



The
DOCTRINES
of **GRACE**

in the
GOSPEL OF JOHN

a brief study from the pages of Scripture

R. BRUCE STEWARD (1936-2006)

The Doctrines of Grace in the Gospel of John

*“All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him
that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” – John 6:37*

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Introduction

Reasons for the *Gospel of John*

In every generation the Christian in the pulpit and in the pew has had need of a clear view of the Gospel, which is “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Romans 1:16). It is of utmost importance that the Gospel proclaimed and believed be the “good news” from God, underpinned by His authority, and therefore based on His Word. For this reason I have prepared this brief study.

I have chosen the *Gospel of John* because it was expressly written by the “beloved” disciple of Jesus Christ to bring men to faith in Jesus Christ (20:30-31). Throughout this Gospel our attention is constantly focused on Jesus Christ. We read of His signs and His solemn words to men. The *Gospel* contains an authentic account of an eyewitness who records what he saw and heard, and who, as an Apostle, wrote an authoritative interpretation of the works and words of Jesus Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (14:25, 26; 15:26, 27; 16:13-15; 20:30, 31; 21:24).

Another reason for choosing this Gospel is that I have suggested to spiritually concerned men, women, boys and girls that they begin their study of the Bible here. The churches that I pastored for over twenty-one years gave out *Gospels of John* as means of literature evangelism. I have also observed that this has been the practice of many evangelical pastors and churches.

As an evangelical Christian, one who believes and proclaims the Gospel of Jesus Christ, I am concerned that what I believe and preach be the same “good news” that Jesus preached, and that He commissioned His Apostles and the church through all time to preach (see Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 24:44-49; the Book of Acts). Those who are evangelical Christians are divided today concerning certain features of the Gospel. Whether they will admit it or not, they are either Calvinists or Arminians.

Two Issues in Church History

Two basic issues are at stake in the viewpoint one takes.

1). The first has to do with man: Since the fall of man, what *can man do* toward his own salvation? It is not a question of man’s responsibility, for both Calvinists and Arminians hold all fallen men accountable to God, and both call on all men “to repent and believe the Gospel” (Mark 1:15, Acts 17:31; 20:21).

2). The second issue has to do with God and what kind of salvation He sets before men: Is what God offers an *actual* salvation or a *possible* salvation?

These are issues which have been raised in the church repeatedly. They were first brought to a head in the controversy between Augustine and Pelagius in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. Through the Middle Ages they were discussed and argued by medieval theologians. In the sixteenth century Luther defended the Augustinian position against Erasmus. John Calvin entered the controversy in opposition to the church of Rome and the semi-Pelagians of his day. Again, in the seventeenth century these questions were debated at the Synod of Dort (AD 1618-19). At this Synod, a group of men who were followers of Jacobus Arminius (died 1609) presented a “remonstrance,” or protest, against the Augustinian-Calvinistic understanding of the Gospel. The response of the Synod in regard to these two issues was to uphold as biblical truth the teachings of Augustine and Calvin, and to reject that of Arminius. The Synod’s response may be briefly summarized by the word “TULIP.”

T.U.L.I.P.

TULIP is, in the first place, a mnemonic (an aid to the memory), and, in the second place, an acronym (each letter standing for an important teaching of Scripture) that presents the Synod’s view of the two issues at stake. It will be admitted that each of the five teachings of Scripture represented by TULIP may be defined more precisely by the use of other words, but the acronym does serve a great purpose in helping to define the issues at stake. These five teachings constitute the “Doctrines of Grace.”

A brief glance at the word TULIP, noting what each letter represents and the opposing point of view, will be helpful in this study.

T—TOTAL DEPRAVITY

Man (by and after the fall) is totally depraved, or corrupt; he is unable to do anything toward his own salvation.

The opposing view is that since man is accountable before God to repent and believe the Gospel, he must therefore be able to do so.

U—UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION

God from all eternity did unconditionally elect to salvation certain ones out of the mass of sinful men. He did this not because He foresaw that they should believe the Gospel when offered to them, but because of His own love and purpose to glorify Himself in the salvation of those whom He chose freely and unconditionally.

The opposing view is that God’s election is conditional, that He foresaw that certain men would believe the Gospel and, on that basis, he chose them to be the heirs of life eternal.

L—LIMITED ATONEMENT

Christ, in the sacrifice of Himself on the cross, bore the sins of those whom God had elected unconditionally to eternal life and thus actually secured the salvation of those for whom He died. His atonement is thus limited to them.

The other view is that Christ sacrificed Himself for each and every man to make salvation possible for them by removing every obstacle in the way of man's being a recipient of eternal life if he believes in Christ.

I—IRRESISTIBLE GRACE

God's grace is irresistible in the elect (those for whom Christ died), and God's purpose of election and the benefits of Christ's saving work will be effectively applied to them by the Holy Spirit so they will be regenerated and believe the Gospel.

The opposing view is that God's grace is resistible by all and that its reception is based not only on the work of the Holy Spirit but the cooperation of man in receiving God's grace in faith.

P—PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

Those whom God has chosen, for whom Christ died, who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, will be preserved by God's power and will persevere in faith unto the end and be saved.

The other view is that the man who truly believes the Gospel may at some or any point leave off believing in Christ and therefore lose eternal life and perish eternally.

As we now approach the *Gospel of John*, there are two things accepted without question by everyone who believes that the Bible—in whole and all of its parts—is God's infallible, authoritative Word.

The *first* is that the eternal Son of God, the Logos, our Lord Jesus Christ, because He is God, has exhaustive and accurate knowledge of God. He has communicated to us in the Bible a knowledge of God that is sufficient for our understanding of Him and the way of His salvation (see John 1:1-5, 9-18; and 14:25, 26; 15:26, 27; 16:13-15).

The *second* is that the Lord Jesus Christ has both extensive and intensive knowledge of men, which He has also communicated to us in the Bible (see John 2:24, 25; 5:33-42; 6:15, 64, 70, 71).

2

“Total Depravity”

The critical issue is Total Depravity. There are many who would profess that they hold to this point (and the final point, the Perseverance of the Saints), but who in reality do not. Upon discussion of this subject, they hold that in some way the will of man, though impaired by the fall, can at least cooperate with the grace of God and must do so if one is to receive the gift of eternal life. However, when one studies carefully John's *Gospel*, I am convinced of the truth that apart from the new birth, man will not and cannot receive Christ. The teachings on man's condition will be considered under two heads: first, the *diagnosis* of man's condition, and second, the *prognosis* of man's condition as conducted by the Great Physician Himself and His beloved student, John.

The Diagnosis

1. Man's spiritual knowledge

In the prologue of the *Gospel* (1:1-18), we are confronted with man's condition after the fall (v. 5): “And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.” This is the condition of *spiritual blindness*: it cannot comprehend light. Jesus later told Nicodemus that “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (3:3). In the miracle of the man born blind (Ch. 9), Jesus used the occasion to point out that this is the tragic spiritual condition of man, especially if one thinks that he can see (9:39-41). Again, it is only those who follow Him (and to follow someone implies the ability to see) who do not walk in darkness (8:12). Man is blind and lives in darkness (12:35, 40).

