



Finding God Reasonable

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. - Romans 12:1

A Philosophical Treatise on
Reasonableness

John H. King

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*My thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,
saith the LORD - Isaiah 55:8*

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The following list of English translations might help to identify the limited use of them in this work. [<https://solarmythology.com/translations/bibles.htm>]

- AMP Amplified Bible 2015
- AMPC Amplified Bible Classic Edition 1965
- ASV American Standard Version 1901
- BBE Bible in Basic English 1965
- CEB Common English Bible, 2011
- CEV Contemporary English Version 1995 (NT - 1991)
- CSB Christian Standard Bible 2016
- CWB Clear Word Bible 1992
- ERV Easy to Read 2015
- ESV English Standard Version 2003
- ICB NCV International Children's Bible, New Century Version 1986 (NT - 1978)
- JPB J.B. Phillips New Testament in Modern English 1958 (Revised 1972)
- KJ21 Twenty-First Century King James Version 1994 (NT - 1992)
- KJV AV King James Version (also known as Authorized Version) 1611
- MLB NBV Modern Language Bible also known as New Berkley Version 1959 (NT - 1945; NT revised 1969)
- NASB New American Standard Bible (NASB) 1971 (NT - 1963; Revised 1996)
- NET New English Translation 2005
- NIrV New International Reader's Version (NIrV) 1996
- NIV New International Version 1978 (NT - 1973)
- NKJV New King James Version 1982
- NLT New Living Translation 1996
- NRSV New Revised Standard Version 1990
- TEV Good News Bible also known as Todays English Version 1974 (NT - 1966; Revised 1993)
- YLT Young's Literal Translation 1862 (Revised 1887, 1898)
- WIL Williams New Testament in the Language of the People 1937; Reprinted 2000 as Millennium edition.

To My Sons and Their Families

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Introduction

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” - Romans 12:1

Is God reasonable? Is He a reasonable explanation for the existence of the Universe and life? We are distinguished from all other life forms by our ability to reason; so, this should be, itself, a reasonable question to consider.

In this work, we must refer back to Romans 12:1 from time to time because it raises this question in the believer's mind about their service to God by calling it reasonable. Professor John Lenox a mathematician from Oxford speaks of truth being self coherent [comprehensible or logical] and a cog in reality [part of a real life and not dreams or fantasies] which is just what Paul called *reasonable service*. We plan to dissect this phrase and examine its meaning from every angle of thought.

This is a philosophical question, an epistemological look into what makes something sound reasonable to our minds. Should we learn the mechanism that triggers reasonableness, we might be more alert when the snake approaches us with a discussion of forbidden but delicious fruit which we should be avoiding. We might be more astute in defining carnality and more conscious of God's will distinct from our own. When someone begs us to go in a direction we think is wrong for us and they try to convince us “for friendship's sake” to be “reasonable,” how vulnerable are we? How vulnerable is our knowledge? How vulnerable is our Faith?

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I once worked as a computer programmer with a manager who required full documentation of my code but he never liked how I wrote it, how I explained things. I was ever returning to my cubicle to rewrite it until one day I recognized that always after 3 rewrites he tired of the chase and told me to leave it on his desk; he would accept it in its present form. After that I got more carelessly relaxed about the whole thing, realizing whatever I did would never be good enough and after 3 tries he would accept it. I think I may have even returned the document a couple times unedited. His sense of reasonableness seem to be linked somehow with a degree of emotional exhaustion or maybe there was something magical about the number 3 in his sub-conscience. People may not realize it but one's sense of reasonableness can be manipulated [Oh, by the way, that manager and I remain friends to this day.]

Faith

I never thought I would have a reason to recall my first day in Calculus and Analytical Geometry in my first year at The State University of New York. This was the initial "taste" of college, and so unlike high school. The professor lowered a black board [yes, black, slate] that ran the width of the room and in the upper left corner wrote: $1 + 1 = ?$ and asked us for the answer. Everyone knew it was "2." But then he told us to prove it! All I could think of was, "This man is crazy." And I knew then I wanted to take the course in night school under a different professor, which I did. But meanwhile the "day" instructor began writing [yes, chalk] and filled the board from left to right and top to bottom with squiggles—and some recognizable markings—ending in the lower right corner with [you guessed it] " $= 2.$ " Throughout my grammar and high school experience in learning arithmetic and mathematics I was happily "assuming" that $1 + 1 = 2$ and now I come to find out that it is provable. But as grammar school students, we were never asked to prove it. It was assumed because we were learning basic arithmetic and not calculus.

