

Security in Christ

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

“The Lord knows those who are His.”

(2 Timothy 2:19)

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

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Introduction

Where would we be without any sense of security in our lives? There are so many dangers lurking that could easily lead to emotional turmoil, financial loss, physical violence—even death. There are also the everyday challenges of hunger, abandonment, and disease.

Think for a moment how you would feel if you were suddenly devoid of all security: No home, no shelter, no emotional safeguards, no financial assets—no security of any kind. You would be completely vulnerable in such a condition—to physical assault, to emotional onslaught, to financial enticement. Truly, security is one of our deep needs—possibly our deepest need.¹ Without it, we would live in the grip of fear and anxiety, and this would create overwhelming levels of stress in our lives.

This pressing need for security is no less true in the spiritual realm. If we do not possess a rock-solid level of security in our Father’s acceptance and care, then we will be fearful of spiritual loss—to the point of eternal damnation. This spiritual insecurity will, as in the physical realm, cause deep levels of stress in our lives and thus motivate our behavior in unhealthy ways. Truly, there is no substitute for knowing that we are eternally secure in Christ. Only this level of security supplies complete comfort and rest to the salvation experience and therefore provides a healthy motivation for our thoughts and actions.

In this study I will provide a biblically based support for this security that cannot be refuted because it is grounded in the necessity of God’s nature (“I AM”—Exodus 3:14). I realize that there are reasonable objections to this doctrine. Some that commonly expressed are as follows:

¹ This is well known from the work of Abraham Maslow and his hierarchy of needs: Maslow, A. H. *A Theory of Human Motivation*. *Psychological Review* 50 (1943): 370-396.

- “I have free will, so how can I ever be eternally secure? I can always choose to reject Christ.”
- “If I am eternally secure, then I know I am safe in God’s care for all eternity, so I can live as I please with no real consequences. Eternal security thus becomes a license for sin.”
- “I am not even secure in my present salvation, so how could I ever be secure in my final salvation?”

I will provide clarity in each of these areas.

First, I will resolve the issue of free will in relation to the eternal security of the believer by showing that one can talk intelligibly about freedom only in the context of the rationality of existence—that is, in the context of what makes sense. I will further demonstrate that a person’s will is free only when it is acting in accordance with the dictates of reason. In short: All actions that are not in harmony with reason (for example, rejecting the protection and guidance of a loving and merciful God) are clearly the result of bondage, not freedom—and this is precisely the type of behavior from which the Good Shepherd promises to protect His sheep.

I will also address the issue of eternal security being a license to sin by showing that biblical security in Christ represents rock-solid entrenchment in a God-ordained path of holiness and rationality since this is the only meaningful expression of freedom. Sin is enslavement to Satan’s irrational force in the life of the believer, and this, as stated above, is bondage, not freedom. Willful departure from the path of true freedom in Christ results in the chastening of the Father, and this chastening—although painful—is always dispensed in love, and it is completely effective toward the ultimate end of holiness.

Finally, I will address the issue of individuals being insecure in their present state of salvation by providing a clear, biblically based analysis on what it means to be born again.

Anyone who has doubts in this area will thus learn, in a practical way, what it means to have a true saving relationship with Christ.

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

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

1. Personal Struggles

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 (Matthew 25:34; Revelation 20:11-15). I felt this desperate need for security because I had been through some difficult periods in my life—seasons of adversity 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 in a path of sanctification and holiness. I knew this was all delusion, but, unfortunately, I was prone to delusion—and I was prone to weakness as well.

Another factor was this: Starting at about the age of forty, I began to experience recurrent bouts of depression. Many areas of the Christian walk became quite difficult for me during these depressive times, and I often felt that I would give up in discouragement and despair. I even wondered at times if I could take my own life. I thus needed a rock-solid assurance that God would protect 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 difficult times in my life to know that, if it did, then my life would always be filled with insecurity and doubt.

The bottom line for me was this: I needed assurance that I truly was God's child and that He would get me through any future times of adversity and trial. I needed to be able to rest in this assurance—the assurance that God Himself would protect me from my own weakness and delusion (dumb sheep that I am) 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 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 (Jeremiah 31:3, KJV)—but also to keep me (Psalms 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 “heartfelt 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 are these:

- 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 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 that God had promised to bring His work in me "to completion" (Philippians 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. Here is one: "The one who stands firm to the end will be saved" (Matthew 24:13). Could I be sure that I would stand firm to the end? I didn't know. Here is another: "My righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back" (Hebrews 10:38). Could I be sure that I would live by faith and not shrink back? Again, I didn't know.

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 (Luke 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 of hanging naked on a cross and 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 (Luke 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 cannot respond to this account 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.” One cannot respond in this way because Christ assured the thief that he would be with Him in Paradise, and Christ prefaced His assurance with the words, “Truly, I tell you” (Luke 23:43). Clearly, this desperate, justly condemned criminal could know with certainty that he would be with the Savior in God’s kingdom, and this certain knowledge of salvation was therefore 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 security that cannot be refuted because it will be grounded in the nature and being of God Himself (*I AM*—Exodus 3:14). The result of this analysis will be that all who are presently comforted by their saving relationship with Christ will be able to rest in the full assurance of final salvation.

As I stated in the Introduction, for those who are not presently comforted by a saving relationship with Christ, I will cover all aspects of the believer’s born-again experience so that they will know how to receive and to verify this personal state of grace.

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

2. 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 if Jesus were 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 and thus coeternal with the Father.

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 (Ephesians 4:30). The Bible also states that this sealing is the “guarantee” of their inheritance until they acquire possession of it (Ephesians 1:14). After reading promises like these, I would 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.” I would thus feel secure.

The Bible also states that all whom God justifies He also glorifies (Romans 8:30). After reading this promise I would 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 glorifies.” So, once again, I would feel secure.

But there were other texts that seemed to paint a different picture. The two I have already mentioned are good examples: (1) “The one who stands firm to the end will be saved” (Matthew 24:13) and (2) “My righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back” (Hebrews 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 (not actual) inconsistencies in Scripture and find a foundation of coherent truth. I now believe all Scripture that seems to imply insecurity 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.

I should probably mention at this point that I have a Ph.D. in philosophy. 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 the darkest period 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 that I had no future and no hope. I was convinced that my life was over.

Like Jeremiah, I felt that I had been deceived by God (Jeremiah 20:7). I simply could not understand why He had seemingly inspired me to continue in a path that appeared so worthless and senseless. Clearly, 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 that I was capable of mustering in terms of personal responsibility. (I intend no offense to those who have doctoral degrees in philosophy. This is simply the way I felt at the time.)

While I was enduring this difficult period in my life, I would often think, “Maybe I’m not God’s child, and maybe my life is reflecting this reality.” If I could have disappeared

somehow into thin air during this extremity, 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 that I acquired during 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 to get "underneath" the various contradictory views I encountered on the topic.

Regarding the desperate hunger I experienced for security in Christ, I should mention that I did not want this sense of security so that 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 (Ephesians 1:4), and I genuinely experienced a spiritual yearning for this type of life. I believe that anyone who is truly born again will experience this same desire for a life of purity.

So, again, I did not crave this sense of security so that I could live a life of sin. Rather, I desired rock-solid security in Christ so that I could be assured of 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 delusion.

