

# ABSOLUTE ASSURANCE IN JESUS CHRIST

BY: CHARLES SLAGLE – Copyright 1998

## FOUR VIEWS OF THE SALVATION OF OUR GOD

If you have been devastated by spiritual abuse or fear of God's hopeless abandonment, this book will change your life.

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## INTRODUCTION

How wonderful it is to be free! To feel free and to know God loves me. To experience ever increasing freedom from sin's cruel grasp while resting secure in the love of our Lord.

For many years, as a Christian, I was unable to rest in God's love while trusting Him to bring me into wholeness. Perhaps you struggle now with the same restless panic that held me captive. Perhaps you wonder, "How can I rest in God's love—in my wretched state? Yes, God is love. But the Bible also says He hates sin, and it warns us of God's eternal wrath and judgment."

That was my state of mind for decades. It finally resulted in my hospitalization and living for a year without sanity, and for many months being "sustained" by prescription anti-depressants.

I was brought up in a legalistic Christianity that taught, "Jesus loves you, but watch out! No sin will enter Heaven, and He may return or let you die on one of your bad days. . ." Sheesh! As a young adult, it suddenly dawned on me: that concept of the gospel had to be wrong, for it was anything but "good news."

So I found friendship with Christians who understood the gospel differently. Their version (and, for years, my own) was, "Jesus loves you, and if you'll receive Him as Lord and Savior before it's too late He will save you. And once you're saved, you will always be saved. And once you are truly saved you will want to obey and serve Him, though sinless perfection will never happen in this lifetime."

Problem was, so much wreckage still remained in my life, my reflexes, thoughts, mind and emotions! I could see what appeared to be evidence of God's Spirit working in my life. I even received, on occasions, what seemed to be positive proof God was affirming and loving me—actually speaking inside my heart.

On the other hand, I saw what appeared to be proof positive—repeatedly—that I had never been truly saved. (Uh oh, there's the catch! Right?) There were times when nothing inside me wanted to obey the Lord—not even to try! Not even a little! I found myself filled with rage, lust and rebellion. Seasons came (and, thankfully, went) in which I didn't want to think about God or Jesus—let alone hear or speak about spiritual issues.

Then . . . I would "wake up" again, filled with fear, shame, self-loathing and remorse. Had I ever truly been saved? How could I have been, in light of all the havoc I was causing? Had all my, so called, "God-encounters" been only demonic delusions? Perhaps I was a counterfeit, an evil and deluded dreamer who only thought he was one of the "elect." For, given the parameters of my Scriptural understanding—Biblically speaking—there was no way to know. "God" was an agonizing blur in my tormented brain. I found that I loved Him, yet also hated Him and recoiled in horror from Him. Can you relate?

If you can, this message is for you. What follows may at first seem "dry" and appear to be only another boring theological presentation. But do us both a favor and

Hang In There

With Me!

Okay? . . .

I believe you'll be more than pleasantly surprised (and perhaps, bursting into tears of joy!) as you journey with me to discover afresh the love of our Wonderful God.

Lamentations 3:31-33 For the Lord will not cast off forever. Though He causes grief, Yet He will show compassion According to the multitude of His mercies. For He does not afflict willingly, Nor grieve the children of men. (NIV)

For men are not cast off by the Lord forever. Though He brings grief, He will show compassion, So great is His unfailing love. For He does not willingly bring affliction Or grief to the children of men.

FOUR VIEWS OF THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS CHRIST

## **I. THE GOOD NEWS OF ONCE SAVED, HARDLY SAVED (ARMINIANISM)**

Christ bought us all back from Satan and sin by His blood shed on Calvary. However, Christ will NEVER get all He paid for because:

- a. God's commitment to redeem us depends on the strength and steadfastness of our commitment to follow Christ in consistent obedience. For faith without works is dead.
- b. Our heavenly Father "desires" all to be saved. Yet He also has known from eternity past that His desire is only futile sentimentality, because it will not ever be fulfilled. For narrow is the way that leads to life and few (ever will) find it.
- c. God's will being accomplished depends on the faithfulness of our human (sin-weakened) wills to help Him succeed in saving us.
- d. In theory Christ is the Savior of all men, and yet many people will be eternally damned. So as it turns out, Christ is actually the Savior of those whom He will never save! And worse, those whom He knows He will never save.

## **II. THE GOOD NEWS OF ONCE SAVED, ALWAYS SAVED (CALVINISM)**

Christ's blood has bought only an elect few that God has chosen to be saved. The Lord is furious with the human race because we all sinned while in the loins of Adam. Furthermore, He's furious because all of us subsequently born with sin-impaired natures have continued to violate His holy law. Therefore He owes none of us the debt of love, for it is very kind of Him to choose to save anyone. So, in short:

- a. Christ will inherit all He has bought with His blood, but the majority of mankind he will (rightly and justly!) send to endless torment.
- b. Since a certain few have been chosen for salvation, once they are (truly) saved they can never be lost, for a predestined person cannot logically be unpredestined.
- c. For it is not of him who wills or runs, but of God who shows mercy. For many are called, but few are (ever) chosen.
- d. In theory, God "loves" everyone—but He values only a few sufficiently to save them. That is because His absolute holiness and hatred of sin is a quality altogether different—and more important—than His love. This is a great mystery summed up in the phrase, "God is Sovereign."

The above have been the prevailing views for most of the church since Augustine and Pelagius set them into motion in the fourth and fifth centuries.<sup>1</sup> Nowadays some Christians seek to adhere to a muddled mix between these views—Calv-Arminianism?

### **III. THE GOOD NEWS OF ONCE SAVED, NEARLY ALWAYS SAVED (CALV-ARMINIANISM)**

This muddled mixture between Calvinism and Arminianism takes so many forms that books could be (and have been!) written to describe them. This understanding of the gospel is the kindest, yet most inherently self-contradictory, of views generally held. Calv-Arminianism takes on the more attractive (and less despair-inducing) features of each system and tries to blend them together. The most popular form of Calv-Arminianism assures us:

- a. that Christ probably died for all mankind.
- b. that the Lord is probably no longer angry with the human race.
- c. that we are saved only by God's grace. Yet in the end our ultimate salvation probably depends, to some significant degree, on the success of our own effort (but to what degree is uncertain).
- d. that once we're (truly) saved we can never be lost. Or at least it's probably next to impossible to be lost—according to whoever happens to be trying to clarify his or her own doctrinal persuasion.
- e. it is probable that only the most flagrantly wicked will perish forever. And among Calv-Arminians as a whole, the subject of the fate of those who have never heard of Christ is studiously avoided.

What has given rise to all the above views which turn the Good News of Christ into bad news? NONSENSE! It is a cruel dogma, found nowhere in the original language of Scripture.

It is a lie. It is the lie that God is Infinite Holy Love, yet in the end, He will consign most or some of His creation to agony forever. In short, it's the illogical idea that God is love—and yet—He creates people whom He plans in advance (already knowing their unwise future choices) to get rid of forever! This is the lie of hate that calls itself "love." The lie of "forgiveness" that practices eternal vindictiveness when the story is over. The lie that All-

Powerful Love is either biased or will eventually fail. This is the lie that lurks within the root of all these systems. So, is it any wonder that—despite all heroic efforts of their advocates—these gospel presentations miserably fall short of landing on our ears as "good news"?

Now let's be merciful. If you sincerely believed "God is love/God spawns eternally doomed creatures" was an essential truth taught in the Bible, would you be able to come up with a better message than all the aforementioned?

I couldn't! For thirty desperate years I tried—diligently—to present the Good News of Christ as "Glad Tidings", while trying to preserve the toxic lie mentioned above at the same time. And I did it sincerely. I honestly thought the double-talk "God is love, but" was a foundational truth of the gospel. To my mind, it was a vital point of Scriptural "orthodoxy", sound doctrine! Even so, I did everything in my power to believe and present this contradictory message as "unconditional love."

Is it any wonder I finally fizzled out and became a blithering basket case—and actually was hospitalized? It only takes a little yeast to leaven the whole loaf. So in the end, even my "Calv-Arminian gospel-understanding" rendered it impossible for me to completely trust or love the Lord. I could affirm and voice trust and love for the Lord. Problem was, I couldn't actually do them. How could I? The Good News (!?) message programmed into my poor brain kept telling me that God could not be trusted. For in the end He would lose a good number of people—forever. Thus, I felt compelled to trust in my own strength so as to make my "calling and election sure," which to my mind meant my ultimate salvation. This made it impossible for my heart to rest. Though the Lord had blessed me, often in wonderful ways, deepest serenity evaded me from age twelve until age forty-nine! I did not know how to trust My heavenly Father and—at the same time—believe all His Word, as I then understood it, and to meditate on it. All I could do was try not to think much about those "dark passages" that made me feel afraid. Yet they still thrived beneath the surface of my conscious mind, and often came out in my dreams.

So the deep inner wounds that caused my obsessions and compulsions could never heal. An unconscious undercurrent of terror only intensified my bondage. However, when—through Scripture—the Lord at last assured my heart of His unfailing love, inner transformation rapidly began to happen.

I then could say with the psalmist David, "Lord, I have hoped in Your judgments." I began to rejoice in all of God's words, for His statutes are indeed right, rejoicing the heart! (Ps. 19:8; 119:43). Finally it dawned on me that any true word from God will pass the meditation test. As we mull it over in our minds, a true word from God will impart life and hope. It will build, not sabotage, our trust in the Lord and His unfailing love.

Try meditating on the "truth" (so called by some) that God will abandon any person He has created to misery forever, and see what happens to your trust! Christ tells us that His words are spirit and life. So shouldn't we be able to meditate on all His words and increase our faith? Including all He has to say about judgment and everlasting fire!

That is, provided we do so with a right understanding. Does your present understanding about judgment and hell cause your trust and love toward God to increase as you meditate on it? If not, why would His Spirit communicate a "truth" that only weakens our trust when we think deeply about it? If God's whole agenda is to win our deepest trust, why would He tell us He has created people in the certain and calculated knowledge that they would suffer forever?

He would not, and He has not! His heart and His plan for all His creation is better—by far—than that. Now I'll share the fourth view of the gospel which every human heart knows is the true one. The view that reveals the heart of a Heavenly Father all of us can count on.

