisely what I needed – *certainty*.

I hungered to be at a place in my walk of faith where I had *no* doubt about God's love for me and *no* doubt about one day seeing Him face-to-face as I bowed down in worship before Him.

And now, at last, I have found this. I have found rock-solid security in Christ – in two simple words: ***I AM***.

Truly, God has revealed Himself in a complete and comprehensive way in these two simple words, and I intend to "unpack" this revelation to show that if we are not secure in our saving relationship with Christ, then God is not God.

Or, stated differently – if God simply *is* Who He says He is, then we are secure in our saving relationship with Christ.

[1] I should also acknowledge the writings of Norman Geisler since they were very helpful – specifically those contained in the works, *Chosen But Free* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2001) and *Philosophy of Religion, 2nd edition* (with Winfried Corduan) (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003). Although I do not always agree with Norman Geisler's conclusions, I believe he grapples with the important theological and philosophical implications of our faith as competently and as nobly as anyone.

The vital point is this: our eternal security in Christ is grounded in the very nature and being of God Himself, so we can have the same certainty of final salvation that the thief on the cross had.

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To God be the glory, great things He has done.

2. The Order and the "Flow"

There is a certain order and "flow" to this study, and this is in place so there will be no obstacles to understanding the force of the arguments presented.

First of all, there is a need for understanding and clarity in the area of free will.

The topic of free will arises in almost every discussion of eternal security because intelligent Christians wonder how they could ever be eternally secure in Christ while remaining free moral agents. At one time or another, they invariably say something like, "I have free will, so how can I ever be *eternally* secure? I can always choose to reject Christ."

Confusion in this area of free will results because individuals mistakenly identify themselves with their sinful desires, so they believe the capacity to *express* these "misaligned"[2] desires is what makes a person free.

So, again, there is a need for understanding and clarity in this area of free will.

There is also a need for understanding and clarity in the area of personal identity because people believe the capacity to express sinful desires is what allows them to reveal their true identities and thus *be* the authentic persons they are.

Finally, believers in Christ often doubt their eternal security because they have painful doubts about their *present* security. In other words, they have no real assurance regarding their *present* state of salvation.

So there is a need for clarity and understanding in the area of what it means to have a genuine saving relationship with Christ.

[2] I use the term, "misaligned," because I think there is an obvious misalignment of being in the world which is, of course, the reality of sin.

I will address all of these areas at the beginning of the study because it is important to have clarity and understanding in these areas before delving into any in-depth treatment of eternal security.

The general order and "flow" of the study will thus be,

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Section One:

1. An examination of free will and personal identity. This will provide conceptual clarity in two areas that often cause confusion when addressing the topic of eternal security.
2. An examination of what it means to be born into the family of God and thus to have a saving relationship with Christ. This will allow the believer to have certainty of his or her *present* state of salvation.
3. An examination of several Scriptural passages that provide strong biblical support for the believer's security in Christ. This will provide a biblical context for eternal security.

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Section Two:

1. An examination of Exodus 3:14 (specifically God's expressions of ***I AM*** and ***I AM WHO I AM***). This will demonstrate how the believer's security in Christ is grounded in the very nature and being of God Himself.

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If the treatment of Exodus 3:14 in section two becomes a bit overwhelming because of the depth of the analysis, then I would respectfully suggest that you simply skip the section that is too overwhelming and move on to the next one. You can always return to the prior section after the "big picture" becomes clearer in your mind.

Fair enough? ☺

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To God be the glory, great things He has done.

3. Free Will

I remember thinking extensively about human freedom during one period in my life. Do you know what I came up with? Simply this: human freedom is the capacity to choose in accordance with the dictates of reason.

In other words, it is the capacity to choose what makes sense.

Think about it: Is a person really free if he or she chooses something that makes *no* sense?

One might respond by saying, “Human freedom is the capacity to choose what we want. It has nothing to do with reason.”

It is tempting to think this way, but consider this: some of my greatest regrets are because I wanted things at certain times – and thus chose them – but I realized too late that this was not an expression of freedom at all but, rather, an expression of bondage.

Why would anyone ever choose something that makes no sense? And why would anyone consider such a choice to be the expression of freedom?

Surely we are all rational beings, and, as such, we try to make sense of things. This is the only way we can survive. If someone chooses something that makes *no* sense, then, clearly, this person is in bondage to something quite irrational.

In other words, he is held fast by a power that makes *no* sense.

Let's look at a simple example: if I know that eating a meal consisting of a double cheeseburger, large fries, a super-sized carbonated soft drink and a pint of ice cream is bad for my health, but I choose it anyway, is this the expression of freedom?

I could say something like, "Well, I chose to eat it because I wanted it – so, yes, it was an expression of freedom."

But as I look back on such experiences in the wisdom of later years, would I not rather say that these were experiences of bondage to appetites or impulses that made no sense?

I could write much more about this topic, but I hope you see the relevant point.

It is this: the bottom line is *reason*. The bottom line is *what makes sense*. This is why God says, "Come, let us *reason* together" (Isa. 1:18). This is also why He places the *facts* of Christ's life and death before us (as well as the facts of our sinful condition) *prior* to expecting any response of faith.[3]

In short: there is an obvious rationality to existence, and this is the only context where one can sensibly talk about freedom.

You could think of matters in this way: acts of volition (that is, choices) do not spring from a vacuum. Rather, they spring from the content of our hearts. If our choices result from desires that *overpower* rational beliefs regarding what makes sense, then, clearly, our hearts are in bondage.

These desires of our hearts may be rooted in all sorts of unconscious needs and motivations – this, I take it, goes without saying. Nevertheless, the bottom line with regard to freedom is reason and reason alone.

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I could write much more about this topic, but I hope the explanation I have given is sufficient for each of you to rest in Christ, knowing that your eternal security in Him presents no threat or constraint to your free will.

And why does your eternal security in Christ pose no threat to your free will? Because one's will is free only when it is acting in harmony with *reason*, and leaving the fold of a good

[3] Those who think that Christian faith amounts to a "leap" that is contrary to reason are, I think, quite mistaken. This type of thinking has a long history that probably goes back to Soren Kierkegaard, but I cannot adequately address the topic in the present study.

and faithful Shepherd Who wants only to protect His sheep and to make them happy – well, this is not the act of a person who is acting in harmony with reason. Rather, this is the act of a person who is acting out of *delusion* and *bondage*.

Any person who commits such an act is a person who "loves death" (Prov. 8:36), and God has promised to *protect* His children from such acts of self-destruction.

In short, Christ has promised to keep us in a state of freedom:

Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.
(Jn. 8:32)

If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.
(Jn. 8:36)

(I will develop this area more fully in chapter six: "Christ's Sheep.")

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Before bringing this quick examination of free will to a close, I will ask three questions.

- Could an angel in Heaven choose to do something sinful and wrong?

You would doubtless answer, "Of course not."

But how can this be – given that angels in Heaven have free will and are thus "free" to choose anything at all?

- Could any of the glorified saints choose to do something sinful and wrong?

Once again, you would doubtless answer, "Of course not."

But we have the same problem as with the angels since the glorified saints in Heaven will have free will and will thus be "free" to choose anything at all.

- Could God Himself choose to do something sinful and wrong?

In this case, I am *certain* you would answer, "*Of course not!*"

But, as with the angels and the glorified saints in Heaven, God possesses the faculty free will and is thus "free" to choose anything at all.

* * *

So how do we make sense of all this?

We make sense of it by acknowledging that the choices of angels, of glorified saints, and of God Himself emanate from the content of their hearts. And since these beings have pure hearts (or *purified* hearts – as in the case of the redeemed and glorified saints), they could never produce impure, sinful choices.

Clearly, in the case of God, He could never choose to do something sinful and wrong because, as God, He has the *heart* of God, and the heart of God is a heart from which only goodness flows. Thus, it is a heart from which only good *choices* flow.

Yet God still has free will. This simply means that God, like the angels and the glorified saints, is free to act in accordance with the dictates of reason. God never finds Himself in bondage to irrational impulses that lead to alienation and death. Likewise, the angels and the glorified saints in Heaven will never find themselves in bondage to such impulses either.

But we, as children of God on this earth, will almost *surely* find ourselves in bondage to such impulses at times. God has promised, however, to *protect* us from abandoning ourselves to the alienation and ultimate death of this bondage, and He has further promised to work these times of "failure" for good in the lives of His children (Rom. 8:28).

(Once again, I will develop this area more fully in chapter six: "Christ's Sheep.")

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To God be the glory, great things He has done.

4. Personal Identity

Have you ever thought about what it is to be you?

I'm sure you have. Some are forced to address this issue of personal identity when they go through a painful ordeal such as a divorce or a mid-life crisis. One's focus during such times is obviously affected by the emotional nature of the ordeal, so one's thoughts about personal identity are likewise affected. In the present study, I will keep a practical and conceptual focus on this issue as it relates to the topic at hand.

As I stated in the prior chapter, people become confused about free will because they identify themselves with their sinful desires; therefore, they think the capacity to *express* these desires is what makes them free.

In a similar way, people think the capacity to express sinful desires is what allows them to *be* the authentic, unconstrained persons they truly are.

We must realize, however, that there is a level more fundamental to our identities than the level of our desires.

This is the level of rational awareness.

In short: we are not merely beings who *desire* certain things and *act* in certain ways; we are also (and *more fundamentally*) beings who are *consciously aware* of having such desires and of acting in such ways.

In other words, we do not live at the level of stimulus and response – as, for example, laboratory rats do. Rats are stimulated, and rats respond. This is the level of rats' existence – the level of stimulus and response.

As rational beings created in God's image, however, we do not live at this level of stimulus and response. We live at the level of *conscious awareness*. We are not merely

stimulated; rather, we are *consciously aware* of being stimulated, and we do not merely respond; rather, we are *consciously aware* of responding.

There is thus a level that is more fundamental to our nature than action and desire.

The recognition of this truth is vital when considering areas such as human freedom, for an individual can make no sense of this freedom without first making sense of personal identity. This is so because acting with "free will" implies, at the very least, that a person is acting freely *as the person he or she is* with no external constraint or coercion.

Therefore, in order to understand what it means to be a morally *free* person, one must first understand what it means to be a *person*.

If I were to ask you point blank if you have a sense of your own identity, what would you say?

Let's say someone were to ask me this question at a time when I was really down on myself. I might respond by saying something like, "Well, I frequently desire to eat a lot of food, and I often act on this desire, so I must be a glutton."

It may be true that I frequently desire to eat more food than is healthful for me, and it may also be true that I frequently act on these desires, but saying, "I am a glutton," implies that I *identify* myself with these desires. It implies that I am "going with the flow" of them and welcoming their indulgent fulfillment whenever I experience them.

But this may not be the case.

If I acknowledge these desires on the level of rational awareness and *renounce* them by saying something like, "Hey, I don't want to do this; it doesn't make sense – it's killing me!" then, I am by no means a glutton (although I may be in bondage to gluttonous desires).

The point is this: conscious awareness comprises both a *subject* and an *object* level of awareness, and our identity is grounded – not at the *object* the level of stimulation and response – but, rather, at the *subject* level of being *consciously aware* of stimulation and response.

Since personal identity (the "I" or ego) is grounded at this transcendent *subject* level of conscious awareness, it is at *this* level that we must define human freedom. This is why I mentioned in the prior chapter that human freedom is the capacity to choose in accordance with the dictates of reason. In other words, human freedom is the capacity to choose in harmony with our rational awareness because *this* is the level that defines our being. *This* is the level where personal identity resides.

Let's consider what the Bibles states about the experience of the apostle Paul in order to make these points clear.

Paul wrote of having experienced enslaving passions and desires. He even wrote of having acted upon these desires (Rom. 7:14-21). But he did not *identify* himself with this activity, for he wrote,

It is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me.
(Rom. 7:17, 20)

Paul was obviously the person who acted upon the impulses he experienced, yet he wrote, "It is no longer I that do it." He wrote this under inspiration. And Inspiration pressed this point upon him so forcefully that he felt impelled to write it *twice* (Rom. 7:17, 20).

Clearly, this is an important point – and the point is this: on one level, Paul was obviously the person who acted on the desires of which he spoke. Nevertheless, since Paul, on the level of rational awareness, *renounced* the activity, then, in a real way, it was no longer he that did it (Rom. 7:17, 20).

If you read the entire biblical account in Romans 7:14-21, you will see clearly that Paul did, in fact, forcibly renounce this sinful activity on the subject level of rational awareness. Indeed, he eventually became so overwhelmed with the rebellious behavior occurring on the object level of stimulation and response that he cried out (on the subject level),

What a wretched man I am!
Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?

(Rom. 7:24)

Paul cried out for deliverance because he recognized (on the transcendent level of rational awareness) the reasonableness and justice of God's standards,

The law is holy,
And the commandment is holy, righteous and good.

(Rom. 7:12)

He thus recognized that the harmful desires that resulted in his sinful behavior (on the object level) represented – not *freedom* – but, rather, *bondage*.

And he desired *deliverance* from this bondage.

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After reviewing these experiences of Paul, I hope you see that it is merely a deception of the devil to think we are "free" when expressing impulses that alienate us from God and from our authentic (rational) selves. I hope you are see that any impulse or desire that makes no sense is simply a tool of the evil one to bind us to hell and death.

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Consider one final point: none of us is a self-sufficient entity (as God is); rather, each is an "ontologically deficient" creature that is characterized by lack, not fullness. In other words, we are all need-motivated beings, and our desires are grounded (fundamentally) in these needs.

Augustine has said, “Thou has made us for Thee, O, Lord, and our hearts will be restless ‘til they find their rest in Thee.” Personally, I think a statement that expresses a more fundamental truth would be, “Thou has made us for Thee, O, Lord, and our hearts will be *impoverished* ‘til they find their *fullness* in Thee.”

One of the significant problems of the “misalignment” of being in which we live (which is, of course, the reality of sin) is that we are naturally prone to project the deep need of our souls *laterally* in an attempt to find fulfillment from other people or things rather than from the only God Who can provide sufficiency. In our deceived, sinful state, we have become convinced that we need to be “free” to express these lateral projections.

But there is no true soul fulfillment to be found in this lateral direction; thus, these irrational expressions represent – not freedom – but, rather, bondage and alienation.

And the end result is misery and death.

I will show in chapter six (“Christ’s Sheep”) that God assures His children of *protection* from this end of misery and death, but I will first address (in the next chapter) the topic of the new birth so that each of us can understand what it means to be born into the family of God.

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To God be the glory, great things He has done.

5. Born Again in Christ

Since the focus of this book is the security of the believer in Christ, most chapters are directed to those who know they are believers. Some Christians, however, are unsure if they even *are* believers. They are unsure if they even *have* a saving relationship with Christ. For this reason, the focus of the present chapter will be the clarification of what it means to be a true believer and thus to have a saving relationship with Christ.

On a surface level, believing in Christ would appear to be fairly simple – just believe that He died for your sins and accept Him as your personal Savior.

In spite of this apparent simplicity, however, all of us have doubtless experienced times when we were filled with uncertainty and unbelief. We were painfully aware of how difficult it is to trust Christ as our Savior from sin and to abandon our lives to His care and safekeeping.

We thus wondered,

- Am I *really* a believer – or am I just *really deceived*?
- Do I *truly* have a saving relationship with Christ?

The first step in the process of clarification is to realize that the Bible does indeed state (in many places) that one must *believe* in order to become a child of God.

"Yet to all who did receive him,
To those who believed in his name,
He gave the right to become children of God."

(Jn. 1:12)

The second step is to realize that sinners who are brought to the point of confessing their sin and believing on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ are born again. This phenomenon of the new birth is the means by which rebellious sinners are miraculously transformed from 'children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3) into children of the Living God:

"Truly, truly, I say to you,
Unless one is born anew,
He cannot see the kingdom of God."

(Jn. 3:3)

* * *

"Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit,
He cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

(Jn. 3:5)

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Therefore, if anyone is in Christ,
He is a new creation;
The old has passed away,
Behold, the new has come."

(2 Cor. 5:17)

These verses from God's word make it clear that all who hope to be saved in God's kingdom must, at some point, be born again.

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The new birth allows believers to taste and see that the Lord is good (Ps. 34:8).

It allows them to drink of the water that becomes in them a well of water springing up into everlasting life (Jn. 4:14).

These biblical metaphors about "tasting" the goodness of the Lord and "drinking" the water of spiritual life are meant to convey the truth that believers are ushered into an actual *experience* of communion and fellowship with the Godhead. In other words, born-again believers enjoy the privilege of *interpersonal intimacy* with the Father and the Son:

"Our fellowship is with the Father and with his son, Jesus Christ."

(1 John 1:3)

This communion and fellowship is accomplished through the agency of the Holy Spirit:

"This is how we know that we live in him and he in us:
He has given us of his Spirit."

(1 Jn. 4:13)

The Bible is thus clear that born-again believers have a very definite *experience* with God, and this experience with God forms the spiritual foundation of their lives of faith.

The first question we must ask ourselves, therefore, is this: Do we experience spiritual communion with God?

If we do not, then our condition is serious indeed, for God's word is clear that believers should be able to confidently say, "By God's grace I have been born again. I have been mercifully ushered into the Land of Promise, and I now enjoy fellowship with the Father and the Son."

Surely this is what it means to have a saving relationship with Christ and thus to be part of the family of God.

As I have stated, the only biblical condition that one must fulfill in order to be born again (and thus to find one's place of eternal security in Christ) is to believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Believing on the name of Christ, however, requires that one must first *confess* one's need of a personal savior – and those who are rigidly bound to the pride and sufficiency of the world will never confess this need.

They do not cry out to me from their hearts,
But wail on their beds.

(Hos. 7:14)

The proud and autonomous of this world (our natural state, of course) wail upon their beds rather than cry out to God from their hearts. They murmur and complain rather than confess their state of need. They worry, and worry – and then worry some more – rather than expose any honest vulnerability.

In short: those who are bound to the carnal state of this world prefer to live independent lives of misery and pain rather than allow God to *be* God in their lives.

I should point out that even though the Bible is clear that each of us must believe in order to be saved (Jn. 1:12; 5:24; Acts 16:31; Rom. 10:9), the Bible is also clear that God has "dealt to every man the measure of faith" (Rom. 12:3, KJV). Therefore, one need only be honest in relation to his or her desperate need of salvation in order to be saved. This is so because if one is simply honest in this area without any self-justifying defense, then this "measure of faith" that God has dealt to every person will be operative in the life, and one will respond to the call of Christ with an immediate act of saving faith.

In other words, an honest person will believe.

Let's assume for the moment that all of us understand these reasonable conditions of salvation, and let's also assume that we believe we have honestly confessed our need to God and have exercised saving faith in Christ.

How can we be sure that we are truly born again?

We realize, of course, that we must take God's word at face value without seeking for a "sign" of our new birth on the level of feeling (for we walk by faith and not by sight – 2 Cor. 5:7).

Nevertheless, we also realize that the heart is "deceitful above all things" (Jer. 17:9), so we seek assurance that we are not deceiving ourselves.

So, with this understanding, we look to the eighth chapter of the book of Romans, and we see that it provides four clear criteria for anyone to determine if he or she is truly born again in Christ:

- Believers experience the Spirit prompting them to cry, “Abba! Father!” – thus bearing witness with their own spirits that they are redeemed children of God (Rom. 8:15, 16).

