

The UNION

Get Ready to Meet the King!

God Calls His Church to
Truth, Faith and Holiness

2019

Joan H. Richardson

The UNION

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CHAPTER 15

Concerning Predestination

If salvation were as simple as most of us say it is, we would not need a book filled with inspired words to study. Holy men of God would not have been led to write them. For at least the first few centuries, men didn't believe we only needed one sentence to be saved. But our salvation is profound.

The Teaching

²⁴ Then the Jews surrounded Him and said to Him, "How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly."

²⁵ Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me. ²⁶ But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. ²⁷ My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.

²⁸ And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.

²⁹ My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of My Father's hand. ³⁰ I and My Father are one." (John 10:24-30 NKJV)

Notice Jesus didn't say, "Because you don't believe, you are not my sheep." It was the other way around: He identified those whom the Father had given Him by their ability to hear His voice in faith. His sheep would follow Him, and He would give them life as they obeyed His words. The others could not understand what he was saying since they were not given to Christ by the Father. In other words, we who believe do so because we are His sheep, appointed to believe by the Father who is greater than all.

¹⁰ And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?"

¹¹ He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.

(Matthew 13:10-11 NKJV)

Protestant Teachings

Someone might say that it wasn't given to them because they didn't believe; however, that isn't what Jesus said. He said they didn't believe because they were not His sheep—even though He came for the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

The doctrine of predestination comes largely from Paul's letter to the Romans in which he declared that God chooses those to whom He shows mercy but hardens the hearts of others. The fact that the word "predestined" is in the Scriptures is enough to at least look into it, but that idea is abrasive to our minds since most of us have agreed on another doctrine, "man's free will." Wesley was wrong, and the more we look into it, the clearer it becomes. Let's not stop there. Calvin was wrong too; we aren't predestined to be saved forever. We are predestined to be set free. Can "free will" be overruled by our sinful nature? What if our will is only truly free after the truth sets us free?

Andrew and John were disciples of John the prophet in the wilderness when Jesus passed by them, and they followed Him. They may have thought they had chosen Jesus, but He said,

"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. (Jn. 15:16 NKJV)

We love to overlook Paul, the disciple to the Gentiles who also rebuked Peter for his hypocrisy, and Peter was glad he did. *But no prophecy of scripture was written by any man's private interpretation of things, but holy men of God spoke as the Holy Spirit moved them. (See 2 Pet. 1:20-21)* Do we believe the writings?

The Father shows us His salvation entirely by grace: those who believe in Jesus Christ believe by grace. Those who follow Him can do so by His grace. If anyone is willing, he is willing by the grace of God because God chose to give him a free will to want Him and His righteousness if after having been predestined, we so choose, and that's the test:

¹² Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. ¹³ For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do his good pleasure. (Philippians 2:12-13)

Concerning Predestination

¹⁴ What shall we say then? *Is there* unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! ¹⁵ For He says to Moses, “*I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.*”

¹⁶ So then *it is* not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. ¹⁷ For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, “*For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.*” ¹⁸ Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. (Romans 9:14-18 NKJV)

We were slaves to sin when He showed us mercy and compassion because, in His sovereignty, He chose to do that for some of us. We couldn't earn it; it was a free gift. God does not pattern His thoughts by ours. (See Is. 55:8-9) To mortals, the idea of predestination isn't fair—which is why Paul warned us to receive Him as He is because He is God and God is good.

Apart from God in Christ, there is no standard by which to discern good from evil. Considering His mercies, we bow in awe. Had He not chosen some, we would all be condemned. Had He not rejected many, we would not appreciate salvation. He keeps us by our fear of Him, making us holy as He is holy.

³⁴ And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth forever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: ³⁵ And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? (Daniel 4:34-35)

Believing all the Scriptures helps us appreciate and understand the grace of God. He set us free when we were slaves to sin. He loved us and foreknew who we would be, wanting us to grow into His likeness by faith in the power of His life, which He would give us as the chosen of the Father. After receiving what should be our inheritance, His gift of eternal life is ours if we choose life over death—a decision only a free man can make.