Another significant struggle for me was this: Since I doubted my ability to “stand firm to the end” (Matthew 24:13) and not “shrink back” (Hebrews 10:38), I continuously postponed any 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 Corinthians 9:24). I thus needed God’s assurance in relation to my final salvation (not merely in relation to my present state of

justification). Only in this way did I feel I could devote myself wholeheartedly to God's cause in the way that I knew I should.

Are you beginning to get a sense of where I was and what inspired me to pursue this study? The only course of action that seemed sensible to me 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" (Exodus 3:14). Once I did this, everything began to make sense.

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 that this pull was from God Himself.² I knew that if I built upon the sure foundation of God's fundamental nature, then I could be certain of all the truths that logically followed, 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 His beloved child. 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 comprehensive way in these two simple words, and I intend to unpack this revelation to show that if we are not secure in our final salvation in Christ, then God is not God. Stated differently: If God is Who He says He is (and, of course, He is), then we are

² I should 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 that he grapples with the important theological and philosophical implications of our faith as competently and as nobly as anyone.

forever secure in our final salvation in Christ. 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.

In the immediate chapters that follow I will address the topics of free will, personal identity, and the believer's born-again experience in Christ. These are areas that often cause obstacles for people in embracing the biblical truth of eternal security, so it seems prudent to address these topics at the outset.

I will then provide a biblical context for eternal security, showing that it is indeed Bible-based and that it results in a path of holiness, not sinfulness.

Finally, after these topics are covered, I will proceed (in section 2) to unpack the "I AM" statement of God to show how it provides a security for the believer that cannot be refuted.

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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 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 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 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, this person is held fast by a power that seeks to cause him or her to abandon the power of reason.

Let's look at a simple example: If I know that eating a meal consisting of two double cheeseburgers, large fries, a super-sized carbonated soft drink, and a quart of ice cream is bad for my health, but I choose to eat 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 give additional examples that include indulgences in sex, gambling, alcohol, and drugs, 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” (Isaiah 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 insecurities—this, I take it, is obvious. Nevertheless, the bottom-line regarding freedom is reason and reason alone.

I hope this explanation that 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. 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 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” (Proverbs 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” (John 8:32). Again: “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36).

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.

I will develop this area of thought more fully in chapter six, “Christ’s Sheep,” but before I bring this quick examination of free will to a close, I will ask the following 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 presumably have free will and would thus seemingly be “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 unfallen angels since the glorified saints would also presumably have free will and would thus seemingly be “free” to choose anything at all.

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

In this case, I am certain that you would answer, “Of course not!” But, as with the unfallen angels and the glorified saints in Heaven, God possesses the faculty free will and would thus seemingly be “free” to choose anything at all.

So how do we make sense of this? We make sense of this by acknowledging that the choices of angels, of glorified saints, and of God Himself emanate from the content of their hearts. 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, acts 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. Yet, we, as children of God on this sinful 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. He has further promised to work all things together for good in the lives of His children (Romans 8:28)—and the “all things” here referenced includes these times of “failure.” (Once again, I will develop this area of thought 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 am 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 turmoil 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 that the capacity to express these desires is what makes them free. In a similar way, people think that 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 other words, we are not merely beings who desire certain things and act in certain ways; rather, we are also—and more fundamentally—beings who are consciously aware of having such desires and of acting in such ways.

In short: 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: Stimulus and response. As rational beings created in God's image, however, we do not live at this base level of stimulus and response. We live at the level of conscious awareness. We do not experience only stimulation; rather, we experience a conscious awareness of this stimulation. Furthermore, we do not experience only response; rather, we experience a conscious awareness of this response. There is thus a level to our nature that is more fundamental 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 coercion or constraint. Therefore, 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? If someone had asked me this question when I was stuffing my feelings with food, I might have responded 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.” During this period of my life, it was true that I frequently desired to eat more food than was healthy for me, and it was also true that I almost always acted on these desires. Nevertheless, saying, “I am a glutton,” implies that I identified myself with these desires. It implies that I was “going with the flow” of them and welcoming their indulgent fulfillment whenever I experience them—but this may not have been true. If I had acknowledged 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 was by no means a glutton (although I may have been 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 level of stimulation and response—but, rather, at the subject level of conscious awareness. 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.

Consider what the Bible states about the experience of the apostle Paul. He wrote of having experienced enslaving passions and desires. He even wrote of having acted upon these desires (Romans 7:14-21). Yet, 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” (Romans 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 (Romans 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 very real sense, it was no longer he that did it (Romans 7:17, 20).

If you read the entire biblical account in Romans 7:14-21, you will see 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?” (Romans 7:24)

Paul cried out for deliverance because he recognized—on the transcendent level of rational awareness—the reasonableness and the justice of God’s standards: “The law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good” (Romans 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.

After reviewing these experiences of Paul, I hope you see that it is merely a deception of the devil to think that we are “free” when expressing impulses that alienate us from God and from our authentic rational selves. I hope you also 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.

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 fundamentally grounded 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 basic truth would be this: “Thou has made us for Thee, O, Lord, and our hearts will be impoverished ‘til they find their fullness in Thee.”

A significant problem resulting from the “misalignment” of being in which we live—which is the reality of sin—is that we are naturally prone to project the deep need of our souls laterally to other people or things rather than to direct it upward to the only God Who can provide sufficiency and fulfillment. 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; therefore, these irrational expressions represent—not freedom—but, rather, bondage and alienation. The 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

The focus of this book is the security of the believer, so most chapters are directed to those who know that they are true disciples of Christ. Since many individuals struggle to know this with certainty, however, the present chapter will provide clarification of what it means to have a saving relationship with Christ.

On a surface level, believing in Christ would appear to be simple—just believe that He died for your sins and accept Him as your personal Savior. Despite 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 fully 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 to become a child of God. For example: “Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (John 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’ (Ephesians 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” (John 3:3).

- “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).
- “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 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. The new birth allows believers to taste and see that the Lord is good (Psalms 34:8). It allows them to drink of the water that becomes in them a well of water springing up into everlasting life (John 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 are 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 John 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 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” (Hosea 7:14).

The proud and autonomous of this world (which is our natural state) 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 and need. 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.

Although the Bible is clear that each of us must believe to be saved (John 1:12; 5:24; Acts 16:31; Romans 10:9), the Bible is also clear that God has “dealt to every man the measure of faith” (Romans 12:3, KJV). Therefore, one need only be honest in relation to his or her desperate need of salvation 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 eventually respond to the call of Christ with an act of saving faith. In other words, an honest person will eventually believe.

Let us assume for the moment that all of us understand these reasonable conditions of salvation, and let us 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 that we must take God's word at face value without seeking a sign of our new birth on the level of feeling—for we walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7).

Nevertheless, we also realize that the heart is deceitful above all things (Jeremiah 17:9), so we seek assurance that we are not deceiving ourselves. 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 spirits that they are redeemed children of God (Romans 8:15, 16).
- Believers experience the Spirit prompting them to groan inwardly as they await the redemption of their bodies (Romans 8:23).
- Believers experience the Spirit interceding for them in prayer with “groanings which cannot be uttered” (Romans 8:26, KJV).
- Believers experience God Himself searching their hearts through the mind of the Spirit (Romans 8:27).