#### **IV. THE GOOD NEWS OF CHRIST'S TOTAL VICTORY**

Christ bought us ALL back by His own blood shed at Calvary. He came to earth for this purpose: to destroy the devil's deceptive works and to save that which was lost. Eventually our Lord will fulfill His sure purpose and inherit ALL He paid for. That is because:

a. God is Holy Love, and love means commitment.

b. God's commitment is stronger than our weaknesses, our foolish choices, our stubbornness, our SIN. For if God's commitment to us is only as strong as our commitment to Him (perish the thought!) that means He is no better than we are.<sup>2</sup>

c. God's fires of purifying judgment are unrelenting, though not of endless duration (contrary to tradition but not Scripture). So He persistently and patiently corrects us—until—He succeeds in redeeming us. For our heavenly Father's judgments arise, not from vindictive rage, but from His loving mercy. He loves us too much to let sin and death destroy His dreams for us. Christ's death on the cross demonstrates the depth of God's love as well as His commitment to destroy sin and death. It shows us that, to His own hurt and agony, the Lord is absorbing all the death-dealing abuse of our sin and will "swallow it up" into His life as He saves us.

Acts 3:21 tells us God has promised through all His holy prophets that He will restore ALL things. Furthermore, both Old Testament and New Testament writers and prophets tell us: that all earth's families will be blessed through Christ, Abraham's "Seed" (Gen. 12:3, Acts 3:23, Rom. 4:13). Furthermore, according to Galatians 3:8, this promised blessing means that all earth's families will be turned from their sins; justified and set right with God;

that success or failure at keeping God's law has no bearing on whether or not this promised blessing will finally be bestowed, for the law cannot cancel this covenant (Gal. 3:17-21);

that all earth's families, therefore, will remember the Lord, turn to Him and worship Him (Ps. 22:27-28);

that all flesh will bless His name forever and sing His praise (Ps. 145:21; 66:3-4, Rev. 5:13);

that His tender mercies are over all His works, and all His works shall praise Him (Ps. 145:9-10);

that God's anger is momentary but His mercy is everlasting (Ps. 103:8-10; 136, Micah 7:18);

that mankind shall be blessed in Christ (Ps. 72:17);

that every knee will bow and every tongue will confess and give thanks to the Lord. Furthermore, they will swear to Him and oath of allegiance and give thanks that in Him they have righteousness and strength. And this will bring glory to our loving Father. (Isa. 45:21-24, NKJV, also see the Amplified Version; Phil. 2:9-11);<sup>3</sup>

that our Tender Father of all Compassion is not pleased or glorified with mere lip service. (Matt. 15:8, 2 Cor. 1:3-4);

that no one can confess Jesus as Lord apart from the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3);

that God's will and purpose must come to pass and no one can restrain Him. For He works ALL things according to His will (Ps. 33:10-11, Prov. 19:21; 21:1, Ecc. 3:1,17, Dan. 4:34-35, Eph. 1:11);

that His will and good pleasure and purpose is to unite ALL creation in Christ (Eph. 1:10; 2:9-10);

that His Word will not return void but accomplish His desire, pleasure and purpose (Isa. 45:23; 46:11; 55:11);

that through His death on the cross, Christ will draw all mankind to Himself. For Gabriel announced that Christ our Savior shall be glad tidings of great joy to all people (John 12:32-33, Luke 2:10);

that BECAUSE God created all things for His pleasure, He is worthy of all power, honor and praise (Rev. 4:11);

that for this reason Christ descended into Hades and proclaimed the gospel to the dead, specifically Noah's disobedient generation—so they could be judged in order that they might live by God's Spirit (1 Pet. 3:19; 4:6);

that Christ, our Good Shepherd, who preached the gospel to Noah's generation, is the same yesterday, today and forever. Thus, we can rest assured that He will fulfill the redemptive plans of God's heart for ALL generations (Ps. 33:11, Heb. 13:8);

that God has given Christ ALL things (Matt. 11:27; 28:18, Luke 10:22, John 3:35; 13:3; 17:2, Eph. 1:22, Heb. 1:2; 2:7-8, 1 Pet. 3:22);

that Christ will accomplish His Father's will and lose nothing of all He's been given (John 6:37,39; 17:2, Heb. 10:7,9);

that the Lord has spoken it and He will accomplish it, that He has purposed it and will also perform it (Isa. 46:11);

that in the last days God will pour out His Spirit on ALL mankind, and whoever calls on the Lord's name will be restored and saved. And as has been shown, all will not only call on the Lord's name, but all will swear allegiance to Him and offer Him thanks (Joel 2:28-32, Acts 2:16-38);

that ALL—whether righteous or unrighteous—will be resurrected. And according to Paul, this provides good reason to hope in God (Acts 24:15-16);

that just as Adam's trespass brought condemnation on all people—so also—Christ's act of righteousness was justification that brings life to all people. For as through Adam's disobedience "the many" were made sinners—so also—through Christ's obedience "the many" will be made righteous (Romans 5:18-19);

that therefore where sin abounded, grace abounded much more! (Romans 5:20);

that the whole family<sup>4</sup> in heaven and earth is named after our Father. For we are all His offspring. Thus He is above all, through all, and in all (Amos 9:12, Acts 17:28, Eph. 3:14-15; 4:6);

that Christ has ascended to fill all things (Eph. 4:10);

that God's mercy triumphs over judgment. For it is His tender mercy that governs His judgment (Ps. 62:12, Jam. 2:13);

that the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and His Messiah (Dan. 7:14,27, Rev. 11:15);

that the Lord has made bare His holy arm (strength!) and all shall see His Salvation (Isa. 52:10);

that righteousness and praise shall spring forth before all nations, and everlasting joy shall come to them (See all of Isaiah 61);

that He Who is Sovereign Holy Love will have mercy on those who were not His people. He will say to them, "You are My people!" And they shall say, "You are my God!" (Hosea 2:23);

that Sovereign Holy Love will raise from death those who were not His people. He will thus be the Plague and Destruction of death—and Hades (Hos. 13:13-14);

that Paul therefore could joyfully shout, "O death, where is your sting? O Hades where is your victory?" (1 Cor. 15:54-55);

that our Good Shepherd will feed His flock, the sheep of His pasture. He shall be Peace and His name shall be great worldwide (Mic. 5:4);

that the Lord will rise up in plunder. He will pour out the fire of His jealousy. Then He will restore to the peoples a pure language, so they all may call on Him in unity (Zeph. 3:8-9);

that all things came through Christ and are made for Christ and will finally be subject to Him. For He has tasted death for everyone. (1 Cor. 15:25-28, Col. 1:16, Heb. 1:2; 2:8-10, Rev. 4:11);

that God is reconciling ALL to Himself through Christ's cross (John 12:32, 2 Cor. 5:18-19, Col. 1:15-20);

that Authentic Love reveals itself, not only in words, but in deeds done in integrity, and God's ever-active love never ceases or fails (1 John 3:18, 1 Cor. 13:8);

that Christ will be satisfied that God's will and pleasure has prospered in His hand through His death on the cross (Isa. 53:10-11);

that God's will is that none should perish but that ALL should come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9);

that God is the Savior of ALL people, especially (not exclusively) of those who believe. These things prescribe and teach (1 Tim. 4:9-11);

that through His love-sacrifice Christ, the Lamb of God, has put away sin—the sin of the world (John 1:29, Heb. 9:26, 2 Cor. 5:19);

that all is from and through God and must return to Him, for God desires all to be saved, and this will be confirmed in due time. Again we recall how God's Word will not return void but will accomplish all He desires. (Isa. 55:11, Romans 11:32-36, Heb. 2:10, 1 Tim. 2:4-6, Rev. 4:11);

that Christ, through His church, will eventually fill all things so God will become all—not merely in some—but in ALL (1 Cor. 12:6, 15:28, Eph. 1:22; 4:10, Col. 3:11);

that Christ will reign over the nations and they shall hope in Him (Isa. 11:1-11, Romans 15:12);

that the earth is the Lord's in all its fullness and those who dwell therein. So Christ will inherit the nations and all He has made will worship Him (Ps. 1:8; 24:1; 83:8; 86:9, 1 Cor. 3:11; 12:6, Rev. 5:13);

that the Father has given His Son dominion over the works of His hands (all of which shall praise Him). And He has put all things under His feet (Ps. 8:6; 145:9-10);

that our Lord's Word that He will fulfill His purpose stands firm and is forever settled in Heaven. His faithfulness endures to all generations (Ps. 119:89-90);

that our Father does whatever pleases Him (fulfills His pleasure) in Heaven and earth and all the deep places (Ps. 135:5-6, Eph. 1:9-11);

that in one passage the declaration occurs twenty-six times that God's mercy endures forever (Ps. 136);

that God's prophetic Word (which cannot return void) is, "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!" (See all of Ps. 150.);

that in the last days all nations shall flow into the Lord's house (Isa. 2:2);

that Christ the Savior of all men, our Trustworthy Good Shepherd, will not fail. Neither will He be discouraged until He establishes justice (salvation) in the earth (Isa. 42:4, Matt. 12:18-21);

that Christ is a Covenant (Promise!) and a Light to all who are spiritually unenlightened, who weep under the shadow of darkness. He is to free them from idolatry's prison. For God will not share His glory with graven images (Isa. 42:6-9, Luke 1:78-79);

that the Lord will reduce to nothing ALL the gods of the earth! (Zeph. 2:11);

that the crooked places (not merely some crooked places) shall be made straight. And all flesh shall see the Lord's Salvation (Isa. 52:10, Luke 3:4-6);

that God has raised mankind up in righteousness and will direct all his ways (Isa. 45:11-13);

that our Lord's Word and irrevocable call is, "Look to Me all you ends of the earth and be saved!" (Isa. 45:22);

that God—who is Holy Love Unfailing—receives no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 18:23; 33:11). So our Good Shepherd searches for each of His lost sheep until He finds them. For all earth's inhabitants—bottom line—are God's people, the "sheep" of His pasture (Ps. 96; 100, Ezek. 18:23-32, Luke 15:4-7);

that the heathen—the nations—will be glad and sing for joy. For our Strong Deliverer shall righteously judge the poor and govern the nations. All the ends of the earth shall reverence Him! (Ps. 67);

that the Lord executes righteousness for all the oppressed (Ps. 103:6). Therefore He came for this purpose: to destroy the devil's works—which include all satan's lies that have alienated hearts from God (1 John 3:8, Col. 1:21, NJKV);

