



2023 3Q Ephesians—Lesson 2 God's Grand, Christ-Centered Plan

by Tim Jennings (announcements last page)

SUNDAY

Read second paragraph,

Paul praises God for the fact that He has “blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing” (Eph. 1:3, ESV). That the blessings are spiritual (Greek, pneumatikos) suggests that they come through the Spirit (pneuma), pointing to the closing of Paul’s blessing, which celebrates the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers (Eph. 1:13, 14). (Adult SS Guide 3rd Q 2023, Ephesians p. 15).

What do you understand the work of the Holy Spirit to be?

Let’s read Acts 19:1-6:

While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”

They answered, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.”

So Paul asked, “Then what baptism did you receive?”

“John’s baptism,” they replied.

Paul said, “John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in [other languages] and prophesied. (Acts 19:1–6 NIV84).

What is this talking about?

- Can we be saved through Jesus’ sacrifice without the inner working of the Holy Spirit?
- Is salvation the process of cognitive acceptance of the facts, the truth, that Jesus is God, that Jesus is our substitutionary sacrifice, that Jesus achieved all that is necessary for salvation?
- Can one be saved by cognitively accepting a list of beliefs and believing those beliefs and then making a legal claim for the blood of Jesus to pay the price and erase from the record books in heaven the list of sins they have committed? Or does salvation require the inner working of the Holy Spirit to transform the heart from fear and selfishness to love and trust?

In the book *The Desire of Ages* it describes the work of the Holy Spirit in our salvation this way, and I have concluded this is a very accurate description—do you agree?



In describing to His disciples the office work of the Holy Spirit, Jesus sought to inspire them with the joy and hope that inspired His own heart. He rejoiced because of the abundant help He had provided for His church. The Holy Spirit was the highest of all gifts that He could solicit from His Father for the exaltation of His people. **The Spirit was to be given as a regenerating agent, and without this the sacrifice of Christ would have been of no avail.** The power of evil had been strengthening for centuries, and the submission of men to this satanic captivity was amazing. **Sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of the Third Person of the Godhead,** who would come with no modified energy, but in the fullness of divine power. **It is the Spirit that makes effectual what has been wrought out by the world's Redeemer. It is by the Spirit that the heart is made pure. Through the Spirit the believer becomes a partaker of the divine nature.** Christ has given His Spirit as a divine power to overcome all hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil, and to impress His own character upon His church. (The Desire of Ages 671.2)

Of the Spirit Jesus said, “He shall glorify Me.” The Saviour came to glorify the Father by the demonstration of His love; so the Spirit was to glorify Christ by revealing His grace to the world. **The very image of God is to be reproduced in humanity.** The honor of God, the honor of Christ, is involved in the perfection of the character of His people. (The Desire of Ages 671.3) **[this is countering the work of Satan who wants to reproduce the satanic image in humanity, and we are called to give glory to God and we do that by having His character reproduced in us.]**

“When He [the Spirit of truth] is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.” **The preaching of the word will be of no avail without the continual presence and aid of the Holy Spirit.** This is the only effectual teacher of divine truth. **Only when the truth is accompanied to the heart by the Spirit will it quicken the conscience or transform the life.** One might be able to present the letter of the word of God, he might be familiar with all its commands and promises; **but unless the Holy Spirit sets home the truth, no souls will fall on the Rock and be broken.** No amount of education, no advantages, however great, can make one a channel of light without the co-operation of the Spirit of God. The sowing of the gospel seed will not be a success unless the seed is quickened into life by the dew of heaven. Before one book of the New Testament was written, before one gospel sermon had been preached after Christ's ascension, the Holy Spirit came upon the praying apostles. Then the testimony of their enemies was, “Ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine.” Acts 5:28. (The Desire of Ages 671.4)

What is described by this author? Is this describing a legal adjustment in books outside of one's person? No! Salvation is and always has been healing, restoring, recreating, transforming sinners back to sinless perfection, righteousness.