Let us examine each of these criteria 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 witness of the Holy Spirit. We should experience this prompting of the Spirit as well as the peace and the 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 Peter 3:18).

The unconverted of the world do not experience this firsthand witness of the Holy Spirit that God is their Father and that they are His adopted children in Christ because they do not allow Him to take permanent residence in their hearts. They surely experience conviction of wrongdoing (John 16:8)—which they suppress—but they do not experience the firsthand witness of the Holy Spirit that God is their Father in Christ until they cry out to God for deliverance from sin and subsequently accept Christ as their 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 for more and still more of 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 (Romans 6:23), for the unredeemed souls of the world "love death" (Proverbs 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 drawn out to Him in prayer through the Holy Spirit. These are times when God shares the burdens 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 realized that times of trial are times of great blessing (James 1:2). During these times our oft-hardened hearts are broken, and we become far more sensitive to the tender promptings of a tender and merciful 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 am totally self-absorbed and just doing my own thing.

I remember once walking through a Walmart, thinking about something I was going to purchase for my home. Suddenly God’s Spirit broke through my self-absorption and drew my heart out to Him in such a powerful way that I began to weep. I remember spontaneously uttering the following confession: “I just want to love Jesus!” Where did *that* prayer 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 this 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 difficult to experience authentic intimacy and connection with the unconverted of the world—well, this is the reason. 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 us as children of God is the result of this activity of God’s Spirit, 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 in bondage to some 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 doubtless feel a sense of extreme distance and alienation. It would seem as if everyone were "out of touch" with no real feeling of interpersonal connection.

Indeed, everyone is “out of touch,” and it comes across to others like a "white elephant in the living room." This is so 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 allows 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 dishonesty, deception, and disconnection.

* * *

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

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, 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 one of God’s promises for rest and renewal before Him and then to claim it in the name of Christ. Truly, if one completes this one simple act, then our Heavenly Father will mercifully respond—even during a period of pronounced spiritual deadness. He will usher anyone into a deep and affirming fellowship of peace and rest, for 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” (Ezekiel 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, for, as I have already mentioned, believers walk by faith—not by sight or by feeling (2 Corinthians 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 this: “I will give you a new heart . . . and I will put my Spirit in you” (Ezekiel 36:26, 27).

If we cling to this promise unflinchingly amid sin, 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. Remember: There is a divine purpose to any perceived delay, for God intends to make us strong in faith, and such strength is not gained by instantly receiving that for which we pray.

I can personally testify that I have experienced God’s deliverance during what seemed to be a completely hopeless state of deadness and despair. The deliverance for me 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. I certainly took various steps of faith as I was resting in the truth of this promise by becoming involved in different forms of ministry and looking for the open doors of God’s providence. Nevertheless, it was the supernatural work of God that provided spiritual renewal, for any activity on my part could do nothing to restore my heart from its state of deadness and sin. Only the life-giving power of God’s Spirit could do this. Indeed, I knew this firsthand because I had spent almost two years experiencing no renewal at all because I had allowed myself to lapse into a condition where I did not believe and rest in the promises of God.

If you are at a point in your experience where it seems that you are unable to claim God's promises by faith, then 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 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” (John 17:3).
- “This is how we know that He lives in us: we know it by the Spirit he gave us” (1 John 3:24).

* * *

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" (John 10:27, 28).

These promises, powerful as they are, will not be sufficient to assure many believers of their security in Christ, for these doubters—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 that is in harmony with reason. This is an act where the power of an irrational force has overtaken the power of 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 God's authority, but this situation is quite different from a sheep of Christ wandering from the fold.

Many think that Christ's sheep (that is, the elect of God) is a group of people that is constantly in flux and thus continuously changing. They think a person can be a sheep of Christ, then not a sheep, then a sheep once again—and on and on. The population of Christ's sheep is not a group in flux, however. 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 then realize that the composition of this group could never change because of its intimate connection to God's essence. Let us now think about this matter in a simpler way.

Consider:

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

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

- 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 regarding the identity of the persons called, and Jesus Himself would not use this language unless He wanted to convey—again, in the strongest possible sense—that there is likewise no uncertainty or ambiguity regarding the identity of the sheep in His fold.

If someone is a sheep of Christ, then this person does not become a non-sheep because he or she is living in the ways of the world for weeks, for months—or even for years. This person

may deny Christ with foul language (as Peter did) or persecute His true followers (as Saul, who later became the great apostle 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, and it may also seem that 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.

- 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 comprise an unalterable group of believers that has been fixed from all eternity.

- 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 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" (John 10:27). Therefore, 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—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 an immutable being grounded in necessity, His knowledge can never change. Since Christ is God, 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. We can see even now, however, that one of Christ’s sheep could never wander away and destroy itself by considering the way Christ addresses lost souls at the judgment: He states, “I never knew you” (Matthew 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 this: How can one be in a state where Christ truthfully says, “I know you”—as He says of His true sheep (John 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 (Matthew 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” (John 2:19). The significant point here is that there is a class of people that is God’s children, and there is a class of people that is not. There are people of the truth (John 18:37), and there are people of the lie⁴ (John 8:43-47). There are children of the kingdom (Matthew 13:38), and there are children of the evil one (Matthew 13:38). There are those who are Christ’s sheep (John 10:27, 28), and there are those who are not His sheep (John 10:24-26).

There is simply no way around this clear Scriptural truth and this brute ontological reality. The composition of either group is known only to God, and the precise timing of anyone’s conversion among His elect is known only to Him as well. Nevertheless, the fact remains that there is a class of people that is God's children, and there 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” (John 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 (John 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 (Matthew 27:18; Mark 15:10). Instead of focusing upon mere symptoms like glory-seeking or envy, however, 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” (John 10:26). Once again, there are those who are Christ’s sheep (John 10:27, 28), and there are those who are not (John 10:24-26).

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).

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 (Romans 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 unchangeable truth that he or she is a child of the Almighty.

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 (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43). This parable tells how the man’s enemy comes and sows weeds among the good seeds of wheat that 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” (Matthew 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 (Matthew 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 Peter 2:21). He states that their experiences are in accordance with the truth of a known proverb, namely, “The dog turns back to his own vomit, and the sow is washed only to wallow in the mire” (2 Peter 2:22).

I cannot begin to tell you how many times I have heard this verse used 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 uncomfortable 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 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 (Luke 10:17), but Christ referred to him as a “devil” (John 6:70).

When Judas was about to betray Christ's trust, the Savior simply said, "What you are about to do, do quickly" (John 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 thus never heeds 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 translated "to perish" in verse 28 (Greek transliteration: *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*" (John 10:10). Since this verb is used in the middle voice in John 10:28, it could legitimately 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 when he passed a deep chasm and heard the bleating of a lamb. He and a friend

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

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. Clearly, this lamb was destroying itself.

Jesus assures His sheep, however, that they will never destroy themselves because He is the Good Shepherd Who carefully watches over them and thus protects them. He realizes that their greatest need is to be saved from their own weaknesses 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 perishable is clothed with the imperishable at Christ's Second Coming (1 Corinthians 15:53). Our Savior understands this. He is the good and merciful Shepherd, and 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 to go in search of the one who has gone astray. 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 His cleansing power. His mighty hand holds us even during the times when we are wayward, weak, 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*,⁶ 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.

