

# Toward a Biblical Philosophy

## Notes on the Content of Biblical Philosophy

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### PART I

## Fundamental Elements of Biblical Philosophy— Part One

### *THE CORE MESSAGE AND WORLDVIEW OF THE BIBLE*

#### Elements That Comprise the Philosophical Foundation to the Biblical Worldview

#### *Reality*

##### *The Fundamental Nature of Reality*

1. From a biblical perspective, all of reality is created. It is not self-existent. It is not eternal. Its existence is entirely dependent upon an uncreated creator outside and apart from it. {Genesis 1:1}
2. From a biblical perspective, all of created reality is a story; and God is the author of that story. {John 1:1–5; Acts 2:23; Hebrews 1:2, 10:7}

•We all know what a story is. But it is a very difficult concept to analyze and define. It could be that the concept of a story is a foundational concept within human language and thought. One might be tempted to think that a “story” is an imaginative imitation of reality. But, in truth, the concept of “story” precedes the existence of created reality; it does not follow it. For created reality was created to have the logical and conceptual nature of a story.

•It seems likely that human beings are storytellers precisely because they are created in the image of God. God is the archetypical storyteller. We are storytellers in imitation of him.

- 2.1. The narrative structure of reality is a crucial, foundational assumption of the biblical worldview. Many important implications follow from this assumption.

•If the view I have of God’s relationship to his creation does not permit me to assert the same things that the Bible asserts, then my view does not match the Bible’s view. My contention is that the Bible teaches two things quite clearly: (i) absolute divine determinism (that is, that God determines every aspect of everything that is and everything that occurs), and (ii) human freedom and responsibility in the sense that we have always commonsensically believed. I maintain that understanding God’s relationship to his creation by analogy to an author’s relationship to his story is the only way to affirm both of these things—divine determinism and human freedom—without contradiction. Popular Christian beliefs actually reject divine determinism, the explicit teaching of the Bible, as the only way it can reconcile what the Bible affirms with its beliefs about God’s relationship to his creation. Therefore, popular Christian

belief about God cannot be right. A proper belief about God's relationship to his creation should permit one to affirm divine determinism just as the Bible itself does. Since understanding God as the author and his creation as the story appears the only way that one can affirm all that the Bible does—namely, the only way that one can affirm both divine determinism and human freedom—then it follows that it is the model that captures how the Bible itself understands God's relationship to his creation.

2.1.1. Reality exists on an entirely different plane of existence than God does. The being of reality is fundamentally different from the being of God.

2.1.1.1. What God creates is not within the same reality that he inhabits. There is the reality where God dwells ("the heavens") and there is the reality in which we dwell. They are not the same reality.

*•Existence is not one single concept or category that subsumes both the existence of God and the existence of the created cosmos. The created cosmos does not exist in the same sense in which God exists. We human beings do not exist in the same sense in which God exists.*

*•The elements of created reality are not the ontological equals of God, the author. Just as the author of a story exists above, beyond, and outside the creation of his imagination, God exists above, beyond, and outside the realm inhabited by God's creatures. God is not a fellow-character within the story of reality; he is the author who transcends his story. However, God can reveal (and has revealed) himself within character-roles within his story. When God so reveals himself, the person who he is is not exhausted by the character-role that he inhabits. Rather, he is the author of the entire story of reality. It is only something about him that can be revealed in and by the role that he adopts.*

2.1.1.2. If reality is a story of which God is the author, then God, as creator, is not thought—from a biblical perspective—to have "built" reality; neither is he thought to have "conjured" reality into existence. Rather, God is thought to "imagine" reality into being. Like an author imagines the story he is creating, so God "imagines" created reality into existence.

*•Reality is not the result of God fashioning a cosmos out of the elements of the same reality he inhabits. It is not the result of God constructing our reality out of elements that exist on the same plane of reality within which he exists. God is not like a craftsman who crafted our reality.*

*•Reality is not the result of God magically (supernaturally) manipulating the elements of the same reality he inhabits to bring about the cosmos. It is not the result of God calling forth our reality out of elements that exist on the same plane of reality that he is on. God is not like a powerful wizard with the knowledge and art to be able to bring forth our reality from the elements of being.*

*•Reality is the result of God imagining a whole different, subordinate, and dependent reality into existence by the power of his mind. It is the result of God willing into existence a plane of existence that had no prior being whatsoever. God is like the author of a story—out of his mind and imagination, our reality is willed into existence out of blank nothingness.*

2.1.2. God's creative work is not restricted by, limited by, nor determined by the nature of a reality that both he and the cosmos inhabit. Created reality is completely and totally subordinate to and inferior to the reality that God inhabits. Accordingly,

everything about that created reality is subject to God's will, purpose, and creative act. There are no inherent limits on what God can and cannot create.

2.1.3. Reality cannot exist independently of God's will and, hence, it cannot function independently of God's will. Every aspect of created reality is utterly and completely a function of what God wills it to be. Every moment of created reality is utterly and completely a function of what God wills it to be.

2.1.4. Reality is fundamentally a story. It has the structure and being of a narrative, not the structure and being of a mechanism (neither that of a physical mechanism nor that of an immaterial mechanism).

2.1.4.1. Reality is a story with a predetermined outcome. It is not a law-following mechanism whose destiny has yet to be determined by the chance interplay of its structure and elements. It is not an entity that has no pre-established purpose, significance, meaning, or future. Rather, it is a coherent, dynamic story that unfolds through time. Its purpose, future, significance, and meaning is inherent to its very being. Its future is not open. It is closed. It is closed by the storyline, purpose, significance, meaning, and script that God has willed there to be.

3. Reality is a complex of many different interlocking stories with an overarching story that provides context and meaning for all the other stories.

3.1. The reality that we human beings inhabit has a narrative structure to it. Each individual human existence is a story; and that story is a sub-story within an even grander, overarching story.

3.1.1. The meaning and significance of a human being's existence is the meaning and significance of his story. We exist to tell a story. We exist to give expression to what a story can give expression to—specifically, we exist to express something about the author of the story.

3.1.1.1. Each person can rightly think of his existence as the protagonist of the particular story that centers in his life and existence; and as a role player in the story of other individuals.

3.1.1.2. The meaning and purpose of each person's existence is centered in who he will choose to be and what contribution he will choose to make to the overall narrative of reality.

3.1.1.3. The meaning and significance of a human being's existence is not fundamentally to find and secure happiness, pleasure, or well-being. Human existence is not about and for the human individual. Human existence is about and for God, the author.

3.1.2. A human being is a character within a story. The storyline (and, therefore, the meaning and significance) of his existence is determined and defined by the free choices that he makes. But, being a character within a story, each of his self-defining free choices is scripted by the author of the story who is the author of his being.

3.1.2.1. The divinely-scripted story within which we are characters just is the reality of our existence. The fact that we are part of a story does not make us fictional; it does not make our lives an illusion. The story of our lives is as real as we have always known it to be. It is a real story; it is the story of our reality.

*•While our lives and existence might be "fictional" relative to the existence of God (that is, not as real as God is), that does not mean they are not real. It only means that God is more real than we are—that God exists on a whole other plane of reality.*

3.2. The present phase of the grander, overarching story of reality is the story of Life. Specifically, it is the story of whether and how each and every human being will come to be granted the blessing of Life in the everlasting age to come and how God brings that about. {John 1:1–5; 1 John 1:1–4}

## **God**

### *Definition and Ontological Nature of God*

4. The biblical view of God is the view of God articulated by Transcendent Monotheism—namely, the concept of God as (i) the god who determines all of reality and all of history, (ii) a transcendent being, (iii) a self-existent being, (iv) a personal being, and (v) a morally good being.

4.1. The God of biblical philosophy is the "god" who determines all of reality and all of history. The Bible rejects polytheism. Ancient polytheism held that all of created reality—all of created history—was determined by the net effect of all the various "gods" working independently of (and at cross-purposes to) one another. The Bible maintains that all of created reality is determined by the one, single, unified will of one "god."

*•This does not mean that there exists only one god. The Bible recognizes the existence of other “gods”; but it denies that any “god” can operate independently of the will of the one and only God whose will controls and determines everything in created reality.*

- 4.1.1. The term “god” is a way of denoting a “reality-shaping force.” In biblical philosophy, there are many different reality-shaping forces (gods); but there is one and only one reality-shaping force (only one “god”) whose purpose controls and determines the nature of created reality. In other words, there is one god whose purpose controls and determines the effects of all the other gods. The one and only supreme God who determines everything, only he is worthy of our love, service, and obedience.
- 4.1.2. In modern terms, we can recognize the existence of various “gods” in this way: our personal lives and all of human history are shaped by realities like economics, love, hate, war, various weather phenomena, politics, technology, etc. In the terms of ancient polytheism, everything on the list of what shapes our lives would be denoted a “god.” The Bible does not deny that these realities shape our lives—in other words, it does not deny that these “gods” exist. The Bible differs from polytheism in that it does not believe that any of these “gods” (any of these realities that impinge upon and shape our lives) operate, to any degree, independently of the will and determinative power of the one and only God.
- 4.1.3. The biblical view of God—Transcendent Monotheism—necessarily entails divine determinism. Divine determinism is the view that every aspect of everything that exists and every aspect of everything that occurs is caused and determined by God himself. Nothing is outside of his control. Nothing is outside of his will and purpose.
- 4.2. The God of biblical philosophy is a transcendent being. This is another significant difference with ancient polytheism. The polytheist believes that the gods are on the same level of reality as the world. They are in the “upper” portion of reality (the “heavens”), but they are on the same plane of existence. In the biblical conception of God (Transcendent Monotheism) God is in an entirely different plane of existence; his being is at a whole other level of existence. In other words, he transcends created existence; he exists above and beyond created existence altogether. He does not exist, as we exist; he exists in a wholly different sense. God is not real, as we are; he is more real than we are. Imagine a magical metaphysical eraser than can erase everything that exists. If one were to take that eraser and erase everything that exists, God would still be there. He does not exist;

he is there above and beyond what exists.

- 4.2.1. If one likens reality to a house, ancient polytheism believed that the gods lived in the upstairs of the house while human beings live downstairs. The Bible (and Transcendent Monotheism), on the other hand, believe that God lives outside and apart from the house altogether. He is not a dweller in the house of reality; he is the builder of the house of reality. He is on the outside looking in on it; he is not resident in reality participating in its life—as are the gods in polytheism.
- 4.2.2. However, God (Yahweh) does reveal or manifest himself as an actor within the drama of reality and history. In specifically defined roles, God does become a participant in the life and drama of reality. But it is only in specifically defined roles—only insofar as he takes on a particular persona—that he is such a participant. In his essential nature, in his ultimate being, God is not a participant in reality; he is its author, its creator. In the Bible, it's very important to recognize the distinction between Yahweh in his transcendent being and Yahweh insofar as he reveals himself within a specific role and persona. Yahweh as the “judge of mankind” is importantly distinct from Yahweh the “transcendent author of all.”
- 4.2.3. God is the transcendent author of all reality. As the ultimate determiner of all that is [see 4.1.3 above], God does not determine everything as an ordinary cause within our reality, he determines everything as a transcendent cause outside of our reality. It is helpful to think of God's relationship to our reality (to created reality) as analogous to the relationship between an author of fiction and the fictional reality that he imagines and creates in a story that he tells. In this sense, the concept of God as the author of created reality captures quite well the biblical and transcendent monotheist's concept of God. God transcends his creation in the same way that an author transcends the reality of that which he conceives in his imagination. The author does not exist in and reside within the world of his imagination. He exists beyond and apart from the world of his imagination. And yet, nothing in the world of his imagination can exist apart from him, the author. The whole world of his imagination “lives, moves, and has its being in him (the author).” This describes exactly how the Bible understands God's relationship to his creation. {Acts 17:28}
- 4.2.4. God's (Yahweh's) transcendence is the key to understanding how biblical philosophy deals with the issue of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Both are true within biblical philosophy: (i) God is absolutely sovereign (the determiner of

absolutely all that occurs and all that exists), the one who determines the very choices a human being makes; and, yet, (ii) human beings are responsible for the choices they make. How can both of these things be true? Because God causes human choices out of his transcendence, not through ordinary causation (that is, not through coercion or any other means by which one part of created reality causes an effect in another part of created reality). God “causes” human choice by creating a spontaneous, free-will choice within the human being he is creating, not by necessitating his choice through other intermediate, created “causes.” If God did cause human choice through intermediate, created cause, then God’s sovereign causation would be incompatible with the reality of human responsibility. But human responsibility is preserved and not nullified if the cause of human choice arises out of the transcendent causation of divine authorship of reality.

4.3. The God of biblical philosophy is a self-existent being. This is a correlate of divine transcendence. If God is transcendent in the manner described above [see 4.2], then he is necessarily self-existent. By “self-existent” we mean this: he does not need an explanation for why he exists. God is of such a nature that the question of why he exists is fore-stalled. His existence needs no explanation. Or, more accurately, it makes no sense to expect that we could possibly acquire an understanding of why God exists. From our standpoint, God just is. That is as far as our understanding could possibly extend. To the extent that God transcends the level of existence that we inhabit, to that extent his existence is not contingent in the same way that everything in created reality is contingent. Nothing in created reality can exist unless God wills it into existence. Everything is contingent upon God’s will. But God is outside of created reality. He is not similarly contingent. His existence is dependent on no one and no thing willing him into existence or causing him to be. He just is. In this sense, he can be said to have necessary existence, rather than contingent existence.

4.3.1. It is from our standpoint and with respect to the limitations of human knowledge that God’s existence is unaccountable in the way described above. We are in no position to say that God’s existence is ultimately and absolutely inexplicable. But, if an account of God’s existence could be given, only God could give it. We are in no position to be able to do so. This is what is being indicated by the concept of divine self-existence. It is not an absolute description of what we do know about the nature of God. Rather, it is an admission of the limitations we face. It indicates what we cannot possibly know about the nature of God. From our perspective—so far as

we can possibly know— the being of God is not dependent upon the will, power, or authority of any other being. This may be absolutely true; but in any case it is most certainly true *from our standpoint*.

- 4.3.2. It is this feature of God's existence that is being highlighted by the name "Yaweh"— the name that God famously assigns to himself. In my judgment, "Yahweh" should be translated as, roughly, "He Who Is." God is describing himself as the One who just is! He is the one who so transcends reality that his being is otherwise unaccountable and inexplicable.

*•I believe it is a significant misunderstanding to translate "Yahweh" as "I Am." This is the commonly accepted translation, but I believe it is wrong. This mistranslation has resulted in a great deal of confusion and misunderstanding. My translation follows the Septuagint translation of the name of God.*

- 4.4. The God of biblical philosophy is a personal being. God is not an impersonal being; rather, he has all the attributes of personhood—(i) rationality, and all that that involves (e.g., language ability, creativity, etc.); (ii) higher-order intentionality, and all that that involves (e.g., the ability to be conscious, self-conscious, self-aware, etc.); (iii) morality, and all that that involves (e.g., free will).

*•I do not suggest that emotionality is an essential part of personhood. This may be a mistake. Certainly the Bible attributes emotional states to God: wrath, delight, etc. The problem, however, is how to understand and analyze emotionality. Human emotions have both a rational component and a physical component. It has a rational component in that we respond emotionally for a reason. We get angry because we have been dealt with unjustly. We are delighted because we have been given a gift. Etc. It has a physical component because the way we "feel" when we are angry, delighted, in love, etc. is attributable to body chemistry. Arguably, God does not "feel" as we humans do, for he does not have a physical body. But clearly he does have the rationality that responds with anger to injustice and evil, with compassion and pity to whatever elicits such a response, etc. So, while I have not included emotionality as a distinct attribute of personhood, I would suggest that, as a person, God does indeed exhibit emotions. However, I would include his emotional responses under the category of rationality, not as a distinct attribute of personhood.*

- 4.4.1. A human being is created "in the image of God" just to the extent that his being and nature is that of a created person. To the extent that a human being manifests the characteristics of personhood, to that extent he "images" the being of God.
- 4.4.2. God is rational; and human rationality is an image and reflection of the rationality that is intrinsic to God's very being. One important implication of this fact is that God is knowable to mankind. The rationality that a human being employs in order to construct his understanding of the world is consonant with the rationality that



is endemic to who God is. Therefore, knowledge of God is possible. God is not above and beyond logic and reason; his being exists within the parameters of what reason and logic require. This is not to suggest that God can be known exhaustively. Mankind cannot know everything about God. Man's understanding is bounded and limited. But, within the boundaries of what mankind can know about God, mankind's reason is competent to result in a true and accurate understanding of the transcendent creator.

- 4.4.3. God is intentional; and human intentionality is an image and reflection of the intentionality that is intrinsic to God's very being. By "intentionality", I mean the ability to entertain mental concepts and refer those mental concepts to things in reality, to other mental concepts, or to other persons. While animals are rational, they do not have the same higher levels of intentionality that human beings do. This is reflective of the high-order intentionality that exists in the mind of God.

*•Intentionality must not be confused with the word "intention" as we use it in everyday idiom. It does not refer to the purposes behind human choices and actions. It is a term that is derived from medieval philosophy. It refers to a mind's ability to direct itself toward reality and represent reality to itself by means of various mental acts and mental objects. It is the basis of consciousness.*

- 4.4.4. God is moral; and human morality is an image and reflection of the morality that is intrinsic to God's very being. God is "moral" in the sense that he is subject to moral categories. In principle, God could be good (morally) or he could be evil (morally). Mankind's being subject to these same moral categories is a reflection of this truth about God's intrinsic nature.

- 4.5. The God of biblical philosophy is, in fact, a morally good being. He is not an evil being.

- 4.5.1. As a moral being, the categories of good and evil apply to God. In biblical philosophy, it is claimed that God is morally good and not morally evil. Indeed, the claim is that God is perfectly and wholly good and is not morally evil to any degree whatsoever. {James 1:17}

- 4.5.2. One of the most important philosophical challenges to biblical philosophy is the classic "Problem of Evil"—that is, the seeming incompatibility between the moral goodness of God, who is the author of all reality, and the nature and extent of the evil that exists within created reality. Biblical philosophy upholds the pure and unadulterated goodness of God even in the face of the evil that exists in his creation.

•The Bible does not explain the apparent incompatibility between God's goodness and the evil in the world; rather, it maintains that the alleged incompatibility is only apparent, and not real. Biblical philosophy holds that, ultimately, the goodness of God is compatible with the amount and nature of evil that he has created in this world. Furthermore, the Bible does not attempt to explain how it is that God's goodness is compatible with the evil that he has created; rather, it contends that the human standpoint is so severely limiting that a human being cannot reasonably expect to be able to comprehend how God's goodness is compatible with the evil in the world. However, Biblical philosophy is not recommending blind, dogmatic "faith" in the goodness of God; it maintains that there is solid empirical evidence for the goodness of God. The perspective of biblical philosophy can be captured as follows: (i) there is significant evidence of the goodness of God; (ii) the empirical reality of the evil that exists in the world is indecisive with respect to whether it indicts God's goodness; therefore, (iii) the empirical reality of the evil that exists in the world cannot reasonably refute the evidence that exists for God's moral goodness; and (iv) the evil in the world needs to be understood and interpreted in the light of God's presumed goodness. This is a very challenging and important issue. For a fuller treatment of it, see my paper, "Biblical Divine Determinism and the Problem of Evil."

5. The God of the Bible is the personal "god" who entered into and revealed himself to various men throughout the history of mankind.
  - 5.1. God's revelation of himself to mankind was progressive. That is, he revealed himself bit-by-bit over the course of time. He revealed himself to Abraham as *El Shaddai* — "The God Most High." He did not reveal himself as *Yahweh* — "He Who Is"—until Moses. The former was a concept of god compatible with the polytheism with which Abraham was familiar and comfortable. The latter was a revolutionary understanding of God. God instructed Moses to understand him as more than the supreme god within the polytheistic pantheon of gods. He was the one and only transcendent, self-existent author of all of created reality.
  - 5.2. The God of the Bible is the "god" who made himself manifest to Abraham and made two important sets of promises to him. [See notes on "Background to the Gospel to the Jews: The Promises to Abraham," note #20 ff.]
  - 5.3. The God of the Bible is the transcendent "God" who chose Israel to be a distinctive people, who made a unique Covenant with Israel, and who spoke to and made specific promises to them through his prophets (who were taken from among his people, the Jews).

•The promises he made to Israel through his prophets were further clarifications and expansions on the promises he had already made to Abraham.

#### *Additional Notes on the Biblical Concept of God*

6. From the biblical concept of God, defined above, the more important traditional "attributes"

of God would automatically and necessarily follow. As the transcendent creator and author of all of reality, God will be (i) omnipotent, (ii) omniscient, (iii) omnipresent, (iv) Spirit, etc.—if these concepts are rightly understood.

*•However, some traditional attributes of God do not make any sense. It is not helpful to think of God as “infinite” for example. And some of the traditional attributes of God do not follow from the Bible’s conception of God but are elements of one’s conception of God that result from a synthesis of Biblical and Greek—“Platonic”—ideas. So, for example, to think of God as “impassible and unchanging” or as a “simple and undivided” being are not helpful ideas for explicating the biblical view of God.*

7. According to the biblical concept of God, the “Spirit of God” refers to God when he is working within created reality through his transcendent causation to bring about certain dramatic, otherwise inexplicable effects (miracles, an individual’s sanctification, etc.). Hence, the Spirit of God refers to God himself. It is a reference to the transcendent God to the extent that he is making himself known through certain effects in created reality.
  - 7.1. God’s nature as “spirit” follows directly from God’s transcendence. As a transcendent person, God is necessarily “invisible” to his creation, for he is not a being within the created order. He is the author who exists outside the created order. Therefore, to someone within the created order, God himself will be invisible—that is, he will be immaterial, intangible “spirit.” One can see the effects of God’s working, but cannot see and observe the being of God himself.
    - 7.1.1. The traditional orthodox Christian concept of the Trinity is not a biblical concept. In this regard, the Spirit of God is not a separate “person” of a triune godhead who exists in union with two other divine persons. Rather, the “Spirit of God” is simply a way of referring to the one and only God who exists, the transcendent author of all reality, when one is focusing on his creative activity within created reality or on his transformation of created reality.
8. According to the Biblical concept of God, he is the “Father” of all that exists.
  - 8.1. When the Bible describes God as “the Father” it fundamentally means that he is the source and origin of all that exists. Just as a father gives life and existence to his children, God gives life and existence to every existing thing. His title “Father” is intended to indicate just this fact.

*“Father” as a title or as a metaphor is used of God many times in the Bible and it has several different meanings. “Father” as the origin of existence is only one of the many ways it is used. However, this is the meaning of the most typical sense in which the title “Father” is assigned to God.*

*•Nothing about the meaning and significance of the title “Father” suggests anything like a gender for God. God is not male or female. Sexuality is a strictly human characteristic. It is not a divine attribute.*

9. God is the author of all reality.

- 9.1. Created reality is best understood as a set of interlocking stories or narratives. God is the author of every individual story and of the complex of interlocking stories. The Bible typically resorts to a different metaphor and title to approximate this idea. The Bible calls God “King.” God is considered the king who sovereignly rules over all of his creation.

*•The concept of God as king is not exactly synonymous with the concept of God as author. God’s role as king does not explicitly entail the narrative structure of reality; nor does it entail that God is the author of every narrative. So, “authorship” is a more philosophical-ly precise and detailed analogy than kingship. However, insofar as it is intended to indicate God’s absolute determinative control over all of created reality, “God as king” describes, by approximation, what I mean by “God as author.” Why does the Bible use the less precise metaphor? In choosing the title “King” for God, the Bible is not attempting to address the question of why God created reality or the question of what purpose reality serves. Rather, it is only attempting to address the question of to what extent reality is shaped and determined by God. To answer that question, “kingship” is a perfectly adequate and sufficiently accurate metaphor.*

- 9.2. Given the intrinsic nature of created reality—as a complex of interlocking narratives—the purpose of created reality is to be an act of “self-expression” on the part of God, the author of created reality. God’s relationship to created reality is helpfully understood to be like a novelist, who creates a novel in order to take part of who he is (his values, interests, etc.) and, in some sense, to objectify that in something other than himself.

10. God is the judge of all the living.

- 10.1. The ultimate outcome of the existence of every created being will be either reward or condemnation (judgment). God is the being who innately possesses the being, position, and capacity to judge his creatures and determine the appropriate outcome for their existence. This fact is captured by assigning to God the title “Judge.”