that God's covenant with Abraham, which Christ has come to fulfill, is immutable and unchanging. Thus, it is a hope and anchor for our souls—steadfast and sure (Romans 15:8-12, Heb. 6:13-20);

that the Lord will speak peace to the nations. His Kingdom shall be to the ends of the earth (Zech. 9:10);

that from the sun's rising to its going down, the Lord's name will be great among the gentiles. So that in every place incense and a pure (not forced and reluctant) offering will rise before him (Mal. 1:11);

that Christ declares His purpose in coming to earth is to seek and save (restore) that which was lost. And again, we recall how our Lord's Word tells us that He will fulfill His purpose (Matt. 18:11, Luke 19:10);

that our Lord and His church (His first born, co-heirs) possess the keys to death, hell and the grave. The keys to God's Love Kingdom (Matt. 16:19; 18:18, John 14:12; 20:21, Romans 8:16-17, 1 John 4:17, Rev. 1:18);

that our Lord and His firstborn co-heirs will conquer "the strong man," satan. They will take away all his armor and confiscate his booty! (Luke 11:21-22, Romans 8:16-23,32, Eph. 1:18,22-23);

that after our Lord's visit and ministry among them, the Samaritans were convinced that Christ is the Savior of the world (John 4:42). (When will all of us Christians be convinced?);

that our Lord declares that He gives (not merely offers) life to the world (John 6:33);

that He clearly states His purpose in coming to earth is to save the world (John 12:47);

that Israel will bind itself to the Lord with an everlasting covenant that cannot be canceled. For God's calling and gifts cannot be revoked. Hence, all Israel and all the world will be saved. Thus, the Lord will accomplish and fulfill all His pleasure—His good pleasure—for ALL things are of Him, through Him and TO Him (Jer. 50:5, Romans 11:8-12,26-29,32-36, John 4:42, 1 John 4:14);

that to the Lord who hears prayer, all flesh will come (Ps. 65:2);

that Christ therefore bids us pray to our Father, "Your will be done on earth even as it is (universally done!) in Heaven" (Matt. 6:10);

that the earth will be full of the revelation of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. For the nations will seek Him (Isa. 11:9-10, Ps. 72:18);

that the lake of (God's purifying) fire lasts, not for eternity, but until the ages of the ages (clearly stated in the original language of Scripture<sup>5</sup>). Thus it will last until the fullness of the times when God unites all in Christ (Eph. 1:10, Rev. 21:8, 20:10,15);

that God's fire is spiritual not literal. For our Heavenly Father would never dream of subjecting His own offspring to such an atrocity as torture by literal burning<sup>6</sup> (Jer. 19:5, Luke 9:54-56);

that God Himself is a Consuming Fire. He is like a refiner's fire and will also purge His priesthood people. Thus they will offer Him pure offerings, Thanksgiving offerings included (Ps. 116:17, Mal. 3:2-3, 1 Thes. 5:18, Heb. 12:29);

that God's judgments, however severe, are always just—not cruel and vindictive. For, according to Scripture, the Lord does NOT cast off forever (Ps. 62:12; 67:4; 96:11-13; 119:75, Lam. 3:31, John 5:22-23);

that the Father has committed all "judgment" to the Son—so that—ALL may honor both Him and the Father (John 5:22-23). Therefore for this very purpose these who have done evil will come forth in the "resurrection of judgment": so that Christ will lead all to repentance and fulfill His Father's will and purpose that He draw all people to Himself. Thus our Good Shepherd will lose nothing of all His Father has given Him, and all therefore will honor the Son just as they honor the Father (John 5:29-30).

that our Good Father will destroy death (1 Cor. 15:26, 2 Tim. 1:10);

that God and Christ's Bride, the New Jerusalem, will tabernacle with MANKIND. And He will wipe away all tears, and ALL death, sorrow and pain will pass away (Isa. 25:7-8, Rev. 21:4);

that He makes all things new. For as in Adam all die, even so, in Christ all shall be made alive (Isa. 25:7-8, Romans 5:18, 1 Cor. 15:22, Rev. 21:4-5);

God promised Abraham that his descendants would be as innumerable as the sand grains on the seashores and as plentiful as the stars in the heavens! For all who have faith in Christ, according to Scripture, are descendants of Abraham (Gen. 22:17-19, Romans 2:28-29, Gal. 3:6-7, Rev. 7:9). So Christ's ultimate "harvest" of human souls will be of such magnitude that no man can number. What is now called "the church" is only a kind of firstfruits of that harvest (Jas. 1:18).

Thus, the writer to the Hebrews calls God's covenant with Abraham a sure anchor for the soul. For it enters in behind the veil (into the holiest of holies) where Christ offered His blood for the sins of all humanity (Heb. 6:19).

How can we anchor our souls? As Christians, how can we anchor our mind, will and emotions to possess a solid sense of identity and a good reason for being unless we can rely on Christ's faithfulness to fulfill God's covenant with Abraham? The Scriptures tell us that this covenant is an anchor—steadfast and sure! Why is this so? Because this covenant assures us that all humanity will be blessed in Christ!

So why do so many Christians feel insecure in God's love? One problem is the unscriptural tradition that most people will be lost forever—that only the fittest will survive in God's economy!

The unbiblical tradition that God brought us into being to respond to the question, "Where will you spend eternity?" is another problem. But that is not the message of the Good News! The Biblical message is, "Repent! For the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!" (Matt. 4:17). Nowhere in the New Testament do we find the glad tidings proclaimed in terms of, "Where will you spend eternity?" The message, "Choose this day whom you will serve" (Josh. 24:15), is Scriptural. "Where will you spend eternity?" is not a Biblical concept. Pure and simple: God created all of us for His pleasure. He did not put us here "on probation" so we could choose our eternal destiny! God has already planned that all of us will be drawn to Christ and unified in His love.

Another unbiblical tradition that keeps many of us from having a solid sense of identity and a good purpose for being is the tradition that people who die in sin or while unconverted will never be brought to repentance. And why? Because they failed to recognize their "chance" to exercise sufficient wisdom to "seize the moment" (so tradition would have us believe). But is that what the Scriptures really teach? Are we saved, not by God's grace, but by chance—or by our cleverness to recognize our "chance" before it's "eternally too late"? If so, will most flesh sing God's praise and bless His name forever while agonizing from an endless hell? If that describes the final scenario our Loving Creator has in mind, how is Abraham's covenant a sure anchor for the soul? What hope does Abraham's covenant offer? Where is our Lord's tender mercy?

The Bible says that it is appointed to men once to die, and after that the judgment<sup>7</sup> (Heb. 9:27-28). It does not say after death all hope is gone! Thus, we see that: Sodom's fiery judgment is "eternal" (Jude 7)—until—God "will restore the fortunes of Sodom" (Ez. 16:53-55);

Israel's "affliction is incurable" (Jer. 30:12)—until—the Lord "will restore health" and heal her wounds (Jer. 30:17);

The sin of Samaria "is incurable" (Mic. 1:9)—until—the Lord "will restore . . . the fortunes of Samaria." (Ez. 16:53);

Ammon is to become a "wasteland forever" and "rise no more" (Zeph. 2:9, Jer. 25:27)—until—the Lord will "restore the fortunes of the Ammonites" (Jer. 49:6);

An Ammonite or Moabite is forbidden to enter the Lord's congregation "forever"—until—the tenth generation (Deut. 23:3);

Habakkuk tells us of mountains that were "everlasting", that is—until—they "were shattered" (Hab. 3:6);

The fire for Israel's sin offering (of a ram without blemish) is never to be put out. It shall be "perpetual"—until—Christ, the Lamb of God, dies for our sins. We now have a better covenant established on better promises (Lev. 6:12-13, Heb. 8:6-13);

God's waves of wrath roll over Jonah "forever"—until—the Lord delivers him from the large fish's belly on the third day (Jonah 2:6,10; 1:17);

Egypt and Elam will "rise no more" (Jer. 25:27)—until—the Lord will "restore the fortunes of Egypt" (Ez. 29:14) and "restore the fortunes of Elam" (Jer. 49:39).

"Moab is destroyed" (Jer. 48:4,42)—until—the Lord "will restore the fortunes of Moab" (Jer. 48:47);

Israel's judgment lasts "forever"—until—the Spirit is poured out and God restores it (Isa. 32:13-15).

So, narrow is the way to life and few find it—until—Christ and His church confiscate the "strong man's" booty, setting the captives free so God becomes all in all (Isa. 61, Luke 11:21-22, Matt. 7:13; 16:18, 1 Cor. 15:24-28);

God is now calling out "a people for His name"—an "elect" or chosen priesthood people who will represent and reflect His loving nature. Many are called and few are chosen—until—the small chosen priesthood people, by the Spirit, restore "David's tabernacle" so ALL mankind may inquire of the Lord. Thus we see that the church is the first born, the beginning—until—in all (later born new creatures in Christ) our Lord will have supremacy (Amos 9:11-12, Matt. 22:14, Acts 15:14-18, Eph. 3:15, Col. 1:18).

All manner of sin will be forgiven in this age as well as in the age (not eternity) to come, except blasphemy against God's Spirit—until—such blasphemy finds pardon in the fullness of the times (or ages) when God unites all in Christ. For the Lord does not retain His anger forever because He delights in mercy (Matt. 12:32; 18:11,21-22, Eph. 1:9-11, Rev. 4:11; 5:13, Mic. 7:18-20).

God's wrath has come upon Israel "to the uttermost"

(1 Thess. 2:16). So there is a gulf between "the rich man in purple" (Royal Covenant "Son", Israel) and the saved gentiles (Lazarus) which no man can cross—until—Christ Himself crosses it to bring His promised restoration. For again, Scripture promises that ALL Israel will be saved (Jer. 50:5, Luke 16:19-26, John 12:32, Romans 11:26-29).

Christ's fallen apostle, Judas, will be restored just as surely as fallen Israel (of which he is a member) will be restored. For the gifts and callings of God are irrevocable, and He has purposed to unite all in Christ. For Scripture assures us that He who calls us is "faithful". He will surely perform it. So Judas is lost—until—the Lord restores Him (John 15:16, 1 Thess. 5:24).

So, Christ will say to unrighteous nations, "Depart from Me into 'everlasting' fire." And these nations will go away into "everlasting" (original language: age-lasting) punishment or

pruning.<sup>8</sup> That is—until—by God's severe mercy shown in judgment, all nations He has made glorify and worship Him. Thus God will fulfill His covenant with Abraham that in Christ all the families of ALL the nations will be BLESSED (Gen. 12:3, Ps. 62:12, 67:4, 86:9, Matt. 25:41,46). For according to Paul (Gal. 3:8), God's covenant with Abraham means that ALL will be justified and set right with God. So all flesh will bless His name forever and ever (Ps. 145:21).