We need the Holy Spirit in our hearts to renew, enlighten, enable, and empower us. It is not sufficient to proclaim belief in a list of doctrines, to go through ritual water baptism, to stop working on the Sabbath each week, to pay tithe, to join a denomination—all of this can be done from a heart driven by fear, the fear of death, and the desire to save self and to advance oneself above others—Pharisaism.



Salvation means to be healed, to be transformed, to be renewed, to become like Jesus in character having the law written upon the heart. This is not a legal process it is a reality process. And the penal legal theologies based on the human law construct obstruct the real healing that God freely offers all of us.

Jesus singly and alone procured the remedy to our sin problem, in doing so He in His person, because He became fully human saved the species human. The Holy Spirit administers the remedy that Jesus procured into the hearts and minds of all who give consent, all who surrender to Christ and say yes, and all who cooperate with God and comply with His treatment plan.

MONDAY

Read first paragraph,

Sin had been a dark, dominating force in the lives of the members of Paul's audience. Paul can describe them in their prior existence as the walking dead—"dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1, NKJV) yet "walking" or living as Satan commanded them (Eph. 2:1-3). Enslaved to sin and Satan, they had no ability to free themselves. They needed rescue. God has done so through His gracious actions in Christ, and Paul celebrates two new blessings of God's grace in the lives of believers: redemption and forgiveness. (Adult SS Guide 3rd Q 2023, Ephesians p. 16).

How is this paragraph describing sin? If a person is enslaved to sin, which is a terminal condition that will result in death, can that condition be resolved by legal means?

Can you think of a condition today that is destructive to those who are caught up in it and enslaves them at the same time? Addictions—can people be set free from addictions by legal means?

- If God or the nation passed laws against using drugs, does that free people from drug addiction?
- How about if we inflict external punishments on people for using illegal drugs, does that make them addiction free?
- What if we have an innocent substitute take the addict's place, and we inject the innocent person with some drug and then execute the substitute in the place of the addict, does that set the addict free from the enslavement of their addiction?
- What if we have the supreme court declare the addict innocent of any wrongdoing does that set them free from their addiction?
- What if we have the person who led them into drugs and their pusher arrested and punished does that set the addict free from their addiction?
- Is there anything legal that actually sets the addict free from all aspects of their addiction and restores them to perfect health, including freeing them from all desire to ever use again?



- What is necessary to free someone caught in addiction? Healing the brokenness and damage within that causes and reinforces the destructive addictive cycles and behaviors.

As the Bible teaches:

- “We who are Jews by birth and not ‘Gentile sinners’ know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified...for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!” (Galatians 2:15, 16 & 21 NIV84).

This is why, through faith, we are, reborn, have circumcision of the heart by the Spirit, have the hard stony heart removed and a tender heart created within, receive a new heart and right spirit, have the living law of love written into our hearts and minds, become new creations, have the mind of Christ. Everything that the Bible teaches about salvation is about healing, recreation, renewal, restoration to God’s original ideal that He created Adam and Eve to become. It is Jesus who became the second Adam and through our truth in Jesus we are transformed back into God’s original plan, people recreated with hearts and minds that love God and others and love to live out God’s methods. None of this is legal, it is all actual, reality based, transformational.

Read the third and fifth paragraphs,

Our freedom comes at an extreme cost: “In him [Jesus] we have redemption through his blood” (Eph. 1:7, ESV). The idea of redemption also celebrates God’s gracious generosity in paying the high price of our liberty. God gives us our freedom and dignity. We are no longer enslaved!..

Note carefully that the idea that God pays the price of redemption to Satan is a medieval, not a biblical, one. God neither owes nor pays Satan anything. (Adult SS Guide 3rd Q 2023, Ephesians p. 16).

The lesson is correct when it states the idea of God paying the devil a price is not biblical. So we can rule out the idea that the blood price was paid to Satan.

But the lesson doesn’t tell us why Christ did have to pay a price—and the price is His blood. It doesn’t explain what does this mean and it doesn’t tell us to whom was it paid.