## **The Core of Biblical Philosophy: The Gospel**

### ***The Gospel—To Mankind***

#### *Background to the Gospel to Mankind*

11. There is a transcendent creator and author of all of history and reality. [See notes on “Reality” and on “God”]

12. God has a purpose for all of history and reality. {John 1:3; Heb. 1:2}
  - 12.1. Reality is not a chaotic, out-of-control product of independent forces and realities; it is an ordered and purposive narrative that God has chosen to create.
    - 12.1.1. The Bible assumes and advocates the worldview of Transcendent Monotheism, not of polytheism.
13. God's purposes extend to everything he creates and has created; therefore human beings are creatures made by God with specific purposes in mind. [See notes on "Mankind"]
  - 13.1. God's purposes for mankind extend to individuals *qua* individuals, to people groups *qua* people groups, and to the race of mankind *qua* a race.
14. God has created mankind such that, for any given individual human being, there exists a specific reality or experience that would result in the ultimate fulfillment of his being and existence.
  - 14.1. The ultimate fulfillment of any and every human being is to attain "Life" (also called "*aionic* life"—misleadingly translated "eternal Life"). [See notes on "Life"]
    - 14.1.1. Rightly understood, John 1:5 is an explicit statement that the most important truth that any human being could ever know is the truth about how to attain Life.
15. Because of the moral depravity that characterizes every individual human being, no human being deserves to be granted the Life for which he was created; every human being deserves condemnation and destruction instead. [See notes on "Sin" and on "Judgment"]
16. Given what every man is and what every man deserves, no human being can possibly attain Life (his ultimate fulfillment) unless it is granted to him as a gracious gift, by an act of divine mercy. [See notes on "Grace"]
  - 16.1. The man, Jesus of Nazareth, claimed, among other things, to be the one God sent as his "Anointed One"—the "Son of God"—in order to rescue certain individuals from condemnation by appealing to God for mercy on their behalf. [See notes on "Titles of Jesus"]
  - 16.2. Among other things, Jesus claimed that he was voluntarily going to his death (at the hands of the Romans) because his death was a propitiatory offering offered up as an appeal to God for mercy on behalf of mankind. [See notes on "Roles of Jesus" and on "Atonement"]

- 16.2.1. The apostles teach that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead means, among other things, that God is “well-pleased” with his Son, has accepted the propitiatory offering of his blood, and stands ready to listen to his intercession. [See notes on “Roles of Jesus” and on “Atonement”]
- 16.2.1.1. The apostles teach that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead means, among other things, that God, being pleased with Jesus’ sacrifice, has granted Jesus the authority to appeal to him for mercy, functioning as a high priest for mankind before God. [See notes on “Roles of Jesus” and on “Atonement”]

*Summary Statement of the Gospel to Mankind*

- 17. Ultimately, the gospel (good news) to mankind could be summarized like this: God will grant mercy to some—to those whom he has chosen and for whom, therefore, Jesus will serve as their high priest and advocate. [See notes on “The Roles of Jesus”]
- 17.1. In its most general and universal form, the gospel (good news) to mankind could be summarized like this: God will grant mercy to some—to those whom he has chosen and whom, accordingly, he has made suitable recipients of his mercy.
  - 17.1.1. At the judgment, God will mercifully grant Life to those whom he has chosen for that end. [See notes on “Election”]
  - 17.1.2. At the judgment, God will mercifully grant Life to those whom he has “qualified” for his mercy by creating within them the realities that qualify them (that is, render them fit) to receive mercy from God. [See notes on “The Conditions for Dikaiousune”]
- 17.2. In its most typical form, the gospel (good news) to mankind could be summarized like this: At the judgment, God will mercifully grant Life to those who have believed the truth about Jesus and have put their destiny in his hands. [See notes on “Faith in Jesus”]

•Note how absolutely central Jesus is to the message of the gospel. Jesus is the key to everything within Biblical Philosophy.

*Universal Relevance of the Gospel to Mankind*

- 18. The personal relevance of the gospel—with respect to every individual human being—is that

it announces the possibility of my attaining Life—the true fulfillment of my personal existence—rather than Death—the complete and utter nullification of my existence by my destruction.

- 18.1. The gospel is universally relevant; it is just as personally and individually relevant to every Jew as it is to every Gentile.
- 18.2. Aristotle contends that the ultimate good of every human being is what he calls *eudaimonia* (fulfillment, the flourishing of a human being in his existence). The Bible, in effect, contends that Life is the true *eudaimonia* of every human creature. (It does not say this in just those terms. The Bible does not use the term *eudaimonia*.)
  - 18.2.1. Every human being, if he is honest with himself, longs for and yearns for *eudaimonia*. The gospel claims that *eudaimonia* is possible for those who receive mercy from God in accord with what Jesus has done and will do on their behalf. Therefore, nothing could be more personally relevant to every human being than the gospel to mankind.

#### *The Bible and the Gospel to Mankind*

19. The essential core purpose of the Bible is to proclaim the gospel (good news) to mankind—namely, that God is willing and eager to show mercy to those who qualify for it.
  - 19.1. More than anything else, the reason God gave us the Bible is so that we might hear and understand, through its message, this good news of divine mercy to mankind.
  - 19.2. Any other purpose that might be served by the Bible is secondary and subordinate to the above. To interpret the Bible under any other understanding of its core purpose will inevitably lead to a distortion of its message and meaning, and therefore to a distorted understanding of the essential nature of biblical faith.

#### ***The Gospel—To the Jews***

##### *Background to the Gospel to the Jews*

20. The promises that God made to Abraham involve two sets of promises: one set concerns promises with regard to Abraham and his metaphorical “descendents”; the other set concerns promises made with regard to the physical descendents of Abraham (the Jews), whose ethnic identity derives from their history and physical (or, ethnic) lineage as children of Abraham.
- 20.1. The first set of promises concern a “blessing” that will be given to Abraham and to his metaphorical “descendents.”
- 20.1.1. The center and essence of this first stream of Yahweh’s promises to Abraham runs like this: “Abraham, I will bless you; and IN YOU all the peoples of the earth will be blessed.” {Genesis 12:1–3}
- 20.1.1.1. The “blessing” promised to Abraham is assumed to be the ultimate blessing a man could receive. It is the antithesis of the “curse” that Adam and Eve were subject to—the curse that they showed all humanity to be under. Accordingly, the apostles interpret this promised blessing to Abraham to be Life, that is, *aionic* Life. {Gen. 15:1; Rom. 4:9–16; Gal. 3:8–9}
- 20.1.1.2. The “in you” of Yahweh’s promise to Abraham is taken to mean, “by being a member of your family”, “by being ‘in’ your people group”, “by being your descendent.” {Rom. 4:9–16; Gal. 3:8–9}
- 20.1.1.3. Note the cryptic and paradoxical nature of the promise: “By being a member of your family, individuals from all those people who are NOT members of your family will be blessed.”
- 20.1.1.4. The nature of the promise comes to this: “Abraham, I will bless you with *aionic* Life and, by virtue of their qualifying as your descendents, people from all the different people groups throughout world history will likewise be blessed with *aionic* Life.”
- 20.2. The second set of promises concern a unique relationship that will be established between Israel (the ethnic descendents of Abraham) and Yahweh (the god who revealed himself to Abraham). That relationship involves a number of different elements.
- 20.2.1. Yahweh promised Abraham that his descendents, the ethnic group called “Israel”, will be given a specific piece of real estate: the very land that God had promised to Abraham (the land of Israel). {Gen. 13:14–17; Gen. 15:12–21}



- 20.2.2. Yahweh promised Abraham that he (Yahweh) would establish a relationship with his ethnic descendants, Israel, wherein he would be their god and they would be his people. {Gen. 17:7–8; Gen.}

  - 20.2.2.1. As their god, Yahweh would prosper them in the land he gave them, protect them from their enemies; multiply them and make them numerous, etc. {Gen. 12–22}
  - 20.2.2.2. As his people, the people of Israel would be expected to practice circumcision, and to worship and serve Yahweh as their god. {Gen. 17:10; Gen. 18:19}

#### THE MOSAIC COVENANT

- 21. The covenant that Yahweh made with the people of Israel under the prophetic leadership of Moses (the Mosaic Covenant) was the beginning of a process whereby Yahweh intended to keep one of the earlier promises he made to Abraham. Specifically, the Mosaic Covenant spelled out the terms of the unique relationship that Yahweh had promised to establish with Abraham's offspring—namely, it spelled out the terms of the relationship wherein he would be their “god” and they would be his people. [See 10.2 above.]

  - 21.1. One function of the Mosaic Covenant was to spell out Israel's obligation to Yahweh; that is, to define what would be required in order for Israel to be “Yahweh's people.”

    - 21.1.1. The obligations that Yahweh placed on Israel in the Mosaic Covenant can be analyzed according to four different categories: (i) moral obligations, (ii) obligations of ritualistic worship, (iii) obligations of personal or national religious piety, (iv) obligations of social justice.

      - 21.1.1.1. Some of the commandments were simply straightforward moral commands. (E.g., prohibitions against murder, theft, adultery, fraud, etc.)

*•Because they reflect a universal moral obligation that every human being is under simply by virtue of being a human being made in the image of God, the relevance of the moral commandments transcend the specific purposes of the Mosaic Covenant. Therefore, the moral commandments are instructive to and relevant to every human being, Jew or Gentile, throughout all time.*

- 21.1.1.2. Some of the commandments pertained to how, when, and why they were to engage in various rituals. (E.g., the system of offerings, sacrifices, and washings, etc.)

*•The ritualistic worship required by the Mosaic Covenant has no relevance outside the purposes of the Mosaic Covenant itself. Accordingly, it is not (and never has been) binding on Gentiles.*

- 21.1.1.3. Some of the commandments pertained to distinctive religious practices that they were to engage in or to forms of piety they were to observe. (E.g., requirements of circumcision, Sabbath-keeping, festival observances, dietary regulations, etc.) Many of these requirements could not be obeyed by an individual alone; to be obeyed at all, they must be observed by the people as a whole.

*•The religious piety required by the Mosaic Covenant has no relevance outside the purposes of the Mosaic Covenant itself. Accordingly, it is not (and never has been) binding on Gentiles.*

- 21.1.1.4. Some of the commandments pertained to how, as a nation, they were to respond to individuals who were immoral or who failed to keep the Covenant. Many of these requirements could not be obeyed by an individual alone; to be obeyed at all, they must be observed by the people as a whole. (E.g., specific requirements for how and when to punish various crimes and transgressions against the Covenant, means of protection or reprieve from punishment, ways to receive justice or legal protection, etc.)

*•The system of social justice required by the Mosaic Covenant has no direct relevance outside the purposes of the Mosaic Covenant itself. Accordingly, it is not (and never has been) binding on Gentiles. It may, however, be instructive to Gentiles if one gives due account of its specific purposes and makes the appropriate adjustments.*

- 21.1.2. The obligations that Yahweh placed on Israel in the Mosaic Covenant can be analyzed according to four different purposes that they served: (i) to call Israel to pursue personal moral goodness or righteousness, (ii) to call the people of Israel to take Yahweh and their unique relationship to Yahweh seriously, (iii) to call Israel to take their moral and spiritual failings seriously, and (iv) to call Israel to be peculiar and different in order to visibly mark the fact that they have a unique relationship with Yahweh.

- 21.1.2.1. In the Mosaic Covenant, Yahweh required each and every person among the people of Israel to strive to be good in accord with a concept of goodness that reflected the very goodness of Yahweh himself. In other words, if they were to

be his people, he insisted that they seek to be righteous as he, Yahweh, was righteous. Many of the commandments must be understood as defining and describing this righteousness that they were required to pursue.

- 21.1.2.2. In the Mosaic Covenant, Yahweh required each and every person among the people of Israel to treat with utter seriousness his relationship to Yahweh and his responsibility to serve Yahweh and strive to fulfill his purposes. In other words, each and every person was to recognize that he was a “holy” individual set apart for a unique role in relation to God. Their whole life together as a people was intended to reflect the holiness of their calling. Many of the commandments (especially those that spelled out their system of justice and punishment) should be understood as defining and describing this “holiness” that they were required to pursue.
  - 21.1.2.3. In the Mosaic Covenant, Yahweh required of the people of Israel that, insofar as they failed to live righteously or failed to be obedient to their calling, they acknowledge and confess their failure and that they recognize such failure as a grave offense against Yahweh, requiring his mercy. Many of the instructions (especially those concerning offerings, sacrifices, and washings) must be understood as defining how they were to acknowledge and confess their failings and how they were supposed to appeal to God for mercy. In brief, Yahweh required accurate and profound self-knowledge among his people.
  - 21.1.2.4. In the Mosaic Covenant, Yahweh required of the people of Israel that every aspect of their lives tangibly mark them in such a way that it made it evident that they were a people uniquely related to Yahweh. Many of the instructions (e.g., dietary regulations, dress requirements, festivals, Sabbath, circumcision, etc.) must be understood as obligating them to a way of life and a way of being that tangibly stamped them as a unique and peculiar people, chosen to be the people of Yahweh.
- 21.2. Another function of the Mosaic Covenant was to spell out Yahweh’s obligation to Israel; that is, to define what would be required of Yahweh in order for him to qualify as their god and meet his obligations as “Israel’s god.”
- 21.2.1. In the Mosaic Covenant, Yahweh promised the people of Israel that, if they were obedient to the Covenant (that is, if they took Yahweh seriously as their god), he would bless them. But he also threatened to curse them if they did not keep his

Covenant. As their god, Yahweh would function either as their Benefactor or their Adversary (and, in either case, as their Judge.)

- 21.2.1.1. If they kept the Covenant, Yahweh promised to bless them with productivity, prosperity, protection from their enemies, long-life in the land, etc.
- 21.2.1.2. If they failed to keep the Covenant, Yahweh promised to curse them with destruction of their way of life, banishment from the land, captivity, hardship, etc.

*THE DAVIDIC COVENANT*

22. The covenant that Yahweh made with the people of Israel under the leadership of King David (the Davidic Covenant) was an addendum to what he had already promised Israel in the Mosaic Covenant. As such, it further spelled out the manner by which Yahweh intended to keep his earlier promise to Abraham. The Mosaic Covenant spelled out the terms of that unique relationship that Yahweh promised to establish between himself and Abraham's descendants—the terms of the relationship wherein he, Yahweh, would be Israel's god and they, Israel, would be Yahweh's people. The Davidic Covenant adds an important feature to how Yahweh intends to function as Israel's god—namely, Yahweh intends to rule over Israel as their god by embodying his sovereign rule over Israel in a human being who would rule as Israel's king.

*•The extent of God's rightful rule is over the entirety of his creation. Accordingly, the extent of the human being who embodied his rule would ultimately be to reign over the entirety of God's creation.*

- 22.1. In the promise Yahweh made to David, God promised David and his descendants after him that they would be as a "Son" to him and that he, Yahweh, would be as a "Father" to them. In other words, Yahweh was promising David and every future king in the line of David that he, Yahweh, would embody his sovereign rule over all of creation in the King of Israel. {2 Samuel 7: 4–17, esp. 14; Psalm 2; Psalm 89}
- 22.1.1. In the time of David, there was a concept that was current in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the ancient world in general of a god-king relationship described in terms of god being "the Father" and the king being "the Son" of that god. The concept seemed to denote the fact that the human king was the human embodiment of the power, authority, person, and sovereignty of the god himself.
- 22.2. Yahweh further promised that the throne of David would be everlasting; it would never

come to an end. {2 Samuel 7: 4–17, esp. 14; Psalm 89}

- 22.3. The unique authority invested in the Davidic King of Israel in accord with the promise made to David in the Davidic Covenant is what is being denoted by all of the following titles that get applied to David and all of his sons who ruled over Israel after him: (i) the “Anointed One” (=the “Christ = the “Messiah”) {Psalm 2}; (ii) the “Son of God” (= the “Son” = the “Son of Man”) {Psalm 2, Psalm 8:4} and variations on this theme; (iii) the “Firstborn” {Psalm 89:27}; (iv) “God” and various divine titles {Psalm 45:6–7}; and (v) other rarer titles.
- 22.4. Exactly what Yahweh intended for it to look like when he promised to make the Davidic King of Israel his “Son” does not get spelled out in the initial promise to David.
- 22.4.1. A fuller picture of what the promises implicit in the Davidic Covenant involved gets spelled out in what David says in a number of the Psalms and, further, by what gets revealed to later prophets of Israel. Accordingly, the full picture of what Yahweh is promising with respect to the rule of his “Son” must be gleaned from the whole of the Hebrew Scriptures.
- 22.5. None of the Davidic kings over Israel who are mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures were ever actually, *in reality*, the embodiment of Yahweh’s sovereign rule; and none of them actually fulfilled any of the predictions that were made on the basis of the promise God made to David.
- 22.5.1. The ordinary sons of David who ruled over Israel in succession were, in the final analysis, placeholders. They bore the title of “Son” and, thereby, kept alive the concept and the promise that God had made. But none of them ever substantively were, in reality, what their title or what the promise to David suggested. [David and his unrighteous descendents were “Son of Yahweh” in the same sense that Pharaoh was “Son of Re”—namely, in name and concept only; not in actuality.]
- 22.6. Accordingly, it becomes clear to the people of Israel (and this clarity comes to be reflected in the Hebrew Scriptures) that the fulfillment of God’s promise to David will not come about through any of the long line of ordinary, sinful descendents who made up the Davidic dynasty. Rather, it becomes clear that one is coming, a unique descendent of David, who will uniquely fulfill all the promises implicit in the Davidic Covenant and will ACTUALLY embody the sovereign rule of God in a manner that substantively reflects what the title “Son of God” suggests. That “coming one” will bring to pass all that God was promis-

ing when he made his covenant with David.

- 22.6.1. The titles under which Israel eventually came to describe this one that they expected to truly and authentically fulfill Yahweh's promise to David included: (i) the "Coming One"; (ii) the "Son of David"; (iii) the "Son of God" or the "Son" or the "Son of Man", or variations of these; (iv) the "Anointed One" (=the "Christ = the "Messiah"); and (v) other rarer titles.
- 22.6.2. John frequently describes this unique individual as the *monogenes* (=unique, one-of-a-kind [typically mistranslated "only-begotten"]) Son of God, or the *monogenes* (=unique, one-of-a-kind) Son. He is clearly trying to distinguish him from the in-name-only Sons of God throughout the history of the Davidic dynasty.

THE PROMISE OF UNIVERSAL SANCTIFICATION AND THE NEW COVENANT

23. The history of the people of Israel is the history of a people who simply were not interested in taking Yahweh seriously, nor were they interested in taking seriously the covenants God made with them (the Mosaic Covenant, et. al.).
  - 23.1. From the very beginning of God's making a Covenant with the people of Israel, he predicted that Israel would not keep the Covenant. The problem, as God expressed it, is that they did not have a "heart" to want to serve God. This fact has been true throughout their history.
    - 23.1.1. In every generation of the people of Israel, there have been a number of individuals who have had a heart to want to serve and obey God; but the people of Israel as a whole has never been characterized by such a heart.
      - 23.1.1.1. Paul refers to the relatively small set of individuals who could legitimately be characterized in this way as a "remnant." Accordingly, up to the present day, it has only been a remnant of Israel— and never the whole people group—who has desired to serve and obey God.
24. However, God also predicted from the beginning that—at some unspecified time in the future—God, after many generations of Israelite disobedience, would supernaturally instill in a whole generation of Israel a desire and willingness to serve Yahweh and to keep his Covenant.

- 24.1. This miracle of restoring or transforming all of the people of Israel in a future generation is described in various ways, including: (i) circumcising their hearts (Deuteronomy 30:1–10); (ii) replacing their heart of stone with a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 11:13–21, 13:16–38); (iii) writing his Covenant on their hearts (Jeremiah 31:31–34); (iv) returning the hearts of the children to their fathers (Malachi 4:1–6); (v) pouring out his Spirit upon all of Israel (Isaiah 44:3, Joel 2:28–32); etc.
- 24.1.1. These are all ways of describing God’s working to “sanctify” the people of Israel—that is, to supernaturally realign their inward orientation (i.e., their "heart") such that, contrary to all their natural inclinations, they would be inclined to want to know him, love him, serve him, and obey him.
- 24.1.2. Jeremiah 31:31 ff is a particularly explicit announcement of just this promise. When the promise of Jeremiah 31:31 ff (often misleadingly identified as the "new covenant") is fulfilled in Israel, the entire people of Israel—unlike all the generations of Israel before them—will be eager to keep the Covenant that God made with their fathers at Mt. Sinai (the Mosaic Covenant). In whatever way they happen to interpret the Mosaic Covenant and understand its demands at that time, the entire nation will join together in eagerly meeting those demands.
- 24.1.2.1. As we see below, the Covenant that they will keep in that day will be a modified form of the Mosaic Covenant. Since it has significant modifications to it, Jeremiah speaks of it as a "New Covenant" that God will make with Israel on that day.
- 24.2. Such an event will finally be a fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham: “I will be their god; and they will be my people.” [See notes at 20.2]
- 24.2.1. God intended and declared (at least, implicitly) that there would be a long, multi-generational delay before the fulfillment of his original promise to Abraham with regard to the people of Israel—namely, the promise that “they would be his people and he would be their god.”
- 24.2.1.1. The eventual fulfillment of the “Promise of Universal Sanctification” (the fulfillment of one aspect of his promises to Abraham) will be a dramatic manifestation of the *hesed* of God—of God's remarkable loyalty to his promises.
25. This widely promised event is CORRELATED in Jeremiah 31:31 ff with a "new" covenant that God intends to make with Israel. The New Testament writers (Paul in particular) understand

this "New Covenant" that God, through Jeremiah, predicted as a covenant wherein the basis for propitiation is altered somewhat relative to the basis for propitiation in the Mosaic Covenant. No longer will propitiation be expected to come through the intercession of Levitical priests. Under the "New Covenant" it will be expected to come through the intercession of the one ultimately true high priest, Jesus. And, no longer will mercy be expected in connection with the propitiatory offering of animal sacrifices. Now it will be expected in connection with the propitiatory offering of Jesus' own life.

- 25.1. This is what Jesus has in mind when, in the upper room, he lifts the glass of wine and identifies it as a symbol for "the new covenant in my blood."
- 25.2. The New Covenant (contrary to the way many Bible students understand it) is not the fact that God will "pour out his Spirit" on all of Israel and sanctify an entire generation of Jews. (In other words, the "New Covenant" is not identical to the "Promise of Universal Sanctification.") God will, in fact, sanctify ALL of Israel one day. But, at the time that God does such a miracle, he will also forgive the sins of Israel and not hold their past rebellion against them (Jeremiah 31:34). On what basis will he do that? Will it be purely and simply on the basis of the Mosaic Covenant? No, but rather on the basis of the "New Covenant"—on the basis of the intercession and propitiatory offering of Jesus.
  - 25.2.1. Hence, the New Covenant is not DEFINED by the wholesale sanctification of the entire nation of Israel. Rather, the New Covenant that God will put in place will be a radically new and unexpected basis for propitiation, mercy, and forgiveness.
    - 25.2.1.1. In Jeremiah 31:31ff, God announces the making of a new covenant with Israel in connection with the day when he will keep his promise to sanctify all of Israel. But his purpose is not to define the new covenant as the wholesale sanctification of the people of Israel. His purpose is to simply identify the basis upon which God, on that day, will forgive Israel their sins—namely, on the basis of a New Covenant.

*Summary of God's Promises to the Jews: The Expectations of Biblical Jews*

26. When God has fulfilled all of his promises to Israel, all of the following will be true: (i) they



will live safely, prosperously, and freely in the land that God gave to Abraham, (ii) Yahweh will live among them and rule over them in the form of the Messiah, who embodies the sovereign reign of Yahweh himself, and (iii) they will have been transformed by God's Spirit into a people fit to be called the people of God, for they will have a heart to want to serve and obey him.

26.1. The concept that unites all of these expectations into one concept is the concept of the "Kingdom of God." Therefore, the great hope of the Jews was captured by their hope in the coming of the Kingdom of God.

26.1.1. There are two senses in which the concept of the "Kingdom of God" is used in the New Testament.

26.1.1.1. In one sense, the "Kingdom of God" is used to refer to the fulfillment of all the promises that God has made to his chosen people Israel to be fulfilled at some point during the history of this present evil age. This is the sense mentioned in 26.1 above. [This corresponds to the second stream of the promises of God to Abraham; see 20.2 above.] {Luke 1:33, 17:20; Acts 1:6}

26.1.1.2. In a second sense, the "Kingdom of God" is used to refer to the existence of those who have been blessed with *aionic* Life (the ultimate blessing promised to Abraham) who will reside as citizens in a kingdom ruled over by the promised Messiah in the eternal Age. [This corresponds to the first stream of the promises of God to Abraham; see 20.1 above.] {Matt.25:34; John 18:36; 1 Corinthians 15:50}

26.2. In the prophetic picture, the fulfillment of the promise made in Jeremiah 31:31ff coincides closely with the coming of the Kingdom of God in history (in the sense outlined in 26.1 above). The Kingdom of God and the wholesale sanctification of all of Israel seem to be part of one and the same grand event in the history of the people of Israel.

27. An understandable misapprehension of God's purposes would picture all of God's promises to Israel being realized simultaneously. Hence, one could understandably expect that the coming of the Messiah would immediately usher in a period of safety, prosperity, and independence in the land. (This is how many Jews interpret the prophets to this day. They assert that Jesus cannot possibly be the Messiah, for Jesus clearly did not usher in the Kingdom of God.)

27.1. However, nothing in what the prophets predict requires that the Messiah's coming be ac-

accompanied by an immediate fulfillment of all of God's promises to Israel. That is, nothing in what the prophets predict requires that the Kingdom of God follow immediately upon the appearance of the King, the Messiah.

*The Gospel of Jesus to the Jews: A Summary Statement*

28. Ultimately, the gospel (good news) to the Jews could be summarized as follows: Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. Therefore, in Jesus, the King appointed to reign over the promised Kingdom of God has come.

28.1. Jesus' coming amounts to "good news" to the Jews, not because his coming fulfills all of the covenants and promises that God had made to Israel. It does not. Rather, it amounts to "good news" in the sense that he is that King by whom and in whom all the covenants and promises that God made to Israel will be fulfilled when they are fulfilled. Accordingly, if the promised King has been brought into existence, then it is only a matter of time before God will bring about everything else that he had promised. That is good news!

28.1.1. This is what Jesus meant by his proclamation "The Kingdom of God is at hand." He did not mean that the fulfillment of all that God had promised was imminent. He simply meant that since he, the King, had entered history, it was only a matter of time before God would make him victorious over all the enemies of God and Israel, establishing the Kingdom of God.

*Relationship Between the Gospel to Mankind and the Gospel to the Jews*

29. Implicit in the idea of being a member of the people of God is the notion that one is qualified to receive mercy from God and to be granted *aionic* Life. Hence, the most important outcome of God fulfilling all of his promises to the ethnic descendants of Abraham is that those ethnic descendants of Abraham who see the fulfillment of all God's promises to Israel (the coming of the Kingdom of God) will also be qualified, as individuals, to receive *aionic* Life. In other words, the generation of the people of Israel that sees the fulfillment of the Covenant of Universal Sanctification will all, individually, be qualified for *aionic* Life, in addition to seeing the temporal, historical manifestation of the Kingdom of God within the present age.

29.1. The gospel to the Jews is most importantly the same thing as the gospel to mankind; but

it includes some additional elements that are uniquely relevant to the physical descendants of Israel. It involves the fulfillment of promises and covenants that address themselves only to the destiny of Jews in this present age, not commenting on Gentiles at all.