Therefore, ALL scriptural references that speak of everlasting fire or judgment must be understood in light of God's (Love's) clearly expressed heart, promise, desire, purpose and will. They are "everlasting"; that is, they are continuous and on-going—until—God's judgments serve to accomplish His unchanging will and purpose to unite all creation in Christ. (Gen. 12:3, Romans 4:13, Heb. 6:17).

Gehenna's fires are not quenched and its worm does not die—until—the restoration of all things which has been spoken of by all God's holy prophets (Christ included) since the world began. For our Savior did not come to contradict His own prophets. Our Good Shepherd and Faithful Deliverer came to fulfill the law and the prophets! Thus our Lord does not cast off forever (Lam. 3:31-32, Heb. 13:8). He who taught us to forgive and bless our enemies will surely do the same for His. For every tongue will give thanks that in Him they have righteousness and strength. All flesh will bless His name forever and ever! For our Lord will not fail or become discouraged until He fulfills all of God's purpose, word and will. For He tells us that everyone will be "seasoned" with fire (Matt. 5:17, Mark 9:42-49, Acts 3:21).

Those who disobey the gospel and persecute Christians will be repaid with "everlasting" (that is, continuous) tribulation, destruction and punishment—until—by such persistent correction God shows them their need for Christ. So what is written in the prophets will come to pass, that all shall be taught of God, and everyone who has heard and learned from the Father (eventually) comes to Christ. Thus, all the families of the nations will remember Him and worship before Him. And all will submit to Him and sing His praise. So God's promise will be fulfilled that ALL men shall reverence Him, proclaim His works, and wisely consider His doing (Ps. 22:27-28, 64:4-5, 64:9, 2 Thess. 1:7-10).

Paul the apostle understood the "forever until" principle at work in God's redemptive judgments. He knew the heart of God, and Paul also knew God's will, purpose and plan. His knowledge of God's character, will and purpose governed his understanding of Scripture. That is why Paul could appear to contradict the prophet David! Have a look at Romans 11:9-12 (NIV), where David prophesies: May their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution to them. May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see and their backs be bent forever.

And observe how Paul responds: Again I ask: Did they (Israel) stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the gentiles (pagans, all who are spiritually unenlightened) to make Israel envious. For if their transgression means RICHES for the WORLD, and their loss means riches for the gentiles—how much greater riches will their (Israel's) fullness bring?

Wow . . . ! In the next three verses Paul assures us: that Israel's fall is the reconciliation of the world;

that Israel's fall will be (for them and all the world) life from the dead! (Ez. 37);

that because the FIRST fruit (Israel) is holy, the whole world ("lump" or "harvest field") is holy.

Read all of Romans chapter eleven, and the Scriptures will clearly speak for themselves. Practice reading all of God's Word in light of His character, commitment, purpose and reliable good pleasure and will. Get God's "forever until"<sup>9</sup> policy of judgment settled in your heart—and get ready! You are about to embark upon a love affair with our Heavenly Father that will

transform your life. His heart will heal and transform your heart! For of Him and through Him—and to Him—are ALL things! (Romans 11:36) Yourself included. For again, we must remember, our Savior did not come to contradict the words of His own prophets. He came to fulfill them.

Until the heart of God and the will of God become the foundational factors determining our understanding of Scripture, our "gospel" will be bad news—not good. "God is Love, but" is simply not the message the Holy Spirit is conveying to us in the Bible (1 John 4:10,14).

Does this mean God will violate His creatures' free wills in order to save them? Not at all. What it means is that God has already told us in Scripture that eventually everyone will respond to His wooing. For God foreknows that eventually all He has made will freely choose Him and bless His name forever (that is, once the "lights come on" inside them sufficiently so they can choose Him). For our Lord is the Light of the World, and Scripture assures us that He illuminates every human being born into the world (John 1:9).<sup>10</sup>

Does all of this mean we have a license to party and live like the devil? No, for we already sin well enough without a license, or haven't you noticed? The Lord has put us all in a universe jam-packed with CONSEQUENCES, both pleasant and painful. So just because God doesn't get rid of people forever does not mean there are not serious judgments that await those who willfully reject the truth. The resurrected unrighteous will face judgment (John 5:29, Heb. 11:35). So if certain ones calculate that a life of rebellion against the Lord is worth "going to hell" for a time, then no one—least of all God—is going to force them to stop having their fling. We can all have as much hell as we want, perhaps more than we bargained for!

What, then, is the point of sharing this radically Good News about God? The point is, until we have a heart and mind understanding of God's true character and agenda: we will lack the ability to rest consistently in God's love;

we will lack the ability to trust Him totally and completely. Why? Because we will find ourselves in a constant struggle trying to trust ourselves;

we will lack humility born of the realization that our good or bad behavior has nothing to do with God's love and commitment to us;

we will lack peace and joy—except on a sporadic basis;

we will lack a heart of true worship and adoration toward our Savior;

we will lack the ability to discern the difference between justice and cruelty;

we will lack the understanding that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom—not the fear of His hopeless rejection. For correction is not rejection.

we will lack the serenity and hope that comes from the understanding that Love always succeeds and never fails;

we will lack the ability to understand or appreciate or receive unconditional love;

we will lack the ability to love others unconditionally;

we will lack an understanding of God that is worthy of His true nature;

we will lack the ability to understand Scripture in light of God's heart, and His clearly revealed purpose and will;

we will lack as individuals a solid sense of identity. For if any doubt lingers as to Whose we are, we can never know who we are or why we are;

we will lack a perception—a wholesome perception—of our identity and purpose and ministry to the world as members of Christ's body. For we are not the only-born—we are the firstborn of all God's redeemed children. Our commission is to join with Christ in restoring all His cherished creation.

we will lack the ability to appreciate God's heart of committed love toward all His creation;

we will lack the ability to judge NO ONE by the flesh (external criteria);

we will lack the understanding of God's good purpose for all His creation and the certainty of its fulfillment;

we will lack the understanding that Jesus Christ is Who the gospel is all about, and creation's restoration is what the gospel is all about;

we will lack the understanding of the magnitude of Calvary's Victory;

we will lack the ability to proclaim the Good News of Christ to a hurting world in terms of God's unconditional, unending and committed love.

Creation did not fall into ruin by its own choice, according to Romans 8:20-21. God Himself allowed it because of a hope He cherished in His heart.

The Good news is that the same God who willed His creation's temporary unraveling is re-creating it back—by His own loving blood-sacrifice—to reflect greater splendor than it had at its beginning.

This is why the gospel truly is glad tidings of great joy which shall be to ALL people! The Lord takes full responsibility for His creation's fall, and for its full recovery. Thus, God has shut all in sin's prison that He may have mercy on all (Romans 11:32). So all will honor the Son, just as they honor the Father (John 5:22-23). For God works all things according to His will.

Read and meditate on the Scriptures for yourself. Ask our Lord and Savior to guide you. The Lord yearns for you to know the height, the depth, the width, and the length of His love which surpasses knowledge! He yearns for your trust. He desires that you be filled with the knowledge of His will. He longs to convince you of His commitment and to ravish you with His love. He longs to remove every mental or theological roadblock that hinders your trust in Him. He longs to smash to smithereens every vain imagination that exalts itself against the pure knowledge of Christ! Hide and watch! You shall (one day) love the Lord your God with all your heart, your body, your soul, your mind—your being. You "shall". . . This is not just a command; it is a promise. And you shall be like Him, radiant with the light of His life-giving holy love—for—you shall see Him AS HE IS. And that's what salvation is all about.

Blessed assurance, Jesus is Mine,

Oh what a foretaste of glory Divine,

Heir of salvation, purchase of God,

Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.

This is my story, this is my song,

Praising My Savior all the day long,

This is my story, this is my song,

Praising my savior all the day long!

Fanny Crosby

## **CONCLUSION**

If the restoration of all things is not the truth, then I maintain that no truth exists—at least, none in Scripture—that will nurture whole-hearted trust in God. For Love minus commitment equals abusive nonsense (1 John 3:18).

Furthermore, if the Scriptures do not mean what they say—that is, that Christ will inherit all things—then only three options remain: 1) The Good News of Arminianism is correct? If so, then chance, along with our sin-impaired wills, are the factors, which determine our destiny, our salvation and our identity—bottom line. In other words, Christ cannot save the worst of sinners, only the "willing" and consistently obedient ones who respond to Him in this lifetime. (That is, if they are lucky enough to have a chance to hear about Him.)

2) The Good News of Calvinism is correct? If so, then many are called but few are ever chosen. Infinite Unfailing Love Himself has chosen to save only some of His own offspring. He therefore has chosen to bring most of them into being to suffer endless torment. Why? No matter how sincerely voiced, such questions are regarded as "irreverent" in this framework of understanding. The stock answer is, "God is sovereign."

3) The Good News of Calv-Arminianism is correct? If so, then again, none of us can rest secure in the love of God. For the "significant degree" of human effort required to assure our ultimate salvation is unknown to all of us. Thus, we can never know exactly why some people will be lost forever. This means some people will be in for a rude awakening on judgment day! And again, eternity will prove that Christ came to heal the well, not the sick. He cannot save the worst of sinners; He can save only the milder cases.

Do any of the above options sound like "glad tidings of great joy which shall be to all people"? Do any of them inspire deepest worship, admiration and gratitude in your heart toward the Lord? I pray our tender Father will make His heart known to you as you prayerfully ponder the Scriptures.

As you can see from all you have read in these pages, the Lord longs to lead us all to repentance. And He will do so, one way or another—sooner or later. That is His sure commitment! He loves us too much to leave us forever in the grasp of ANY bondage or evil.

Wow! That's comforting, isn't it? However, it may be a bit threatening to certain bondages we've learned to love/hate. That is, various "pleasures" we fiercely cling to while knowing they're killing us along with other people we care about most.

Are you tired? Are you exhausted from clinging to lust? Bitterness or resentment? Chemical, sexual or emotional addictions? Abusive religion? Always having to be right or get the last word? Are you tired of looking for love in all the wrong places and only finding abuse disguised as "love"? Self abuse?