Protestant Teachings

If we don't tell others about Him, He will not speak on our behalf to the Father. If we deny Him before men, He will deny us to the Father. Many Calvinists don't say a word about Him.

Have we understood who God is? Most teachers deny the discomfoting fear of God, which is why only a remnant will be saved. But the fear of God is only discomfoting if we sin, and there is a reason we should accept it: His work in us is eternal:

He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.

(Ecclesiastes 3:11 NKJV)

We say we are Israel, and that's true of all who follow in the steps of Abraham who feared God and obeyed His words by faith in Him. Though teachers have a stricter judgment, we must all face God, and each of us has a calling of some sort. False teachers might be aborting millions of children by not declaring the true and complete gospel. Holiness by sanctification must be worked out in cooperation with the Holy Spirit who is *at work within us to will and to do His good pleasure*. (See Phil. 2:13)

If we once believed on Christ for our salvation, but then return to the love of this world without repentance, we will be rejected by Him as hypocrites. He has graciously given us the option to confess our sins and repent so that somehow we might be saved. But if we believe our teachers instead of God, the LORD will treat us no differently than He treated Israel when they fell into unbelief. Who is willing to believe these words?

He chose Abram out of Ur by grace, giving him a son by a promise and the faith to believe it. Why Abram? By grace He was chosen. God promised him the land and the nations by grace. He chose him out of Babylon and apart from his family—who were not chosen. He chose Jacob, not Esau. He chose Pharaoh and further hardened his heart for His glory to be manifested to Israel. By merit of His Name, God has the right to choose whomever He will for His glory, and it's arrogant to think otherwise. Only believe; understanding often follows faith.

⁶ Not as though the word of God hath taken no effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: ⁷ Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, *are they all*

Concerning Predestination

children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. ⁸ That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these *are* not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. ⁹ For this *is* the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son. ¹⁰ And not only *this*; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, *even* by our father Isaac; ¹¹ (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) ¹² It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. ¹³ As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. (Romans 9:6-13)

First, the LORD chose Abram out of Ur in Babylon; next, he chose his promised son Isaac. Though Isaac preferred his son Esau, God chose Isaac's second-born Jacob; yet to each, He gave sons: to Esau, five; to Jacob, twelve. He also provided riches for both. Esau was the firstborn twin; there was no difference in their bloodline. Both had sinned, but Esau had despised what should have been his birthright, which was told as a lesson to us. Esau the hunter and Pharaoh the king knew the wrath of God.

¹⁹ You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" ²⁰ But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to Him who formed it, "Why have You made me like this?" (Romans 9:19-20 NKJV)

Maybe we have thought since we're saved by His grace, it doesn't matter if we sin. It mattered to God when Esau despised his birthright, and it mattered when Israel sinned in the desert. Had they feared Him, they would have shunned sin and acted on their faith, making it real and alive by their works; however, He later blinded Israel to make His name great among the gentiles.

In our desire to belong to God, we must persevere in faith, trusting Him to work in us to do His will; if we aren't willing to obey His words, we'll be lost. Twenty-three thousand were slain in one day when they sinned in the desert—all these had been miraculously delivered out of Egypt! They'd been set free from slavery, but they continued in sin. This is an example to us.

Protestant Teachings

Obedience is the way to life; after being hand-picked to live forever, we must believe and obey. *Not all Israel is Israel* (See Rom. 9:6-9), but all who practice their faith like Abraham are his children. Faith in God's words liberates us to resist sin and live by faith. If we take grace for granted by continuing sin, we will be astonished when Christ denies ever knowing us. If we sin without repentance, we'll be damned. We'll be judged by our works. He freed us to choose between two fathers. If we believe in Him, we fear God and turn from evil; we choose life and not death. It's that simple.

The Chosen

We were lost but are found; once hopeless, we are hopeful. Before the foundation of the world, He chose us to believe. How could we return to the sins from which we've been freed by grace? Our choice, based on our desire, is clear though profound.

Understanding the warfare between darkness and light arms us for victory. As we practice the faith, our Savior who won the war also wins the warfare through us by our faith in the power of His Spirit within us, for His Spirit is Christ our hope of glory.