30. The gospel to mankind is a distillation of the most important promises of the gospel to the Jews. Those aspects that pertain uniquely and exclusively to the Jews have been omitted.
  - 30.1. The blessings and promises uniquely relevant to the physical descendants of Israel are relatively unimportant as compared with the blessings and promises that are relevant to all of mankind.
31. Fundamentally, the gospel to mankind pertains to the last age, to the eternal age to come. The unique and distinctive aspects of the gospel to the Jews pertain only to events within this present age of the world.

*•The concept of the "last age" is a complicated one in the Bible. On the one hand, the Bible, at times, refers to an eternal age beyond the present created reality—a time when God will create a "new heavens and a new earth" as an everlasting created order—as the "last age," or the "age to come," or the "age of ages." On the other hand, at other times the Bible seems to refer to the very last era of history in the present created realm as the "last age," or the "age to come." The prophetic picture in the Bible does not seem to treat the destruction of present created reality and the creation of a whole new cosmos as the decisive, determinative transition point in created history. Rather, it seems to treat the return of Messiah Jesus as that decisive transition point. In a very real sense, eternal existence begins (for some, at least) with the return of Jesus. Those who are "in Christ" at Jesus' return—Paul tells us—will be "transformed in the twinkling of an eye," and their "mortality will take on immortality" on that day. For that reason, it seems, the destruction of the present created order and the creation of a new created order is somewhat anti-climatic by comparison; for their recreation into eternal existence has, at that point, already occurred for many of the children of God. So, as another way of expressing the same thing: the transition from the earthly kingdom of God that will be established by Jesus when he returns to the eternal kingdom of God that will endure forever and ever is a relatively seamless transition. Once Jesus comes and establishes the Kingdom of God on earth during the present stage of history, it is a relatively slight transition into the stage of cosmic history where the eternal Kingdom of God comes into being—where ALL THINGS are made eternal, perfect, and immortal. The point in this note is that the early stage of the Kingdom of God (the stage that occurs in our present stage of history) is where all those aspects of the gospel that are unique to the Jews will be actualized and fulfilled. The aspects of the gospel that will be fulfilled in the last stage of the Kingdom of God (the stage that occurs in the Eternal Age) is what those aspects of the gospel that are universal (applicable to Jews and Gentiles alike) will be fulfilled. Arguably, when history leaves this present created order behind and becomes the Eternal Age of created reality, there will no longer be any meaningful distinction between Jew and Gentile.*

#### *The Bible and the Gospel to the Jews*

32. The story of God's dealings with his chosen people, the Jews, is a singular preoccupation of the Bible.
33. The essential core purpose of the Bible is to proclaim the gospel (good news) to mankind.

However, the manner in which it does that very thing is by telling the dramatic story of God choosing Israel for a unique and special role and making distinctive promises to them.

- 33.1. The proclamation of the good news that Jesus is the Messiah is the climax to that dramatic story. But it is in the culmination to this dramatic story of God's dealing with the Jews that we also find the climactic good news of God's dealing with mankind. Both find their climax in one and the same person and in one and the same event—Jesus.

## PART II

# Fundamental Elements of Biblical Philosophy— Part Two

## *OTHER ELEMENTS NECESSARY TO FILL OUT THE BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW AND GOSPEL MESSAGE*

### **Mankind**

#### *The Ontological Nature of Mankind*

34. Human beings are beings created in the image of God.
  - 34.1. As created beings, created out of the “dust of the ground,” human beings are akin to the rest of creation. Most notably, human beings are like the animal kingdom in certain important respects. {Genesis 2:7}
  - 34.2. As creatures created in the “image of God”, human beings are unique in God's creation. No other created being possesses the dignity, significance, and importance that a human being has. This makes human beings stand apart from the rest of the created order; mankind is the apex of God's creation. In one sense, all the rest of creation was created to be the environment for and the delight of human beings. {Genesis 1:26–31}
    - 34.2.1. The concept of being “made in the image of God” refers to a human being's personhood. He is a person like God is a person. Personhood involves many elements (rationality, language, creativity, imagination, etc.); but the most distinctive and definitive mark of personhood is morality. Human beings are moral creatures. They experience and think about their world in moral categories.

### ***The Moral Nature of Mankind***

35. Human beings are created beings who are inherently in rebellion against the creator.
- 35.1. Human beings are morally evil; they are not good. The essence of human evil rests in mankind's fundamental hostility or opposition to God and his will or purposes. There are many ramifications of this rebellion which, when taken altogether, constitute human evil. But at the root of all human evil is the human being's proclivity to resist God's will and fail to submit to his purposes. [See notes on "Sin, Evil, and Unrighteousness" and notes on "The Anatomy of Human Moral Nature".]

### ***The Divine Purpose of Mankind***

36. Human beings are created beings who were created to fulfill, as individuals, significant and meaningful roles within the drama of created reality.
- 36.1. The fundamental purpose, meaning, and significance of an individual human existence is to exist as a role-player in a narrative that God is authoring, with that human individual as the center of his unique narrative (the "protagonist" in it). All of created reality is best understood as a complex of interlocking narratives. Created reality is not a static artifact of God's creative act; it is not an engineering feat. Rather, it is a dynamic, moving complex of narratives that, in their overarching meaning and significance, embody who God, their author, is. Note that the purpose of human existence is simply an aspect of the divine purpose for created reality as a whole. [See "Additional Notes on the Biblical Concept of God"]

*•Does this perspective on the purpose of humankind demean man or exalt him? If one is accustomed to thinking of a human being as different from God, the creator, only by a matter of degree—that is, if one views mankind as the ontological peer of God who is lesser in stature and status, then the perspective of biblical philosophy will seem like a demotion of man. But if one focuses on how central each human individual is to the unique narrative of his own existence, then the human individual can be understood to be exalted to a special and unique place in the creative work of God. Each human being is a unique, irreplaceable individual whom God is intimately involved with and on whose being and story God is intent as he crafts it.*

### ***The Ultimate Fulfillment of Mankind***

37. The ultimate fulfillment of any and every human being is to attain "Life" (also called "aionic life"—misleadingly translated "eternal Life"). [See notes on "Life"]

## **Jesus**

### ***The Centrality of Jesus***

38. Jesus is destined to directly and uniquely represent, throughout all of eternity to come, the individual person of the creator God, Yahweh. {Colossians1: 15; Hebrews 1:3; John 1:18}
- 38.1. Jesus is the personal identity of the transcendent creator, Yahweh, translated into the form of a human being. As such, he will be the image of the creator God himself for all eternity. No creature is so directly linked to and identified with the creator as is Jesus. Therefore, no creature is as centrally important to God's purposes as is Jesus.
39. Jesus is the one for whom everything in created reality was created. Everything that is was created in order that it might serve to bring glory to him. {Colossians1:16; 1 Corinthians 8:6}
- 39.1. Jesus is the very reason for the existence of all that is (the *raison d'être* of created reality). Everything that exists and everything that occurs ultimately finds its meaning and significance in how it relates to Jesus. Jesus is the one created by God to be the ultimate, sovereign ruler over all of reality. It is in and through its being of service to Jesus that everything that exists finds its meaning.
- 39.2. All of reality is created by God to be the stage upon which Jesus is to perform his God-given roles.
- 39.3. Every human being who will inherit Life in the age to come is a "gift" from the Father (the creator) to the Son. {John 6:37-39, 17:1-2,24}
40. Jesus is the "last Adam." He is the first of a new and different order of human being. {1 Corinthians 15:45; Romans 8:29}
- 40.1. In the purposes of God, existence in this present "evil" age {Galatians 1:4}—in this world that is "passing away" {1 John 2:17}—does not represent what God ultimately purposed for mankind. God's original purpose was for a human being to be a creation that he would ultimately re-create, transforming him into a glorious being. Jesus came into this present evil age in the "likeness of sinful flesh" {Romans 8:3}—that is, he came into this world having the same ontological nature as a normal (sinful) human being. However, Jesus did not share the sinfulness of ordinary humanity. God created him to be a human creature who, unlike his fellow humans, was righteous, not sinful. Jesus was inclined to obey and submit to his creator rather than rebel against him. Therefore, he was a totally new creation, a radically new way of being a human being with respect to his moral condition. (After his resurrection, Jesus would also assume a radically new and different way of being human with respect to his physical being; he was the first human being to have

a new, different, and glorious body.) And, as such, he was (and is) the first in a completely different race of human beings. God's intention was that Jesus would be the "first of many brothers." Hence, in the final age, Jesus and his transformed brothers would constitute a new and different humanity, with Jesus being the "Adam" of that new humanity.

41. Jesus is the *soter*, the conquering hero who has entered into human history and delivered human beings from the destruction to which they were doomed and secured for them the blessing of Life in the everlasting Final Age. {Philippians 3:20; 2 Timothy 1:10}

*•The typical translation of soter as "savior" no longer adequately conveys what the word means. Tradition has taught us to picture Jesus as "savior" by envisioning him dying on a cross. The actual meaning of the word would suggest that we picture Jesus riding into history on a powerful horse, sword in hand, leading a successful charge against all the ultimate enemies of God and mankind.*

42. Other things about Jesus could be included as an aspect of his centrality to God's purposes. There is nothing that Jesus has been given to do that does not, more or less, make him absolutely central to all the purposes of God. [See notes on "The Roles of Jesus / The Work of Jesus" and notes on "The Titles of Jesus"]

### ***The Titles of Jesus***

43. The identity of Jesus is central to the claims of the gospel itself. To believe the gospel can be summed up as believing that Jesus is "the Christ," the "Son of the Living God." Or, (which is to say the same thing) to confess that Jesus is "Lord." Therefore, to understand the titles that are attributed to Jesus is to understand an essential aspect of the gospel message itself.

*•Gospel="Good News! The Messiah has come. Jesus is the Messiah."*

44. Jesus and/or the apostles claimed that Jesus was the one who could be described by any and all of the following titles: the *messiah* (Christ, Anointed One), the Son of God, the Son of Man, the Son, the Son of David, The Coming One, the Firstborn, the Righteous One, Lord, God, and *Soter*. All of these titles are fundamentally making the same claim—namely, that he is the promised son of David who would fulfill all that God had promised David with regard to establishing his "seed" forever as the human embodiment of the rule of Yahweh himself. All of the titles that Jesus claimed for himself (or that his apostles assigned to him) are designating just this role for Jesus.
  - 44.1. Son of David—the title "Son of David" is intended to indicate that Jesus is descended from David and is qualified to inherit his throne. Specifically, it is intended to suggest that he is the coming descendent of David who would uniquely fulfill the promise God made to David (in the Davidic Covenant {2 Samuel 7:4–17}) that he would establish his

“seed” forever as the embodiment of his own rule. To call Jesus the “Son of David” is virtually synonymous with calling Jesus the “Son of God.”

- 44.1.1. “Son of David” is the title that designates the King, in the line of David, who will rule with the authority of God himself over God’s people forever. [Meaning and origin of the title: THE promised son of David.]
- 44.2. Son, Son of God, Son of Man—all of these titles are synonymous and they all indicate virtually the same thing: the one who would be the unique fulfillment of the promise that God made to David (in the Davidic Covenant {2 Samuel 7:4–17}) that “I will be a Father to him, and he will be a Son to me.”
  - 44.2.1. The title “Son of God” is the fullest and most descriptive title describing this role. So, to call Jesus the “Son of God” is to designate him as the one who uniquely fulfills the promise God made to David. Jesus is the one to whom God is his Father, while he is his (God’s) Son.
  - 44.2.2. The title “Son” is intended to indicate exactly the same thing as the title “Son of God.” The operative term is “Son” in all three of the titles under consideration. It comes directly from the Davidic Covenant {2 Samuel 7:14}: “I will be a Father to him, and he will be a Son to me.” So, to call Jesus “the Son” is simply to suggest that Jesus is the one who uniquely fulfills this promise from God. To be the “Son” in relation to God is to be the one who is the human embodiment of God’s person, sovereign rule, and authority.
  - 44.2.3. The title “Son of Man” is intended to indicate exactly the same thing as the titles, the “Son” and the “Son of God.” The operative term is “Son” in all three of these titles. It comes directly from the Davidic Covenant {2 Samuel 7:14}: “I will be a Father to him, and he will be a Son to me.” So, to call Jesus “the Son” is simply to suggest that Jesus is the one taken from among men (hence, “Son of Man”) who uniquely fulfills this promise from God. To be the “Son” in relation to God is to be the one who is the human embodiment of God’s person, sovereign rule, and authority. To add the “of Man” is simply to underline the fact that Jesus is the man existing among other men who has been appointed the Son in relation to God.
    - 44.2.3.1. These are all titles that designate the King, in the line of David, who will rule with the authority of God himself over God’s people forever. [Meaning and origin of the titles: God’s promise, “I will be a Father to him, he will be a Son to



me.” The title “Son” = that predicted Son. The title “Son of God” = that predicted Son in relation to God, his Father. The title “Son of Man” = that man from among other men who is this promised Son.]

- 44.3. The Firstborn—the title “Firstborn” {Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:6, 12:23} is an allusion to Psalm 89:27. It is intended to indicate that Jesus is the one descended from David who, in fulfillment of the promise God made to David, has been appointed to be the human embodiment of God’s person, sovereign rule, and authority—and, therefore, the supreme king over the whole earth. It is a title that is closely linked to the title “Son of God.”
- 44.3.1. “Firstborn (over all the kings of the earth/ over all creation)” is the title that designates the King, in the line of David, who will rule with the authority of God himself over God’s people (and over the whole of created reality) forever. [Meaning and origin of the title: the promised son of David who will be appointed as a firstborn Son to inherit Yahweh’s reign and sit on Yahweh’s throne.]
- 44.4. God—the title “God” {Titus 2:13; 2 Peter 1:1; Isaiah 9:6} is intended to indicate that Jesus is the one descended from David who, in fulfillment of the promise God made to David, has been appointed to be the human embodiment of God’s person, sovereign rule, and authority. The title “God” is virtually synonymous with the title “Son of God.”
- 44.4.1. Eternal Father—the title “Eternal (Everlasting) Father” [in some versions of Isaiah 9:6] is used by the prophet Isaiah in a prediction of Jesus. It is intended to indicate exactly the same thing as the title “God.” [Note the title “mighty God” also in Isaiah 9:6.] It indicates that Jesus is the one descended from David who, in fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant, has been appointed to be the human embodiment of God’s very person, rule, and authority.
- 44.4.1.1. These titles designate the King, in the line of David, who will rule with the authority of God himself over God’s people forever. [Meaning and origin of the title: the promised son of David who will be appointed as the Son of God to inherit God’s (Yahweh’s) reign and will sit on God’s (Yahweh’s) throne forever. That is, as God’s proxy, he will rule as if he were God and is therefore entitled to be addressed as “God” under virtually any and every title that belongs to God.]
- 44.5. The *messiah* (the Messiah, the Anointed One, *christos*, the Christ)—all of these titles mean exactly the same thing. The Hebrew word *messiah* would be translated into English as “the Anointed One.” The Hebrew word *messiah* would be translated into Greek as *christos*

(= the “Anointed One”). The Hebrew word *messiah* gets anglicized as Messiah; and the Greek word *christos* gets anglicized as Christ. The title focuses on Jesus’ kingship. To be the “Anointed One” is to be the one whom God has “anointed” (appointed and qualified) to be the king who would rule with the sovereign rule of Yahweh himself. The kingship that is designated by this title is the kingship that is promised and described by the Davidic Covenant. Therefore, assigning the title “Anointed One” to Jesus is virtually synonymous with assigning the titles “Son,” “Son of God,” or “Son of Man” to Jesus.

*•The ritual of “anointing” a person with olive oil was used to designate men to many different kinds of offices. Not just kings, but priests and prophets were anointed as well. But, in using this title for Jesus, what is in view is Jesus’ status as king.*

44.5.1. These are all titles that designate the King, in the line of David, who will rule with the authority of God himself over God’s people forever. [Meaning and origin of the title: the Anointed One is the one anointed to be the promised King.]

44.6. Lord, King—calling Jesus “Lord” or “our Lord” is virtually synonymous with calling him the “King” which is virtually synonymous with calling him “the Anointed One.” The title “Lord” (in this sense) is a title of respect for and submission to the sovereign rule of a king. To call Jesus “lord” is to acknowledge him to be the king.

*•The term “lord” is a common title of respect. It is used in the context of many relationships. It is rather like the Spanish word, “Senor,” or the English word, “Sir.” It is used within any context when one man wants to show respect to another. Any inferior would call his social superior “lord.” But, when used of Jesus, this title has a particular understanding of his status in view—namely, that he is the king and we are his subjects.*

44.6.1. These are titles that designate the King, in the line of David, who will rule with the authority of God himself over God’s people forever. [Meaning and origin of the title “lord”: as the promised King, he will be our lord (master) and will be eternally worthy of our respect and reverence as such.]

44.7. The Expected One—to call Jesus “the Expected One, or “the Prophet who is to come” {Matthew 11:3; John 6:14} is to declare him to be the one who would be the unique fulfillment of the promise that God made to David (in the Davidic Covenant {2 Samuel 7:4–17}).

44.7.1. “The Expected One” (and similar titles) are titles that designate the King, in the line of David, who will rule with the authority of God himself over God’s people forever. [Meaning and origin of the title: the one whom the people expected to be sent as the promised “Son of God” in fulfillment of the promises God made to David.]

44.8. The Righteous One—to call Jesus “the Righteous One” {Acts 3:14, 7:52, 22:14; 1 John 2:1} is to declare him to be the one predicted in Isaiah 53:11. The apostles understand the one predicted by Isaiah 53:11 to be one and the same with him who would be the unique fulfillment of the promise that God made to David (in the Davidic Covenant {2 Samuel 7:4–17}).

44.8.1. “The Righteous One” is a title that designates the King, in the line of David, who will rule righteously with the righteous authority of God himself over God’s people forever. [Meaning and origin of the title: in contradistinction to David, Solomon, Rehoboam, and all the other unrighteous “Sons of God” throughout Israel’s history, this one is the uniquely righteous Son of God who is qualified to rule with the righteousness of God himself forever and will therefore fulfill all that God had promised to David with regard to the rule of his “seed.”]

44.9. The Soter—to call Jesus “the Soter” (or “Savior”) {John 4:42; Acts 5:31, 13:23; *Philippians* 3:20; 2 *Timothy* 1:10} is to declare him to be the conquering hero who comes and delivers Israel from all of the enemies of God. (On the one hand, the title is used to describe Jesus [or God] rescuing Israel from her political enemies, but on the other hand it is also used to describe Jesus [or God] rescuing mankind from its ultimate enemy—death.) As such, Jesus is that individual who would be the unique fulfillment of the promise that God made to David in the Davidic Covenant (2 *Samuel* 7:4–17). For it is none other than the promised son of David (the Christ, the Son of God) who will finally deliver on all of God’s promises of a righteous kingdom where evil, death, and all that stands against God and his purposes are defeated. In other words, it is the Christ of the Davidic Covenant who will finally come as the *Soter*, the conquering hero. [Meaning and origin of the title: the one who would come in triumph over all the enemies of God in fulfillment of the promises God made to David.] [See notes on “The Centrality of Jesus”]

*•Note that Soter was one of the favorite titles of more than one of the Roman Caesars. It has nothing to do with “salvation” in the sense that most Christians understand that—as intimately connected with dying for someone’s sins. A Soter was a champion, a deliverer, a heroic rescuer. The title as used of Jesus means exactly this same thing. Jesus is our heroic deliverer. We are in bondage under all that is at enmity with God. When Jesus finally abolishes sin, death, futility, and all that opposes God’s will and establishes God’s eternal kingdom of righteousness, he will do so as the conquering hero who has rescued us from all that opposes God and us. Like other titles given to Jesus, he shares the title with God. It is not unusual to have God himself also referred to as our Soter in the New Testament.*

45. All (or virtually all) of the titles assigned to Jesus refer to Jesus as a human being with a unique status and role. None of them is used to indicate that Jesus has an intrinsically divine

nature, nor is any used to indicate that he is anything other than an ordinary human being. Indeed, all (or virtually all) of these titles had been used to denote various ordinary human beings in the Old Testament. {Hebrews 1 (the entire argument); John 10:33–39}

*•Note however that the title “Son of Man” is a title that is rarely, if ever, used by others about Jesus. Jesus is virtually the only one who ever uses it as a title he ascribes to himself. However, everyone who hears Jesus call himself the “Son of Man” seems to understand it and equates it with the titles “Son” and “Christ.”*

- 45.1. King David and Solomon (and their descendents) are assigned these titles at various times and places in the Old Testament. When the Old Testament scriptures grant these titles to King David, Solomon, and other Davidic kings, they did not intend to suggest that these unrighteous men were divine beings or in any way more than human. Therefore, whatever the meaning of these titles, they were titles that an ordinary human being could legitimately bear. Hence, none of these titles suggest that Jesus was anything other than an ordinary human being with respect to his ontology. (Certainly, with respect to his status and role, Jesus was anything but "ordinary.") {Psalm 2, 8, 45:6–7, 82:6, 89:19–29, 110 (to cite a few); and note John 10:33–39 especially}
46. Yet, none of these titles is entirely without reference to Jesus’ divine identity. All of them denote the ordinary human being who uniquely embodies the personal identity of God himself.
  - 46.1. The apostles clearly and explicitly teach that Jesus is the iconization of God, that is, that he is “the image of the invisible God.” {Colossians 1:15}
  - 46.2. The original title “Son of God,” rightly understood, did denote a human being who was identified with God. The “Son” of *Yahweh* is that human being who is the human embodiment of *Yahweh* himself. The title’s meaning seems to be derived from the ancient Near Eastern concept that the king was the embodiment of the primary god of his people. So, for example, Pharaoh (the king of Egypt) was the “Son of Re.” The ordinary and sinful human descendents of David who bore the title “Son of God” were so in name and concept only. They were the “son of *Yahweh*” like the Pharaoh was the “son of Re.” That is, they were not actually the embodiment of *Yahweh*’s identity anymore that Pharaoh was actually the embodiment of Re’s identity.
    - 46.2.1. The human sons of David were anticipatory placeholders for the actual Son of God who was to come. Hence, they could rightly bear the title. But they were not literal-

ly and actually the Son of God in the sense that they were in actuality the embodiment of Yahweh himself. Only the unique Son of God was actually the embodiment of Yahweh. This is what explains John's tendency to call Jesus the *monogenes* [μονογενής] (=unique) Son of God. He, uniquely, was the Son of God in actuality, and not in name only.

### ***The Roles of Jesus / The "Work" of Jesus***

47. Jesus was sent to be the ultimate prophet and teacher.
  - 47.1. Jesus is the prophet sent by God to speak definitively about and to finally disclose to mankind during this present earthly existence what human existence is ultimately all about, what God's purposes in and through Israel are, and what is, in truth, the way to *aionic* Life.
    - 47.1.1. Jesus calls himself "the light of the world" precisely because of this role as the ultimate prophet and as the teacher who discloses the definitive truth about God and his purposes. {John 8:12, 9:5, 12:35} It is also with respect to this role that Jesus typically describes himself as having been "sent from God." {e.g., John 5:23-38} Corresponding to this, this is why Paul calls him an "apostle." {Hebrews 3:1}
  - 47.2. One of the more important functions of the miracles performed in connection with Jesus' teaching was to give evidentiary support to his claim to be the ultimate prophet sent from God—that is, the one sent to disclose the "message of Life" to mankind. {Hebrews 2:1-4, 1 John 1:1-3}
  - 47.3. Jesus taught by his deeds as well as by his words. His life (his choices, his attitudes, his actions, etc.) was a crucially important part of his "teaching." By being the sinlessly perfect man that he was, he taught us who we should be. He taught us what was pleasing to God in the way a human being lived.
48. Jesus was sent to be the ultimate high priest and the ultimate advocate for those whom he will rescue and, as a result, to be the judge of mankind.
  - 48.1. Jesus is the one whom God has uniquely designated to serve as a mediator between himself and mankind and to have the right and authority to appeal to God—the judge—for mercy on behalf of mankind. No other human being has any standing before God to be able to intercede on mankind's behalf. If Jesus does not choose to intercede and request

mercy from God on one's behalf, then such a person can have no hope that he will escape God's condemnation. In this capacity, Jesus is sometimes characterized as our high priest. At other times he is characterized as our advocate [*parakletos*]. {The primary argument of the book of Hebrews explores at great length Jesus' role as our high priest. In particular, note Hebrews 2:17-3:1, 4:14-15, 5:10, 6:20, 7:26-8:3, and 9:11. Jesus' role as our advocate is mentioned once, in 1 John 2:1.}

48.2. Jesus can also be said to be the "judge" of mankind. His role as judge is intimately connected with his role as high priest. He is judge in the sense that his choice determines the ultimate fate of every human being. Jesus' choice will determine whether an individual receives Life or condemnation. But his choice fundamentally reduces to the choice of whether he will intercede as high priest for an individual. The default fate of every evil human being is condemnation. Only those on behalf of whom Jesus intercedes for mercy will be given Life. Hence, those who live and those who die is ultimately a function of Jesus' choice. It is in this sense that Jesus is also the "judge" of all mankind. {John 5:19-30; 2 Timothy 4:8}

48.2.1. The biblical perspective is that it is God himself who is intrinsically qualified to judge mankind. Jesus has that role only by delegation. God has delegated to Jesus the responsibility to judge. When Jesus exercises his authority to judge, he will only judge in accordance with the will of God who intrinsically has the authority to judge. As a consequence, depending upon the context, the Bible can speak of Jesus being the judge or of God being the judge. There is no contradiction, for when Jesus "judges" he is simply embodying the judgment of God in the form of human judgment.