- Believers experience the Spirit prompting them to groan inwardly as they await the redemption of their bodies (Rom. 8:23).

- Believers experience the Spirit interceding for them in prayer with “groanings which cannot be uttered” (Rom. 8:26, KJV).

- Believers experience God Himself searching their hearts through the mind of the Spirit (Rom. 8:27).

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Let's examine each of these criteria a more closely.

- Believers experience the Spirit prompting them to cry, “Abba! Father!”

All of us, as God’s children, have a deep need to know *without any doubt* that we experience this prompting of the Holy Spirit that causes us to cry out to God as our Father in Christ.

Surely there is no substitute for this, for it is difficult to imagine how we could have any basis for asserting that we are children of God if we do not experience this firsthand spiritual witness of the Holy Spirit that God is our Father and that we are His adopted children in Christ. We should experience this prompting of the Spirit as well as the peace and rest that flow from the accompanying release. We should also experience deeper levels of intimacy and communion with God as we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Savior (2 Pet. 3:18).

The unconverted of the world do not experience this firsthand witness of the Holy Spirit because He has not taken permanent residence in their hearts. They surely experience conviction

of wrongdoing (which they suppress), but no one experiences the firsthand witness of the Holy Spirit that God is their Father in Christ until he or she cries out to God for deliverance from sin and subsequently accepts Christ as personal Savior.

- Believers experience the Spirit prompting them to groan inwardly as they await the redemption of their bodies.

We who have been born again in Christ experience the deep moving of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, and this causes us to yearn for release from our carnal bodies. As true children of God, we experience the peace and fullness that only His uncreated life can provide, and we realize that no true or lasting fulfillment can ever result from abandoning ourselves to the proud and lustful impulses of the flesh.

As we grow in God's grace, we yearn more and more for His spiritual fullness, and this causes us to "groan inwardly" as we await the consummation of Christ's second coming that will allow us to forever leave these bodies of sin and death.

As with the prior experience, the unconverted of the world know nothing of this inward groaning or yearning, for they feel fully at home in their carnal bodies. They yearn only for more opportunities to satisfy sensual cravings. They do not care that this is a path of self-destruction leading to death (Rom. 6:23) – for the unredeemed souls of the world "love death" (Prov. 8:36). Therefore, they refuse to cry out for deliverance from the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life.

- Believers experience the Spirit interceding for them in prayer with "groanings which cannot be uttered."

As children of God, we need to know that we experience authentic times when our hearts are being drawn out to Him in prayer through the Holy Spirit. These are times when God trusts us with His burdens – times when He shares the burdens that are on *His* heart with *our* hearts.

I can personally testify that the most intense "groanings" that I have experienced invariably occurred during times of adversity and trial. I have thus come to realize (*finally!*) that times of trial *truly are* times of great blessing (Jas. 1:2). During these times are our oft-hardened hearts broken, and we become far more sensitive to the tender promptings of a tender God.

I can also testify to intense experiences of the Holy Spirit's intercession in the wee hours of the morning when the heavenly manna is falling.

Finally, I can testify to personal experiences of the Spirit's intercession when I was totally self-absorbed and just doing my own thing.

I remember once walking through a Walmart, thinking about something I was going to buy for my house. Suddenly God's Spirit broke through my self-absorption and drew my heart out to Him in such a powerful way that I began weeping. I remember spontaneously uttering the words, "I just want to love Jesus."

Where did *that* come from?

Surely not from me.

It was from God – from the Spirit's intercession.

- Believers experience God searching their hearts through the mind of the Spirit.

We who have been born again in Christ experience a spiritual witness that is constantly drawing us to the truth as it is in Christ, and it brings a dimension of honesty and authenticity to our lives that is found only among the children of God.

This is the “searching of heart” through the “mind of the Spirit” of which the Bible speaks.

If you have ever wondered why it is so difficult to experience authentic communication and connection with the unconverted of the world – this is why. They have no abiding access to the mind of the Spirit, so they live in deep delusion. The truth that is so plain and evident to you is the result of this activity of God’s Spirit in His children, but, for them, it lies on the other side of a wall of deep denial.

Have you ever heard the phrase, "The white elephant in the living room"?

This is a phrase that is often used to refer to the atmosphere of projection and denial that engulfs dysfunctional families where one (or more) member is ensnared by some sort of addictive behavior. There is a sense of awkwardness and tension in such families because the issues in their lives are not being faced with honesty and truthfulness. If you were to walk into the home of such a family, you would probably feel a sense of extreme distance and alienation. It would seem as if everyone was "out of touch" with no real feeling of interpersonal connection.

And, indeed, everyone *is* “out of touch.” And it comes across to others like a "white elephant in the living room." This is so, once again, because everyone is involved in an elaborate system of defense and avoidance.

Yet life goes on for this family as if the “white elephant” (namely, the interpersonal disconnection and alienation) were not there. Everyone avoids it. No one wants to talk about it. Everyone learns behaviors and avoidance mechanisms that allow him or her to go on with a dishonest life.

Such individuals cannot be real with you because they refuse to be real with themselves and with God.

It is only the "searching of heart" through the "mind of the Spirit" that draws individuals to truth and authentic connection in Christ rather than to deception and disconnection.

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Do you see that God has given us very definite criteria by which we can be assured that we are born into His family? Needless to say, any believer should first possess assurance on this level of *present* salvation before seeking assurance of eternal security in Christ.

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One may ask, "What if I am currently enshrouded in darkness and despair with no experience of the spiritual realities from Romans eight – what then?"

First of all, be assured that the remedy is not to focus inwardly on your spiritual experience (or lack of it), for this activity will not help anyone in the slightest.

Rather, the remedy is simply to place a promise of God before Him and then claim it in the name of Christ. Truly, if one completes just this *one* act, then our Heavenly Father will mercifully respond – even in the midst of spiritual deadness. He will usher *anyone* into a deep and affirming fellowship of peace and rest.

He has given His Word on this.

Personally, I have found the promises contained in Ezekiel 36:26, 27 to be perfect ones to claim during times of spiritual darkness and despair. These are well-known promises in God's Word, and they worked miraculously for me during one of the darkest times of my life:

"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you;
I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.
And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees
And be careful to keep my laws."

(Eze. 36:26, 27)

You can see that God has promised everything that one would need in these verses. He has promised a new heart, and He has promised to put His own Spirit within us. I have found that deliverance from painful times of darkness and despair results from simply claiming promises like these in the name of Christ. One can then rest in the assurance of God's promised deliverance – *regardless* of the present state of one's spiritual experience.

I must emphasize that – even though the new birth does indeed usher one into an actual experience with the Almighty – we should not expect to receive any sort of confirmation of our new birth on the level of feeling. (As I have mentioned, believers walk by faith, not by sight or by feeling – 2 Cor. 5:7.) The only confirmation we need is the Word of the God, and we *have* this. So we must simply *accept* as true that which we have every *reason* to accept as true – namely, the Word of the Living God.

The fact that our sinful hearts seem hard and unspiritual does not change in the least what God has promised, and what He has promised is,

"I will give you a new heart . . . and I will put my Spirit in you . . . "
(Eze. 36:26, 27)

If we cling to this promise unflinchingly in the midst of sin and darkness and despair, then our Father in Christ will proceed to usher us into a rich experience of communion with Him, and we will sense His fellowship and acceptance in real and affirming ways.

I can personally testify that I have experienced this sort of deliverance myself when I was in the midst of what seemed to be a hopeless state of deadness and despair. The deliverance came – not by any personal works on my part – but, rather, by simply resting in this promise that God had given to me for the sake of Christ.

If you are at a point in your experience where you believe you are unable to lay hold of a promise like this by faith, then I would suggest that you simply confess this unbelief to God.

Surely this is something you can do – so do it.

Just confess your unbelief to God and cry out for deliverance.

You will find that our Father in Christ will meet you right where you are (as He always does), and He will begin to strengthen your faith to claim all of His fullness.

He did it for me – trust Him to do it for you!

"This is eternal life:
That they know you,
The only true God,
And Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

(Jn. 17:3)

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"This is how we know that He lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us."

(1 Jn. 3:24)

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To God be the glory, great things He has done.

6. Christ's Sheep

Now that we are clear about what it means to have a saving relationship with Christ and thus to be a true sheep in His fold, we will begin to examine the biblical evidence that we have for the security of the believer.

Consider the following promises of our Savior:

"My sheep hear My voice,
And I know them,
And they follow Me;
And I give them eternal life,
And they shall never perish;
And no one shall snatch them out of My hand."

(Jn. 10:27, 28)

These promises, powerful as they are, will not be sufficient to assure many believers of their security in Christ, for these believers (and I used to be one of them) will reply by stating something like, "I know Christ will always be a faithful Shepherd to me, and surely no one can snatch me out of His hand. Nevertheless, I can always decide to leave Him, and He would not stop me from doing this because He respects my free will."

I hope this response from many believers will not be *your* response since we are now clear – not only about what it means to have a saving relationship with Christ – but also about the true nature of free will and personal identity.

Remember: we are acting with free will only when we are acting in harmony with *reason*, and jumping out of the hand of a good and faithful Shepherd Who wants only to protect us and to make us happy – well, this is not an act in harmony with reason. This is an act where the power of an irrational force has overtaken the power of reason and good sense in a fundamentally rational being.

In other words, it is an act of delusion and bondage.

If Christ were to allow anyone to leave Him, it would have nothing at all to do with respecting a person's free will, and any thinking along these lines is confused and misguided.

It is certainly true that the Father and the Son will never force anyone who is bent on rebellion to submit to their authority, but this situation is quite different from a sheep of Christ wandering from the fold.

Many think of Christ's sheep (that is, the elect of God) as if they were a group of people that is constantly in flux and constantly changing. They think a person can be a sheep of Christ, then not a sheep, then a sheep once again – and on and on.

But Christ's sheep is not a group in flux. It does not represent a collection where a member of the group can wander off and ultimately be lost, while another non-member can wander in and ultimately be saved. We will understand this point clearly in later chapters when we learn that God's nature is grounded in necessity, not contingency. We will thus realize that the composition of this group could never change because of its intimate connection to God's essence.

But let's think about this matter now in a simpler way.

Consider:

- Christ *calls* His sheep *by name* (Jn. 10:3).
- They were *chosen* in Him *before the foundation of* the *world* (Eph. 1:4).
- He *knows* each one *personally* (Jn. 10:27).

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Let's consider the following questions in relation to each of the above Scriptural truths:

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- How can the composition of this group change if Christ *calls* His sheep *by name*?

Calling by name implies in the strongest possible sense that there is no uncertainty or ambiguity with regard to the identity of the persons called. Therefore, Christ would not use this language unless He wanted to convey – again, in the *strongest possible sense* – that there is likewise no uncertainty or ambiguity with regard to the identity of the sheep in His fold.

If someone is a sheep of Christ, this person does not become a *non*-sheep because he or she is living in "the ways of the world" for years. This person may deny Christ with foul language (as Peter did) or persecute His true followers (as Saul – later Paul – did), but God knows this person's heart, and He has called him or her *by name*. Thus, at the right time, he or she will begin working earnestly in the work of God with all the others who are the called of Christ on this earth.

From our finite perspective, it may seem that non-sheep wander into the fold and become sheep, while sheep wander out of the fold and become non-sheep.

But this is not the case.

A sheep is a sheep, and a non-sheep is a non-sheep – and Christ calls each of His sheep *by name*.

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- How can the composition of this group change if Christ's sheep were all *chosen* in Him *before the foundation of the world*?

Can we go back in time and make a change to that which God has *already decreed* in eternity past?

Clearly, we cannot.

So how can the composition of this group change?

The Bible would not use this language unless Christ's sheep comprised an *unalterable* group of believers that has been *fixed* from all eternity.

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- How can the composition of this group change if Christ *knows* each of His sheep *personally*?

As with the prior two points, we will think about this question in a basic sort of way since we have yet to develop significant truths in relation to God's necessity.

According to the text of Scripture cited at the beginning of this chapter, Christ *knows* each of His sheep personally, for He states,

"I know them . . . "
(Jn. 10:27)

Thus, if you and I are Christ's sheep *now*, then Christ knows us.

Much could be written about this knowledge that Christ has of His sheep. Clearly, this is not propositional knowledge as it is understood in the western analytic tradition of philosophy. Rather, this knowledge is "existential" in the sense that it is grounded in interpersonal intimacy and communion (not in mere statements of fact).

In other words, Christ's knowledge of a person and a person's knowledge of Christ equates to a real *experience* with the other person, a real *relationship* involving interpersonal fellowship and communion. It does not equate to mere justified true belief of various statements of fact.

(My knowledge of God, for example, cannot be reduced to justified true belief of propositions such as, "God is all-powerful," "God is all-knowing," etc.)

We will see clearly in a later chapter that, since God is immutable, His knowledge can never change (and Christ, of course, is God). Thus, one of Christ's sheep could never wander

away and destroy itself because this would imply that God's knowledge of His sheep would have changed – and it cannot.

But we can see even now that one of Christ's sheep could never wander away and destroy itself by considering the manner in which Christ addresses lost souls at the judgment.

He states,

"I never knew you . . . "

(Mt. 7:23)

Notice that Christ does not say, "I knew you once, but you wandered away."

Nor does He say, "I knew you once, but you stopped believing."

He also does not say, "I knew you once, but you didn't stand firm to the end."

Rather, He says, "I *never* knew you."

The relevant question is, How can one be in a state where Christ truthfully says, "I know you" (as He says of His true sheep – Jn. 10:27) and then pass to a state where Christ truthfully says, "I *never* knew you" (as He says of the lost souls at the judgment – Mt. 7:23)?

Clearly, passing from a state of being truthfully known by Christ to a state of *never* being truthfully known by Him is impossible. Therefore, passing from a state of being saved to a state of being lost is likewise impossible.

The apostle John makes this same point when he states under inspiration that those who are "of us" *continue* "with us":

"They went out from us,
But they were not of us;
For if they had been of us,
They would have continued with us;
But they went out,
That it might be plain
That they all are not of us.

(Jn. 2:19)

The significant point here is that there *really is* a class of people that is God's children, and there *really is* a class of people that is not.

There are people of the truth (Jn. 18:37), and there are people of the lie[4] (Jn. 8:43-47).

There are children of the kingdom (Mt. 13:38), and there are children of the evil one (Mt. 13:38).

There are Christ's sheep (Jn. 10:27, 28), and there are all the rest (Jn. 10:24-26).

There is just no way around this clear Scriptural truth and this brute ontological reality.

The composition of either group is known only to God, of course, and the precise timing of anyone's conversion (among His elect) is known only to Him as well. Nevertheless, the fact remains that there *really is* a class of people that is God's children, and there *really is* a class of people that is not.

Notice what Christ says to the persistently unbelieving Jews before He states the beautiful promises cited at the beginning of this chapter:

"You do not believe because you do not belong to My sheep."
(Jn. 10:26)

Christ could have said, "You do not believe because you seek approval and glory from men rather than from God" – and this would have been true (Jn. 5:44).

He also could have said, "You do not believe because you are filled with envy" – and this would have been true as well (Mt. 27:18; Mk. 15:10).

But instead of focusing upon mere symptoms like glory-seeking or envy, Christ lays the ax to the root of the tree and gives the real, underlying cause of the Jews' unbelief – namely, "You do not belong to My sheep" (Jn. 10:26).

[4] "People of the Lie" is an expression used by M. Scott Peck, and it is also the title of one of his books: M. Scott Peck, *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983).

Once again, there are those who are Christ's sheep (Jn. 10:27, 28), and there are those who are not (Jn. 10:24-26).

We like to think along these lines: "Oh, if I could just be more loving, or more obedient, or more persevering . . . *then*, I could be certain that I will be in God's Kingdom."

I hope it will become clear by the conclusion of this study that we will never get assurance on this level, for assurance must be grounded in God's *necessity* – nowhere else. God has known those who are His children (that is, Christ's sheep) from all eternity. He has known – even before there was the dimension of time itself –who will embrace His uncreated life, and He has chosen to reveal the truth of His Fatherhood to those who are truly His (Rom. 8:15, 16).

(I will develop this point more fully in a later chapter.)

Why has God chosen to reveal the truth of His Fatherhood to those who are truly His? He has done this so that His children will find comfort, security and strength in their status as sons and daughters of the Living God. Indeed, nothing can bring more spiritual power and resolve to the life of a believer than resting in the truth that he or she is a child of the Almighty.

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Returning to the point of the class of people that is God's children and the class of people that is not, consider Christ's parable of the man who sows good seed in his field (Mt. 13:24-30, 36-43).

This parable tells how the man's enemy comes and sows weeds among the good seeds of wheat the man has sown. When the seeds of wheat sprout and bear heads of grain, the weeds also appear, so the servants of the man, seeing the weeds, ask him if he wants his servants to "pull them up" (v. 28).

Notice how the man responds:

"No," he answered,
"Because while you are pulling the weeds,
You may uproot the wheat with them.
Let both grow together until the harvest.
At that time I will tell the harvesters:
First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned;
Then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn."

(Matt. 13:29-30)

Notice the man who sows the good seed (whom Christ says represents Himself – v.37) does not say, "Do not try to separate the wheat from the weeds because there are sprouts of wheat that may become weeds, and there are sprouts of weeds that may become wheat."

The man who sows the good seed does not say this because wheat does not become weeds, nor do weeds become wheat. Likewise, a lamb (a child of the kingdom – v. 38) does not become a wolf (a child of the evil one – v. 38), nor does a sheep become a pig or a wild dog. Indeed, Christ Himself states that we should not give dogs that which is holy, nor should we cast our pearls before swine (Mt. 7:6, KJV).

Why would Christ issue this command if there were any chance of a dog or a swine becoming a lamb or a sheep?

Peter talks in his second epistle of those that have known the "way of righteousness," and then "turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them." (2 Pet. 2:21)

He states that their experiences are in accordance with the truth of known proverbs – namely,

"The dog turns back to his own vomit,
And the sow is washed only to wallow in the mire"

(2 Pet. 2:22).

I cannot begin to tell you how many times I have heard this verse used in order to establish that a genuine believer in Christ may fall away. But note carefully what the verse states: the dog and the sow – *not* the sheep and the lamb – return to vomit and mire.

A pig is comfortable wallowing in the mire, and it will find its way back. A sheep is *un*comfortable in such an environment, and it will always (eventually) seek deliverance.

So, sheep are sheep, and, as such, they heed the voice of the Good Shepherd and are ultimately saved and secure. Pigs and dogs, on the other hand, are pigs and dogs, and, as such, they *refuse* to heed to the voice of the Good Shepherd and are thus *never* saved (regardless of appearances) and therefore never secure.

Even Judas Iscariot gave the appearance of being a true sheep of Christ as he performed many miracles in Christ's name with the other disciples (Lk. 10:17), but Christ referred to him as a "devil" (Jn. 6:70).

When Judas was about to betray Christ's trust, the Savior simply said, "What you are about to do, do quickly" (Jn. 13:27), but to a true sheep like Peter, He said, "When you have turned back, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:32).

The important point is this: if you and I are Christ's sheep (those who love the Savior and thus heed the Good Shepherd's voice), then neither of us can ever become a pig or a wild dog (one who does *not* love the Savior and does *not* heed the Good Shepherd's voice).