Unbelievers are not His sheep and don't have the freedom to choose life or death. Some will turn from unbelief and hear the gospel since the Father chose them, just as He chose us by grace. Their bitterness will turn to sweetness; their cynicism, to faith when they receive forgiveness from God in Jesus Christ. Who are they? They're His sheep who will hear and obey His voice.

First God sent His Word; then He sent His Word in Christ to speak His message to His lost sheep—among the Jews of Israel. Jesus sent His disciples who received the Word and went to the world to speak to His lost sheep among the nations whom God had chosen: *How can they believe unless they hear, and how can they hear unless it is preached? How can they preach unless they are sent?* (See Rom. 10:14-15) His name is our commission.

Many of us have been reading the Bible like a novel. We prefer to listen to men whose words we enjoy than to search the Word to see if they're true. Other than the Bible, the best-selling books in Christian stores are fiction, fully absorbing our interest. Do we trust in men, believing their fiction is true? The Spirit-inspired words disinterest us if we haven't believed His incisive truth that alerts us to ourselves and to our times.

Concerning Predestination

Whoever practices sin is a slave to sin—none seek God, not even one. The church has had it upside-down by thinking men have a free will to believe and then we have eternal security, no matter what, since we're predestined! It's the other way around. We are chosen to believe and are set free to continue in the faith and overcome in the battles.

After God draws us into the faith for our salvation, He urges us to decisively offer our bodies as living sacrifices to Him. Then by renewing our minds with His Word, we are transformed to prove His good, perfect, and acceptable will. (See Rom. 12:1-2) But we must not conform to this world; our hearts must be His.

He doesn't want any of us to perish; but if we prefer darkness rather than light, we'll never know Him. And our own righteousness is filthy rags to Him because we insist on ruling our own lives while struggling to attain holiness, an impossible feat for the natural man. After receiving the gift of life, if we will not abide in His Spirit, then by our own choice, we are carnal and natural, and we will not belong to Him.

Paul's argument shows that by His sovereignty, foreknowing us, the Almighty saves us. His Holy Spirit inspired the apostles; we who believe receive the words of writers who entrusted their souls to the Sovereign of the creation. We know they were inspired because their words are true; they inspire us to live as Christ and not to die as sinners. We are convinced that the Bible is true from Genesis to Revelation, because its words change us:

²⁴ "The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; ²⁵ nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since he Himself gives to all *people* life and breath and all things; ²⁶ and He made from one *man* every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined *their* appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, ²⁷ that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; ²⁸ for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.' (Acts 17:24-28 NASB) Paul addressed pagans in Athens; those whom God chose would believe, not by any merit of their own. In Him, we live and move and exist.

Protestant Teachings

As an example to us, the descendants of Abraham had been slaves in Egypt four hundred years; yet apparently the Jews of the first century believed that, as sons of Abraham, they had never been slaves. Their teachers had made them oblivious to their history, which was also their present condition by bondage to sin. We see that attitude in the church today:

³³ They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How *can* you say, 'You will be made free'?" ³⁴ Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. ³⁵ And a slave does not abide in the house forever, *but* a son abides forever. ³⁶ Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.
(John 8:33-36 NKJV)

Are slaves free men? Although it is the Word of God, many churches treat predestination as a false doctrine. They weave their way through the Word to disprove and rationalize it rather than simply believe it. When we weave through the Word, we follow the serpent. If we believe the inspired words, their truth in our hearts unlocks the rest; however, if we spurn them, we will be confused by other Scriptures. A full conversion to Christ depends on making our carnal hearts believe our spiritual God.

Professing believers are no different today than Jews who believe they are sons when they are slaves. Having the right to become sons of God indicates a process, but if our faith is an impractical theory, we'll practice sin. (See John 3:16) As slaves to sin, we'll be caught in a deadly trap. How easily we forget His words, *a slave does not abide in the house forever*. (See John 8:35) The house is the body. Jesus was saying that a slave to sin will not have life; His sons are not slaves to sin; they are bond-slaves to righteousness by choice.