49. Jesus was sent to be the propitiatory offering for mankind's sins. {1 John 2:2; 4:10; Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:17}

49.1. Jesus' right to intercede for us and appeal for mercy on our behalf is intimately connected with his having died on the cross "for us." Just as the high priest in the Old Testament made an appeal to God for mercy for the worshipper (or for the nation) by means of a "propitiatory" offering, Jesus made his appeal to God for mercy for mankind by means of a "propitiatory" offering. Jesus' propitiatory offering was not the blood of an animal; it was his own blood. Jesus' propitiatory offering was not the sacrifice of the life of an animal; it was the sacrifice of his own life. In an act of divine-like love, Jesus allowed the wrath of God toward human sin to be pictured and depicted by God's acting out his

wrath in the event of Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus' willingness to endure the cross on behalf of mankind was Jesus voluntary offering that was "propitiatory" in its purpose, intent, and meaning. That is, it was intended to serve to appeal to God for mercy.

50. Jesus was sent to be the ultimate king—the "Son of God," the "Anointed One," the "First-born over all creation," the "Soter."
  - 50.1. Jesus is destined to fulfill a role as king in two importantly different respects: (a) he is predestined to be the king over God's people the Jews in the history of this present age (at some point in our future)—in fulfillment of God's promises to Israel; and (b) he is predestined to be the king over the eternal Kingdom of God for all eternity in the final age beyond this present age. In both cases, his rule will be the human embodiment of God's rule and authority. In the first instance, of God's rule over his people Israel. In the second instance, of God's rule over the whole of created reality. {Every scriptural passage which discusses Jesus' role as "Son" and "Christ" is describing one or both of these roles.}
  - 50.2. One of the more important functions of the miracles performed in connection with Jesus' teaching was to give evidentiary support to his claim to be the Son of God—that is, the one sent to be the human embodiment of God's reign over creation. {John 10:22-39}
51. Jesus was sent to be the "last Adam," that is, the first of a whole different order of humanity. The first of a "righteous" and "glorified" race of human beings. [See notes on "The Centrality of Jesus"]
  - 51.1. Paul asserts that believers in Jesus will be "conformed to the image of [God's] Son" such that Jesus will become "the firstborn among many brethren." {Romans 8:29} His point is that those whom God rescues from condemnation will be glorified in the same way that Jesus was glorified—namely, raised to a whole different (and more glorious) order of human existence. The resurrected Jesus entered into a whole different kind of human existence and therefore, became the first of many to enter that new sort of human existence.
  - 51.2. As a morally perfect human being who represented (and was the origin of) a whole different way of being a human being, Jesus also served as a real life example of what true humanity should look like. So, Jesus' life (his choices, his attitudes, his actions, etc.) was a crucially important part of his "teaching." He taught by deeds as well as by words, just by being the sinlessly perfect man that he was.
52. Jesus came into the world, sent by God, qualified to function in his capacity as the ultimate

prophet sent by God (the Light of the world). Jesus, in an act of God-like love, freely sacrificed his life so that he might rescue from death and condemnation those whom he had chosen. In that act of obedience to his Father's will, he offered himself as a propitiatory offering. Because of this obedience, he became qualified to function effectively as our high priest and advocate, and therefore, as our judge. Furthermore, because of his obedience to the point of death on the cross, he became qualified to be the Son of God, the King over all creation, forever. At the resurrection, not only did Jesus enter into a state wherein he was qualified to rule as the Son of God (that is, he was "seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high") {Hebrews 8:1; 1 Peter 3:22}, but he also entered a whole new order of human existence. Jesus was raised to a state or immortal human existence, thereby becoming the first of many brothers to "put on immortality." {Philippians 3:20–21; Hebrews 2:10; Romans 8:29}

- 52.1. Jesus was born with the promised destiny of serving as the eternal Son of God. But Jesus did not actually become qualified and authorized to serve as the eternal Son of God until his crucifixion. Subsequent to his crucifixion, Jesus' status as now qualified to serve as the Son of God was confirmed by the amazing miraculous sign of the resurrection. But Jesus has not yet realized or actualized his authoritative rule as Son over all of creation. His reign will not be actualized until the end of the present age when all of God's (and hence Jesus') enemies will finally "be made a footstool under his feet." [Psalm 110:1; Hebrews 10:13]

### ***The Ontological Nature of Jesus***

53. Jesus is a human being. In terms of the nature of his being, he is just like us; he is an ordinary human being. He is the most important human being in all of God's creation. Indeed, he is the most important being in all of created reality. But his greatness and importance does not stem from his being ontologically greater than other human beings; it stems from his being appointed by God to a uniquely superior status and role. [See notes on "The Centrality of Jesus," "on the "Titles of Jesus," and on "The Roles of Jesus/ the Work of Jesus"]
  - 53.1. The New Testament writers simply take Jesus' humanity for granted at every turn. It is never in question that Jesus just is a human being among human beings. Sometimes his ordinary humanity becomes problematic. For some in his day, it was controversial whether an ordinary human being could be the *Messiah*. But the project for the New Testament writers is not to persuade their readers that Jesus is God in the sense that orthodox Christianity maintains. Their project is to persuade their readers that Jesus is indeed



the *Messiah*. Now to be the *Messiah* is to be God, in a sense. But not in the sense that orthodox Christianity asserts.

54. Jesus is the *iconization* of God, that is, he is the “image” of the invisible, transcendent God in the medium of a human being. {Colossians 1:15} Jesus is the “stamp” of God’s individual personhood onto the being of a human existence. {Hebrews 1:3} Jesus is the unique person that God is in the sense that he is the “translation” of the unique person that God is into the form of a human person. {John 1:18}

•The apostle John describes Jesus as the *exegesis* (translation) of God. In John 1:18, he says, “No one has seen God at any time. The unique Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he has translated him.”

- 54.1. Though, ontologically, Jesus is an ordinary human being, yet he is also one and the same as God, the transcendent author of all reality. In a very real sense, Jesus is numerically identical to the creator God with respect to his personal identity.
- 54.1.1. Note that Jesus is not the same as God with respect to his ontological essence. Rather, he is the same as God with respect to his personal identity. Jesus is to God as a shadow on the wall is to the object that casts the shadow. A shadow is numerically identical to the identity of the object that casts it while being ontologically very different.
- 54.2. Jesus is the same as the transcendent God in just that sense and to just that extent that it makes sense to say that a human being is one and the same individual as the transcendent God. Obviously Jesus is not transcendent; and obviously he does not have the attributes of transcendence. But Jesus is in all other respects the manifestation in the form of an ordinary human individual of all that God is.
- 54.2.1. Jesus is the human manifestation of God’s goodness, of God’s authority, of God’s power, of God’s will, and of anything else that defines the unique individual personal identity of Yahweh, the transcendent God.

### ***The Moral Nature of Jesus***

55. Jesus is (and was) morally perfect. He was without sin. {Hebrews 4:15}
- 55.1. Jesus’ perfect goodness follows from the nature of who he is. As the “image” or embodiment of all that God is, it follows that he must be purely good and not evil in order to reflect the goodness of God. If Jesus were a typical sinful human being, then he could not be the “image of the invisible God” nor the “translation of God” into human existence.

55.2. Jesus' life and being is a model of what God ultimately intended human existence to be. Jesus is a model of truly righteous, God-like human existence.

55.3. Jesus' sinlessness was a prerequisite to his being qualified to function as our high priest, advocate, intercessor, or mediator.

*•This fact was foreshadowed by the system of offerings and sacrifices in the Mosaic Covenant. The propitiatory offerings, scapegoats, etc. were always required to be "unblemished."*

### ***Additional Notes on Jesus***

#### *The Significance of Jesus' Miracles*

56. God performed miraculous signs in connection with Jesus in order to "testify" to the fact that Jesus really was who he said he was—the *Messiah*, the Son of God.

56.1. The miracles that God performed in connection with Jesus' word, command, touch, or action were performed as evidence of Jesus' authority. The "signs" that God performed credentialed Jesus as the one granted authority by God to represent him to his people and to mankind. {Luke 5:17–26, John 5:36, 10:25}

56.1.1. The miracles that Jesus performed were not acts done by Jesus out of his intrinsic supernatural power. The miracles were performed by the Father of Jesus out of his power as the transcendent author of all reality. {John 5:19, 10:32–37, 14:10; Hebrews 1:1–3}

#### *The Significance of Jesus' Life*

57. Jesus lived an exemplary life. The life of righteous obedience, love, and goodness that Jesus lived is a model for the type of life that every human being ought to live. {Philippians 2:5 ff; Hebrews 12:1–4}

58. Jesus taught mankind the message of how to attain eternal Life. Jesus taught the Truth, having been granted authority from God to reveal God's truth to mankind. {1 John 1:1–3}

#### *The Significance of Jesus' Death*

59. Jesus voluntarily went to the cross to be crucified in order that he might serve as a propitiatory offering offered up to God on behalf of everyone who believes that he needs Jesus to ap-

peal to God for mercy on his behalf.

60. Jesus died on the cross to die “for the sins of mankind.” Specifically, Jesus allowed God to display his wrath toward him in order that every man might have displayed dramatically for him what God thinks about his own personal unrighteousness. Jesus’ punishment was representative of the punishment that every human being deserves.

*The Significance of Jesus’ Resurrection*

61. Jesus’ resurrection attests to the truth that Jesus was pleasing to God and most importantly, therefore, that Jesus can effectively secure for me mercy from God.
- 61.1. The resurrection means that Jesus’ is qualified to be my advocate and high priest.
  - 61.2. The resurrection means that Jesus’ propitiatory offering was found acceptable by God.
  - 61.3. The resurrection means that my sins will be forgiven.
62. Jesus’ resurrection attests to the truth that Jesus’ really is the Son of God (in the sense defined above), the King destined to reign over the eternal Kingdom of God.
63. Jesus’ resurrection attests to the truth that Jesus’ really is the one sent by God to reveal the Truth to mankind.
64. Jesus’ resurrection attests to the fact that the promise of Life is a reality. There really does await us a whole new glorious existence in an eternal Age to Come. Because of the resurrection, I can know that the curse of death has been defeated; the blessing of Life is what awaits us.
65. Jesus’ resurrection attests to the fact that God is faithful to do all that he has promised to do. God is a God who keeps his covenants. God really will establish his Kingdom, just as he said he would.
66. We could undoubtedly identify other ramifications of Jesus’ resurrection; but the ones listed above represent the more obvious and important ones. Note that the resurrection of Jesus does not necessitate his being ontologically identical to God. Jesus was raised up by God through the miraculous power of God. Jesus did not rise from the dead through his own intrinsic power.

*The Destiny of Jesus*

67. Jesus’ destiny is to reign as King over the everlasting Kingdom of God in the last and eternal

age to come.

- 67.1. Jesus' destiny is to represent and be a manifestation of the very person and rule of Yahweh, the transcendent author of all reality, for all eternity as he dwells in and among God's people and reigns over them in the eternal Kingdom of God.
- 67.2. This destiny is described variously in the New Testament. On the one hand, it is described as "the joy set before him." {Hebrews 12:2} On the other hand, the fact that he has finally become qualified for this destiny is described as "being seated at the right hand of God" {Hebrews 12:2, et. al.}, as being "exalted" {Philippians 2:9-11}, etc.
  - 67.2.1. Even to this day, Jesus has not attained his ultimate destiny. He will not attain his ultimate destiny until God establishes the eternal Kingdom of God in the final age of created reality. However, Jesus has accomplished all he needs to accomplish in order to qualify for that destiny. It is only a matter of time before God grants him his ultimate, exalted status as King over all creation forever.

### **An Analysis of the Essence of Human Sin**

68. In the Bible, sin, evil, ungodliness, godlessness, impiety, and unrighteousness are all close synonyms. While there are subtle distinctions of meaning between them, for the most part they denote the same reality and the same dynamics.

*•For the purposes of these notes, I will usually refer to this reality as "sin." This choice is arbitrary. Any biblical term could serve as an apt label for the moral depravity of human beings that is being analyzed in these notes.*

69. In the Bible, sin is defined by the inner orientation of a person's being, not primarily by how a person behaves. Therefore, at its essence, sin is not what we do; it is what and who we are.
70. In biblical philosophy, the essence of sin is a person's inner orientation wherein he is hostile toward his creator.
  - 70.1. In essence, sin is a rejection of and hostility toward God. It can manifest itself in anything ranging from an out-and-out hatred of God ("hot" hostility) to a benign neglect of and indifference toward God ("cool" hostility).
  - 70.2. While fundamentally sin is a hostility toward God (the creator), it typically manifests itself in a hostility toward anything and everything that is connected with God.
    - 70.2.1. Sin manifests itself in hostility toward God's values and priorities (e.g., a hostility to goodness, a hostility to truth).

- 70.2.2. Sin manifests itself in hostility toward God's sovereign rule (e.g., a hostility to God's purposes, God's promises, and God's providence).
71. While at its foundation sin is a hostility toward one's creator, it expresses itself, as well, in a wrong orientation toward other human beings, a wrong orientation toward ourselves, and a wrong orientation toward other things that are connected with the work and purposes of God. These other wrong orientations are not the root and essence of sin, but they are dramatic, typical, and obvious symptoms of it.
- 71.1. There are several importantly different regions within which sin can and will manifest itself. Sin can concretely and explicitly manifest itself in a broken or wrong relationship to God (by the very definition of sin), to other human beings, to our own selves, our own persons, our own existence, to the rest of created reality in general, and to anything that God values (most notably, to Truth and to Goodness).
- 71.2. Contrary to common conceptions, the biblical concept of sin is not restricted in its definition to harm done to others. Not every manifestation of sin "victimizes" another human being (e.g., to blaspheme God, to not love truth, to act self-destructively at no one else's expense, etc.) But such "victimless" sins are just as evil as those that do have victims. Sin is not defined by something that has harmful consequences. It is defined as a manifestation of antagonism toward God and the things of God.
- Being thoroughly "trained" in the mindset of consequentialism, we modern Americans find the biblical concept of sin completely strange and alien. The idea that something that didn't obviously harm someone could be evil tends to be unthinkable to us. However, in the biblical teaching, a thing does not have to harm someone to be evil. A thing is evil if and when it runs counter to what God has willed, purposed, designed, and created to be right. If it does violate what is right, it is evil, irrespective of whether it harms or injures anyone.*
- 71.3. The definition of sin can be summarized as follows: sin is our proclivity to respond in opposition to God, that is, it is our proclivity to oppose or reject what God is, what he stands for, what he is doing, and what he values.
72. There are two importantly different ways in which sin can manifest itself: willful rebellion and moral weakness.
- 72.1. One manifestation of sin is willful rebellion—a willful, purposive decision to reject and oppose what is good and to do instead what is evil.
- 72.2. Another manifestation of sin is moral weakness—the felt inability to do what is good.
- 72.2.1. Moral weakness is no less hostile to God and the things of God than is willful re-

bellion. The hostility is less intense, less explicit, and less obvious, certainly, but it is hostility to God nonetheless. Moral weakness is a hostility to God that manifests itself as an unwillingness—as an “inability”—to do what is good rather than one that manifests itself as an out-and-out, explicit opposition to doing what is good.

72.2.2. Contrary to popular sentiment, biblical philosophy does not view moral weakness (the felt “inability” to do what is good and right) as an exculpatory excuse for not doing what is good and right.

73. A current, false analysis of sin is that sin is an inappropriate attachment to “me”—that is, to my “ego.” This is not an analysis of sin that is consistent with biblical philosophy. Rather, in biblical philosophy, sin is an inappropriate rejection of the creator, not an inappropriate attachment to self.

73.1. In the biblical perspective, there is an inevitable and healthy self-centeredness that is endemic to human existence. The fact of the matter is that I just AM the center of my own life, existence, and experience. That is as it should be; that is how I was created to be.

73.1.1. The evil involved in what is typically called “selfishness” is not a matter of seeking what is best for myself. To do this is not evil; it is rather wise, good, and right.

73.1.1.1. The evil involved in “selfishness” is one or more of the following: (a) to act on the idea that what is best for me is to work to satisfy shallow, superficial, and immediate desires at the expense of another person’s well-being; (b) to act on the self-deluded idea that I am the most important thing in the cosmos and to fail to acknowledge the truth that other human beings are just as important as I am, or (c) to reject the idea that what is best for me is to be like God in being committed to the well-being of others.

73.1.1.2. It is not “selfish” in any sense that is evil to choose to act in a way that fosters my own greatest well-being. That is to say, goodness does not require that I evidence a total disregard for my own best interests in favor of the interests of others (that is, goodness is not “altruism” as many would define that). Rather, goodness is a commitment to what God values, and that includes a commitment to work for the benefit and well being of others [=love].

73.1.2. True goodness does not fundamentally consist of ego-negation. The problem of sin is not my attachment to my “self.” The problem of sin is the ignorance, foolishness,

and perversity out of which I act to serve my self and to bring benefit to myself. In the blindness of my sin and unrighteousness, I do not even know what it would be to truly and genuinely bring benefit to myself. The sinner actually behaves self-destructively and brings loss to himself even while he thinks that he is taking care of himself.

73.1.3. This fallacious understanding of sin as ego-negation and/or as the elimination of desire involves confusing a common strategy for coping with pain and suffering for a definition of moral goodness.

73.1.3.1. Deliberately “detaching” from my own ego (that is, purposefully “denying” the very desires and longings that necessarily attach to my self) is a common human strategy for finding comfort in the midst of pain, grief, and chaos. The strategy amounts to this: if I [my ego] does not want or value anything, then I [my ego] will not feel pain and disappointment when I suffer loss, deprivation, or disappointment in life. Such elimination of desire has therapeutic value. It is a coping mechanism. It is a way of living with chaos and grief without being crushed by the pain.

*•This universal human instinct—this universal coping mechanism—finds systematic expression in ancient Stoicism, modern Buddhism, and other religious-philosophical systems. But, as a coping strategy, it is not confined to devotees of any particular religious or philosophical system.*

73.1.4. Both as a coping strategy and as a philosophy, ego-negation (the strategy to deny any importance and/or significance to myself as an individual self) is not a part of biblical philosophy. From a biblical perspective, there are at least two problems with ego-negation: (a) it is a violation of my humanity if and when I attempt to “detach” altogether from my ego (from my identity, from my self) or to deny the legitimacy of my ego; and (b) it is counterproductive to the divinely intended effect of suffering if I do not allow myself to experience the suffering of suffering.

*•To deny the self is contrary to what is true and real. The truth is that I am, in fact, a distinct, individual SELF. I am, in fact, in God's created purpose the center of my own existence. I am the protagonist in the story at which I am the center. To pretend otherwise is to deny truth and reality itself.*

*•Suffering is intended by God to lead to my resolving my sorrow and disappointment into wisdom and true perspective. I am not so likely to resolve sorrow and disappointment into wisdom and true perspective if and when I do not allow myself to feel the suffering as suffering.*

## **The Nature of Human Sin: Further Analysis**

### ***The Metaphysics of Sin (and of Righteousness)***

74. God causes and determines each and every choice a human being makes.
- 74.1. God is the author and determiner of everything whatsoever in created reality. Accordingly, God causes human beings to choose exactly as they do.
- 74.1.1. God is the cause of every evil choice a human being makes.
- 74.1.2. God is the cause of every good choice a human being makes.
75. Every human choice is the result of “free will.”
- 75.1. When used to describe human choice, “free” describes the fact that human choice is completely uncaused and undetermined by any other created reality.
- 75.1.1. Human choice is not caused or determined by physics, chemistry, biology, or any other aspect of created reality. Human choice is the resolution of a person’s will to do what he chooses to do. It is “free” because nothing in created reality made him choose as he did. So far as created reality is concerned, he could have chosen otherwise.
- 75.1.1.1. Human choice is not caused and necessitated by physics, chemistry, biology, or by any aspect of created reality whatsoever.
- 75.1.2. Because human choice is “free” in the above sense, the choices a human being makes are reflective of nothing other than his own person. They are caused by no created thing. Therefore, a person’s choices do not reflect causes that are external to him. They reflect nothing except who the person himself is. Accordingly— as a consequence of the “freedom” of his choices—each human being is morally responsible for his choices. That is, he must be made to give a moral account for who he himself is. The person who makes evil choices is evil by virtue of his choices. The person who makes righteous choices is righteous by virtue of his choices. And each person can rightly be held to account for whether he is good or evil.
- 75.2. When used to describe human choice, “free”—so far as biblical philosophy is concerned— does not describe human choice as uncaused and undetermined by God.
- 75.2.1. No human choice could ever conflict with what God has willed or purposed. Hence, so far as the will of God is concerned, no human being could ever have chosen oth-



er then he did.

75.2.1.1. God creates evil people to be evil; and God creates good people to be good.

75.2.1.2. The fact that a human being just is, morally, what God has purposed him to be does not exempt him from being accountable for what he is. An evil person is damnable for being evil, in spite of the fact that God created him to be evil. And a good person would be commendable for being good, in spite of the fact that God would have created him to be good. Moral accountability is the result of WHO and WHAT an individual is (whether a good person or an evil person). It is not the result of HOW or WHY he has come to be that person.

*•If I build a chair and the chair is defective in such a way that it is useless as a chair, WHY it is defective—namely, because I built it poorly—is of no relevance with regard to its uselessness. The defective chair is useless regardless of WHY it is defective. Analogously, if God creates a human being to be evil, why he is evil—namely, because God purposed for him to be so and created him so—is of no relevance with regard to his condemnation. In other words, the evil man is damnable regardless of why he is evil. He is damnable simply by virtue of the fact that he is evil, irrespective of why he is evil. It is inherent to the very nature of morality that evil is damnable.*

*Related to the above point, human beings are not morally accountable before God because they CHOSE to be evil (ultimately, they did not choose to be evil; God—for his own purposes—created them to be evil). Human beings are morally accountable for BEING evil, not for CHOOSING to be evil.*

76. God causes human beings to choose just as he wants them to choose, and he does so directly, without any intermediate cause. Every human choice—whether good or evil—is a direct creation by God.

76.1. Contrary to a common perspective on human choice, it is not strictly accurate to think of a human being's choice as being caused by his will.

76.1.1. The choice of a human being is not caused by his will as if his will is an organ in his body that mechanically produces his choices.

76.1.2. Nor is the choice of a human being caused by his will as if his will is a faculty within his person that causes and determines his choices.

76.1.3. Hence, it is not strictly accurate to think of a human being's sinful choice as being caused by his sinful or fallen will. God causes the sinful choices of a sinful human being.

76.1.3.1. Understanding one's sinful or fallen will as the literal, actual cause of his sinful choices creates a great deal of confusion in a person's attempt to understand various aspects of biblical philosophy.

- 76.2. Contrary to a common perspective on human choice, it is not strictly accurate to think of a human being's choice as being caused by his moral nature.
- 76.2.1. The choice of a human being is not caused by his moral nature as if his moral nature is an organ in his body that mechanically produces his choices.
  - 76.2.2. Nor is the choice of a human being caused by his moral nature as if his moral nature is a faculty within his person that causes and determines his choices.
  - 76.2.3. Hence, it is not strictly accurate to think of a human being's sinful choice as being caused by his sinful or fallen nature. God causes the sinful choices of a sinful human being.
    - 76.2.3.1. Understanding one's sinful nature as the literal, actual cause of his sinful choices creates a great deal of confusion in a person's attempt to understand various aspects of biblical philosophy.
77. While it is important to remember that God is the real and ultimate cause of every human choice, it will be helpful to employ a philosophical fiction when seeking to describe and better understand the biblical perspective on the nature and dynamics of human sin.

### ***Sin and Sin Nature as Philosophical Fictions***

78. A philosophical fiction is something that is not actual and real being treated *as if* it is actual and real. More specifically, it is something that could never be the actual cause of an effect (because it does not actually exist) being treated as if it is the actual cause of an effect.
- 78.1. Centrifugal force is a philosophical fiction sometimes employed in the field of physics. If I swing a bucket of water around my head in a circle, the water stays in the bucket and does not spill out. Why? Sometimes the answer given is that "centrifugal force" keeps the water in the bucket. The phenomenon is then being envisioned as if a force directed outward away from the person is pushing on the water and forcing it against the bottom of the bucket. In reality, however, there is no real, literal centrifugal force that pushes water toward the bottom of the bucket. Centrifugal force is what physicists call a pseudo-force. It is what I am calling a philosophical fiction. The real, literal force at work is the

centripetal force of the bottom of the bucket pushing the water inward and forcing it to revolve in a circle.

- 78.2. Climate is a philosophical fiction that is routinely employed when speaking of weather phenomena. If I am asked why it is snowing at my house, I might very well answer that it is because I live in a snowy climate. I am envisioning—and I am inviting you to envision—the climate where I live as the cause of the snow that is occurring. But this only makes sense as a manner of speaking. It is not literally and actually true that the climate causes the weather events that occur. Rather, “climate” is an abstract concept that serves to summarize the pattern of weather events in an area. It is not an actual concrete reality that causes those weather events. However, it can conveniently be used to stand for the complex of various real causes that do cause the weather events. In that case it is being used as a philosophical fiction. I am, then, speaking of the climate as if it were a real and actual cause of the pattern of weather events. But, it is not, in fact, their cause. It is only AS IF the climate caused the weather events. There is no real, actual thing called the climate that exists in the world and can function as the real cause of weather events. So, to speak as if it exists in that way is a philosophical fiction.
- 78.3. Any time we employ a philosophical fiction, it is because it is somehow helpful to do so. When we employ a philosophical fiction, it allows us to describe in much simpler terms a more complex and therefore much more difficult to describe and understand literal reality.
79. The concept of a “sin nature” is often employed as a philosophical fiction in order to describe something about the nature and dynamic of human sin.
- 79.1. People often speak of a person’s “sin nature” as being the reason he sins. They are explaining the pattern of a person’s moral choices as if that pattern is caused by a reality that they label the “sin nature.” They speak as if the “sin nature” causes the moral choices that a person makes. This is to employ the concept of a “sin nature” as a philosophical fiction. For, as we saw above, the real, actual cause of the pattern of our moral choices is God himself. But while the “sin nature” is not the real and actual cause of our sinful choices, it will sometimes be useful to think of it as if it were. It will help us to more simply describe some of the more complex aspects of the nature, dynamic, and significance of human sin.
80. In these notes, I may sometimes employ as philosophical fictions the concepts of sin, a sin nature, a fallen will, and other related concepts. Sometimes I will be fully aware that I am

doing so. Other times I will do so inadvertently.

