Predestined for Good Works

Founded Upon Grace
Book 3



By Eddie Snipes

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The Purpose of Predestination

Understanding God's predestined plan for your life is a powerful tool for maturing you in the faith. In fact, it is vital, for it reveals to us that we don't carry the burden of success. We can now rest in the assurance that God has worked all things ahead of time so that when we are walking in faith, the way is already prepared when we reach every event of life.

Don't mistake God's foreknowledge and His predestined plan with Calvinism. They are not the same. The Bible tells us that God knows the end from the beginning, and He has predestined His good into your life. Meditate on this often quoted scripture from **Jeremiah 29:11**

> For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.

Do we really understand what this means? The plans of God is your predestined path of this walk of faith. Your future and hope has already been prepared, and the invitation to enter that path is the call of faith!

We now must trust His goodness and His power to bring us into hope. If we can't trust in God's plan, our foreordained path will remain unrealized, and we will be another person who didn't live up to the potential we should have achieved.

God's foreordained plan is your hope. Not only the hope of your life, but the success of your potential ministry. The truth is that every Christian is called into the ministry. Not all are preachers and teachers, but all have the invitation to see the greatness of God unfold before them, and have a life that has significance that will impact the future and eternity.

The comfort we are given is that you and I don't have to forge our own way, we don't have to figure out a way that works, and we don't have the burden of trying to make ministry happen. We walk by faith, trusting in God to prepare our hearts, prepare the way, and accomplish His work through us.

The Bible says that God is faithful to both call you, and to accomplish His perfect will in you. We are yoked with Christ, but our burden is light. God works through us, so we don't have to work for God. It's not us trying to accomplish something that God will accept, but it is us enjoying the journey of fellowship as God accomplishes His work in us, then through us.

I have seen many people serve God until they burned out and faded away. However, I have never met anyone who sought to discover the reality of their

life in Christ so His works shone through them, and burned out. Burnout is the result of either carrying a load God intended to carry for you, or taking on tasks (including ministry) that God did not call you to do.

The life of ministry does not always include doing religious tasks. It is often doing things you love, while using the activities of life in a way that gives you the opportunity to witness to others, and show how faith fulfills your life. Your circle of influence from daily life is a rich mission field. Don't burden yourself with trying to do something God has not called you to do. Don't try to force success when God has not yet opened the door.

If your service for God is a heavy burden, you are not serving God, for Jesus promised that our burden would be light. Sometimes the call for good works begins with stepping back and seeking God first. There has never been a man or woman that walked in communion with God that did not fulfill their ministry.

As you grow into maturity, the right kinds of desires will emerge, and God will bring opportunities into your path. God will not forget you. God will not allow circumstances to prevent you from discovering the path of His plan for you. When the road is blocked and the way impossible, we rest. It's God's job to open the door that no man can shut.

If God can keep the galaxies in motion and all the planets and stars within their appointed path, God will have little difficulty keeping everything in your life on the right path. Sometimes you'll have to wait for Him to guide you to the right opportunities He planned for you before you were born.

Most Christians swap God's plan with their efforts. Instead of seeking to establish their heart in the Lord, they seek to establish their ministries for the Lord. Yet, ministry without the working of the Spirit within us is human effort. While we are busy with our self-purpose, God's purpose for us remains undiscovered. Our plans often become distractions that draw us away from God's purpose – which is always better.

When your heart is secure in fellowship with the Lord, you will have the discernment to recognize God's purpose when He leads you to it. If you are so busy for God that the relationship is weak or nonexistent, emotions, guilt, and the opinions of others will be the driving force for ministry, and will lead you astray. God doesn't honor our works, but His works.

People get burned out because they are taking on duties God has not called or equipped them to do. They are working in the power of the flesh, so strength is limited. What's more is that when your work for God is how you measure God's acceptance of you, you'll never rest in security. Then the temptation to take more on will always be a challenge.

People will pressure you to fill a need in the church organization, but an

unestablished Christian won't have the ability to recognize if this is God's call. A Christian working in their calling by the power of the Spirit will be energized by ministry. Frustration, discouragement, and mental exhaustion are key indicators that we are working in the flesh and outside of God's plan for us.

Most of the time God does not reveal our gifts and callings until we are maturing in the faith. This is God's design to keep you focused on the right things, which should be maturity first. As we mature, the desires of our heart begin to emerge to reveal God's calling. Even when we begin to see our calling, God doesn't always immediately open the door. It is the call to prepare ourselves for ministry, and to teach us how to wait as we trust Him to open up the right opportunity.

When we see where we should be ministering, it's easy to get ahead of God and wonder why He isn't allowing us to press ahead. It may be that God has given you a glimpse into where you are going so you can prepare with the goal in mind. You must still prayerfully wait on God's timing and His wisdom as to what role you will begin with. Other times God does not reveal our purpose until the day He calls us into action. Then the way will be clear and His joy and affirmation in our heart will make it certain that something is our calling.

Don't worry about knowing God's purpose for your life. Seek to grow in Christ, and when you are equipped by the Spirit, God will make the way plain.

In the 1800s, George Mueller founded three orphan houses that supplied the needs for two-thousand orphans at a time. He did this without any organization supporting him, but lived in daily dependence upon God to supply all their needs.

In the life of Mueller, he was willing to allow God to change his direction. His personal goal had been to be a missionary, but God had other plans. At one point he felt the calling to move to the city of Bristol to minister, but he spent months in prayer trying to discern whether it was emotional enthusiasm, or the call of God. He understood the deception of self-will. He felt the desire beginning to grow, and the more he sought God, the more the right way became plain.

Mueller used six steps to discern God's will. 1. He sought to get his heart in a state to where it had no will and was willing to do or not do what seemed to be the right purpose. 2. Once he felt his heart was in the right place, he determined not to make a decision based on feelings or impressions alone. 3. He sought to receive the will of God through prayer, studying the word, and trusting in the Holy Spirit's guidance. 4. He looked for God's providence in circumstances. Was God opening the door? 5. He asked God to reveal His will in a way that was plainly right. 6. He meditated on the word of God through prayer and then

reflected on the opportunity for ministry. If he was at peace, he sought affirmation from God two or three times more. If the peace remained, he would move forward as God gave opportunity, or prayed for God to move to open the opportunity.

Using discernment will keep us out of commitments that are not God's will for us. Once people are depending upon us, we'll feel pressured to fulfill the expectations of others, even if we later see this isn't God's plan. Serving out of obligation is not God's will.

Add to this, once the church realizes you are willing to serve, they tend to keep piling on the duties when they can't find anyone to fill the need. It's vital that we be able to say 'no' when it's not God's calling for us.

When I first began to teach and preach, I had the privilege of leading services at a prison and two housing projects each week. Three, and sometimes four times a week I would speak. Not one time did I feel taxed from my works, because this is my calling. Soon afterward I was asked to be a trainer in a church program, which required a big commitment and weekly effort. In the leadership's eyes, I was qualified and they were convinced this was God's will for me. In my spirit, I felt this wasn't what I should be doing.

After a couple of weeks of prayer, I said, "I don't believe I can do this. I can't put another iron in the fire without taking one out. Otherwise I would be too overloaded. Since I'm convinced these other ministries are where God has called me to be, I'm going to have to say no."

They disagreed and tried to persuade me to take it, but I knew this wasn't God's will. I've never had the slightest regret or doubt since giving my answer. Part of my perspective was shaped by the many examples I have seen in churches over the years. People who work themselves ragged, then when they are exhausted and frustrated, they drop out completely.

An example of this is a pastor friend from many years ago. He stopped by for a visit, and he looked exhausted. After a brief bit of small talk, he asked for prayer. He was pastoring a small church and trying to keep everything going. When there wasn't anyone willing to do a task, he would step in and keep it going. He confessed that he was at his wits end, and didn't know what to do.

I asked him what he believed God had called and gifted him to do. Without hesitation he said, "I'm called to be an encourager, and a discipler." I agreed, knowing that the last time I saw him thriving, these were the things he was focused on. He is clearly a person who mentors others well, and he loves to encourage everyone he meets.

I then took a piece of paper and said, "List out every task you do at the church, big or small." It was quite a long list. "Now let's look at each task. Read

it and answer these two questions: Does this fulfill my calling? If the answer is ‘no’, Does it hinder your calling in any way?”

Only one item on his list fulfilled his calling, and nearly everything on the list hindered his calling. He was being burned out on the things that God had not called him to do. I recommended that he drop everything from his tasks except his calling. Then tell the church that someone has to step into these roles, or they will be dropped until someone with those callings comes into the church.

Works and ministry can be a trap. If you are doing things that God has not called you to do, they are empty works and have no significance. In fact, they rob the energy you should have had for the things that are significant.

Don’t get caught in the mindset that you need to get busy for God. That is a false belief. You need to learn to diligently seek God, and learn how to trust Him and take the Lord at His word. Mature in intimacy with God, and let Him worry about the works. God can keep the universe in motion without you until you are in a spiritual condition to enter His works.

The most important thing regarding works is to establish a heart that is satisfied and happy in the Lord. The second most important thing in works is to be on guard that the works do not become your god. If working for God takes you away from fellowship with God, they are no longer the works of God. The third most important thing with works is faith – trusting in God’s power to accomplish what He desires.

Your mistakes can’t defeat God’s purpose. Your inabilities and lack of qualifications are not a hindrance to God’s calling for you. Whom the Lord calls, He equips. None of the ragtag band of fishermen in Jesus’ inner circle were qualified to become apostles. They worked in the power of the Spirit, which made their lack become irrelevant.

God has established one boundary for Himself in the Christian’s life – unbelief. Unbelief is not doubt. Unbelief is to disbelieve God’s word and put our trust in doubt. It is not possible to be a man or woman of strong faith without personal time and fellowship with God. Reading and meditating on the word, and spending time in prayer are essential.

Faith comes by hearing the word of God. Without being diligent to know God’s word, we have little to draw us into faith. Faith is the revelation of God’s purposes, with the invitation to join God in what He is doing. If this time of prayer and meditation on the word is absent, your faith will be weak, your ministry will be powerless, and you’ll fall back to human resources to make up the lack. And this is where most Christians operate.

But God has better things for you. As you discover God, you’ll discover your place in His plan. You’ll discover His calling into that plan. You’ll then be

able to step out in confidence, knowing that failure isn't possible, for it doesn't depend upon you, but Him. However, you can't enter God's works without Him. You can't leave God behind and expect to enter His purposes.

In the life of fellowship, failure is impossible; therefore, when obstacles stand in the way, and you know where God is leading, you can rest in confidence knowing every trial will be an example of God's power to overcome, and do the impossible. Take to heart the words of Jesus in **John 14:12**

> Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater *works* than these he will do, because I go to My Father.

This is God's will for you. And the best part is that the burden is not upon you. You have the promise that His work in your life is greater than you realize. You are called to do the impossible. You are called to do greater things than your abilities can accomplish. You are called to do greater things than your resources can support. You are called to do greater things than the world can believe. The world's limitation doesn't apply to faith.

Yet, all of this begins with the small seed of faith. Your focus is not on accomplishing big things, but the small things. The small things are what equips us for the greatness of God's purposes. The small thing of prayer draws us into God's presence. The Holy Spirit uses the small things of the word to reveal understanding to us. The small things of receiving the joy of the Lord becomes our strength. The small thing of trust causes us to let go of our life in this world so we can take up the life Christ has given us.

The person who seeks to do great things for God, instead of trusting in the greatness of God, is merely glorifying the flesh.

The real question is, do you believe? These promises are outside of the reach of those who don't believe. You can't believe until God reveals, and God won't reveal to you what He doesn't give you the faith to receive, and you can't have faith without the word. You can't have the word without setting your life aside to seek Him.

The church has no comprehension of how much God can do (and desires to do) through them. We fall back to human resources, methods, and man-made faith, not understanding that these limit true faith and hinder us from entering the call of faith. The call of faith invites you into the path God has foreordained, where every supply has already been given, and the Spirit's fulfillment of your work is certain.

This is why understanding predestination in its true biblical light is vital. Without understanding that God has already made the way, we have nothing but

human ability to rely upon. Your limitations become irrelevant when you are operating in faith. You are only limited in one respect – outside of faith God's provision is inaccessible. In faith the way has already been made, your works are complete, and His plan is prepared and waiting for you to enter into it.

Discussion Questions

- Read Romans 8:28-31. According to verse 31, why does God assure us of His predestined plan for us?
- Can we have the confidence that all things work together for our good if we don't understand that the plan has already been prepared before we arrive at the moment of hardship, challenge, or decision?
- What is God's reason for predestination according to verse 29?
- Read Psalm 8:3-6 and Hebrews 1:3. If God can keep the universe in order, and He upholds all things by the word of His power, what does this tell you about His ability to keep the path of life He has planned for you?
- How do we discern between our emotions and the affirmation of the Spirit's call?
- Is this a true statement, "Where you see a need, you have the call of God?" Explain why or why not.
- Think about the tasks that take up your time. Make a list and answer these two questions: Does this task fulfill or support my calling? If the answer is 'no', ask yourself if this hinders your calling? If you are not sure of your purpose, then your calling is to mature in your relationship with Christ.
- Read Acts 4:13. What equipped the apostles for both the challenges of life, and the work of ministry?
- Read Romans 10:17. If you struggle with faith, how does God grow you in the faith?
- How does understanding God's predestined plan help prevent us from falling back to human resources?

Predestined for Good Works

Let me challenge your view of works. Most people were taught as I was, that we need to get busy for God. Some also teach that we just need to do something, and God will move us into the right direction as we prove our worth through workmanship.

It is often taught that our works are earning our reward in heaven, but the truth is that we are rewarded by seeking the heart of God by faith.[1] As a young man, I bought into the misguided teaching that God saves people because He needs laborers, and my reward was based on how much I worked, instead of entering into God's works. A preacher once told this story from the pulpit:

> *A man died and went to heaven and met Jesus. He said, "I want to see my mansion," so Jesus said, "Come with me."*
>
> *As they walked, they passed the largest mansion he had ever seen. "Is this my mansion?"*
>
> *"No," Jesus said, and they continued walking. They soon came near a huge mansion, but it was smaller than the one earlier.*
>
> *"Is this my mansion?"*
>
> *"No." Jesus kept walking until they passed a smaller mansion. Then a smaller one. Each mansion got smaller until they arrived at the end of the road where there was a meager shack. "There you go," Jesus said to him.*
>
> *"What? Why is my mansion nothing but a broken down shack?" the man asked Jesus.*
>
> *"Because this is all the materials you sent to me."*

This story was intended to motivate us into working harder for Jesus, but this has no basis in biblical truth. Aside from the fact that the concept of us getting a mansion is a mistranslation of John 14:2, there are also other misconceptions in this story. The word 'mansion' is the Greek word 'mone', which means abodes, dwelling places, or a place to stay. It is more accurately translated as 'dwellings', not mansions.