Have you ever heard that the blood price was paid to God or the law? Have you ever had ideas of Jesus in heaven presenting His blood to the Father to pay for our sins, or applying His blood to record books to erase our sins?

Is His blood a legal price that God’s heavenly court or law required be paid to legally allow God to pronounce legal pardon and declare the unrighteous who claim the blood to be legally accounted as righteous?



No, we just established that sinners cannot be made righteous through legal means. All the legal descriptions are false and interfere with people experiencing the reality that God has provided in Jesus.

So if you ask the question: What is the price that Jesus paid? The answer will be, as the lesson states, the blood of Jesus.

In the book, *The Cross of Christ* by George Knight, which is a book held in high esteem by those who cling to the penal/legal view of salvation, he agrees with the lesson that “the ransom price was His [Christ’s] blood.” (p. 69).

He also agrees with the lesson that the idea that the price was paid to the devil is not biblical. But after demonstrating that the blood price was not paid to Satan, he then writes the following:

...Word pictures such as ransom and redemption are metaphors that teach a lesson but (like Christ’s parables) were not meant to be taken literally in all their details. **We do not, therefore, have to be concerned with whom the ransom payment went to.**

Leon Morris writes “that in the New Testament **there is never any hint of a recipient of the ransom.** In other words[,] we must understand redemption as a useful metaphor which enables us to see some aspects of Christ’s great saving work with clarity but which is not an exact description of the whole process of salvation. We must not press it beyond what the New Testament tells us about it. **To look for a recipient of the ransom is illegitimate.** We have no reason for pressing every detail. We must use the metaphor in the way the New Testament writers did or we fall into error. (Knight, G., *The Cross of Christ* p. 70).

Does this sound reasonable to you? Is it true the New Testament never gives any hint of a recipient of the ransom? Is it true that to look for a recipient is illegitimate?

Or is to whom the price is paid one of the most critical piece of information for us to understand in the plan of salvation? If someone held your child captive and a ransom was required to free them, don’t you want to know who it went? Wouldn’t knowing that be important information for your future ability to love and trust? What if the ransom went to one of your own siblings who kidnapped your child? And what would is say about God if the ransom price had to be paid to God?

There is a reason the penal legal models take the position cited above—they want to avoid the unreasonable, illogical, and destructive conclusion that God or the law are the ones being paid off by Jesus’ blood, because they know such an idea prevents salvation and incites greater fear of God. It creates a divide among the Godhead with one member being for us but another member requiring something done to Him in order to be for us.

And is it truth that “in the New Testament **there is never any hint of a recipient of the ransom**”? Only if one believes Satan’s lies that God’s law functions like human law and salvation is a legal payment. If that is one’s belief, then it is true that the Bible provides no hint ever of a recipient for a legal payment to set sinners legally free. This is quite right.



But if you return to worshipping God as Creator, and recognize His laws are the laws reality operates upon, then you will realize that the New Testament does teach exactly and specifically to the ransom is paid.

Both the lesson and *The Cross of Christ* agree that the ransom price is the blood of Jesus, which is still a metaphor, for it isn't the red corpuscles but as the Bible says, the life is in the blood. So it is the sinless life of Jesus that is the ransom price, but let's stick with the blood metaphor for a moment as the price, and we discover that Jesus Himself told exactly to who the ransom price is paid:

“I tell you the truth, unless **you** eat the flesh of the Son of Man and **drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever** eats my flesh and **drinks my blood** has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and **my blood is real drink. Whoever** eats my flesh and **drinks my blood remains in me**, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the **one who feeds on me will live because of me**. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever.” (John 6:53-58 NIV84).

Does Jesus tell us specifically who is to receive the ransom price of His blood? Jesus is clear, if we don't receive the ransom payment of His blood into us then we have no life, in other words we die from sin.

But blood is still a metaphor, He is not speaking cannibalism. So to understand the full meaning of the ransom price we must move beyond metaphor to reality.

What is the function of a ransom? It is the price necessary to free someone from bondage.

What holds us sinners in bondage?