However, not only is man spiritually blind, he is *spiritually deaf*. Jesus again states that though the Father has borne witness of Him through the works He has performed, “Ye have neither heard His voice at any time...and ye have not His word abiding in you” (5:36-38). There is, therefore, an inability on man's part to receive not only the witness of the Father, but also the witness of the Son (3:11), or even the witness of Jesus' forerunner, John the Baptist (see 1:6-8, 15, 19-36; 5:33-36; 8:27-36). They rejoiced in John's light but not in Him to whom John bore witness, that is, they did not hear John in that important matter which was the whole purpose of his ministry (1:6-8). Jesus gave the reason for man's lack of understanding of what He was saying: “...because ye cannot hear My word” [i.e., what I am saying] (8:43). When men cannot hear His word, it will not find a place in them (8:37).

Finally, man is *ignorant concerning spiritual things*. This truth confronts us in Chapter 1 of the *Gospel of John*. In verse 5, man did not “comprehend” the Light; in verse 10, they did not “know” the Light; in verse 11, they did not “receive” Him, and even after John the Baptist introduced Him (v. 26), they still did not know Him. In His con-

versation with the woman at the well, Jesus emphasized fallen man's spiritual ignorance in two matters: (1) that God has a gracious gift that man needs, and (2) that He (the Christ) is the giver of that gift (4:10-26).

He found this ignorance not only in the Samaritans but also in Nicodemus, the teacher in Israel (3:10), the multitudes of the Jews (7:41, 52; 10:20-24; 12:40), the Pharisees (8:19), those who professed to believe in Him (8:31-32, 43, 55), the custodians of the synagogues (9:16, 29-34), and even in His own disciples (13:6-9). He states that the opposition and persecution which His followers would experience by unbelievers is "because they have not known the Father or Me" (16:1-3). Man by and after the fall has a spiritual IQ of 0.00000. He is blind, deaf and ignorant of God, His Christ, and His Word (17:25).

2. Man's spiritual affections

Man's affections are manifested in what he loves and what he hates, in what "turns him on" and "turns him off," in what "makes him tick" and "ticks him off."

Man naturally has an antipathy to God, Christ, the True Light, His Word, and His people. John points out this antipathy in Chapter 1 where he writes, "He [the Word (v. 1), the Life (v. 4), the Light (vv. 4-5, 9)] came unto His own [the Jews], and His own received Him not" (v. 11). This summarizes the attitude of the Jews throughout this Gospel. Despite their privileged status as descendants of Abraham in the flesh (8:33, 39) and the possession of the Word of God in the Scriptures (5:39), when Christ Jesus arrived in history among them, they rejected Him. Because of man's condition as an evildoer, he is not merely indifferent to the Light, but he also does not come to the Light—and even hates the Light—because it exposes his evil deeds (3:20). This includes an aversion for true life (5:40). When man is pressed on spiritual matters, he dishonors the Son (8:48, 49). Man's spiritual antipathy was displayed in the days of His flesh in their desire and plan to put Him to death (7:19, 25, 32; 8:59; 10:31; 11:50-53; 12:10).

On the positive side, man has a natural attraction for and adherence to evil. He hates the Light and loves darkness (3:19). Darkness is the atmosphere in which he lives and moves and has his being. Because the "ruler of this world" is his "father," his will and example are dominant in his life. That is why he is a liar and a murderer (8:44; 12:31; 14:30). The rule of his life is not the will and approval of God, but the applause of his fellow bond-slaves to sin and Satan (7:13; 9:22; 12:42, 43; 19:38).

Jesus also taught that man is addicted or enslaved in a threefold manner. *First* of all, he is enslaved by sin: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin" (8:34). The practice of sin is the evidence of slavery to sin. *Second*, this addiction to sin is evidence of an enslavement to Satan: "Ye do the deeds of your father"...who was, not as they supposed Abraham (8:39-41), but "the devil" (8:44). *Third*, He taught that man is also addicted to himself, and because of the dominion of sin and Satan, is deluded in thinking he is saving his life while he is actually losing it (John 12:25).

Judas Iscariot serves as an example of such addiction to self (12:4-6). His love of his own life and desire for material possessions was his god, and this became the occasion for the betrayal of Jesus (13:2). He became the instrument of Satan (13:26, 27) and led the authorities to arrest Jesus at the place where He resorted to pray (18:1-3, 5). We learn from the notes on Judas' character, that the man who serves himself and his own interest has a most terrible god, a god that destroys him.

3. Man's spiritual volitions

This is the critical point within the critical point. It is important to recognize that man makes his decisions freely—but on the basis of his interest (sin, self, and Satan) and his affections, which are opposed to God, His Christ, and His Word. His decisions, then, though freely arrived at, can only be wrong.

Jesus taught that man is plagued by a twofold inability.

First, man cannot come to Him for life. He stated, “No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him” (6:44). Again he says, “Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto Me, except it were given unto Him of My Father” (6:65). The ability to come to Christ for eternal life has two aspects: (1) an inner alluring or “drawing” by the Father to the Son, and (2) the gift or “grant” of the Father of the ability to come to Christ. He taught also that those who come to Him have been given to Him by the Father (6:37).

Second, Jesus stated that unregenerate man is unable to believe in Him. To Nicodemus he said, “If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?” (3:12). In His discourse on the Bread of Life, He connected believing on Him with coming to Him (6:64, 65). This connection indicates that to come to Christ is to believe in Christ. In the same discourse He declares that only those who “eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood” have life in themselves (6:53-58). This is a vivid way of showing the absolute dependence of man on the person and work of Christ for eternal life. As a result of this “hard [difficult] saying” (6:60), “many of His disciples went back, and walked with Him no more” (6:66 cf. 8:30, 31). In His teaching on the Good Shepherd and His sheep, He gave the reason for the unbelief of the Jews as not being His sheep: “My sheep,” He said, “hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me” (10:26, 27).

John comments on the obstinate unbelief of the multitude (12:37) as the fulfillment of two of Isaiah's prophecies. In 12:38 he quotes Isaiah 53:1: “Lord, who has believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?” In the next verses he writes, “They could not believe” (i.e., there was an inability to do so), for as Isaiah said again, “He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them” (12:39, 40; Isaiah 6:10). Jesus Himself refers to this failure to come to Him as the opposition of the will acting freely: “And ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life” (5:40).

Man, in his inner spiritual life before God, in order “to receive,” “believe on,” or “come to” Christ, stands in need of a new birth (John 1:13; 3:3, 5, 7). His darkened eyes need to be opened and enlightened to know the truth. His wayward affections need to be turned that he might love the light and hate darkness. His obstinate will must be enabled by a powerful work of God so he might “believe on,” “come to,” and “follow” Christ.

4. Man’s activity before God

The *Gospel of John* teaches very clearly that the expression of man’s condition before God is seen in his actions. Jesus taught “that men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov’d [exposed]” (3:19, 20). In verse 19 the word translated “evil” indicates an active evil, one that is “pernicious” or “destructive.” In verse 20 the word “evil” indicates the “worthlessness” of those deeds, their “good-for-nothingness” before God. The first word (v. 19) may be used to describe the root of such a one whose inner life is described in items 1-3 above. The second word refers to the fruit that is produced from such a root: it is under God’s judgment (3:18).