A hand that holds is no imposition upon a person's free will because acting with free will amounts to acting in harmony with reason. It amounts to acting in ways that make sense. Pulling loose from a loving father's or a good shepherd's protecting hand does not make 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 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 agree to translate the verb in this way, however, the Bible is still asserting with a double negation (in the Greek) 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?

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, confusion about the nature of salvation, and confusion about the nature of God. This will become even clearer as we progress in this study, for we will understand that the security of the believer is grounded in God's necessity; therefore, it is necessarily true that the sheep of Christ are His forever.

⁶ J. R. Strombeck, *Shall Never Perish* (Moline, Ill: Strombeck Agency, Inc., 1956), 3.

In short: 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” (Romans 8:38, 39).

It is 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 I used to be one of them—by responding, "God's word does not 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 His children.

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 doubts 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. This is the precise area of concern that God's word is addressing in this passage, and 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? Clearly, both of our selves are included in "death or life," for each is a part of life right now, and God's word is stating that neither death nor life can separate us from His love for us in Christ.
- Is there anything that your self or my self can pass through that is not included in things present or things to come? Once again, both of our selves are included in the stated categories, for each is a part of "things present," and God's word is stating that neither things present nor things to come can separate us from His love for us in Christ.
- 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"? Both of our selves are included in all these final categories, for each is a part of "height" and "depth" and "anything else in all creation," and God's word is stating nothing in these final categories can separate us from His love for us in Christ.

The clear point of the passage is that 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 insecurity 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 would not impose His will upon me to 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. Even though I have addressed these areas in significant detail, I will still examine this situation as if it were a true possibility to show in a practical, step-by-step way how God's grace would "play out" in the life of the believer.

Fair enough?

First, it is certainly true that God will never coerce our wills to stop us from doing things that we are determined to do. We know by firsthand experience that this is true because we have personally witnessed the many times that God has allowed us to follow our own ways—even when we knew in our hearts that we were disobeying Him. 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? Yes, it was. Was our stubbornness and carnal pride broken by these experiences in ways that they needed to be broken? Yes, 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 (Philippians 1:6) and that He will sustain us to the end? (1 Corinthians 1:8, RSV)

Someone might respond, “But I could just walk away from Christ at some point and stay away. I could 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 course of action in a practical, step-by-step way as if it were a legitimate possibility.

First, 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 (John 14:16). Because of this permanent residence of the Holy Spirit, if one of God’s children ever tried to walk away from God and stay away, then 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 believe 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 any of 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 us say that someone still is not convinced that God is able to preserve us, 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; therefore, none of them could ever have his or her life cut short, but let us just imagine this for the sake of this example.

The question is this: 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, in fact, 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;⁷ and those whom He called He also justified; and those whom He justified He also glorified" (Romans 8:29, 30).

⁷ 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.

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 also stating that this was done according to His foreknowledge. Each of these verbs is in the aorist tense and the indicative mood, and this 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" (Colosians 3:3, 4). This arrangement is like that of Christ when the Bible states that He was foreordained before the foundation of the world but was revealed in these last times (1 Peter 1:20).

Surely God can keep a life that is already glorified and hidden in Him, and just as surely can He take such a life at any time without any change in the glorified status. So, there is simply no rational basis for thinking 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 the following: 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 our inheritance as believers is secure because it is reserved in Heaven. We have been exhorted to lay up our treasures in Heaven "where no thief approaches and no moth destroys" (Luke 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? How can such a person 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 the second section, I will “unpack” God’s “*I AM*” statement found in Exodus 3:14 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 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 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 is 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 divine attribute that is relevant for this discussion 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. The result of all this is that 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.

I will emphasize that you should not become concerned if you do not understand all these areas at this point in the study because this is simply a preview of what is coming in later chapters. 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.

* * *

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” (Ephesians 1:3, 4).

God’s choice of His children (according to His foreknowledge—Romans 8:29, 30) takes place “before the foundation of the world,” and the 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.⁸

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 about human freedom because, as I have stated, 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 our lives, 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.

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 (John 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.

⁸ 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.

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 thus realize that I could lose my salvation if I persist in a life of sin. Therefore, I will try not to sin.” 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?

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 infinite power and autonomy?

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, a glorified saint or angel in Heaven, or God Himself in heaven—does nothing to cause one to sin.

Sin is grounded in delusion. Thus, it is only people of the lie (John 8:44-47) who desire to stubbornly persist in a path of autonomy and rebellion (John 10:25, 26). They do this because they do not “hear” the words of Christ (John 8:43), but people of the truth hear these words gladly (John 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: 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 because, as sons and daughters of Adam, we are naturally prone to fall into states of weakness and delusion. I remember facing this struggle myself. I had realized and experienced for the first time the comfort and peace of knowing that I was eternally secure in my salvation (after years of struggling with this issue), and I found that I initially became somewhat lax and allowed myself to indulge in certain areas where I formally tried to refrain.

I can truthfully state, however, that the 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 lies and delusion. I realized and experienced in more powerful ways than ever before that there is no true fulfillment apart from Christ, and I have no doubt that this will 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 discontent, and these releases are always transient and unfulfilling. The fulfillment of God, however, 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 Corinthians 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 this “ontologically deficient” state of dependency and need, we must choose one of two options: (1) project our deepest needs and dependencies laterally toward other people and things (which is a losing game), or (2) direct these needs and dependencies upward to the only legitimate source of soul fulfillment. Whatever ordeals and bad choices God’s children need to pass through to finally understand that these are our only options, well, these are precisely the experiences needed. God knows all of this, so He allows various ordeals in the lives of His children—even if these ordeals result in temporary increases of sinful activity as learning experiences.

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 (Romans 2:4). Since God’s children are people—not of the lie (John 8:44)—but, rather, of the truth (John 18:37), they embrace the cutting words of Christ that force an individual to accommodate reality (that is, they hear His words—John 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 (Romans 8:28).

The same kindness and forbearance of God that leads to a deeper level of repentance and consecration among His children does not lead to this outcome 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 (Romans 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 of 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” (Isaiah 14:14).

A significant point about eternal security that must be acknowledged is this: Many do not consider this area of rock-solid safety to be an area in which God can help us. They believe the only way we can possess 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” (Matthew 10:22).

How is this anything but a theology of works?

Allow me to emphasize that *of course* I believe God's children will stand firm to the end—this should go without saying. We must recognize, however, that qualities such as endurance, longsuffering and faithfulness are clearly the fruit of God's gift of salvation

(Galatians 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” (“sozo”) is in the aorist tense and the indicative mood—thus denoting a completed act.

Think of the thief on the cross: He stood firm to the end. Yet, his perseverance and endurance were not qualities he needed to express 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 (“You will be with me in Paradise”—Luke 23:43). His perseverance and endurance were simply the inevitable fruit that flows from the life of a saved child of God.

Our part in the salvation process is simply this: An honest confession of need. Really, how could anything that is given by grace as a gift (Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8) require anything more of the recipient? As I have stated previously, 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” (Hosea 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. People of the truth, however, do cry out to God for deliverance and salvation. They confess their desperate need in this area, and this always results in acceptance of Christ by faith as their personal Savior.