If so, good! That is what repentance is all about: being sick and tired of BEING sick and tired. Being willing and ready for healing and change. Repentance means healing and change. Repentance by which our heart-attitudes and lives launch into Love's direction—God's direction. For God is Who Love is all about. Love is not a what but a Who.

Do you know Him—personally? Do you daily enjoy literal friendship with your Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ whom He sent into the world? If you're sick and tired and ready for a supernatural turn-around, with all your heart (in your own words, if you prefer) pray: Dear Heavenly Father,

Thank You for loving me with total commitment. Thank You also, Lord Jesus, for dying for my sins on the cross. Thank You for showing me that Love never gives up on anyone—including myself.

Heavenly Father, I gratefully acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord of all creation, and today I receive Him as my Lord and Savior. Your power released Christ from death's power, and I am trusting You to raise me to life as well.

Thank You for Your kindness and faithfulness to lead me to this place of healing turn-around and repentance. I gladly welcome the new heart and lifestyle You're giving me at this moment.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, by Your grace, Your loving help, I now commit all that I have and am to You. Lord Jesus, You are my Gift of Salvation, so wherever You lead me I will follow. Amen. (Romans 10:9-10)

Do you realize that God gave us His oracles (the Scriptures) to ravish us with encouragement—and hope? Absolutely! The Lord longs for you to rest secure in His love and be ASSURED of His good plans for you. He wants His Abrahamic covenant to be a sure covenant with you. Our deep and settled sense of a Good Reason for being comes from knowing God's heart, His commitment and purpose. It does not come from the uncertain Calvinistic concept of "once save always saved" (if you have truly been saved). Nor does it come from the Arminian idea that God helps only those who help themselves. Such concepts can only foster a sense of pride and exclusiveness—or else perpetuate in our lives a pattern of unceasing paranoia and morbid self-scrutiny.

Let's go back to the Scriptures to nurture our hope! Let's put our "grace glasses" on to see our Heavenly Father's heart and sure purpose revealed to Abraham and all of God's prophets! Let's follow Paul as he follows our Lord Jesus Christ:

"May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written:

"Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name.' Again, it says, 'Rejoice, O Gen-tiles, with His people.' And again, 'Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to Him, all you peoples.' And again, Isaiah says, 'The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in Him.'

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:4-13).

". . . so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isa. 55:11).

"This hope we have as an anchor for the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters into the Presence behind the veil . . ." (Heb. 6:19).

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself" (John 12:32).

## APPENDIX I

### Common Objections & Questions

1) "If everyone is going to be saved eventually, what urgency is there in proclaiming the gospel?"

How much hell do you want others to go through? The love of Christ compels us. That is the urgency. People must be brought to repentance so they can experience the full redemption and deliverance which Christ died to give them. People will never be saved until they ARE saved. Does it not matter to you if your loved ones or neighbors live out their earthly lifetimes without the joy—and deliverance—that comes from knowing Jesus? What kind of environment do you desire in this world for your children? What about your grandchildren?

2) "This may be the truth. Even so, the restoration of all things could be dangerous teaching for unstable people who would interpret it as license to sin."

People looking for excuses to sin will always find them under any belief-system. Regarding the salvation of all mankind, Paul said, "These things prescribe and teach" (1 Tim. 4:9-11). Understanding God's true character and plan for His creation lays a healthy foundation for authentic righteousness that comes from whole-hearted trust and love toward the Lord. The greatest commandment of all is that we love Him with all our being. How can we totally trust and love our Creator, and at the same time be totally convinced that His commitment to us is conditional?

3) "This teaching cancels out any necessity for Calvary. What would be the point of Christ dying on the cross if God plans to save everyone anyway?"

That's like asking, "What's the point of having a hospital that has discovered the cure for all diseases?" Just because Calvary will prove itself to be 100% successful does not render Christ's sacrifice unnecessary. If a rescue team saved all the passengers on a sinking ship, would that prove their mission to be futile? The unscriptural dogma that only some will be saved undermines the atonement. It renders our Lord's work as mostly a failure. Some (Calvinists?) believe that most people will be saved. This renders Christ's atonement almost successful!

4) "This teaching will cause division in the church. Besides, I believe we can rest in God's love because once we're saved, we're always saved."

No doubt in many quarters it will cause a stir. Jesus said that He had not come to bring peace, but a sword. Sometimes a wholesome division must occur so hearts already divided will be exposed—for the purpose of healing, resulting in true unity later on.

Once saved, always saved. Hmm . . . that is, if you truly are among the "elect" few chosen for salvation, according to your doctrinal foundation. But how do you KNOW (based on Scripture) you have acknowledged Christ as Lord with ALL of your heart? The Bible tells us that only a fool trusts in his own heart—that it is desperately wicked—who but God can know it? When you're in the throes of some desperate weakness, how does God's covenant with Abraham anchor your soul? Can you honestly love and admire God wholeheartedly while also believing He may have brought many of your loved ones and neighbors into being for the purpose of eternal torment? If "yes" is your answer, my prayer is that the Lord will give you a conscience when He does save you.

5) "This means that both saint and sinner will get the same reward!"

"First of all, salvation is a gift, not an achievement we accomplish and are "rewarded" for (Eph. 2:1-10). However, all of God's judgments are rooted in His love (Ps. 62:12). So—for their own good—all people will be called into account for their deeds (ourselves included) and rewarded accordingly! Even so, it will not be a happy experience for any who have lived in calculated rebellion against the Lord (Romans 2:6-11, 1 Cor. 3:13-15).

However . . . you haven't always been a saint, have you? Did you volunteer to live for Christ, or did God's Spirit lead you to repentance? Do you actually want other people to suffer endless torment because the Holy Spirit overcame your stubbornness and led you to Christ before He did the same thing for them? Perhaps you need to read about the "elder brother" in the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). Also review the story of the hired workers in the vineyard (Matt. 20:1-16). Remember, if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us (1 John 1:8).

6) In Luke 13:23-30, Jesus was asked if only a few would be saved. He said to strive to enter into the narrow gate, for many would try and not be able.

Christ came, not to the gentiles (the world population in general), but to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24). These were already God's chosen covenant people—all of whom will finally be saved, according to Paul (Romans 11:26). Bear in mind that these covenant people are the ones Christ is talking to on this occasion.

So, the Lord is not here contradicting promises He has made elsewhere by saying that only a few will ever be saved. Otherwise John 12:32 would have quoted Him as saying, "If I be lifted up, I will draw only a few people to Myself." Furthermore, 1 Corinthians 15:22 would say, "In Adam all die; in Christ only a few will be made alive." So Luke 13:23-30 is not about whether Christ will eventually reap the full harvest of human souls He paid for with His own blood—that is, how many will finally be saved (Gen. 22:17-19, Romans 4:13, also note carefully Romans 11:15-16,32,36).

Here He is talking about being saved during this dispensation to occupy a rulership role in His love-kingdom—to act as co-laborers, co-restorers with Him in His world-harvest field (John 4:34-38). Only those who enter the narrow gate of self-denial, allowing Christ to perfect them in love and holiness can qualify to minister to the world in this era as well as the Kingdom Millennial Age to come. These will shine as lights set on a hill (Matt. 5:14; Ps. 48). They will serve as kings and priests—a holy nation, a royal priesthood—to reflect God's character to the world (1 Pet. 2:9-12). Many are called to this high privilege, but few respond. Such as refuse will find themselves in a place of outer darkness—not "forever," but for a season (Matt. 25:14-30). This describes exactly what happened to many Jews when Jerusalem was crushed under Rome's armies in 70 AD—which Christ prophesied in Matthew 24 and 25.

Nothing is mentioned about eternity in this passage and others which are similar to it. Read the best-seller *The Final Quest*, by Rick Joyner. Also contact Arthur Eedle (see Suggested Reading List) for his excellent articles: "Jesus—Firstborn of Every Creature" and "Millennial Kings and Priests." This Luke 13 passage has to do with attaining to a "better resurrection," being made qualified to "rule over cities" in the Millennial age (Heb. 11:35, Phil. 3:10-11, also compare Luke 19:12-27 and Ps. 78:34). The current theology that insists that only the priesthood people (the church) will ever be saved leaves the church with no one to "reign over" in the Millennium! Again, the church is not the only born of God's new creation in Christ. It is the first born, co-redeemer, "called out" company. But "called out" for what? Review Colossians 1:18 and also study Acts 15:15-17 and Amos 9:11-12.

7) Does this mean that satan and all the fallen angels will be restored eventually?

In the original language of Scripture, Hebrews 2:16 says, "God is not now laying hold of angels." So if He is not laying hold of them now, why should we? The present focus is on mankind. However, Colossians 1:15-20 does say all the invisible realm was made for Christ and is being reconciled through His cross. It would harmonize with God's character for our

Good Shepherd—eventually at some future age—to lead His rebellious angels to repentance (Romans 8:19-23, Heb. 13:8). But apart from true heart-repentance, there can be NO salvation for anyone! I would caution against any kind of intercession on our part for fallen angels now. At present, we're in the midst of rescuing Adam's sons and daughters. We're plundering satan's prison-house, freeing all who have been "taken captive by him to do his will" (Luke 11:21-22, 2 Tim. 2:26).

Human wills, therefore, must first be made free (by the church's intercession and ministry) so they can respond to and receive Christ's light. Also, satan and his minions must first be judged and punished for their atrocities before we can sensibly think in terms of their eventual rehabilitation. See Andrew Jukes' Restitution of All Things mentioned in the reading list for more exposition of Scripture on this subject. His long-time bestseller, The Names of God, is still available in most bookstores. It's an excellent study of God's character. (Keep your Kleenex box handy! This book so tenderly reveals the heart of our wonderful Lord as shown in Scripture you'll probably cry a lot!)

8) "I still believe in endless hell, but I also believe God's love is unconditional and totally committed. What's wrong with just loving and trusting God and leaving all mysteries in His good hands?"

That is a good attitude to adopt. That is, if you're absolutely certain you can prove that endless torment is an essential yet mysterious doctrine taught in Scripture. And it's a worthy attitude if you're sincerely convinced that God's prophetic word, as well as His will, purpose, and desire to redeem His whole creation will be thwarted forever.

We all must be prepared to give a reason for the hope that lies within us, according to Paul. How do you explain your hope to people who ask, "Why would a loving God create people whom He already knows are doomed for endless agony?" How do you assure them of God's unconditional love—and total commitment—from a Scriptural basis?