The life of man stands under God’s judgment because of a lack of faith and obedience (3:18, 36). Believing in Christ is evidenced in obeying Him. Lack of faith (the root) produces disobedience (the fruit). Jesus taught that the motive of those who obey Him is to express their love toward Him (14:15, 21, 23). He goes on to state, “He that loveth Me not keepeth not My sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father’s which sent Me” (14:24; 15:23-26). And, as the aim of obedience to Christ is to honor Him and the Father who sent Him, so disobedience to Him is to dishonor Him and the Father (5:23 cf. vv. 39-47). Man’s actions are thus judged good or evil not only on the basis of the root from which they spring (the inner life of fallen man) and the worthlessness of the fruit, but also from the motive, which is hatred of God and His Son, and the aim, which is to dishonor God and His Son.

5. Man’s condition before God

The only logical conclusion that one can properly come to on the basis of the preceding facts is that man is spiritually dead. However, we are not left to draw our own conclusions in this matter. The *Gospel of John* asserts this plainly.

First, Jesus taught that man has no life in himself (6:53). All of His teachings, which require a “new birth” by the Spirit, a “coming to Him,” an “eating of His flesh,” a “drinking of His blood,” and a “believing on Him” for eternal life, imply this as well (e.g., John 3:1-11; 5:40; 6:53-58; 20:30, 31). His statements that He alone is the Life and that He alone gives life, require us to believe that apart from Him and His gift man has no spiritual life before God (John 10:27, 28; 11:25, 26; 14:6).

Second, He taught that the unconverted man’s condition is one of present spiritual death. He says that the one who “heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life” (5:24). He then speaks of the present time (“and now is”) “when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live” (5:25). A careful examina-

tion of the setting of this passage shows that here Jesus refers to the spiritually dead. He refers to the physically dead as those who are “in the graves” (verses 28 and 29).

Spiritually, all men are like Lazarus (when Jesus came to his tomb and ordered the stone removed), having the stench of death about them, “bound hand and foot with grave-clothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin” (11:38-44). And as it was only the life-giving voice of the Son of God saying “Lazarus, come forth” (v. 43) that brought him from the cave tomb (v. 44), so only the same voice speaking today to men spiritually dead, calls them forth to spiritual and eternal life. For man is spiritually dead.

The Prognosis

The Diagnostician also gives the authoritative prognosis for man. Man, if he remains in and under the condition of spiritual death in this life, will have certain consequences to face in the period after death, at the resurrection of judgment (5:29). It should be noted that man, though unable to do that which pleases God, is still responsible to please Him, and is without excuse before Him (1:5; 7:28; 9:40, 41; 10:37-39; 15:22-25).

There are three consequences under which man labors.

1). Man is destined to perish eternally

Jesus told Nicodemus that only those who are believers will “not perish” and have eternal life. All non-believers will therefore “perish” eternally (3:16). He pointed out to those in the Temple (John 8:12-59) that those who were not believing and following Him would die in their sin (8:21, 24). They would be cast out forever (6:37; see also 8:35, 10:28).

2). Man is living under the wrath of God

John the Baptist declared to his disciples that their faith was to be placed in “the Bridegroom” (3:27-30), “the Son” in whose hand the Father has given all things (3:31-35). He then contrasted the situation of those who trust the Son and those who disobey Him. The believing one has eternal life, but the disobedient one has the wrath of God abiding or remaining on him (3:36).

3). Man is condemned already

Jesus taught that He was not sent “into the world to condemn the world”; there was no need for this, because he that does not believe on Him has been judged already (3:17, 18). This judgment will be publicly declared at the last day when they that have done evil will come forth to a resurrection of judgment (5:28, 29).

Terrible is the expectation that awaits unbelievers, according to the *Gospel of John*. Man who is wrapped in the grave-clothes of spiritual death is perishing eternally, already under God’s wrath and judgment. For him death will not bring life in its fullness, but judgment to its uttermost extent, or what can only be described as eternal death. This is the prognosis set forth by the Great Physician.

3

“Unconditional Election”

Our attention is now focused on God—God who so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, the Beloved One, who from all eternity “is in the bosom of the Father” (1:18; 3:16; 17:24). This love toward man is amazing in the light of man’s character and condition as in the previous chapter. There is nothing in, about, or for man that is lovable. He is not only totally corrupt and displeasing in God’s sight, he is also totally incapable of doing anything to alter his condition or character before Him.

God has, however, of His own sovereign and free will, set His everlasting love on a particular number of fallen men to eternal life. There are four categories of statements made in the *Gospel of John* that teach this truth.

1. God has chosen certain ones to be His own

God, the holy and righteous Father, has chosen certain ones to be His own. This truth is set forth clearly by Jesus in His prayer recorded in Chapter 17 of John. Jesus states that those men that the Father had given Him, were first of all the Father’s. We read “thine they were” (v. 6), “they are thine” (v. 9), and “all [things that are] mine are thine, and thine are mine” (v. 10). He prays “that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved Me (v. 23)...for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world” (v. 24). In other words, there are men whom the Father, because of His own free love, chose to be His own before the foundation of the world.

2. God, the Father, has given these chosen ones to His Son

Christ reminds the Father that He was given authority over all mankind, that to all whom He has given Him, He may give eternal life (17:2). Again, one of the arguments that He advances for God’s keeping them in His name (17:11) is that He had manifested His (God’s) name to “the men which Thou gavest Me out of the world...and Thou gavest them Me; and they have kept Thy word” (17:6). His prayer is not for the world, but for “them which Thou hast given Me” (17:9). That Jesus was not merely thinking of the eleven apostles as the sum of all those given to Him, He indicates in verses 20-24. In verse 20 we hear His words, “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word”—the word that the Father had given to Him, that He gave to them (see vv. 6-8). He prays “that they may all be one” (v. 21); i.e., the apostles and “them also which shall believe on Me through their word.” This includes the church from the first century to this day, and as long as this age endures. He continues in verse 24, including apostles and all believers of all time as “they also, whom Thou hast given Me.” (See also 6:37; 10:29.)

3. The Son of God committed Himself to die for them

God the Father gave them to His Son, who had committed Himself to die to purchase eternal life for them. As this will be dealt with more fully under the next point, I will touch on it only briefly here. In Chapter 10, as the Good Shepherd, Christ says, “The good shepherd giveth His life for the sheep” (v. 11). He continues, “Therefore doth My Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I might take it again....I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again” (vv. 17, 18). His death (“lay down My life”) and resurrection (“take it again”) for the sheep, are in accord with the Divine purpose: “This commandment have I received of My Father” (v. 18).

Throughout this *Gospel*, Jesus is conscious of the will of His Father (His commandment) that He must accomplish (4:34; 5:30, 36; 6:38; 17:4; 19:28-30), and of His hour, filled with great suffering, that awaits Him (2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 16:32; 17:1). When He was in the garden and saw Judas coming with the officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, “Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon Him, went forth” to meet them (18:3, 4). And, as He went, He was reaching for the cup which the Father had given Him to drink (18:11).

4. God also gave them the means whereby it is secured to them

God the Father, who has appointed them to eternal life, has also determined to give them the means whereby it is secured to them.

a. God's purpose for them is eternal life

In regard to eternal life as God's purpose for His people:

- 1). It is a present gift and possession of those whom He has chosen (6:39, 40; 14:2, 3).
- 2). It includes the hope of the resurrection of life on the last day (5:24, 25, 28, 29; 6:39, 40, 44, 54).
- 3). It includes being with Christ—”where I am and beholding My glory” forever (17:24, cf. 1:14; 17:5).

b. God provides the means for eternal life

He also appoints and gives all the means that are necessary to receive and secure eternal life to His chosen ones:

- 1). He gives them the ability to come to Christ (6:37, 44, 65).
- 2). He gives them the ability to behold and believe on the Son (6:40; 10:26, 27). In this connection, we are to understand Jesus' statements of eating His flesh and drinking His blood (6:51, 53-58). It is a very concrete way of showing what believing on Christ is—it is absolute dependence on Him as the only source and support of spiritual life, just as for physical life we depend on food and drink.
- 3). He gives them the ability to hear His voice and follow Him (8:47, cf. 46; and 10:26, 27, 29).