Returning 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? 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 (Proverbs 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.

It is true, of course, that we, as God's children, often wander into a path of sin and bondage, 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 (Proverbs 3:17). We also recognize and experience that only in God's presence is there fullness of joy, and only from Him can we receive pleasures for evermore (Psalms 16:11). So, as God's children, we 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; therefore, 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 Peter 1:10). Peter clearly regarded the assurance of one's call and election to be something that will

keep one from sinning (or “stumbling”)⁹. 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.

In my own experience, I have found that a rock-solid assurance that 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 have full assurance that my personal destiny is to be “holy and blameless” before God (Ephesians 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 is a class of people that is God’s children, and there is a class of people that is not. There are people of the truth (John 10:27, 28; 18:37), and there are people of the lie (John 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 a perspective that reveals confusion regarding 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

⁹ 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?

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

I would respond by stating that 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" (Matthew 7:20). Nevertheless, the Bible is clear that no one is ever able 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.

To understand this point clearly, consider again Christ's parable of the man who sows good seed in his field (Matthew 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" (Matthew 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" (Matthew 13:29-30).

I initially referred to this parable in chapter 5 ("Christ's Sheep") 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 (Matthew 13:30).

I hope what I have written on this topic of a call to holiness is enough to show that (1) God's call is indeed a call to holiness (Ephesians 1:3, 4), and (2) since God's call is a call to holiness, we, as God's children, can 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—Philippians 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?" (Hebrews 12:6, 7, NKJV) Thus we see that God's grace "teaches" us (Titus 2:11-13) to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts by a process of chastening. Chastening always involves a series of providences by which we are reprovved 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 you and me to a 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. 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. 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 quite a different person. He 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 obviously 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 Peter 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 Peter 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 providences 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.”¹⁰

The suffering from this path of the cross is not just suffering for suffering’s sake, for this 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 to ever walk this earth 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 wisdom¹¹: "The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep His commandments; for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecclesiastes 12:13). 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 for 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.

¹⁰ Hannah Whitall Smith, *The Christian’s Secret of a Holy Life* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1994).

¹¹ 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.

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" (Ecclesiastes 2:1). He also says that he withheld no pleasure from himself (Ecclesiastes 2:10). He found this path to be one that ultimately led to suffering and pain—and the chastening of God (2 Samuel 7:12-15; 1 Kings 11:9-13).

Do we think the process will be any different for us? What child is there who always 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 are invariably those who believe that they would not have sinned as grievously as Solomon if they had lived during his time and possessed the same power and fame that he did. They also believe that they would not have committed adultery and murder as his father, 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. Yet, I think we err grievously if we think that 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 Samuel 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 that we are eternally secure as God's children, then we will almost certainly misinterpret His actions toward us during these times of divine "teaching." The pain of the relevant chastisement will lead us to believe that God is inflicting vengeful punishment upon rebellious sinners rather than bestowing loving correction to His eternally secure children. Remember: God has laid all the punishment for our sins completely upon His Son and Our Savior, Jesus, so there is none left for us. "He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:4). We must never lose sight of this vital truth, but if we are not eternally secure as God's children, then we will. This resultant blindness will make us weak in spiritual power so that we are more prone to succumb to Satan's temptations.

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!"? (Mark 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"? (John 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 that 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. Satan will insinuate that we are God's children doubt during these difficult times—just as he did with Jesus: "If You are the Son of God, . . ."

(Matthew 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 seems 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 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 desperate and 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 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 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 believers to wonder if they could be children of the Most High. So, we need to know that we are eternally secure 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 we will hedge our risk in this area 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 our 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 John 2:1).¹²

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.¹³ We do not grow in grace from a works-oriented place outside of God's merit and favor where we are desperately trying to grow into it. Rather, we grow from a grace-oriented place inside of God's merit and favor where we are restfully growing in it. This may seem to be such a trite insight, but many of us know and experience little of God's grace. Many of us are trying (in one way or another) to grow *into* grace rather than to grow *in* it. That is, we are trying—in one way or another—to merit an approval from God that has already been freely bestowed upon in Christ. "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin" (Matthew 6:28). Also: "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?" (Matthew 6:27)

Surely, growth in grace is a place of spiritual rest that is diametrically opposed to self-dependence, self-effort, or legality of any kind. 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.¹⁴*

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

¹² Note in this verse that John writes that we have an advocate—not with our heavenly Judge—but, rather, with the *Father*.

¹³ I am indebted to the writings of Hannah Whitall Smith for this important insight.

¹⁴ This is a stanza from a hymn written by Jean Sophia Pigott (1845-1882).

God's chastening or enjoying the bright sunshine of a 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 because this understanding and experience 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 a people of destiny.

* * *

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

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. 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 insecurity (or conditional security) in Christ.” We could spend endless hours engaging in theological rhetoric and offering contradictory biblical interpretations, but surely there is a better way.

I would like to get to a place of indisputable, foundational truth, so I will emphasize again that a position of security that is built upon the fundamental nature of God Himself is unshakable and irrefutable because one cannot get “underneath” the bedrock of Deity. In short: There is nothing more fundamental than the ground of being,¹⁵ so a position of security that is soundly built upon this foundation is a position that is unassailable.

Before commencing this study of Exodus 3:14, I will 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 way to unpack the inherent meaning of these expressions without delving deeply into various philosophical areas. This depth is not necessary, however, to get a simple sense of one’s security

¹⁵ This is a phrase employed by Paul Tillich to denote the metaphysical foundation of all that exists.

in Christ. I would therefore suggest that you skip any chapter (or any portion of a chapter) that seems too overwhelming and simply move to the next one. You can always return to the prior chapter 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 us look now at the biblical dialogue in which God introduces Himself to Moses as *I AM*. You can read the entire account of this dialogue 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).¹⁶

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

Notice that God identifies Himself as 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 (as well as 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 outset 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 some of these surprises may be welcome, one or two may possibly be unwelcome. Whether or not a surprise is welcome or

¹⁶ God prefaces His "*I AM*" statement with the statement, "*I AM WHO I AM*." I address this assertion of God later in the study.

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 us look at this name of God:

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

Notice that God does not say that His name is “I AM NOT” (which would imply non-existence); rather, He says that 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.¹⁷
(“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 to you. Before proceeding to an examination of these points, however, I will note that anyone would arrive at the conclusion that a necessary being like God must exist even if we did not have these words of God about Himself in Scripture.

You may ask, “How would we arrive at this conclusion apart from these words from Scripture?” I would reply, “We would arrive at this 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.

¹⁷ 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)

Stay with me, okay?

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? Since we are rational beings, and since there is an obvious rationality to existence (that is, things make sense), it is natural to ask, “Why is there something rather than nothing?”¹⁸

A person who does not believe in any transcendent structure of being (and thus does not wish to embark upon a path that would lead to the existence of God) may say something like, “Well, things just are.” A response like this does not answer the “Why?” question, however. It does not answer this question on either a rational or a causal level.

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 some sort of rational explanation or causal sequence to the ultimate question about existence?” This same person may say, “There is no need to give an answer here.” I would assert, however, 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 (the rationality of existence), and things flow in predictable cause-and-effect sequences (the causality of existence). This is why people can 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

¹⁸ This is a well-known question posed by philosophers such as Heidegger and Leibniz.

them most—namely, at the time when we are seeking to gain an understanding of ourselves as well as our place in the universe.