9) "If this total restoration doctrine is true, why have I never heard of it before? The only people I've ever known to deny the doctrine of endless hell are unorthodox cultists who also deny Christ's deity, etc."

People asked the same question about justification by faith in Christ alone five centuries ago when Martin Luther and others began proclaiming it. Many dedicated Christians throughout the centuries have believed in this full gospel of restoration. In fact, history indicates that most of the church understood the Good News in this way for the first three to four hundred years, AD. The oldest statement of orthodox faith known to Christianity was formulated in the 300's at the Roman government's request. Now get this—the Apostle's creed, as it came to be called later (which appears in two slightly different versions) makes no mention of an endless hell! One version mentions Christ's descent into Hades where He preached to Noah's generation. However, that passage in 1 Peter tends to disprove—not support—the notion of endless punishment!

Interesting, how the fourth century Christians' ideas about "orthodoxy" differ from those of much of today's church, isn't it? For good historical documentation, order Christ Triumphant, the book mentioned at the top of the reading list. (It's available from Concordant Publishing for \$7.00, plus \$1.50 postage and handling.)

10) "This doctrine of universal reconciliation sounds to me like a teaching someone made up in order to advertise a 'God' who is soft on sin and more acceptable to the world."

On the contrary, any "God" who will permit sin such as cursing, blasphemy, and bitterness to endure eternally would be soft on sin. For only such a compromising deity would invent an endless hell of ceaseless cursing and blasphemy to co-exist with his holy nature forever.

But thank you for being honest. As long as you're absolutely certain that your own version of "God" is solidly based on the original language of Scripture—and all that is prophesied in Scripture—then believe what your heart dictates to be true. Would you please write us a testimony explaining how your meditations on the Lord's judgments (as you understand them) have increased your love for Him? How have they inspired your heart toward deeper worship? The psalmist David also sang of God's judgments. Do you have any songs to share that would increase our faith? Please share them if you do. I say this with all respect and sincerity.

11) "I still have problems with thinking that people like Adolph Hitler and Joseph Stalin will one day be in Heaven."

I understand! Yet I am also confident our Good and Just Father knows how to see that such men get what's coming to them—to the satisfaction of us all—without taking forever to do so. I shudder to think of being in their shoes! However, if endless hell actually were taught in Scripture, do you know who would be hardest for me to understand going to Heaven? Adam and Eve! I can't imagine a greater miscarriage of justice than for our first parents to be saved despite the damages they caused all the rest of us. People like Adolph Hitler would never have been born had it not been for Adam and Eve's rebellion.

12) "I still don't understand how God can save everyone and yet every person have a free will."

Well, you believed people had "free will" before, didn't you? What's wrong with God showing the same kindness and patience toward others He has shown toward you until they make a good choice? I don't understand how God can be "one" and also "three," but the Bible teaches it, so I believe it. However, Scripture does not require that I must believe that God is love/hate or that God is committed/uncommitted. Big difference!

13) "Why do we not hear more people proclaiming this message today?"

Next time you go to church, have a good look at the classic songs of the faith in your hymnal. Also, if your church uses an overhead projector, note carefully the words of many choruses now being published by today's younger generation. "Ancient of Days" is good for starters. Also, don't forget to review all the verses to well-known Christmas carols, as well as Handel's "Messiah." If our "free will" is the bottom line factor determining our destiny, why aren't there any songs about it? Truth liberates the heart to worship, doesn't it?

According to Eugene Peterson, the entire book of Revelation is a hymn of worship, sung by many of the early church (see The Message translation by Eugene Peterson). Obviously, much of today's church cannot sing all of it because they don't understand God's judgments as the first century Christians did. Review Psalm 96, bearing in mind that the only Scriptures available to the earliest Christians came from the Old Testament. And remember that the New Testament finds its roots in Moses and the prophets.

14) "I believe God is SOVEREIGN. This means God is all-powerful and holy, and He can do anything He wants to do!"

So do I. God is Sovereign Holy Love. And 1 Corinthians 13 tells us exactly what He wants to do, and does do—and will always do.

Sovereign Holy Love can only act in harmony with His nature. Thus He cannot perpetuate error, pain and evil. Nor can He "allow" them to exist forever. For Omnipotent, Omnipresent Love Himself always succeeds and never fails. Therefore, Calvary MUST succeed for all the world—for any exception would mean an eternal victory for satan.

And to be utterly honest, I'm convinced that most Christians, in their deepest hearts, believe the same thing. Otherwise, instead of opposing (easy and convenient) abortions, we would all

be mounting a campaign for the immediate sterilization of the human race. That is, if we truly believed that most infants born in this world are destined as adults for endless torment. For no human parent with a heart would dream of conceiving a child—knowing—that hopeless damnation was its probable (or even possible) destiny.

Is God any less merciful than we are? Is He only as powerful as we are? Think about it.

"Love is very patient and kind, never jealous or envious, never boastful or proud, never haughty or selfish or rude.

Love does not demand its own way. It is not irritable or touchy. It does not hold grudges and will hardly even notice when others do it wrong. It is never glad about injustice, but rejoices whenever truth wins out. . . There are three things that remain —faith, hope, and love— and the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:4-6,13, The Living Bible).

"Every tongue shall take an oath, He shall say, 'Surely in the Lord I have righteousness and strength!'" (Isa. 45:23b-24, NKJV).

"Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him . . . His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him" (Daniel 7:14,27b, NKJV).

"Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: 'To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!'" (Rev. 5:13, NIV).

## **APPENDIX II**

### **Ponder Prayerfully**

If most people will be lost forever because Christ does not finally lead ALL to repentance: then eternity will prove that satan did a better job at corrupting creation than Christ did in redeeming it.

then eternity will demonstrate that satan's power to seduce human wills is stronger than God's power to influence them toward good.

then eternity will show that God devised His own everlasting defeat when He planned His creation.

then eternity will reveal that God's love is no different from the "love" of corrupted men, because it places value on people based on their performance. How so? All who have failed to hear of Christ and respond to Him within a certain time limit are discarded!

then eternity will demonstrate that Christ's atonement for all mankind (in many cases) is an everlasting failure.

then eternity will show that God planned that good and evil co-exist forever, side by side, in His universe as an eternal testimony of His holy (?) and loving (?) nature.

then eternity will prove that our Loving Creator has knowingly brought many people into being whose suffering shall have no end—that He has done a thing to His own offspring that no normal earthly father would dream of doing.

then eternity will show that God—Who receives no pleasure in the death of the wicked—has failed to fulfill His promise that He will perform all His good pleasure to unite all creation in Christ (either because He will not or He cannot do so).

then eternity will prove that God's "desire" that all be saved either is not a deep and sincere desire—or else—it is an irrational desire that He knows to be vain and futile. Hence, Perfect Love and Wisdom desires what He knows will never happen—not ever! This means that God's desire is rooted in unreality and is merely sentimental and wishful thinking.

then eternity will show that God's purpose (to unite all in Christ) will never be accomplished. Therefore He lied when He assured us, "I have spoken it; I will bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it" (Isa. 46:11, Eph. 1.9-10).

then eternity will show that Christ will not, in fact, inherit ALL things. So all Scriptures that prophesy along these lines were only nice-sounding words—gross and misleading "inflated advertising." For Christ shall have drawn only some, not all, people to Himself. For the gentiles will not hope in Him. Only some gentiles will hope in Him.

then eternity will show that God loves pain. Otherwise He would have retained His original state of pleasure by never spawning creation.

then eternity will show that God's covenant with Abraham that in Christ all earth's families will be BLESSED is by no means a sure anchor for the soul. For only mild and temporal and mostly imperceptible blessing was intended by this covenant for earth's families. Such "blessing" will hardly be of comfort when remembered by vast multitudes agonizing forever whose lives on earth were characterized by disease, oppression, ignorance, squalor and hard labor.

then eternity will show that Loving-Kindness, Himself, has created billions of people whom He foreknew would never hear Christ proclaimed during their earthly lives and therefore would suffer forever.

then eternity will prove that God created many things for His everlasting displeasure and therefore is not worthy of all power, honor and praise—contrary to Revelation 4:11 and Isaiah 46:10.

then eternity will prove that, for many, God's calling them into being was a curse of such magnitude that its horror defies description.

then eternity will prove that Christ will be "satisfied" that God's pleasure (forever!) shall only partially "prosper" in His hand. How so? Only the firstfruits of His world harvest of human souls will ever become His inheritance.

then eternity will show that Scriptures calling the church "the firstborn" and a "kind of firstfruits" were meaningless.

then eternity will demonstrate that Christ is not the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. It will reveal Him as the Lamb of God who tried to take away the world's sin and failed.

then eternity will prove that abortionists are far more merciful than "God" or "Christians" who would preserve infants alive so as teenagers and adults most of them would have to endure endless torment.

then eternity will demonstrate that God's "tender mercies" are over only some (not all) of His works, for only some will bless His name forever and ever. Many others will agonize for all eternity.

then eternity will demonstrate that Christians who proclaimed so many messages about "resting in God's love and grace" were grossly imbalanced in their emphasis (to put it as kindly as possible).

then eternity will demonstrate that God's will shall never (fully) be done on earth as it is in Heaven. For when earth yields up its dead from their graves, most who are resurrected will live outside of God's will forever and ever. Therefore, Christ taught us to pray a prayer He knew would NEVER—not ever—be answered.

then eternity will prove that God will not be the plague and destruction of death and Hades. For the sting of death in its most hideous form—the second death—shall endure forever and ever. Thus, Paul was grossly deceived to have shouted, "O death, where is your sting; O Hades, where is your victory?" For death shall prove itself to be victorious—in many cases—for all eternity. The second death, the lake of fire, will sabotage God's fulfilling all His good pleasure forever and ever.

then eternity will prove that only some things shall be made new, not all. Moreover death, sorrow, tears and pain, contrary to Scripture, will endure forever as testimony of satan's victory over Calvary.

then eternity will demonstrate that God has called Himself the "Savior of all men," fully knowing He would never save but only a few. Thus He only wanted to sound nice when He referred to Himself as "the Savior of ALL men."

then eternity will prove that God is weaker than evil. Or else, eternity will show that He chose to go into everlasting collusion with evil when He created all things so that evil forever could exert greater power than His over the wills of many people.

then eternity will demonstrate that Christ failed to accomplish His purpose to save the world—that which was lost—and to destroy the devil's works. For He shall have saved only some of the world, and some of that which was lost, and destroyed only some of satan's works.

then eternity will reveal that love is neither committed nor unfailing—nor is it by any means unconditional.

then eternity will show that Holy Love has foreseen and therefore fore-planned for everlasting disaster for much of His own creation.

then eternity will demonstrate that God is kinder to animals than He is to human beings. For He has allowed death to end any suffering that beasts endure in their earthly lifetime. Yet He has ordained endless torment for human beings, created in His image.

then eternity will either demonstrate that—bottom line—human beings (contrary to Scripture) are in fact their own saviors through the strength of their own ingenuity and will-power. Or else, eternity will show that God has chosen to save some and brought others into existence for the purpose of endless suffering.

then eternity will show that "Love" gives up on His own offspring forever—in advance of His having created them. For He has foreknown all of His works from eternity past and fulfills all His plans based on His foreknowledge.

then eternity will reveal God as the author of endless pain, error, and evil—since His own Word states that He Himself willed His creation's fall (Romans 8:20-21).

then eternity will demonstrate that Christ, contrary to Scripture, never intended to draw all mankind to Himself—or else He promised to do so but was unable to fulfill His promise. Therefore John 12:32 is meaningless at best and a lie at worst.