In My Father's house there are many dwellings, makes sense. Mansions do not. Not to mention that the concept is that our Father's house has ample room for all His children, and the concept is a community of family that dwells together, fellowships together, and is in the communion of God, our Heavenly Father.

However, the main point we need to dispel is that Jesus is dependent upon our works. It's often taught that works are our gift to God, but in reality, works are God's gift to us. Before examining this truth, let's first look at how Jesus explained works. Look at **Luke 17:7-10**

7 "And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to
him when he has come in from the field, `Come at once and sit down to eat
'?
8 "But will he not rather say to him, `Prepare something for my supper, and
gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you
will eat and drink '?
9 "Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were
commanded him? I think not.
10 "So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are
commanded, say, `We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our
duty to do.'"

Did you catch the conclusion of Jesus' point? After you have worked to obey all that the Bible commands, don't believe that you have earned a reward. After completing all of your work, you are still unprofitable. In other words, you haven't earned anything. You can never put God in debt to you. A lifetime of service does not pay your debt to sin, so how can you ever get to the point of earning payment for your labor?

Does Jesus' words sound harsh? They do to the person who thinks they can earn God's favor, but don't forget that Jesus also said, "It's the Father's good pleasure to give you His kingdom." Everything is by grace – God's undeserved, unmerited, and unmeritable favor. The moment you try to apply a merit system to God, the Kingdom of God becomes unattainable. To understand this, let's review a passage we studied in a previous book, **Romans 4:4-5**

4 Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.
5 But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the
ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness,

To the one who works to earn God's favor, his works are not counted toward God's grace, but to the worker's debt. The moment you make Christianity a merit system, you are putting yourself under the law, which is a conviction system. It only incurs debt. Works cannot earn rewards. Here is how we receive the reward, **Hebrews 11:6**

But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God

must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

The rewards of God are the natural outflow of a relationship with Him. God requires one thing of you – that you have faith in Him. You must believe His promises, His word, His love, His character, and His grace. Your role is to seek God, and as you discover the depths of the relationship God has designed for you, works will be the natural result. Your works are the unfolding of God's plan for your blessing. He has given you gifts of the Spirit, equipped you with His power, given you a heart with desires that are grounded in eternity, and given you a calling that gives your life meaning. When you grow in the faith, works become an expression of the love of God in you.

There was a man whose hobby was restoring old cars with his son. Since his child was old enough to hold a wrench, they worked together in the shop. They worked on many projects together. After the son grew into manhood and married, the two continued to restore cars on weekends. The young man committed a crime and was imprisoned, and the father stopped working on cars. When someone asked him why he no longer restores cars, he said, "It was never about the cars. These projects were opportunities to connect with my son. As long as my son is in prison, I have no desire to restore cars."

In many ways, this is what works are all about. It is an invitation by your heavenly Father to join Him in fellowship, and experience the life of building the kingdom. It's not about the works. It's about His love for you, and your connection with Him. As you grow in grace, a deeper fellowship emerges, and God hands you the tools to say, "Come join Me." That's why a thriving Christian will always be drawn into works.

According to Titus 2:14-15, the person abiding in grace will overcome sin, live in righteousness, and will become a person zealous for good works. The passion of your heart will drive you to do good works, and it will be a joy, and not a labor of obligation.

In John 15:5, Jesus said that the one who learns to thrive in an abiding relationship with Him, bears much fruit. It is a guarantee. You will do good works, and they will be fruitful. In 2 Peter 2:3-11, we are first promised that everything that pertains to life and godliness has been freely given to us through God's provision. We learn to receive these things and add them to our lives with two main promises – if you do these things (add the things that we receive from God as we seek Him), we will never stumble, and we will bear fruit. We are again promised that a fruitful life is a guarantee.

This promise ends with the words, "An entrance will be supplied to you

abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ."

There is no mention of how much we have accomplished for God. It's not about how much material we send to heaven so Jesus can build our mansion. Everything is supplied, and the receiver of the relationship with God becomes a partaker of all that God has provided. Then that person is rewarded for what they have received – not for what they have done. It goes back to faith. If you believe that God is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him, you will seek, you will find, and by faith, you will receive. Then God's work is completed in you, and you are rewarded because of your walk of faith.

Jesus explained this in the parable of the talents.[2] Each person received a talent, which is a sum of money, and was sent out to prosper with what they had been given. So from the beginning, each of these men started with the Lord's provision. In the end, none of these men actually prospered from what they did, but rather from allowing the money to grow. The only one who didn't grow was the man who hid it.

After examining the faithfulness of each person, the only one who suffered loss was the one who did not allow the Lord's gift to do its work. Jesus then said to take it from the one who hid the money, and give it to the one who prospered the most. He followed up by saying, "For to him who has, more will be given, but to him who has not, it will be taken away even that which he has."

Jesus made this statement twice. In Matthew 13:12, he said the same thing regarding those who heard His teaching. Jesus taught in parables. The masses heard the word, but only a fraction of those came to Christ to seek understanding of what they had been taught. Compare this to the parable about the one sowing seeds Jesus just finished teaching. Many will hear the word, and because they have no place in their heart to plant it, the raven (which represents Satan) comes and snatches it away.

Those who had the word and did not seek to understand had the same gift as those who gained understanding. However, the word was taken away, but those who sought God's revelation of truth not only kept what they had received, but they received more in abundance. And best of all, the work rested upon Christ's shoulders – not the hearers. The hearers diligently sought the Lord, but the prospering of the word was the work of God.

Religion tries to manipulate people into service with fear tactics and false promises of rewards. The reason is that religion trusts in rules, not God. Because we don't believe grace can create a people with a passion for good works, we substitute faith for fear and a demand for works.

Jesus told a parable about the end times when religious workers would stand

before Him presenting their good works. They believed they would be measured based on what they did. They presented the very works that Jesus said His disciples would do. When they presented their good works, all was done in Jesus' name. Though they presented works that appeared to be good, Jesus called them workers of lawlessness.[3]

How can good works done in Christ's name be acts of lawlessness? Jesus clued us in on the answer when He said, "Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit."[4] The Bible also explains that the body of flesh is still dead because of sin.[5] Even if we have the will to do good, in our flesh nothing good dwells, and we will not find the power to perform good.[6] By good, the Bible is referring to what is good in God's sight. Only the life of the Spirit is acceptable to God, which makes us completely dependent upon God for good, and not our religious efforts.

The reason Jesus said the religious workers who were laboring for His name were actually workers of sin was because their works were born out of human effort, and not the working of the Spirit. Good works are works that are compatible with the eternal work of the Spirit. The only things that are truly good first originates with God. These are given to us (like the parable of the talents – see Matthew 25:15), and we enter into them to fulfill the works that are destined to return to God.

Jesus said, "There is no one good, except God." The Bible also explains this in **1 Corinthians 15:50**

> Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.

The Bible also uses statements like, "A corrupt spring cannot produce fresh water," and "Do men gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles?" The fleshly fruit of human effort cannot produce the pure work of the Spirit. The works of God must be first given to us, then the man or woman of faith receives from God, allows the Spirit to fulfill His purpose through us, and then God accounts His work as our reward!

This is why Jesus said to the workers of human effort, "Depart, for I never knew you." They had religion, but not relationship. Religious works cannot produce favor with God. However, walking with God will always produce good works.

This is why works have not been discussed until this third book. Works are

meaningless until we are in an abiding relationship with God. Religious people try to make God accept them by working hard for His favor. This is a rejection of grace, and replacing God's work with human effort. Instead, we first are established by faith, learn how all barriers have been removed through Christ, and we are in God's complete acceptance, so we learn to start walking with God in an intimate relationship. Until then, works are almost always acts of the flesh.

As you learn to walk in fellowship, God matures your heart, and when you are ready, the desires of your heart will begin to emerge, and then you will see God's calling and the joy of working in fellowship with God.

Don't lose sight of the words of Jesus concerning being yoked with Him for good works. To those under the law, Jesus said, "You who are weary and heavy laden (which is the burden of the law), come to Me and I will give you rest." He then says for us to take upon ourselves His yoke with the promise, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

If you are burned out, you are not under Christ's yoke. If you are frustrated, it isn't coming from the work of Christ. A yoke is a harness that binds to oxen together so they can work together to plow a field. The yoke of the law was God doing half, and man doing his half. But man does not have the power to carry his half. That's why the Bible calls the law a burden, the ministry of death, and the ministry of condemnation. What the law could not do because it was weak through the flesh (which is man's incapability of doing his part), God did by sending Christ to do the work on our behalf.[7]

Jesus' yoke is easy because He carries the burden. We are yoked in fellowship and we walk with Him, but the burden is not ours to carry. The field is being plowed, but our burden is light. Our part is easy. We are walking in God's works, and He is our rewarder. He rewards us for being a part of what He is doing. This is reiterated in **Ephesians 2:10**

> For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Who prepared the work? God did. What is our role? It is to walk in God's works, which He prepared beforehand that we should walk in – which is part of our fellowship as we are yoked together with Christ. Let's bring in another passage from **Ephesians 1:11-12**

> [11] In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will,
>
> [12] that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

God has predestined your path so you have all things that pertain to life and godliness. He predestined the path of good works, which can only be obtained through being yoked in fellowship with Christ. Now we are told that God's purpose is for you to obtain your inheritance, not based on how much you work, but based on grace alone, so everything is to the praise of God's glory.

No one will stand before God and say, "I have earned my inheritance." We will all discover that everything is designed to reveal God's power in our life, and His unmerited love to us, so we all will one day stand before Him, and understand that everything is to the praise of His glory.

Predestination is a difficult topic for many. It is a vital teaching of scripture, but God's foreordained plan does not strip man of his will, but prepares the path so man can walk unhindered into the fullness of God's inheritance, designed for each one of us.

By the end of this book, I believe you will have a clearer understanding of predestination. It is a vital part of works, for if we are not walking in God's works prepared for us, we are replacing our inheritance with the work of the flesh. Not only that, but once you understand God's predestined work, you will walk in confidence, knowing the burden of success is not on your shoulders. If God prepared the work, God will bring it to fulfillment. If you are preparing the work, it is bound to the flesh and cannot enter the life of the Spirit.

This is not a study of Calvinism, for all 'isms' are man-made and not God ordained. It is not Arminianism, for that is another 'ism'.

Any doctrine that divides rather than unites the church is not of God. Any doctrine that forces us to choose one set of scriptures and reject other scriptures is not a doctrine of Christ. The call for obedience and submission to God do not nullify God's sovereignty. Passages that speak of God's sovereignty do not nullify the rest of scripture.

In a discussion on this topic, a man once said, "Do you believe this scripture, or that scripture?" He was referring to two scriptures that are often used by opposite sides of this issue. My answer was, "I don't have to choose. I have to seek to understand how these work together."

After many years of wrestling with this issue, each time I read through the Bible, it becomes clearer. Of course, understanding comes by revelation as the Holy Spirit teaches us. If you seek understanding, God has promised to give it.

I encourage you to study the scriptures discussed in this book, and seek to understand the complete picture God is painting. I believe that if you do this, you'll discover what I am discovering – that God's foreordained plan paves the way for us to receive and experience all that God has. Or as the Bible puts it, that

we come short in no gift. Yet, even God’s foreordained plan must be entered and received by faith. Otherwise, it profits us nothing.

This is an exciting study, and I pray you walk away from this book with a greater confidence and clarity of understanding.

Discussion Questions

- Review Luke 17:7-10. What was the point Jesus is making to His disciples?
- Why did Jesus see the need to dispel the misconception of earning approval by working?
- Review Romans 4:4-5. How does one receive from God? Does this agree with what Jesus said in Luke 17?
- Read Hebrews 11:6. What must we do to earn a reward?
- If works don't earn rewards, what motivates Christains to do good works?
- Read Titus 2:14-15. What does the life abounding in grace receive and accomplish?
- Read 2 Peter 2:3-11. What is the source of all the things we add to our lives?
- What does the promise that we will bear fruit mean?
- Read Matthew 7:22-23. Whose name were these works done in?
- Why did Jesus call them acts of lawlessness?
- Read Matthew 25:15-29. Where did the men get the resources for their works?
- According to verse 27, what human effort was needed to prosper the Lord's work?
- Read Matthew 11:28-30. If works are a heavy burden, are we walking in Christ's rest?
- According to Ephesians 2:10, what is our role in the works of God?
- According to Ephesians 1:11-12, how do we obtain our inheritance?
- According to Ephesians 1:11-12 and Ephesians 2:10, what does predestination teach us about works?
- Does God's predestined plan of your works mean that you will automatically do works with or without a willing heart of faith?

Predestined For Maturity

Let's begin this chapter by looking at **Romans 8:28-31**

28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose.

29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

30 Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

31 What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *can be* against us?

Stop for a moment and think upon this promise. God has predestined you to conform to the image of Christ, which is the pinnacle of spiritual maturity. God's word gives you the promise that He has foreknown you and planned into your life a spiritual maturity that is so complete, your life is a mirror image of the life of Christ.

Now let me ask a question. Have you reached this level of maturity? Have you ever met anyone who has reached that level of maturity? Not one person has ever risen to the perfection required to be able to say, "I have conformed to the image of Christ."

Not even the apostles could make this claim. In the Bible, you see Peter being rebuked for getting caught up in peer pressure and withdrawing from Gentile disciples to avoid being criticized by Jewish Christians, a group who still believed that only those under the law could be right with God.[8] Paul publicly rebuked him for his hypocrisy.

Paul also had to battle with his own flesh. In Romans 7, the Apostle Paul testifies of his struggles by saying that there are times when the sin in his flesh gets the best of him.

How can this be? How can we be predestined to become the image of perfection in our life in the Spirit, but no one has ever accomplished this? How can we not accomplish what we have been predestined to do? Doesn't predestination mean that something is guaranteed to happen?

This is why the battle of predestination versus free-will has raged for so long. As stated earlier, don't be confused, predestination is NOT Calvinism. Calvinism is a belief system based on John Calvin's teaching, which focuses on

the scriptures that teach predestination. However, anytime a movement sets boundaries that ignore or explain away other scriptures that don't fit into its 'system', it becomes a lopsided gospel. This is not only Calvinism, but any other movement or denominational slant that loses a balanced view of scripture.

People get so caught up in debating on predestination that the purpose of the gospel is lost. The word 'gospel' means good news. The gospel's best introduction is the most well-known verse in the Bible, **John 3:16**

> For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

When a Christian gets caught up in a movement that stakes everything on a belief system that depends on teachings not specifically taught in the Bible, the scriptures are brought into confusion. Since God is not the author of confusion, any system of theology that complicates rather than simplifies, is probably not the work of the Holy Spirit. The letter to the Corinthian church warns of this when the Apostle Paul said, "I fear lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted away from the simplicity that is in Christ."[9]

Just as the apostles were concerned that complicated theology was corrupting the minds of the Christians in their day, the same is true today.