- 80.1. As helpful as it can be to employ such concepts as philosophical fictions, it is important to always be mindful that that is what they are. They are not literal realities that are actual causes of sinful choices. They are only philosophical fictions.
- 80.2. I intend to put you on notice of this fact so that you are not misled by the discussion to follow. If it sounds like I am assigning the cause of sin to anything but God himself directly, then it is important that you recognize that I have resorted to employing that alternative "cause" of sin as a philosophical fiction. It is my understanding of biblical philosophy that nothing, other than God himself, can stand as the actual, literal cause of sinful choices.

### ***The Two Levels at Which Sin Manifests Itself***

81. In biblical philosophy, sin can be analyzed at two distinct levels: (a) it can be understood as being operative at the level of the defining moral essence of my created being; and (b) it can be understood as being operative at the level of one's existential commitments.
  - 81.1. On the one hand, biblical philosophy understands sin to be operative at the level of one's foundational moral nature. According to biblical philosophy, a human being is fundamentally evil at the deepest level of his moral being. The orientation and moral proclivities of his very being as a person are sinful. [I will call this sin at the level of the defining essence of one's moral being.]

*•As noted above, I will sometimes employ "sin at the level of the defining essence of my moral being" as a philosophical fiction. This concept does not describe an actual, literal, concrete thing. It does not describe the actual literal cause of sinful choices. God the actual cause. However, to understand the theology of sin as described in biblical philosophy, it will sometimes be helpful to think of "sin at the level of the defining essence of my moral being" as if it were the cause of my sinful choices.*

- 81.1.1. The biblical concept that corresponds to sin at the level of the defining essence of one's moral being is the concept of the "flesh." This is the only way that the Bible explicitly and directly denotes sin at this level. By "flesh" (in a technical moral sense), therefore, the Bible means the evil proclivities of one's foundational moral nature, the evil in the defining essence of one's moral being.
      - 81.1.1.1. Literally, "flesh" refers to the meat hanging on a human being's bones. Derivatively, it denotes the physical, bodily existence of a human being, existence in this present physical universe. Figuratively, it denotes the moral condition that typifies human existence in this present physical universe, namely, sin (moral

depravity) at the deepest-most level of one's being

81.1.2. Moral worthiness in the eyes of God is determined by one's moral condition at this level—at the level of the defining essence of one's moral being, at the level of his foundational moral nature. If one is evil at this level, then he deserves condemnation (even if he is righteous at the level of his existential commitments [discussed below]). According to biblical philosophy, every human being is evil at the level of the defining essence of his being. Therefore, every human being is inherently damnable.

81.2. Biblical philosophy understands sin to be operative at the level of one's inner, existential commitments as well. The natural orientation of one's inner, existential commitments is toward sin and evil. But—unlike the defining essence of one's being—inner, existential commitments are changeable. [Insofar as sin is operative at this level, I will call this sin at the level of one's inner, existential commitments.]

*•As noted above, I will sometimes employ "sin at the level of my inner, existential commitments" as a philosophical fiction. This concept does not describe an actual, literal, concrete thing. It does not describe the actual literal cause of sinful choices. God is the actual cause. However, to understand the theology of sin as described in biblical philosophy, it will sometimes be helpful to think of "sin at the level of my inner, existential commitments" as if it were the cause of my sinful choices.*

81.2.1. "Commitment" > With respect to the concept of an inner, existential COMMITMENT, I mean the following: an orientation of a person's will wherein he resolves to value, to embrace, and to uncompromisingly pursue something that he has deemed valuable.

81.2.2. "Existential" > With respect to the concept of an inner, EXISTENTIAL commitment, I mean the following: a commitment that is of such a nature and significance that it shapes and defines who a person is—that is, it is definitive of the person's very existence as a human being.

81.2.2.1. The commitment to eat oatmeal for breakfast every morning is not, in all likelihood, an existential commitment.

81.2.2.2. The commitment to make obedience to Jesus the defining feature of one's life is, by its very nature, an existential commitment.

81.2.3. "Inner" > With respect to the concept of an INNER, existential commitment, I mean the following: a commitment that defines something deep within the core of who a person is. It is in contrast to both a superficial outward reality of a person's life and

to an ephemeral, passing reality.

*•It is important to note, however, that while an “inner” commitment reaches deep into the core of what defines a person, it does not reach so deep as does the very defining essence of one’s being. The defining moral essence of one’s being describes the FOUNDATION of one’s moral nature. An inner commitment defines a deep, core commitment that is built over and above that moral foundation. If the defining moral essence of a person’s being is the foundation of his moral being, the person’s inner commitments are the super-structure of his moral nature that is built on that foundation.*

81.2.3.1. Inwardness is something that runs so deep into the core of a person that one’s INNER, EXISTENTIAL COMMITMENTS will typically reflect (and be determined by) the moral condition of the DEFINING ESSENCE OF HIS MORAL BEING. If the defining essence of one’s moral being were righteous, then his inner, existential commitments would naturally be righteous. But if the defining essence of one’s moral being is sinful, then, typically, his inner, existential commitments will be sinful. Because inwardness is derived from and reflective of the defining essence of one’s moral being, it is not easily changeable, nor is it readily manipulable.

*•It is important to note that emotions and emotionality are not elements of inwardness in the requisite sense. This can readily be seen in the fact that emotionality is quite easily changed and manipulated.*

81.2.4. Biblical philosophy describes the locus of inner, existential commitments in a number of different ways. To list the more important of the terms it employs, it indicates the locus of those commitments by the terms “spirit”, “mind”, “inner man”, or “heart.” I will typically refer to inner, existential commitments as “heart” commitments. And I will typically refer to this level of one’s moral nature as his “heart.” However, I may occasionally use these other terms interchangeably with “heart.”

81.2.5. Because heart commitments are changeable and are subject to the voluntary choices of a human being, a human being who is sinful in the defining essence of his moral being can nonetheless have righteous heart commitments.

*•To understand how the same person can be evil at one level (the defining essence of his moral being) and righteous at another level (his heart commitments), it is important to consider the following:*

*•It is quite evident what it would mean for a person like me to have an evil heart. An evil heart means that I would deliberately and willfully reject what is good and pursue what is wrong. But even if I do not deliberately and willfully reject what is good and pursue what is wrong (that is, even if I do not have evil heart commitments), several things can and will nevertheless be true of me:*

(1) *The evil in the very defining essence of my being will virtually spill out of every pore of my body. (I am not able to stop it. I cannot be other than I am; and who I am is toxic to others. My very personality is intertwined with and distorted by the evil that is present in the defining essence of my being.)*

(2) *I can be evil even when I do not "intend" to be evil. (This is evidence of evil in the defining essence of my being showing itself. While I may purpose to show love to someone, the actual result of my attitudes and behaviors can be destructive—the effects of evil within me.)*

(3) *I can know the right thing to do and want to do it, and yet not do it. (This fact is evidence that my commitments and/or desires to do good are not the determinative, controlling force in my actions. Something else determines and controls my actions and behavior: namely, the evil in the defining essence of my being.)*

81.2.5.1. In biblical philosophy, one who is good and righteous at the level of his "heart" is called "righteous." This is true even though—at the level of the defining moral essence of his being—he is fundamentally evil.

81.2.5.2. In biblical philosophy, one who is sinful and evil at the level of his "heart" is called a "sinner", a "slave (or servant) of sin", or simply "unrighteous."

81.2.6. It is the moral condition at the level of one's heart that determines whether one will be granted mercy and the blessing of *aionic* Life by God. If one's heart is righteous (if one's inner, existential commitments are toward goodness and righteousness), then he will receive mercy in the form of the blessing of *aionic* Life. If one's heart is not righteous (if one's inner, existential commitments are toward sin and evil), then he will not receive mercy from God; he will be condemned.

81.2.6.1. The teaching of biblical philosophy is this: though a person be unrighteous in the defining essence of his moral being (that is, though he is damnable at the level of his foundational moral nature), if he is righteous of heart, God will not hold the evil in the defining essence of his moral being against him; he will show him mercy instead.

81.2.6.2. When a New Testament writer states that there is no eternal Life for the one who "does" sin or for the one who "practices" sin, he is speaking of sin at the level of one's heart commitments. He cannot and does not mean to suggest that anyone who gives evidence that he is evil in the defining essence of his being will forfeit eternal Life, for every human being, universally, gives evidence of that.

•Note that when John says, "No one who does sin is born of God," he is speaking of actions and behavior born of one's heart commitments. He is not speaking of actions and behavior born of his "flesh," the defining essence of his being.

### *The Two Levels at Which Sin Operates: Further Notes*

82. The relationship between the inner, existential commitments of the heart and the defining essence of one's being (one's foundational moral nature) can be characterized as follows: the inner, existential commitments of one's heart will naturally and automatically reflect the moral condition of the defining essence of one's being (one's foundational moral nature) unless God directly and supernaturally intervenes to effect a change in one's inner, existential commitments—that is, unless God causes “repentance” to occur in his heart.
- 82.1. Left alone, a righteous and good foundational moral nature would result in righteous and good existential commitments in the heart. Righteousness in the defining essence of one's being would necessarily result in righteous heart commitments.
- 82.2. Left alone, an unrighteous and evil foundational moral nature would result in unrighteous and evil existential commitments in the heart. Unrighteousness in the defining essence of one's being would necessarily result in unrighteous heart commitments.
- 82.3. Although it is logically possible, there is no possible scenario in real human existence where a person with a righteous foundational moral nature would make evil existential commitments in his heart. God would never bring about a state where one is righteous in the defining essence of his being but unrighteous in his heart commitments.
- It would, of course, be possible for God to cause such a state of affairs to be; but it would never be within the boundaries of his purposes to do so.*
- 82.4. There is a realistic scenario in human existence where a person with an unrighteous foundational moral nature would express righteous existential commitments in his heart. God would and does bring about a state where one remains unrighteous in the defining essence of his being but has become righteous in his heart commitments. This is the person whom God is “sanctifying” in order to mark him as his child, destined for eternal life. The Bible calls such a one “righteous,” “holy,” and a “new creature.”
- 82.4.1. The process wherein God produces a discontinuity between a believer's sinful moral state at the level of the defining essence of his being and a righteous moral state at the level of his heart commitments is what biblical philosophy calls “sanctification.”
- 82.4.1.1. Sanctification is a transformation at the level of one's heart commitments; it is not a transformation at the level of the defining essence of one's being. The



sanctified person does not become more righteous and good in the defining essence of his being; he becomes more clearly and deeply committed to the pursuit of goodness in the commitments of his heart.

- 82.4.1.2. The sanctified person is not spontaneously and, therefore, successfully good; he strives and fights to be good. But he nevertheless frequently fails—sabotaged by the evil of his foundational moral nature, by the evil in the defining essence of his being.
- 82.4.2. The sanctified person is not made WORTHY of the blessing of eternal Life by the fact of his sanctification; he is made DISTINCTIVE because of his sanctification. Only transformation of the defining essence of one's being could render a person "worthy" or deserving of God's blessing.

*Table of All the Possible Relationships between the Commitments of One's Heart and the Defining Essence of One's Being*

	<p><b><i>Righteous in the Defining Essence of One's Being</i></b></p> <p><i>(The person is morally righteous [good] at the level of his foundational moral nature.)</i></p>	<p><b><i>Unrighteous in the Defining Essence of One's Being</i></b></p> <p><i>(The person is morally unrighteous [evil] at the level of his foundational moral nature.)</i></p>
<p><b><i>Righteous Heart Commitments</i></b></p> <p><i>(The person is morally righteous [good] at the level of his inner, existential commitments.)</i></p>	<p><i>This will be the state of the person who has been "glorified" in the age to come—the eternal state of all those who have been granted eternal Life.</i></p>	<p><i>This is the state of the person who is being "sanctified" in this present age.</i></p> <p><i>[The "righteous" person.]</i></p>
<p><b><i>Unrighteous Heart Commitments</i></b></p> <p><i>(The person is morally unrighteous [evil] at the level of his inner, existential commitments.)</i></p>	<p><i>A state in which no human being will ever find himself.</i></p>	<p><i>This is the initial, natural state of every human being.</i></p> <p><i>[The "sinner:"]</i></p>

83. Some traditional Christian views define "self" (personal identity) in such a way that the true "self" of the believer is isolated from and seen to be uninvolved in sin and evil. [The flesh is sinful, but the "true self" of the believer is good, perfect, sinless, etc.] This is not a true and helpful way to understand the relationship between the believer and sin. It is not a view endorsed by the Bible. The biblical view is that the self (personal identity, character, and personality) spans the division between the believer's righteous heart and his sinful defining essence. Hence, with regard to his "true self," the believer's moral condition is fundamentally ambiguous. His heart commitments are righteous; but the righteousness of his heart commitments exists in the context of a being (character, personality) that is broken, morally depraved, and sinful.
- 83.1. On the one hand, a believer's self (personal identity, character, and personality) is defined, in part, by the evil in the defining essence of his being. Certain elements of his identity, being shaped by the inherent depravity of his foundational moral nature, are beyond his ability to change. And, furthermore, God has made no promise to change those elements, this side of eternity.
- 83.1.1. Some aspects of a our personalities (as believers) are so intertwined with and bound together with our foundational sinfulness, that we just are, in our very way of being, evil. Evil runs so deep in just such elements of our personality that there is nothing we could do to change it. To that extent, we are hopelessly evil (this side

of eternity).

- 83.2. On the other hand, the believer's self (personal identity, character, and personality) is defined, in part, by the righteousness of his inner existential commitments. Certain elements of the believer's identity, being shaped by the inner existential commitments of his heart, are very much subject to the believer's power and ability to change. Through ongoing sanctification and the "repentance" that results from that sanctification, a believer will be transformed into someone more and more authentically committed to doing what is good and right. God is committed to changing these elements of a person's character here and now, this side of eternity.
84. According to the biblical perspective, the relationship between the existential commitments of one's heart and the defining essence of one's being (and hence one's moral worthiness) is asymmetrical in an important respect: evil heart commitments necessarily entail that one is evil in the defining essence of his being, but righteous heart commitments do not necessarily entail that one is good in the defining essence of his being.
- 84.1. Unrighteous existential commitments are indeed evidence of unrighteousness at the level of one's foundational moral nature—for one's existential commitments would not and could not be unrighteous if he were fundamentally good in the very defining essence of his being.
- 84.2. Righteous existential commitments are not in fact evidence of righteousness at the level of one's foundational moral nature—for one can remain evil in the very defining essence of his being, even when his existential commitments are righteous.
- 84.3. To put it another way, one can be sanctified [holy] without being fundamentally good; but one cannot be a sinful rebel without being fundamentally evil.
- 84.3.1. Sinful rebellion is evidence that I am morally unworthy and undeserving of God's blessing; but sanctification is not evidence that I am fundamentally good and, therefore, morally worthy and deserving of God's blessing.

*•This too-seldom-understood point is absolutely essential to understanding the arguments and perspectives articulated by Paul in his writings in the New Testament. Failure to grasp this point has led to innumerable misinterpretations of the implications of Paul's teaching.*

- 84.3.1.1. *Romans 1* describes the unsanctified rebelliousness of mankind—it describes mankind's heart commitments to evil. Paul's purpose is to indicate man's unworthiness of divine approval and divine blessing. In view of the point above,

Paul's approach is perfectly valid: sinful rebellion is indicative of and evidence for fundamental evil in the defining essence of one's being. Hence, it is evidence of moral unworthiness in the eyes of God.

- 84.3.1.2. Throughout *Romans* and other writings, Paul argues that "keeping the Law" does not render one worthy of or deserving of the divine blessing. In view of the point above, Paul is right to argue so. While it is true that a life of Law-keeping genuinely reflects a righteous heart (that is, sanctification), sanctification (righteousness of heart) is not evidence that one is fundamentally good and, therefore, morally deserving of God's blessing.

### ***Sin Versus Transgression***

85. In biblical philosophy, sin (evil, unrighteousness, etc.) denotes the moral condition of a human being. Transgression denotes an act of disobedience to an explicit commandment by God. It denotes rejection of an explicit instruction by God.
- 85.1. Transgression is a symptom of and is reflective of unrighteousness or evil; but it is not the essence of evil itself.
- 85.1.1. One can be evil without ever having transgressed a commandment of God (for one may never have faced an opportunity to transgress); but one cannot transgress and be righteous. Transgression is necessarily an indication of human evil.
- 85.2. Guilt, divine judgment, and condemnation are the result of sin (evil, unrighteousness, etc.). They are not the result of transgression *per se*. They are the result of transgression indirectly—insofar as transgression is the symptom and evidence of sin.

### ***Toward a Biblical Taxonomy of Human Sin: An Outline***

#### 86. Godlessness

- 86.1. Impiety = any of various manifestations of an overt rejection of God himself

*Examples: idolatry / polytheism, blasphemy, any failure to acknowledge God (atheism, naturalism), any ingratitude toward God, any hatred of God.*

#### 87. Unrighteousness

- 87.1. Manifesting a rejection of God by rejecting what is good

87.1.1. Manifesting a rejection of God in how we relate to and treat other human beings; namely, manifesting an unwillingness to love others (as we would love ourselves)

87.1.1.1. Failing to be kind to others

*Examples: any violation of the Golden Rule*

87.1.1.2. Willingness to harm others

*Examples: murder, adultery, theft, assault, slander, lying to harm others, being willing to use what is true about others to harm them in the eyes of others, factiousness (=insistence that others prove loyal to us by rejecting others that I have made my enemies)*

87.1.2. Manifesting a rejection of God by rejecting the order God created

87.1.2.1. Rejecting God's order by rejecting God's order with respect to sexuality.

*Sexual impurity, sexual immorality (= adultery, fornication, homosexuality, and any other sexual perversion or sexual impurity)*

87.1.2.2. Rejecting God's order by rejecting God's order with respect to our biological existence

*Rejecting God's order through the unchecked pursuit of pleasure (materialism, greed, gluttony, sexual impurity)*

*Rejecting God's order by degrading any human person (any behavior that degrades man to a beast or fails to honor the dignity of another human being as a being made in the image of God, whether that man be myself or another human being), self-degradation*

87.1.3. Manifesting a rejection of God by rejecting ourselves

87.1.3.1. Being unwilling to accept and live in accord with the truth about myself:

*Self-hatred, self-importance, self-righteousness*

*Any refusal to accept the created boundaries on my life (=envy, jealousy, anger at God due to frustration at the limitations he has imposed on me)*

87.1.4. Manifesting a rejection of God by rejecting God's creation and providence

87.1.4.1. Vandalism with regard to creation and history

*A desire to destroy what God has created (cruelty to animals, disrespect for God's creation) and/or*

*a desire to thwart what God has purposed (anti-semitism)*

*•Satan is the Arch-vandal with regard to God*

87.2. Manifesting a rejection of God by rejecting what is true.

87.2.1. Refusal to believe the truth.

87.2.1.1. Refusal to accept revealed truth.

*Rejection of the teaching of the Bible.*

*Unbelief with respect to the gospel.*

*Refusal to accept the reality of my own sinfulness and condemnation.*

87.2.1.2. Refusal to believe any truth whatsoever.

87.2.2. Willing acceptance of lies and myths instead of the Truth.

### **The Scope and Extent of Human Sin**

88. According to biblical philosophy, every human being who has ever existed in all of human history (with the one notable exception of Jesus) has been sinful (evil) at the level of his foundational moral nature. Every human being is wicked at the very defining essence of his being.

88.1. Every human being who has ever existed in all of human history (with the one notable exception of Jesus) has been sinful (evil) at the level of his inner, existential commitments, unless and until such time as God begins to make him his child by beginning the process of sanctifying him.

89. The moral depravity (sinfulness) of every human being does not necessarily mean that every deed a human being performs is somehow tainted or corrupted with evil. God created a human being to be made in the image of God. As a consequence, doing good comes “naturally” to him insofar as the created purpose of his humanity is concerned. Therefore, it is not evidence against his moral depravity if a human being actually does some deeds that, evaluated as deeds, are truly good. Man’s moral depravity consists, at the very least, in how ready, willing, and able a human being is not to do what is good, in violation of his created purpose.

89.1. Man is depraved insofar as he will gladly forsake doing what is good in order to do what is convenient, desirable, pleasurable, or in any other respect advantageous to him from his personal, self-centered perspective.

89.2. Furthermore, while a morally depraved human being may very well do a deed that, considered as a deed, is good, it does not follow that the human being doing such a deed is a good person. It is easy enough to see how a human being who performs a deed that is truly good could, at the same time, be a person who is fundamentally evil (fundamentally opposed to God and the things of God). A person’s performing a good act does not alter the fact that his very being is wrongly oriented toward God and the things of God.

89.2.1. In fact, a person’s very being could be wrongly oriented toward goodness at the very same time that he is performing a good deed.

90. It is a moot point whether the moral depravity of every human being means that his depravity colors, affects, and makes itself evident in the nature of every deed he performs.
- 90.1. It could very well be true that, while a deed performed by a human being—insofar as it is considered as a deed—could legitimately be judged to be a good deed, and yet it could nevertheless be tainted and colored by the moral depravity of the person performing it. It is possible that every deed a person performs gives evidence of the underlying evil of the person performing it.
- 90.1.1. But nothing the Bible teaches hinges on whether this is, in fact, the case. The Bible's concern is that we understand that EVERY HUMAN BEING is evil and, therefore, damnable. It is of no consequence to biblical philosophy whether every DEED is evil and, therefore, damnable.

### **The Origin of Human Sin**

91. The human beings that God originally created (Adam and Eve) were inherently flawed morally; that is, they were inherently evil.
- 91.1. Adam and Eve did not become sinners because they sinned; rather, they sinned because they were sinners.
- 91.1.1. The eating of the forbidden fruit was not the cause and origin of evil; the eating of the forbidden fruit was a test that they failed, making evident that they were already evil.
- 91.1.1.1. The “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (as intended by God) was an ordinary tree that God placed off limits. They were forbidden to eat from the fruit of it in order to test their goodness and obedience. This otherwise ordinary tree, arbitrarily proscribed, would reveal whether mankind was willing to submit to the will of God—in other words, it would reveal whether they were good or evil. Therefore, it was the tree of the knowledge of whether man was good or evil.
- 91.1.1.2. The “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (as deceitfully interpreted to Eve by the tempter) was a tree that—because God had forbidden eating from it—presented Adam and Eve (mankind) with a unique opportunity. It presented them with the opportunity to decide for themselves, from their own standpoint—as God does—whether eating from the tree was good or evil. To partake of it—God having forbidden it—would make mankind like God with respect to

the nature of his knowledge of good and evil. Like God, mankind would have decided for himself, independently of anyone outside of himself. The tree presented an opportunity for mankind to achieve this kind of god-likeness. The tree presented the opportunity for mankind to achieve a knowledge of good and evil that was independent of the command of God. So, according to the tempter, the tree was the tree that afforded mankind his own independent knowledge of good and evil.

91.1.1.3. The actual result of mankind's eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (as interpreted by God) was that mankind did become like God in knowing good and evil. From God's perspective, this was a bad thing; for mankind had perversely taken upon himself a strictly divine prerogative—namely, to judge from his own standpoint whether something is good or evil. This is what the tempter said would occur. But the tempter presented it as a good and right and desirable thing. As a matter of fact, it was a perverse and evil thing.

91.1.1.4. Hence, mankind did not "become like God in knowing good and evil" because some magic juice in the fruit of the tree enlightened them. Rather, they "became like God in knowing good and evil" because, in their evil rebellion, they presumed to assume for themselves a divine prerogative. It follows, then, that the eating did not cause them to become evil; the eating was an act of evil that showed them up to be inherently corrupt in the very defining essence of their being. Their evil presumption caused them to eat; eating did not transform them into beings who only then were capable of evil presumption.

92. Adam was the prototype for all of humanity. {Romans 5:14}

92.1. We share sinful, rebellious human-ness with Adam. Just as Adam's sinful human-ness explains why he sinned, so does our sinful human-ness explain why we sin. We are all "chips off the old block."

92.1.1. Sin is inherent in the defining moral essence of mankind as God created us; it does not originate in a transforming choice made by the first man.

93. The traditional doctrine of the "Fall of Mankind" is not a biblical concept; it is a concept invented by Christian tradition and made particularly popular by Milton.

93.1. According to Paul, creation was subjected to futility by the creator who created it, not by Adam who sinned.



*See Romans 8:20-21 [Note: It was subjected "with the confident expectation" that it would also be set free from corruption. That has to refer to God and his intent, not to Adam's intent.]*

- 93.2. Genesis does not give the slightest hint or suggestion of a "fall" of the whole created order. (No mention of even a quiet swoosh—let alone a big bang—to indicate the restructuring of the whole created cosmos from an anti-entropic physical universe to an entropic physical universe.)

### **The Biblical Concept of Goodness**

94. In the Bible, righteousness, goodness, godliness, piety, and others are all close synonyms. While there are subtle distinctions of meaning between them, for the most part they denote the same reality and the same dynamics.

*For the purposes of these notes, I will usually refer to this reality as "goodness." This choice is arbitrary. Any biblical term could serve as an apt label for the moral righteousness of human beings that is being analyzed.*

95. Goodness (and its synonyms) is simply the concept that represents the contrary to sin (evil/unrighteousness). Sin is the lack of goodness. Goodness is the direct opposite to what sin is.
- 95.1. Goodness (righteousness / godliness) is ultimately an inner openness, receptivity, tenderness, and responsiveness to God and to the things of God—namely, a propensity to value and love what God has purposed, promised, and valued.
- 95.2. The contrary of everything said above with regard to sin (evil / unrighteousness) would define or describe goodness (righteousness)—including the fact that goodness (righteousness) can describe the moral state of a person at two different levels, at the level of the fabric of his being, or at the level of his existential heart commitments.
- 95.3. A succinct and apt summary of the nature of goodness (righteousness / godliness) could be formulated like this: goodness consists of two fundamental aspects—(a) loving God and the things of God without compromise or reservation, and (b) loving one's neighbor.