## **APPENDIX III**

### **Experience Explodes Arguments**

After six months of agony, it happened overnight. It happened when my desperately wounded heart finally became convinced God loves me. It happened when I suddenly knew My heavenly Father truly had created all things for His pleasure—myself and loved ones and you and your loved ones, and they and their loved ones, and they and their loved ones. . . I woke up on May 1st of 1996 instantly free from: a deeply rooted fear of God's hopeless abandonment,

Chronic manic suicidal depression, any desire whatsoever for alcohol, even to this very day, dependence on five prescriptions of anti-depressants and related medications, tormenting sexual night dreams and obsessions that had recurred off and on since age twelve and had brought great heartache in my marriage, self-hatred, chronic insomnia, a love/hate relationship with God and the resulting morbid perfectionism that had nearly ruined my life and marriage.

After my attempted suicide in August of 1995 my wife, Paula, was deeply heartbroken. She found herself with no choice but to commit me to the care of a Christian psychiatric hospital. I was also under the wonderful care of Helen Crossland, founder of Homes of Hope Ministries, and the godly and refreshing influence of her husband, Don. Bless them, bless them, Lord! Had it not been for their wise counsel (as well as that of our on-going seasoned inner-healing counselor and spiritual mom, Carolyn Barnett), I probably would be a goner today. I also thank God for the unconditional love, wise counsel, deep generosity, and caring heart of Dr. Wanda Stephens, founder of Living Hope Institute in Little Rock, Arkansas. I also owe much to Dr. David Haas for believing in me when I had lost all ability to believe in myself. The same goes for Dick King, who pastors Emmanuel Baptist Church. Also I owe deepest thanks, along with Paula, to the proven friends and partners of our ministry. They continued to support us financially during the very darkest days of our lives. And I thank God for all who continue to do so. We will need support as the Lord leads and anoints us to impart His healing hope to those who weep under the shadow of darkness. Bless them abundantly, dear Father! And bless all our dear and proven friends who have sacrificed much in order to shower us with love and every kind of assistance possible. (And friends, you KNOW who you are, need I mention?)

Back to my story. . . I had attempted suicide. What had happened? I had lost all hope, that's what had happened. About a year before I went under, I was given a book that contained selections from George MacDonald's writings. (Anyone remember the Scotsman C.S. Lewis often referred to as his spiritual master/teacher?)

As I read and re-read that book over the next several months, I often blubbered and cried like a baby. Was it possible? Could it be that God could be that good? I began searching the Scriptures.

But it was too late. The damage to the memory banks of my brain's neuron cells was too massive. My head could hope, but my heart could not. I had spent too many years trying to find wholeness the wrong way. Too many years trying to meditate on the love of my heavenly Father while also trying desperately to believe with integrity: God's ever-active, unfailing love is unconditional—but—on the following conditions:

- 1) That you are in the elect (Calvinism) or that God has foreknown that you are one of the few who will repent—in this lifetime (Arminianism).
- 2) That you hear of Christ in this lifetime.

3) That you respond to Him in this lifetime.

4) That you trust only in His mercy and His grace—as well as trust in your own ability to walk in consistent obedience. For thus you must prove your salvation (Calvinism) or assure your salvation (Arminianism).

5) That you don't die in sin.

6) That you endure until the end (based on a wrong interpretation of Scripture).

God is committed love/God's love, however, is not committed to many people (Calvinism).

God "loves" everyone—but, however, even so . . . (Arminianism).

God has chosen to help some people/God has chosen to abandon most people.

God saves hopeful failures/God gets rid of hopeless failures.

Love is kind/Love has spawned billions of people He already knows are doomed for endless fiery disaster.

God is all powerful and loves you. However, He has ordained that your free will shall be the bottom line factor that determines your eternal destiny. Thus, your identity—whether a child of God or a child of everlasting evil and darkness—depends on your willpower.

God is the Savior of all/He is not the Savior of all.

The Lord wishes the best for you and you must love Him with all your heart, though He is not fully committed to you or anyone else, unless people are diligent to trust and obey. In other words. He loves you, but don't count on it.

God is Everlasting Forgiveness/Eternal Wrath and Vindictiveness

Our Lord is utterly victorious and will destroy the devil's works. Yet the devil will destroy most of Christ's works (people) forever.

God is worthy of all power, honor and praise because He has created a few things for His pleasure. However, when I sing that chorus, I must say "all things."

God is Sovereign, so He can commit any atrocity He pleases (Calvanistic agony once again). Or—God is good, but the whole reason He gave us free wills was so He would eventually have a universe forever divided between "winners" and "losers." A universe He will weep over for all eternity. In other words, God loves pain!?! (Arminian torment again.)

You can count on God if you are in the "elect" (Calvinism). Or,

You can count on God if He can count on you (Arminianism).

You must believe all the Lord says in His Word, but He also wants you to "rest in His grace," so you must try not to always take all He says too seriously. On the other hand—perhaps you had better take Him more seriously! Yes or no? (How could we Arminian Christians talk so much about grace even while we teetered on the brink of a possible Christless infinity!?)

God, in His holy, sovereign grace, may have chosen you for salvation. How dare that you not rejoice that your friends, neighbors and loved ones may be predestined for eternal torment! Truly spiritual people can delight and hope in the Lord no matter what! Charles, what's wrong with you!? (Torment from my attempt to cling to Calvinism).

The Lord is gracious, tenderhearted, compassionate and patient. He does not cast off forever because of the multitude of His mercies. Even so, it isn't wise to carry that idea too far. He gets rid of some people. That is, He "loses ability" to ever reach them, etc., etc. . . . That does sound nicer, doesn't it? (Arminianism again.)

All of these hopeless contradictions were entrenched in my belief system, posing as "truths." Shocking? Have a look at these . . . God thinks you are "very special." Don't worry that in His foreknowledge He's written off most everyone else. Just trust . . .

Perhaps God wants us to believe all the Bible, but not to think about parts of it too much, so we'll have courage to trust in His grace? Also, He wants us Christians to preach only the comforting parts of it—at least most of the time, in order to make Him appear nice? (Calv-Arminian agony working.)

Maybe God hopes everyone in the world at least will feel loved by Christians before He consigns most everyone to endless torment. In the meanwhile, we Christians should oppose abortion (!) and build hospitals and try to provide every help possible for the world's starving and homeless multitudes . . . ? (Believe me, I tried very hard not to think about this horrifying contradiction.)

All earth's families will be blessed in Christ, Abraham's "Seed." Well, a little bit, for a few years (so I was trained to believe)—before most of them are sentenced to endless despair. (Powerful promise, huh?)

God loves you and is committed to you for who you are, not for what you do. Nevertheless, He has already planned in advance to abandon most people because of what they do or don't do.

God is love/hate (Guess which system!)

God is good, but . . . (Guess which system!)

You can trust God, though it isn't wise to trust Him too much. You must trust the reliability of your free will. For it is appointed unto man once to die, and after that—no hope.

And here's the heartbreaker: Jesus loves all the little children of the world—red and yellow, black and white. Are they precious in His sight? Yes. They are precious until they reach the age of accountability.

Need I say more? My "God-Picture" was utter chaos! Ironic, isn't it? After all, I had written and published two devotional books, revealing the loving heart of my heavenly Father. What made it worse was, my loving Father actually was revealing His true heart to me. Even in the early eighties (I can see it now!) He was beginning His blessed invasion. In the meantime, my spirit knew Him in one way, but my brain perceived Him in another way.

Talk about agony! Problem was, at the time I had no adequate SCRIPTURAL FOUNDATION for the kind of "Father of tender mercies" I was hearing from and conveying in my speaking and writing.

So yes, my understanding of the Lord had finally evolved into something beautiful. But was it too beautiful? That's what disturbed me; it was only the "beautiful" side of God that gave me any hope whatsoever! What I dared not do was to think much about His austere aspects, His

judgments—at least as tradition has taught us to perceive them. For in my framework of understanding there was no hope in God's judgments. Not for despairing people who could not hope or people who are not in the "elect" (depending on whether my tortured mind was laboring under the despair of Arminianism or Calvinism).

But in the throes of my own battles against the world, the flesh and the devil, how could I avoid thinking of the Lord's judgments on occasions? Besides, I had felt a growing uneasiness with the way I had always approached the Bible: meditate on the nice parts, "believe" the horrifying parts, but don't believe them too much. I had to find some sort of grace to count on! So my policy had been to stuff "Everlasting Horrors We Must Believe About God" in a "backfile" in my brain, labeled "Required Orthodox Tenets" and then try not to think of them much. I've often wondered if my Calvinistic and Arminian friends do the same thing. . . .

Is that your policy? If you're deeply wounded and scrambling to survive while searching for healing, I do not recommend it. That is exactly what I did for years! I back filed much of my belief system. Believe me, this is a sure recipe for eventual insanity!

Now, I want to ask a respectful, yet honest question of my readers, especially Christian pastors and counselors: how can we help thinking people get healed of deep inner traumas while encouraging them to "believe"—and yet not be too concerned about all that is written in the holy Word of our Lord? Unless we can behold our loving Lord in all of His terrible (awesome!) beauty, how can our hearts ever be fashioned into His holy likeness? Is the secret of deepest healing of the heart found in playing "believe, but don't think about" mind games with the Bible? Is that how the Lord (secretly) expects we should deal with His Word?