- The lies of Satan that we believe that keep us from trusting Him
- Our own terminal, carnal, sin-condition

What do we need to be set free, to be ransomed from this terminal state?

- Truth to destroy the lies of Satan and win us back to trust in God
- A new nature

This is illustrated in the metaphor of flesh and blood. The flesh is the truth which destroys the lies of Satan. Jesus is the Word made flesh, to eat the flesh of Jesus means to ingest into our hearts and minds the truth about God that Jesus revealed which destroys Satan's lies about God and restores us to trust. Then we open the heart in trust and we receive a new life, new motives, new desires, are reborn by receiving the life of Christ which is illustrated by His blood, and that new life is the life of love which casts out all fear and we are no longer controlled by the carnal selfish survival of the fittest drives. Thus we have a new life and from that moment begin growing in godliness.



This is reality from our God who built reality—there is nothing penal or legal going on in the plan of redemption.

So what about the language of paying a price? To whom is the price paid? It is paid that reality required in order for human beings to be saved from this sin condition and, it was paid to you and me. We needed the truth and we needed a new heart and right spirit. God did not need truth presented to Him and God did not need a new sinless life with new motives and desires restored within.

Read the last paragraph,

The benefits of Calvary also include “the forgiveness of our trespasses” (Eph. 1:7, ESV). On the cross, Christ takes upon Himself the price of our sin, both past and future, “canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands” (Col. 2:14, ESV). In doing this work of redemption and forgiveness through Christ, God is acting as our generous Father, with the “riches of his grace” being “lavished upon us” (Eph. 1:7, 8, ESV). (Adult SS Guide 3rd Q 2023, Ephesians p. 16).

What does it mean that the benefits of Calvary also include the forgiveness of our trespasses?

- Are they saying God could not forgive without the death of Jesus?
- Are they saying that God’s forgiveness is the same as salvation?
- Did Jesus forgive those who were crucifying Him?
- Did He have the right to forgive people of their sins?
- And did Jesus’ forgiveness of them result in their salvation and cause them to become Jesus trustworthy friends or did they remain His enemies?

Be very clear, God’s heart toward all sinners is that of forgiveness. But not all sinners receive that forgiveness into their hearts and therefore they are not convicted of the goodness of God and the destructiveness of sin and therefore they do not repent. They do not repent from distrust and rebellion. Thus, they remain hostile to God and in a state of unforgiveness, i.e. rebellion, even though God is forgiving to them.

The death of Christ was not in any means or aspect necessary to change God or get God to forgive. The self-sacrifice of God in His Son was absolutely required in order to save human sinners and it was provided by God as a free gift to us.

What do you think of their quotation of Jesus taking upon Himself all our sins and “canceling the record or our debt that stood against us with its legal demands,” quoting Colossians 2:14 from ESV?

Other versions render it:

- having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, (Colossians 2:14 NIV84).



- having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. (Colossians 2:14 NKJV).
- he cancelled the unfavourable record of our debts with its binding rules and did away with it completely by nailing it to the cross. (Colossians 2:14 GNT)

How do you hear this? There is nothing about legal requirements in the text, that is read in and written in by the translators of the ESV. It is based on reading the Bible with the assumption that God's law works like human law and that sin is a legal problem. But when we return to design law, we realize it is so much more simple, reasonable, and beautiful—because it is how reality works. This is how I rendered it in The Remedy, we will start in verse 13.

When your condition was terminal, when selfishness reigned unchecked in your minds, and when your hearts were tied to the destructive cravings and practices of the world, God intervened and brought you the life-giving Remedy—Jesus Christ. He reclaimed you from your terminal condition, nullifying the pathology report that certified you as dead in sin; he made it clear that the written code, with its regulations, was only a diagnostic instrument designed to expose our terminal state and teach us the need for a true cure, and he nailed it to the cross. Through his death, he revealed the truth about God and—in his humanity—eradicated selfishness, thus he completely destroyed Satan's weapons of lies and selfishness, and triumphed over Satan at the cross. (Colossians 3:13-15 REM)

Do you see how Jesus nullified the pathology report, the diagnosis of humanity's terminal state?