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Every enquiry into knowledge starts with assumptions, something foundational upon which that subject can be constructed. A study of life begins with a framework postulating either a Creator, a designer, some evolutionary process or some other assumed first cause. In the case of the universe, the Bible starts with “God” [Genesis 1:1]. We know Him by faith.

All knowledge is best thought of as a segment [a finite piece] of truth. The beginning of life, of the universe, remains shrouded in mystery which Christians by faith accredit to God as Creator. Professor Lenox once remarked, “Even atheists believe,” only not in God.

Considering the vast storehouse of truth, the expanse of all there is to learn, we enter somewhere in the middle in our education because the knowledge base is infinite assuming some things [not otherwise proven] but which our current learning depends upon.

We haven’t advanced beyond a small child asking, “Why” over and over again trying to understand on what reasonable basis parental authority rests. I remember “Mikey,” a 5 year old who lived next store to us during my teen years. One day, Mikey, according to his mom, emptied out of their refrigerator whatever little hands could get a hold of and made a tossed salad in the center of the kitchen floor before his mom caught him. When she pointed out how wrong this was, like the time he plugged the bathroom sink and turned the water on [some kid, right!] he responded—to her discontent—“why!” Why is it wrong? This is a very good question for a 5 year old. Life might be correctly summed up in the small child’s question. The child seems like he is trying to find the ultimate or original reason mom thinks he did wrong.

Only the presumptuous would think they have come to the end of their quest—the ultimate why or how—and now they know the ultimate truth about all things! No! We search back through the causes of something and, if we are honest, we come to Faith. Faith, therefore, is a reasonable part of our thinking.

Our Bible opens with “In the Beginning God...” Everyone who embraces this verse as truth at least knows that

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God exists. Scientific materialism, however, must begin by ignoring God, which amounts to denying His existence, only because they are studying the *created* and not the *Creator*. If He is not part of our quest to know and if material or physical knowledge can be obtained without knowing Him [and it can, sadly—or some think as much], His existence becomes, for them, irrelevant.

This is different from saying that He does not exist. They are saying, we cannot *prove* He exists. They talk about “The absence of evidence” about a Creator they have decided not to investigate anyway. Scientific materialism is *assuming* He does not exist, so they never look. Every miracle that could be credited to Him is set aside as an unknown because it does not fit the paradigm. We can maintain that God has revealed Himself in nature and in our salvation [Romans 1:16, 17, 18-21] but Scientific Materialism credits nature with its own beginning!.

Meanwhile it seems reasonable to some to ascribe the miracle of life, itself, to a personification of nature called “mother” or to the universe. These are mythological representations now clothed in scientific language to mask ignorance [I say this respectfully]. Yet, God as Creator sounds like an unreasonable first cause, though, He is the only explanation with any real validity—other theories to date being discredited by the very science that upheld them a few generations earlier. All believers ask is for true science to recognize as reasonable that life exists outside the boundary of the material, to allow us in conversation to, at least, postulate that life is the work of a Creator [Genesis 2:7].

Definition

But is this a reasonable way to think? If by reasonable we mean able to be supported by “reason” we must ask “What is reason?” Before the Greek philosophers began exploring in earnest the nature of things, the Ancients never thought to engage such questions. Wisdom, for them, was the collective treasure of centuries of traditions, and everything had to have a practical,

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real-life, application or meaning. “It’s true because our father told us so! He learned it from grandpa!” [study Deuteronomy 6:2]. Why talk in the abstract when a concrete down-to-earth problem needs solving or a lesson in living needs to be taught.