In short, we are Christ's – and we are His forever.

* * *

Another significant point to be made when studying these verses in John 10 is this: the verb "to perish" (v. 28) in the Greek (transliterated: *apollumi*) also means "to destroy." Note how this Greek verb is used earlier in the same chapter of John's Gospel:

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy."
(Jn. 10:10)

Since this verb is used in the *middle* voice in Jn. 10:28, it could possibly be translated as, "They shall never *destroy themselves*" (instead of being translated as, "They shall never perish").

In this case, Christ would be understood as specifically addressing the issue of our choosing to jump out of our master's hand since the connotation is on destroying oneself and not merely perishing.

Dr. Harry Ironside, a preacher of the early 20th century, is a proponent of such a translation.[5]

We see additional support for this translation from the verses in Mathew 18:12-14. These verses are a clear reference to sheep "going astray" (v. 12) and thus destroying themselves, and Christ uses the same root Greek word (*apollumi*) in the middle voice when He states that it is not the will of His Father in Heaven that any of these little ones should perish.

I think all of us realize how easily sheep destroy themselves when they are not properly supervised by a good shepherd.

Dr. Harry Ironside describes how he witnessed such an experience where he passed a deep chasm and heard the bleating of a lamb. He and a friend looked over the edge of the bridge and saw the lamb about fifty feet down on a small ledge. The lamb had apparently been eating and saw the ledge that was all green with grass. After migrating down and eating all the grass, the lamb could not get back to safety. Dr. Ironside mentions how he and his friend tried to lasso the helpless creature, but they did not have the expertise to do this. He also mentions that there were already three great buzzards flying above, waiting for the time when the little animal would die.[6]

Clearly, this lamb was destroying itself.

[5] *Eternal Security of the Believer*, Dr, Harry Ironside, www.gotothebible.com/HTML/eternalsecurity.html.
[6] Ibid

But Jesus assures His sheep that they will never destroy themselves because He is the Good Shepherd Who carefully watches over and protects them. He realizes that their greatest need is to be saved from their own weakness and waywardness.

We should remember that, as Christ's sheep, we are not freed from our tendency to wander from Christ and destroy ourselves when we accept Him as our Savior. Indeed, the presence of sin (and thus the tendency to wander) is with us until this corruptible puts on incorruption at Christ's Second Coming (1 Cor. 15:53).

And our Savior understands this. He is the Good and Merciful Shepherd. He knows that His sheep are prone to wander from His fold (we are *dumb sheep!*), so He is always ready to leave the ninety-nine in order to go in search of the one who has gone astray. And the Bible is clear that Christ continues to pursue the lost sheep *until* He finds it (Luke 15:4).

We should not think that Christ cannot keep us because of the dark desires that surface at times in our lives. God is simply allowing this providential surfacing of what is in our hearts so that we will see a deeper need of His grace and cleansing power. His mighty hand holds us even during the times when we are wayward, and weak, and double-minded, and faithless.

We are portrayed in God's Word as children and sheep that are in desperate need of a Loving Father and a Good Shepherd. What father or shepherd would allow his children or his sheep to wander to destruction and death?

Clearly, no loving father or good shepherd would allow such activity. This is why Christ's hand and our Father's hand are not open, non-protective hands; rather, they are hands that *hold*.[7] And no dumb sheep or weak child who is prone to deception, wandering, bondage – and a hundred other things – would want it any other way.

[7] J. R. Strombeck, *Shall Never Perish* (Moline, Ill: Strombeck Agency, Inc., 1956), 3.

A hand that holds is no imposition upon one's free will because, once again, acting with free will amounts to acting in harmony with *reason*. It amounts to acting in a way that *makes sense*. Pulling loose from a father's or a good shepherd's protecting hand makes *no* sense. It amounts to an irrational act of bondage and deception, so we should *expect* that a loving father and a good shepherd would protect children and sheep from such activity.

Returning to the issue of whether the Greek verb in this passage should be translated as "perish" or "destroy themselves," I would be the first to admit that there are many verses in the Bible where the same Greek verb is used in the middle voice, and the only plausible translation would appear to be "perish."

Even if we do agree to translate the verb in this way, however, the Bible is still asserting with a *double negation* that Christ's sheep will *never* perish.

So how can one of Christ's sheep jump out of Christ's hand? Wouldn't this sheep perish?

Yes, the sheep would perish.

What then becomes of Christ's assertion with an emphatic *double negation* that His sheep will *never* perish?

* * *

Needless to say, I believe all talk about how a true believer (that is, one of Christ's sheep) is not eternally secure in Christ is grounded in confusion – confusion about the nature of free will, about the nature of salvation, and about the nature of God. And I think this will become clear as we progress in this study.

I think all of us will see that the sheep of Christ are His – and they are His forever.

In other words, God's children are eternally secure in Christ.

* * *

To God be the glory, great things He has done.

7. The Love of God

"For I am sure that neither death, nor life,
Nor angels, nor principalities,
Nor things present, nor things to come,
Nor powers,
Nor height, nor depth,
Nor anything else in all creation,
Will be able to separate us from the love of God
In Christ Jesus our Lord."

(Rom. 8:38, 39)

It's hard to imagine a statement in Scripture that is more powerful or more comprehensive than this one. Yet many render these verses completely empty and meaningless (and, again, I used to be one of them) by responding, "God's word doesn't mention self, and self can always separate itself from God's love in Christ by simply exercising its free will."

I will state again that any thinking along these lines is confused and misguided because a person's will is free only when it is acting in harmony with reason. A will that is exercised to separate itself from the love and favor of God in Christ so that one can burn in the Lake of Fire – well, this is not a will that is acting in harmony with reason. This is a will that is bound by delusion and bondage, and it is precisely this delusion and bondage from which God promises to protect us.

God understands that we are prone to wander. He knows the many temptations that assail us during our lives here on earth. Nevertheless, He is promising in the most forceful way in these verses that *none* of this can separate us from His love. This is the clear point of the passage.

Someone may repeat, "But self is not mentioned in the passage."

In response to this objection, I will ask the person the following question: Is your self in Christ *now*?

If the person has any doubt about this, then the relevant area of concern is obviously his or her *present* state of salvation. Therefore, *this* is the area that must be addressed – and I have provided clarity for this area in the chapter entitled, “Born Again in Christ.”

If, however, there is no doubt about one’s *present* state of salvation, then this believer should have rock-solid assurance that his or her self is in Christ *now*.

Therefore, there would have to be a *cause* for this self to *separate* itself from Christ.

And *this* is the precise area of concern that God's word is addressing in this passage. His inspired word is stating in the most plain and powerful language that *nothing* can cause this to happen.

- Is there anything that your self or my self can pass through that is not included in either death or life? God's word is stating that neither death nor life can separate us from His love for us in Christ. (And, clearly, both of our selves are included in “death or life,” for each is a part of life right now.)
- Is there anything that your self or my self can pass through that is not included in things present or things to come? God's word is stating that neither things present nor things to come can separate us from His love for us in Christ. (Once again, both of our selves are included in this stated category, for each is a part of “things present.”)
- Finally, is there anything that your self or my self can pass through that is not included in “height” or “depth” or "anything else in all creation"? God's word is stating that neither height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation can separate us from His love for us in Christ. (Both of our selves are included in all of these final categories, for each is a part of “height” and “depth” and "anything else in all creation.")

The clear point of the passage is that nothing – *nothing* – can separate Christ's sheep from God's love. And if that nothing can separate Christ's sheep from God's love, then they are eternally secure.

Even in the face of this powerful and comprehensive promise of security, I know (from personal experience) how deeply a sense of *in*security can lodge itself within the heart of any believer. I thus realize that any of us could ignore or misinterpret this promise of security and be driven to say, "I know myself, and I know the many darling sins in my life. I also know how I am often tempted by the ways of the world."

One of us could then go on to say, "I may choose one day to walk away from Christ because of the pull of my flesh. Surely God will not stop me from doing this."

I have already addressed how God has promised to protect Christ's sheep from just such a scenario. I have also explained what it means to act with human freedom as opposed to acting in delusion and bondage.

But even though I have addressed these areas in significant detail, I will still examine this state of affairs as if it were a true possibility in order to show in a practical, step-by-step sort of way how God's grace would "play out" in the life of the believer.

Fair enough?

First of all, it is certainly true that God will never coerce our wills in order to stop us from doing things we are determined to do. We know this is true by firsthand experience because we have personally witnessed the countless times that God has allowed us to follow our own ways – even when we knew in our hearts that we were disobeying Him.

But we must ask ourselves, Was God's mercy there for us when we learned the painful lessons that resulted from following our own ways instead of His? Of course it was. And was our

stubbornness and carnal pride broken by these experiences in ways that they *needed* to be broken? Of course they were.

So why would we think that anything along these lines would change in the future? Has God not given us His word that He will bring the work in us to completion (Phil. 1:6) and that He will sustain us to the end? (1 Cor. 1:8, RSV)

Someone might respond, "But I could just walk away from Christ at some point and *stay* away. I could just immerse myself in the world and all that it has to offer and never return to the fold of the Good Shepherd."

Once again, I have already addressed the reasons why this scenario could never unfold; nevertheless, I will address this "possibility" in a practical, step-by-step sort of way.

First of all, it is important to understand that when one is born into the family of God, the Holy Spirit takes *permanent* residence in the heart of the believer. This is what is meant when God's word states that He comes to abide with us *forever* (Jn. 14:16). The unconverted of the world cannot relate to this permanent residence of God's uncreated life in the heart of believers, but we know, from God's word, that it is true. (The Bible states that the unconverted of the world cannot receive this indwelling of the Third Person of the Godhead – Jn. 14:17.)

Because of this permanent residence of the Holy Spirit, if one of God's true children ever tried to walk away from God and *stay* away, this child of God would eventually realize that his or her heart was with *Christ*, not the world. While living in the ways of the world, this person would experience growing anguish of heart and torment of mind until he or she returned to the true Lover of his or her soul.

I think it is clear that the thief on the cross (whom I referenced at the beginning of this study) lived such a life of anguish and torment, for he never would have cried out to the Savior

while hanging on the cross if he had cultivated a hardened heart like the other criminal who was crucified with Christ.

Clearly, it is simply another delusion of Satan to believe that God's children could walk away from the tender and merciful One and stay away.

Be convinced that you never could. The loser, Satan, will try to convince you that this is a real possibility, but this is only because he is painfully aware that he has forfeited the infinite bliss of Heaven. He lives in great misery because he is permanently separated from the peace and fulfillment that only God's love can provide – and misery, of course, loves company.

Let's say that someone *still* is not convinced that God is able to preserve us. Let's say that someone *still* is not convinced that God is able to keep our wills free (for only in Christ are they acting in harmony with reason). In this case, I would ask, Why wouldn't God just take our lives *now*? Why would He allow us to live to a point where we choose to separate ourselves from His love?

Seriously, it makes no sense that a perfectly benevolent and all-powerful being would allow you or me to live long enough to choose burning in the Lake of Fire when He could simply cut our lives short at any point prior to this time so we would enjoy an eternity of bliss with Him in the new earth.

Someone might say, "The problem is that I need to be sanctified so that I can receive a glorified body at His coming. Only in this way will I be able to enjoy the pleasures of Heaven with the holy angels and the host of the redeemed."

Well, what if you and I are *already* glorified in Christ – would it then be okay for God to take our lives before we choose to separate ourselves from Him?

I realize, of course, that when God's true saints reach glory, they will live eternally; thus, none of them could ever have his or her life cut short. But let's just imagine this for the sake of this example.

The question is, Would it be okay for God to take our lives before we choose to separate ourselves from Him if we were somehow already glorified?

This would seem okay, right?

Well, God's word states that we *are* already glorified in Christ.

"For those whom He foreknew
He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son,
In order that He might be the first-born
Among many brethren.
And those whom He predestined He also called;[8]
And those whom He called He also justified;
And those whom He justified He also glorified."

(Rom. 8:29, 30)

This passage of Scripture is too clear and too plain to allow for any sort of compromise or misinterpretation. God's word is stating in the clearest and plainest language that those whom God justified (in eternity past) He also glorified (in eternity past). And His word is stating that this was done according to God's foreknowledge.

Each of these verbs is in the aorist tense and the indicative mood, and this clearly denotes a past, completed action – just like the English simple past tense.

The Bible is thus clear that believers are *already gloried* in Christ, and Paul discloses in the book of Colossians that is only the *revealing* of the believers' glory that is yet future:

"For you have died,
And your life is hid with Christ in God.
When Christ Who is our life appears,
Then you also will appear with Him in glory."

[8] I think it is clear that this call represents an inward, effectual call of the heart to those whom God has foreknown (since it results in justification and glorification) rather than the general outward call that is witnessed by all.

(Col. 3:3, 4)

This arrangement is similar to that which we see of Christ when the Bible states that He was foreordained before the foundation of the world but was *revealed* in these last times (1 Pet. 1:20).

Surely God is able to keep a life that is already glorified and hidden in Him. And just as surely is He able to take such a life at any time without any change in the glorified status. So there is simply no rational basis for asserting that God would allow someone to live long enough to separate himself or herself from His love.

One final point: God's Word is telling us in this passage from Colossians that our lives are hidden with Christ in God.

I ask, Can anything be more secure than a life hidden with Christ in God?

We have doubtless heard sermons in which we have been assured that the believer's inheritance is secure because it is reserved in Heaven. And we have been exhorted to lay up our treasures in Heaven "where no thief approaches and no moth destroys" (Lk. 12:33).

How much safer and more secure is a life that is kept – not merely in Heaven – but in *God*?

Would we presume to say that a person could be taken from this place in glory where he or she is hidden . . . in *God*?

Really, how can such a person who is hidden in God be anything less than *eternally secure?*

* * *

In closing, I will mention something that will provide a bit of a "preview" of areas I will cover in the second section of this book. In this second section, I will "unpack" God's ***I AM***

statement found in Exodus 3:14 in order to show that there are certain attributes or qualities of Deity that simply *must* exist in the Godhead. I will further show how these qualities *guarantee* our security in Christ.

The qualities that I will derive are those that have been historically associated with the Godhead through hundreds of years philosophical and theological thought, so, in many ways, I will not be presenting anything new. I will simply formalize the analysis in order to show how each quality derives directly from God's statement about Himself, and I will demonstrate how this fundamental nature of God guarantees our security in Christ.

Do not be concerned if you are unable to understand completely all that I present now as I plan to develop this thought much more comprehensively later in the book.

This is simply a "preview." ☺

In the passage of Scripture we just read, we see that all whom God foreknew, He also predestined, called, justified and glorified.

On the surface, all of this may seem a bit strange. How can there be such perfect harmony where every single person who is foreknown is also predestined, called, justified and glorified?

And how can believers be *already* glorified? (?!)

Okay, here's the preview.

God's knowledge, like every other attribute of Deity, is grounded in necessity and thus cannot change.

There is also another attribute or quality of Deity known as God's simplicity. Since God is a simple being, all His attributes are one with His indivisible essence; therefore, all His thoughts, plans and actions must be integrated into a unified whole.

Finally, there is one last relevant divine attribute (for this discussion, anyway) known as God's eternity. As an eternal being, God does not think or plan in a chronological (or even a logical) sequence (as we do) because He does not exist in the successive structure of time.

Since God has the attributes of simplicity and eternity, He transcends multiplicity and composition – and He also transcends time. Therefore, all His thoughts, plans and actions must be simultaneous, eternal and coordinate, and these must be in eternal harmony with His (unchanging) knowledge.

I will emphasize that you should not become concerned if you do not understand all of these areas now (or even *any* of them!) because this is simply a preview of coming attractions. I think it is important to give you a sense of what is forthcoming, however, because I want you to be aware that you will be able to make sense of seemingly senseless Bible passages once you understand the relevant issues on a deeper level.

And you *will* understand the relevant issues on a deeper level if you simply plod through the study, one step at a time.

In any event, the end result of what I have just stated is this: God cannot call or justify someone *before* He glorifies him or her. The calling, the justification, and the glorification are all eternally simultaneous and coordinate acts within the Godhead, for God's simplicity and eternity *demand* that it be this way.

And this is precisely what verses 29 and 30 of Romans eight are asserting.

* * *

To God be the glory, great things He has done.

8. A Call to Holiness

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
Who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing
In the heavenly places,
Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world,
That we should be holy and blameless before Him.

(Eph. 1:3, 4)

God's choice of His children (according to His foreknowledge – Rom. 8:29, 30) takes place "before the foundation of the world," and the end result of this choice is that they are "holy and blameless before Him" (v. 4).

Thus, God's call is clearly a call to holiness.[9]

This is an important area to cover because many believe that eternal security amounts to a license to sin. They believe that once a person knows he or she is eternally secure in Christ, this person will feel "free" to sin at times when he or she otherwise would not.

This perspective reveals confusion in the area of human freedom because, as I have stated many times, we are acting freely only when we are acting in a manner that *makes sense*. And, as creatures of our God and Creator, we are acting in a manner that makes sense only when we are acting in harmony with His plan for us.

Since any act of sin amounts to a time when we are acting in *rebellion* to our Creator's plan for us, any act of sin clearly makes *no* sense. Therefore, acts of sin express – not freedom – but, rather, *bondage* to an irrational force in the life of a rational being.

Thus, the notion that we are "free" to sin when we know we are eternally secure is a complete delusion.

[9] This call is clearly an inward, effectual call of the heart to those whom God has foreknown (since it results in justification and glorification) rather than the general outward call that is witnessed by all.

A life of sin is a life of *bondage*, and when we are in touch with the true substance of our lives, we recognize and experience the truth of this reality (Jn. 8:34).

Only a life of holiness – wholeness for God – is a life of freedom.

In other words, only a life of holiness *makes sense*.

The doctrine of eternal security represents nothing less than the *assurance* of holiness (and thus freedom) in one's personal life. We will see in later chapters of this study that we can have *complete confidence* in this desired end of a holy life because it is grounded in the immutable foundation of God's necessity, not in the ever-changing morass of our fleeting desires and wavering decisions.

How could this doctrine of eternal security thus be interpreted as a license to sin?

One might respond by saying, "It amounts to a license to sin because if I am *not* eternally secure, then I have no guarantee of my salvation. I could thus *lose* my salvation if I persist in a life of sin. Therefore, I will try not to sin."

And one might go on to say, "But if I *am* eternally secure, then I know that I am secure in God's care for all eternity, so I can sin all I want."

This perspective reveals confusion on many different levels, and it is clearly grounded in a theology of works, not a theology of grace.

I would initially respond to this perspective by asking the following question: Do we believe that angels in Heaven are sinning "freely" because they are secure in God's care?

Another question: Do we believe that redeemed saints in Heaven will be sinning "freely" because they have finally reached glory and are thus likewise secure in God's care?

And one final question: Do we believe that God Himself is sinning "freely" because He is the great ***I AM*** and is thus secure in His own care?

(We will see later in the study that God's nature is grounded in a position of unique *necessity* – and there is *nothing* more secure than *this*.)

Clearly, we do not believe that God or His angels are sinning "freely," nor do we believe that the redeemed saints in Heaven will be sinning "freely."

The obvious point from these questions is that the presence of security in one's life – whether it is the security of a redeemed saint on earth, the security of a glorified saint or an angel in Heaven, or the security of God Himself – does *nothing* to cause one to sin.