*I will not work out the details of what is implied by goodness being the contrary of sin in these notes. I will leave it to the reader to do that.*

### **Divine Wrath Toward Human Sin**

#### ***Divine Wrath: The Moral Response to Human Evil***

96. The moral depravity (sin, unrighteousness, evil) of each and every individual human being provokes a response of wrath from God. God responds with moral outrage and indignation toward the evil of every human being.

- 96.1. The Bible describes being “under the wrath of God” alternatively as "lacking peace with God" or as "not being reconciled to God." If something were to occur to propitiate the wrath of God, then it would alternatively be described as "having attained peace with God" or as "having been reconciled to God." Under God’s wrath we are in a state of being subject to the hostility of God. We are not in a state of peace; we experience alienation from God rather than reconciliation.
- 96.1.1. The biblical concept of atonement is the concept of having been put into a relationship of being at one with God (at-one-ment). By this, the biblical authors mean being put into a relationship where the operative relationship between man and God is no longer hostility but “peace” or “reconciliation.” Something must propitiate the wrath of God in order for atonement to result.
- 96.2. Every human being is morally “worthy” (deserving) of God’s wrathful response. It is the objective nature of all evil (including human evil) that goodness ought to respond to it with antagonism, hostility, and alienation; goodness must repudiate, renounce, reject, and oppose it. Therefore, as a morally pure person, God is morally obligated to respond to individual human evil with wrath (subjectively). And, unless someone or something “propitiates” that wrath of God in relation to an individual human being, God will respond by objectively punishing [enacting vengeance]. That is, God, as a morally good being, is morally obligated to respond with outrage, antagonism, hostility, alienation, etc. (subjectively) which naturally would lead to his meting out punitive violence, harm, or destruction (objectively) unless someone or something “propitiated” his wrath.

*Note that “divine wrath” is used in two different senses in the Bible. On the one hand, it can describe a subjective disposition in God. On the other hand, it can describe the objective outcome of God’s subjective disposition. God’s “feeling” anger is his divine wrath in the subjective sense. God’s responding to evil with some sort of objective punishment is his divine wrath in the objective sense. To be “under the wrath of God” is to be doomed to be punished by God.*

97. God’s wrath toward every human being is due to the fact that every human being is morally unworthy in the eyes of the morally pure author of all reality.
- 97.1. The moral unworthiness of every human being must not be confused with the concept of ontological unworthiness. The former does not entail the latter. The fact that one is morally unworthy does not mean that he is ontologically unworthy. One can be ontologically valuable and significant while being morally unworthy.

*Note: To describe an evil human being as being morally “unworthy” is to describe him as not being worthy of a blessing from God. It does not follow that if one is guilty, blameworthy, and in this sense “unworthy”, then he is insignificant or “worth nothing” as a cre-*

ated being. One can be a valuable and significant creature (like a human being made in the image of God) and yet be morally “unworthy”—undeserving of a blessing from God.

### ***Divine Judgment and the Condemnation of Human Sin***

98. The Bible describes the objective punitive response of God to human evil as judgment or condemnation. Because God rightfully responds with subjective wrath toward human evil, he responds (objectively and concretely) by judging or condemning evil human beings. The concepts of judgment and condemnation arise from a legal / judicial metaphor. God, seen as judge, sentences guilty human beings to the just punishment they deserve. The act of sentencing a human being to just punishment for his evil is labeled as either judgment or condemnation.
99. The condemnation of any human being is a tragedy. It is seen to be a tragedy by God.
  - 99.1. Divine condemnation is not the destruction and/or disposal of what is trivial, of what is inherently insignificant or worthless. It is the punishment of an inherently valuable and significant creature. It is the ontological worth of a human being that makes his condemnation a tragedy. If he were a worthless, insignificant creature, his condemnation would be of little consequence.

### ***The Nature of the Divine Condemnation of Human Sin***

100. The Bible describes the just punishment for human evil in a variety of different ways: death, destruction, tribulation, distress, torment, just punishment, just reward, etc. All of the biblical descriptions seem to fall into one of two different outcomes: (a) the human being receives (and is conscious of) some kind of appropriate punishment (harm, tribulation, torment) that is proportioned to his evil; or (b) the human being is destroyed and his existence brought to an end for his evil.
  - 100.1. On the one hand, the Bible seems to describe divine retribution that is proportional to the deeds that the human being has done. On the other hand, the Bible seems to describe divine retribution that is uniform—that is, the total annihilation of the human being who is evil.
    - 100.1.1. On the one hand, the just punishment for a human being’s moral depravity (sin, unrighteousness, evil) is for God to withhold from him the blessing of eternal Life—the ultimate fulfillment of his humanity [See notes on “Background to the Gospel to Mankind”]. That is, the just punishment is for him to be cursed with the forfei-

ture of eternal Life. In this sense, the just punishment for human evil is death.

100.1.2. On the other hand, the Bible seems to describe the just punishment for a human being's evil deeds to be a punishment (presumably, tribulation, torment, etc.) that is proportioned to those very deeds.

101. The Bible itself does not explicitly reconcile these two very different descriptions of judgment and condemnation. It would seem that they are not reconciled because the Bible is proposing that they are both true. Presumably, they are true sequentially. If a human being fails to be granted mercy by God, then he is sentenced to a punishment of "tribulation and distress" that is justly proportioned to "the deeds that he has done." Then, upon coming to the completion of his just punishment, he is made to undergo death (that is, he is denied Life in the eternal Kingdom of God), and therefore destroyed.

*Note: because the just penalty for sins is always described as being just and proportional to the evil one has done, the traditional concept of hell as everlasting, unending torment is not consistent with the biblical view of condemnation.*

## Salvation

### *Definition of Salvation*

102. The concept of salvation in the Bible is the concept of being rescued from the outcome of God's wrath, from the tragic destiny of being condemned by God because of one's sin and evil.

102.1. Salvation is rescue from punishment by God followed ultimately by death and destruction.

102.2. Ultimately, therefore, salvation is a hope—an eager, confident expectation. Salvation is not a present reality. It does not describe something that is realized in this present age. It describes something that is only realized in the age to come.

### *The Ultimate Basis of Salvation*

103. At the most fundamental level, the Bible asserts that the ultimate basis of an individual's salvation is the sovereign choice of God.

103.1. It is the creator's prerogative to make his creatures to be whatever he wants to make them. If he wants to make a human being a person who is rescued by God from death and condemnation into blessing and *aionic* Life, then it is God's prerogative to do so. If he does not want to make a human being a person who is so rescued, then it is God's prerog-

ative to do that as well.

103.2. The concept of “election” refers to the above biblical teaching. The concept of “election” is simply a reference to the sovereign choice (election) of God with regard to whom he will save.

*One could say that the Bible teaches the doctrine of “Salvation by Divine Election.”*

103.2.1. Divine election is not rightly understood as God choosing from the mass of already created human individuals those whom he will save. (That would make God’s election arbitrary.) Rather, divine election is best understood as God choosing (electing) to create each and every human individual for exactly that destiny that his sovereignly chosen purposes required.

103.3. The concept of “foreknowledge” refers to exactly the same biblical teaching. “Foreknowledge” is a synonymous concept to “election.” The word translated “to know” need not denote an epistemological relationship. It can simply denote the entering into some sort of intimate relationship with something. For God to “know” a human being is to enter into an intimate connection with that human being such that he is committed to making him his child, his heir. In other words, it is to “choose” him to be his child. To “know”/ “choose” a human being in advance (prior to creation itself) is to “foreknow” him—that is, to pre-ordain him (to be a child of God).

103.3.1. Note that the concept of “knowing” someone is used to describe sexual intercourse when the text says, for example, “And Adam knew his wife Eve and she conceived and bore a child.”

### ***The Cause of Salvation***

104. The Bible teaches emphatically that the underlying cause of God’s sovereign choice to save those individuals that he saves is his mercy.

*Therefore, one could say that divine mercy is the ultimate ground of an individual’s salvation. Hence, one could say that the Bible teaches the doctrine of “Salvation by Divine Mercy.”*

104.1. Mercy, by definition, is something that the recipient is not worthy or deserving of. To receive mercy is to receive a good thing I do not deserve rather than the bad thing I do deserve. Therefore, to say that salvation is based on mercy is to describe it as being rescued from the punishment and condemnation I do deserve by being given the blessing of *aion-ic* Life that I do not deserve.

- 104.1.1. Salvation could also, with equal validity, be said to be based on grace. Grace, by definition, is something that is given to someone as a gift. It typically describes some good gift that one does not deserve. Therefore, it is virtually synonymous with “mercy” in its use in the New Testament.

*Therefore, one could say that divine grace is the ultimate ground of an individual’s salvation. Hence, one could say that the Bible teaches the doctrine of “Salvation by Divine Grace.”*

- 104.2. Mercy results from the free sovereign choice of God. Ultimately, God is answerable to nothing beyond himself in making the choice to be merciful. He grants mercy if he chooses to be merciful. He does not grant mercy if he chooses not to be merciful.

- 104.2.1. God shows mercy to anyone and everyone that he “calls” (in the sense of “appoints” or “designates”) to be a part of his people.

*Note the ambiguity in the concept of “calling.” On the one hand, God’s “calling” a person can denote God’s naming a person or appointing a person to a particular status (e.g., to be his child). On the other hand, God’s “calling” a person can denote the activity of God when he is inviting that person to respond to his request (e.g., to repent). The first “calling” of God is irresistible. The second “calling” of God is not irresistible. It is perfectly meaningful to say, “Only those whom God has called will not reject the call of God.” But that is because “calling” is used equivocally.*

- 104.3. *Dikaiosune* is an important biblical concept that describes the state of a person who is situated such that he will receive mercy from God at the final judgment. He will receive the *aionic* Life that he does not deserve rather than the condemnation that he does deserve. In other words, *dikaiosune* is the state that an individual is in when God, the divine judge, has made a judicial determination that he will receive mercy. Such a divine judicial decision results from God’s free sovereign choice.

*Therefore, one could say that the Bible teaches the doctrine of “Dikaiosune (Justification) by Divine Election.” With equal validity, one could say that the Bible teaches the doctrine of “Dikaiosune (Justification) by Divine Mercy.”*

- 104.3.1. *Dikaiosune* is a judicial metaphor. If God, as the divine judge, issues a judicial decree that I am not to be punished for my moral guilt but am to be granted the blessing of Life instead, then it could be said that I have been decreed to be *dikaios*. If one has been decreed *dikaios*, he is said to have been granted *dikaiosune*. Roughly speaking, to be *dikaios* is to be in a state of pardon. To have been granted *dikaiosune* is to have been granted a pardon in the face of one’s moral guilt.

- 104.3.2. The traditional translation of *dikaiosune* as “righteousness” is very misleading. *Dikaiosune* is not righteousness—neither imputed righteousness, nor infused righteousness. One does not receive the blessing of *aionic* Life because he is “righteous,”

he receives *aionic* Life because he has been pardoned (that is, because he has been decreed *dikaios*). The one who receives a pardon from God has not somehow become deserving of his pardon ("righteous"). His pardon is strictly a reflection of the profound depths of God's goodness and compassion.

- 104.3.3. The traditional conception of *dikaiosis* as "justification" is also misleading. *Dikaiosis* is not justification in the sense of being in a state wherein the demands of justice have been satisfied. *Dikaiosis* is not justification; it is pardon. Pardon (and therefore *dikaiosis*) is a judicial determination that the demands of justice will be allowed to go unsatisfied. It is not a determination that the demands of justice have already been somehow satisfied.

### ***The Penultimate Basis of Salvation***

105. While it is inherently God's prerogative to choose who will receive his mercy and be saved. God has expressly "delegated" that responsibility to his Son, Jesus. As a consequence, the scope of who will receive divine mercy and, therefore, salvation is defined by Jesus' choice. Whomever Jesus wants to be saved will be saved. Jesus can be said to be the "judge" of mankind.

- 105.1. Jesus makes it clear that the basis of his choice is (and will be) what his Father wills. Therefore, it is ultimately a moot point whether the scope of salvation is determined by God's sovereign choice or by Jesus' choice. They come to one and the same thing, for God's choice is mapped on to the choice of the human judge Jesus. God's choice of who to save is ultimate; Jesus' choice of who to save (by interceding for them) is penultimate.

### ***Jesus' Intercession as a Basis for Salvation***

106. As a matter of fact, with respect to how God runs this reality, mercy is not granted apart from an intermediary. Sinful human beings—deserving of God's wrath as they are—are without any qualification or basis to approach God and request mercy from him on their own behalf. Without a qualified intermediary who can approach God and request mercy from him on one's behalf, such a person has no hope of receiving mercy. Consequently, one has no hope of salvation if there is no intermediary who can appeal to God for mercy on his behalf.

- 106.1. Jesus is the qualified intermediary who is capable of appealing to God for mercy on behalf of a sinful individual.

- 106.1.1. Jesus' role in appealing to God for mercy and obtaining it for a sinful human being

is described in various ways. Jesus is called a “mediator,” an “intercessor, an “advocate,” and a “high priest”—to name the more important metaphors. All of these refer to Jesus’ role in obtaining mercy at the judgment seat.

*Note: none of these descriptions of Jesus refer to an intermediary role in obtaining anything other than salvation. Jesus does not intercede for us with respect to the practical needs of everyday existence. At least, it makes no sense to think in those terms. Jesus came to save men from condemnation, not to get goodies from divine providence for them.*

106.2. This is the process by which Jesus’ authority to determine who will be saved (an authority granted to him by God) is effected. Jesus exercises his authority to save whom he will by choosing for whom he will intercede.

106.2.1. It is in this indirect sense that Jesus is the “judge” of mankind. God is the ultimate judge. But because God will not grant mercy to an individual unless Jesus chooses to advocate for that individual, Jesus becomes the *de facto* judge of who will be saved. [See notes on “The Roles of Jesus / The ‘Work’ of Jesus”]

#### *Jesus’ Crucifixion as a Basis for Salvation*

107. Jesus’ crucifixion—more accurately, his “sufferings” (passions), all the various ways he suffered in connection with the event of his crucifixion—was a task given to him by God, his Father. The purpose of the crucifixion was to depict and represent what mankind deserved for his evil and depravity.

107.1. The “request” of Jesus’ father was for Jesus to offer up his own life (his own body) to be the canvas upon which God would draw a picture of the wrath that was due to human beings on account of their evil and guilt.

108. Jesus’ crucifixion is the basis for the salvation of mankind—not by virtue of Jesus’ death, but by virtue of Jesus’ love and obedience. God’s mercy is not secured by Jesus’ death *per se*; God’s mercy is secured by Jesus’ intercession. Jesus’ intercession is effective through his crucifixion and suffering because it was his suffering that qualified him to intercede effectively on mankind’s behalf.

108.1. It is not Jesus’ death *per se* that makes his crucifixion significant. Rather, Jesus’ crucifixion is significant because of the nature and character of Jesus’ choice. Jesus displayed amazing, God-like love for mankind when he freely and voluntarily went to the cross to die for their sins. And, he displayed an amazingly pure obedience to God when he willingly and obediently died for the sins of mankind.



108.1.1. The heroism of Jesus is manifest in the fact that he freely and voluntarily accepted this assignment. Jesus was “obedient” to the will of his Father, even to the point of submitting to the sufferings of his crucifixion.

*Jesus' Propitiation as a Basis for Salvation*

109. In biblical philosophy, not only will Jesus play the role of the intermediary who will, at the judgment, appeal to God for mercy for the human sinner, but he also lived and acted in such a way that he himself can serve as that which propitiates the wrath of God. Jesus’ propitiation of the wrath of God, therefore, is part of the basis for mankind’s salvation.
- 109.1. The concept of propitiation is the concept of a person’s wrath “melting away” (or being mitigated to a point of no longer being relevant) due to some delight that displaces it. The concept of God’s wrath being propitiated is the concept of something occurring which softens or diminishes God’s wrath to the point where his wrath will no longer control and direct his decision at the final judgment. If and when God’s wrath has been propitiated, he is in a position to consider responding in mercy.
- 109.2. In order for Jesus’ appeal to God for mercy on behalf of the sinner to be effective, two things are necessary: (i) God needs to have his wrath toward the sinner propitiated, and (ii) Jesus needs to have his intercessory appeal for mercy heard and accepted by God. The same reality accomplishes both—specifically, the reality that Jesus proved to be “pleasing” to God. Consequently, the direct testimony of God that Jesus is “My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased” is of critical importance to the salvation of sinful humanity. Insofar as Jesus is greatly pleasing to his Father, to that extent he (i) propitiates God’s wrath and (ii) is qualified to be heard by God.
- 109.2.1. In order for Jesus to serve in the intermediary role that is so critical to every sinful human being’s salvation, it is critical that Jesus be “pleasing” and “acceptable” to God, the Father. If God were indifferent toward or displeased with Jesus, God would reject any mediation Jesus would attempt on our behalf.
- 109.2.2. In order for Jesus to be able to propitiate the wrath of God toward the human sinner, it is critical that Jesus himself supply the source of delight to displace God’s wrath. (For there is nothing in the human sinner himself that could supply such delight.) Therefore, it is critical that Jesus himself be greatly “pleasing” to God.
- 109.3. Jesus was “well pleasing” to the Father and qualified to mediate on our behalf for three

distinct reasons:

- 109.3.1. The sinless, morally perfect life that Jesus lived was pleasing to God to such an extent that Jesus is qualified to serve as our intercessor and intermediary. Jesus lived a life that earned him the right to be heard by God.
- 109.3.2. Jesus' remarkable act of righteous obedience to the will of the Father, at being willing to go to the cross, was pleasing to God to such an extent that Jesus earned the right to serve as our intercessor and intermediary.
  - 109.3.2.1. Jesus' remarkable act of righteous obedience was not merely that he went voluntarily to his death. It was that he submitted to the torture of scourging and crucifixion, as well as to mockery and contempt. It under-appreciates the depth of Jesus' obedience if we think of it as simply "giving his life" for us.
- 109.3.3. The act of God-like love, on the part of Jesus, that was manifest in his willingness to die for the sins of sinful mankind was pleasing to God to such an extent that Jesus earned the right to serve as our intercessor and intermediary.
- 109.4. Jesus' act of voluntary submission to suffering and death will propitiate the wrath of God for two distinct reasons:
  - 109.4.1. Jesus' remarkable act of righteous obedience to the will of the Father, at being willing to go to the cross, was so pleasing to God that it will eclipse and soften God's wrath when Jesus appears before him at the judgment.
  - 109.4.2. The act of God-like love, on the part of Jesus, that was manifest in his willingness to die for the sins of sinful mankind was so pleasing to God that it will eclipse and soften God's wrath when Jesus appears before him at the judgment.

*Jesus' Redemption as a Basis for Salvation*

110. It could also be said that redemption is the basis of mankind's salvation. The concept of redemption is the concept of a price paid in order that another might be set free. The natural home for the concept of redemption is the concept of slavery. When someone pays a price in order to buy the freedom of a slave, it is "redemption" or a "redemption price" that he has paid. The "slavery" from which mankind is set free by the redemption price paid by Jesus is their slavery to their condemnation to eternal death and destruction.
  - 110.1. The "freedom" that Jesus bought for mankind by the redemption price of his suffering was freedom from everlasting death. By Jesus' death at his crucifixion, mankind is set

free from the wrath of God that would, apart from Jesus, lead to his being condemned by God to final, absolute death.

110.2. The redemption price paid by Jesus is not identified with his blood. Nor is it identified with his death. Rather, the redemption price paid by Jesus is the entire extent of what he suffered. Specifically, the price Jesus paid was ALL the suffering he willingly endured because he submitted to God's purpose to depict what sinful mankind deserved.

110.2.1. It is Jesus' suffering and crucifixion, not his death *per se*, that is the redemption price paid for sinful humanity. The price Jesus paid for the sins of the world was not merely the fact that he died. Rather, the price he paid for the sins of the world consisted of all that he suffered during the entire scope of the event of the crucifixion. In order to save sinful humanity, Jesus did not merely sacrifice his life (although certainly that is included). Rather, Jesus allowed God's wrath toward human sin to be pictured, portrayed, and represented in the torture he suffered as well as in the fact that he was put to death.

110.2.2. The New Testament authors frequently refer to the "blood" of Jesus as that which is the "ground" of our salvation. This cannot be rightly understood apart from the background of the Mosaic Covenant. Jesus' crucifixion is not characterized as "shed blood" because it was necessary in God's purposes for Jesus to bleed in and during his death. Rather, it is characterized as "shed blood" because Jesus' crucifixion plays a role roughly analogous to the "blood" taken from a sacrificial animal and used to appeal to God for mercy. In conformity to the requirements of the Mosaic Covenant, the blood of the sacrificial animal was sprinkled on the altar (or mercy seat) by the priest as a propitiatory offering. So, Jesus' "blood" is a reference to all that he suffered during the crucifixion, not merely the blood that he might have bled. Referring to it as his "blood" is simply a way to refer to his suffering as a propitiatory offering. For the reality is this: Jesus did not give his "blood" as the propitiatory offering he was making to God; rather, Jesus sacrificed his whole body to the torments and tortures of the Romans as the propitiatory offering he was making to God.

### ***Sanctification as the Necessary Condition of Salvation***

111. Those individuals who will receive God's mercy and be saved are those that the Bible calls the *hagioi*.

- 111.1. The Greek word *hagios* (plural = *hagioi*) means a "holy one." *Hagios* is typically translated "saint" in our English Bibles. [*Hagioi* is typically translated "saints."]
- 111.2. The process by which a sinner becomes a *hagios* (a "holy one") is called sanctification. The state of having been made a *hagios* (a "holy one") is called *hagiosune* (= the state one is in when one has been sanctified, typically translated "holiness") or else *hagiasmos* (= the state one is in when one has been sanctified, typically translated "sanctification.")
- 111.3. The person who will receive mercy from God and be saved is the person who, during the course of his lifetime, was becoming "holy" (*hagios*) because he was undergoing a process of "sanctification." Therefore, the person who evidences the fact that he is being "sanctified" by being marked by a state of "holiness" or "sanctification" (*hagiasmos*, *hagiosune*) is the one whom God has determined to save. Showing evidence of sanctification, therefore, is a necessary condition for salvation.

*One could say that the Bible teaches the doctrine of "Salvation (Justification) by Sanctification."*

- 111.4. The Bible looks at *hagiosune* (holiness, or sanctification) in two different ways, from two different perspectives: (i) from the perspective of God, the creator, and (ii) from the perspective of the person being sanctified.
- 111.4.1. From the perspective of God, *hagiosune* (sanctification) is a state deep within the inner being of a man that exists because God, the author of that person's being, has created that state within him. From this perspective, it is something that is done to the human being. *Hagiosune* is a somewhat tangible "mark" that God places on the inner being of the person to whom he is going to show mercy. It is the "brand" of God's ownership of that person.
- 111.4.1.1. Holiness (*hagiosune*) is an inner state of being wherein the person is oriented inwardly toward knowing, acknowledging, and being pleasing to God. From God's perspective, such a state is the work of God in the inner life of a person.
- 111.4.2. From the perspective of the *hagios* himself, *hagiosune* (holiness) is a state of his inner being that is freely chosen and embraced by that individual himself out of his own free will. It is the result of a series of choices that he has made.
- 111.4.2.1. Holiness (*hagiosune*) is an inner state of being wherein the person is oriented inwardly toward knowing, acknowledging, and being pleasing to God. From the

human perspective, such a state is the result of free will choices on the part of the person becoming sanctified.

Notably, *hagiosune* is the state out of which a person responds positively to the “calling” (the invitation) of God. God invites every human being to repent and learn from God. Only the “holy” person responds to that call (invitation) of God and repents and begins to learn from God.

- 111.4.2.2. From the human perspective, *hagiosune* is a condition that must be met in order for a person to be saved. The one who will be saved is the one who manifests through his free choices that he is committed to the pursuit of holiness.

*The Nature of Hagiosune (Holiness/Sanctification)*

112. Holiness is fundamentally an orientation of the inner being of a person. It is the inclination of his “heart”, his “spirit,” or his “inner man.” It lies in the nature of his personal existential commitments. [See notes on “Two Levels On Which Sin Operates”]
- 112.1. The relevant words used in the Bible in connection with the concepts of holiness and sanctification are (i) *hagios* (“holy,” or “holy one,” or “sanctified one,” that is “saint”), (ii) *hagiazoo* (“to make holy” = “to sanctify”), and (iii) *hagiosune* (“sanctification”= the process wherein one is made *hagios*, holy).
- 112.1.1. There are fundamentally three different concepts that are conveyed by the term *hagios* (holy) as it pertains to each and every one of the following:
- (i) Meaning #1 of *hagios* (holy), which can pertain only to God:
- For God to be “*hagios*” (holy) means that God is vastly above and beyond the ordinary, it means that he is incomparable in a way that renders him awesome to such a degree that one is struck with fear, respect, and reverence.
- (ii) Meaning #2 of *hagios* (holy), which pertains to a created person, place, or thing:
- To be “*hagios*” (holy) is to be connected with God in such a way that the person, place, or thing becomes extraordinary by association; and, because of his or its connection with the holy God, one is motivated to show him or it respect, reverence, and deference. “*Hagios*” (holy) in this sense of the word denotes a status that something or someone has.
- [If a person has been chosen for the merciful gift of eternal Life by God, this particular, unique connection to God renders such a chosen person “*hagios*” (holy) in this sense. He is a person chosen for a unique status in relation to God. This is the sense

in which believers are *hagioi* (= "saints" = "holy ones").]

(iii) Meaning #3 of *hagios* (holy), which can pertain only to a person:

To be "*hagios*" (holy) is to possess personal attributes that signal or mark the fact that one is "*hagios*" (holy) in the sense of meaning #2—that is, it is to have personal attributes that signal the fact that one has a unique status in relation to God. Namely, it is to have personal attributes that signal the fact that he is destined for the blessing of Life in the age to come. Therefore, "*hagios*" (holy) in this sense of the word denotes personal attributes that a person possesses.

[The "holiness" (*hagiasmos* or *hagiosune*) that is produced by the process of sanctification is *hagiasmos* (holiness) in the sense of meaning #3.]