If His Spirit hadn't moved in our lives, we'd be lost in our sins; if He hadn't given us faith, we'd be without hope. But if our idea of predestination is fatalistic, pride or presumption will ensnare us, and we will not obey the commission to share the gospel and love others, especially those who believe. If we accept the plan of God and run the race to gain the prize, then we obey, showing we love Him by participating in His divine plan. We do this by faith, and His Spirit accomplishes the mission.

Concerning Predestination

But there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him. ⁶⁵ And He was saying, “For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.” (John 6:64-65 NASB)

And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand. (Luke 8:10)

To the crowd that found Him in Capernaum, He said,

³⁷ All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. ³⁹ This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. ⁴⁰ And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.” (John 6:37-40 NKJV)

The Freed Will

By a divine decision, God sent His Word into the world to rescue some among mankind. Those He calls to repentance and faith will find the freedom to believe and obey. If we obey Him, He leads us into His love for others by His love for us.

elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ:

Grace to you and peace be multiplied. (1 Peter 1:2 NKJV)

²⁴ Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, ²⁵ to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. (Jude 24-25)

Jesus told a parable about a farmer who planted seed. (Read Luke 8:4-15) The harvest depended on the kind of soil that he plowed and sowed. He explained that the Word is like seeds;

Protestant Teachings

when it's received, it takes root, and by its life it bears fruit that multiplies.

The important thing is to *hear* the Word of God, *repent* of sin, and then *believe* and *receive* the truth about His provision to save us; then His words change us. The Scriptures prompt, urge, and command us to put off the old self and put on the new man. We now have freedom to choose the old or the new because when we *believe* His words, we *receive* His life, and He sets us free to make choices and to discern good and evil. We are not alone; He is within us to guide, teach, and empower us.

Even when we were vile, practicing sin, we responded—even in our fear of Him, we believed He loved us. His love still wins hearts, and His truth still sets free. We experience intimate closeness by honest confession to Him and to each other if it's necessary. Pressing in to know Him more, we grow into love. Activated by our faith, we believe He is alive and lives in us. We run the race till we pass the finish line and meet the crowd, cheering us on to win the crown. We press in, not shrinking back but aiming for the mark, we gain victories over our crucified nature by our faith in His victory on the cross. The challenges increase as we grow in strength, but the load seems to lighten.

¹² But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: ¹³ who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

(John 1:12-13 NKJV)

Born of Him, we have a right to become like Him. Nowhere do the Scriptures say God has done everything, or that we don't need works that prove our faith for salvation. The Word is filled with exhortations and warnings to do good works by the power of the Spirit living in us, *walking after the Spirit*, not the flesh, as Paul says in Romans. Abiding in the vine, we remain in His will.

¹² Therefore, God's chosen ones, put on heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, ¹³ accepting one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a complaint against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive. ¹⁴ Above all, put on love, the perfect bond of unity. ¹⁵ And let the

Concerning Predestination

peace of Messiah, to which you were also called in one body, control your hearts. Be thankful.
(Colossians 3:12-15 HCSB)

We believe God and live by faith in His power to obey Him. As God was in His Son, He is living in us. We are changed as we believe only He can perfect us. Like Paul, we say, “There’s nothing good in my flesh.”

Our flesh was in His body that was crucified since He came in our likeness. For us to follow Him, we must receive His death with our nature in it; then put on the risen Christ, patterning our lives after His. Dying daily to selfish, carnal ways, we live in the Spirit that raised His body out of death. If we refuse the cross that crucified our sinful nature, we can’t share in His resurrection either. We are baptized by immersion as, in a figure, we die to the former life and are raised into the new life.

⁶ Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. ⁷ For he that is dead is freed from sin. (Romans 6:6-7)

Yeshua gave up His life to take our sin, destroying the work of the devil. By faith in Him, our identification is in Him. As we welcome His life into ours, we give up our lives to Him so we can become partakers of His life. Faith finds its reward:

¹⁸ For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but *how* to perform that which is good I find not. ... ²⁴ O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin. ²⁵ There is therefore now no condemnation for them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

(Romans 7:18, 24-25a) [Re: the struggle of slavery vs. freedom]

Consider Job who cried out for justice for the righteous. What was God’s response? That He is sovereign and wonderful beyond our comprehension. His righteous servant, Job, fell on his face in awe, gaining insight into His nature as few have done.