Sin is grounded in *delusion*. Thus, it is only people of the lie (Jn. 8:44-47) who desire to stubbornly persist in a path of autonomy and rebellion (Jn. 10:25, 26). They do not "hear" the words of Christ (Jn. 8:43) – but people of the truth hear these words gladly (Jn. 10:27; 18:37).

I will now write something that I know could easily be misinterpreted, but I will write it anyway.

Here it is: *Of course* the knowledge and experience of being eternally secure in Christ might initially result in an increased level of sin in the life of a believer. This is so because, as sons and daughters of Adam, we are naturally prone to fall into states of weakness and delusion. I remember experiencing this struggle myself. I had realized and experienced for the first time that I was eternally secure in my salvation (after *years* and *years* of struggling with this issue), and I found myself indulging in certain areas where I formally tried to refrain.

I can truthfully state, however, that the end result of these experiences was that I reached a place where I realized *more than ever* that the gratification that sin promises is grounded in *delusion*. I realized (and *experienced*) in more powerful ways than ever before that there is *no true fulfillment* apart from Christ.

Needless to say, I believe this would be the experience for anyone who is truly born again.

Sinful indulgences in the lives of God's children always amount to releases of fleshly "tensions" that are rooted in temporary states of restlessness and dissatisfaction, and these releases are always transient and unfulfilling.

The fulfillment of God, on the other hand, is never simply a release from a physical or emotional tension; rather, it is a spiritual infilling of God's fullness. This is invariably an experience of the true *sufficiency* of God (2 Cor. 3:5; 9:8; 9:12, KJV) – a sufficiency that is desperately needed by *non*-self-sufficient beings like you and me who are fundamentally characterized by *dependency* and *need*.

Because of our state of "ontological deficiency," we are in a position where we must choose one of two options: (1) project our deepest needs and dependencies laterally toward other people and things (which is, of course, a losing game), or (2) direct them upward to the only legitimate source of soul fulfillment.

Whatever ordeals and bad choices God's children need to pass through in order to finally understand that these are our only options, well, these are *precisely* the experiences needed. God knows all of this, of course, so He allows various ordeals in the lives of His children – even if these ordeals result in temporary increases of sinful activity.

Another point to be made about the flurry of sin that may result when we initially realize our security in Christ is this: God's kindness and forbearance in dealing with our expressed weakness and folly always leads to a *deeper* level of repentance among His children and thus to a *greater* level of consecration to Him (Rom. 2:4). Since God's children are people – not of the lie – but, rather, of the truth (Jn. 18:37), they *embrace* the cutting words of Christ that force an

individual to accommodate reality (that is, they *hear* His words – Jn. 10:27). Their knowledge and experience of God's love for them breaks their formerly proud and willful hearts, and God is thus able to work together for good even something like a season of increased sin in their lives (Rom. 8:28).

Needless to say, God's kindness and forbearance in dealing with sinners' weakness and folly does *not* lead to repentance or consecration for people of the lie. Rather, it leads to a hardening of their hearts toward their Creator and His plan for their lives. This process eventually culminates in God giving them up to the lusts of their hearts because they are committed to exchanging His truth for a lie (Rom. 1:24, 25).

* * *

Returning to the issue of eternal security being a license to sin, I think it is clear from God's Word that persistence in a path of sin is the result – not of security or insecurity in Christ – but, rather, of a willful posture toward delusion and deception. People of the lie *choose* this posture of delusion and deception rather than one of honesty and truth, and this posture of darkness is grounded in their very being. The ultimate delusion to which all people of the lie cling is the same for which Lucifer himself was guilty: "I can be like the Most High" (Isa. 14:14).

I should point out that many do not consider this area of rock-solid security to be an area in which God can help us. They believe the only way we can possess any ongoing assurance of salvation is if we continue to do "our part."

In other words, they think we must prove the genuineness of our faith and the strength of our resolve by "standing firm to the end" (Mt. 10:22).

Really, how is this anything but a works theology?

Allow me to emphasize that *of course* I believe God's children will stand firm to the end – this should go without saying. What we must recognize, however, is that qualities such as endurance, longsuffering and faithfulness are clearly the *fruit* of God's free gift of salvation (Gal. 5:22, 23) – they are never conditions imposed in relation to the *root* of it.

In short, if God has saved us through the merit of Christ, then we are *saved*.

"He saved us,
Not because of deeds done by us in righteousness,
But in virtue of his own mercy.

(Titus 3:5)

(The Greek word translated as "saved" is in the aorist tense and the indicative mood – denoting a *completed* act.)

Think of the thief on the cross: he stood firm to the end. But his perseverance and endurance were not qualities he needed to express in order to *secure* his salvation. His salvation was *already secured* by the saving act of God, and his final salvation was confirmed by the words of Christ Himself.

His perseverance and endurance were simply the inevitable *fruit* that flows from the life of a saved child of God.

I realize there are many texts of Scripture that depict salvation as a *process*, not a completed act – but there are also many texts of Scripture that depict salvation as a *completed act*, not a process. An expanded discussion of this topic is beyond the scope and focus of this study; nevertheless, I believe the relevant distinction is usually this: one group of texts refers to our status before God (justification – completed act), while the other refers to our present state in the world (sanctification – process).

Also, one group usually relates to the *root* of our salvation (justification – completed act), while the other usually relates to the *fruit* of it (sanctification – process).

Our part in the salvation process is simply this: a confession of need that leads to acceptance of Christ by faith as one's personal Savior. Really, how could anything that is given *by grace* as a *free gift* (Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:8) require anything more of the recipient?

As I have stated, a confession of need is precisely what the vast majority of those in the world will not give.

"They do not cry to me from the heart,
But they wail upon their beds."
(Hos. 7:14)

People of the lie will not cry out to God for deliverance and salvation. They will moan and groan and gripe and complain ("wail upon their beds"), but they will never admit to their need of a Savior, nor will they ever repent of their evil deeds.

* * *

Returning once again to the issue of eternal security being a license to sin, consider the following question: Why would the assurance of eternal security result in a desire to willfully continue in the path of sin and death from which a believer has *already* sought deliverance?

Really, is this not why someone receives God's free gift of salvation – because he or she desires *deliverance* from the power of sin in the life? So why would someone want to return to the same worldly ways that have already been shown to be unfulfilling?

I think it is clear from God's word that those who covet a path of self-destruction (Prov. 8:36) are not those who embrace the power of God's redemption; rather, they are those who *resist* this power. Thus, it is children of the devil – *not* children of God – who desire to abide in the path of sin and death.

Now *of course* it is true that we, as God's children, often wander into a path of sin and bondage (I certainly do), but, in the depth of our hearts, we recognize and experience that only

God's ways are "ways of pleasantness," and only *His* paths are paths of "peace" (Prov. 3:17). We also recognize and experience that in God's presence there is "fullness of joy," and in His right hand are "pleasures for evermore" (Ps. 16:11).

So we, as God's children, never willfully raise our fists to God in acts of bold defiance and high-handed rebellion. On the contrary, we desire the "ways of pleasantness" and the "fullness of joy" that we know by experience are found only in Christ.

Only the lying and unconverted heart finds God's ways of pleasantness unwelcome, and His pleasures unsatisfying. This is so because the unconverted heart seeks to live an autonomous life that is independent of God; thus, it is a heart that is throbbing with all the restless strivings of personal pride and ambition. Such a heart finds no repose in the peace and pleasantness of God's rest. This is true whether one's personal pride and ambition lead to an outwardly immoral life in the world or to an outwardly moral and "holy" life within the church.

The apostle, Peter, certainly did not consider the assurance of one's final salvation to be an incentive to sin, for he wrote,

"Therefore, my brothers and sisters,
Make every effort to confirm your calling and election,
For if you do these things, you will never stumble."

(2 Pet. 1:10)

Peter clearly regarded the assurance of one's call and election to be something that will *keep* one from sinning (or "stumbling")[10]. In other words, Peter believed that a rock-solid assurance that we are called and elected to salvation is a vital key – not to continuance in sin – but, rather, to attainment of victory.

[10] It is also clear from this passage that God does not call and elect all persons in Christ (as some maintain), for, if this were true, then it would make no sense for God's word to implore readers to *confirm* their call and election. (What is the point of "confirming" something that is freely given to all?)

In my own experience, I have found that a rock-solid assurance that I – *even I!* – have been called and elected by God to be a part of His family for all eternity gives a grounding to my hope and an assurance to my faith that nothing else can give. I now *know* that my personal destiny is to be "holy and blameless" before God (Eph. 1:4), and this inspires hope and courage.

It also gives substance and legitimacy to my personal identity in Christ.

As I have mentioned many times: there *really is* a class of people that is God's children, and there *really is* a class of people that is not.

There are people of the truth (Jn. 10:27, 28; 18:37), and there are people of the lie (Jn. 8:43-47; 10:25, 26).

Given this reality, each of us needs to know *with certainty* that we are in the one class and not the other, and our assurance of this must be grounded in God's calling and election, not in our wavering commitment and resolve.

(Later in this study, we will see that God's calling and election are grounded in the necessity of His nature; therefore, our assurance of final salvation is as rock-solid as God Himself.)

* * *

Any perspective that regards eternal security as a license to sin is one that reveals confusion with regard to the means of personal salvation, and those who embrace such a perspective are invariably enmeshed in a works theology in which they believe they are keeping God's commandments as a condition of their salvation.

One may object by stating, "No, I am not enmeshed in a works theology, nor do I believe I am obeying God's commandments as a condition of my salvation. Rather, I simply believe that

proper fruit must flow from the lives of all who are being saved – and keeping God's commandments is proper fruit."

My response: *Of course* it is true that proper fruit will flow from the lives of God's children, for Christ Himself states, "You will know them by their fruits" (Mt. 7:20).

Nevertheless, the Bible is clear that no one is ever in a position to properly evaluate the fruit of anyone's life in an infallible way unless he or she has the eternal and omniscient perspective of Deity.

In order to understand this point clearly, consider again Christ's parable of the man who sows good seed in his field (Mt. 13:24-30, 36-43). You will recall that the man's enemy sowed weeds among the good seeds of wheat, and when the seeds of wheat sprouted, the weeds also appeared, so the servants of the man asked him if he wants his servants to uproot the weeds.

The man who sowed the good seed (whom Christ says represents Himself – v.37) responds by saying, "No, because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them" (Mt. 13:29).

He goes on to say,

Let both grow together until the harvest.
At that time I will tell the harvesters:
First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned;
Then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn."

(Matt. 13:29-30)

I initially referred to this parable in chapter 5 ("Christ's Sheep") in order to show that a lamb of God cannot become a pig, nor can a sheep become a wild dog.

Notice another point in this parable: Christ does not say, "Here is the infallible outward test for properly differentiating between a sprout of wheat and a weed."

No, Christ does not say this – in fact, He cautions *against* any such evaluation before the harvest, for *only then* will the fruit of all lives be properly manifested for final evaluation (Mt. 13:30).

* * *

I could write much more on this topic of a call to holiness, but I hope I have written sufficiently to show (1) God's call *truly is* a call to holiness (Eph. 1:3, 4), and (2) since God's call is a call to holiness, we, as God's children, can rest (*rest!*) in the assurance that God will bring to completion the process of sanctification that He has begun in our lives (just as He has promised – Phil. 1:6).

In the next chapter I will address the process by which God accomplishes this end of holiness in the lives of His children.

* * *

To God be the glory, great things He has done.

9. The Path of Holiness

"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men,
Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts,
We should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age,
Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing,
Of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ."

(Titus 2:11-13, NKJV)

Notice that God's word does not state that His grace teaches us to *embrace* ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live recklessly, unrighteously, and ungodly in the present age. Rather, it states that His grace teaches us to *deny* ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live *soberly*, *righteously*, and *godly* in this present age.

So how does God's grace do this?

The root Greek word that is translated as teaching in this text (transliterated: *paideia*) is translated three times as some form of chasten in Hebrews 12:6, 7:

"For whom the LORD loves He chastens,
And scourges every son whom He receives.
If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons;
For what son is there whom a father does not chasten?"

(Heb. 12:6, 7, NKJV)

Thus, God's grace "teaches" us (Titus 2:11-13) to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts by a process of *chastening*, and chastening always involves a series of providences by which we are reproved and corrected by God (as our Father in Christ) so that we, as His children, can be brought to a state of meaningful and intelligent submission.

In other words, chastening brings proud and arrogant creatures like ourselves to the place where we finally admit, "You know – I think my Creator knows best."

I hope it goes without saying that any process of chastening will always involve a degree of suffering. This is so because our sinful flesh is fully bent on having its own way (*always!*).

Thus, any process of reproof and correction – even a process that is orchestrated by a loving and merciful Father – will invariably involve a cross for self-absorbed beings like you and me.

In order to get a better sense of how this process of chastening works to sanctify a believer, I will focus attention on one of Christ's "inner three" disciples – namely, the apostle, Peter.

Peter was clearly a somewhat rash and intemperate person during the time of Christ's earthly ministry. Later in his life, however, Peter became a very different person. He clearly did not possess the same undisciplined and intemperate manner when he wrote his second epistle, for he encourages fellow believers in this epistle to give "all diligence" to the process of adding to their knowledge temperance, and to their temperance patience (2 Peter 1:5, 6, KJV) .

One might understandably wonder, "Is this really *Peter* writing this? How was he miraculously transformed from the rash, impetuous disciple to the one who now extols the virtues of temperance and patience?"

Peter experienced the reality of God's chastening in his life, for, in his first epistle, he states,

"Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh,
Arm yourselves with the same thought,
For whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin."

(1 Pet. 4:1)

Later in this epistle – an epistle in which Peter emphasizes the value of suffering for the sake of Christ – he states,

"This is the true grace of God; stand fast in it."

(1 Pet. 5:12)

Thus, Peter believes that "the true grace of God" in which we must "stand fast" amounts to a meek submission to the sufferings that God allows in our lives.

In other words, it is only as we meekly submit to God providence of personal suffering for the sake of Christ that the power of our willful flesh is broken.

Truly, this is the only way that we are brought to the end of ourselves.

This is the path of the cross, and I believe Andrew Jukes, a missionary of the nineteenth century, described this path well:

> Some speak and act as if they thought that advance in the knowledge of the truth could be acquired by effort, and by our searching this, or willing that. But, unless I mistake, all real growth in knowledge is just a revelation which comes, not by effort, but by and in our accepting meekly the varied experiences we are called to pass through, every one of which in one way or another makes us learn our own helplessness and the help and grace and power of Him who manifests Himself to us in our tribulation. Thus the cross is the great teacher – not the mere doctrine of the cross – but the actual crossing of our will which is indeed the crossing of ourselves."[11]

The suffering from this path of the cross is not just suffering for suffering's sake, for such would be meaningless and worthless, and it would accomplish no productive end in the life of a believer. The suffering that results from God's chastening is always suffering that has a purposeful end of maturity and growth in grace. Thus, God's leading during these times of chastening is always intelligible in the sense that He always allows us to understand the lessons of grace He is trying to teach us.

Even Solomon, the wisest man apart from Christ Himself, had to be brought to the end of himself through chastening before he could state the following at the end of his book of wisdom[12]:

"The end of the matter; all has been heard.
Fear God, and keep His commandments;
For this is the whole duty of man."

(Eccl. 12:13)

[11] Hannah Whitall Smith, *The Christian's Secret of a Holy Life* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1994).
[12] I realize that this verse may have been added by someone after Solomon; nevertheless, it is still the inspired word of God, and it comes after "all has been heard" regarding the many lessons that have been learned through God's process of chastening.

In other words, Solomon wrote these words only after being brought to the point where he could see the true vanity of life and thus know firsthand that all striving after pleasure and fame is really a striving after wind. He did not reach this place of enlightened perspective because his father, David, taught him to keep God's law. No, Solomon fell *deeply* into all sorts of sin after hearing his earthly father's instruction.

Solomon was brought to this point of seeing the true wisdom of God's ways only after following a path where he said to himself, "Come now, I will make a test of pleasure; enjoy yourself" (Eccl. 2:1). He also says that he withheld no pleasure from himself (Eccl. 2:10).

And he found this path to be one that ultimately led to suffering and pain – and the chastening of God (2 Sam. 7:12-15; 1 Kings 11:9-13).

Do we really think the process will be different for us? What child is there who just obeys when he or she is told to do so (other than our Savior Himself)?

Those who believe they can obey from the heart without God's chastening (in one form or another) are invariably those who believe they would not have sinned as grievously as Solomon if they had lived during his time and had possessed the same power and fame as he. They also believe they would not have sinned as grievously as Samson if they had lived during his time and had possessed the same strength as he.

And, of course, they believe they would never have committed adultery and murder as David did – and on and on.

This is all, in my estimation, a state of extreme delusion, for I think a measure of honesty in our lives will drive all of us to confess, "But for the grace of God, I am capable of doing *anything*."

Yes, it may seem ruthless and despicable for a person to commit adultery with the wife of one of his best soldiers and then murder the soldier – and, of course, it *is* ruthless and despicable. But I think we err grievously if we think we are incapable of doing the same. We think in this manner only because we have never been inflated with the power and fame of someone like King David.

As Abraham Lincoln stated, “Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power.”

Can you or I really believe that we would pass a test of character that a man after God’s own heart failed? (1 Sam. 13:14)

* * *

Returning to the process of chastening, an important point is this: if one is not grounded in an assurance of eternal security, then the desired effect of God’s chastening is entirely undermined.

This is so because, if we do not know we are eternally secure as God’s children, then we will almost certainly misinterpret God’s actions toward us during these times of God’s “teaching.” We will think He is inflicting vengeful punishment upon rebellious sinners rather than bestowing loving correction upon eternally secure children of God. We will also be inclined to doubt that we are "measuring up" to the conditions of salvation during these necessary times of reproof, and this doubt will make us weak in spiritual power so that we are more prone to succumb to Satan’s temptations.

I hope it goes without saying that I am speaking from painful personal experience.

God’s children have a desperate need to know that His “teaching” (Titus 2:12, KJV) and “training” (Titus 2:12, RSV) constitute a process of *grace* (Titus 2:11), and this grace must be

understood and experienced in the context of eternal acceptance and security in the Father's love and care.

This is not a trivial issue. One cannot simply say, "Only believe." If this issue were so trivial, then why would a man who longs for God's blessing cry out with tears, "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief!"? (Mk. 9:24, KJV)

And why would Christ seek to encourage His followers by saying, "Let not your hearts be troubled. *Trust* in God; *trust also* in Me"? (Jn. 14:1)

Surely we know that we do not trust God to the degree that we should. We need the assurance that He *truly is* our Father in Christ, and we *truly are* His children. This will allow us to find *rest* in His care. If we cannot rest in His care, then we will be enmeshed in all sorts of uncertainty when facing times in the wilderness. As with the Son of God, Satan will *always* start by insinuating doubt that we are God's children:

"If You are the Son of God, . . . "
(Mt. 4:3, 6)

In other words, Satan will tempt each of us to ask ourselves,

- Am I *really* God's child?
- Would God allow a child of His to *suffer* in this way?
- Would He leave me in a state that appears to be so *hopeless*?
- Would He allow me to be in this marriage, with this job – and all these problems?