*The Attributes of Hagiasmos or Hagiosune (Holiness/Sanctification/Sanctifiedness)*

113. As an orientation of the inner being of a person, the "holiness" (=sanctifiedness) that is produced by sanctification consists of certain inner, existential commitments of the heart that are distinctive in that they consist of a good and proper orientation toward God and the things of God.
114. There are numerous specific manifestations of such a good and proper orientation toward God. The more important of these manifestations can be placed into the following categories: (i) a commitment to goodness and godliness (righteousness), (ii) a commitment to truth, (iii) a commitment to God (to know, honor, and love him), and (iv) a commitment to everything that pertains to God.
  - 114.1. The holy (=sanctified) person is one who evidences a commitment to goodness and godliness (righteousness).
    - 114.1.1. Holiness (=sanctifiedness) is not goodness, but it is not unrelated to goodness. The process of sanctification is the process whereby God transforms a person at the level of his personal existential commitments, not at the level of the defining essence of his moral nature. [See notes on "Two Levels On Which Sin Operates"] The *hagios* (=holy = sanctified) person has not been transformed into a good person; but he has been transformed into a person who loves God (and goodness) and is committed to the pursuit of goodness. He has a passion to be like God, to imitate him in his righteousness and love. A commitment to the pursuit of goodness is not the only manifestation of sanctification, but it is one of the more important and striking

manifestations.

- 114.1.2. Sanctification, among other things, is the process wherein God produces a discontinuity between the believer's moral state at the level of the defining essence of his moral nature and his moral state at the level of his personal existential commitments. The sanctified person does not become more righteous and good in the defining essence of his moral being; he becomes more clearly and deeply committed to the pursuit of goodness in the commitments of his heart. The sanctified person is not spontaneously and, therefore, always successfully good; he strives and fights to be good, even though he often fails—sabotaged by the evil of his foundational moral nature, the “defining essence of his moral being.”
  - 114.1.3. The sanctified person is not made WORTHY of the blessing of eternal Life by the fact of his sanctification; he is made DISTINCTIVE because of his sanctification.
  - 114.1.4. As one committed to goodness and godliness, the *hagios* (=holy = sanctified) person will evidence a commitment to love others.
- 114.2. The *hagios* (=holy = sanctified) person is one who evidences a commitment to truth, coming to seek and embrace truth while coming to renounce error and deceit.
- 114.2.1. As one committed to truth, the *hagios* (=holy = sanctified) person will be committed to the truth about God.
    - 114.2.1.1. As one committed to the truth about God, the *hagios* (=holy = sanctified) person will be committed to the truth about God's will—about his purposes, promises, and desires.
    - 114.2.1.2. As one committed to the truth about God's purposes, the *hagios* (=holy = sanctified) person will come to believe that God will transform him into a morally perfect creature one day—when he will be made perfectly righteous as God is righteous— and, hence, he lives in eager anticipation of that day.
    - 114.2.1.3. As one committed to the truth of God's purposes, the *hagios* (=holy = sanctified) person will be committed to the truth of the gospel of Jesus, the *messiah*. He will not be hostile toward or resistant to the truth of the gospel of Jesus, the *messiah*. He will be open and receptive to it. His receptivity to the truth will typically result in his believing the gospel, most notably in his believing that Jesus is the *messiah*.

*Belief in the gospel of Jesus, the messiah, is what is commonly called "faith" in most Christian traditions. Note that, contrary to what Christians might typically think, such "faith" is an element of and indication of sanctification. The believer does not first come to "faith" or "belief" and then, subsequently, receive sanctification. Rather, one comes to "faith" or "belief" precisely because he is being sanctified. In other words, faith results from being sanctified; being sanctified does not result from faith.*

114.2.2. As one committed to truth, the *hagios* (=holy = sanctified) person will be committed to the truth about himself.

114.2.2.1. As one committed to truth about himself, the *hagios* (=holy = sanctified) person will be committed to the truth about his damnable sinfulness. He will not be hostile toward or resistant to this truth about himself—namely, he will be open and receptive to the idea that he is a sinner who is deserving of eternal condemnation for who and what he is. Accordingly, the *hagios* (=holy = sanctified) person will be one who evidences authentic contrition in the face of the reality of his sinfulness. He will be ashamed of his own evil, foolishness, and rebellion against God. His receptivity to this truth will result in his being receptive to the idea that the *messiah* was sent to die for his sins and, in the typical case, it will result in his actually believing it to be the case [another aspect of what is typically called "faith"]. Further, his receptivity to this truth will result in his being willing to show mercy to others—to forgive even those who have sinned directly against him—for they are no more sinful than himself. And, finally, in the light of this truth, he comes to perceive himself, apart from the promises of the gospel, as poor rather than rich, no matter how much earthly "wealth" he might possess.

*This evidence of holiness (=sanctifiedness) is a particularly important and telling one. Resistance to the truth of one's profound moral depravity is a particularly strong evidence of ongoing rebellion against God and of the absence of sanctification.*

114.2.2.2. As one committed to truth about himself, the *hagios* (=holy = sanctified) person will be committed to the truth about his humble, lowly status as a mere creature. He is open and receptive to the idea that, as a mere creature, he is not the most important being in created reality. He is willing to acknowledge that he is not the *raison d'être* of created reality; God and his Son, Jesus, are such beings. Accordingly, he comes to be willing to forego presumption before his creator. He comes to be meek and unassuming rather than demanding and entitled.

114.2.3. As one committed to truth, the *hagios* (=holy = sanctified) person will be committed to the truth about created reality. Notably, he is committed to accepting the following truths about it: (i) that the longing of the human heart cannot be truly and per-



manently satisfied by acquiring or enjoying any of the “good things” of this present physical reality, and (ii) that this present physical existence is characterized by evil and futility.

- 114.2.3.1. The one who is *hagios* (=holy = sanctified) comes to be willing to forsake the things of this world, not “loving” them but rather “loving” God and his purposes. Therefore, in the light of the promises of the gospel, he perceives himself as rich, and not poor, no matter how deprived he might be of the “wealth” this world has to offer.
- 114.2.3.2. The one who is *hagios* (=holy = sanctified) comes to grieve at the presence of evil in the world and in his own being.
- 114.2.4. As one committed to truth, the *hagios* (=holy = sanctified) person will be committed to the truth about other human beings.
  - 114.2.4.1. As one committed to the truth about other human beings, the *hagios* (=holy = sanctified) person will come to acknowledge the truth that other human beings are no less important and no less worthy of love, respect, and honor than himself.
  - 114.2.4.2. As one committed to the truth about other human beings, the *hagios* (=holy = sanctified) person will come to acknowledge the truth that other human beings are fundamentally hostile to God and will be correspondingly hostile to him for wanting to honor him. In reality, the *hagios* (=holy = sanctified) person will ultimately be hated and rejected by those who oppose God.
- 114.2.5. As one committed to truth, the *hagios* (=holy = sanctified) person will be committed to the truth about God’s purposes, values, and desires.
  - 114.2.5.1. As one committed to the truth about God’s desires, the *hagios* (=holy = sanctified) person will come to acknowledge the difference between true righteousness and its many counterfeits, and he will seek to emulate the true while he rejects the counterfeit.
- 114.3. The *hagios* (=holy = sanctified) person is one who evidences a commitment to God. He evidences a commitment to know him, honor him, and love him.
  - 114.3.1. The *hagios* (=holy = sanctified) person is one who evidences a commitment to come to love God.

114.3.2. The *hagios* (=holy = sanctified) person is one who evidences a commitment to seek to know God.

114.3.2.1. The *hagios* (=holy = sanctified) person, being open to the truth about the goodness of God, comes to trust God implicitly with every aspect of his life and existence; he comes to want God's will to be done, believing that God's will is ultimately always good.

114.3.2.2. The *hagios* (=holy = sanctified) person, being open to the truth about the power and authority of God, comes to fear God, understanding that God is not safe and is not protection against pain and sorrow.

114.3.3. The *hagios* (=holy = sanctified) person is one who evidences a commitment to learn to submit to God's will, purposes, and promises.

114.4. The *hagios* (=holy = sanctified) person is one who evidences a commitment to everything that pertains to God.

114.4.1. The *hagios* (=holy = sanctified) person is one who evidences a commitment to come to embrace, acknowledge, and support anything and everything that has to do with God and what he desires, values, purposes, or does.

114.4.1.1. The *hagios* (=holy = sanctified) person comes to find delight in being and doing whatever is pleasing to God.

114.4.1.2. The *hagios* (=holy = sanctified) person comes to love those who love God. Hence, he comes to love others who have committed themselves to the truth about Jesus.

115. Each of the above can accurately be considered to be a necessary "condition" for salvation. If one does not strive to conform his being to all of the above elements of *hagiasmos* / *hagiosune* [holiness or sanctifiedness] (under the concept of *hagiasmos* / *hagiosune* described just above), then he will not receive mercy and salvation from God.

#### *Explicit Belief in Jesus as a Condition of Salvation*

116. A number of statements in the Bible teach something to the following effect: it is the one who believes in Jesus (that is, who believes the truth with regard to Jesus) who will be saved. And inversely, the one who does not believe in Jesus will not be saved.

117. Many Christian traditions maintain—on the basis of the above such biblical statements—that explicit belief in Jesus (however they define what that is and what that looks like) is a necessary condition for an individual to receive God’s mercy and be saved. This is not an accurate grasp of the teaching of the Bible. In biblical philosophy, the prerequisite to salvation is not actual, explicit belief in Jesus and the truth. Rather, the prerequisite to divine mercy is an inner openness to accepting and embracing those truths.

*God does not grant Life to those who believe the Truth. Rather, God grants Life to those who—because they have responded in belief to the Truth—have demonstrated an inward orientation that is “open” and “receptive” to God and the things of God.*

117.1. It is the state of one’s heart and not the presence or absence of actual, explicit belief that is ultimately determinative of one’s ultimate destiny. If one has a good heart, he will be saved to *aionic* life. If one has an evil heart, he will be condemned.

	Where X = Explicit belief in the Truth of biblical philosophy [BELIEF]	Where X = Explicit rejection of the Truth of biblical philosophy [UNBELIEF]
X is due to an evil heart	A. Destiny is <b>condemnation</b> [Example: a person who explicitly believes due to the financial or social benefit of being connected with the believing community]	B. Destiny is <b>condemnation</b> <i>{the paradigm state}</i>
X is due to good heart	C. Destiny is <b>salvation</b> <i>{the paradigm state}</i>	D. Not a possible state
One's heart is evil, but X is NOT determined by the condition of the heart	E. Due to the condition of his heart, his destiny is <b>condemnation</b> , his explicit belief notwithstanding. [Example: a merely cultural Christian who happens to have been enculturated to explicitly believe what the Bible teaches, but who manifests no real interest in the implications of the Truth]	F. Destiny is <b>condemnation</b> , but not on account of his explicit unbelief; rather, because of the condition of his heart. [Example: a person who finds it impossible to explicitly believe the Truth due to deeply ingrained cultural prejudices, but who, furthermore, manifests no real interest in the implications of the Truth]

<p>One's heart is good, but X is NOT determined by the condition of the heart</p>	<p>G. Destiny is <b>salvation</b>, but not on account of his explicit belief; rather, it is due to the condition of his heart.  [Example: a merely cultural Christian whose explicit belief in biblical truth is merely cultural; but who nonetheless manifests a real interest in living in accord with what is good, right, true, and godly.]</p>	<p>H. Destiny is <b>salvation</b>, his explicit unbelief notwithstanding—due to the condition of his heart.  [Example: a person who finds it impossible to explicitly believe the Truth due to deeply ingrained cultural prejudices, but who has a real interest in living in accord with what is good, right, true, and godly.]</p>
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*•All of the below follow from an examination of the chart above and help to further elucidate it:*

*>Neither explicit belief nor explicit unbelief is absolutely and ultimately determinative with respect to salvation. It is possible to believe and not be saved. It is possible to not believe and be saved.*

*>Condition of the heart is what is unfailingly determinative. But the condition of one's heart cannot be known unfailingly. Only God unfailingly knows the heart of man.*

*>But, as a general rule, the Bible sees the visible evidence of explicit belief as a barometer of the invisible state of a good heart.*

*>When the Bible was written, the above generalization was even more accurate and reliable than it is in modern times.*

*>At the present stage of history, a failure to explicitly believe the key truths of biblical philosophy can be an important indicator that one will not be granted aionic life. But it is not absolutely and necessarily indicative of such.*

*>If there were no countervailing cultural or personal forces at work, a normal human adult of adequate intellectual competence would inevitably come to explicitly believe the truth of biblical philosophy if his heart was rightly oriented toward God.*

*>The natural, simple correlation between right inward orientation and belief in the gospel is not always the reality of people's lives.*

117.2. In theory, it is possible to attain Life (*aionic* life) without actually, explicitly believing some of the key truths of biblical philosophy.

117.2.1. In theory—if one's heart is right *vis à vis* God—one could, due to some sort of intellectual mistake, fail to actually believe the key truths of biblical philosophy and yet, nonetheless, be saved.

117.2.2. There is a profound difference between refusing to believe the Truth and failing to believe the Truth.

117.2.3. Therefore, in theory, it is possible to attain Life (*aionic* life) without actually explicitly believing that Jesus is the Messiah.

*None of the people mentioned in Hebrews 11 had an explicit belief that Jesus was the Messiah.*

*It is theoretically possible that the circumstances of some righteous men and women today (post-Jesus) makes it so that they do not and cannot believe that Jesus is the Messiah. (A godly orthodox Jew is one possible example.)*

117.2.4. It is the state of one's heart and not one's commitment to a set of detailed doctrines that is ultimately determinative of one's ultimate destiny.

*Hebrews 11 > it is possible to be dikaious and acceptable to God while understanding and embracing a very minimal set of doctrines: (1) that God exists and (ii) that God is a "rewarder of those who seek him."*

117.2.4.1. One can have a good, sanctified heart while having a deficient set of explicit beliefs—an incomplete or faulty set of doctrines that one holds.

117.2.4.2. One can have an evil, unsanctified heart while having a complete and accurate set of doctrines that one holds.

117.3. Biblical philosophy teaches that Life (*aionic* life) is granted on the basis of a moral/spiritual condition, not on the basis of an epistemological condition. That is, it is granted on the basis of what kind of person one is, morally; not fundamentally on the basis of whether one has come to know and understand something. (The Bible does assume that right belief is correlated with soundness of heart, that the act of belief is a reflection of one's moral/spiritual state.)

117.3.1. To make salvation hinge on an epistemological act or condition would be bizarre. It would be bizarre if a "good" person who did not believe was condemned while the "bad" person who does believe is saved. (Unfortunately, just this is what is sometimes understood to be biblical philosophy.)

117.3.2. The criterion whereby human beings are judged is NOT whether we believe (nor what we believe). Rather, it is whether we are willing to believe the TRUTH, even though it is offensive to us. Four things follow from this:

(i) It is not the FACT that one does not believe that is the basis of condemnation; rather it is the fact that one has willfully suppressed the truth and has actively refused to acknowledge it as truth.

(ii) It is not the FACT that one does not believe that is the basis of condemnation; rather it is the moral-spiritual condition that has resulted in one's unbelief that is the basis of condemnation.

(iii) It is NOT the case, then, that everyone who does NOT believe will therefore be condemned by God. If someone does NOT believe out of ignorance, they will not be condemned for their unbelief. The one who will be condemned is the one who

does not believe due to his rebellion against God and his suppression of truth.

(iv) From the biblical perspective, the criterion by which we are judged IS ultimately a moral and spiritual one. It is whether we are so hostile to God and to truth that we are unwilling to acknowledge it; or whether we are open to God and truth. It is a matter of our moral/spiritual state.

- 117.4. While the nature of what a person believes cannot establish decisively whether a person has a sanctified heart (that is, whether he is a “righteous” person who loves the truth and wants his beliefs and actions to be grounded in it), yet the nature and content of what a person believes is not irrelevant to that issue either. (It can be a very important indicator of the fundamental condition of his heart, of his fundamental orientation to truth, goodness, and God.)
- 117.4.1. If we understand the Bible’s teaching about the human condition and the state of human depravity, it follows that most of our false and evil beliefs are rooted, at least in part, in our lack of righteousness. For most people most of the time, it is more accurate to describe them as unrighteous people inclined toward lies and false beliefs than it is to describe them as righteous people innocently shaped by cultural beliefs that are false.
- 117.4.2. Indeed, the belief that most people are INNOCENT victims of their cultures is itself an attractive lie. It is certainly true that culture is a very powerful influence on every one of us. But it is NOT true that we can never transcend the influence of our culture. And, it is NOT true that we are innocent in the process of being shaped by our culture. Culture is nothing other than a community of evil liars telling lies to one another.
- 117.4.3. It is in keeping with the above observations that Jesus taught the following: (i) If someone says he knows the Father and rejects the Son, he is a liar. He does not know the Father. (ii) Anyone who knows the Father will come to the Son.
- 117.4.3.1. These must be interpreted in the context in which Jesus uttered them. We cannot justly apply them to a primitive tribe in the jungles of the Philippines concerning their lack of belief. Jesus was speaking to an audience that did not lack information about the truth.
- 117.4.3.2. But it would be equally invalid to ASSUME that the primitive Filipino tribesman is innocent. While his ignorance is NOT irrelevant—it does not necessarily ex-

onerate him.

117.5. The openness and receptivity to the truth of, from, and about God (Faith) is an element of the holiness that sanctification produces in the inner person of the one whom God has chosen to save. This is one of the more striking and important indicators of salvation; but it is not the only one.

*Contrition as a Condition for Salvation*

118. At a most fundamental level, one of the most important conditions placed by God on divine mercy—and, therefore, on salvation—is contrition in the face of one's own individual sin and culpability.

118.1. Since there can be no contrition with respect to sin without an acknowledgement of sin, personal acknowledgment of one's own sin and guilt is a necessary condition for divine mercy and salvation. No one who refuses to admit the reality and/or seriousness of his sin will be granted mercy by God.

119. In biblical philosophy, God—who knows the inner realities of an individual's being—is able to know whether an individual is contrite in response to the reality of his own sin and moral depravity. However, there are several significant outward indicators that can be indicative of this state of contrition as well.

119.1. One such indicator is an openness to believe that the Jesus who—having been arrested and crucified by the Romans in collusion with the Jewish establishment—was a failed, defeated, and humiliated person was the promised Messiah.

119.1.1. In the light of how Jesus' life ended in humiliation and death, a person can believe that Jesus is the Son of God only if he believes—as Jesus taught—that he (Jesus) was voluntarily going to his death in order to die a death that represented the death that every other person deserves for his own individual sins. Consequently, a person will not and cannot be open to the proposition that the crucified Jesus is the Son of God unless one has come to fully acknowledge that he deserves a judgment like the one acted out toward Jesus on the cross. In other words, contrition for one's sinfulness is a necessary precondition for belief that the crucified Jesus is the Messiah. Therefore, belief that the crucified Jesus was the Messiah necessarily entails the sort of contrition that will be met by God with mercy.

119.1.2. Jesus' death by crucifixion was purposed by God to be an important and significant

test for mankind. In effect, Jesus' sufferings poses a question to every human being: "In Jesus' sufferings, God was depicting his wrath toward human sin. Do you deserve such wrath? Are you that reprehensible?" Every human being who can answer, "Yes, I do deserve such wrath. I am that reprehensible," is one who is being sanctified by God and destined for eternal Life. Every human being who, one way or another, answers, "No, I do not deserve any such thing from God," is one who is not being sanctified by God and is not destined for eternal Life.

119.1.2.1. How one responds to and assesses the sufferings of Jesus is the ultimate test in all of human history that sorts out and distinguishes those who will be saved from those who will not.

119.1.3. It is primarily in this sense and by this line of reasoning that the New Testament authors maintain that the one who will be saved is the one who has faith—that is, the one who believes the truth that the crucified Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. Traditionally, this has been labeled the doctrine of "justification by faith." The one who can see his way to embrace the truth that this got-himself-crucified Jesus is the promised Messiah is one whose inner desires, attitudes, and perspectives are rightly oriented toward God and the things of God such that a Messiah who was sent by God to die the death that we sinners deserve will make sense to him.

119.1.3.1. "Faith"—belief in the truth of Jesus' identity and role—is not the basis or ground of salvation. It is, rather, a condition of salvation. But even calling it a condition of salvation is not exactly accurate for two reasons: (1) The ultimate condition of salvation is an inner heart attitude. Belief (faith) is a condition of salvation only to the extent that belief (faith) is indicative of that inner heart attitude that is the ultimate condition of salvation. (2) The condition of salvation is not so much belief that Jesus is the Christ as it is belief that Jesus is the Christ in light of the FACT of his crucifixion and humiliation. Overcoming the crucifixion as an obstacle to belief can only result from a profound contrition in the face of one's own sin.

119.1.3.2. Belief (faith) is indicative of the inner heart attitude that will be granted mercy (salvation) because, primarily (but not exclusively), it is indicative of one's being contrite in the face of one's own individual moral unworthiness.

119.2. A second important indicator of inward contrition is this: in the context of a desire to keep the Covenant that God made with the people of Israel, a sincere and meaningful



participation in the propitiatory offerings prescribed by the Mosaic Covenant.

- 119.2.1. It is one's inward attitude and orientation and not the mere outward offering of the offerings that is key to whether this manifests the requisite contrition. God did not prescribe the offerings because he wanted the blood or carcasses of dead animals. God wanted the "broken and contrite heart" of the worshipper.
- 119.3. The most general articulation of the condition for salvation is found in *Hebrews* 11:6, "Now without faith it is impossible to please [God]. Now he who comes to God must believe that he {God} is and that he {God} is a rewarder of those who seek him." This is the most general level at which the condition of salvation can be articulated. Here, Paul is suggesting that the inward heart attitude that meets the condition for salvation may outwardly express itself in nothing more than the person's "seeking" God out of a conviction that God will "reward those who seek him." Obviously, only God can accurately interpret whether a man's outward attempts to "seek" God do, in fact, reflect the requisite inner heart orientation.
- 119.3.1. It is not obvious that "believing that God exists and that he is a rewarder of those who seek him" is indicative of someone who acknowledges his moral guilt and is appropriately contrite. However, in the light of everything the Bible teaches, it would seem apparent that Paul presupposes an attitude of just such contrition as the basis for and context of such a belief.
- 119.3.1.1. It is entirely implausible to think that Paul could suggest that a person would be "justified" in God's eyes who fulfilled the conditions of (a) believing that God existed, and (b) believing that God would "bless" him, but whose beliefs were rooted in presumption, arrogance, and a sense that he deserved to be blessed by God. Clearly, in view of everything Paul teaches elsewhere, he is meaning to suggest that the one who will be justified in God's eyes is the one who understands and acknowledges the fact and seriousness of his own depravity and guilt, but who, at the same time, believes that God, in his mercy, is capable of blessing him in spite of that depravity and guilt.
- 119.4. Contrition in the face of one's moral depravity and unworthiness is an element of the holiness that sanctification produces in the inner person of the one whom God has chosen to save. This is one of the more striking and important indicators of salvation; but it is not the only one.

*Yearning for Goodness (Righteousness) as a Condition for Salvation*

120. Another important condition placed by God on divine mercy—and, therefore, on salvation—is an inward yearning to be truly and authentically good—to be like God with regard to his moral perfection and purity.
- 120.1. Included within the ultimate blessing that God has promised to the *hagioi* is their moral transformation. God has promised to make them have God-like moral perfection. Accordingly, this condition for salvation is tantamount to longing for and yearning to receive the very blessing that God has promised to grant to those whom God has chosen. In other words, it is an authentic yearning for the ultimate outcome that God has promised.
- 120.1.1. This condition placed on salvation amounts to this: if and only if one genuinely wants to be saved will a person be saved.
- 120.2. This eager yearning for righteous perfection is an element of the holiness that sanctification produces in the inner person of the one whom God has chosen to save. This is one of the more striking and important indicators of salvation; but it is not the only one.

*Perseverance as a Condition for Salvation*

121. One important piece of evidence that one is truly being sanctified (and, therefore, chosen for salvation) is the durable or persistent nature of one's belief in the truth about Jesus. The belief that evidences sanctification endures through any and all kinds of life circumstances.
- 121.1. The Bible describes it like this: the one who is truly being saved is the one who perseveres in believing the truth of the gospel.
- 121.2. Belief in the truth of the gospel *per se* is relatively easy and attainable. Such belief is remarkable only when it persists and continues when life circumstances have not rewarded it—or, indeed, when circumstances have punished it. Belief in the gospel that can survive being punished (or unrewarded) is a significant sort of belief that has substantial import. Only belief that persists through and survives any and all of life circumstances is a belief that evidences the fact that one is being sanctified and has been chosen by God for salvation.
- 121.2.1. One can decide to follow Jesus for a wide variety of reasons. Many of those reasons can be quite shallow and self-serving. [I may think that by following Jesus I will secure material, physical benefit in this present age (health, wealth, pleasure, etc.), or I may think that I will secure emotional/psychological reward (glory, honor, re-

spect, joy, tranquility, etc.]). Life has a way of disappointing any false expectations one has with respect to his belief. The person who believed in Jesus with the expectation of receiving various things that were never promised will soon be disappointed; and, as a result, such a disappointed person will typically stop believing. He will typically discard his belief in Jesus and the gospel.

121.2.2. Alternatively, one can decide to follow Jesus for the fundamental reason that he is the source and center of truth itself. The one who does this follows Jesus simply because to do so is right, good, and true. This sort of belief and commitment is relatively immune from disappointment. No matter how little one's belief in Jesus has rewarded him with physical or psycho-emotional benefit, and no matter how much it might have led to suffering, believing in Jesus remains right, good, and true nonetheless. Hence, such a believer would typically continue to believe through any and all of life's circumstances. It is this sort of belief—a belief that persists through thick and thin—that marks a person as destined for salvation.

121.3. A pursuit of holiness that persists through any and all circumstances is an element of the holiness that sanctification produces in the inner person of the one whom God has chosen to save. This is one of the more striking and important indicators of salvation; but it is not the only one.