A case in point is the challenge some have made to John 3:16. Since one of the five pillars of Calvinism claims that God has provided limited atonement (or the belief that Jesus only died for specific people), John 3:16 is a problem to that system.

A couple of years ago, a prominent Calvinist teacher wrote an article explaining why John 3:16 didn't mean that God loves the world. In Calvinism, God does not love anyone but the elect – those who will be saved. This teacher makes the argument that when John 3:16 says God so loved the world, it means, and I quote, "[This] refers to the world of believers, God's elect."

Aside from the scripture's warning that we are counted as liars if we add to or take away from the word of God, the context leading up to John 3 makes it clear that world means world – including those who reject Christ. The discussion that leads to John 3:16 begins in the first chapter. Look at **John 1:9-11**

> 9 That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.
>
> 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.
>
> 11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.

The word ‘world’ comes from the Greek word ‘kosmos’. The same word (kosmos/world) is used in John 1:10, “And the world did not know Him,” as is used in John 3:16, “God so loved the world.” We can’t decide that a word means one thing in John 1, and then redefine it to mean something else in John 3. This is imposing our views upon scripture, instead of drawing our understanding from scripture.

In a discussion with a pastor who was sold out to Calvinism, he said, “God does not love anyone but the elect. If God loves someone, they will come to faith because they are the elect. If God does not love someone, they won’t come to Christ. God does not love anyone who is not the elect.”

This misconception can be rebutted by a single scripture. In Mark 10, a rich man came to Jesus asking how he could obtain eternal life. He was focused on his ability to keep the law. To get a complete picture, read the account in Matthew 19, Mark 10, and Luke 18. The man claimed that he was perfect in the law, and Jesus proved to him that he was not keeping the law with one command. “If you will be perfect,” referring to his claim that he perfectly kept the command to love his neighbor as himself, “go and sell all you have and give to the poor.”

The man loved his possessions too much, and because he was trusting in the flesh, both in his flesh to earn salvation and his trust in his wealth, he could not discover the invitation of faith. The invitation was in Jesus’ last statement, “And come follow Me.”

The one thing that disproves God’s love for only the elect is the statement before Jesus called him. Mark 10:20 says, “The Jesus looking at him, loved him.” That word ‘love’ is ‘agape’. Agape is the love of God. It’s what God pours into our hearts at the moment of salvation.[10]

God loved him with the same agape love given to us, but without faith, agape remains outside the heart and cannot be experienced by mankind. It is impossible to love/agape God until the agape love of God has been first given to us. That’s why 1 John 4:19 says, “We love Him because He first loved us.”

Jesus loved a man that walked away from the call of salvation. God loved him just as God loves the world. Jesus is not only the Savior of the elect, but of the whole world. Or as **1 Timothy 4:10** explains it:

> For to this *end* we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is *the* Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.

Jesus is the savior of all men, especially those who believe. Why does the

Bible make a distinction between all men and those who believe? Because rejecting Christ does not nullify the truth that Jesus died for each person, and the call of salvation has gone out to all the world.

Understanding these things is important, for declaring that God does not love the world is directly refuting what God has declared. To tell the world, “God hates you unless you are the elect,” is a false statement about God. Even if we scale down our language to say, “God doesn’t love you unless you are someone pre-elected for salvation,” is still a false statement about God.

So if it is true that God loves the whole world, and Jesus died for all, then why doesn’t all experience His love? It’s the same reason all Christians don’t fully mature in Christ. If you have been predestined to conform to Christ’s likeness, which is to perfectly fulfill the Christian life in all ways, why doesn’t everyone fulfill God’s predestined purpose for them?

I believe the answer is found in an example the Bible gives as a warning to the church. It’s the example we looked at previously, where the children of God could not enter into His promise. We’ll refer to this often, since it is a passage that reveals the foundation of election and predestination.

The examples of the Old Testament are given to us as foreshadows of the New Covenant faith we have in Christ. One of the clearest examples is the Children of Israel being called out of slavery, through the Red Sea, and into the Promised Land.

This is a picture of the child of God being called out of the slavery of sinful flesh, being baptized into Christ, journeying toward the fullness of God’s promise, and receiving it by faith. The Bible says the people were baptized when they passed through the Red Sea when escaping the armies of Pharaoh.[11]

They ate the mana of God, which is the word of God, which is Jesus – the word made flesh.[12] The people were saved from bondage the moment they crossed the sea, but that was not the end of God’s purpose for them. God’s intent was for them to enter the life of faith and receive all He had promised. But they did not receive it because they did not believe all of God’s word. Now let’s pick up the story by again looking at **Hebrews 4:1-3**

> 1 Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it.
>
> 2 For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard *it*.
>
> 3 For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said: "So I swore

in My wrath, `They shall not enter My rest,'" although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.

This passage was referring to the time when the Children of Israel did not believe God could conquer the giants before them, and refused to enter the land of rest God had promised. Remember, without faith it is impossible to please God. The moment we limit God or disbelieve in His willingness or His power to keep His promises, we have stepped outside of God's plan, and into the flesh. The flesh cannot inherit the promises of God.[13]

There is an important truth I want you to notice in this passage. They could not enter God's promise because of unbelief – even though the works were finished before the foundation of the world.

Stop and meditate on that last phrase.

How can God's promises be finished and fully provided, but not received? The people had to do nothing but believe God and follow Him into the promise. That is what the living example of Joshua is all about. Joshua means, "Jehovah is Salvation." Jehovah is a transliteration of the name of God in the Old Testament, YHWH, which is often written in Hebrew as Yahweh.

The name 'Jesus' in the New Testament means, "Jehovah is Salvation." The point is clear. The Old Testament believers could not enter the Promised Land until they followed Joshua/Jesus into it. Under Moses, or the Law, faith could not stand. The law pointed people to the promise, but God said, "You can see it with your eyes, but you cannot enter." Under Joshua, all the people had to do was walk by faith into the promise.

So how did God finish the works before the world was founded, but the people invited into that work never benefited from it? It's the same reason God has predestined each Christian to conform to the perfection of Christ, but most Christians are still haunted by the flesh. Without faith, no one can enter into God's promise. Each call into perfection must be answered by faith, or remain unrealized by those God has already predestined to receive it.

As you can see, the works were not being performed by God as the people acted. The work of God was finished before the first man was created. When God called the people to enter the promise, they could not for one reason only – they did not believe. The work was done, the invitation was given, but only those who believed experienced the finished work of God. Only by faith could they receive the promise.

This is an important principle. Let's bring in a few more passages that we can use to clarify predestination. First look at **Ephesians 1:4-6**

4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we
should be holy and without blame before Him in love,
5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself,
according to the good pleasure of His will,
6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted
in the Beloved.

When did God predestine us for adoption? Before this earth was founded. So does this mean that God chose some to be predestined for adoption and others were predestined for hell? Let me issue a challenge. Find one scripture where the Bible says that people were predestined for hell. Is there any scripture that says, "God has chosen that group to suffer in hell before the foundation of the world?"

Consider the words of Jesus in Matthew 23, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!"

In Luke 19:41-44 Jesus proclaimed that this day was meant for their peace, but because they refused, God's plan was hidden from their eyes.

Jesus then said that they were now left to be desolate. Was it God's predestined plan for them to be outside of His love? If it were His plan, Jesus would not have wept over the city. His lamentation is the proof that God longed for them to be with Him. He did not predestined them to be outside of His protection. Jerusalem was destroyed because they refused to come under God's wings, and so they were assaulted by the corrupt world that hated them.

There are some passages that can be misinterpreted, and misused to teach that God foreordained people to reject salvation. We'll discuss these as we go along; however, there isn't one passage that says God predestined some for heaven and the rest for hell.

So when the Bible says that we were predestined for adoption, does it also mean that those who don't believe were excluded before the world was founded?

Go back and read our passage from Hebrews. Why did some not enter the promise? Because of unbelief, even though God prepared the work for them before the world was founded. God did not predestined the people to miss the promise. He predestined them to enter, but without faith it was impossible for them to enter into God's predestined plan. We'll expound on that in a moment. First let's bring in two more passages. Look at **1 Peter 1:19-20**

19 but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and
without spot.

> [20] He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you

When was the work of Christ prepared? Again the Bible affirms that God's works were finished before the world was founded, but it was not made manifest (or revealed) until two-thousand years ago. This is also affirmed in **Revelation 13:8**

> All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

Once again, the Bible affirms that the work of Christ was completed before the world was founded. It does not say that people were predestined for judgment. It says they were not written in the Book of Life. We know why this is so. They could not enter because of unbelief, even though the work of Christ was finished before the foundation of the world.

The reason the topic of predestination is important is because it reveals the certainty of God's purpose for your life, and His purpose for the rest of the world. Because predestination has been turned into Calvinism, many people fear this topic, but it is a vital part of the life of faith. When you understand God's work has already been finished, it becomes a call for you to believe and enter, instead of being under the limitation of human effort and hoping you can make your ministry into something that pleases God.

If you know that God has predestined you for maturity in Christ, how are you going to approach life? When you fall on your face, how will you respond? If you understand that you are learning how to enter into God's completed work for you, and His perfect path, you'll learn how to seek Him and trust in Him. If you think you must get your life right, create your own works, make things happen, and depend upon your own efforts, when you are weak, you'll be discouraged and may even quit. Not to mention that all your efforts will be valueless, since human effort is born of the flesh.

If you struggle with a character flaw, addiction, or see a lack in your life, and you know that God has predestined you for perfection, this gives you hope to seek to enter God's work for you. The Christian life is not about learning how to work for God. It is not about learning how to be a good Christian. The Christian life is about learning how to walk by faith. It is learning how to trust in God's works, and enter the life of the Spirit by faith.

When you blow it, it is a reminder that you have stepped out of the Spirit and are now operating in the flesh, where success is impossible. Human success

leads to either pride or failure. It never pleases the Lord, for the Bible says, "Those who are in the flesh cannot please God."[14]

This is why the Bible says that without faith it is impossible to please God. God's plan for your life is already pleasing to Him. You don't have to accomplish anything. You have to learn to enter the path He has designed for you. He has already prepared the way for you, so your life is in perfect agreement with Him, and there is nothing preventing you from walking in complete fellowship with Him – nothing except unbelief.

Remember this one basic truth. Agape is the love of God. Period. You love God through agape, not philia. There are two words translated into love in the Bible. Philia love, which is human love. It means warm affection or friendship. It can be a very deep love on human terms, such as marriage or a parent-child relationship. However, philia love is always selfish on some level. I love my kids because they are mine. They are part of me, and I have my identity in them. They are important to me, and my love is based on my feelings of connection to them. Even though philia can be very sacrificial, I am sacrificing for my own benefit on some level.

Agape love does not originate with man. A Christian cannot love God in a way that draws them into fellowship with Him without agape. Agape is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit when we receive the Spirit[15] – which is our new birth in Christ. As stated a moment ago, this is why we love God – because He first loved us.

God is complete without man. Man is not complete without God. Before man was created, the Father loved the Son, the Son loved the Spirit, the Spirit loved the Father. All are one God, but there was a complete fellowship within the Godhead. Look at **John 17:24**

> "Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world."

Before the world was founded, the circle of agape love was complete. Agape love is not like philia love. Rather than explaining agape love, let's look at how the Bible defines it in **1 Corinthians 13:4-8a**

> 4 Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;
>
> 5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil;

6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;
7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
8 Love never fails.

Unlike philia love, agape does not seek its own. It doesn't even think evil of you. Instead, agape believes all things. Through agape, God sees you according to hope. Hope is the confident expectation of good, which is the completed work of God in your life. Because God views you through His agape love, He believes all things promised to you, for He sees the power of agape to transform your character into a life compatible with His character.

God created you for the purpose of inviting you into the agape fellowship with Himself. The same love the Father has for the Son, God has for you. Once you enter into agape fellowship, God sees you through agape. The call of faith is for you to begin to see your relationship with God through that same agape love. This means you don't view yourself as incomplete, you view yourself through the completeness of agape. You no longer compare yourself to others or a legalistic standard, you believe and hope in all things through agape – and agape never fails. Agape never fails, even if you do. You aren't standing upon yourself. You are standing upon faith in God's agape love.

If you are in Christ, you are standing within the inner circle of the love of God. It is a complete circle, and agape goes out from God, builds up all who are in His love, and returns to God, having accomplished all that God sent it to accomplish.

And this is what God has predestined for you. Predestination does not mean that God forces you into a mold. It means that God has ordained your path of life, and as you learn to enter His works by faith, you begin to experience what God has already prepared for you to receive. You also begin to experience the person God predestined you to become. You are entering into His finished work, and then it is as if you were always righteous and holy, for your completeness was finished before time began.

The same is true for works. As you learn to trust in His work, you discover that works are not dependent upon you. Then when hardships and challenges hinder you, you continue to walk by faith, knowing God's purpose is to unveil His completed work in your ministry at the proper time.

The reason we struggle to discern the will of God and have a hard time figuring out our spiritual gifts is because we have not yet grown into maturity through faith. As you mature, God makes manifest, or reveals, these things to you. Just as an infant doesn't show the evidence of their potential at birth,

neither can you. These emerge as you mature in the agape fellowship of God.

God's works are complete. Whether you are obedient to your call or not, God's works will be fulfilled. The only question is whether we will be a part of His preordained works, or whether we will miss out. Will we enter into the promise by faith, or will we be one of those who stand on the outside because of unbelief?

When God revealed the end times to Daniel, the Lord said four times that events would happen at their appointed time. In Daniel 11:27, God also said, "The *end* will be at the appointed time." This makes it clear that nothing is dependent upon man. No one can help God. No one can hinder God.

The same is true for your life. At the appointed time, God reveals His will to your life. Many times it comes in ways we can only recognize when we are in tune with the Spirit. Since most Christians live through the flesh, they often don't see God's revelation for them. Other times the way of faith is uncertain to the flesh, so we are reluctant to step out of the flesh and into the promise of faith.

A story I often tell is when my daughter was about 4 years old. Our family went to a river for the day, and there was an island in the middle of the river. The water was shallow, so we waded to it. My daughter called out saying she wanted to come. I waded back to get her.

When I took her hand, she reached back to the shore and grabbed a root. I said, "If you want to come with me, you have to let go of the shore."

"If I do, I'll sink," she said.

The water was only knee deep to me, but more than waist deep for her. "You won't sink. I'll take you by the hand and lead you. There are flat rocks for you to step on, and if you slip, I'll keep you from falling."