This issue becomes even more significant when we realize that the only situations where we truly grow in grace and maturity are those that appear to be genuinely hopeless. This is so because a situation that does not appear to be hopeless (from a human standpoint, that is) allows the control that we are always exerting in our lives to be throbbing with life and vitality.

It is only when all human-based hope is *gone* that we let go.

And it is only when we let go that we cry out to God for deliverance.

Finally, it is only when we cry out to God for deliverance – from *truly helpless hearts* – that we receive His grace and strength.

If we are continually doubting that we can endure the trial faithfully (that is, because everything appears to be so hopeless), then the very situation that God is seeking to use to *strengthen* us in His grace will instead have the effect of enshrouding us in darkness and despair. The end result will be that the trial *weakens* our faith – just as Satan intends.

Most of us are acutely aware of how we often bring trials upon ourselves by our foolish behavior, and the evil one uses this awareness to unsettle our hearts. He brings the magnitude of our folly before us in ways that cause all honest and sensitive persons to wonder if they could really be children of the Most High.

So, again, we need to know that we are eternally security in Christ and thus that God is our Father . . . forever.

A final point: if we are not grounded in the truth of our *final* salvation through the knowledge and experience of being eternally secure in Christ, then we will often seek to insulate ourselves from divine providences that are designed to lead us into straight places where we are forced to exercise living faith. We will live in self-protective modes where we passively refuse to abandon ourselves to the will of God. There will thus be a hard, unrelenting rigidity that underlies all aspects of our lives – regardless of how soft and vulnerable we may appear to others.

This is no different than any other area of our lives where we make significant investments. If you and I are not sure about a certain monetary investment, for example, then *of course* we will hedge our risk in this area in order to insulate ourselves from possible loss. If this

is true for something as fleeting and transitory as money, then how much more is it true when it applies to our very *lives*?

We need to know that we are God's children, and we need to know that we are eternally secure in His love and care. Furthermore, we need to know that we are His *forever* during the unsettling times of His chastening. Once these issues are settled in our hearts and minds, *only then* can we rest in the assurance that we are receiving – not cold-hearted punishment from a lawgiver – but, rather, loving discipline from a merciful Father in Christ.

As God's children, we need to be grounded in the assurance that God punished *His Son* for our sins. We will thus realize that He has no need to punish us (even if He wanted to – which He doesn't). Once we understand that this punitive aspect of salvation was handled *once and for all* on the cross, we can rest in the assurance that God is truly our eternal Father in Christ and not our temporal Judge (1 Jn. 2:1).[13]

* * *

Knowing that we are eternally secure in Christ during times of God's chastening allows us to realize that the only place of growth is in *grace*[14]. We do not grow from a works-oriented place *outside* of grace where we are desperately trying to grow *into* it. This may seem to be such a trite insight, but it often appears that many of us know and experience very little of God's grace. Many of us are usually trying (in one way or another) to grow *into* grace rather than to grow *in* it. In other words, we are trying (in one way or another) to merit an approval from God that has *already* been freely bestowed upon in Christ.

True growth in grace is diametrically opposed to self-dependence, self-effort, or legality of any kind.

[13] Note in this verse that John writes that we have an advocate – not with our heavenly Judge – but, rather, with the *Father*.
[14] I am indebted to the writings of Hannah Whitall Smith for this important insight.

"Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow;
They toil not, neither do they spin."

(Matthew 6:28)

And again,

"Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?"

(Matthew 6:27)

If our experiences are those of stretching and straining toward spiritual growth during these times of chastening in the wilderness, then we can be certain we are accomplishing nothing.

Upon God's will I lay me down
As child upon its mother's breast.
No silken couch, nor softest bed
Could ever give me such sweet rest.[15]

The experience conveyed in this stanza from a Jean Sophia Pigott hymn captures the rest that each of us should experience in Christ – whether we are enduring a deep, dark valley of God's chastening or enjoying the bright sunshine of the mountaintop. It is this experience of rest that allows us to grow in grace, and this rest comes from the knowledge and experience that we are forever accepted by God as His child.

Strength and purpose will come to our lives from this understanding and experience of our eternal security in Christ, for the understanding and experience of this security will bring the realization that we will never be abandoned because of the wavering commitment of our unstable hearts.

We will thus understand and appreciate that, truly, we are people of destiny.

* * *

To God be the glory, great things He has done.

[15] This is a stanza from a hymn written by Jean Sophia Pigott (1845-1882).

10. The Study of *I AM*

We are now at the point in this study where I will begin an analysis of the name that God ascribes to Himself in Exodus 3:14 – namely, ***I AM***. I intend to show by this analysis that our security in Christ is every bit as rock solid as God Himself.

By the conclusion of this section, I hope you will understand that if believers are not secure in their saving relationship with Christ, then God is not God.

Or, stated differently: if God is God (and, of course, He is), then believers are secure in their saving relationship with Christ.

I realize that I have already given powerful biblical support for the believer's security in Christ, but I understand that many will respond to this support by stating, "I can give powerful biblical support for the believer's *in*security (or *conditional* security) in Christ."

We could spend time engaging in theological rhetoric and offering contradictory biblical interpretations, but surely there is a better way.

I would like to get *beyond* all of this to a place of indisputable, foundational truth, so I will emphasize again that a position of security that is built upon the foundation of God Himself is unshakable and irrefutable because one cannot get "underneath" the nature of Deity.

In short: there is nothing more fundamental than the ground of being,[16] so a position of security that is soundly built upon *this* foundation is a position of *unassailable* security.

* * *

Before commencing this study of Exodus 3:14, I would like to emphasize that any comprehensive analysis of expressions like ***I AM*** and ***I AM WHO I AM*** (both of which occur in this passage of Scripture) involves a degree of depth. This depth is necessary because there is no

[16] This is a phrase employed by Paul Tillich to denote the metaphysical foundation of all that exists.

way to extract the inherent meaning of these expressions without delving deeply into various philosophical areas. All of this depth is not necessary, however, in order to get a simple sense of one's security in Christ. I would therefore suggest that you skip any chapter or section that seems too overwhelming and simply move to the next one. You can always return to the prior area of the study once the "big picture" becomes clearer in your mind.

And the "big picture" *will* (eventually) become clearer in your mind. ☺

* * *

To God be the glory, great things He has done.

11. The Name and the Nature of God

Let's look now at the biblical dialogue in which God introduces Himself to Moses as the great ***I AM***. (You can read the entire account in chapters three and four of the Book of Exodus.)

When Moses was asked by God to go to His people on behalf of Himself, Moses asked God what he should say to them if they should ask him, "What is His name?" (Ex. 3:13)

God answered, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, '***I AM*** has sent me to you'" (Ex. 3:14).[17]

So these are the words of God: "***I AM*** has sent me to you."

Notice that God identifies Himself as the great ***I AM*** when He is preparing to deliver the Israelites with miraculous power from the bondage of Egypt and Pharaoh. Clearly, He believed it was important for them to know Him as such at this critical time.

It is equally important that *we* know God as such when *we ourselves* seek deliverance in Christ from the bondage of Egypt and Pharaoh (that is, sin and the devil). Indeed, knowing God in this way (and also knowing the implications that flow from this knowledge) has been nothing short of life-transforming for me. I realize it may seem a bit extreme to think that two simple words could be life-transforming, but I think you will agree with me when you complete this study.

I should point out that even though a deeper understanding of these two simple words has resulted in a life transformation for me, it has also resulted in some surprises. I state this now at the beginning of the study because I believe that a deeper understanding of these two simple words might result in some surprises for you as well. Furthermore, while a few of these surprises may be welcome, one or two may possibly be unwelcome.

[17] God prefaces His "***I AM*** statement with the statement, "***I AM WHO I AM***." I address this assertion of God later in the study.

Whether or not a surprise is welcome or unwelcome, however, does not change the fact that all the implications that flow directly from this knowledge of God will be true simply because they are grounded in the very name (and thus the nature) of Deity.

In short: they will be implications that cannot be denied.

Let's take a look at this name of God:

- Clearly, God expresses a name for Himself that reveals His nature and essence.
- The name that God expresses for Himself is, ***I AM***.

Notice that God does not say His name is ***I AM NOT*** (which would imply *non*-existence); rather, He says His name is ***I AM*** (which implies *existence*).

Here are three important points that flow directly from this statement of God:

- Since God's nature and essence imply existence, God exists necessarily.
  (***"I AM"*** – Ex. 3:14)
- Since God exists necessarily, all that He is, He is necessarily.[18]
  (***"I AM WHO I AM"*** – Ex. 3:14)
- Since all that God is, He is necessarily, He cannot change.
  (***"I the LORD do not change."*** – Mal. 3:6)

I will develop each of these points more fully in the chapters that follow, so do not become concerned if they are presently unclear for you.

Before proceeding to an examination of these points, however, I would like to emphasize that we would arrive at the same conclusion that a necessary being like God must exist even if we did not have these words of God about Himself from Scripture.

You may ask, "But how would we arrive at this same conclusion apart from these words from Scripture?"

[18] I am greatly indebted to the writings of Norman Geisler for helping to clarify my thought in this area. (*Chosen But Free,* Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2001, pp. 52, 111)

I would reply: we would arrive at this same conclusion by simply acknowledging the *non*-necessary nature of ourselves as well as the universe in which we exist.

(Many philosophers refer to this as the "contingency" of the world.)

Stay with me, okay? ☺

In order to understand the *non*-necessary nature of ourselves as well as the universe in which we exist, we will start with a basic observation: Something exists rather than nothing exists.

This is true, right?

But what if we were to wonder *why* is there something rather than nothing?[19]

A person who does not believe in any transcendent structure of being (and thus does not wish to embark on any path that would lead to the existence of God) may say something like, "Well, things just are."

But a response like this does not answer the "Why?" question, does it? It does not answer this question on either a rational or a causal level.

In other words, it provides neither a conceptual reason nor a physical cause for existence.

Are you still with me? ☺

So, in response to the person who states that things "just are," I would ask, Is it reasonable to think that we are unable to give a rational or a causal answer to the ultimate question about existence?

This same person may say something like, "There is no need to give an answer here."

But I would assert that there *is* a need – a very *definite* need – simply because there is an obvious rationality and causality to existence. In other words, things make sense (rationality of existence), and things flow in cause-and-effect sequences (causality of existence). This is why

[19] This is a well-known question posed by philosophers such as Heidegger and Leibniz.

people are able to engage in rational dialogue about meaningful issues, and this is also why the enterprise of science is so successful.

So, given the rationality and the causality of existence, if there is a whole bunch of stuff that exists ("stuff" like you and me), but this stuff need *not* exist, then we are in a position where we need to provide a rational *explanation* and a sufficient *cause* for it. If we cannot do this, then we are forced to admit that we have abandoned reason and causality at the very time when we need them most – namely, at the time when we seek to gain an understanding of ourselves as well as our place in the universe.

Furthermore, if we are going to provide any sort of rational and causal explanation for all of this stuff, then the only type of explanation that will suffice is one that postulates the existence of a necessary being as the sufficient cause and explanation.[20]

And this is the identical conclusion we reach from the words that God applies to Himself (***I AM***).

Still there? ☺

I will develop all of these points more fully in the chapters that follow, but I wanted to mention at the beginning of this study that – even though we are deriving truths about God and His existence from His very own words (***I AM***) – we would arrive at these *very same truths* even if we did not have these two simple words that God declared about Himself.

For now, let's proceed to an examination of God's necessity that flows from His ***I AM*** statement.

* * *

To God be the glory, great things He has done.

[20] This explanation is actually one that addresses our contingent existence – not in a chronological sense – but, rather, in a hierarchical sense. In other words there is a need to provide a "ground" of being for any non-necessary existence in the here and now.

12. God's Necessity, Part 1

You will recall the first conclusion we derived from God's name and thus His nature:

- Since God's nature and essence imply existence, God exists necessarily.

This conclusion is quite simple and straightforward, and I honestly see no way around it.

If one's name is ***I AM*** and thus expresses ***"I AM"***-ness, it is impossible for such a being to be characterized by ***I AM NOT***. Thus, it is impossible for such a being not to exist.

Such a being must therefore exists necessarily.

The alternative to a being that exists necessarily is one that exists contingently. A contingent being is one that might or might not exist. You and I are contingent beings since we are beings that clearly are not characterized by ***"I AM"***-ness; thus, we do not possess the basis or "ground" of our existence within ourselves.

If you were to become angry with me and ask, "Why do you even exist?", I could not reply by saying, "Hey, I'm Stuart Cedrone!" Clearly, this would not be a sufficient reason – nor would it be a sufficient cause – for my existence. Given that I am a contingent, not a necessary, being, I would need to point to something *beyond* myself in order to account for my being and existence.

For dust I am, and to dust I shall return (Gen. 3:19).

God, however, *could* reply by simply giving His name, for the name, ***I AM***, implies that "to be" is essential to His essence. Thus, He exists necessarily.

If God does not exist necessarily, then, like you and me, He exists contingently – and this would imply that there is something more fundamental than God since a sufficient reason and cause for His existence would need to be found beyond His nature and essence.

But there is nothing more fundamental than a being who declares that "to be" is essential to its essence. Such a being obviously has no dependency upon any being *beyond* itself because it has being (that is, "to be"-ness) grounded *in* itself.

So, once again, since God's name is ***I AM*** and thus expresses ***"I AM"***-ness, it is impossible for Him to be characterized by ***I AM NOT***. Thus, it is impossible for Him not to exist.

Therefore, He exists necessarily.

There are two further points that flow directly from this necessity of God's nature.

1. Since God is a being who exists necessarily, we can safely assert that He is also a being who is uncaused.

We can assert this because the only other possibilities are that He is caused by another, or He is self-caused – and we will see in a moment that neither of these "possibilities" is really possible.

With regard to the first "possibility," we can safely assert that God cannot be caused by another because, if this were true, then He would not be the great ***I AM*** Who comprises existence within Himself. In other words, if He were caused by another, then, like you and me, He would need to point to something *beyond* Himself in order to give a sufficient reason and cause for His existence. But if God had to do this, then He would not be the great ***I AM*** Who has His existence grounded – not in *another* – but, rather, in *Himself*.

Clearly, then, God cannot be caused by another.

With regard to the second "possibility," we can safely assert that God cannot be self-caused because, if this were true, then He would need to exist *prior* to Himself in order to give

existence to Himself, and this is impossible. In other words, God would need to exist *before* He exists in order to cause His own existence.

Clearly, this is self-contradictory nonsense.

Thus, the only possible conclusion is that God is uncaused.

I hope you will reflect upon the above arguments until it is clear to you that God is indeed uncaused.

Here is the second point that flows directly from this necessity of God's nature:

2. Since God is a being who exists necessarily, we can safely assert that He has existed from all eternity.

This must be true for two important reasons.

First of all, we know (from the above argument) that God is not caused by another. If God is not caused by another, and He is also not eternal, then this implies that He suddenly arose out of nothing (because this is the only other possibility). But only nothing proceeds from nothing, so if there were ever a time when there were nothing, then this nothing would never be able to produce something. And this nothing *certainly* would never be able to produce a being like God Who is necessarily existent.

Therefore, God must be eternal.

Another reason for safely asserting that God is eternal is this: any being that is truly and accurately characterized by the present tense of the verb "to be" (as God is – ***I AM***) *must* be eternal because any such being is clearly one that transcends time as we know and experience it.

Think about it. Could you characterize yourself by the present tense of the verb "to be"? Could I? No, we could not. Why? Because the present tense of the verb "to be" applies to you and me only at the *present* instant of time in which we happen to exist. It certainly does not apply

to us at *all* instants of time. In order for the present tense of the verb "to be" to apply to us at *all* instants of time, we would need to be entities that *transcend* time and contingency.

In other words, we would need to be necessary and eternal.

But, of course, you and I do not transcend time and contingency, for, at any given moment of time, you and I may exist, or we may not exist. We certainly have no *guarantee* that we will exist. Both of us could be hit by a falling tree or an automobile. We could die of old age – and on and on. This is true because you and I are non-necessary, transient beings who are susceptible to all the various contingencies that could cut our lives short at any moment.

But when God declares Himself to be the great ***I AM***, He is clearly characterizing Himself in a way that *transcends* time and contingency. He is declaring that He is *not* susceptible to all the various events that could cut lives like yours and mine short at any moment.

In sort, He is declaring that, unlike you and me, He is necessary and eternal.

I hope you will again reflect upon the above arguments until the relevant conclusion (in this case, God's eternity) is clear to you.

To summarize our brief study so far: we are able to know from the simple name that God applies to Himself that He is

- Necessarily Existent
- Uncaused
- Eternal

* * *

To God be the glory, great things He has done.

13. God's Necessity, Part 2

We will now examine the second point about God's name (and thus His nature):

- Since God exists necessarily, all that He is, He is necessarily.

The important point here is that God does not happen to merely *have* certain features or properties; rather, He *is* (by necessity) these features or properties.

- One would not say, for example, that God just happens to *have* the attribute of love; rather, one would say (as the Bible does) that God *is* love. (1 Jn. 4:8)
- One would not say that He happens to *have* truth; rather, that He *is* truth. (Jn. 14:6)
- Not that He happens to *have* life; rather, that He *is* life. (Jn. 14:6)[21]

All the properties of God are essential, not accidental or contingent. They are part of His essence (and the essence of any "something" is simply what it is to *be* that something – from the Lain *esse*, to be).

If this point does not seem clear to you, then consider this: if it were not true that all God is, He is *necessarily*, then this would mean that there is something accidental or contingent in God. But if this were true, then God would not exist necessarily *as that*. And if God did not exist necessarily in some aspect of His being, then ***"I AM"***-ness would not be true of Him as He exists.

But, clearly, ***"I AM"***-ness *is* true of God as He exists, for He truthfully declares His name to be ***I AM***. We thus know that God comprises necessary existence in *every dimension of His being*.

[21] The last two statements apply, of course, to God incarnate in the Person of Christ. There is no problem applying these principles to Him, however, because Christ clearly identifies Himself as the great ***I AM*** (Jn. 8:58).

I have mentioned that all the properties of God are essential, not accidental or contingent. This distinction between accidental or contingent properties and essential properties may not be clear to you, but it is very important, so I will clarify it.

A good way to explore the meaning of these terms is in relation to a person like you or me. I will do it in relation to me since I know certain truths about myself, but I obviously know none about you.

I will start by revealing that I happen to have brown hair. For this reason, I could truthfully say, "I have brown hair." I also happen to have short fingernails, so I could also truthfully say, "I have short fingernails." You get the idea, right? Each of these is a property that I happen to have, so I could express these true statements about myself.

But one statement I would not express about myself is this: "I have 'Stuart-Cedrone-ness'." Instead of expressing this statement, I would rather say, "I *am* Stuart Cedrone." This is so because "Stuart-Cedrone-ness" is not a feature I just happen to have. You can see this clearly if you simply ask yourself, "*Who* would have this feature of "Stuart-Cedrone-ness"? If this feature is the one that makes me Stuart Cedrone, then Stuart Cedrone can't be the one who has it – because he isn't Stuart Cedrone *until* he has it.

You see? I cannot be who I am without it because it constitutes my essence. It constitutes what it is to *be* Stuart Cedrone.