If you had cancer and had a treatment that destroyed the cancer and restored you to perfect health, then the diagnostic accuracy of the pathology report that condemned you to die from cancer is nullified.

In Jesus we who were dead in trespass and sin are reborn with new hearts and right spirits and receive eternal life. The pathology report that certified us as terminal is nullified when we are reborn in Christ.

Thoughts?

Does the Bible contradict itself? The quote in Colossians appears, in some versions, to say that through Christ the record of our debt is canceled, but in 1 Corinthians 13 it says:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, **it keeps no record of wrongs**. (1 Corinthians 13:4-6 NIV84 emphasis mine).

The Bible teaches that God is love, therefore God keeps no record of wrongs—is this a contradiction? What do we do with the records described in Revelation, the heavenly records if there is no record of wrongs?



And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. (Revelation 20:12 NIV84).

What is going on here? Are there deeds being recorded into books when 1 Corinthians tells us that love keeps no record of wrongs?

The Bible tells us what is recorded in the books,

And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose **names are in the Book of Life**. (Philippians 4:3 NKJV).

Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those **whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life**. (Revelation 21:27 NIV84).

What is recorded in the books? Names, and in Scripture what do names represent? Character—it is our individuality, our characters, that are recorded in the books of heaven. Those who have trusted Jesus and been reborn have Christlike characters operating upon the design law of God which has been reproduced in them. But those who have rejected Christ and clung to the methods of fear and selfishness, coercive control, and legal enforcement form characters like Satan. And thus their records accurately diagnose who they are in character.

Thus the best way to understand all Bible passages about heavenly records is that they are like medical records; they simply record what is happening in a person. If a person is sick with sin, then just like a medical record that records pathology, our heavenly records record that destructive process with all of its symptoms we call sins. But if a sick person takes a remedy then the medical records record the healing transformation that occurs when the symptoms resolve, the lungs clear up, the fevers stop, the cough resolves, the blood oxygen levels return to normal, the medical records document that. So, too our heavenly records merely record what is happening in us. If you want to have changes made in your heavenly records you **MUST** have changes made via the Holy Spirit in your heart and mind.

Here are two historical quotes from EG White, one of the founders of the SDA church who described it this way:

Remember, **your character is being daguerretyped [photographed] by the great Master Artist in the record books of heaven**, as minutely as the face is reproduced upon the polished plate of the artist. What do the books of heaven say in your case? Are you **conforming your character** to the Pattern, Jesus Christ? (Letters and Manuscript Releases vol. 5 letter 51).

Let parents and children remember that day by day they are each forming a character, and that **the features of this character are imprinted upon the books of heaven**. God is taking pictures of His people, just as surely as an artist takes pictures of men and women, transferring the features of the face to the polished plate. What kind of picture do you wish to produce?



Parents, answer the question! What kind of picture will the great Master Artist make of you in the records of heaven? (Child Guidance 562).

So God doesn't keep score, count up wrong deeds, tally up how much each person must be punished. All such ideas are Satan's, they stem from accepting the lie that God's law functions like human law. God is the God of reality and God's records are simply the accurate recording of what actually is in every heart and mind. Have we surrendered to Jesus in repentance and been reborn with a new heart and right spirit and chosen to apply God's design laws to our lives in how we live, or do we reject the kingdom of heaven and instead embrace the kingdom of this world with its imposed rules and legal enforcement that is incapable of healing hearts and minds?

TUESDAY

Read second paragraph,

The term that Paul uses to describe the plan is a picturesque one (Greek, *anakephalaiōsasthai*), to “head up” or to “sum up” all things in Christ. In ancient accounting practice, you would “add up” a column of figures and place the total at the top. Jesus heads God's final, eschatological plan. This Christ-centered plan was crafted “before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4) and is so broad that it encompasses all time (“the fullness of the times,” NKJV) and space (“all things . . . things in heaven and things on earth,” ESV). Paul announces unity in Christ as the grand, divine goal for the universe. (Adult SS Guide 3rd Q 2023, Ephesians p. 17).