Protestant Teachings

Job learned to love the way God loved him. He fully surrendered to God that day, giving it all up to Him. Though He could have slain him, Job didn't shrink from what he heard. God rewarded the prophet and included his memoir among the heroes of the faith, encouraging generations with wisdom and hope.

Whether God predestines us for mercy or wrath is His right as our Creator. But we prefer to believe we've done it ourselves and claim we were saved by searching for Him, so it's difficult for us to accept that we were saved by grace alone. However, if His appointment had depended on us, we would be without hope. He is perfect, but we are fallen, yet He compels us to believe on Him, and to turn to Him because He is at work in us.

²¹ Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use? ²² What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? ²³ And *He did so* to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, ²⁴ *even us*, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles. (Romans 9:21-24 NASB)

He calls some out of sin but further hardens many. Like a blacksmith who first forms his hammer and anvil to shape his work in the fire, the God of Israel uses every fiery trial together for the good of those who love and obey Him. (Is. 54:16) The choice to remain in Him is ours to make as we work out our salvation with fear and even trembling.

Israel was in sin, and God turned them over to their enemies for seven years. When they cried out to Him, and He heard them and raised up a fearful young man who was threshing wheat in a winepress to hide it from his enemies. The weakest in his family was Gideon, *and the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, the LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour!* (Judg. 6:12) We can't understand His ways, yet He is with us.

Why Gideon? God chose Gideon to lead Israel *as one man* (Judg. 6:16) against the Midianites for His glory. He granted signs and wonders that bolstered his faith for battle. Gideon mustered an army: thirty-two thousand, but God said they were too many.

Concerning Predestination

They'd rob Him of glory, claiming their own strength had won the victory. All thirty-two thousand were called, but twenty-two thousand were frightened and were permitted to leave the battlefield; only ten thousand remained—still too many.

Next, God gave a simple test: how would they drink water from a brook? Those who drank by lapping it, cupping it in their hands, stayed for the battle. A remnant, three hundred fearless and determined men, gained the victory by faith that night: many had been called; few were chosen, not for their wisdom or their brilliance. He chose them because they were the fewest.

Only three hundred men were called, chosen, justified, and glorified. But from the start, all thirty-two thousand had been called with equal opportunities. In the same way, we are chosen to hunger and thirst for righteousness, humility, and love, and to know Him. Seeking to be like Him, we are the minority who refuse cowardice and unbelief; we are resilient in warfare: *For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.* (Rom. 8:29)

²⁴ “Strive to enter in through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able.

²⁵ When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open for us,’ and He will answer and say to you, ‘I do not know you, where you are from,’ ²⁶ then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.’

²⁷ But He will say, ‘I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.’ (Luke 13:24-27 NKJV) – But we were told it’s grace by faith alone that saves us.

Some of us reject the messages our daily tasks bring, despite all the little hardships that could be used to reshape our souls. In practice, do we prefer independence, loving this world more than Him? He would interrupt us and call us to Himself in our everyday tests. Let’s sensitize our spiritual ears to hear Him in all kinds of difficulties: *For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other*

Protestant Teachings

creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:38-39) Yielding to His Spirit is vital to secure our salvation. We should consider His *kindness and severity*. See what God said to Israel about idolatry:

³³ As I live, saith the Lord GOD, surely with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out, will I rule over you: ³⁴ And I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out. ³⁵ And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I plead with you face to face. (Ezekiel 20:33-35)

Sometimes by terrible adversities, God stretches out His hand to conform us to His Son. In our wilderness, He pleads with us to change. He wants none of us to perish, yet is not at fault in hardening sinners *to show His wrath and to make His power known. (See Rom. 9:22)* Not mocked, He establishes our fear for His absolute Lordship. We who believe rejoice in His mercies:

139 O LORD, You have searched me and known *me*.
² You know my sitting down and my rising up;
You understand my thought afar off.
³ You comprehend my path and my lying down,
And are acquainted *with* all my ways.
⁴ For *there is* not a word on my tongue,
But behold, O LORD, You know it altogether. ...
¹³ For You formed my inward parts;
You covered me in my mother's womb.
¹⁴ I will praise You, for I am fearfully *and* wonderfully
made;
Marvelous *are* Your works,
And *that* my soul knows very well.
¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from You,
When I was made in secret,
And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the
earth.
¹⁶ Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed.
And in Your book they all were written,
The days fashioned for me,
When *as yet there were* none of them.
(Ps. 139:1-4, 13-16 NKJV)

Concerning Predestination

God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. (From Acts 15:14 NKJV) As James said, out of the Gentiles, God took some of the people for His glory. He chose us by no merit of our own but by His Sovereignty.

How can we know God? By persistently opening our hearts, baring our souls, and turning to Him, we learn of His mercies; receiving His words by believing them, we renew our minds. In His steps, we commit our lives to His righteousness and love.

We neither despise our birthright nor spurn our promised destiny. We invest our souls in His will by choice: *But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience. (Lk. 8:15)*

Abiding

The apostle exhorts us to be patient for righteousness to ripen because God is good. So we passionately run after His holiness until we discover that His holiness has apprehended us! He will not forsake us, but we must want Him more than life itself. Not immune to sin, we refuse to allow its dominion:

¹³ You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. ¹⁴ For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.
(Galatians 5:13-15 NIV)

We choose life, not death. If we love Him, we obey and trust Him; miraculously, He works it together for our good by our faith, and we escape the corruption of our old nature. In His Spirit, we become like Him. Wasn't this His plan in Eden?

³ as His divine power has given to us all things that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, ⁴ by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption *that is* in the world through lust. (Continued)

Protestant Teachings

⁵ But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, ⁶ to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, ⁷ to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. ⁸ For if these things are yours and abound, *you* will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. (2 Peter 1:3-9 NKJV)

Our hope is in fully knowing Jesus Christ. Yearning to know Him was the driving force that compelled Paul forward, despite the trials he'd suffered. Jesus cast His gospel net:

³⁴ When He had called the people to *Himself*, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. ³⁵ For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. (Mark 8:34-35 NKJV)

Sin Leads to Death

While death is not what the carnal nature wants, death is its destiny. That nature died in His death; now we can grow in His life; His Spirit is life, and He is in us. By faith, we yield the fruit of His Spirit, knowing we would fail without Him.

The most widely received false teaching in today's church entices us to believe the ongoing sins of Christians don't lead to death—a direct and seemingly deliberate contradiction of the Scriptures. We deceive ourselves if we think God doesn't see our sins. Even the darkness is as light to Him. After a profession of faith, if we presume sin is part of the normal Christian life, we are missing the mark of the biblical mandate for salvation.

Arguments against the possibility of losing our salvation are based on human reason, but the Scriptures consistently warn us to walk circumspectly, bringing forth the fruit of the Spirit by obedience to Christ. If we believe Him, we obey Him; if we obey Him, we love Him. Or else, we disobey by unbelief, using our false doctrines to rationalize His warnings. By ignoring the truth, we encourage others to be fearless of God, but let's read

Concerning Predestination

about people who believe grace covers the practice of sin:

¹⁵ What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶ Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?

(Romans 6:15-16 NIV) [The sin that enslaves you can lead to eternal death. Below: Do we redeem the time, or waste it?]

10 For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; ² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; ³ and all ate the same spiritual food; ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. ⁵ Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness.

⁶ Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. ⁷ Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY."⁸ Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day.⁹ Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. ¹⁰ Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. ¹¹ Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. ¹² Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall. No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it. (1 Corinthians 10:1-13 NASB)

If we refuse to act by faith in the Word, but push it aside as we continue to sin, then faith has no effect in our hearts. In that case, we don't have a right to the promises, because *without faith, it is impossible to please him.* (See Heb. 11:6) If we think we love

Protestant Teachings

Jesus but live in opposition to His commands, we are self-deceived hypocrites and wolves in the flock.