The Covenant of Redemption

In this section there are set forth two important theological concepts in regard to salvation. The first involves the agreement between the Father and the Son, or what has been termed the *Covenant of Redemption*. The Father gives a people to the Son, and the Son agrees to redeem this people by His death (see 1 and 2 above).

This serves as the basis for the second: the *Covenant of Grace*, in which the Father, as the Fount of the Godhead, and the Son, as Head and Mediator of His people, secure the salvation of the elect, and all the means to that salvation (see 3 and 4 above). “Salvation is of the Lord” (Jonah 2:9).

4

“Limited Atonement”

By “Limited Atonement” is meant that the death of Christ is intended solely for the elect and that the effect of His atonement actually secures their salvation. Two things are thus emphasized:

- 1). that redemption is *particular*, and
- 2). that redemption is *accomplished* for the elect of God.

There are, in the *Gospel of John*, two classes of passages that treat the subject of the death of Christ. One class sets forth the death of Christ as intended for a particular people. The other class sets forth His death as having universal implications. How are we to understand them? Are they a true antinomy that may never be harmonized, or is there a way of understanding the passages that magnifies the wonders of Christ’s death?

1. Christ’s death is for a particular people

a. Chapter 10

The first passage that sets forth this truth is found in Chapter 10. Christ states in verse 11, “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth His life for the sheep,” and in verse 14 these sheep are termed “His own” twice (cf. vv. 3, 4). In verse 15 He states that “I lay down My life for the sheep.” Jesus made these statements to the Jews at the Feast of Tabernacles in the seventh month (see 7:2). Later, at the time of the Feast of the Dedication (Hanukkah) in the twelfth month, Jesus is again at Jerusalem (10:22, 23). He then explained the unbelief of the Jews as being a sign that they were “not of My sheep” (10:26). That is, they were not given to Him by the Father, and, therefore, are not the objects of His redeeming death!

In verse 27 He gives two marks of His Sheep: they “hear My voice... and they follow Me” (cf. v. 14). He gives them the eternal life destined for them (vv. 28, 29) because He lays down His life for them (see vv. 11-18). Another passage that has bearing on the subject is found in Chapter 21. Here Christ restores and re-commissions Peter (21:15-19). Peter is to be an undershepherd of Christ (see 1 Peter 5:1-5) and His sheep (vv. 16, 17). Peter’s motivation to this service is his love for Jesus Christ (vv. 15-19), the One who laid down His life for His sheep.

b. Chapter 11

The next passage is found in chapter 11:47-53 (cf. 18:14). Jesus had just performed His last great public miracle by raising Lazarus from the dead (11:38-44). As a consequence, many of the friends of Mary believed on Him; however, some went and reported this to the Pharisees (11:45, 46). The Jewish religious leaders convened a council to decide on a course of action in regard to Jesus because He had performed so many attesting miracles (11:47). They viewed Jesus and His works as a source of public unrest that could cause the Romans to resort to harsh measures that would completely crush the Jewish state and religious structure as then constituted (11:50).

Then Caiaphas, the high priest, utters a remarkable prophecy (v. 51), though to him it was merely shrewd policy or a sharp political move. God spoke in the words of Caiaphas as He spoke through Balaam’s ass, and through the money-grubbing Balaam himself (see Numbers 22-24). Here are Caiaphas’s words: “Ye know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should perish not” (11:49, 50).

We learn three things:

1). This action of putting Jesus to death (11:53) has a wonderful order about it (it is “expedient”) in the flow of history.

2). His death would bring about great good to the people, meaning the people of God, or as interpreted by John, “the children of God...scattered abroad” (11:52, i.e., those whom God has chosen and given to the Son out of the world or as yet have not believed on Him—cf. 10:16; 17:20).

3). His death would be the means of preserving a part of the nation as the people of God, “that the whole nation perish not.” John informs us that in this sense Jesus was to “die for that nation” (v. 51). This prophecy, uttered by Caiaphas not “of himself” or of his own initiative, sets forth the truth that Jesus’ death was not for all indiscriminately, but for a particular group of people—“the children of God”—both from the Jewish nation and of other nations.

c. Chapter 13

In Chapter 13, which records the Last Supper, we read: “Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end” (or literally “to the uttermost” or “eternally”). Here we see that His death is set forth as being motivated by His great love for “His own.” Throughout the chapter

Jesus emphasizes His lowly service to His own and indicates that there was one among them that His service would not benefit, the one to whom He gave the sop, Judas Iscariot, His betrayer (13:2-31). Then He sets forth this service of love as a pattern that His disciples were to show to one another, "That you love one another; as I have loved you" (13:34; cf. 31-33). His love for them was demonstrated by His death for them.

d. Chapter 15

Chapter 15 contains Jesus' discourse on His relationship with His people. He is the true vine and the Father is the Husbandmen (or vine dresser); His disciples are the branches that depend upon the vine for life, and are pruned by the Father (15:1-8). Jesus again takes up the theme of His love for His disciples in verse 9. His love for them is set forth again as an example and pattern for their imitation (vv. 9-12). He sets forth the greatness of His love in verses 13 and 14: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you."

Note the following:

- 1). His death is voluntary, a laying down of His own life.
- 2). His death is for those whom He counts to be His friends, i.e., a particular group of people.
- 3). Those for whom He laid down His life may be recognized by their submission to His command.

e. Chapter 17

The last passage that bears on this theme of a particular redemption is 17:19 in Christ's High Priestly prayer. He prays, "And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth." Now the construction of the verse is such that what Jesus does is the ground of what will take place in the lives of His people. This is indicated by the fact that the verb "sanctify" is active and the participle "sanctified" is passive. The word translated "that" also indicates that what follows is either the purpose or result of that which precedes it in the sentence. Jesus' sanctifying Himself indicates His entire consecration to God's will, which culminates in His death on the cross for the consecration of His people to God.

The context and the content of His prayer indicates the same. He had stated, "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father" (16:28). After He prayed (Chapter 17), we read, "Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon Him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye?" (18:4). Then after Peter cut off Malchus's right ear (18:10), He says to Peter, "Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?" (18:11). He is willing to accept the cup of woe, the cross.

In the prayer itself we find the somber tones of death and suffering: "Father, the hour is come (17:1); ...I am no more in the world (v. 11) ...and now I am come to Thee (v. 13); ...I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am" (v. 24). These statements indicate that His consecration to His Father's will was so absolute in His

mind that He had already died and returned to His Father, so much so that he could appeal to it as already finished: “I have glorified Thee on the earth: I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do” (17:4). His sanctifying Himself in His death, He states, is “for their sakes,” that is, for all those whom the Father had given to Him (17:2, 6, 9, 20, 24). His death is for a particular people.