I am making this subject very simple (and actually distorting the issue a bit) for the purpose of clarification. In reality, there are two separate issues involved here: (1) The property (or properties) essential to my being a *person*, and (2) the property (or properties) essential to my being the *particular* person I am (namely, Stuart Cedrone). The one point I am emphasizing here

is simply this: I don't just happen to *have* the property of "Stuart-Cedrone-ness" in the same way that I happen to have the properties of brown hair and short fingernails.

Rather, I *am* Stuart Cedrone.

This distinction between a property like brown hair and a property like "Stuart-Cedrone-ness" is the relevant distinction between an accidental and an essential property.[22] An accidental property is one that I could lose and yet still retain my identity. It is a property that I just happen to have (like brown hair).

An essential property, on the other hand, is one that I could *not* lose and yet still retain my identity (a property like "Stuart-Cedrone-ness" – if such a property existed).

We must now translate this thinking about accidental and essential properties to God, and when we do, we discover that God has no accidental properties because He exists necessarily, and any being that exists necessarily is characterized by *necessity*, not contingency. As I pointed out earlier, if there were anything accidental or contingent in God, then this dimension of God's being would not be characterized by ***"I AM"***-ness (that is, by necessary existence); thus, God could not truthfully declare that His name is ***I AM***.

But God *is* able to declare that His name is ***I AM***; therefore, there is *no* contingency in God.

The point, once again, is that whatever attribute God *has*, that He *is*. This is so, once again, because God is a *necessary* being, and a necessary being is what it is *necessarily*. God thus "has" nothing because "having" something would imply that He could *lose* this something (that is, this accidental property or feature) and yet still be God.[23]

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[22] This is another possible distortion for the sake of simplicity as many philosophers would probably maintain that it is simply the collection of accidental properties that result in a person being the particular person he or she is.

[23] I am indebted to Norman Geisler for helping to clarify my thought in this area. (*Chosen But Free*, Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2001, p. 111)

But this is not true of God. This is true only of a being in whom there is some contingency. For only in a being in whom there is some contingency could there be an accidental property that could be lost without affecting the identity of the being itself.

Think again of me.

I could lose my brown hair, and yet I would still be me, right? I could dye my hair blue, for example (or even shave my head completely), and I would still be Stuart Cedrone.

Let's say I did, in fact, dye my hair blue. You would not say, "Stuart Cedrone has ceased to exist, and another person has come into existence." Rather, you would say, "Stuart Cedrone used to have brown hair, but now he has blue hair."

The relevant point to understand about God is that He has *no* accidental or contingent properties like this that could be changed because, as the great ***I AM***, He is characterized by *necessity*, not contingency.

Needless to say, I am repeating this point often – but only because it is *important!*

The bottom line is this: there are no "accidents" in God because, as a necessary being, He is what He is *necessarily*.

In order to derive this point directly from the words of God Himself, we will look at the complete statement that God expresses to Moses in Exodus 3:14:

Then Moses said to God,
"If I come to the people of Israel and say to them,
`The God of your fathers has sent me to you,'
And they ask me,
`What is his name?'
What shall I say to them?"
God said to Moses,
"I AM WHO I AM."
And He said,
"Say this to the people of Israel,
`I AM has sent me to you.'"

(Ex. 3:13, 14)

Notice that God states, "***I AM WHO I AM***" *before* He gives His name as ***I AM***.

Why did God make this statement about Himself? Who else can God be than Who He is?

Clearly, God cannot be anyone but the Person He is, so what is the point of declaring,

"***I AM WHO I AM***"?

The best way to clarify this statement of God is to think of it in relation to an expression that has become quite popular in our day – namely,

"***It is what it is.***"

I remember when I first heard someone use this expression, my first thought was, "Does this person think he is telling me anything by the use of this expression?"

Clearly, the statement is a tautology (that is, a necessary truth) because it is not stating anything meaningful (that is, falsifiable) about the world.

If I were to point to a certain object and say something like, "It is a diamond" – well, this is an assertion that can be tested. In other words, the object in question could be subjected to various tests in order to see if my statement about it is true.

But if I point to a certain object and say, "It is what it is" – well, this is an assertion that is true by necessity[24]; therefore, no tests are needed. (What else can something be than what it is?)

Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that this statement is true by necessity, people (especially professional athletes) use this expression quite often when they are faced with an unpleasant circumstance or situation in life that cannot be changed. Saying, "It is what it is," is their way of saying, "I'm not going to moan and groan and gripe and complain about it. I acknowledge it. I accept it. I'm going to deal with it. That's that."

[24] Strictly speaking, philosophers would probably assert that a statement like, "It is what it is," is *logically* true (or *analytically* true) rather than *necessarily* true since the concept of necessity is often reserved for the area of metaphysics; nevertheless, for our purposes, the point is the same.

What these people are essentially acknowledging and accepting when they express this statement is that there is *no longer any contingency*. In other words, they are acknowledging and accepting that there is no possibility that circumstances might be different than they are.

If we were to personalize this statement and apply it to God, then it would read,

"***He is Who He is***."

And, of course, this is precisely what God states about Himself when He declares,

"***I AM WHO I AM***."

The important point is this: just as the statement, "It is what it is," implies in the strongest possible sense that "it" cannot be other than what it is, so the statement, "***I AM WHO I AM***," likewise implies in the strongest possible sense that *God* cannot be other than Who He is.

So, one last time: God exists *necessarily*; therefore, all that He is, He *is* necessarily.

* * *

To God be the glory, great things He has done.

14. God's Immutability

The third point that flows directly from God's name (and thus from His nature) is,

- Since all that God is, He is necessarily, He cannot change.

One could simply cite Malachi 3:6 in order to establish this truth and be done with it:

"I the LORD do not change."

Establishing the unchangeableness of God in this way, however, does not help us to see *why* God cannot change. It does not help us to see how this attribute is grounded in the *necessity* of God's nature. For this reason, I will dig into this area of God's immutability a bit more deeply in order to show the connection to God's necessity because this connection will be important in our understanding of the rock-solid security we have in Christ.

First of all, it is important to understand that any change must be either an accidental or essential one – that is, any change must involve either an accidental property or an essential property. As I mentioned in the prior chapter, an accidental property is one that I can lose and yet still retain my identity (like the property of brown hair), while an essential property is one that I could *not* lose and yet still retain my identity (like the property of "Stuart-Cedrone-ness").

Let's take a realistic look at each of these changes in relation to myself as a person.

Let's propose for the moment that memory is essential to my personal identity. A philosopher by the name of John Locke believed this. If memory is, in fact, essential to my identity, then if I lose my memory (as in the case of amnesia), I have lost my identity.

In other words, if the possession of my memory is essential to the existence of my self, then the *loss* of my memory amounts to the *loss* of my self. It amounts to the loss of what it is to *be* Stuart Cedrone.

Therefore, Stuart Cedrone ceases to exist.

This would be an essential change – a change to the *essence* of what it is to *be* Stuart Cedrone.

I could also undergo an accidental change. I could dye my hair. I could let my fingernails grow. I could gain ten pounds. All of these changes would be *accidental* changes in which my identity would persist through the change.

Accidental changes do not result in a change in identity because an accidental property is an "accident," so to speak. It is a feature that is not *essential* to my identity; thus, it could change, and I would still retain my identity as Stuart Cedrone.

Let's apply this thinking to God.

First of all, we know that God has no accidental properties. That is, He has no "accidents" because all that He is, He is *necessarily*, not accidentally. For this reason, there can be no accidental change in God because He has no accidental *feature* like brown hair or short fingernails that He could lose and yet still be God. Any feature that God has, He does not *happen* to have; rather, He *necessarily* has. This is required, once again, by the necessity of His nature.

So, God definitely cannot change in any accidental way because, again, He has no "accidents."

But God cannot change in any *essential* way either because this would mean that God would cease to exist, and this is impossible for a necessary being.

Remember, essential properties constitute the *essence* of something, and the essence of something is what it is to *be* that something. So, clearly, if an essential property of God changes, then the essence of God has been destroyed. And if the essence of God has been destroyed, then God *as God* ceases to exist (because, again, God's essence is simply what it is to *be* God).

It would be the same sort of situation as the one in which I lost my memory. If my memory is essential to my identity as Stuart Cedrone, then the loss of this results in the loss of my identity as Stuart Cedrone. Therefore, I, as Stuart Cedrone, cease to exist.

One could think of another example: imagine someone believing that autonomy or independence is a necessary condition (or an essential property) for any entity to be a person. If one believes this, then the loss of autonomy or independence means the resulting "entity" is no longer a person. Thus, if an aging person eventually deteriorates to the point where he or she is incapable of survival without some form of life support, then, according to this criterion of "personhood," this entity has ceased to be a person.

Needless to say, this would be the sort of argument that would be used to justify a form of euthanasia.

One might also argue that this same essential property of autonomy (or "viability") is not possessed by a fetus (at least not in the early months of pregnancy). Thus, a "pre-viable" fetus does not qualify as a person, and abortion is therefore justified.

I hope it is clear that I am not stating that the premises in either of these arguments are true, nor am I stating that I support either argument. I am simply trying to show the rationale that would be used in these cases in order to clarify this issue of essential properties.

The relevant point is this: when one loses an essential property, one loses what it is to *be* a certain something. And since God cannot cease to be God, He cannot lose any essential property; thus, He cannot undergo any essential change.

To summarize: there cannot be any *accidental* change in God because there are no "accidents" in Him, and there cannot be any *essential* change in God because then He would cease to exist – and this is impossible for a necessary being.

Another important point is this: everything that changes has a cause more fundamental than itself, and this is another reason God could never change.

A massive tree, for example, cannot transform itself into a house, nor can a heap of scrap metal transform itself into an automobile. There are agencies beyond the tree and the metal that would be required in order for the tree to, in fact, become a house; and the metal, an automobile.

One might say, "But a living tree is changing over time. It is getting taller. It is growing leaves in the spring and shedding them in the fall. Even a tree that is cut down is changing. It is slowly decomposing without anyone doing anything to it."

Yes, all of this is true. And we could even state that the heap of scrap metal – if it is iron – will rust over time and thus will change (like the tree) without the intervention of any personal agency.

But this merely reinforces the point that everything that changes has a cause more fundamental than itself. In these cases, the fact that the tree and the heap of metal are changing over time shows that neither of them constitutes a fundamental level (or "ground") of being. We thus know there must be something more fundamental than massive trees and heaps of metal in the world.

We know this because changes never occur without causes to bring about the changes.

In these cases, there are biological structures and interactions that cause trees to grow, and there are molecules and laws that cause wood and metal to oxidize. These biological structures and chemical components (along with all of the relevant laws that pertain to them) are clearly more fundamental than wood, metal, trees and automobiles.

The important point, once again, is that there are always causes of changes, and these causes (along with the relevant components) are more fundamental than the changes and the

entities being changed. This is simply the nature of change and causation in our world, and there is no way around this brute fact of existence.

If one thinks the level of impersonal particles and laws (which is what all of this reduces to) is the most fundamental level of existence, then this constitutes the "ground" of being. In other words, if the entire framework of impersonal matter in motion is the rock-bottom, foundational level of being (as many secular scientists believe it is), then everything else derives from and reduces to only this.

Personally, I think there are insurmountable problems with any attempt to reduce rational awareness to impersonal matter in motion, but, of course, this is a topic for another study. At the very least, there is no way to coherently "fit" personal, conscious entities into an entirely impersonal, material "ontology."[25] Sentient beings like ourselves with personal hopes and aspirations would have no genuine meaning within this framework; rather, we would be merely "dust in the wind." All personal desires such as those for love and intimacy would have no legitimate metaphysical grounding; thus, personal beings like ourselves would be left without hope when it comes to meaningful *personal* fulfillment.

This is the alienation of the post-modern human condition.

The important point for the present study is this: any change requires a cause, and the cause is more fundamental than the change and the changed entity. Therefore, if God changed in some way, this would imply that there is something more fundamental than God. In this case, the "something" would be some unchanging absolute (like, for example, a principle of the universe or a law of nature) that formed the ultimate basis for His and all other change (and relative to which God's change could even be perceived as such).

[25] An "ontology" is simply a formal characterization of the fundamental nature of being.

But there is nothing more fundamental than a being who is truly and accurately characterized by the present tense of the verb "to be" (***I AM***), for such a being must be an eternal and necessarily existent being that transcends time and contingency.

Clearly, then, God does not change. Rather, He is the unchanging and uncaused absolute Who forms the foundational basis of all other being and change in the world.

* * *

If all this writing about change and "being" seems a bit abstract, then possibly a helpful way to think about this issue is to do so in relation to the physical universe in which we live. (I must warn you, however, that the reality of the physical universe can be a bit mind-boggling as well!)

If you know anything about relativity theory, then you understand that the concepts of absolute space and time are meaningless in our universe. This is quite counter-intuitive because most are inclined to think of space and time as absolutes. That is, most are inclined to think of our physical universe as having a whole lot of absolute (non-relative) space, and most are also inclined to think that we ourselves are marching through this space in the absolute (non-relative) dimension of time.

But things are not always as they appear, and, as it turns out, space and time are relative commodities in our universe. For as velocity increases, time dilates (that is, it goes more slowly) and length contracts. This continues until one reaches the one absolute in our physical universe – namely, the speed of light.

Yes, the speed of light in a vacuum is the one unchanging absolute in our universe to which even space and time are themselves relative. The value of this speed is completely

independent of the relative velocity of any observer, and it is also the maximum velocity since the energy needed to accelerate to this value approaches infinity as we seek to advance to it.

Given the absolute status of light in our universe, it is not surprising to read in God's Word that He begins His creative acts – not with the creation of space or time – but, rather, with the creation of light.

"And God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light." (Gen. 1:3)

This aspect of God's creation always puzzled me until I became familiar with relativity theory. I would think, "Why did God start with something like light? He should have started with space. Then He could have added time. He didn't even need a special creative act for light. He could have simply created the sun and the stars, and He would have gotten light along with them."

At one time or another, I guess we all have a tendency to think we're smarter than God.

☺

In any event, the reality of the physical universe is such that we could not have space and time until we have that to which they are themselves relative (namely, light). We need the unchanging absolute first; then commodities that are relative to this unchanging absolute become meaningful. Indeed, then change and relativity themselves become meaningful.

Likewise in the non-physical universe.

One cannot meaningfully discuss change unless there is some unchanging absolute. Even Heraclitus, the great pre-Socratic philosopher who believed that change is, in a sense, fundamental in our universe, knew there had to be some structuring principle to reality, some unchanging absolute. For him, this was the Logos, and, of course, God's Word equates this with Christ (Jn. 1:1, 14).

God, as the great ***I AM***, is the one, unchanging absolute that transcends even the space-time structure of the universe itself. What light is to the physical universe, so God is to the entire realm of being.

He is the Logos of all creation.

He is the one necessary being who transcends time and contingency.[26]

Before moving on to the next chapter, I would like to point out that God's unchanging nature provides yet another reason that He must be an eternal being who transcends time.

Think about it. Time imposes a certain "successive structure" upon any person or object that is *in* time since the condition of any entity in time necessarily progresses from one successive state to another. Therefore, if God were in time, this structure would be imposed upon Him as well.

But if this were true, then God would be progressing through all sorts of changes. For example, He would be gaining knowledge of events in time. He would be undergoing sentient responses to these events in time – and on and on.

The critical point to understand, however, is that *none* of this is true of God, for He *does not change*. Indeed, He *cannot* change. If God were to change, then He would not be the great ***I AM*** Who is characterized by necessity.

Furthermore, a change in God would imply that there is something more fundamental than God (just as the unchanging absolute of light is more fundamental than the changing dimensions of space and time in our physical universe).

So, quite simply, God *cannot change*, and this is why He declares of Himself,

"I the LORD do not change."

[26] We will see in a later chapter that God is unique; therefore, there is no other necessary being like Him. We can thus legitimately refer to Him as the *one* necessary being.

(Mal. 3:6)

* * *

To God be the glory, great things He has done.

15. Necessity and Contingency

I hope one point is clear at this point in the study, namely,

* * * *There is no contingency in God.* * * *

In other words, I hope it is clear that everything about God is characterized – not by ambiguity and possibility – but, rather, by certainty and necessity.

God is the great ***I AM*** Whose very nature and essence imply existence, and, because of this, He has no dependence upon anything outside of Himself that could bring about contingency or uncertainty of any kind.

- God is not dependent upon causes that may or may not produce desired effects because He is an *un*caused being who transcends causality.
- God is not dependent upon contingent states of affairs that may or may not occur because He is a *necessary* being who transcends contingency.
- God is not dependent upon the passage of time in order to learn something new or to know something important because He is an *eternal* being who transcends time.

I remember when I first realized this truth that there is no contingency in God. It was such a revelation and a breakthrough for me. I had been thinking and praying about God's nature and essence (in an on-and-off sort of way) for many years. I had recently devoted myself to a more intensive study in this area, and I was thinking quite deeply about this. I was also praying fervently and reading many helpful books.

I was trying desperately to put all of this together in my mind.

I even emailed two former professors whom I knew from the time of my doctoral study in philosophy at The University of Connecticut. Both were philosophers who specialize in the area of metaphysics, but neither provided the type of insight I desperately needed.

It soon became clear to me that if I were ever going to resolve these issues, I would have to do it on my own (with God's help, of course).

In all honesty, I felt *completely* lost.

I hope it is clear that my motivation to work through these areas in relation to God's nature and essence did not flow from a desire to accomplish some abstract philosophical goal. Indeed, it was the perceived preoccupation with disconnected, "ivory tower" research that led to my disenchantment with the field of philosophy (although I would be the first to admit that my departure from the field was primarily due to my depressed state of mind and victim mentality at the time).

The motivation for me to work through these issues in relation to God's essence was deeply personal. I hungered for security in Christ, and, after thinking and praying about this issue for many years, I became convinced that the only way I would find the security for which I hungered was to build upon a foundation that was rooted in God's nature.

But I was *confused* about God's nature.

Then, finally, after many years (decades, really) of thinking, and reading, and studying, and praying, it suddenly dawned upon me:

*** *There is no contingency in God.* ***

You may wonder how this insight could possibly be helpful in giving any sort of security to one's salvation; nevertheless, this was a true turning point for me, and I am very thankful to God for the insight.

Because it may be difficult for non-philosophers to find meaning in a statement like this, I will ask you once again to think of God's statement, "***I AM WHO I AM***."

You will recall that we are able to understand the meaning of this statement by thinking of it in relation to the statement that is so popular in our day, namely, "It is what it is." People use this expression (as I mentioned earlier) when they are faced with an unpleasant circumstance or situation in life that simply cannot be changed. Saying, "It is what it is," when faced with such a situation is their way of saying, "I'm not going to moan and groan and gripe and complain about it. I acknowledge it. I accept it. I'm going to deal with it. That's that."

The significant point about this saying (as I stated in a prior chapter) is the acknowledgment and acceptance that there is *no longer any contingency*. There is no longer any possibility that things might be different than they are. People are thus acknowledging and accepting that they must therefore *accommodate* themselves to the situation as it exists. They are brought to the point where they realize that it does no good to moan and groan and gripe and complain, for, given that, "It is what it is," they must now find a way to "fit" themselves into the "it" that it is.

Failure to do so means failure to accommodate reality.