Timidly, she let go of the root and trusted in me to guide her to the rocks. At first, she was afraid. But as she saw that I was guiding her to each rock, she became more confident. By the time we reached the island, she was stepping happily along and enjoying the journey. Do you realize God has given you that same promise? Look at **Psalm 37:23-25**

> 23 The steps of a *good* man are ordered by the LORD, And He delights in his way.
>
> 24 Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; For the LORD upholds *him with* His hand.
>
> 25 I have been young, and *now* am old; Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, Nor his descendants begging bread.

Unlike my journey with my daughter, God is guiding you to the predestined

path He has created for you. There will be times when you slip back into the flesh and stop operating in faith, but God still upholds you with His hand. The faithful man or woman is the one who truly believes that God will never forsake them. They can step out in faith with confidence because they understand this walk is not about our abilities and plans, but God's ability and plans.

God has predestined you to conform perfectly to His own likeness. God has predestined your works and has invited you to walk in them. He has predestined all things that pertain to life and godliness. You lack nothing. The only thing you need to do is learn to discover how to walk by faith.

Discussion Questions

- Review John 1:9-11 and John 3:16. When the Bible says, "God so loved the world," do these passages indicate that God only loves a pre-chosen group of people?
- Review 1 Timothy 4:10. Explain what the Bible means by Jesus being the Savior of all men.
- What does this passage mean by, "Especially those who believe?"
- Review Hebrews 4:1-3. If God's works were already finished, and the people were invited in, did God predestine the people to enter God's rest, or did He predestine them to miss it?
- Review Romans 8:28-31. Are all Christians predestined to become like Christ?
- Based on Hebrews 4 and Romans 8, what do you think prevents people from receiving what God predestined for them?
- Based on Romans 8:31, what is the reason God tells us about His predestined plan?
- What is the difference between the Old Testament saints who could not enter the promise, and the next generation that did receive it?
- Can you find any passage that says the non-elect were predestined for hell?
- Read Matthew 23:37-38. Was it God's predestined desire for Jerusalem to be outside of His love?
- According to verse 37, was it God's plan for Jerusalem to enter into the protection of God's promise?
- Read Luke 19:41-44. Was God's plan to blind Israel to the call of peace?
- Why did they miss the promise?
- If your path is planned and ordained by God, what can hinder you?

Finding Hidden Treasures

Never lose sight of the promise that God is the Rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. Of course, this promise begins by explaining that without faith we cannot please God, but through faith we begin to seek. We diligently seek because we know God's promises are true. If true, then we seek with expectation.

God's ways are easy, but they seem challenging because they go against the flesh. Yet, God does not honor apathy. Nor does He honor working hard in the flesh.

When we lack faith, we fall back to human effort in an attempt to force our will when we don't believe God will do right. On the opposite end of the same spectrum, apathy is when we don't have the expectation of good, so we are unwilling to explore the invitation of faith. Since the Bible says, "Whatever is not from faith is sin,"[16] all forms of unbelief take us outside of God's purpose and blind us to the abundant life we should be experiencing.

Jesus explained that our faith is in God. Faith in ourselves is not faith. Faith in the things of the world is not godly faith. Trusting in my bank account, job, or any other thing is a curse. This is why the Bible says cursed is the man who trust in man and makes flesh his strength. That man's heart will depart from the Lord. That person will not even see when good comes, but will be in a barren place, just as if their soul is a shrub in the dry desert.[17]

This comes from Jeremiah 17:5-8. This passage also gives the opposite. Trusting in the things of this life is a curse, but blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord and whose hope is in the Lord. That person will be like a tree planted by the rivers of waters. Instead of being barren, that person will flourish – even during the heat and drought. When the world around you dries up, because your waters are flowing from the life of the Spirit, you will flourish and never cease from bearing fruit.

The life of faith is able to see the goodness of God, and the trials of life cannot stop the flow of the Spirit. You are watered by God, or as Jesus said, "Out of your belly (or literally inner man), rivers of living waters will spring up." This person cannot be dry or barren. But this can only be drawn through the life of the Spirit.

God not only waters you, but feeds you. Look at the words of Jesus in **Revelation 2:17a**

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat.

The living word-picture of this was given in the Old Testament story of Exodus. As the people journeyed through the barren land, God provided manna from heaven. God declared that none of them had any lack.

Jesus is the manna. Jesus is also called the word of God made flesh. As you open the bread of life, which is the scriptures, the Spirit reveals the things that will nourish and water your soul. The nourished soul comes from a life of faith, where we are completely satisfied through the provision of God.

A faithless person can read the Bible and get nothing out of it. A man or woman of faith opens the word with expectation. They are seeking God through the word, and the Spirit is unveiling life to their soul. Then we discover truth, wisdom, understanding, and all the hidden truths God has prepared for us to find.

We can get a better understanding of this through the teaching of **1 Corinthians 2:7-11**

7 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God ordained before the ages for our glory,

8 which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

9 But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

10 But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.

11 For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.

Let’s dig some manna from this passage. The first thing to note is that the world cannot discover the things of God. Their eye cannot see, their ear cannot hear, nor has any of these things entered into their heart or imagination. But they have been revealed to us!

Notice that these things the world cannot see or perceive has been (past tense) prepared for us. This is not talking about heaven. This is talking about your life in the Spirit now. There are indeed things prepared for us in heaven, but that is not the topic here.

The Bible says that the carnal man, or natural man, cannot receive the things

of God, nor can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned. I feel the need to repeat something I say in most books. When the Bible uses man in the general sense, it means mankind. Some words in the Greek have gender. You also see things like this in other languages, such as Spanish.

When Paul was facing shipwreck, the word for ship is feminine, and that's why the King James Version says things like, "We let her drive." In the same sense, the word 'anthropos' means human being, but the word is masculine. So even though its meaning applies to humans, both male and female, it's translated as 'he' because the word is masculine. It's necessary to explain this since some doctrines exclude females, not understanding that even a masculine word can refer to both women and men.

Back to our subject, the natural man, both male and female, cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God. This does not only refer to the unsaved person. It refers to anyone who is approaching the word of God through the flesh, or natural mind. The unredeemed person has no choice, for they do not have a new spirit and do not have the Holy Spirit within them. The Christian does, but even the Christian can approach the Bible from the natural mind. In fact, most people do study the Bible and attempt to approach God from the natural man. This makes it impossible to discern the deeper things.

The natural mind can understand superficial truth. Even the carnal mind can read, "Thou shalt not kill," and know that it's wrong to kill. Even the world can understand that it's wrong to steal. However, when it comes to digging out the deep things of the Spirit, only the Spirit can know them, but He reveals them to us – but only when we are entering the life of the Spirit by faith.

When a Christian begins to learn to seek God through faith, their faith is weak and their ability to discern the revelation of God is limited.

Like a child, we begin learning through the milk of the word, and as we grow, we slowly graduate to solid food. As you discover the basic things, you are feeding your spiritual life, and beginning the process of maturity. It isn't instant, and this is why we don't compare ourselves with each other. Instead, we focus on what God is revealing, and the journey of faith becomes the joy of discovery.

We must study through faith, praying with expectation for the Spirit to reveal His truth to us. Then we seek God and read with anticipation. Just as it is with learning to walk, so it is with learning to study. When you begin seeking God through the word, you'll have a mixture of studying through the natural mind, and times of the Spirit's revelation of the word. But as you learn to be in tune with the Spirit, the revelations of the word will become the norm. Then each time you read the word, God will reveal more truth and even deeper

understandings.

Not everyone is called to be a teacher, preacher, or expositor of the word, but we all are called to seek God through the word. The Spirit searches the deep things of God, and He reveals them to us. This is what I like to call, ‘Revelation knowledge.’ That is where the Spirit reveals truth to us in a way that we can comprehend, then we apply that understanding to our natural mind, but it can’t work the other way around.

You can’t use the natural mind to discover the deep things of God. The natural mind can understand, Thou shalt not kill, but it has great difficulty understanding that resentment toward another person is murder in the heart. The natural can understand the command not to have any gods before God, but it doesn’t understand that money can be a god. So can hobbies, relationships, and even the good deeds of ministry. Pride is to make ourselves a god, for we are lifting ourselves up instead of recognizing that our good is the work of God through us. As self is dethroned, greater revelations emerge. Then we discover the depth of grace, the love of God, and the power of God in us.

The natural mind falsely believes that grace will cause people to sin, but the mind in the Spirit discovers that grace defeats the flesh. The natural mind believes that God is pleased by what we do for Him and what we resist in our attempt to produce obedience. The spiritual mind recognizes that we live by faith. By faith, we enter into the obedience of Christ, and we learn to recognize that everything flows from His grace to us.

Let me reiterate this vital truth. The Bible makes it clear that no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. The human spirit can know the human perspective, and can use human reasoning to draw what he thinks is a reasonable interpretation, but mankind always misses the deep things of God. Only through the Spirit can we discover and discern the things of God.

God has hidden these things with the promise that those who seek will find. I encourage you to study Proverbs 2. God promises that those who receive His word and begin praying for discernment and understanding will discover the hidden things of God. However, this promise is similar to the promise of James 1:5. If anyone lacks wisdom, let him ask of God. The next verse warns that we must ask in faith. The one who does not have faith will not receive anything from the Lord.

The one who asks in faith will then open the scriptures and begin to seek. They will cry out for understanding and lift up their voice for discernment. That person will seek as though it is hidden treasures. The person who does this has the promise, “Then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.” We are then told that the Lord gives wisdom, knowledge,

and understanding.

Proverbs 2 then explains that God has stored up these things for you to find. It is God's purpose for you to discover the depths of the things of God, but this cannot come through human understanding. We are again told that these things come through the revelation of the Spirit, and are only given to those who prayerfully seek by faith.

Why do so many people struggle to spend time in the word? It really boils down to the fact that they don't believe God intends to reveal the things of the Spirit. We read without expectation, then labor through our daily study as if it is a chore. We last for a few days or a few weeks, but then we fall out of the habit. We're not diligent because we don't have expectation. It's a chore because there's no anticipation of discovery.

For most of my Christian life, Bible study was a duty. A duty I neglected more than I accomplished. My studies were boring because I wasn't discovering anything, and my expectation was to read words for no other purpose than to try to make myself obey God's call to study. I got little out of it because I had no faith that the Spirit had prepared treasures for me to discover. I didn't discover because the Bible says that this can only be received by faith, and the one who doubts can expect nothing. And that is what I usually discovered – nothing.

I no longer have this lack of expectation. When I go to the word, I expect to be fed. I expect to receive. I know for a certainty that God wants to reveal the deeper things of the Spirit. No longer do I walk away saying, "Now that task is done." Now I walk away saying, "Wow! God has given me more than I could have expected." When I spend time in the word, I find myself asking, "Why do I not make this my highest priority? What busy thing of life is worth missing out on God's revelation for me?"

Some of the results of God's treasures stored up for you are these promises in **Proverbs 2:8-9**

> 8 He guards the paths of justice, And preserves the way of His saints.
>
> 9 Then you will understand righteousness and justice, Equity *and* every good path.

When you are in God's wisdom, you will understand every good path. You understand because God is revealing everything to you. Not only that, but when you're on the path of wisdom, God says that He guards you on that path and preserves your way. The rest of this chapter shows the work of wisdom in our heart.

Not only are we discovering the right way, but wisdom produces discretion.

Discretion is the revelation of God's purpose, which is showing you the right way, and it reveals to us what is the wrong way. A man or woman of discretion will be able to recognize the trap of sin, and see the path of righteousness. This is why the following verses say that wisdom delivers us from the ways of evil, from people of bad influence, and from those who would seduce us into temptation.

No longer do you have to worry about finding the will of God, the treasure of wisdom reveals it to us. No longer do we have to worry about temptations, wisdom removes the false mask of beauty to reveal its ugliness.

Not long ago I encountered something that once was a temptation I could not resist. It once seemed so appealing that it produced the craving to sin in me. An amazing thing happened. I didn't feel tempted. I wasn't even interested. The thought of that temptation created disgust in my soul. I pondered this event and had to express my gratitude to the Lord. The bondage that once ruled my life was so unappealing that I couldn't even feel tempted.

When I fought temptation, I lost. Once wisdom was given to me, it stripped sin of its power, guards my way, and delivers me from the flesh that once chained me to sin.

This is why we must not focus on our sins, but on God's goodness. As you become a receiver of the treasures God has laid up for you, temptation and the weaknesses of the flesh are driven out. When they try to return, they have no place. No one throws out gold to make room for trash. No one who has received the revelation of the Spirit will throw the treasures of God out to receive temptation.

With this perspective, our earlier scripture has more power. Let's again review **Hebrews 11:6**

> But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

The Christian life revolves around faith in God. Without faith, you can't please God. Without faith, you can't receive the gifts of the Spirit. Without faith, you can't walk in the Spirit. But the one who believes God will diligently seek Him. The more you seek, the more you find.

We all want to know the deeper things of God, but we are not yet able to receive it. You can't build the walls of a house without first laying the foundation. You can't build the roof without first having the walls. The same is true about the life of the Spirit. You can't receive the deep things of God if you have not yet received and built yourself upon the basics. Consider **1 Corinthians**

3:2-3

2 I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not
able *to receive it*, and even now you are still not able;
3 for you are still carnal. For where *there are* envy, strife, and divisions
among you, are you not carnal and behaving like *mere* men?

The evidence of carnality (or fleshly thinking) in the Corinthian church was fighting and divisions in the church. However, this passage is not about church fighting. It explains why the church was limited in their growth. They were stuck in a fleshly mindset, which is what the Bible earlier called, the natural mind. Because they were still focused on the fleshly way of thinking, they were incapable of receiving the deeper things of God.

The milk of the word is the basics. It's the apostle's way of saying, you must get your eyes off yourself, off other people, and off the fleshly way of viewing the Christian life. You need to first learn how to walk by faith. Once you are operating in faith, God will wean you off milk and begin growing you into maturity.

A baby doesn't go from milk to steak. As the child is weaned, soft foods are given, then more solid, and as they are able to receive it, they grow into the ability to eat meat and other adult foods. This is the Christian life. God will not reveal the deeper things until you are able to receive the basics. Most Christians aren't able to receive the teachings of faith. They are stuck in a focus on sin, their abilities, their failures, their status, their reputation, and other self-focused or man-focused things.

The Hebrew church struggled with this, and Paul rebuked them by saying they were stuck in the elementary things, and they keep relaying the foundation of repentance from dead works, and not faith toward God, so they never go on toward perfection. But God calls us to stop looking to ourselves, stop focusing on sin, and begin receiving the power of the Spirit. Then we begin building ourselves upon faith, and press toward perfection. That is building upon the basics so that God can begin revealing the deeper things. Or as the Bible puts it in **Isaiah 28:9-10**

9 "Whom will he teach knowledge? And whom will he make to understand
the message? Those *just* weaned from milk? Those *just* drawn from the
breasts?
10 For precept *must be* upon precept, precept upon precept, Line upon line,
line upon line, Here a little, there a little."