2. Christ’s death is universal in scope

Here we will consider passages in which Christ’s death is for “the world,” “whosoever,” and “all.” The purpose is to determine if they are in conflict with a particular or limited atonement.

a. “the sin of the world” (1:29)

John the Baptist turned the attention of his hearers to Jesus by the words, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (1:29). The next day as John was standing with Andrew (v. 35) and an unnamed disciple, known as “the beloved” disciple (John), he exclaimed, “Behold the Lamb of God!” (1:36). The word “Lamb,” applied to Jesus, naturally recalled to the minds of his audience the Passover lamb and the offerings of sacrifice in the temple (see 2:13, which helps fix the time of John’s announcement as before the Passover).

The startling announcement was as follows:

1). Jesus, a man, was to die a sacrificial death that would set people free from the bondage of sin, “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin...” (cf. 8:36).

2). His death was not confined to the nation of Israel but included some men in all nations, “...of the world” (see 11:50-52).

If we understand the mind-set of the Jew in the first century and their conviction that the Messiah was exclusively theirs, then the words can be understood in their true sense and have their proper impact in exploding the Jews’ misunderstanding of Old Testament prophecy. So understood, the universal extent¹ of Jesus’ death does *not* exclude a particular redemption.

b. “lifted up” (3:14)

Now we will turn to Jesus’ own words that are found in 3:14-18; 8:28; and 12:32-34. All of these passages contain a reference to Jesus’ being “lifted up.” John tells us that this expression was used “signifying what death He should die” (12:33). Jesus said, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up” (3:14); that is, “My death is an absolute necessity.” He explained, “That whosoever believeth [believes] in Him should not perish, but have eternal life” (v. 15). This tells us that the benefit which His death secures, eternal life, is only for one whose attitude toward Him is one of continual trust (the force of the present participle “believes”). Jesus goes on, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever

¹ **universal extent** – The atonement is universal in reach in that it included some men from all nations, not only the Jews.

er believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting [eternal] life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved” (3:16, 17).

Note the following:

- 1). The *motive* of God—He “so loved the world.”
- 2). The *action* of God—”He gave His only begotten Son,” He “sent His Son into the world.”
- 3). The *purpose* of God—”that the world through Him (the Son) might be saved,” “that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” “He that believeth on Him is not condemned” (v. 18).

Universal scope

We again see that the *scope* of God’s salvation through the death of Christ is *universal*:² “world” (four times, vv. 16, 17), and “whosoever” (two times, vv. 15, 16). It is also *particular*, for those who benefit from Christ’s death, the objects of God’s love, are those who are characterized by continually believing on Him (the present participle preceded by the definite article: “he who believes” or “the one who believes,” vv. 15, 16, 18). In light of our discussion of unconditional election (in which we saw that God gave certain men the ability to believe or come to Christ), we find an interlocking of particular election and particular atonement in universal contexts.

In 12:32-34 we find much the same thing. There Jesus states, “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me” (v. 32). This is followed by objections from His hearers. In response to them, Jesus points out the necessity of believing in “the light,” that they may become “the children of light” (vv. 34-36). In verse 32 the term “all men” is qualified, so that we have the meaning, “All men who are believing in Me receive the benefits of My death.”

c. “Savior of the world” (4:42)

The statement of the Samaritans who were directed to Jesus Christ by the testimony of the woman at the well is full of instruction, especially in the light of the flow of the passage. They said to her, “Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world” (4:42). The expression “the Savior of the world” made by them is the climax of Jesus’ dealings with the Samaritans and their confession of faith in Him. John in placing this statement last, and without either criticism or additional comment, underscores the truthfulness of their conclusion that Jesus is “indeed the Savior of the world.”

I will summarize what was revealed by Jesus to the Samaritans:

- 1). He was Messiah, the Christ (vv. 25, 26, 29).
- 2). He was the Giver of the water of eternal life (vv. 10, 13, 14).

² **scope...universal** – Christ’s atoning death won the salvation of some men from all nations, and was not just for the Jews only.

3). He revealed that salvation would no longer be the exclusive privilege of the Jews or that Jerusalem would be the only proper place to worship the Father (vv. 21-24).

When they used the expression “the Savior of the world,” it indicated that His salvation was not for Jews only, but Samaritans as well and by implication all who would believe on Him (vv. 14, 29, 39, 41).

Again, the truth is: His salvation is *universal*—”whosoever,” “the Savior of the world” (4:14, 21-24, 42), yet *particular*—”whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him” (v. 14), “true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth” (vv. 23, 24), “the Father seeketh such [ones] to worship Him (v. 23), “many [not all] of the Samaritans of that city believed on Him” (v. 39), and “many more [not all] believed” (v. 41).

Having examined the statement of v. 42 in the light of the passage, the question may be raised, “But what has this to do with Christ’s atonement?” The answer: everything. Atonement for sin is at the very heart of the woman’s statement to Jesus of the contention between the Jews and Samaritans (vv. 19, 20). And to one in her condition, an adulteress (vv. 17, 18, 29), the true resolution of the problem, “Where may I properly offer the proper sacrifices for my sins?” was no question of idle curiosity. Sacrifice for sin was necessary, salvation from sin was needed. Sacrificial, substitutionary death for sin, to save the sinner, looms large in this passage. The expression “Savior of the world” does have bearing then on our Gospel’s view of the meaning of the sacrificial death of Christ.

d. “life of the world” (6:51)

The final passage that falls under our notice in this connection is 6:22-59. Jesus is found by the multitudes whom He had fed the day before (see 6:1-21), in the synagogue in Capernaum (v. 59). John tells us that the time was close to the Passover Feast (v. 4), when the Jews celebrated their deliverance from bondage in Egypt by sacrifice (see Exodus 12). In His discourse on the bread of life (vv. 32-59), Jesus said, “And the bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world” (v. 51). That this “giving of His flesh” is a reference to His death (see v. 33) is made evident in verses 53-56 where He speaks of eating His flesh and drinking His blood three times. His death, in which the flesh and blood will be separated (see 19:33-37), is the means by which eternal life would be bestowed on men (vv. 51, 53, 54, 56-58). Faith in the death He experienced is vividly set forth under the terms “eating” and “drinking,” and “My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.” The meaning is clear: just as men depend on food and drink to have physical life, so must men depend on the death of Christ to have spiritual and eternal life.

We note in this passage that the word “world” (v. 51) has the sense of meaning not just Jews, but Gentiles also, as we read that the only ones who derive the benefit of His death or eternal life (including resurrection from the dead) are the ones who come to Him (vv. 35, 44, 45; cf. v. 65), believe on Him (vv. 35, 37, 40, 47), have been given to Him by the Father (vv. 37, 38, cf. v. 65), are drawn by the Father (v. 44), and taught by the Father (v. 45), so they may eat (vv. 50, 51, 53, 54, 56-58) and drink (vv. 53, 54, 56) His flesh

and blood. Again we see that His death is *universal* and *particular*. By the term “Limited Atonement,” we have set forth the universal particularism³ of the benefits of Christ’s death (see also Rev. 7:9-10 for this important truth).

5

“Irresistible Grace”

To put this article of faith in its proper perspective, let us summarize our findings to this point. So far we have seen that out of the mass of *totally* depraved men (T), God has *unconditionally* chosen some to life everlasting (U), those for whom Christ died (L). Under the present head we are concerned with the application of the benefits of the atonement of Christ to those for whom He died and those the Father had chosen. It is important to note that what is under discussion is that God’s grace is irresistible only to those whom the Father had chosen and for whom Christ died. It is not that God’s grace cannot be resisted by any (see Acts 7:51).