God is essentially expressing the same statement that people in our day express except that He has *personalized* the utterance and applied it to Himself. So the expression now implies – not an acknowledgement and acceptance of an impersonal circumstance or situation – but, rather, an acknowledgement and acceptance of a *Personal* Being.

Furthermore, since this Personal Being (namely, the triune God) identifies His name (and thus His nature and essence) with ***"I AM"***-ness (necessary, uncaused and eternal existence), He is declaring that He must be acknowledged and accepted as none other than the one, true ground of being.

And this is precisely the point God is making.

When God states that His name is ***I AM*** and also declares, "***I AM WHO I AM***," He is expressing the ultimate "It is what it is" statement.

He is declaring,

- "All must acknowledge and accept the reality of Me, and all must ultimately *accommodate* themselves to Me."
- "Do not fear Pharaoh (Satan) because the children of Israel seem to be in bondage To Him, for he and everyone else are dependent upon Me, the great ***I AM***."
- "***I AM*** the ultimate foundation of all being and existence."
- "***I AM*** the eternally self-existent one."
- ***"I AM*** what is."

Once again, the critical point to understand here is that God is identifying *Himself* as the one, true ground of being.[27] He is identifying *Himself* as the One to Whom all – even powerful world rulers like Pharaoh (and powerful spiritual rebels like Satan) – must accommodate themselves. This is why He could command Moses to go to Pharaoh without Moses having to feel fear or intimidation.

Therefore, just as the proper attitude toward an unchangeable situation in life (that is, a situation in which there is no longer any contingency) is to acknowledge and accept it for what it is ("It is what it is"), so the proper attitude toward God (a Being in Whom there is *never* any contingency) is to acknowledge and accept *Him* for Who He is ("***He is Who He is***").

Stated differently: it does no good to moan and groan and gripe and complain about a God Who simply *does not change*. Eventually, we must all acknowledge that we are a smaller part of a larger whole, and we must therefore *accommodate* ourselves to Him in Whom we "live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

[27] We will see in a later chapter that God is necessarily an infinite being who is unique in this respect. Thus, He and He alone is the true ground of being.

Is all of this starting to come together for you? I hope so.

But there is more to come.

* * *

To God be the glory, great things He has done.

16. Some Implications of God's Necessity and Immutability

As I stated at the beginning of this work, the implications that flow directly from God's name (and thus His nature) are broad, deep and life-transforming. Furthermore, they are implications that cannot be disputed since they flow directly from the words God has spoken about Himself. I state this once again because some of these implications might be unexpected and possibly resisted.

But just as one cannot dispute the direct implications of light being the unchanging absolute in the physical universe (and these implications are broad and deep as well), so one cannot dispute the direct implications of God being the unchanging absolute in the total universe.

For to deny them would be to deny God.

The point, once again, is that God is the unique uncaused and eternal being Who is characterized by brute necessity. He thus forms the causal (that is, the cause-and-effect) basis for all existence.

One important implication of this truth that I have already covered is this: since God exists necessarily, all that He is, He is necessarily. Thus, whatever attribute God has, that He is.

The significant implication that flows directly from this truth is that God is absolutely changeless. He simply cannot become different in any way than He is.

Scripture attests to God's non-contingent, unchanging nature:

"Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above,
Coming down from the Father of lights,
With Whom there is no variation
Or shadow due to change."

(Jas. 1:17, NIV)

* * *

"I, the LORD, do not change."

(Mal. 3:6)

* * *

"From everlasting to everlasting,
Thou art God."

(Ps. 90:1)

* * *

"***I AM WHO I AM***"

(Ex. 3:14

* * *

We also have the statement of Scripture that testifies to the immutability of God incarnate in the Person of Jesus Christ, our Savior:

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever.

(Heb. 13:8)

* * *

Clearly, the God-inspired Scriptures bear witness to the truth of God's immutability. And this is just what we would expect since this conclusion flows logically and directly from the necessity of God's nature.

To summarize:

- God exists ***necessarily***. (***"I AM"*** – Ex. 3:14)
- Therefore, all that God is, He ***is*** necessarily. (***"I AM WHO I AM"*** – Ex. 3:14)
- Therefore, God ***cannot change***. (***"I the LORD do not change."*** – Mal. 3:6)

* * *

Here is where I will introduce one of the possible "surprises" that I have mentioned:

Since all properties of God are essential, even the *knowledge* that God has – that He is.[28] In other words, even God's knowledge is one with His immutable essence and thus *cannot* change.

Two important implications that flow directly from this truth are,

- God's knowledge is completely independent of anything outside of His eternal, unchanging nature.
- God's knowledge of anyone's salvation or damnation cannot be dependent upon anything (like personal choices or behavior) that occurs in the contingent realm of space and time.

I hope it is clear that there is simply no way around either of these conclusions, for the truth of each is grounded in the fundamental nature of God. Furthermore, the nature of God that is presented here is the direct result of a deeper understanding of the words that God has spoken about Himself. For this reason, there is no way to get around these conclusions unless we abandon rationality itself – but if we do this, then there would be no way to communicate meaningfully about anything at all.

I should point out that these conclusions do not imply that we have nothing to do with our salvation. Nor do they imply that a person's eternal destiny is the result of God unconditionally electing some to be saved while leaving others to be lost. Rather, they simply indicate that the areas of salvation, free will and God's foreknowledge require deep and thorough examination – and any examination must be done in the context of what we know to be true of the fundamental nature and being of God.

For example, when we are seeking to understand an area like God's knowledge, we must remember that God's knowledge simply *cannot change*. Therefore, God cannot know that a certain person is beloved as His child at one moment and then know at a later time that he or she is not – for, in this case, God's knowledge would have changed.

[28] I am once again indebted to Norman Geisler for helping to clarify my thought in this area.

Furthermore, we must also remember that God's knowledge *truly is* independent of anything that occurs in the contingent realm of space and time. This truth flows quite logically and unavoidably from the necessity of His nature.

So, given that God's knowledge of His true children cannot change, how then can one who has genuinely become His son or daughter through Christ "fall away"?

Clearly, from God's vantage point, he or she cannot. (Remember: God does not exist in the successive structure of time.)

Are you beginning to see some of the grand implications of God's necessity?

Are you also beginning to see why His two simple words, "***I AM***," are worthy of the deepest study and the most prayerful reflection?

* * *

To God be the glory, great things He has done.

17. The Knowledge of God

We have covered quite a bit of ground in this study so far, so I hope you will review any material that is unclear for you before reading later chapters since each subsequent inference builds logically upon the prior ones.

I will now press onward.

From the prior chapter, we know,

- God's knowledge is completely independent of anything outside of His unchanging nature.
- God's knowledge of my salvation or damnation cannot therefore be dependent upon anything (like personal choices or behavior) that occurs in the contingent realm of space and time.

So how does God know the eternal destinies of every one of His creatures before any of their lives are fully lived – or before they even *exist*?

First of all, we must remember the attribute of God's eternity. When we take this attribute into account, we realize that God transcends time. Therefore, He is not "locked in" in the successive dimension that structures our experience; rather, He sits enthroned above. For this reason, we can understand that God does not know future decisions or behaviors of ours by looking forward in time from a place "farther back."

From our limited and finite perspective it may seem that God knows things like eternal destinies *before* they happen, but from His unlimited and infinite perspective He knows them in the "now" in which they are occurring.

The recognition of this truth helps us to see that God's knowledge imposes no constraint upon our freedom. In other words, if God knows our decisions *before* we make them, then it seems we are not free to decide other than what He knows.

But if God knows our decisions in the "now" in which we are making them, then this does not impose a constraint upon our freedom at all. That is, we are not "destined" to do what God knew "way back then" we would do; rather, we are simply doing what we have decided to do, and God knows all of this in the "now" in which it is occurring.

In reality, the issue goes deeper than this, for God does not merely sit enthroned above time in some passive sort of way; rather, He has created the entire space-time continuum. Furthermore, God has revealed His working through time before it happens in the form of prophetic Scripture.

In spite of these complications, I will keep things at this level for now since the main purpose of this study is not to address all of these time-related issues, and any attempt to do this would require significant development. Also, I don't think any meaningful distortion will result from moving forward with this perspective.

So, as we move forward with this perspective, we realize that God possesses knowledge of our eternal salvation in the *transcendent* realm of being in which *He* resides – a realm that transcends even time itself.

An obvious and important question is this:

- Does God ever *share* this knowledge of our salvation in the *contingent* realm of space and time in which *we* reside?

Let's look at a passage of Scripture:

"When we cry, 'Abba! Father!'
It is the Spirit Himself bearing witness

With our spirit
That we are children of God."

(Rom. 8:15, 16)

You recall that I referenced this text of Scripture in the chapter on the new birth. I mentioned that this cry of, "Abba, Father!" is prompted by the Holy Spirit, so it represents a witness *from God* that we are truly His children.

In other words, the eternal God, Who possesses all His attributes in the transcendent realm of eternity, is sharing His knowledge of our salvation – and He is sharing this knowledge *with His children* in the contingent realm of space and time.[29]

The significant point is this: although the witness of the Holy Spirit is received by humanity in the contingent realm of space and time, the *truth* of this witness is grounded – not in humanity's contingency – but, rather, in *God's necessity*.

And since God's necessity demands that what He is, He is *necessarily*, this means that this knowledge of God is *essential* to His nature; thus, it *cannot change.*

Therefore, the present witness that God is our Father becomes an assurance of our eternal security in Christ.

Before developing this point further, please allow me to state that I believe all of us need this assurance of eternal security in Christ *desperately*. I write this so that the true motivation for this in-depth philosophical study is clear. As I have mentioned, I do not want anyone to believe that I pursued this study as an exercise in philosophical analysis or critical thinking, for nothing could be further from the truth. I pursued this study in a desperate attempt to get "underneath" all

[29] I realize that verse 17 states an explicit condition: " . . . provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him." Needless to say, there are many conditions like this one stated throughout the Bible, but these do not affect in the least the implications that flow from God's necessity. These all pertain to the fruit, not the root, of our salvation – just as the thief on the cross suffered with Christ as the fruit of the salvation that he had already freely received as a gift. (Please see Acts 27:22, 31 for an illustration of the principle of how God uses explicit conditions as a means to establish already-determined ends.)

the theological rhetoric that takes place about whether or not born-again believers are eternally *secure* or eternally *in*secure in their salvation.

I could *never* have pursued a study like this for any reason that was not intensely personal because the work involved in it was *hard*. I would never have been able to muster the motivation to press onward at every step if I were not inspired by a deeply personal and intensely-felt need.

In short: I felt I needed *security* in Christ as much as I needed the air that I breathed. And, yes, I believe *all* God's sons and daughters in Christ need this security as well. Anything less than a rock-solid assurance grounded in God's necessity is a "foundation" of works-orientation that will never stand. It amounts to something like, "I know I can endure to the end. I know I can persevere through perilous trials. When times get tough, I know I will be someone who stands for God."

Is this not what Peter thought before he denied Christ three times?

One last point about God's knowledge: God does not know the eternal destinies of His children through some detached cognitive process. Rather, He knows these destinies because He has allowed His children to partake of His uncreated life in an intimate way that is not available to those who are not born into His family.

In short: the *knowledge* of God is grounded in the *being* of God.

As we will soon see, God comprises an un-composed and indivisible essence, and, for this reason, every faculty of Deity is integrated into a unified and coherent whole. No attribute of God can be disassociated in any way from His simple, un-composed essence. Therefore, every act God performs and every area of knowledge He possesses is integrated into His simplicity and thus grounded in His oneness.

I will explore this point more fully in the next chapter where I examine the salvation process.

* * *

To God be the glory, great things He has done.

18. The Salvation of God

Up to this point in the study, I have derived every conclusion from the simple name of God – ***I AM***. This has ensured that every assertion of truth is grounded in God's necessity and is thus rock solid.

We cannot expect to examine the topic of salvation by deriving more truths from God's name, however, because salvation is not a process that applies to God (even though He is, of course, the One Who initiated it). God is not Someone Who needs salvation – in fact, He needs nothing at all. Finite and sinful beings like ourselves are the ones who need salvation; thus, in order to explore this area, we will need to examine certain texts of Scripture that apply to ourselves, not to God. Hopefully, the analysis and exegesis of these texts will be straightforward and uncontroversial.

What does the Bible say about how we become saved as God's children? What is the biblical *means* by which we are miraculously transformed from 'children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3) into children of the Living God? (Jn. 1:12)

Personally, I think the Bible is clear that this transformation occurs through the phenomenon of the new birth:

"Truly, truly, I say to you,
Unless one is born anew,
He cannot see the kingdom of God."

(Jn. 3:3)

*** * ***

"Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit,
He cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

(Jn. 3:5)

*** * ***

Therefore, if any one is in Christ,
He is a new creation;
The old has passed away,
Behold, the new has come."

(2 Cor. 5:17)

I think we all know that salvation does not result from a cold, works-oriented decision to follow Christ. Rather, it results from a true heart cry to God where one acknowledges his or her desperate need of a Savior. The end result of this heart cry is a born-again experience where one becomes God's child:

"But to all who received Him,
Who believed in His name,
He gave power to become children of God."

(Jn. 1:12)

And the born-again salvation experience results in a bona fide spiritual union with God:

"Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God,
God abides in him,
And he in God."

(1 Jn. 4:15)

* * *

"That they all may be one;
As You, Father, are in Me,
And I in You;
That they also may be one in Us."

(Jn. 17:21, NKJV)

* * *

"By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us,
Because He has given us of His own Spirit."

(1 Jn. 4:13)

* * *

So one may ask,

- How can finite, contingent being be "born anew" of infinite, necessary being? (Jn. 3:5, 6)
- How can finite, contingent being be "one" with infinite, necessary being? (Jn. 17:21)
- How can finite, contingent being "abide" with infinite, necessary being? (1 Jn. 4:15)

It's all quite mind-boggling, isn't it?

Really, how can any of these Scriptural assertions be true?

How can finite and sinful beings like ourselves possibly be born of, be one with, and abide with . . . *God?!*

- Is it really true that finite beings like ourselves receive the very uncreated life of the Infinite One?
- Does the Almighty actually raise us up to the level of His only begotten Son?

Christ Himself states that He will grant those who conquer[30] to sit with Him on His throne, just as He Himself conquered and sat down with His Father on His throne (Rev. 3:21). Our Savior is thus elevating us to a place where we will sit with Him upon the throne of the universe.

Can we even *begin* to take this in?

It would seem that all we can do is exclaim with the writer of the Book of Hebrews,

**** So Great Salvation !!! ****

(Heb. 2:3, KJV)

[30] The phrase, "those who conquer," does not imply that salvation is by works and not by grace, for the Bible is clear that salvation is a gift of God. Clearly, those who are in Christ will become conquerors as the *fruit* (not the root) of their salvation.

This truth about our salvation is even more incredible when we consider that Lucifer was expelled from Heaven for desiring this very position and status (Isa. 14:13, 14), and Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise for the same reason[31] (Gen. 3:5).

Yet God gives this position and status as a free gift to those who simply accept His grace in Christ.

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him
In the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, . . .
For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith –
And this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God –
Not by works, so that no one can boast.

(Eph. 2: 6, 8, 9)

Once again, we can only exclaim,

**** So Great Salvation !!! ****

Clearly, as finite beings, we cannot even begin to comprehend the magnitude and scope of what God has done for us in Christ. At some point, all we can do is simply bow down and worship the great ***I AM***.

Returning to the topic of our spiritual union with God through Christ, we know that such a union of Spirit and flesh occurred when God became a man in the Person of Christ, and this phenomenon of the Incarnation is clearly the means by which we are enabled to become united with the divine essence. Like our own spiritual union with God, however, the Incarnation is quite mysterious, and I doubt the phenomenon will ever be completely understood.

But although none of us will ever fully understand the Incarnation or our own spiritual union with God through Christ; nevertheless, all of God's children have the privilege of experiencing the comforting reality and "belongingness" of this spiritual union.

[31] I am thankful to J. F. Strombeck for clarifying my thought in this area. (*So Great Salvation*, Strombeck Foundation, 1940, 98-100)

God’s children also have the privilege of being able to draw legitimate conclusions about this union by simply thinking logically about what God has revealed in His word.

One significant point that can initially be established is this: my place in the *human* family is grounded in the *contingency* of humanity, but my place in *God’s* family is grounded in the *necessity* of Deity.

In other words, my place in the human family is subject to change: I could cease to exist, or the entire human race could cease to exist.

But none of this is true of my place in God’s family, for my place in His family is grounded in God’s necessity, not humanity’s contingency.

One may question why my place in God’s family is grounded in His necessity and thus cannot change. One may say, "God is a necessary and immutable being; thus, *He* cannot change – but surely His *family* can change."

I would respond by pointing out once again that God's family cannot change simply because God’s *knowledge* of this cannot change. This reason alone is sufficient to establish the unchangeableness of His family. But God’s family cannot change for another (more fundamental) reason as well.

One can see this reason clearly if one simply acknowledges the obvious attribute of God’s personality. Our Father in Christ is not some impersonal cosmic battery that we just "plug into" when we are born again. On the contrary, God is a *Personal* Being Who *Himself decides* who partakes of His uncreated life in this intimate way.

I would ask you to please think about the following: Could someone be a child to a human father without the father’s consent? Of course not. The father must choose to beget the child because the life of the child is, in the most real and direct way, derived from his.

Furthermore, he must choose in an ongoing way to continue his fatherhood toward the child because he could, at any point, disown this child – in which case the child would no longer be *his* child.

Likewise, we cannot become *God's* children without His consent. We do not become Gods children by anything less than being born into His family (Jn. 3:3), and this cannot happen without God's consent (Jn. 1:13; 6:44), for we become partakers of His uncreated life when we are born into His family. This is how we are able to experience communion with the Father and the Son (1 Jn. 1:3) through the agency of the Holy Spirit (Whom the world *cannot* receive – Jn. 14:16, 17).

Another important point is this: people do not "birth" themselves in the physical realm. Those who are born are always the passive, not the active, agents in the birthing process. There are no exceptions to this rule in life, and surely God would not have chosen this metaphor to capture the essence of our conversion if it did not fit the salvation process precisely.

Thus, God is intimately involved in this process of our being born into His family – even though He does not (as I will show in the next chapter) sovereignly decree that some will be saved while others are left to be lost.

A clear deduction from all of this is that the "belongingness" we have in God's family through the new birth simply *cannot change* because, if this belongingness were to change, then *God Himself* would have to change. He would have to change His mind about a child whom He had formerly decided to father by disowning this person as His son or daughter in Christ.

But God cannot do this because God *cannot change*. He is the great ***I AM*** Who is characterized by necessity and immutability. Thus, if God were to change His faithful stance toward us – even in the face of *un*faithfulness on our part – then He would no longer be God.

This is precisely what the Bible states in 2 Tim 2:13:

"If we are faithless, He remains faithful --
For He cannot deny Himself."

Please note: the Bible does not say that God remains faithful to His faithless children because He cannot deny *them*; rather, the Bible states that God remains faithful to His faithless children because He cannot deny *Himself*.

In other words, if God were to be unfaithful to His children, He would cease to be God. But God can never cease to be God, for what He is , He is *necessarily*.

One might respond, "No, God never chooses to abandon us, but *we* can choose to abandon *Him*."