Let us start weaning off the milk, the elementary things of the faith, and begin receiving what God is ready to reveal. As you learn each precept of the word, it becomes the foundation for the next. But if that foundation is not established, it is not possible to receive the next revelation.

This should also encourage us. There is no end to the storehouse of God's treasure. The more you receive, the more you are able to receive. There is never a time when you'll say, "I have arrived. I now understand what God's word teaches."

You'll understand principles of the word as God reveals it, and you'll arrive to the next plateau of understanding, but you'll never reach the end of God's unsearchable riches.[18] In fact, the more you grow in understanding, the more you'll see how little you actually know. But at the same time you'll rejoice in the depths of what God has shown you, and you'll feel the drawing to discover more. Each revelation begins a new joy of discovering.

The scriptures of Proverbs 2:10 says that when wisdom enters our heart, we receive knowledge that is pleasant to our soul. Each revelation is a new level of knowledge, and it enriches us and gives pleasant life to our soul. The soul becomes empty when it's cut off from the flow of the Spirit, but the Spirit-filled life always abounds. The Christian life is a never-ending joy of discovery.

God's limitless treasures are hidden for the purpose of being discovered. By faith, seek the Lord diligently through prayer and the word. Pray in faith with expectation, knowing that it is God's purpose for you to discover. Live in the promise of **Psalm 34:10**

> The young lions lack and suffer hunger; But those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good *thing*.

You will not lack if you seek the Lord. You won't lack in your physical needs, but even better, you won't lack in your spiritual needs. This is how Christians become fulfilled. You will be an overcomer and find the hidden manna as you learn to seek through faith. The person operating in faith has overcome the flesh.

The life in the Spirit lacks no good thing, has their way preserved by God, and that person's soul delights in abundance!

Discussion Questions

- Read John 6:32-35. What is the water and the bread Jesus spoke of? How does this apply to your life?
- Can a persecuted Christian be satisfied? Explain your answer.
- When a person faces trials in life, how do they remain satisfied?
- Is this the life you are experiencing? If the answer is no, how do you begin experiencing the abundant life?
- Review 1 Corinthians 2:7-11. According to verse 10, is this promise about heaven, or the Christian life we are now in?
- According to verse 11, can the natural mind discover the hidden things of God without the Spirit's revelation?
- How do you find the revelation of the hidden wisdom God has ordained for your glory?
- What does the Bible mean by, "No one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God?"
- What does this tell you about man's ability to know truth?
- Review James 1:6-7. Why does the Bible tell us that the one who does not ask in faith will not receive anything from the Lord?
- Review Proverbs 2:8-9. Explain what it means that God preserves your way?
- What does verse 9 mean to you?
- Review 1 Corinthians 3:2-3. Why was the Corinthian church not able to receive the deeper things of God?
- Why do we sometimes feel empty and joyless?
- Why does the Christian life seem unappealing to those outside of faith?
- What causes Christians to lose joy?
- What is the abundant life?

Preparation for Works

A common but erroneous way of thinking is that God expects us to just start doing something. One common teaching is that you have to be in motion before God can start turning you in the right direction. Start doing anything.

Yet another misconception you may have heard is, “Where you see a need, you have the calling of God.” Let’s put that one to the test. I see hunger in many countries, and many cities within the US. I see kids that can’t read, and adults that lack the life skills to get good jobs. I see abused spouses and children. I see drug addiction, alcohol addiction. Soup lines need workers. Many communities are unchurched, and many countries need missionaries to reach unchurched groups. There are a lack of Bibles, and some languages that need translations.

I could fill up this book with countless needs all around me, and around the world. You could also add many, many more needs to the list. Is it your calling to reach out to every need you see? Someone speaking at a group I attended said, “If you don’t join the protest to protect the unborn, you are not obeying God.” In yet another group, a speaker said, “If you aren’t ministering to the homeless, you aren’t obeying Jesus’ command to do this to the least of these.” I’ve heard the proclamation of condemnation for not receiving the orphans, not being active in politics, not standing with legal organizations that defend our rights, and many other demands. One popular teacher said that every Christian has an obligation to go to the mission field, and any who don’t at least do missionary work in a foreign land are disobeying the great commission.

Jesus’ command to go into all the world is not only a call to go to distant places. The world is all around you. It is not only another country, but it is also at your place of work, in your neighborhood, and anywhere you encounter unbelievers.

So can you meet every need? If every need is a call of God, is there any way you can be effective by spreading yourself so thin you burn out? Your first mission is to be equipped. Your most important mission is to set time aside to seek the Lord and grow in your spiritual life. If your spiritual life is dead, your ministry is of the flesh. Let’s again review the words of Jesus in **Matthew 7:22-23**

> 22 "Many will say to Me in that day, `Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?'
>
> 23 "And then I will declare to them, `I never knew you; depart from Me,

you who practice lawlessness!'

Let's stop for a moment and look at the word 'knew'. It comes from the Greek word 'ginosko', which means: to learn to know, have intimate knowledge, to know in a way that gives understanding. When the Old Testament was translated into Greek in the 3rd Century BC, this was the word the Jewish scholars used to describe intimacy between a husband and wife. The King James Version of the Bible uses terms like, "Adam knew his wife." This was translated into the same Greek word we see Jesus using here.

Jesus called those who labored in His name, workers of sin – or lawlessness. The word 'lawlessness' (anomia in the Greek), means a violation of the law, iniquity, or wickedness.

These ministers declared, "We have prophesied in Jesus name." To prophesy means to declare the word of God or to speak as one declaring God's divine revelation. Yet this was counted as a sinful work – not because they weren't speaking truth, but because their work was not born out of intimacy with Christ.

"We've cast out demons in Jesus name." Sin. Even though they had the appearance of success, their work was an act of iniquity.

"We've done miracles and wonders in Jesus name." Sin.

What these ministers for Jesus thought were reward-worthy labors were actually acts of the flesh, and they made themselves into rivals of Christ, instead of co-laborers with Christ.

Works don't put God under an obligation to bless. Works don't earn rewards. This flies in the face of most religious beliefs, but think back on the words of Jesus we looked at in a previous chapter. Jesus said that when we have labored, don't say we have earned a reward. We have merely done what is our duty to do.

Let me remind you again of Romans 4:4-8. The person who tries to work to earn God's favor, their works only goes toward their debt. But the one who does not work for God's favor, but believes in God's justification for us, his faith accounts him as righteous, and that person receives the three-fold blessing: righteousness, forgiveness, and immunity from judgment.

Your reward is the fruit of the Spirit's work in your life. Reward is not from a merit system based on what man does for God, where man thinks he is owed payment for his labors. If we want to be under a merit system, then we have to first pay back our debt before we can start earning anything. But God calls us into His family as an adopted son, so we are an inheritor of His Kingdom.

All believers are called sons of God, whether male or female. This is a word-picture given to the ancient culture that only allowed the inheritance to

flow to the sons of the family. In God's kingdom, all are accounted as son and heirs of the kingdom. Nowhere does the Bible call us kings and queens. There are no queens. The kingdom isn't based on the earthly standard where the males are rulers and the queens are subjects. The Bible says we are kings and priests to our God. We are rewarded for our faithfulness, and faithfulness is the action of our faith.

The Greek word for faith is 'pistis'. The Greek word for faithfulness is usually 'pistos', which is the adjective form of the word faith. It is the description of faith in action. Without faith, faithfulness is impossible. True faith always produces faithfulness, and this is where our works are born.

You are rewarded for your faith (see Hebrews 11:6), and faith reveals the invitation to seek, and those who seek find. God calls us into His works as an invitation to seek Him and be a part of what God is doing, so that we discover His rewards along the way.

The problem with false works is that it is religion's call for us to earn God's favor. Then the focus is not on God, but the works of our own hands, and the false belief that rewards are the profit from the enterprise of human effort. It becomes a selfish enterprise, masquerading as religion. If my goal is to get a mansion, how is that different than selfish human ambition in this world?

Did you know that the top 2% of the wealthy upper class has the highest suicide rate of any other group? Why is that? It's because their focus is on things, and there comes a time when people realize that things don't matter. Those whose identities are wrapped up in possessions lose hope when things lose significance. Status seems worthless when personal ambitions lose value. Sometimes success causes people to lose hope when a goal has been reached, but it doesn't bring the expected fulfillment.

I have never heard of a rich man lamenting on his deathbed that he didn't get more stuff. But I've heard many testimonies of people at the end of life lamenting that they didn't invest more time in living.

Does this suddenly change in heaven? Is your image of heaven you sitting in a mansion with your rewards by yourself, feeling accomplished because you have more rewards than other people? That would be a lonely heaven.

The purpose of works is like everything else in this Christian life. It is a call to walk in intimate fellowship with God as you discover His purpose for you, and experience the fellowship of His body through other believers.

Burnout in Christian ministry is caused by two main problems. We are burned out when we step into a work that God has not called or equipped us to do. Getting busy for God is a recipe for frustration and burn out. God will not bless your work for Him. He blesses His work for you.

The second cause of burnout is when a Christian loses focus on Christ, and over-exalts their personal ministry. That's when someone gets so busy that they don't have time for God, or they make the ministry into their god.

A few years back, a well-known preacher decided to start a college. I believe his original vision probably was the call of God, but his vision outgrew his relationship with the Lord. He took on heavy debt because he was determined to see his vision of a Christian college come to fruition, and his sense of urgency couldn't wait for God when the work was happening too slowly.

He built the college, but student tuitions weren't enough to pay for the debts he incurred. He pleaded for donations, but the response wasn't enough for the millions of dollars that were due. Bankruptcy became a real threat. During his moment of desperation, he was approached by a cult leader named Sun Myung Moon. Yes, the founder of the Moonies. The same man who called himself 'lord of all,' and also claimed that one day Jesus would bow to him.

In order to receive the money, this preacher had to agree to have his picture taken with Sun Myung Moon to be published in Moon's Unification Church magazine, to show his people that he was the savior of this college. It was a fitting demonstration, since Moon claims to be the messiah of the world. Though it's tragic that a Christian leader would bow to someone claiming to be greater than Christ, but the tragedy didn't begin at the point of desperation. Tragedy began when the ministry became the purpose, instead of seeking intimacy with God, and trusting in the Lord's provision and timing.

If this was a work of God, then God would not let it fail. The greater part of ministry is learning to trust in God's works – even when it seems impossible. It takes more faith to risk failure than it does to trust in human effort. It takes more faith to allow a ministry to die, than it does to put it on human life-support. Sometimes a ministry has a purpose that isn't intended to be perpetual. When God ends a work, it has no eternal value if we keep it going. That's often a sign that our identity is wrapped up in our success, instead of in Christ.

Any Christian that allows ministry or life to draw them out of seeking God is no longer serving God. They may be serving in the name of God, but God doesn't inhabit our works. He inhabits His own work. Once we take it out of His hands, it becomes a human effort – even if it was born out of a divine call.

I say all of these things to point out a common pitfall for many sincere Christians. The work and the results are not for us to be concerned with. There is no work so important that we can't afford to spend time with God. Look at this important passage in **1 Corinthians 3:11-15**

11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

12 Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious
stones, wood, hay, straw,
13 each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it
will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it
is.
14 If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a
reward.
15 If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be
saved, yet so as through fire.

The Bible says that we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ to have our works judged.[19] As you can see from verse 15, our salvation is not on trial. Even if we suffer complete loss, we will be saved, for our eternal spirit is of God and cannot be destroyed by the fire of testing. Because we are the eternal work of God, the fire will prove that we are His.

The Bible says, corruption cannot inherit incorruption[20] and whatever is born of the flesh is flesh.[21] What comes from an incorruptible source is precious, and that is what is born of God to us in the Spirit. Wood, hay, and straw (or stubble in some translations) is the work of man. This is not sins being tested, it's the works of the believer. The works that man produces in the flesh is bound to the flesh and will be proven as corrupted and destructible by the testing of God's fire. These will be lost.

The works of God are the gold, silver, and precious stones. They cannot be destroyed, for they are incorruptible. What God is producing through you, and inviting you to enter through the works He has already prepared, are eternal and indestructible. However, when we step out of the Spirit and are no longer working through faith, we are then producing through human effort, and this cannot and will not be rewarded.

Understanding that faith is God's invitation to believe is vital to the Christian life. No foundation can be laid other than Jesus Christ. If you are building upon yourself, your church, your ministry, or anything else, it is a loss. I encourage you to read either the Revelation of Grace or Stop Trying to Fix Yourself, if you don't understand biblical faith. I can provide an ebook for free by request through my website.

The Bible warns that Christian leadership should not be given to a novice, or someone young in the faith.[22] The reason is that an immature believer will

be more easily tempted to be puffed up with pride, and think the work of God is based on their abilities, instead of the power of the Spirit.

Every example of Christian leadership is based on a time of accurate preparation first. Jesus personally trained all of the apostles for three and a half years. Even then, Jesus told them to wait for the power of the Spirit to be given to them.[23] They waited and prayed for forty days, and once the Spirit was given, they were empowered to do ministry.[24]

The Apostle Paul is another example. He was a Pharisee, highly educated and in a position of authority in Judaism. He was very passionate about the Old Testament law, though he was sincerely wrong. He felt the need to persecute anyone who was a threat to the Jewish religion. He received authority to hunt down Christians and bring them back to be tried and put to death, but along the way he encountered Jesus.[25]

He was dramatically transformed, and immediately he started preaching Jesus before the very people he had once partnered with. Then he became the enemy, but he was called of God for another work. When Paul was first called to be an apostle, God revealed to him that he was going to be a missionary for the church. But Paul didn't immediately start his work.

In Paul's testimony in Galatians 1:17, he says that he was in Damascus, where he first was called, for three years. It was three years of study and preparation before he was even introduced to the other apostles. It wasn't Paul who initiated this ministry.

A man named Barnabas was an instrumental part of the first church, but at some point he met Paul. When he recognized Paul's calling, he took Paul to meet the other apostles,[26] and shortly afterward, God revealed Paul's call to the church, and his ministry began.[27]

Paul answered the call to seek, and never neglected his preparation for the gospel, though he didn't know what that would be at the time. This reveals an important truth. God's call on your life will not fail, but it also won't be God's work until He has properly prepared you. And that requires you to answer the call to seek.

It is possible to get ahead of God, and see your calling flop. Or you may struggle in life as God teaches you through hardship what He wanted to teach you in personal growth. Your personal ministry will be hindered when you become impatient and step out before God provides the opportunity. And you can rest, even when circumstances seem to be a roadblock. When God has

prepared you, He makes a door where none existed. There are no roadblocks in God's timing.