If we refuse to abandon reason and causality when we need them most and seek rather to provide a rational explanation and a causal relationship for observable reality, then the only conclusion that will suffice is one that postulates the existence of a necessary being as the sufficient explanation as well as the sufficient cause¹⁹—and this is the identical conclusion we reach from the words that God applies to Himself (“I AM”).

Still there?

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

Let us now 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.

¹⁹ This explanation is 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 that the first conclusion we derived from God's name and thus from His nature is the following:

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

This conclusion is quite simple and straightforward, and I see no legitimate way around it. If one's name is "I AM" and thus expresses "I AM"-ness, then it is impossible for such a being to be characterized by the contradictory name of "I AM NOT." Thus, it is impossible for such a being not to exist. Such a being must therefore exist 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 or a sufficient cause for my existence. Why? Because I need to point to something beyond myself to account for my being and existence—like, for example, my parents, or the "stuff" of which I am composed. This means that I am a contingent, not a necessary, being—for dust I am, and to dust I shall return (Genesis 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. There is nothing, however, that is more fundamental than

an entity that truthfully declares that “to be” is essential to its essence. Such an entity 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, “I AM,” expresses “I AM”-ness, it is impossible for Him to be characterized by the name “I AM NOT.” Therefore, 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 possible.

Regarding 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 God were caused by another, then, like you and me, He would need to point to something beyond Himself to give a sufficient reason and cause for His existence. If God had to do this, however, then He could not refer to Himself with the name “I AM” since this name denotes an entity that has existence grounded—not in another—but, rather, in itself.

Clearly, then, God cannot be caused by another.

Regarding 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 to give existence to Himself, and this is impossible. In other words, God would need to exist before He exists to cause His own existence. Clearly, this is self-contradictory nonsense.

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, 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. Clearly, however, only nothing proceeds from nothing, so if there were ever a time when there was nothing, then this nothing would never be able to produce something. Furthermore, 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 entity 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 entity 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 to me only at the present instant of time in which we happen to exist. It does not apply to us, for example, in any future instant of time. If the present tense of the verb “to be” applied to us in a future instant of time, then we would be entities that transcend time and contingency. In other words, we would be necessary and eternal. You and I do not transcend time and contingency, however, 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.

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 terminate lives like yours and mine at any moment. In short, He is declaring that, unlike you and me, He is necessary and eternal.

I hope you will 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 can 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 simply happen to have certain features or properties; rather, because He is the ground of necessity, He *is* 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 John 4:8)
- One would not say that He happens to have truth—rather, that He *is* truth. (John 14:6)
- Not that He happens to have life—rather, that He *is* life. (John 14:6)²⁰

In short: 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 Latin *esse*, to be).²¹

This distinction between accidental (or contingent) properties and essential properties may not be clear to you, but this distinction is quite 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

²⁰ 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* (John 8:58).

²¹ If this point does not seem clear to you, then consider this: If it were not true that all that God is, He is necessarily, then this would mean that there is something accidental or contingent in God. If this were true, however, then God would not exist necessarily *as that*. Yet, if God did not exist necessarily in some aspect of His being, then His “I AM” statement would not be entirely true of Him as He exists. We know, however, that this statement *is* completely true of God as He exists, for He declares His name to be “I AM.” We thus know that God comprises necessary existence in every dimension of His being.

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.

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 cannot 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 quite simple (and distorting the issue a bit) for the purpose of clarification. 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 do not 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).

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 person he or she is.

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. 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); therefore, God could not truthfully declare that His name is "I AM."

God does, however, truthfully declare that His name is "I AM"; therefore, there is no contingency in God. The point, once again, is that any attribute of God is an attribute that constitutes a dimension of His essence. This is so, once again, because God is a necessary being, and a necessary being is what it is necessarily.²³ God thus has no accidental property because having such a property or feature would imply that He could lose this attribute and yet still be God—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 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, 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 pretend that 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 simply 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. I am repeating this point often, but only because it is important.

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)

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

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 (I include Exodus 3:13 to provide the context of the dialogue that occurred between God and Moses): 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 that 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, "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 to see if my statement about it were true. If I point to a certain object, however, and say, "It is what it is"—well, this is an assertion that is true by necessity²⁴; therefore, no tests are needed, for what else can something be than what it is?

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.

Although this statement is true by necessity, many 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.”

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.”

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 this:

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

One could simply cite Malachi 3:6 to establish this truth and be done with it: "I the LORD do not change." Establishing the immutability 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 His nature. For this reason, I will dig into this area of God's immutability a bit more deeply to show the connection to God's necessity because this connection will be important in our understanding of the rock-solid security that we have in Christ.

First, it is important to understand that any change must be either an accidental or an 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 us take a realistic look at each of these changes in relation to myself as a person.

I will 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 Stuart Cedrone, then the loss of my memory amounts to the non-existence of 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 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; therefore, it could change, and I would still retain my identity as Stuart Cedrone.

Let us apply this thinking to God.

First, 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 merely happen to have; rather, He necessarily has. This is required, once again, by the necessity of His nature. So, God cannot change in any accidental way because He has no accidents.

On the other hand, God cannot change in any essential way 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 is 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. 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 stage of pregnancy). Thus, a “pre-viable” fetus does not qualify as a person, and abortion is therefore justified.

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 type of rationale that would be employed in these cases 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 that something. Since God cannot cease to be God, He cannot lose any essential property; therefore, 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. This is another reason that 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 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. We could even state that the heap of scrap metal—if it is iron—will rust over time and will thus change (like the tree) without the intervention of any personal agency. 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 therefore know that 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 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 that 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 no attempt will be made to argue for this position in the present study. At the very least, there is no way to coherently “fit” conscious, sentient entities with personal hopes and aspirations into an entirely impersonal, material structure; therefore, persons like you and me would have no genuine meaning within this framework. Rather, we would be merely “dust in the wind.”²⁵ Since all personal desires such as those for love and intimacy would have no legitimate metaphysical grounding, all personal beings would be left without hope when it comes to meaningful personal fulfillment. This is the alienation of the post-modern world.

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). Since, however, 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), such a being must be an eternal and necessarily existent being that transcends time and contingency.

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

²⁵ This is the name of a song written by Kerry Livgren and performed by the rock band Kansas, 1977.

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 counterintuitive 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 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. Yet, things are not always as they appear, and, as it turns out, space and time are relative commodities in our universe. As velocity increases, time dilates (that is, it progresses 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 physical 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 are all tempted to think that we are smarter than God.

In fact, 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.

The same is true 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 fundamental in our universe, knew there had to be some structuring principle to reality, some unchanging absolute. For him, this was the Logos—and God's Word equates this with Jesus (John 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 that 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.

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

If this were true, however, 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 is that none of this is true of God, for He simply 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).

To summarize: God, as the ground of necessity, cannot change; therefore, He declares of Himself,

“I the LORD do not change.”