No one is so strong that he can always resist evil, but the Holy Spirit gives us strength to stand against it as we speak the Word, trust in His power, and depend on Him in our weakness. (See Col. 1:27) He speaks to us and sanctifies us. As we believe His every word, He leads us into His resurrection power:

²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:22-23 NIV)

Just as the vine gives life to its branches, He provides life for us if we abide in His Spirit and His words. By our strong desire for Jesus Christ, we gain tenacious faith and our inheritance, everlasting life. Can we fall into sin? Of course we can, but what joy in the Spirit when we return to give the reins to our Father and run this race together with His Spirit to the end!

I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:14)

When Esau was immoral and sensual, he found in himself no ability to repent. He made the decision and traded his birthright for stew—short-sighted, he lived for this world. Not chosen, he lived a carnal, spiritually impoverished life.

¹⁴ Follow peace with all *men*, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: ¹⁵ Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble *you*, and thereby many be defiled; ¹⁶ Lest there *be* any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. ¹⁷ For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears. (Hebrews 12:14-17) [There was no longer grace to repent.]

Plenty of people shrink back to live for the material world rather than for the unseen kingdom. The fear of the Lord enables

Concerning Predestination

us to shun sin before it overtakes us. If we fall, we repent; but the longer we wait, the more difficult it is to return.

For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. (Galatians 6:8 NASB)

Two things are at work in us: the flesh and the Holy Spirit; these are at war over our souls. To gain the victory, we must live in His Holy Spirit each day. With scriptures that pertain to each battle, the authority of His Word is in our hearts. By faith, our speech declares it:

⁸ But what does it say? *“The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart”* (that is, the word of faith which we preach): ⁹ that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, *“Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.”* (Romans 10:8-11 NKJV; cf. Is. 28:16)

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
(1 John 1:9)

Now we see how foolish we’ve been, thinking less of those whom God has not chosen and expecting of them what they can’t do. The responsibility is ours: God requires us to love them from our hearts, declaring His righteousness and love to a world of sinners. His sheep will hear and turn for Him to meet their need; desiring the Word they hear, their hearts take in its seed.

We should repent of our pride. Do we think we are standing on solid ground? The Scriptures exhort us to be careful not to fall. By longing for His will, we want His Spirit to control our hearts and minds so our souls might be saved forever. The more intimate we become with God, the closer we are to His love for others, and the more we love others, the closer we come to Him:

²⁴ God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; ²⁵ Neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he

Protestant Teachings

giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; ²⁶ And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; ²⁷ That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: ²⁸ For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. (Acts 17:24-28a) – Paul in Athens

He reveals Himself to us who are chosen out of the multitude of all who shun Him. He is glorified by revealing His love for His children, teaching us wisdom in the simplicity of our faith. (See Mt. 13:38; 20:16; 22:14; 25:34. Jn. 6:70; Also chap. 17; 18:20, 36. 1 Cor. 1:27. 2 Thes. 2:13. 1 Pet. 2:9, and more.)

Why did Paul suggest men are born at appointed times and in designated places to seek the Lord and perhaps to sense His presence? He said we live and move within His presence that holds everything in the universe together by His power. We are all offspring of our Creator. In saying these things, he was casting a great net into the sea of mankind, hoping to draw them to Christ while knowing that only His sheep would hear His voice and respond to His message.

If we are willing to repent and believe, then God is at work in us. If we are willing to receive Him, He is at work to free us from our sins. If our hearts open to His words, He will come in and fellowship with us by His Spirit who all the while works in us to want Him more.

When we are willing to accept His attributes, He renews our minds about His ways, His nature, and His Identity. When we surrender to Him as He really is, we learn He is far greater than we had thought. He's unlike us and His thoughts are unlike ours.

While we're changing the truth about God so that He looks more like we want Him to be, He calls us to be more like Him.

¹⁸ We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the One who was born of God keeps them safe, and the evil one cannot harm them. ¹⁹ We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. (1 John 5:18-19 NIV) [He who was born of God is Christ who dwells in us. (See Jn. 3:6.)]