Paul was in the Arabian Desert, with no ministry, no one promoting him, and no one around him that recognized his calling of God. But when the time had come, God sent Barnabas. When Paul tried to join fellow believers, they rejected him because they were afraid of him, knowing he had been an enemy of the church. God sent Barnabas to take Paul and introduce him to the apostles of Jesus. Some time later, God said, "Separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work I have called them." It was the launch of Paul's ministry. God would soon change Saul's name to Paul, and ordain him as the apostle to the gentile nations.

A man sitting alone in the desert of Arabia continued to discover Christ, and the Lord raised him from the man rejected by the church to the apostle used to start more churches than anyone in history. Paul's ministry didn't begin by pursuing works, but by seeking to be established in the faith. Then God exalted him. If Paul had exalted himself, his work would have come to nothing. Even if he managed to gather followers, it would have not been God's works, and would have been wood, hay, and stubble.

Don't get impatient. Don't take it upon yourself to make ministry happen. Seek, rest, and wait. Allow God to prepare and equip you.

To nail down the principle of waiting on God, let's look at a couple of other examples. In the Old Testament, God called Joseph to lead his family out of famine so the nation of Israel could grow into a great nation. God revealed this calling when he was a young teen, but Joseph didn't see this become a reality until his early 30s. Between his calling and his commissioning of God, he was sold into slavery and then banished to a prison to be forgotten. This was a time of maturity and testing, but at the appointed time, God intervened and exalted Joseph to be the second highest ruler in Egypt, the greatest world power of that day.

It was impossible for a foreign slave to become a ruler in Egypt. It was even more impossible for a slave that was imprisoned for a crime he didn't commit to be promoted into a position as the second highest ruler in the nation. But Joseph patiently waited and prepared himself.

When the time had come, God opened the prison doors, and none of his oppressors or hindrances could stop God's calling. The Bible even says that Hebrews (Joseph's race) were an abomination to the Egyptians.[28] Yet, God took someone that society rejected, and made him a ruler over a people who were prejudiced against him. And because he was prepared by God, he was able to lead with integrity, and without malice or bitterness.

Let's summarize some of the many examples we have in the Bible. The Apostle Peter was defeated and lost any hope of ministry, but God restored and establish him. Paul was forgotten in a city far away from where his ministry would begin. Joseph was forgotten in a prison. David was forgotten in the fields where he was sent to watch his family's sheep. When his family was called so Samuel could anoint one of them as king, he wasn't even allowed to come, but God's will prevailed. Jephthah was the son of a harlot, and was banished from his nation because of his heritage. God opened the door, and the people who drove him away sought him and made him the leader God would use to deliver the people. Moses was rejected by his people, and spent forty years in the desert. God called him and used Moses to deliver Israel from the bondage of Egypt.

All of these examples, and many more, show us that we don't need to worry about our calling or how we will be established in ministry. God's prepared plan for you cannot be thwarted by anything except your own unbelief. There may be times when you feel forgotten or left out, but it is for God to move. Or as the Bible says, "Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you in due time."[29]

You can't miss the plan of God if you are waiting on Him. That time of waiting is designed for you to grow. A tree can't grow higher than its roots can sustain. In the same way, you can't excel in your calling if you are not first deeply established in Christ. If you neglect establishing your heart in Him, you risk toppling later in your Christian life.

You may have to stop seeking your ministry calling and begin seeking your life-calling, which is intimacy with Christ. Even if you are active in ministry, it means nothing if you are not thriving in the Spirit.

For most people, they will not even know their calling until they are established in their walk of faith. Nearly everywhere I go, people say things like, "I don't know what God's will for my life is."

Here is God's will for you – to know Him. Most Christians spend so much time trying to discover their spiritual gifts and trying to discover God's will (i.e. their personal ministry) that they are blinded to the primary calling of seeking Him. If God hasn't revealed your calling, it's because He doesn't want you to be distracted from establishing yourself in the faith. If God has revealed your calling but hasn't opened the door of opportunity, this is because your calling is to encourage you to seek Him and be excited about what He is preparing you to do. But don't spend so much time trying to find an open door that you neglect the time He has given you to grow into a deeper maturity.

You cannot miss your calling if you are seeking the Lord with all your heart.

The opposite is not promised. You can miss your calling if you are not mature enough to walk in obedience. Let's look at another passage – **Titus 2:11-14**

> [11] For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men,
> [12] teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age,
> [13] looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,
> [14] who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works.

This is referring to Christ, who is the appearance of the grace of God, but this is also the calling for you. God's grace appeared to bring you salvation, teach you how to deny ungodliness and sin, teach you how to live in righteousness and be godly in a sin-tainted world, and grace teaches you how to look for the true blessing, which is your fellowship with Christ.

Out of the life of grace, emerges works. The heart established in grace develops a zeal (or passion) for good works. Your desire will begin to grow, and when your desires begin to mature, God will reveal His calling while providing a way to walk in that calling. Look at this amazing promise from **Psalm 37:4-5**

> [4] Delight yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart.
> [5] Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring *it* to pass.

The heart that has learned to delight in its fellowship with God will receive the desires of the Spirit. Then God will call you from the desire that has grown in your heart, and then He brings good opportunities into your life.

Years ago a man said to me, "I'm afraid to give my life completely to God because He might send me to Africa. I don't want to go to Africa."

I said, "Then you are not called to Africa – at least not yet. If God was calling you to Africa, you would be on your knees begging God for a plane ticket to get there."

Look at the testimonies of great men and women of the faith who have done amazing things in ministry. Have you ever met an effective man or woman of faith who said, "I wish I didn't have to do this?" Of course not. Every call of God began with the desire to go. George Mueller did an amazing work with orphans. With no money, no property, no prior experience, and no one inviting

him into a ministry, he started and ran an orphanage that ministered to more than ten-thousand children in his life. It began with a desire. He felt a desire to help children.

His life of ministry didn't begin with any thought of orphans. He began with seeking the Lord and learning how to walk in faithfulness. His original plans never came to fruition. He prepared his life while expecting to go in one direction, but when the time came, God unveiled a new desire.

One day Mueller saw neglected orphans and said, "I want to help children like this." Then God gave him the desire of his heart. That desire did not begin with guilt, or someone telling him he was obligated. It began with George Mueller discovering his own life of faith, and his desires emerged from a heart at rest in the Spirit. This is why he took great joy in the ministry of his life.

Every great work of God in someone's life begins with a passion born out of their heart. Every great passion for ministry begins with a heart established in the Lord. As you learn to know God, you will grow in your knowledge and understanding. Your heart will begin to delight in the Lord, and one day an idea will be spoken into your heart. You'll cherish that idea, and it will begin to grow into a desire, which will lead you into prayer. Then the day will come that God will open the door, and your ministry will be the joy of your life, because it is centered upon your walk with Christ and the works He has prepared for you.

Or you'll have no idea what type of calling you have, and God will lay you on someone's heart. In a chance encounter, they will ask you to consider meeting a need for ministry. In an instant, your heart will explode with affirmation that this is what God has been preparing for you to do.

You can't be forgotten by God or passed by. At the same time, you often can't recognize God's call for you until you are first established upon Christ and rooted in grace. God may hide it from your eyes until the time has come when you are prepared to receive it.

What is important is that you realize that works are not your gift to God, but His gift to you. What's more is that true works establishes you deeper in fellowship with God. Works are a part of fellowship, and if the works are pushing your relationship with God out of your life, they are becoming a work of the flesh. God's reward is not based on the success of a ministry, but on your faithfulness in your walk with Him.

Discussion Questions

- When you see a need, does that become an obligation for you to meet?
- How do we know when something is a call of God for us?
- If God gives us a passion to serve, are others who don't share our passion in disobedience?
- Read 1 Corinthians 12:14-22. Why do some people have a deep care for the unborn, the homeless, missions, and other needs, and yet others don't feel that same passion?
- Does one member have the right to criticize others for not having the same calling?
- What causes a Christian to experience burnout?
- What is more important, succeeding in ministry, or resting in Christ?
- If ministry demands so much from us that we lose time with God, is this obedience? Why or why not?
- Review 1 Corinthians 3:11-15. What is the work that is burned up, and what is that which remains?
- When you feel called to serve, but don't see an opportunity, what should you do?
- If God has called, will He allow unfavorable circumstances to prevent you? Explain.
- Have you ever felt like opportunity is passing you by?
- Will God allow His purpose to be missed in the lives of those who seek Him? What if someone or something is preventing you?
- What biblical example gives you encouragement, and why?
- Does God call us into works through fear tactics, or by maturing our character to produce the right desires? Explain.
- What is the most important first step of ministry?

Established in Works

Our confidence grows when we understand we are entering into God's works, instead of falsely believing we must create our own ministry. This is why understanding predestination is so important. The traditional mindset is for us to forge the path and make things happen. Instead of being prayerfully led, our natural human tendency is to cast a prayer heavenward as we try to force our plans into God's will.

Your faith will be tested in works. God's testing has many purposes, but one thing is always present – testing puts our faith on trial. Are we standing in our own strength, or upon God's strength? Are we building our work, or entering God's? Are we standing by faith, or are we dependent upon the sight of our eyes? Most important, are we answering God's call, or the emotions spurred on by the excitement of a new idea? A new idea may be of God, or it may not. If we're not in tune with the Spirit, it becomes difficult to discern the difference between our emotions and the call of God.

Many years ago I served in a ministry that reached into three housing projects and a prison. During the four years I led this ministry, I had countless men come to me saying they felt called to preach. That ministry was a great opportunity to cultivate leaders, and I always gave people an opportunity to answer God's call.

I could tell within three weeks if someone was truly answering God's call. It takes about three weeks for the emotional energy to run dry, and then the source of someone's calling would be revealed. Someone who is called by God and is focusing on Him will continue to grow after the emotions fade. Those running on emotions, or are dependent on outward affirmation, will fade. When the work becomes work, it's hard to stay motivated if you aren't being Spirit led.

When working in a church plant a while back, someone came to me and said, "God told me to take on this role," referring to a leadership position. I wasn't directly involved in the decision to give them this role, but I was a little suspicious. Partly because the vast majority of the time someone says, "God told me," this claim turns out to be false. It is either false, or most people who say this decide to disobey God, for nearly all of them quit when the going became challenging. Within a couple of months, this person also resigned from leadership when they discovered more challenges than they expected.

A person walking by faith, who has properly grown into a disciple, will not be deterred by hardships. Let me qualify this by emphasizing that maturity is just

as important as the calling. If the church does not prepare someone spiritually, they often will not have the right perspective, and they won't endure when the road is hard enough to discourage those expecting easy success. Let's look at an example.

At the beginning of the church in Acts, John Mark was with the disciples. This isn't the same John or Mark that wrote the gospels. When someone's name was changed, it wasn't uncommon for the writer of that book of the Bible to let the reader know that John is now surnamed as Mark. Keep end mind, the book of Acts was a written account of Luke's eyewitness of the acts of the apostles. During the time this was written, some of those who read this would have known John before his name was changed.

Sometimes he is referenced as John, his original name. Other times he is referred to as John surnamed Mark. Later he is referred to as his new name, Mark. An example of this is Acts 13:5, where God had just called out Paul and Barnabas for the mission field. At this time, Paul was still called Saul, since his name had not yet been changed. When they left for ministry, John (Mark) was their assistant in the mission field.

Mark had a calling on his life, but not the maturity to endure. He was with the disciples praying for Peter when he was imprisoned,[30] and they saw the miraculous deliverance of Peter.

Before the calling of Paul and Barnabas to the mission field, they were active in ministry at Jerusalem. John Mark was with them and took part in the ministry there (see Acts 12:25). But difficulties arose when he went with them to the mission field. The Bible doesn't tell us what challenges they had to face, but something discouraged John Mark while sailing to a new mission field. The ship temporarily stopped in a port in Pamphylia. John left the team and headed back home to Jerusalem, and the mission team continued on to Antioch.

His departure is mentioned in Acts 13:13, but no explanation is given until John Mark tried to take part in a missionary trip some years later. Now let's look at **Acts 15:37-40**

> 37 Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called [surnamed] Mark.
>
> 38 But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work.
>
> 39 Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus;
>
> 40 but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God.

This is an example of someone who truly had a calling of God, but faltered because they were not yet prepared for ministry. An immature Mark decided to go home on his first missionary trip, but his failure did not change God's call. If anything, it revealed Mark's weakness and showed him that he needed to learn to grow in the faith.

Paul was focused and intensely mission-minded. He didn't want to have a team that wasn't prepared to endure whatever the mission field threw at them. Barnabas was an encourager. Most likely his name was changed to Barnabas, since that name means, "Son of encouragement."[31] Barnabas was gifted at nurturing people into their calling.

Remember, it was Barnabas that brought Saul (soon to be the Apostle Paul) to the disciples to launch his ministry.[32] Barnabas recognized God's calling for Saul. He also recognized God's calling for Mark. He was not about to give up on this young disciple, who had a heart for ministry, but needed to be matured in the faith. He was determined enough to encourage Mark's calling that he was willing to be left behind. So Paul went on his way, and Barnabas and Mark went to a new mission field.

From this point we lose sight of Barnabas. This is not because his ministry lacked. The only reason we don't see his working is because the writer of Acts, who was Luke, was on the mission team of Paul. We see the entire book of Acts written from Luke's viewpoint. We do see Barnabas mentioned by Paul in several of his letters/epistles, but they are now supporting each other's teams, though they didn't work directly together in the mission field.

Here is where the work of Barnabas is important. Mark, the failed disciple, became a valued missionary with a reputation for success. Look at the words of Paul in **2 Timothy 4:11**

> Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry.

We see Mark with Paul in Colossians 4:10 and Philemon 1:24. This should give us encouragement as well. Failure is never failure with God. If we have not yet learned to be led by the Spirit, and walk by faith and not by sight, it doesn't mean we are valueless. It means we need to grow in our faith.

It also tells us that the people around us shouldn't be judged too harshly when they show immaturity in their lives. If someone is not Spirit led, it is nearly impossible to have a true work of ministry. Yet, if someone is learning to

be Spirit led, we should be nurturing them and encouraging them. Not everyone learns to walk by faith on their first attempt.

Success in ministry is learning how to walk by faith. When God reveals His calling, there will be trials. There will be obstacles. When our faith is tried, one of two things will happen. The first thing that will happen is your flesh will rise up and try to take the reins. It may discourage you, and like Mark, you'll be tempted to take your ball and go home.

The flesh will also try to convince you that you need to do something to save God's work. The tempter may use pragmatism. Pragmatism is the idea that the end justifies the means. In the Old Testament, King Saul was a pragmatist. When God told King Saul to destroy everything in a city that was being judged, Saul destroyed everything that didn't look valuable. He saved the good sheep, cattle, and valuable items. He said he didn't destroy what God commanded to be destroyed so, "I could offer them as a sacrifice to the Lord God."[33]

God rejected King Saul's works because obedience was more important than sacrifice.[34] In the Christian life, compromise can always be justified by the flesh. A little dishonesty to help God along is pragmatism. After all, what we gain will be used for the Lord's work, right? Wrong. There may be times when a compromise may give the appearance of success, but God does not receive anything that does not originate from Himself, and God will never violate His word to make His purposes succeed.