That, I regret to report, was my way of ministry for many years. I taught folks to give mental assent to the orthodox (?) teaching of endless torment—and then—I found myself urging them to focus on the love and grace passages in Scripture. For I knew no other way to convey God's heart as my spirit knew Him to be. But praise the Lord! Those days are over. However, perhaps, as a leader or counselor, you have been "stuck" in the same way I was. You know that healing can only come when people know they are valued and loved unconditionally. But your paradigm or concept of the gospel has forced you (unconsciously, as was true in my own case) to "downplay" certain parts of Scripture to help people entrapped in paranoia. I'm praying the Lord will use this book to help free you to minister what your heart already knows.

Identity! Identity is what spawns behavior. Identity is what determines desires, emotions, perceptions and feelings. I am convinced that any interpretation of Scripture that undermines a solid sense of identity, HAS to be wrong. For identity is what Christ came to give us! He is the Light that shines on every infant that enters, kicking and squalling, into this pain-wracked world.

Calvinism undermines identity. It tells us we have purpose (a good purpose) and value—if—we can be CERTAIN our conversion experience and all subsequent "confirmations" we receive of it aren't spurious. Furthermore, it transmits to us a bone-chilling picture of God: God is Holy Love/Holy Love is everlastingly wrathful, unforgiving, arbitrary and biased. Calvinism is embarrassing to its adherents. It forces them (the grace-oriented ones) to present the gospel sounding much like they believe in Christ's total triumph. Afterwards, however, Calvinist leaders are forced to train their new converts to become either arrogant religionists who feel superior to the "non-elect" or despairing manic depressives.

Arminianism (and its half-brother, Calv-Arminianism) undermines identity. I am not criticizing people who embrace any of these systems. Many Christians are like I was for years—what other choice do we have? I understand that. However, now that you have read these pages, you are seeing that there is abundance of Scripture for more hope, aren't you? My earnest prayer is that you will prayerfully study the Scriptures.

Arminianism leaves the identity issue open to question. It transmits this picture of God: God is Holy Love/Holy Love is noncommitted or weak. For if our frail sin-impaired wills ultimately determine if we are God's children or children of everlasting despair—who we ARE—then deepest healing will elude us in this life. How can we trust a "God" who tells us we had better trust in ourselves? We will not have time to be healed. We will be too busy trying to make right choices! How do I know this? I've been there! And again, Arminian Christians will find themselves singing and preaching (as much as possible) as if they believed in Christ's Total Victory (except the "legalistic" ones who take their theology seriously). However, their new converts will be trained: "Bottomline, it's up to you." And the result? The same result as Calvinism: some people becoming self-righteous religionists (as long as youth and vitality hold out) and others becoming suicidal manic depressives. And of course, there will be a good number of people in all the above systems who will manage to maintain a semblance of balance and cope pretty well. That is, until they experience enough agony of self-doubt to desire answers to hard questions.

What is the cure for all of this? Just to do what 20th century grace-oriented evangelical churches have always been doing? Keep sweeping the hard Bible bits under the carpet? Even while we publicly talk in terms of "identity" and "unconditional love" and "resting in God's grace?" To the agony of our thoughtful listeners who are struggling? Is this the answer?

No! Enough is enough. The lie of conditional love must die or we cannot live. We can exist and cope—we can even appear to live—but that lie must bite the dust so we can live. It's time that we Bible-believing Christians stop fearing being ostracized or unkindly labeled. It's time that, for the sake of our children, we understand and proclaim Christ as the thoroughly Good News He is. Our children cannot live with true righteousness or hope unless they know Whose—and who—they ARE.

I'm a new man because I now can delight in all I know about my heavenly Father. I no longer backfile His judgments, I rejoice in them! I can hope in his judgments and even sing of His judgments—even His age-abiding judgments. I now know My Heavenly Father is committed. Not just "loving," but committed. What a difference meditating on His utter goodness has made in my life! Ask Paula! My wife will tell you. Even my friends who have yet to see the fullness of God's love as we've seen it will tell you. I'm a changed Charles. I know who I am. I love being a husband and a grandpa more than ever these days and so enjoy being alive. YES! And my identity is not "minister" (though I love the ministry!).

Paula and I so yearn that others experience the wholeness God has brought into our hearts and our home. It's been prophesied by individuals—worldwide—who knew nothing about us that a dream in our hearts will happen. What is that dream?

For many years, Paula and I have envisioned teaming up with other ministries the Lord will join to us, to bring healing to broken hearts. Especially for hearts that have endured harsh spiritual abuse. And all based on: "God loves you, but you must . . ." Don't misunderstand. I'm not saying I have no appreciation for the fact that the Lord wants us to learn to make good choices. Nor am I saying the Lord does not want each of us to feel uniquely special to Him. And by no means am I saying we shouldn't encourage people in a wholesome fear of the Lord. Anyone who has lived for a few decades knows our Lord's judgments are real. Actions produce consequences! However, fear of rejection is the most common culprit that catapults people into destructive behavior.

We cannot have it both ways. We cannot teach unconditional love—and at the same time—tell shattered people that God's unfailing love is (somehow?) conditional. Whether it be conditioned on their "special election" or conditioned on their performance! Such non-sense is not the gospel. It's heartbreaking despair. Have you ever wondered why some Christians become atheists? Or commit suicide? Having read these pages you can see why, but those are the kind of people our hearts yearn after. We know the Lord's heart yearns after them even more.

Are you drowning in the quagmire of spiritual despair? Take heart, my friend! Salvation is not a gamble, it is a Gift—it's not of works, but of Christ—so no one can boast! Very soon the time is coming when the body of Christ will believe what it has sung about and proclaimed. The Lord is up to something—magnificent!

Oops! I got up on my soapbox again, didn't I? Back to the vision. . . Paula and I yearn to be part of a team that listens to the Holy Spirit, and in His wisdom and power liberates spiritually and emotionally abused hearts so they will hope again. We envision a "Restoration Ranch." It will be out in the country (somewhere!) next to a large lake. (For years, perfect strangers have described this vision to us prophetically—in detail!—having no natural knowledge of what the Lord had put in our hearts.) We envision serious chemical, sexual and emotional addictions being healed. Marriages healed! Christian leaders restored and made whole.

We also envision a "school of the Holy Spirit" on the same grounds. It will be "hands on, learn as you listen to God" training for Christians who yearn to learn to hear the Holy Spirit for the healing of wounded hearts. We know this vision will happen. Interestingly enough, the Lord has now "maneuvered" us to live in the Dallas/Ft.Worth area—where He long ago told us He would establish it! Awesome, huh? Some very interesting things have been stirring—Praise the Lord!

Salvation by faith in Christ alone, the holiness of God, the miraculous ministry of the Holy Spirit—all of those wonderful realities have been "coming back" to the body of Christ over the last five hundred years.

What's next? Every fiber of my being sings that the Lord is about to reveal His true heart and plan for His creation to many, many people worldwide. It won't be long before the FULL "faith once delivered to the saints" will return to us all, accompanied by unprecedented signs and wonders. Hide and watch! And when God's firstborn family members know their identity—watch out, world! Christ's healing light will shine on you.

**REMEMBER** Isaiah 52:14, John 3:16 Worried Child, I AM just, pure and holy. My love is limitless and seeks not its own. When those dark thoughts cloud your mind, causing you to question My love, I ask that you do one thing: remember the cross.

See it now. See the One crucified. See the humiliation, the horror of Innocence disrobed, mutilated and bleeding. Pain racks His every atom. Each gasp of air is agony untold. His every nerve is a conduit of fire.

Can you hear Him cry? No one else can either, but I can. I hear it forever—how could I forget it? It's almost the sound of a boy—a stifled, intermittent cry it is . . .

No, child, don't turn away. Not yet, please. Do you see the thorns piercing His brow? The disfigurement of His face? The spikes splitting His hands and His feet? The jeering crowds at the foot of His cross? They didn't kill him. They would have if they could have—but they could not. He gave His life. He shielded His enemies who were worthy of death by dying Himself in their stead. He suffered murder to save His murderers. He suffered shame to save His mockers. And He would do it again. Again and again. And so would I. Is this not the destiny of Perfect Love in a fallen world?

This is the way love is, and this is the way I AM. Never forget it.

Entreatingly,

Father

(Selection from the devotional From the Father's Heart, by Charles Slagle, Destiny Image)

Finally . . . If the message of this book has liberated your heart to trust and love the Lord more deeply—wonderful! That was its purpose.

May I share a word of advice? This word especially applies if you have experienced deep wounding through spiritual abuse. Ask the Lord to grant you grace to: refrain from debating about this full gospel or being overly anxious to help other to "see" it. Give the Holy Spirit room to work!

Forgive people who in the past conveyed the gospel inadequately to you—or perhaps even spiritually abused you. Instead, thank the Lord that they gave what they had, and ask Him to shower His healing and blessing upon them.

Not make understanding Christ's total victory a requirement for fellowshipping with your Christian brothers and sisters—whatever you do!

Not make this full gospel "your subject" conversationally more than enjoying the Lord Himself and bringing His healing life to others. People who think a good deal, who have been deeply wounded, can fall into that snare while the devil throws a party! JESUS CHRIST MUST REMAIN THE FOCUS. (The early Pentecostals had to learn the same lesson about sharing their newfound freedom in the Holy Spirit!)

Refuse to start a new denomination or "non"-denomination; the Lord knows there are too many already!

Be led of the Holy Spirit in all situations where the Lord Himself receives honor and—by His power—lives are transformed and healed. Even if it means on occasions He may lead you to minister truths that seem to reveal little or nothing of Christ's total victory.

Become a brighter light that attracts others to Christ Himself—and not just words and concepts about Him.

Not be hurt if some Christians misjudge you. Trust the Lord to do business. He will! Hasn't He always? Remember, some who misunderstand you today may be beside you proclaiming Christ to a needy world tomorrow!

Be at liberty not to go to great lengths to hype or to hide your understanding of the gospel. Just enjoy constant fellowship with the Lord and trust His light to shine through you.

Remember that, by God's astonishing grace, many Christians who do not completely share your understanding of Scripture—nevertheless—know God's heart, perhaps better than you do! So avail yourself of every opportunity to be blessed by your other praying, Christ-honoring brothers and sisters. You need them and they need you!

JESUS IS LORD!

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