1. God transforms by His Spirit those that He has chosen

God, in sovereign grace, transforms by His Spirit those that He has chosen out of the mass of sinful humankind and given to His Son, who bore their sins on the cross.

a. The work of God

At the very outset of his Gospel, John points out that those who receive Christ, the rightful children of God, those who believe on Christ’s name, do so because of the work of God in them (1:11-13). These are begotten of God, not because of any human privilege nor of human instrumentality. The ability to receive Him and to believe on His name is found in the gracious work of God to make them genuine children of God (1:12, 13). God in His grace is the source of the new birth.

This truth was set forth by Jesus in His meeting with Nicodemus. Jesus stressed the importance of the new birth to “see” (3:3) and to “enter the kingdom of God” (3:5). This new birth is wrought by the Spirit of God (3:5, 6, 8). It is in consequence of this that men will look believingly on the “lifted up” Son of man and see there that God in His love gave His only begotten Son to give them everlasting life (3:14-16).

³ **universal particularism** – This is an unusual term as applied to the atonement, but the author’s meaning is consistent with Reformation Theology: 1) in His mercy, God has appointed some men from *all nations* (universal) to be saved, 2) and all those so appointed (particular) will be saved.

b. God gives the Spirit; the Spirit imparts life

God in His grace gives the Holy Spirit who imparts new life to His own. John the Baptist, in His testimonies to the Jews, pointed out that the Son of the Father has the Spirit without measure (3:34, 35), and that He, the Lamb of God (1:29, 36), the Son of God (1:34), baptizes with or in the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 12:13). We note here that the Son baptizes men with the Holy Spirit, who at that time gives spiritual life to them (cf. John 6:63).

One of the great comforts that Jesus Christ has given to His people is the assurance that they will be indwelt with another like Himself: “the Spirit of Truth,” “the Comforter,” “the Holy Spirit” (John 14:16-18, 26; 15:26). The Holy Spirit is the gift of both the Father (14:16-26) and the Son (15:26), He teaches life-giving truth (14:26; cf. 8:32-36) by testifying to the Son (15:26), glorifying Him (16:13-14), and convicting of sin and righteousness and judgment, which has reference to Christ Jesus (16:7-17), whom to know is life eternal (John 17:3).

We notice in this gospel that Jesus Christ gives eternal life to as many as the Father (17:1) has given Him (17:2). He gives to them the living water that springs up into everlasting life (4:10, 14). The Son “quickeneth [gives life to] whom He will” (5:21), even those who are spiritually dead whom He calls to life (5:25-27). He gives it only to those to whom He speaks, who hear His voice and who live. Again, it is only a select group whom He calls His sheep, who know Him, hear His voice, and follow Him, for only they believe on Him (10:26-30). To them who were given to Him by the Father, and to them only, He gives eternal life (esp. vv. 28, 29).

c. “draw”

Jesus used the figure of being “lifted up,” a reference to His death, as being the means of drawing all that are His to Himself (12:32, 33). The word “draw” indicates that His death will capture their attention, affections, and incline their wills so that they would follow Him (12:35, 36). God in His grace irresistibly draws His own to Jesus Christ.

One other occasion where Jesus used the word “draw” was in His discourse on the bread of life (6:22-59).

1). He taught that only those who were drawn by the Father would come to Him and be raised on the last day (6:44).

2). These are the ones “taught by God,” those who “have heard and learned from the Father” (6:44; cf. Isaiah 54:13).

3). He later told His disciples that the ability to come to Him for life was a gift of the Father (6:65).

4). Knowing this, Jesus said authoritatively, “All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me;” and He assures us that “him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out” (6:37), and “I will raise him up at the last day” (6:39, 40, 44, 54). If a threefold cord is not easily broken, can a fourfold promise of the Living Truth ever be repealed?

According to our Gospel, those who were chosen by the Father are redeemed by the Son, regenerated, enabled to believe, come to, and receive the Son by the irresistible grace of the Triune God! Thus man who was spiritually dead is given spiritual life, so that he may trust, love, and obey Jesus Christ (John 14:1, 6, 15).

2. Those whom God transforms are not inactive or passive

Those whom God transforms are not inactive or passive, as a stone or piece of wood. They act with all of their being in a way that pleases and glorifies God. We see this in the following aspects of his spiritual life.

a. In regard to his true spiritual and saving knowledge:

1). He is no longer blind, but he can and does see the kingdom of God (John 3:3) and God the Father (1:18; 14:7-9), and has the true Light of the world to guide him through life (1:9, 8:12).

2). He is no longer deaf, but he now hears the life-giving voice of the Son of God (5:25; 10:3, 4, 16, 27; 18:37), “the Christ” (5:24; cf. 4:42), and “the Word of God” (8:47). His ear is opened spiritually and hangs on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.

3). He is no longer spiritually ignorant, but he has true knowledge of God. He knows the Lamb of God (1:29, 34), His gift, the living water (4:10,14), the Christ (4:10, 25, 26; 6:68, 69; 17:3), the Savior of the world (4:42), the teaching (7:17), the voice of the Good Shepherd (10:3, 4, 14, 27), the true God (17:3), the name of the Father (17:6-8) in an increasing manner (17:26), and that the Father has sent the Son into the world (17:25). In that knowledge, he knows his need and asks to have it met by God in His Son (4:10).

b. In regard to his new spiritual affections:

1). It is Jesus’ assumption that His followers will love Him (14:15, 21, 23; cf. v. 24). In these verses He points out that this love for Him is not a sentimental feeling but results in concrete action: “Keep My commandments.”

2). The renewed man’s love for Him is no longer centered in his own interests, desires, and well being; as a matter of fact, he dethrones himself (“hates his life in this world,” 12:25) and dies that he may bear much fruit (12:24) in service to Christ as His follower (12:26).

3). The renewed man’s affections are directed to Christ’s followers. His followers love one another (13:34, 35; 15:12, 17). Their love for one another is patterned on His love for them:

a). It is *intelligent*—recognizing there are needs to be met.

b). It is *compassionate*—seeing that misery and discomfort are the consequence of such needs.

c). It is *purposeful* and desires to meet those needs at all costs. It will involve prayers, comforting words, and actions to alleviate the need.

We see that there is a new love for the Triune God, His Word, and His people (see 21:15-22).

c. In regard to the renewed man's volitions:

- 1). The renewed man is one who is willing to do God's will (7:17).
- 2). The renewed man's desire is to abide in Christ's love (15:9, 10).
- 3). The renewed man's desire is to abide in Christ's word (8:31).

d. In regard to the renewed man's activity:

1). The renewed man is one who receives God's Son (1:12, 13) out of His fullness (1:16), favor after favor (grace for grace) to meet his need (1:16), and receives His Words (17:8).

2). The renewed man is one who believes "on His [Christ, the Word] Name" (1:12, 13; cf. 3:16, 36; 6:68, 69; 9:35-39; 11:45; 20:30, 31), on the One who sent Him (17:25), Christ's manifested glory (2:11), His word (4:41), the words of the Father (17:8), and the words of the apostles regarding Him (17:20).

3). The renewed man is one who enters the kingdom of God (3:3) through the "door of the sheep," Jesus Christ (10:7, 9).

4). The renewed man is one who comes to Christ (i.e., he arrives, 6:37, 44, 45; cf. v. 65).