I've seen many churches and ministries compromise their integrity or step outside of scripture to help God along, but this turns our ministry into our own works of the flesh. Even if we succeed in our goals, that is the wood, hay, and straw that can never be rewarded, for the flesh cannot inherit the Kingdom of God.[35]

What happens if we recognize we have compromised? We lay our works at God's feet and acknowledge that we have stepped out of faith. It's called repentance – or changing the mind. Repenting is taking our trust out of the flesh, and placing our confidence in the Spirit alone. Succeed or fail, it's all in God's hands. Consider **Psalm 127:1-2**

> 1 Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it;
> Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman stays awake in vain.
> 2 *It is* vain for you to rise up early, To sit up late, To eat the bread of
> sorrows; *For* so He gives His beloved sleep.

This also agrees with **Matthew 16:18**

> And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

Who builds the church? It's God's job to build the church. Unless God builds your ministry, all your labors are in vain. Rising up early, working long hours, enduring sorrows, and giving your life to your ministry is vain (or meaningless) unless it's God who does the work.

Many people have fallen into the trap of honoring their ministry over the Lord. When hardships challenge us, and we see our hard work slipping away, it's easy to step into the flesh and try to fix it ourselves.

A pastor once resigned from a church because he said God had called him to a new ministry. The resignation was unexpected, and the church struggled to recover. The pastor called the leadership of the church and said, "I want to come back to take over the church again." After a few questions, the pastor admitted that he didn't feel it was God's will, "But this is necessary in order to save the church," he said.

The leadership wisely declined his offer and struggled through the crisis with prayer and seeking the Lord.

As stated earlier, God will allow struggles and hardships to arise, for this is how our faith is tried and proven. The first temptation is to employ the flesh, but the second option is to endure, pray, and trust God's power. In the book of Job, we see one of the greatest testimonies of faith in the Bible when Job says, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him."

That is what walking by faith is all about. Though the ministry should fall apart, yet I will trust Him. Though my calling risks failure, yet will I trust Him. Though my circumstance may defeat me, yet will I trust Him.

It is not faith to jump into harm's way by our own choice. It is faith to stand firm when we realize we are, or will be, in harm's way if we remain obedient. God delights in snatching victory out of the jaws of defeat. Oftentimes, we can't truly stand by faith until we are helpless to avoid defeat.

Let's go back and meditate on the example of God's people who could not enter the promise because of unbelief. God put their faith to the test by sending spies into the land. The twelve spies found out that everything God promised was true. The land was filled with abundance, but while observing the promise, they also observed the obstacles. There were giants in the land. Men who towered over them. These mighty warriors carried large swords, spears, and great strength. The men testified, "We felt like grasshoppers when we looked at them."

God sent His people into the land for the purpose of seeing the obstacles

that revealed to them that their enemies were indeed greater than they. They were supposed to be too big to defeat. The purpose was to make the people look to God instead of their own resources. While the people bewailed the impossible odds, Caleb stood up and said, “These people are bread for us to consume, because God will fight our battles.”

Only two men believed God. Only two men entered the promise. They had to wander for forty years, and when they finally entered the land, Caleb, who was now eighty years old, said, “I want that mountain.” The same giants that had sent a million and a half people reeling in fear had strongholds in that mountain. It was where he felt called by God. The same giants that sent a nation away in fear, an eighty-year-old man was willing to take on by himself. In the end, he stood on the mountain, and no giant was left standing. But it wasn’t Caleb’s power. It was his faith in God’s power.

When you decide to follow God, you will encounter the giants. It’s a guarantee. When we enter into ministry, we must claim the promise of Matthew 16:18 we read earlier. Because Christ builds the church, we can go forward with the confidence that the gates of hell/hades cannot prevail against the church.

A gate is a defensive barrier that the world erects to prevent the church from accomplishing their mission. A church operating in their own power will batter the gates until they are exhausted and give up. When we begin moving forward, the enemy will send out his best adversaries to scare away the Christian or church. But as Caleb said, when our confidence is in God, they are bread for us. We not only trust God to overcome the attacks of the enemy, but then the success of our mission is also the work of God.

We can enter the work of our calling with absolute confidence ONLY when we are walking by faith in God’s power. Challenges, attacks, and obstacles are designed to show us that the power is not of us, so that we learn to trust in God alone.

This is the secret of successful ministry. We are called into God’s work, and everything that has eternal significance is of faith – trusting in God alone. Each person has their own calling. Your calling could be teaching, preaching, or mission work, or it could be a call to helps, administration, or interceding in prayer. Whether our work is big or small in man’s eyes, the work must be entered by faith. Every challenge must be met through faith and not human effort. Every work must be faced with a willingness to fail unless God rescues us or enters His work.

You can’t rescue God. You can’t help God along. You are the conduit God has chosen to be the dispensation of the Spirit into the world. The Spirit works through faith, for the man or woman of faith is abiding in the vine of Christ, and

Jesus has guaranteed that this person will bear fruit. That fruit is the work of the Spirit. Jesus also gave this guarantee in **John 15:4-5**

> 4 "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.
> 5 "I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

The Bible also says in **Romans 11:18**

> Do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, *remember that* you do not support the root, but the root *supports* you.

You don't uphold God's work of the ministry. You are plugged into the vine of Christ. He is the root, and the main branch from that root. Your role is to learn to abide in Him by faith, knowing first that unless you are abiding in Him, you can do nothing. That is, nothing of eternal value. You can produce wood, hay, and stubble, but you cannot produce anything that is eternal.

Abraham was under God's promise, but he became impatient. God had promised him that through his own body, God would give him a son that would be fruitful and create many nations. This son would also be the carrier of the promise that would one day lead into Christ.

When his age began to threaten the promise, Abraham took the work upon himself. He married a slave because he saw that Sarah was past child-bearing years, and he was almost too old as well. So he helped God along. His interference delayed the promise, but didn't nullify the promise.

He produced a work of the flesh, and instead of seeing good, the son of bondage would become the persecutor of the son of promise. God rejected Abraham's success. Abraham succeeded in fathering a child, but God did not acknowledge Abraham's works. When the promise came, God called the son of promise, which was Isaac, Abraham's only son.[36] Human effort could only produce works of the flesh, and works of the flesh can never be part of God's promise.

The same is true for you. Once you step outside of faith, you are producing works of the flesh, and the best you can hope for is wood, hay, and straw. Sometimes you produce the works of the flesh, and it will become an obstacle that fights against the promise. It's more important to rest in faith than it is to make ministry succeed.

Yet, as you learn to abide in Christ through faith, you will bear much fruit. God guarantees you will be fruitful. The problem with the church throughout

history is that it is great at producing a worldly organization and doing good deeds according to a temporal world, but every generation struggles to learn to live and work in the life of the Spirit. The apostles fought to help the church understand this, but few did. In every generation, the majority of the church operates in a Christianized work of the flesh, but a few learn the reality of God's Spirit, and the call to abide in Christ.

Those people are greatly used by God. Even the ones who operate within the mainstream religious view can have an impact on lives that influence generations to come, when they are in faith. Few are used this way, but everyone is invited into this calling. Everyone wants to find God's will, but only those who seek to learn of the Spirit can discover what it truly means to abide in Christ. And those receive the guarantee of fruit that will flourish here in this life, and will be rewarded when tried and pass the testing of God's fire.

Your work means nothing – unless your work is to enter into God's work. However, when you enter into the work God has prepared for you, the burden is light, and it becomes a work of joy and satisfaction. Every problem can become an expectation of God's promises, and you can cultivate a lifestyle of rolling your cares upon God's shoulders, where they belong. Then God will use you to do the impossible and accomplish the miraculous. Or as Moses said:

> "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today."[37]

Discussion Questions

- Why did the missionary, Mark, abandon the work that God had indeed called him to do?
- Did Mark's failure disqualify him for ministry?
- Review Acts 15:37-40 and 2 Timothy 4:11. What does this tell you about being spiritually equipped and matured for ministry?
- What does this tell you about how we should deal with someone who struggled or became burned out?
- Read Ephesians 4:11-12 When the church isn't focused on equipping the saints, how does this affect people's potential for ministry?
- If our actions contradict scripture, does our success in ministry (or works) please God? Explain your answer.
- Are we entering into God's works, or should we be presenting our works for God?
- Why does God allow us to be threatened by circumstances too great for us to overcome?
- In the Old Testament, why did God put Gideon, Joshua, David, Moses, Joseph, Daniel, and others, into positions where they could not win?
- Did these men succeed? If so, how?
- Read Romans 4:19-22. Why did God wait until Abraham was dead in his ability to produce a child before giving him the power to father Isaac?
- Why did God wait until Abraham's success was rejected before giving the promise?
- According to Romans 4, did God look at Abraham according to the time when he lacked faith, or when he entered into faith?
- Read John 15:4-5. What is the foundation every ministry (big or small) is founded upon?
-

Read Romans chapter 9 to prepare for the next chapter in this book.

Reexamining Difficult Scriptures

If you have not already done so, please Read Romans chapter 9. Since I'll be quoting a lot from Romans 11, I'm going to overview chapter 9. That chapter is where the Apostle Paul lays the groundwork for his concluding discussion on election in chapter 11. Without reading Romans 9, this chapter won't be very clear.

Again I want to challenge the way you look at the scriptures. It is tempting to draw theological lines, choose a side, and hurl accusations at those on the other side. In fact, we are often told that we must choose a position. In a discussion with a Calvinist, the statement was made, "You must choose whether you are going to take the Calvinist position or the Arminianist one."

He then explained that there is no neutral ground. You are either a Calvinist or an Arminianist. It reminded me of the warning of the Apostle Paul when he scolded the church for dividing and basing their identity on which men they followed. One said they were of Paul, others of Apollos, some of Peter (Cephas). In this era people say, "I am of Calvin," or "I am of Arminian." Or perhaps we divide under groups like Baptist, Methodist, Episcopal, or one of the other 33,000 denominations and sub-denominations.

By the way, Arminianism is often presented as the alternative to Calvinism because Arminius focused on freewill; however, this is not what it means to disagree with Calvinism. Arminius had a lot of unbiblical beliefs. No one is forced to believe in Calvin's rival simply because they don't adopt the beliefs of John Calvin. This would be like saying, "If you aren't a Methodist, then you have to become a Baptist." It's just another man-made label to draw battle lines.

True doctrine doesn't divide, but rather it unites. Those who erect labels are called 'carnally (fleshly) minded'.[38] Instead of looking at scriptures and trying to determine who is of what camp, we should be looking at scripture and asking, "How does this teach me the way of faith more clearly?" As we look at a few challenging scriptures, keep in mind the purpose of all scripture as explained in **2 Timothy 3:16-17**

> 16 All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,
>
> 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

If our study of scripture isn't drawing us into the completeness of Christ, or equipping us for ministry, we need to rethink our approach to scripture. Also, according to Ephesians 4, teaching and expounding upon the word equips the saints for ministry WHILE creating unity among believers as they are also taught to draw into Christ. Any doctrine that does not support the unity of the body is not a doctrine of Christ.

In the same sense, any doctrine that limits God is also on dangerous ground. Keep in mind that the Bible makes it clear that the human mind cannot comprehend the things of the Spirit, for they can only be spiritually discerned. [39]

The naturally minded person wants to be in control and have all the answers. The temptation is that when we can't comprehend something, we fill in the gaps with our assumptions, and then we treat our position as though it is the foundation of faith. Then if we repeat it enough, we may be able to persuade others that our assumptions are facts. We see this in denominationalism, science, politics, and any other endeavor of man.

Let's take the point of limited atonement. Is there a single scripture that limits God's love, power, or will to show His mercy? There are many that express God's ability to do anything He pleases, and the only time God does not bless is when we put limitations on God. Or as the Bible says in **Psalm 78:40-41**

> 40 How often they provoked Him in the wilderness, *And* grieved Him in the desert!
>
> 41 Yes, again and again they tempted God, And limited the Holy One of Israel.

They provoked God by limiting Him. In matters of salvation, do we limit God? The Bible says, "For God so loved the world," but man says, "No, God's love is limited to the elect." Or what about **1 John 2:1-2?**

> 1 My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.
>
> 2 And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and ***not for ours only*** but also for the whole world.

In case you are wondering, the word 'whole' at the end of that passage is the Greek word 'holos', which means 'whole or completely'. Not only the elect of the world, but all the world. This was also affirmed by the prophet, John the Baptist, when he said, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the

world."[40]

Yet because man can't comprehend doctrine that he isn't able to reconcile to his own understanding, he creates his own form of scripture and says, "No, God's atonement is limited." These limitations tempt God while claiming to uphold Him.

Instead of rewording scriptures and redefining the world to mean elect, placing limits on the love of God, and rejecting passages that clearly say that Jesus not only died for the elect, but also for the sin of the whole world, let's rethink how we approach scripture. Let's ask why God put these passages about election into His word, and what they teach us about the Christian life.

Having said this, let's examine the most challenging scriptures that are often misused to create the ideology of Calvinism. Romans 9 and Romans 11 can be troublesome passages – but only if you get bogged down in ideology instead of receiving understanding. Nearly all problem passages are resolved if we step back and look at context. What is the Bible trying to communicate? Seemingly complex questions can't be resolved without asking what was being communicated and why? Sometimes you have to step back and look at the entire thought surrounding that passage. It could be a handful of verses, a few chapters, or the entire book.

Romans 9 lays the groundwork for Romans 11. The main focus is Israel. Jacob was the grandson of Abraham. God changed his name to Israel, and his twelve sons would become the twelve tribes of Israel. Romans 9 begins the election discussion by saying, "The children of the flesh are not children of God, but the children of the promise are counted (or reckoned) as the seed."

In the world, the firstborn son was the seed, which was Jacob's brother Esau. Yet before either were born, God went against the fleshly way of inheritance, and instead determined that the heir would be the child of the promise, not of the flesh. Jacob, the younger, was declared to be the heir by God before either of them were born. It was not based on the good they would do, or the evil they would do. In fact, Jacob was the more sinful of the brothers until God blessed him with a new identity under the promise of Abraham.

Keep in mind that before we can understand the details of Romans 9, we have to know what the bigger topic is. We have to step back and take an aerial view. The main topic is Israel missing the promise, but the Gentiles (or non-Jews) received it. Why was Israel outside the promise of righteousness by grace, but the Gentiles were in it? Israel worked for it and they should have been the heirs, since they were the firstborn, but the promise wasn't going to those whom we think should have received it. It was by promise, not by law. Not by human

effort.