(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, 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 uncaused being who transcends causality.
- God is not dependent upon 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 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, so I was thinking quite deeply about this issue in a more consistent way. I was also praying fervently and reading many helpful books. I was trying desperately to put everything 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 metaphysics, but neither provided the type of helpful information that I felt I needed. This is not surprising because—even though each person was highly qualified—one can hardly expect

another person to enter immediately into one's personal realm of study that has been pursued for many years and provide a definitive insight.

It eventually became clear to me that if I were ever going to resolve these issues, I would have to do it on my own. Even though I knew I could depend upon God for His help, I must confess that I felt completely lost. I was so confused about God's essence, yet I had become convinced that the only way I would find the security for which I desperately hungered was to build upon a foundation that was rooted here—in the very nature and being of God.

Then, finally, after many years of thinking, reading, 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 revelation was a climactic turning point for me, and I am so thankful to God for the epiphany.

I realize that it may be difficult for non-philosophers to find meaning in a statement like this, so 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." As I mentioned earlier, people use this expression when they are faced with an unpleasant circumstance or situation in life that 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 gripe and complain about it. I acknowledge it. I accept it. I'm going to deal with it. That's that."

As I stated in a prior chapter, the significant point about this saying is the acknowledgment and acceptance that there is no longer any contingency. That is, the statement

expresses the fact that there is no longer any possibility that things might be different than they are. People are thus acknowledging when they say this that they must accommodate themselves to the situation as it exists. They are brought to the point where they realize that it does no good to 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 (that is, 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. This is the point God is making.

When God declares, "I AM WHO I AM," and further states that His name is “I AM,” He is expressing the ultimate "It is what it is" statement, for He is essentially 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. Therefore, He could command Moses to go to Pharaoh without Moses having to feel fear or intimidation.

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).

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

There is more to come.

* * *

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

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.

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 from His nature—are broad, deep and life-transforming. Furthermore, they are implications that cannot be disputed since they flow directly from the words that God has spoken about Himself. I state this once again because some of these implications might be unexpected and possibly resisted. 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.

To deny them is 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. Therefore, every attribute of God is His essentially, not accidentally. For this reason, no property of God can change in the slightest, for, if it did, then God would cease to be God.

The significant implication that flows directly from this truth is that God is changeless. He simply cannot become different in any way than He is, and Scripture itself attests to this non-contingent, unchanging nature of God:

- "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" (James 1:17).
- "I, the LORD, do not change" (Mal. 3:6).

- “From everlasting to everlasting, thou art God” (Psalms 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 forever” (Hebrews 13:8).

Clearly, the God-inspired Scriptures bear witness to the truth of God’s immutability, and this is 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)

I will now introduce one of the possible surprises that I have mentioned: Since all properties of God are essential, even the knowledge that God has is one with His immutable essence and thus cannot change.²⁸

Two important implications that flow directly from this truth are the following:

- 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.

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

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

saved while leaving others to be lost.²⁹ Rather, they 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.

Since God's knowledge cannot change, He cannot know that a certain person is beloved as His child at one moment and then know at a later point in time (from our perspective) that he or she is not, for, in this case, His knowledge would have changed. Given that this is true, how then can one who has genuinely become His son or daughter in Christ fall away? Clearly, from God's vantage point, he or she cannot. Remember: God does not exist in the successive structure of time, and His knowledge is independent of anything that occurs in this contingent realm.

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.

²⁹ I will demonstrate in chapter 19 that, given the reality of God's simplicity, He could never unconditionally predestine some to a merciful salvation while leaving others to a deserved damnation.

17. The Knowledge of God

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

From the prior chapter, we know the following:

- God's knowledge is completely independent of anything outside of His unchanging essence.
- 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 in the contingent realm of space and time?

First, 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" to the successive dimension that structures our experience; rather, He sits enthroned above it. 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 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.

Despite these complications, however, I will keep things at this level for now since the main purpose of this study is not to address all time-related issues (any attempt to do this would require significant development). Also, I do not think that any meaningful distortion will result from moving forward with this perspective.

So, 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" (Romans 8:15, 16). 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 who are living in the contingent realm of space and time.³⁰

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. Since God's necessity demands that what He is, He is necessarily, this knowledge of God is essential to His nature. Therefore, it

³⁰ I realize that verse 17 states an explicit condition: "provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him." There are many conditions like this that are 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 to establish already-determined ends.)

cannot change. The present witness that God is our Father thus 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 study is clear. I do not want anyone to believe that I pursued this work 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 the theological rhetoric that takes place about whether born-again believers are eternally secure or eternally insecure 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 quite difficult for me. For this reason, 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. When I was engaged in the difficult work of this study, I believed that I needed security in Christ as much as I needed the air that I breathed—and I still believe this. I also believe that all God’s sons and daughters need this security as well. Anything less than a rock-solid assurance grounded in God’s necessity amounts to a theology of works-orientation, and this will never supply a person with the strength and fortitude needed to endure “a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time (Daniel 12:1, NKJV). It amounts to something like this: “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: This knowledge of God—as with all knowledge of God—is grounded in His very being. In other words, since God comprises an uncomposed and indivisible essence, 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, uncomposed 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 Section Two of this 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 you and me are the ones who need salvation; therefore, to explore this area, we will need to examine texts of Scripture that apply to ourselves, not to God. I hope the relevant analysis and exegesis of the Scripture texts that follow 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' (Ephesians 2:3) into children of the Living God? (John 1:12)

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" (John 3:3).
- "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5).
- "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

We 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 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” (John 1:12). This 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 John 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” (John 17:21).
- “By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His own Spirit” (1 John 4:13).

So, one may ask,

- How can finite, contingent being be “born anew” of infinite, necessary being?
(John 3:5, 6)
- How can finite, contingent being be “one” with infinite, necessary being?
(John 17:21)
- How can finite, contingent being “abide” with infinite, necessary being?
(1 John 4:15)

It is all quite mind-boggling, isn’t it? How can any of these Scriptural assertions be true?

How can finite and sinful beings like you and me possibly be born of, be one with, and abide with . . . *God?! Can finite beings receive the very uncreated life of the Infinite One? Does the Almighty raise us up to the level of His only begotten Son?*

Christ Himself states that He will grant those who conquer³¹ to sit with Him on His throne, just as He Himself conquered and sat down with His Father on His throne (Revelation 3:21). Our Savior is thus elevating us to a place where we will sit with Him upon the throne of the universe.

³¹ 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.

Can we even begin to take this in? All we can do is exclaim with the writer of the Book of Hebrews,

So Great Salvation!

(Hebrews 2:3)

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 (Isaiah 14:13, 14), and Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise for the same reason³² (Genesis 3:5). Yet God gives this position and status as a 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” (Ephesians 2: 6, 8, 9).

Once again, all we can do is exclaim,

So Great Salvation!

Clearly, as finite beings, we cannot 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 Jesus, and this phenomenon of the Incarnation is clearly how 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. Yet, even though none of us

³² I am thankful to J. F. Strombeck for clarifying my thought in this area. (*So Great Salvation*, Strombeck Foundation, 1940, 98-100.) We know that Adam ate the fruit, not because he was deceived, but, rather, because he listened to his wife (Genesis 3:17; 1 Timothy 2:14).

will ever fully understand the Incarnation or our own spiritual union with God through Christ, all of God's children have the privilege of experiencing the comforting reality of this union through the sense of belonging that it supplies.