*Trials, Tribulation, and Perseverance: Their Role in Salvation*

122. Given that only a belief that persists through any and every life circumstance can mark a person as a *hagios* (and chosen for salvation), certain life circumstances probe and test the nature and character of one's belief (faith). When some life circumstance is of such a nature that it tends to reveal whether or not a person's belief in Jesus authentically marks him as chosen for salvation (that is, as a *hagios*), then that life circumstance is called a "test" or a "trial."

122.1. A "trial" (or "test") is a life circumstance—whether it be positive and seemingly beneficial, or negative, and seemingly adverse—that probes a person's inner commitments and reveals whether or not he is being sanctified. It does this by creating a circumstance where inauthentic belief (void of authentic inward commitments to follow Jesus) is unlikely to survive.

122.1.1. Only a belief in Jesus that can survive life's "trials" is a belief that is indicative of one's salvation.

- 122.1.2. One and the same event can be viewed as a “trial” or as a “temptation.” Both concepts—either “trial” or “temptation”—have in view some life event that “probes” a person’s inward commitments to determine whether those commitments are strong and authentic or weak and inauthentic. If the purpose of the probe is seen to be a positive purpose—namely, to simply evaluate the state of one’s commitments (that is, one’s faith) then it is considered to be a “trial.” If the purpose of the probe is seen to be a negative purpose—namely, to find a weakness or inadequacy in one’s commitments (one’s faith) in order to seduce that person into abandoning those commitments (that is, his faith), then it is considered a “temptation.”

*There are three Greek words used in the New Testament that are relevant to this discussion. The verb dokimazo (usually translated "to test") seems to be used to describe the evaluative aspect of testing. A teacher tests (dokimazo) his students when he evaluates them and assesses how they are doing. The verb peirazo (usually translated as either "to try" or "to tempt") seems to be used to describe the information gathering aspect of testing. In order to evaluate the enemy's line of defense, a general must probe (peirazo) that line of defense. If the general orders his soldiers to charge, he may very well be testing (peirazo) his enemies defenses. (Peirasmoi, in our English translations, are typically either "trials" or "temptations.") According to biblical teaching, God sends human beings through various trials (peirasmoi). God's purpose is to "test" the strength and authenticity of our commitments. If those commitments prove weak, God would want us to strengthen them. If those commitments prove inauthentic, God would want us to repent and make an authentic commitment. From the standpoint of God's purposes, a life circumstance that probes our commitments (that is, a peirasmos) is a "trial." Satan's purpose is to locate a weakness in our commitments and destroy them. In exactly the same life circumstance that God sends as a "trial," Satan would want to exploit that life circumstance in order to destroy our belief and, therefore, destroy us. From the standpoint of Satan's purposes, therefore, that very same life circumstance that probes our commitments (that is, a peirasmos) is a "temptation," that is, a life circumstance that, potentially, could seduce me away from a belief and commitment to the truth. Hence, the same Greek words (peirazo, peirasmos) can be used to denote a "test" or "trial" (as viewed from the standpoint of God's purpose and agenda) or a "temptation" (as viewed from the standpoint of Satan's purpose and agenda).*

- 122.2. A trial is a life circumstance that puts pressure on one’s belief in and commitment to Jesus. It creates pressure toward unbelief. Accordingly, such a life circumstance is often called a “tribulation” (that is, that which "pushes" on a person). A tribulation is the sort of circumstance that typically causes an inauthentic, wrongly-based commitment to Jesus to fail.

122.2.1. Only a strong, unwavering commitment to Jesus because it is good and right to be committed to Jesus can withstand tribulation.

122.2.2. It is typically adverse circumstances that constitute tribulation. (E.g., loss, failure, tragedy, disappointment, etc.). Accordingly, when the Bible speaks of tribulation, it typically has adverse circumstances in view. However, as a matter of principle, positive circumstances could also be a tribulation in certain contexts. If one’s success and prosperity is of such a nature and is in such a context that it would typically

lead inauthentic or wrongly-based belief to collapse (or evaporate), then it could meaningfully be described as a “tribulation.” Specifically, if a positive event puts pressure on one’s explicit belief such that it would not likely endure were it not authentic, then that positive event is a “tribulation.” Nonetheless, more often than not, the world “tribulation” has negative events (not positive ones) in view.

122.3. Only a belief in the Truth (Jesus, the gospel) that perseveres through the trials (the tribulations) of life is a belief that indicates that one will be saved.

122.3.1. Only the perseverance of a person's belief (faith) through all of the circumstances of life that would tend to cause a person to abandon such belief (that is, trials, tests, tribulations/temptations) can show that that person’s commitments are authentic. This, in turn, indicates that he is truly a *hagios*, which, in turn, indicates that he has been chosen by God for mercy and salvation.

122.3.1.1. This is why Peter tells his readers that the authentication of one's belief through testing is "more precious than pure gold." (1 Peter 1:7)

### **The Content of the Hope of the Gospel**

*There are only two possible outcomes of an individual human’s existence. On the one hand, he can undergo punishment and destruction. Or, if he qualifies for salvation, not only does he escape punishment and destruction, but he is furthermore granted the ultimate blessing instead. Biblical philosophy knows no other possible outcome. For example, one cannot be rescued from punishment and destruction and yet fall short of being granted the ultimate blessing. Accordingly, there are only two possible outcomes: (1) punishment and destruction, or (2) the ultimate blessing.*

123. The ultimate blessing that awaits those to whom God has chosen to grant mercy is described in a number of different ways. The more important of those ways are as follows: (i) the blessing of Abraham, (ii) *aionic* (eternal) Life, (iii) the Kingdom of God, (iv) righteousness, (v) glory, (vi) honor, and (vi) immortality.

123.1. The ultimate blessing that God has promised to the elect (the chosen) is multi-faceted. Accordingly, it is reasonable that it can be described in different ways, from a number of different angles.

124. One description of the ultimate blessing that awaits the elect is “the blessing of Abraham.” When God initially approached Abraham, he promised that he would “bless” Abraham and, also, that “in him, all the peoples of the earth would be blessed.” The Bible understands this blessing as foundational to everything else that God does throughout the whole of human

history. The whole of God's dealings with his own people (the Jews) and everything he does with respect to every other human being throughout history is the story of God dynamically selecting out those who would be included in the set of those who, by being "in Abraham," would receive the same blessing as Abraham.

- 124.1. In the context of Abraham's situation, it is most likely that the "blessing" promised to him was the promise of *aionic* Life. In the history of mankind up to the time of Abraham, it was clear that every human being was "cursed" with death. If the problem of human existence was the curse of death, then it stands to reason that the "blessing" that God was offering Abraham was the "blessing" of Life.
  - 124.2. At the very beginning of the main story line of history, therefore, God has proclaimed the "gospel" to Abraham. While all of mankind is, by their very nature, under the curse of death, God—in his mercy—is promising to grant to Abraham the blessing of Life instead. But this "good news" is not exclusive to Abraham. God is further promising that from all of the peoples of the earth God is going to select out a set of human individuals who—by being Abraham's "children" (that is, by being "in him")—will, with Abraham, be granted the blessing of Life that they do not deserve rather than the curse of death that they do deserve.
125. The typical description of the ultimate blessing that awaits the elect is *aionic* Life (usually translated "eternal life"). Often, it is just referred to as "life." *Aionic Life* is an existence without evil, futility, corruption, or death in the new, recreated (or refurbished) Earth in the final Age (*Aion*) to come.
- 125.1. Note that the concept of *aionic* Life is of a multi-faceted, rich, and textured existence. It is not a narrow, one-dimensional existence as many conceptions of the ultimate blessing within Christian tradition conceive of it.
  - 125.2. *Aionic* Life is more accurately conceived of as a dynamic, never-ending adventure than it is as a static, endless state of being.
    - 125.2.1. The biblical conception of *aionic* Life (the ultimate blessing) is significantly different from the conception of the "blessed" eternal state to be found in various Christian traditions. (E.g., the "beatific vision") Christian traditions tend toward conceptions of eternal blessedness that consist of a never-ending static state of (usually) either perfect love or perfect sight. And, it is assumed, a static state of eternal ecstasy. These are not at all what the Bible actually teaches.

- 125.2.1.1. These conceptions of the ultimate blessedness are typically derived from or, at least, encouraged by the Platonic/Aristotelian influences on Christianity.
- 125.2.2. As best one can glean from the Bible, *aionic* Life will be continuous with life and existence in the present evil age. Everything that this life here and now has to offer will continue to be part of *aionic* Life, with one notable difference. Everything will be significantly glorious than it is in the here and now. And nothing will be subject to death, dissolution, corruption, or futility.
- 125.3. The Bible describes this as the hope of life. It describes it metaphorically as being awarded the crown of life.
126. Another important description of the ultimate blessing that awaits the elect is the Kingdom of God. The blessing that God grants to his elect is that they will have a place—an existence—in the coming Kingdom of God.
- 126.1. The coming Kingdom of God is where God's sovereign reign over all of created reality goes unchallenged. It is a state of created reality where God is perfectly and unexceptionally in control of all things, in the sense that what God actually desires and values is reflected in everything that is and in everything that occurs.
- 126.1.1. In the present "evil Age" God reigns over all of creation in the sense that he is the author and determiner of all of reality. But, in the present evil Age, it is not the case that everything that is and everything that occurs is consistent with and reflective of God's character, desires, values, and preferences. Much occurs that is not consonant with God and his values. This will not always be so. The time is coming—in the final Age of created reality—when every enemy of God (death, evil, destruction, etc.) will be destroyed and God's values and preferences will prevail in all of reality.
- 126.2. In the coming Kingdom of God, God's sovereign reign over all of created reality, will be embodied in the person of his Son, the Messiah, Jesus. Jesus will rule as King in the final Kingdom of God.
- 126.2.1. The ultimate blessing for God's elect is to be granted citizen status in the coming eternal Kingdom where Jesus will rule as King over all of creation.
- 126.2.2. The Kingdom of God in the coming Age is rightly conceived as a dynamic, never-ending adventure. It would be inaccurate to reduce it to a static, but endless, state of being.

127. Another important description of the ultimate blessing that awaits the elect is righteousness. By “righteousness” is meant moral perfection—the complete elimination of all sin and evil within the character of the elect. The *hagioi* will be blessed with having their very beings transformed so that they will be perfectly and naturally good, rather naturally and hopelessly evil and depraved.
- 127.1. In the final Kingdom of God, every enemy of God will be defeated, destroyed, and eliminated. Human evil is only one of the “enemies” of God that will be eliminated, but it is one that is particularly noteworthy in the biblical teaching. Significant stress is put on the fact that the elect will be rewarded with goodness and righteousness. They will be transformed into creatures who are intrinsically worthy and honorable as a result of their moral transformation. In certain biblical contexts, this is highlighted as the primary, core benefit to the ultimate blessing that awaits the elect.
- 127.1.1. To be “like” God (morally) is the ultimate purpose for man’s existence. Accordingly, mankind’s true *eudaimonia* (fulfillment) results from his being like God, that is, from his being pure in his goodness and righteousness.
- 127.2. The ultimate blessing for God’s elect is to be granted true *eudaimonia*—the *eudaimonia* that results from being perfectly righteous.
- 127.3. The Bible describes this as the hope of righteousness. It describes it metaphorically as being awarded the crown of righteousness.
128. Another important description of the ultimate blessing that awaits the elect is glory.
- 128.1. The concept of “glory” is the concept of the capability to inspire awe. If something is glorious, it is awe-inspiring. A person can be awe-inspiring (that is, “glorious”) for a variety of different reasons. (A person can be awe-inspiringly intelligent, beautiful, wise, strong, successful, etc.) There are two specific senses in which the *hagios* will be blessed with “glory”: most importantly, (i) he will be granted the glory that attaches to perfect goodness; but further, (ii) he will be granted the glory of becoming a significantly more awesome kind of creature.
- 128.1.1. In the Bible, God is said to have glory—that is, the tendency to inspire awe. God is “glorious” for a wide variety of reasons. The only sense in which a human being can or will share in the glory of God is with respect to moral perfection. According to the Bible, the *hagios* will one day be glorious, just as God is glorious, in the purity of his moral goodness.



- 128.1.1.1. The underlying biblical assumption here is that moral goodness is awe-inspiring because it has a kind of dazzling beauty about it.
- 128.1.1.2. Therefore, in many biblical contexts, “glory” is simply another way that the Bible describes moral perfection. The glory that awaits the elect is the complete elimination of all sin and evil within his being. The *hagioi* will be blessed with having their very beings transformed so that they will be perfectly and naturally good, rather than naturally and hopelessly evil and depraved.
- 128.1.2. The Bible also recognizes that with the re-creation of the new heavens and the new Earth will come a complete transformation of the human body and being of God’s elect. In the age to come, the *hagios* will not have the same body he has in this age (his “earthly” body); rather, he will be given a new body (a “spiritual” body). The new, “spiritual” body will be significantly more glorious than his older, original body. Sometimes, the Bible has in mind the greater glory of his newly minted body and being when it speaks of the “glory” that awaits the *hagioi*.
  - 128.1.2.1. The more glorious material existence that awaits God’s elect is always seen as significantly less valuable and important than the glory of the moral perfection that awaits them.
- 128.2. The Bible describes this as the hope of the glory of God. It describes it metaphorically as being awarded the crown of glory.
129. A less important (and less frequent) description of the ultimate blessing that awaits the elect is honor.
  - 129.1. Just as moral perfection is “glorious”, so is it “honorable.” The honor that awaits the *hagios* is the honor—that is, the true objective respectability—that will belong to him by virtue of his unflawed moral goodness.
130. Another less important (and less frequent) description of the ultimate blessing that awaits the elect is immortality.
  - 130.1. Immortality is simply the condition of being no longer subject to death. This is an important aspect of *Aionic* Life (as defined above). *Aionic* Life is much more than immortality, but it is certainly no less than immortality. The person who has been given *Aionic* Life will no longer be subject to death.

## **The Nature and Significance of Belief and "Faith"**

131. *Pistis* (what most Christian traditions call “faith”) is a very important touchstone or litmus test with respect to whether a person is a *hagios* who is going to be saved. An accurate concept of what the N.T. calls *pistis*, therefore, is critical to an accurate understanding of biblical philosophy. The biblical concept of the *pistis* that saves a person is as follows: *pistis* (saving belief / saving faith) is an eager, believing, life-defining response to the “good news” that is contained within the truth of divine mercy that centers in Jesus. (That is, it is an eager, believing response of one's inner person to what is traditionally called the “gospel.”)

*The fact that it is belief ("faith") that leads to salvation is a well-established doctrine in various Christian traditions. This is so much the case that, for many Christians, belief can virtually be defined as "that which saves us." Such an identification will make it quite confusing when I eventually suggest that (a) a person can believe without being saved, and that (b) a person can be saved without believing. These claims will sound contradictory to many Christians. It sounds like I am saying that a person can meet the one and only condition for salvation and yet not be saved. Or, that a person can be saved without meeting the one and only condition for salvation. In order to avoid confusion as best I can, I need to carefully define the terms I will use in the following notes and attempt to use them consistently. Here is what I shall always mean by the following terms:*

• *intellectual assent* (e.g., intellectual assent to the gospel) = a conscious, explicit assent to something being true (e.g., a conscious, explicit assent to the fact that the gospel is true)

• *saving belief* = intellectual assent [as defined above] to the gospel accompanied by an authentic existential commitment to live one's life in the light of the truth of the gospel

• *belief* (the Greek word used by the N.T. authors to refer to belief is *pistis*) = the simple, straightforward act of giving intellectual assent to something without regard to what else may or may not be true (e.g., the simple act of giving intellectual assent to the truth of the gospel, without specifying whatever else might be true of one's relation to the gospel). If belief / *pistis* is accompanied by an authentic existential commitment to live one's life in the light of the truth of the gospel, then that belief/*pistis* amounts to saving belief (or, what is commonly called saving faith). If belief / *pistis* is NOT accompanied by an authentic existential commitment to live one's life in the light of the gospel, then it is mere intellectual assent to the truth of the gospel and does not constitute saving belief (saving faith).

*In some contexts, the N.T. authors clearly use *pistis* to mean what I just defined above as saving belief. In other contexts, they use *pistis* simply to refer to intellectual assent to the truth of the gospel, as I just defined it. Therefore, the word *pistis* is, in and of itself, ambiguous and unclear when it is used in the N.T. It always entails the fact that one is giving intellectual assent to the gospel. But, depending upon the context, it may or may not be of such a nature that it meets the condition for salvation on the part of the one who is giving that intellectual assent. In other words, it always involves intellectual assent, but it may or may not involve the authentic existential commitment that makes that intellectual assent saving belief.*

131.1. The *pistis* (belief) that is involved in the “saving belief / saving faith” of which the biblical authors speak is, in the first place, a rational response to the evidence. It is not an extra-rational mode of coming to knowledge and belief. It is not some alternative way of coming to knowledge. It is a strictly intelligent and commonsensical response to evidence with which one has been confronted. The Bible never distinguishes “faith” from

"belief" as if, "faith" were some kind of alternative path whereby a person could come to know and believe.

*One widespread view that has held sway for centuries is that things pertaining to God are known through "faith," not through rational inquiry and investigation. This view implies that "faith" is an alternate way of coming to a knowledge of God that does not employ the ordinary rational methods, processes, and faculties. This is a view that has absolutely no support from the Bible. The Bible clearly assumes that anything one knows and understands about God and the things of God is attained through normal rational channels.*

- 131.1.1. The belief (faith) that is involved in the "saving belief / saving faith" of which the biblical authors speak is rational conviction; but it is not "certainty" (if by "certainty" we mean something akin to logical or mathematical certainty).
- 131.1.2. It is the fact that it is an ordinary rational response to evidence that gives rise to its being labeled "belief" (or "faith"); for the normal ordinary meaning of the word *pistis* is to denote something that an ordinary person believes in the way human beings typically come to believe things.

*There are two important intellectual mistakes that have affected the whole history of Christian thought down to the present: (i) the view that "faith" is, in fact, something like an extra-rational way of knowing; and (ii) the view that a distinctive attribute of "faith" is its being a kind of certain and unshakable belief. The "pistis" (belief, or faith) described by the biblical authors is neither of these. It is NOT an extra-rational way of knowing; it is ordinary, rational belief based on the evidence before a person. And, it is NOT absolute certainty. The one who has pistis will experience all the ordinary doubts and uncertainties that accompany any and all forms of belief. Doubt and uncertainty with regard to one's belief in God, Jesus, or the gospel do not signal some sort of spiritual problem or inadequacy. They are a typical accompaniment to any human knowledge and belief.*

131.2. The *pistis* (belief) that is involved in the "saving belief / saving faith" of which the biblical authors speak is, in the second place, an existential response to the truth of the gospel. Specifically, it is an existential commitment made to what one has decided is true with respect to the gospel and Jesus. While *pistis* (in the sense of saving belief / saving faith) is, at heart, an intellectual response to the truth of the gospel, it is not ONLY and not PRIMARILY an intellectual response. It is indeed an existential commitment to it.

- 131.2.1. By an "existential commitment", I mean a commitment to have one's whole life and being defined by his living his life in conformity to the truth of the gospel.

*The demons believe that "God is One." But they do not conduct the course of their existence in conformity with that fact. They rightly submit to the truth about Jesus, intellectually. But they do not make an existential commitment to define their very existence in conformity to that truth. Demons persist in rebellion against the truth, even though they acknowledge intellectually that the truth is the truth. The opposite of rebellion against the truth is an existential commitment to submit to and live in accord with the truth.*

- 131.2.2. The "existential commitment" element within saving belief is not captured by the

meaning of the word *pistis* (belief) *per se*. One can give intellectual assent to something (the first and primary meaning of the word *pistis*) without making an existential commitment to it. (E.g., I can give intellectual assent to the fact (believe) that there is a continent surrounding the South Pole called Antarctica without defining my very existence in conformity to that truth.) But it is clear from the Bible that an existential commitment to the truth is always being tacitly assumed when there is a discussion of saving belief.

- 131.2.3. Every Christian tradition has rightly recognized that there is more to saving belief than mere intellectual assent to the truth of the gospel. It has been a matter of diverse opinions what exactly that extra, added element is. A common view is that the added dimension or element that turns intellectual assent into saving belief is some form of emotionality. Not uncommonly, Christians think that some kind of passionate emotional feeling connected to one's intellectual assent to the truth of the gospel is what transforms it from mere intellectual assent into true saving "faith." This is not right. The added dimension that makes intellectual assent saving "faith" is not EMOTIONALITY. It is existential investment.

•Saving belief (faith) ≠ intellectual assent + intense emotional response

•Saving belief (faith) = intellectual assent + existential investment

- 131.2.3.1. Existential investment or commitment is a deeply inward reality or phenomenon. Emotionality, by way of comparison, is a relatively outward reality or phenomenon. Salvation is based on the state of one's inward orientation to God, not on the basis of any outward response or expression (except to the extent that the outward response is reflective of an inward orientation).

132. The spiritual significance of *pistis* (belief/faith) arises from the connection between what I do embrace as true (epistemology) and what I am willing to accept as true (morality/spirituality). That is, if I do not want to admit that something is true, I will rationalize why I do not believe it is true. Reason and evidence will not be compelling to the person who does NOT WANT TO BE compelled. A refusal to believe, therefore, is indicative of an unwillingness to believe. And when it comes to God and the things of God, to be unwilling to obey the truth about him is morally reprehensible.

- 132.1. Accordingly, *pistis* (belief/faith) in the gospel is offered as a very important and sensitive litmus test of one's spiritual condition. It is those who manifest saving *pistis* (belief/faith)

who are *hagioi*, children of God, justified, heirs of eternal Life, etc.

132.2. Saving *pistis* (belief/faith) is not the only indicator of one's spiritual condition (and, therefore, of one's status as a *hagios*), but it is the one that receives special emphasis throughout much of the New Testament.

132.2.1. It is important to note that *pistis* (belief/faith) is not an infallible indicator of one's status as a *hagios*. (One can sincerely assent to the truth of the gospel without being a *hagios*, if it is not accompanied by an authentic inward, existential commitment to it.) Neither is *pistis* (belief/faith) an absolutely necessary condition of salvation. (One can be sanctified by God as a *hagios*, as manifest by a transformation one's inner orientation, without having yet given intellectual assent to the gospel.) But *pistis* (belief/faith) or intellectual assent to the gospel is a relatively immediate, accessible, and dramatic litmus test that, TYPICALLY, marks those who are *hagios*.

132.2.2. When intellectual assent constitutes saving belief, it is not the ACT of giving intellectual assent to the gospel that saves us; rather, the basis of our salvation is the inward spiritual condition that that saving belief/faith reflects—namely, the state of being sanctified.

133. The content to which saving belief/faith gives assent is, roughly speaking, the gospel. However, one's salvation is not dependent upon the correctness of the gospel which one believes and to which he is committed. One's salvation is not contingent upon his believing a prescribed set of ORTHODOX beliefs. Rather, salvation is contingent on one's openness to God, to the story of the gospel, and to the truth about God's purposes and promises. Salvation arises from just such a deeply inward receptivity to the gospel (that typically will result in explicit belief in the gospel). Salvation does not require a flawless understanding of the gospel; it requires an authentic and genuine openness to the truth of the gospel and what the gospel implies.

133.1. It is not the clarity and accuracy of ones' grasp of the content of the gospel that indicates his salvation. Rather, one's salvation is indicated by the authenticity of his inner orientation toward God and by his positive response to the story of his saving grace.

133.1.1. One need not be doctrinally right to be saved. One need only be sound of heart (where soundness of heart would be measured by one's being inwardly responsive to God and the things of God). Typically, soundness of heart will eventually and ultimately lead to rightness of doctrine. But it is not rightness of doctrine that is

spiritually significant. Rather, it is the soundness of heart that can be reflected in right doctrine that speaks to one's spiritual condition.

### **Faith (Belief) Versus Works of the Law**

*The role of obedient conformity to the requirements of the Mosaic Covenant is one of the most important controversies discussed in the pages of the New Testament. (It is especially important in Paul's writings. It is the primary issue being discussed in Galatians. It is one of the important issues in Romans. It is an important part of the discussion of Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. It is mentioned in passing in most of Paul's other letters.) It is in answering this question that greater clarity is achieved in one's understanding of the gospel itself. The notes on this subject will focus primarily on Paul's discussion of this topic.*

134. When Paul insists that a person is saved by *pistis* (belief/faith) and not by “works of the Law,” he has in view one of two very different mistakes: (i) the mistaken belief that obedience to the Law is the basis for *aionic* Life, or (ii) the mistaken belief that obedience to the Law is a necessary condition for receiving divine mercy.
  - 134.1. One tendency of the Jews in biblical times was to manifest a mindset that obedience to the Law was the basis upon which one would be granted *aionic* Life. Paul insists that the one and only way that any human being will receive *aionic* Life is as the result of divine mercy. No human being will be granted *aionic* Life apart from divine mercy granted in response to Jesus' advocacy and intercession. No human being can ever be granted *aionic* Life because his obedience to the Law makes him worthy of it. In this sense, no human being can ever attain Life (and be saved from death) by his “works of the Law.”
    - 134.1.1. God's intention, from the very beginning, was to grant *aionic* Life as an act of mercy. (The ultimate condition for that mercy was an open receptivity to the truth of God, most especially to the truth about Jesus. But such open receptivity to the truth [faith] was always intended to be a condition for *receiving mercy*. Such receptivity to the truth does not and cannot make a person *deserving* of [or *worthy* of] the blessing of *aionic* Life.)
      - 134.1.1.1. Given the nature of a human being's inherent moral unworthiness, faithful obedience to the requirements of the Mosaic Covenant is not sufficient to overcome or compensate for what his moral depravity deserves. Accordingly, no human being could ever be granted *aionic* life as a deserved “reward” for his faithfulness in “keeping” the Law. Even total blamelessness in keeping the Covenant is not good enough to make a person worthy of *aionic* Life. Due to a human tendency toward self-deceived self-righteousness, the Jews of biblical times tended toward this very mistaken mindset that faithful obedience to the