This is well said, Jesus is the sum total of God's goodness, truth, love, power, presence—as Scripture says

For in Him [Christ] dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Colossians 2:9 NKJV).

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. (Hebrews 1:1-3 NIV84).

Yes, Jesus is the fullness of God. In Jesus we see God's character perfectly revealed.

What about the idea that this plan of salvation in Jesus was put in place before God created this world or human beings?

Is this true? Then what would that say about God's foreknowledge? God foreknew and was not caught off guard by sin. God is the Creator of all things, including time itself, and God lives outside of and above time and can access all points in time simultaneously. We are restricted to a linear existence in



time, but God is not, and the various theories that suggest God doesn't have foreknowledge are ideas that put limits or restrictions on God.

Read third paragraph,

In discussing God's "plan for the fullness of time" (Eph. 1:10, ESV), Paul shares the theme that he will weave through the letter. God begins His plan to unify all things, rooted in the death, resurrection, ascension, and exaltation of Jesus (Eph. 1:15–2:10), by founding the church and unifying disparate elements of humankind, Jews and Gentiles, in it (Eph. 2:11–3:13). (Adult SS Guide 3rd Q 2023, Ephesians p. 17).

How is it that the universe is brought to unity in Jesus? Can someone explain that process?

What causes division? Lies, fear, and selfishness. And lies primarily about whom?

Then what results in unity? Truth that destroys the lies about God and restores trust, and then having God's law restored into the hearts and minds of us sinners so that we live in harmony with God and unfallen angels, i.e. that we are trustworthy.

The one thing God will not compromise is freedom, because love only exists in freedom. And God will run His universe in such a way that all His intelligent creatures have real freedom. This means heaven will only be populated by people who are safe with freedom, people who are fully and perfectly restored to love, for only those kinds of people are safe to live in full freedom.

Does such freedom mean we are free from God's law or does the law give us freedom?

James says,

But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does. (James 1:25 NIV84).

How does God's law give freedom? Doesn't law restrict?

What kind of law? Imposed law restricts, design law sets free.

WEDNESDAY

The lesson asks us to read Ephesian 1:11-12; they use the NKJV:

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. (Ephesians 1:11-12 NKJV)



What does this mean? What inheritance? What does it mean to be predestined?

What did we inherit from Adam? A terminal sin condition. We were all born in sin and conceived in iniquity. We did not have a choice in the state of our birth. Jesus became a human for the purpose of changing this state of things, for the purpose of destroying death and bring life and immortality to light. He did this by partaking of the terminal condition we all inherit from Adam, overcoming and destroying that condition and replacing that terminal life with His eternal and immortal life that He infused into humanity when He became incarnate. By His victory the species human was purified and saved from eternal death and now in the person of Jesus a human being stands at the command center of the universe directing all of God's agencies for the administration and application of what Jesus achieved into the hearts and minds of all who consent to His working in their hearts and minds.

Thus God predetermined to send Jesus to cure the condition and offer the Remedy Jesus procured to all who trust Him. This is how I rendered it in *The Remedy*:

In the person of Jesus Christ, we experience restored unity with God—the culmination of the Father's plan, the result of what God predetermined to do—as he always works for the healing and restoration of his creation. This is in order that we—who were the first to recognize the significance of all that Christ is, and all he has done—might bring praise and glory to God by experiencing re-creation of Christlike character within. (Ephesians 1:1-2 REM)

Does this answer your questions about predestination? Then what do we do with texts like Romans 8:29-20:

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified (Romans 8:29, 30 NIV84).

Does this text teach, as many Calvinists claim, that God chooses who is saved and who is lost? Does this text mean that individual salvation is only up to God to decide? Or do we, in our attempt to protect God's reputation, knowing that without freedom there is no love, reject the idea of God's foreknowledge altogether, as open theists do?