5). The renewed man is one who "eats" the bread of God and the bread of life (6:51), the flesh of the Son of Man (6:53-56), and "drinks" the blood of Christ (6:53-56) and the water of life (4:10, 14).

6). The renewed man is one who is a disciple, or a follower of Jesus Christ. Both of these words indicate strenuous activity (see 1:34-51, 8:31; 10:27; 13:34, 35).

7). The renewed man is one who is a doer: he practices the truth (3:21) and does the works of God (6:27-29).

8). The renewed man is one who is a worshipper of the Triune God (4:23, 24; 9:38; cf. 20:27, 28).

We see in the life of the renewed man, in all of his faculties and activities, a new life lived in absolute dependence on God, but lived by him.

6

“Perseverance of the Saints”

We now arrive at the last letter in our acronym TULIP. The P stands for the Perseverance of the Saints. It states that those whom God has chosen, Christ has died for, and the Spirit has effectually called, will persevere in faith unto the end (either death or the second coming of Christ) and experience the fullness of the blessing of life as they behold the glory of Christ forever. Now “eternal life” has many aspects. It is a present possession and a promise to be more fully realized in the future. It is *qualitative*, i.e., life of a different kind than man has naturally, and it is *quantitative*—i.e., it is a life that begins now, survives the grave, is manifested in the resurrection of the body, and continues forever beholding the glory of Jesus Christ (4:14; 5:24, 25, 28, 29; 10:9, 10; 11:25, 26; 14:1-6; 17:24). It states that those who truly believe on Christ will persevere in faith unto the end (either death or the second coming of Christ) and experience the fullness of the blessing of life as they behold the glory of Christ forever.

In our Gospel it is set forth in several ways.

1. God’s people are preserved by His grace unto eternal life

a. The end the Father had in view

The perseverance of the saints is the end that the Father had in view when He gave certain men to Christ (see Unconditional Election). Jesus taught:

“And this is the Father’s will which hath sent Me, that of all which He hath given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it [all that He has given Me] up again at the last day. And this is the will of Him that sent Me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day” (6:39, 40).

Please note that in verse 39 the saints are viewed in the sum total, “all that He hath given Me”; therefore, “it” (the sum total) will be raised at the last day. In verse 40 “all” are viewed individually (“every one”) with the identifying mark that in time he believes on the Son and such a one will be raised “at the last day.”

Speaking of His sheep, Jesus said:

“And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand. My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father’s hand. I and My Father are one” (10:28-30).

Jesus plainly teaches that His sheep (1) were given to Him by His Father, (2) are given eternal life, and (3) are held securely in the hands of the Good Shepherd and the Father so they shall never perish!

b. One of the purposes for which Christ offered Himself

The perseverance of the saints is one of the purposes for which Christ offered Himself on the cross (see L above.) He emphasizes this to Nicodemus in John 3:14-16:

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

To summarize these verses, Jesus stated both negatively (“should not perish”) and positively (“have eternal life”) that the goal of God’s loving gift of His Son to the death of the cross is that they may experience eternal life.

When Jesus gave His discourse on the Good Shepherd, He said, “...I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth His life for the sheep” (10:10, 11). He terms eternal life as “abundant life” and includes the promise that “they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand” (10:10, 28).

The purpose for which Christ died for His sheep argues very strongly for their perseverance in faith.

c. The goal of God’s irresistible grace in drawing

The perseverance of the saints is the goal of God’s irresistible grace in drawing them to faith in Jesus Christ. In one statement Jesus brought into focus this truth as well as the truth of man’s total depravity (inability). He said to those who were grumbling about His claim to have come down from heaven, “No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day” (6:44). Previously in this discourse He tied together *unconditional election* (“all that the Father giveth Me”), *irresistible grace* (“shall come to Me”), and the *final perseverance of the saints* (“and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out”—John 6:37). Indeed, all of the evidences of God’s irresistible grace—“coming to Christ,” “believing in Christ,” “eating His flesh and drinking His blood”—communicate eternal life (6:35, 40, 44, 47, 50, 51, 54, 57, 58). This discourse, which caused so much dissent and sent many of those who had followed Him to part company with Him, brought forth Peter’s statement to Jesus, which has echoed in the hearts of God’s people since then: “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God” (6:68, 69). God’s irresistible grace is a pledge of the final perseverance of the saints.

d. An object for which Christ prayed

The perseverance of the saints was an object for which Christ prayed. In His prayer in John 17, Jesus prayed for His apostles (vv. 6-19) and for all those “which shall believe on Me through their (the apostles’) word” (v. 20). Throughout this section (vv. 6-26), He prayed that the Father might keep them: (1) “in Thy Name,” the great revelation of the Father in all of His awe-inspiring, and adorable attributes, and (2) “from the evil one,” Satan and all of his deceiving and soul-destroying power. The reason for this is given in

verse 24 as He prayed, “Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me.” He used a great argument for the fulfillment of His desire, and pled with the Father, “For Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world.” What great assurance this gives to those who believe in Him, that they shall be with Him (that is, in heaven)! His prayer is an argument for the final perseverance of the saints.

It will be apparent to anyone who takes the time to list all of the references to eternal life in the Gospel, the assertion that they who have it will never perish, and that they will be raised to life “at the last day,” would fill many more pages if they were all catalogued and commented upon. Therefore, I would leave that to your industry and make some closing remarks.

2. God’s people persevere by His grace unto eternal life

a. His people persevere unto eternal life in their faith

In the following references the verb or the participle are in present tense in Greek, a tense which indicates not only time, but continuing activity. Let Me illustrate this in the case of the participle in 1:12, “...to them that believe [*who are continuously believing*] on His Name.” The italicized words are a fuller translation of “to them that believe” (cf. 3:15, 16, 18; 4:36; 5:24; 6:35, 40, 47; 11:25, 26; 14:1—“Be ye continually believing in God, and continually believing in Me,” [author’s translation, 20:31]; also the testimony of the Samaritans in 4:42, and His disciples in 16:29-33). By way of contrast, Jesus uses this same tense in 10:25, 26 of those who are not His sheep.

Another way that Jesus taught that His own would persevere in faith, is that they continually come to Him (6:35, 37, 44, 45) and the Father (14:6). This knocks in the head the modern notion that one (isolated) “walk down the aisle” is saving!

b. His people persevere unto eternal life in discipleship

They are abiding (that is, continuing or remaining) in His word (8:31), hearing the word (5:24) and His voice (10:27; 18:37), and keeping His commandments as their expression of love to Him (14:15, 21, 23, 24; cf. 13:34, 35; 15:10-12, 14, 17; 21:15-17). They as His followers (8:12; 10:27; 12:26) lead a holy life as they are no longer the slaves of sin (5:14; 8:11, 31-36).

c. His people persevere into eternal life in keeping and finding spiritual substance in their pilgrimage

1). They are eating Christ, the Bread of Life (6:58); they are eating His flesh and drinking His blood (6:54-56).

2). They are continually going to Christ for His Spirit in every time of need (when “thirsty,” 7:37-39, “i.e., let him keep coming to Me and let him keep drinking”—NASB marginal reading).

3). They receive promised help in their labors through prayer (14:13-16; 16:23, 24).

d. His people persevere in works that last before God (3:21; 5:28, 29; 15:16)

So it is a truth that because God preserves them, His people persevere in the way of faith, in discipleship, in sustaining themselves, and in good works. Because they have received eternal life, they are living for eternity.