The Bible then uses Pharaoh as a type and shadow. He was raised up as a picture of the power of the world, but God chose the weakness of the children of bondage to show His own power. God raised up Pharaoh as a vessel of destruction in order to show that deliverance is of God by promise, and not of man or by human effort.

Then Romans 9:18 says, “Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.”

So is this saying that God hardens every person except a select few? Is it saying that God desires everyone to die in their sins except a few chosen people? No. The Apostle Paul is building up to a shift from Israel, a people of God according to the flesh, to the Gentiles, a people of God according to the promise.

Romans 10 then explains how people are saved – not through the law, but through faith in Christ. Whoever believes in their heart and confesses with their mouth the Lord Jesus will be saved. Romans 10 is the transition from chapter 9 to chapter 11. It is explaining why the Gentiles are saved, and those who expected to be God’s people were not. It is by grace and not by works or the law.

This is where God then says, “I was found by those who did not seek Me; I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me.” And those whom God reached out to through faith, which was Israel, were disobedient and contrary. They wanted to remain in a religious system that tried to glorify the flesh.

At this point, I want to really dig into Romans 11. This is where the purpose of election is spelled out. Up until now, the book of Romans has been laying the groundwork. Now we are going to see how this applies to the life of faith. We’re staying mindful of the broader context, while we dig out the heart of this chapter. Start with **Romans 11:5-8**

> 5 Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.
>
> 6 And if by grace, then *it is* no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if *it is* of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.
>
> 7 What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded.
>
> 8 Just as it is written: "God has given them a spirit of stupor, Eyes that they should not see And ears that they should not hear, To this very day."

Romans 11:6 is the thesis statement of this entire topic. Israel is steeped in the mindset of the law, and trying to use their religious system to elevate

themselves up to God. This is why Romans spends a lot of time explaining how the law is not a merit system, but a condemnation system.

By the time we arrive at chapter 11, we have already been told that by the deeds of the law, no flesh will be justified in God's sight.[41] And the purpose of the law was to silence every person's claim of righteousness and to make the whole world guilty before God.[42] Then the primary reason for the law is explained, that it might be the tutor that leads us to Christ, and as we just read, everyone who believes and confesses Christ will be saved.

Now that we are at the heart of the discussion, the Bible begins explaining that salvation has to either be by grace, or by works. If we are pursuing God through works, we can't claim to be under grace. If we are in grace, then we cannot be approaching God through works.

Israel is pursuing God through works, which is the same as pursuing God through the flesh. Because they are of the flesh, they cannot be children of promise. The Gentiles (which is anyone that isn't a Jew) do not have the law, and therefore have no barrier between themselves and God. When they hear Christ preached and the call of faith, they are in a better position to answer the call, for they are not trusting in human effort under the works of the law.

As Jesus said, many are called, but few are chosen. The call goes out to all the world, but that call can only be answered by grace through faith. If anyone tries to apply God's call through the works of the flesh, they will not be chosen, or given access into the promise. They cannot enter into the life of the Spirit.

Any who answer by faith are elected. The word 'elect' is the Greek word 'ekloge', which means: the act of picking out, or choosing. It's the same word Jesus uses when He says, "You are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world."

When the call of faith goes out, those who hear and answer through faith are chosen, or picked out of the world. They are set apart for God, for they believed God's promise of salvation through grace, and they did not try to supplement God's call with human effort. Those who try to substitute any part of grace with human effort are blinded. The blind cannot see the path of life, for until God opens our eyes, we cannot choose to enter into salvation, for the way is inaccessible to the flesh.

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me."[43] He also said that anyone who tries to enter any other way than through Christ are thieves and robbers,[44] and these cannot enter into the

promise. So unless we are entering through Christ and only Christ, we cannot know the way, and the life of the Spirit is unattainable.

In the same sense, those who were trying to approach God through the law were blinded, but the elect, those who were picked out of the world by God, do see. They only see because they answered the call of grace through faith, without anything that they could twist into a merit system, or an act of the flesh.

Yet even those God blinded in Israel have this promise, **Romans 11:23**

> And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.

Even those whom God blinded will be grafted into Christ, which is the life of the Spirit, if they receive it by faith. Human effort is unbelief. Works of the law are acts of unbelief. Even the Christian, if he or she turns back to the law, are entering into blindness. The Bible says that that blindness will remain until they turn to Christ.[45]

If you talk to someone who trusts in the law, this is clearly seen. They scoff at the idea that grace is enough. They will say things like, “We have to do our part,” or “God helps those who help themselves.”

What they are really saying is that grace is not enough. God’s power can’t be that complete. We can’t trust in God to do it all. We can’t just rest. We have to do something that produces salvation or partial salvation from the human side. God rejects this, and those who can’t believe in the good news of Christ will be blinded from the call of election.

This truth is reiterated by Jesus in **Luke 19:41-42**

> 41 Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it,
>
> 42 saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things *that make* for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.

Notice that Jesus lamented because Israel was not receiving the promise that was meant for her. This day was meant for their peace. God’s purpose was not to blind Israel, but to invite them into His peace through grace. The promise was theirs. This was the day when Jesus presented Himself to Israel as the Son of David, which was the promised Messiah. Yet because they could not believe, God hid the promise from their eyes. He blinded Israel because they trusted in their own righteousness by human effort, instead of righteousness by faith in Christ.

There is yet another interesting statement in our passage from Romans 11. The argument of Calvinism is that only the elect can escape judgment. God does

not love those who are not elected. And by elected, the Calvinist mindset is that God decided who He would love beforehand, and chose a limited number of people. The rest will burn in hell, and there is nothing they or anyone else can do about it. God chose to exclude them from heaven, and the only other alternative is hell.

My hope is that this chapter has given you a better perspective. But if what I've said isn't convincing, let's continue in chapter 11. Look at **Romans 11:32-33**

> 32 For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.
>
> 33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable *are* His judgments and His ways past finding out!

Let me ask you a hard question about these verses. How is it an act of mercy for God to commit someone to disobedience? God said that He blinded all so that He could have mercy on all. How does blinding all of Israel an act of mercy? How does verse 32 fit into Calvinism? Keep in mind that Calvinism puts a lot of emphasis on Romans 9:15, which says that God has the right to show mercy on whomever He will have mercy. The rest are hardened. This is mistakenly interpreted as the elect only receiving mercy, and those who are hardened and blinded are permanently outside of mercy.

Romans 11:32 introduces more questions than answers. It's outside of the scope of this book to explore how blindness opens the door to mercy, but I want to point this out for a reason. Verse 33 is the reason.

> Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable *are* His judgments and His ways past finding out!

In other words, these things are outside of human comprehension. They are intended to show man that he does not have all the answers. Yet, the fleshly mind demands to be in control, and the carnal man will create a supplemental doctrine so he can reduce God's unsearchable ways into something that fits into a tidy theological box.

Deuteronomy 29:29 gives us a clue to live by. The secret things belong to God alone. But the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children. What is revealed is given to us so we can understand this walk of faith, but God is not going to tell you how He will have mercy on all. He is not going to tell mankind the secret things He has reserved for Himself. We can form our own theologies, but they will be wrong.

So the real question to ask is this, how does the doctrine of election and predestination apply to our lives? How do these things make us complete and thoroughly equipped for every good work? Why does God teach election?

Let's go back to the ten-thousand foot view. What is the overarching theme or themes in these chapters?

First, the message is that blindness comes on those who try to approach God through the law or human effort. It is either by grace through faith, or it is by the works of the law. According to God's own word, these two cannot be mixed.

Second, everything comes through grace – God's favor as a gift of love. We can rest because we know that God has already foreordained our path and prepared our works. We can rest as we walk in God's works, which He reveals through our lives when we are grounded in faith.

Third, once we enter into God's works by faith, we are in the eternal. God chose us in Christ before the world was founded. The eternal is not visible in the flesh. The eternal is not bound by time. When you enter into the life of faith, you have entered into God's eternal works. Since we are confined to a world bound by time, we can only experience God's works within our limited view, but it doesn't change the fact that you are entering into what has already been finished.

Many are called. God doesn't call people to enter His life if He doesn't intend to receive them. It's a blasphemous statement to say that God calls, but He will not allow the non-elect to answer. Indeed, Jesus said, "No one comes to Me unless the Father draws him," but that does not mean that the call of faith is a hoax to the unelected.

God calls us out of the flesh, and any who will receive will find. The call cannot be answered through the flesh. We are called out of the flesh and out of the world. Once someone believes the gospel (that Christ has finished all things and given His works to us as His free gift of grace), then they are invited into the eternal. The rest are blinded. This applies to anyone who does not believe God's call to enter life by faith alone.

The work for each person's salvation was finished before the world was founded. See 1 Peter 1:20, Revelation 13:8, Hebrews 4:2-3, and Ephesians 1:4. Just as the gospel was preached to God's people in Hebrews 4, but they could not enter it because of their unbelief, even though the works were finished before the foundation of the world, the same is true for each person. Those called, but who remain in unbelief, cannot enter into God's election, even though He finished the work of their salvation before the foundation of the world. When you understand this truth, this passage makes more sense, **1 Timothy 4:10-11**

10 For to this *end* we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is *the* Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.

11 These things command and teach.

Hopefully, now you know why the Bible makes a distinction between all men and those who believe. Jesus is the Savior of all men. And yes, all means all, the elect and those who remain outside of faith. This is especially true for those who believe, for they have entered into Christ's completed work. Those who don't believe cannot enter into the promise God has set aside for them to receive. Yet if they don't remain in unbelief, they also can be grafted into the promise of Christ.

This also applies to your daily life. You were predestined to conform to the image of Christ. Your works were created beforehand that you should walk in them. Everything is already yours, and the works are finished and waiting to be revealed (or made manifest) in your life. When you believe, you enter into His rest, and the works are revealed in your life. When you believe, you enter into the completed work of Christ, and your life in this world begins to transform into the image of Christ.

The problem is that we don't believe enough. It's hard to believe in what we cannot see in the world when our only vision is coming through the flesh. Yet as we learn to walk by faith, God opens our eyes to see what we previously could not perceive. This is why the Bible says, "The just shall live by faith," and "We walk by faith and not by sight," referring to fleshly sight.

This is why the teaching of predestination is so important. If taught incorrectly, it creates division and confusion. Yet, if we teach it by rightly dividing the word of truth, it gives us insights into our life of faith, and it reinforces our confidence in God. If my life is predestined, then what do I fear? When hardships come up, I can have peace that goes beyond human understanding, and I can rest. In the flesh, stress is the result of uncertainty. In the Spirit, God is our certainty, and we walk by faith, knowing God will reveal His finished work in a way that will bear fruit in our earthly life, which is bound by time.

Rest. Have confidence in God's plan for your life, and walk by faith. Let's end this book with the assurance of **Psalm 139:**

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.

5 You have hedged me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me.

6 *Such* knowledge *is* too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot *attain* it.

…

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.

17 How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the
sum of them!

18 *If* I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand;

God fully comprehends your path and He guides your way. Do you hear Him? Does your spirit perceive His prompting? It is a still small voice that can only be heard by the listening heart of faith. The Lord has planned your path and all your days. Before you were born, God planned your life. His plan is perfect, but often missed. Those who can't believe cannot discover this amazing life of the Spirit.

Take confidence in the final verses you just read. How precious is God's thoughts of you. How great is the sum of them. God put so much thought and planning into your life, that the sand of the seas are less than the planning God accomplished for you.

Don't let disbelief rob you of these plans. Don't let life's hindrances spook you away from trusting God and walking by faith. Don't let the words of the enemy discourage you. Look unto the Author and Finisher of your faith, and then you will have endurance over this life. Rest in confidence. Your life is predestined for victory!

Discussion Questions

- Review 1 John 2:1-2. What does God mean by Jesus not only being our savior, but also the Savior of the whole world?
- Romans dedicates three chapters to the explanation of election. If we only examine 4 or 5 verses, will we get a correct understanding of election?
- Read Romans 9:8. What does the Bible mean when it says the children of flesh are not children of God, but it is the children of promise that are accounted as God's seed/children?
- Read Romans 3:20, Galatians 2:16, and Galatians 6:13. Why does the Bible say that God will not allow the flesh to be justified through the law?
- According to Galatians 2:16, people focus on the law so they can glory in the flesh. If someone tries to enter God's promise through the law, is this of faith, or against faith?
- Will God reveal His Spirit to that person, or will He blind them to the promise?
- Read John 12:37-40. Which came first, disbelief or blindness?
- If these people who heard Christ already didn't believe in Him, what was God blinding them from seeing?
- Review Romans 11:5-8. Is the main focus on election, or works vs. grace?
- Verse 8 says that God gave them the spirit of stupor (which is blindness to salvation). Now review John 12:37-40, Luke 19:41-42, and Romans 11:8. What is common in all these passages as to the cause of blindness?
- Read Romans 11:23. What removes the blindness of those who were not elected?
- If someone, whom the Bible just said is not the elect, departs from unbelief, will their eyes be opened so they can enter into Christ?
- Does this make election a fatalistic declaration that someone who isn't the elect can never be saved?
- So then, what is the point of the doctrine of election?
- In what ways has your understanding of election and predestination grown during this study?
- Does predestination strengthen your confidence in God's purpose for your life? If so, how?

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[1] Hebrews 11:6

[2] Matthew 25:14-29

[3] Matthew 7:23

[4] John 3:6

[5] Romans 8:10

[6] Romans 7:18

[7] Romans 8:3-4

[8] Galatians 2:11-14
[9] 2 Corinthians 11:3
[10] Romans 5:5
[11] 1 Corinthians 10:2
[12] John 1:14, John 6:31-36
[13] 1 Corinthians 15:50
[14] Romans 8:8
[15] Romans 5:5
[16] Romans 14:23
[17] Jeremiah 17:5-8
[18] Romans 11:33, Ephesians 3:8
[19] 2 Corinthians 5:10
[20] 1 Corinthians 15:50
[21] John 3:6
[22] 1 Timothy 3:6
[23] Luke 24:49
[24] Acts 2
[25] Acts 22
[26] Acts 9:27
[27] Acts 13:2
[28] Genesis 43:31-32
[29] 1 Peter 5:6
[30] Acts 12:12
[31] Acts 4:36
[32] Acts 9:27
[33] 1 Samuel 15:14-15
[34] 1 Samuel 15:22
[35] 1 Corinthians 15:50, John 3:6
[36] Genesis 22:2
[37] Exodus 14:13

[38] 1 Corinthians 3
[39] 1 Corinthians 2:14
[40] John 1:29
[41] Romans 3:20
[42] Romans 3:19
[43] John 14:6
[44] John 10:1, John 10:9
[45] 2 Corinthians 3:14-16