The key to understanding this passage, as with the rest of Scripture, is what law lens we are reading it through. If we read Scripture with the assumption that God's law functions like human law—imposed rules enforced by the rule-giver—then God is the all-powerful enforcer who makes things happen the way He wants them to happen. Under this imposed-law view, predestination is God deciding upon whom He will use His power to call, justify, and glorify.

But under design law, we understand God's laws are the protocols upon which reality functions. This means God governs, through the sustaining of the laws that He built reality upon, all aspects of creation, including time. Unlike us, God is not constrained to a linear existence; He lives outside the dimension of time. God doesn't serve at the whims of time; time serves God.



When the Bible says that those God “foreknew” He “predestined” to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, it isn’t speaking of mere cognitive knowledge (awareness)—a list of names and social security numbers in a heavenly registry; rather, it is speaking of biblical knowledge, the fullest sense of “knowing” someone.

Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived (Genesis 4:1 ESV).

This “knowing” is intimate knowledge, not mere cognitive awareness. The unsaved do not have this knowledge of God; therefore, they are not known by God in this intimate, saving way. Jesus said it plainly:

Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?” Then I will tell them plainly, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!” (Matthew 7:21–23 NIV84).

Jesus surely knows who these people are, so this isn’t about awareness. It is about intimacy, unity, oneness—a loving, mutual bond of trust. These people were never friends of Jesus. They never opened their hearts to allow Him in and, thus, they never knew Jesus even though they knew about Him and claimed to be His followers. And because they never chose to know Jesus, they were not in turn known by Jesus in the intimate bonds of fellowship and love. This intimate “knowing” is the key to every person’s salvation:

Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent (John 17:3 NIV84).

Thus, those whom God foreknows He predetermined will be conformed to the likeness of His Son. It is God’s purpose to heal and restore all who trust Him. It is a certainty that those who come to know God, open their heart to Him, and experience His indwelling presence are set right (justified). Those whom God foreknows are the very ones who have chosen to trust Him; that is how God knows them—because they have chosen to know Him.

THURSDAY

Read first paragraph,

In exploring the importance of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers, Paul uses two images, or metaphors, for the Spirit. He first pictures the Holy Spirit as a “seal,” identifying a sealing presence of the Spirit that occurs from the time of conversion. In ancient times, seals were used for a wide variety of functions: to authenticate copies of laws and agreements, to validate the excellence or quantity of a container’s contents (e.g., Ezek. 28:12), or to witness transactions (e.g., Jer. 32:10–14, 44), contracts, letters (e.g., 1 Kings 21:8), wills, and adoptions. Imprinted



on an object, a seal announced both ownership and protection. The presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives marks believers as belonging to God and conveys God's promise to protect them (compare Eph. 4:30). They have been "sealed with the promised Holy Spirit" (Eph. 1:13, ESV). (Adult SS Guide 3rd Q 2023, Ephesians p. 17).

What does this mean? Is the seal a legal mark externally applied in some accounting system, or is it the mark the Holy Spirit makes in the heart, mind, and character restoring in use Christlikeness—we are marked or sealed with the qualities of God as lived out by Christ when we are renewed by the Holy Spirit.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Dennis Hilton has had a stroke and was briefly on a ventilator at Erlanger (Chattanooga, TN). Due to limited visitor times & persons allowed please no visitors at this time. Unable to move left side & can nod yes/no. Prayers appreciated for peace & Gods will. Cami Hilton

I received a copy of the book *Did God Kill Jesus Instead of Killing Us?* By Kevin J. Mullins and found it to be very well done. If any of you would like to read it, you can download a free digital copy at lastmessageofmercy.com.

Memorial Service for Pastor Ralph LaFave father of Christie Jennings will be held, July 8, 2023 at 2 p.m. after potluck at our Come and Reason Ministry building 4922 LA COLLINA WAY, #100 OOLTEWAH, TN 37363. In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to Come and Reason Ministries.

New Address: Come and Reason Ministries is closing our PO Box Address. Please update your records to our building address for all future mail and shipping. Our street address is:

Come and Reason Ministries
4922 LA COLLINA WAY, #100
OOLTEWAH, TN 37363