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. None of this is true of my place in God's family, however, 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; therefore, 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 "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.

Consider 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 God's children by anything less than being born into His family (John 3:3), and this cannot happen without God's consent (John 1:13; 6:44), for we become partakers of His uncreated life when we are born into His family. This is how we experience communion with the Father and the Son (1 John 1:3) through the agency of the Holy Spirit (whom the world cannot receive—John 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 sovereignly decree that some will be saved while others are left to be lost (as I will show in the next chapter).

A clear deduction from all of this is that the "belongingness" that we have in God's family through the new birth 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. God cannot do this, however, because God Himself 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 unfaithfulness 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.” Note that 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, as I have already stated, 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 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. This means, once again, that God Himself would change—but God does not change. So, none of this could ever happen. I have shown in a prior chapter how God promises to protect His children from this very choice. He does this while also honoring their freedom of choice 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:³³

- (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 based on his or her faith in God’s Son (Romans 3:28; 4:5, 6; 5:1). Therefore, at the moment of faith, the

³³ John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Knowing the Truth about Eternal Security* (Harvery House: 1997), pp. 24, 29.

very righteousness of God as well as the obedience of Christ is credited to the believer's account. 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 (John 6:37; 17:2, 6, 9). In other words, this group of true believers is not some amorphous collection 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 be altered? How can God change His mind regarding the composition of a group that He gave to His Son if God does not change? Once again, this is impossible.

Each of the above areas poses insurmountable problems in relation to salvation and God's necessity for those who reject eternal security.

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. 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 several questions that arise in the minds of many Christians. Some possible ones are these:

- Does God's being and nature require that everything about a person's salvation be fixed from all eternity?

Answer: Yes, but this hardly matters from our vantage point because all of this is an unfolding reality from our frames 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. Once again, however, this hardly matters from our vantage point since all of this is an unfolding reality from our frames 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.

There are doubtless other questions that arise in the minds of many, but it is impossible to anticipate all of them. An important point that needs to be emphasized is this: Determining what God's Word has to say about a certain topic is never 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 sound philosophical inference, so there is no room for questioning whether 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 cease to exist
- **Uncausality** 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 uncomposed 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 these:

- **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 the following:

- **Omni-benevolence** God is an all-loving being.
- **Interpersonality** God is an interpersonal 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 around us and in 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 interpersonality 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 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 interpersonality on the level of Deity.

Regarding the important questions that I posed at the beginning of this chapter, I will now 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 unconditionally predestined some to a merciful salvation while leaving others to a deserved damnation. As you doubtless know, there are many Christians who believe that God did, in fact, sovereignly and unconditionally predestine some to salvation and leave others to the damnation that they justly deserve. 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 their beliefs about salvation by God's Word—just as we do. We must, therefore, get "underneath" the differing interpretations of relevant Bible texts 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 to base our position on God's own words about Himself.

By stating that God is a simple being, I mean that God is 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 (and He is), then He could never be decomposed and thus destroyed in this way. For this reason, God must comprise an *uncomposed* and *indivisible* essence—which is to say that 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. There is nothing more fundamental than a being characterized by I AM, however, since such a being is the one being who exists necessarily.³⁴

Since God is thus a simple essence, no faculty of God could ever operate independently of His uncomposed nature. Therefore, the faculty of God's will could never operate independently from His love.³⁵ 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 that it is normally understood) simply cannot be true given

³⁴ 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.

³⁵ I believe we can legitimately take God's love (or omnibenevolence) as a given since the Bible makes such a clear and unequivocal statement to this effect in 1 John 4:8: "God is love."

the nature of Deity that logically derives from God's own words about Himself. One formalized argument demonstrating the simplicity of God's nature (and thus the impossibility of unconditional election) would be the following:

- 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, uncomposed 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).
- But there is nothing more fundamental than God.
- Therefore, God is not a non-simple, composed essence.
- Therefore, God is a simple, uncomposed essence.

I have tried to keep matters as uncomplicated and “streamlined” as possible in this study because the examination of these issues can easily become rather deep and overwhelming. Nevertheless, I will briefly mention one further argument for God's simplicity since the refutation of unconditional election is based upon the existence of this divine 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.³⁶
- Therefore, God is not a non-simple, composed essence.
- Therefore, God is a simple, uncomposed essence.

³⁶ 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.

There is simply no way around the logic of the above arguments, for 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, the choice of either of these options amounts 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, uncomposed essence. Furthermore, if God is a simple, uncomposed essence, then He could never will to love some (and thus mercifully elect them to salvation) and also will not to love others (and thus leave them for a deserved damnation). Such a scenario is self-contradictory, given the nature and being of God.

* * *

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 from God's necessity (that is, from His "I AM"-ness) is the same as denying God Himself.³⁷ So, we will dig into these issues more deeply to understand how everything fits together in a coherent 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 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. The fact that one can build upon the impregnable foundation of God's simple "I AM" statement and then derive an all-

³⁷ Gender is another attribute of Deity that must be established, and I do not mean to presuppose a purely masculine gender by using the pronoun, "His." Clearly, the feminine as well as the masculine gender must be grounded in the divine nature for God to create "male and female" in the "likeness of God" (Genesis 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.

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, 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. The result will be that 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 that you will ever grapple with here on this 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. We are also drawing solid conclusions about His nature from the very words He has declared to us about Himself. It is almost impossible for finite beings to fully appreciate the scope and magnitude of such an endeavor.

Personally, I believe rational reflection upon the nature of Deity 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. It also provides a solid foundation for 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 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.

Prayerful reflection upon the life of our Savior—that is, the life of God in human flesh—is surely important. 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 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. Reflection upon the pre-incarnate God 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 find ourselves wondering, “How is this even possible?!” Frankly, I do not think we will ever be able to understand this glorious phenomenon completely.

We will now develop 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, 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 to this argument, if necessary. Any being that transcends time and contingency, however, must be an infinite being 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. 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.

If I could truthfully declare that my name is “I AM,” however, 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. Only in this way would I truly be beyond all 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. The only way to differ from Him, however, is to possess some feature or attribute that He lacks. Since God is an infinite being, 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. If, however, 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 the prior chapters, so I hope you will give yourself time to digest all the material that was presented. I hope you also will reread various sections to ensure that you fully grasp the logic and the coherence of the development.

You will recall that I began this study by emphasizing our desperate need for security in both the physical as well as the spiritual dimensions of life. As I mentioned in the Introduction, only a rock-solid level of security in our Father's acceptance and care supplies complete comfort and rest to the salvation experience and therefore provides a healthy motivation for the thoughts and actions of our lives. I hope you believe that you now have this rock-solid level of security. I hope you believe that you are eternally secure in Christ.

If I were to choose one vital, overriding point to emphasize from this study, it would be this:

Salvation is in no sense a probation.³⁸

Initially, that statement might seem too bold to you—as it once did to me. It might even seem to border on presumption. I hope, however, that you will one day be able to rest in its truth. You will then know without a shadow of a doubt that you are eternally secure as God's son or daughter in Christ, and this revelation will inspire you with hope toward a life of purity and godliness.

Praise God from Whom all blessings flow.

* * *

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

³⁸ J. F. Strombeck, *Shall Never Perish* (Moline, Ill: Strombeck Agency, Inc., 1956), 22.