But our choosing to abandon God *still* amounts to a change in *God* because, again, God is not some impersonal cosmic battery that we plug into when we are born again. Rather, He is a *personal* being with all the attributes of personhood. Thus, if any of God's children were to abandon Him, then His posture toward them would have to change – and this means that God *Himself* would change. Also, if we were to choose to abandon God after becoming His children, then God's knowledge of His children would change – and, again, this means that God *Himself* would change.

But God *does not change*, so none of this could ever happen.

Finally, I have shown in a prior chapter how God promises to protect His children from this very choice while also honoring their freedom (since human freedom is simply the capacity to choose in accordance with the dictates of reason).

* * *

Before closing this chapter, I will mention two additional problems that are insurmountable for those who reject eternal security:[32]

1. The doctrine of justification by grace through faith (as accepted by *all* evangelical Christians) asserts that a believer in Christ is declared righteous by God on the basis of his or her faith in God's Son (Rom. 3:28; 4:5, 6; 5:1).

Thus, the very righteousness of God as well as the obedience of Christ is credited to the believer's account at the moment of faith.

How can this change?

How can God change His verdict in this area given that God *does not change*?

Clearly, this is impossible.

* * *

2. The Bible states that the group of true believers that is ultimately saved is a gift from the Father to the Son (Jn. 6:37; 17:2, 6, 9).

The group of true believers that is ultimately saved is not some amorphous group that arises willy-nilly apart from the eternal foreknowledge of God. Rather, it is a group that has been given to the Son by the Father in eternity past.

How can this change?

How can God change His mind with regard to the composition of a group that He gave to His Son if God *does not change*?

Once again, this is impossible.

Each of these areas poses insurmountable problems in relation to salvation and God's necessity for those who reject eternal security.

[32] John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Knowing the Truth about Eternal Security* (Harvery House: 1997), pp. 24, 29.

* * *

Are you convinced that you are secure in Christ?

I hope so.

I hope you now believe, as I do, that a believer's security in Christ is as rock-solid as God Himself – because it is.

In the final two chapters, I will provide a review and clarification of what we have covered, and I will also provide development of further truths that flow from the ***I AM*** statement of God.

* * *

To God be the glory, great things He has done.

19. Review and Clarification

At this point in this book, there are probably a number of questions that arise in the minds of many Christians.

Some possible ones are,

- Does God's being and nature really require that everything about a person's salvation be fixed from all eternity?
  Answer: Yes – of course. But this hardly matters from our vantage point because all of this is an unfolding reality from our frame of reference. In other words, we are learning, step by step, what God has known all along.

- If everything about a person's salvation is fixed from all eternity, then is everyone "locked in," so to speak, with no real options?
  Answer: It depends upon what one means by, "locked in." If one means that one's salvation is sovereignly decreed by God independently of whether one is a person of the truth or a person of the lie, then, no. If one means that God knows the outcome of our salvation in the now in which it is occurring, and there is no deviating from this reality, then, yes. But, again, this hardly matters from our vantage point since all of this is an unfolding reality from our frame of reference.

- Does this mean that God has, in eternity past, sovereignly and unconditionally predestined some to a merciful salvation and left all others to a deserved damnation?
  Answer: No, and I will demonstrate this truth in the present chapter.

- What does God's Word have to say about all of this?

This last question is, of course, the most significant one because God's Word is the only infallible source of guidance in this world.

This, I take it, goes without saying.

The problem, however, is this: determining what God's Word has to say about a certain topic

is not always easy because different people often interpret the same passages of Scripture quite differently – and these differing interpretations result in differing belief systems and doctrines.

How can mutually exclusive interpretations be correct?

Clearly, they cannot.

This is why the derivation of rock-solid truths that are grounded in the simple and undeniable words of God about Himself (namely, ***I AM***) are vital.

There are no less than twelve essential attributes of Deity that can be legitimately derived from God's "***I AM***" statement. These twelve attributes are all the result of valid deductive logic and solid philosophical inference, so there is no room for questioning whether or not any of them is truly an attribute of God.

If one simply accepts the "***I AM***" statement of God about Himself, then one must also accept these attributes of Deity:

- **Necessity** God exists necessarily. He cannot *not* exist
- **Un-causality** God is an uncaused being. There is no cause for Him in or beyond Himself.
- **Eternity** God is an eternal being. There was never a time when He did not exist.
- **Infinity** God is an infinite being. He has no lack, limitation or dependency.
- **Uniqueness** God is a unique being. There is no other being like God.
- **Immutability** God is a changeless being. He cannot become different in any way.
- **Simplicity** God is a simple being. He is un-composed and indivisible.
- **Omniscience** God is an all-knowing being. He possesses all knowledge.
- **Omnipotence** God is in all-powerful being. He possesses all power.
- **Omnipresence** God is an everywhere-present being. He is present in all places in His fullness.
- **Immateriality** God is a non-material being. He is not reducible to matter in motion.

- **Personality** God is a personal being. He possesses all the distinct attributes of personhood.

There are other attributes of God that could legitimately be derived from His "***I AM***" statement, but I have not included these because their presence might result in confusion.

For example, there are attributes of God that are part of the long philosophical tradition that goes back hundreds and even thousands of years to philosophers like Aquinas and Aristotle. But some of these attributes are part of an archaic conceptual structure.

Two such examples are,

- **Actuality** God is a fully actualized being with no potentiality.
- **Aseity** God is a self-existent being with life in Himself.

There are also legitimate and important attributes of God that are not archaic in any way but require additional premises and more elaborate philosophical inference to establish.

Two such examples are,

- **Omni-benevolence** God is an all-loving being.
- **Inter-personality** God is an inter-personal being.

Clearly, these two attributes of God are important ones, but, as I mentioned, they require more philosophical inference to establish because they do not flow directly from God's ***I AM*** statement as the prior twelve do.

God's omni-benevolence, for example, is clearly not transparent from His ***I AM*** statement because of all the evil that is in us and around us and through us as a result of the Fall. Nevertheless, this attribute can be formally derived from the necessity of God's nature – it simply requires an additional premise or two.

The inter-personality of God (that is, the fact that there are multiple persons within the Godhead) is yet another important attribute of Deity, but, once again, this attribute requires more

development in order to prove. (Even without this development, however, we can understand that there would be no meaning to phenomena such as interpersonal love and intimacy if there were no metaphysical grounding for inter-personality on the level of Deity.)

* * *

With regard to the important questions that I posed at the beginning of this chapter, I would now like to establish the existence of one attribute of God that will allow us to settle one of these troubling questions with a definitive answer. The existence of this attribute – God's simplicity – will allow us to see that God could never have unconditionally predestined some to a merciful salvation while leaving others to a deserved damnation.

As you doubtless know, there are many Christians who believe God did, in fact, sovereignly and unconditionally predestine some to salvation and leave others to the damnation they justly deserved. Furthermore, like you and me, they claim to support their beliefs by the Bible.

If you are not one who believes in this doctrine of unconditional election, then I hope you realize that the people who *do* believe this doctrine are not unintelligent or uninformed. On the contrary, they are intelligent, Bible-believing men and women who claim to support all of their beliefs about salvation by God's Word – just as we do.

Thus, there is a need to get "underneath" the differing interpretations of relevant Bible texts in order to get to a level where everything is grounded in the very nature and being of God. We will therefore look at the attribute of God's simplicity in order to base our position on God's own words about Himself.

First of all, by a simple being, I mean a being that is not composed in any way. If you think of something like an automobile, for example, then you can easily understand that all automobiles are composed of different parts and can thus be decomposed and destroyed.

If I were to remove various parts from the automobile like the engine, the transmission, the seats, the frame, etc. – then I no longer have an automobile. It is changed and ultimately destroyed.

I could demonstrate this formally by specifying the necessary conditions that are jointly sufficient to define an entity such as an automobile, but this hardly seems necessary. Whatever entity is left after removing the means of locomotion (engine), the means of gearing (transmission), the means of sitting (seats), the means of support (frame) – well, this is not an automobile as we know it. It may still be an orderly conglomerate of metal, but it's not an automobile.

The relevant point about God is this: if God is an eternal, uncaused and necessarily existent being (which He is), then He could never be decomposed and thus destroyed in this way. For this reason, God must comprise an *un*-composed and *in*divisible essence – which is to say He has the attribute of simplicity.

Another, more basic, reason that God must be a simple being is this: if God were a composed being, then this would imply that there is something more fundamental than God because the parts of any composed being are clearly more fundamental than the composition itself. But there is nothing more fundamental than a being characterized by ***I AM*** since such a being is the *one* being who exists necessarily. (I will show in the next chapter that any being characterized by ***I AM*** must be – not only infinite – but also unique. Therefore, there can be no other being like God.)

Since God is thus a simple essence (and I have just been shown that He *must* be a simple essence), no faculty of God could ever operate independently of His un-composed nature.

Therefore the faculty of God's will could never operate independently from His love.[33]

In other words, God could never will to love some (and thus show mercy by unconditionally electing them to salvation) and also will *not* to love others (and thus *not* show mercy by leaving them to face the justice of their damnation).

Some may say that this is just theological "common sense" because a loving God could never fail to seek the salvation of all His creatures. I can assure you, however, that Calvinists who believe in unconditional election do indeed believe this doctrine is supported by sound and impregnable biblical exegesis. Furthermore, they believe this doctrine is just as much theological "common sense" as its denial is to others – especially when viewed by them in the context of God's sovereignty over His creation.

An entire book could be written about this subject, but my point here is simply this: unconditional election (in the way it is normally understood) simply *cannot* be true given God's *own words* about *Himself.*

One formalized argument demonstrating the simplicity of God's nature (and thus the impossibility of unconditional election):

- If God is a non-simple, composed essence, then He is subject to decomposition and change.
- But God, as the great ***I AM***, is *not* subject to decomposition and change.
- Therefore, God is *not* a non-simple, composed essence.
- Therefore God is a simple, un-composed essence.

Another basic argument demonstrating the same point:

- If God is a non-simple, composed essence, then there is something more fundamental than God (namely, the components that God comprises as well as the relevant laws that pertain to this composition).

[33] I believe we can legitimately take God's love (or omni-benevolence) as a "given" since the Bible makes such a clear and unequivocal statement to this effect in 1 Jn. 4:8: "God is love."

- But there is nothing more fundamental than God.
- Therefore, God is *not* a non-simple, composed essence.
- Therefore God is a simple, un-composed essence.

I have tried to keep matters as uncomplicated and "streamlined" as possible in this study because the exploration of these issues can become rather deep and overwhelming at times. Nevertheless, I will briefly mention one further argument for God's simplicity since I am refuting a commonly-held doctrine on the basis of this attribute:

- If God is a non-simple, composed essence, then He could never be an all-powerful, infinite being because there would always be the possibility of adding an additional part (or *any number* of additional parts).
- But God *is* an all-powerful, infinite being.[34]
- Therefore, God is *not* a non-simple, composed essence.
- Therefore God is a simple, un-composed essence.

There is simply no way around the logic of the above arguments, for in order to deny the conclusion in each argument, one must either (1) dismiss the very words of God about Himself, or (2) dismiss rationality. But if one chooses either of these options, then legitimate and reliable communication about God would cease.

In short, if one were to choose either of these options, then this would amount to an admission of defeat.

If, however, one does not choose to dismiss either rationality or the words of God about Himself, then one must admit that God is a simple, un-composed essence. And if God is a simple, un-composed essence, He could never will to love some (and thus mercifully elect them to an underserved salvation) and also will *not* to love others (and thus justly leave them for a deserved damnation).

[34] Although it is obvious from Scripture that God is an infinite, omnipotent being, I will demonstrate in the next chapter how this truth can be derived from His ***I AM*** statement.

This is just the way it *has* to be given the nature and being of God.

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To God be the glory, great things He has done.

20. God's Infinity and Uniqueness

Before concluding this study, I will introduce two further attributes of God that one can soundly deduce from the necessity of His nature. It is important to understand these two attributes since each is essential to a God Who is the one, true ground of being.

The first attribute is God's infinity; the second, His uniqueness.

Before moving forward, I would like to acknowledge that either of these attributes could be established by Scripture alone since there are many Bible texts that support both the infinite nature of God as well as the uniqueness of God.

As with God's immutability, however, establishing these points by "proof" texts in the Bible does not help us to understand how these attributes are grounded in the necessity of God's nature. It is important that we understand how these important attributes of God are grounded in His necessity because it is only here that we find something about God that is too basic to be denied. Once again, denying anything that flows directly from God's necessity (that is, from His "***I AM***"-ness) is the same as denying God Himself.[35]

So we will dig into these issues more deeply in order to understand how everything fits together in a harmonious way.

I hope you see at this point in the study that there is an undeniable logic and coherence involved in the derivation of the essential attributes of God. I hope you also see that all of this logic and coherence is built upon the two basic words that God has declared about Himself. Everything thus flows from a foundation that is solid and secure.

[35] Gender is another attribute of Deity that must be established, and I do not mean to presuppose a purely masculine gender by the use of the pronoun, "His." Clearly, the feminine (as well as the masculine) gender must be grounded in the divine nature in order for God to create "male and female" in the "likeness of God." (Gen. 5:1,2) Personally, I believe the feminine attributes of nurturance and comfort are embodied in the interpersonal nature of God – specifically, in the Person of the Holy Spirit.

The fact that one can build upon the impregnable foundation of God's simple ***I AM*** statement and then derive an all-encompassing body of belief from valid deduction and sound philosophical inference – well, this has been the ultimate thought project for me.

I remember how awestruck I was when I first began to realize that I did not have to read a book on the various attributes of God and then try to remember them. Rather, I could simply start with God's basic and foundational ***I AM*** statement and then think it all through.

And you can do the same. You can start with God's basic, foundational ***I AM*** statement and think it all through. And it will all make sense to you. It will all "fit."

It's almost like putting together the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. The one important difference in this case is that the subject matter and the consequences of this endeavor will be far more significant than any jigsaw puzzle or mind exercise you will ever grapple with here on earth.

Please stop for a moment and reflect upon this: we are thinking about *God*.

- The *eternal* God.
- The *uncaused* God.
- The God Who created this vast universe out of *nothing* by His *spoken word*.

We are reflecting upon *that* God.

And we are drawing solid conclusions about His nature from the very words He has declared to us about Himself.

It's almost impossible for finite beings to fully appreciate the scope and magnitude of such an endeavor.

Personally, I believe reflection upon the nature of Deity in a rational manner is quite humbling in a healthy sort of way. It puts everything into perspective. It gives us a true sense of

God's glory and majesty, and it allows us to see ourselves as we really are in the context of His greatness.

And, of course, it provides a solid foundation for all our beliefs and convictions.

One final point before moving forward: the activity of reflecting upon the nature and being of God (as we are doing in this study) is very different from the activity of reflecting upon the life of God incarnate in the Person of Christ. This is so because once God enters into the contingent realm of space and time in the person of Christ, the glory and majesty of His necessary attributes are veiled by the human condition that He has chosen to inhabit.

I realize, of course, the importance of prayerful reflection upon the life of our Savior. Indeed, there is probably no activity that will increase our faith and trust in God more than this because we witness firsthand in Christ's life what God has suffered for our salvation. The end result of this reflection is a deepening of our trust in God as we see His mercy for us revealed in unmistakable ways.

Nevertheless, as important as this activity is, it is still quite different than the activity of reflecting upon the nature and being of the eternal God apart from His incarnation in the Person of Christ. Only this reflection upon the pre-Incarnate God reveals to us the "raw" attributes of Deity as He exists in His authentic state of infinite transcendence.

In fact, I believe this reflection upon the pre-Incarnate God actually *enhances* our reflection upon the life of Christ, for it magnifies our appreciation of what God has done when He allowed infinite, necessary being to incarnate finite, contingent flesh.

We will even find ourselves wondering, How is this even *possible*?!

(Frankly, I don't think we will ever be able to understand this glorious phenomenon completely.)

Okay – onto the attributes of God's infinity and uniqueness. Once again, these attributes are vital in establishing God as the one true ground of being.

First of all, the attribute of God's infinity:

I mentioned in chapter twelve that any being that is accurately characterized by the present tense of the verb "to be" (***I AM***) must be a being that transcends time and contingency. (You may want to refer back to this argument, if necessary.) But a being that transcends time and contingency is necessarily an infinite being. This is so because if there were any lack or limitation present in this being, then this same lack or limitation would be a potential vulnerability for non-transcendence.

In order to make this point clear, think of a finite person like me. I have all sorts of lacks and limitations. Therefore, I am not one who transcends time and contingency. For this reason, I cannot truthfully declare that my name is ***I AM*** because any one of my lacks or limitations could result in my life being cut short by external causes at any moment.

For example, I could be hit by a stray bullet or a meteor. I could inadvertently walk in front of an onrushing vehicle. My many areas of lack and limitation make me vulnerable to all sorts of contingencies that occur in the dimension of time.

So, as a finite and limited being, I do not transcend time and contingency; rather, I am very much *subject* to time and contingency. Therefore, I cannot truthfully declare that my name is ***I AM***.

But if I *could* truthfully declare that my name is ***I AM*** (as God can), then I must be an *infinite* being that has *no* lack or limitation. Only in this way would I genuinely transcend all vulnerability in relation to the various contingencies that occur in time. In other words, only in

this way would I truly be *beyond* all of the cause-and-effect influences that could cut my life short at any moment.

Clearly, then, God must be an infinite being, for only an infinite being comprises true "***I AM***"-ness and thus true transcendence.

Now, God's uniqueness:

The significant point to grasp here is that if another purported being like God existed, then it would have to differ from Him in some way. But the only way to differ from Him is to possess some feature or attribute that He lacks. Since God is an infinite being, however, He lacks nothing. Every dimension of being is grounded and actualized in Him to the fullest degree. (Philosophers like Aristotle and Aquinas would refer to this infinite state of being as "pure actuality.")

No being could thus possess a feature that God lacks. Therefore, any other purported necessary being would simply possess all the same features that God possesses. But if there is no difference between two necessary, uncaused and eternal beings, then, clearly, they are the same being.

In other words, if there is no basis for differentiation in two (or more) beings because they are the same in every respect, then they are not different but, rather, the same.

Therefore, God is not only infinite, He is also unique.

In short, there is no other being like our uncaused, eternal and infinite God.

* * *

To God be the glory, great things He has done.

Conclusion

We have covered quite a bit of ground in this study, so I hope you will give yourself time to digest all the material that was presented. I also hope you will re-read various sections in order to ensure that you fully grasp the logic and coherence of the development.

If I were to choose one vital point to emphasize, it would be this:

****** Salvation is in no sense a probation.[36] ******

In other words, God has known us as His own – so known we are.

God's solid foundation stands firm,
Sealed with this inscription:
"The Lord knows those who are his,"

(2 Tim. 2:19)

* * *

"I know them . . . "

(Jn. 10:27)

And God has saved us as His children – so saved we are.

He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

(Tit. 3:5)

I hope you can rest in this salvation. I also hope you can know without a shadow of a doubt that you are God's son or daughter in Christ, and that, truly, you will see our Almighty Father one day as He is (1 Jn. 3:1).

Praise God from Whom all blessings flow.

* * *

To God be the glory, great things He has done.

[36] J. F. Strombeck, *Shall Never Perish* (Moline, Ill: Strombeck Agency, Inc., 1956), 22.