7

Closing Remarks

The two questions answered

1. *“What can man do since the fall toward his own salvation?”*

I believe that the question, “What can man do since the fall toward his own salvation?” has been answered clearly: ***absolutely nothing***, the reason being that he is totally and incurably depraved. If man is to experience salvation, God alone can initiate, provide for, and preserve man to life eternal. (See Total Depravity.)

2. *“Is what God offers an actual or possible salvation?”*

I believe that the second question has been adequately answered: “Is what God offers an actual or possible salvation?” The salvation that God offers man is an ***actual salvation***. This salvation rests on God’s unchanging and eternal purpose to save some men, by the sacrifice and finished work of Christ on the cross (see 19:30), by God’s effectually drawing men to Christ, and His purpose that they shall experience eternal life now, will be raised on the last day, and will be with and behold Christ in glory forever (see U, L, I, and P above).

These teachings produce three things in the Christian life

I believe that a careful study and meditation on these teachings will be productive of three things in the Christian life:

a. Praise to the God of Salvation

When the Christian reviews the great salvation bestowed on him by the God of Love and Grace, he will find his heart filled with adoration and wonder that can only be expressed in prayer, praise and thanksgiving. Joseph Addison wrote,

*When all Thy mercies, O my God, My rising soul surveys,
Transported with the view, I’m lost In wonder, love, and praise.*

*Ten thousand thousand precious gifts My daily thanks employ;
Nor is the least a cheerful heart That tastes those gifts with joy.*

*Through every period of my life Thy goodness I'll pursue;
And after death, in distant worlds, The glorious theme renew.*

*When nature fails, and day and night Divide Thy works no more,
My ever grateful heart, O Lord, The mercies shall adore.*

*Through all eternity to Thee A joyful song I'll raise;
For O, eternity's too short To utter all Thy praise.*

It is no wonder that he on his death bed could exclaim, "See in what peace a Christian can die."

b. Humility before God

The Christian, in reviewing these mercies of God to such a one as himself, will find every vestige of pride and self-righteousness laid in the dust. He will find in himself and what he has done cause for great humility before the Lord. He will leave off all thoughts of his own goodness and merit, not only in his sins but in his good works. He will, like David Dickinson, "leave them in two heaps, flee from them and fly to Christ." What is taught here will produce a heartfelt humility.

c. Devotion to God and His Word

These Doctrines of Grace that fill the heart with wonder, will fill the mouth with praise, the head with knowledge, the hands with work, and set the feet in paths of obedience. It will increase devotion to the Triune God and His will as revealed in the Scriptures.

1). In worship

In both private and public worship there will be a concern to approach God in the way that His word reveals is acceptable to Him. It will bring a wariness of novelties in worship that merely provide entertainment or excitement. Coupled with this, there will be a desire to check comfortable customs to see if they indeed meet the requirements of God's Word. It will cause the heart to find rest only in the God who reveals Himself in Scripture, and to Whom alone worship is due (Psa. 29:1,2).

2). In witness

Seeing that these things (TULIP) are taught in the Scriptures and especially in a book (the *Gospel of John*) that was written to evangelize (20:30, 31), it will cause the Christian minister and layman to set before the unbelieving world "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). There will be a recognition that any attempts to soften the blow of these truths is an act of unfaithfulness to God and the word by which the Holy Spirit convicts the world "of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:7-11). He knows that the truths are humbling, for he has been humbled; that they exalt the Majesty of God, for he has seen God's majesty herein; that they shut the sinner up to that help that comes only from above, for he has been rescued by help from above, by Jesus Christ, "the Savior of the world" (4:42). In his witness the Christian will thus show his love to God in faithfulness to His Word, and his love to his fellowman by setting forth the facts of his situation before God.

3). In works

Someone has well said, “Doctrine is grace and duty is gratitude.” The Christian who comes to know these blessed truths will express his heartfelt gratitude to God by all that he does. In this the work of his life will be directed by the Scriptures so that whatever his vocation be, it will be guided by certain principles that make for what the Bible calls good works. A work is good when it: (1) aims at the glory of God (Matthew 5:16); (2) arises from love to God (John 14:15, “If ye love Me...”); (3) conforms to the will of God (John 14:15, “...keep My commandments”); and (4) brings benefit to men (Matthew 5:13, 14). Thus the Christian who knows the grace of God will strive to make his whole life a testimony to his gratitude to God.

To summarize this point: The Christian who properly receives these teachings will be constantly seeking his Ph.D. in the school of Christ through a life of praise, humility, and devotion before His gracious and good God.

These themes of Divine grace that are set forth in John’s Gospel are in the whole of Scripture, Old and New Testament. The whole cluster of these truths is found in Psalm 65:3, 4—

- a). “Iniquities prevail against me...”
—*Total Corruption.*
- b). “As for our transgressions, Thou shalt purge [Mg. Lit. cover over, atone for] them away”
—*Limited Atonement.*
- c). “Blessed is the man whom Thou choosest...”
—*Unconditional Election.*
- d). “And causest to approach unto thee...”
—*Irresistible Grace.*
- e). “...that he may dwell in Thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of Thy house, even of Thy holy temple”
—*Perseverance of the Saints.*

The old hymn of Philip Doddridge, with additional stanzas by Augustus Toplady (3, 5, 6), sets forth the reverent adoration of the Christian heart in the contemplation of these aspects of God’s grace:

*Grace! ’tis a charming sound, Harmonious to the ear;
Heaven with the echo shall resound, And all the earth shall hear.*

*Grace first contrived the way To save rebellious man,
And all the steps that grace display Which drew the wondrous plan.*

*Grace first inscribed my name In God’s eternal book;
’Twas grace that gave me to the Lamb, Who all my sorrows took.*

*Grace led my wandering feet To tread the heavenly road;
And new supplies each hour I meet While pressing on to God.*

*Grace taught my soul to pray And made mine eyes o'erflow;
'Twas grace that kept me to this day And will not let me go.*

*Grace all the work shall crown Through everlasting days;
It lays in heaven the topmost stone, And well deserves the praise.*

*O, let Thy grace inspire My soul with strength divine!
May all my powers to Thee aspire And all my days be Thine!*

Uncertain?

I would say something to those who have read these pages and are uncertain about their present spiritual condition before God. It is a matter of grave importance, one about which the *Gospel of John* was written to give authoritative information (20:30, 31). Jesus has carefully diagnosed our condition before God (see T above). He also has prescribed the remedy, which is a personal relationship with God through faith in Himself (14:6; 17:3).

He calls you to Himself in many ways. To the one who knows and owns his sins, He is the "Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (1:29). To the one who is perishing in his sins, He is the God-given "Serpent lifted up in the wilderness," who gives life to all who believe in Him (3:14-16). To the spiritually thirsty, He gives "the water of life" freely (4:10, 14; 7:38, 39). To the one who senses his condemnation before God, His word, heard and believed, is the passage from death unto life (5:24). To the hungry, He is the Bread of God (6:33, 35). To the one groping in darkness, He is the "Light of the World" (8:12). To the one wandering aimlessly in ignorance, He is the "Good Shepherd" (10:11). To the one who is fearful and sorrowing because of death, He is the "Resurrection and the Life" (11:24, 25). To the one who is filled with doubt and uncertainty, He is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (14:6). To the one who is separated from the source of life, He is the "True Vine" who gives life to the branches (15:5).

In closing, I can only point you to Him, saying go to Him by faith, remembering that He has said, "The one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out" (6:37).