But, some might say, they did invent stories about the gods—stories that had no practical value for living, only designed to explain what later the philosopher would use reason to explain and still later, the scientist would investigate: like the beginning of life or the universe. Yet, there is an argument to be made that mythology was a way of defining social and ethical norms, either defining acceptable or restricting unacceptable forms of behavior. If this be so, even ancient religious practices were relative to how one should live. We may still maintain that “reasonableness” in Ancient times was more associated with traditional beliefs and a way of life than it was related to “reason” or “logic,” which is a later Greek idea.

Since we are talking about God’s existence: a deist might deduce that it is reasonable to believe that God as a transcendent God is uninvolved in the affairs of men. God, they reason [based on what they might interpret as empirical evidence] created a world that now functions in His absence. [I don’t think this too harsh an explanation.]

But if God is not involved, it means that what He started has proven to have been somewhat of a failure. From Adam’s sin to the dystopia that this current world is living in we must either say, God intended it to be this way or He made something that got away from Him. If God were to get involved now, He would have to crisis manage His creation because He gave man too much independence. Every stage or dispensation or epoch of time from the Garden to the Flood to the Tower of Babylon to the Babylonian Exile to now—nothing—has worked to bring mankind in line with the desires of their Creator. Jesus’ crucifixion cannot happen in this view. Is that the “God” deism wants to portray to the world! If so, it makes as much sense to believe in His *Nonexistence*.

How reasonable than is atheism? Since we have entered the age of reason, reasonableness for atheism must be more than

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a scientific disinterest in God as Creator; it has to mean the development of a social order or a moral code dependent exclusively on a natural wisdom—a legislated justice not based on Christ's death. This is not to say, atheists cannot plagiarize "God"; the atheist is, no doubt, not above crediting as reasonable any "ancient" idea which others might credit to God—like the 10 commandments.

Bias

But the larger issue is "bias." "No God" means whatever "code" for living that there is has to be made by someone or some group other than "God" which means that absolute objectivity is not possible. Whatever is codified will favor one group over another.

For one, the writing of laws is incomplete and if it is not a moral code for *all time*, it is not a moral code for *all people*. it is either ministered *post-facto* to persons who didn't know they broke it at the time but still had to pay for their crime or *ex ante* meaning the persons who broke the law now existing were not found liable. They got away with it! For some, the statute of limitation runs out even though they remain guilty. Punishment is administered unevenly because only God's grace, as we understand it, is an unchanged divine idea in existence before the world was created. Man's law is forever changing! When we maintain that "No one is above the law" we claim in error that man's law is always administered fairly.

I am often reminded of the decisions made by referees and umpires at ball games. If they call it on my team, I am yelling at the T.V. "Unfair! I'll never watch another game!!" But I will; and I do. Referees have no choice but to be—in part—subjective in their calls. No matter how well the rule is written, it is never able to claim absolute objectivity.

As many have experienced, laws are, at times, proven inadequate to decide innocence over guilt, right from wrong. We have come to see this as reasonable because we have admitted man's inability to represent an absolute and totally objective justice. When "law" is exercised it is often done so unequally; so, it must be applied in a more narrower scope—where reasonable

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doubt is honored. And there can be no code of law that is thorough or complete enough to anticipate every act evil may imagine. Interestingly, I asked A.I. how many words are there in the U.S. law code: it is estimated to contain over 22 million. And how many in the King James Bible? 783,183. The Bible is a closed record but the U.S. code of law is still a work in progress being tweaked and refined and honed in—what I would suggest is—a misguided effort to improve upon it—if we do so without God.

Happiness

Social order is based more on personal definitions of “happiness” than community based cooperation. Every one has their own truth. Is that what we want? Living without God might ultimately prove to be a mistake; that is, to say, that not having an outside objective source of justice—Abraham’s Judge of all the Earth—might make our quest for that happiness futile. And how is this? Without an outside, objective, and wise voice who can rightly and justly decide where the boundaries should be, each individual search for happiness will always trespass on another’s place of happiness—where they shouldn’t go. When there is no independent authority to determine where we may walk, people will always jay walk.

The Church has shown itself at times a disappointing representative of God’s love and justice primarily because—if I may suggest—Christians represent their own selfish interests as if there were no God. But this does not prove God is disinterested or non-existent. It only, sadly, implies such to a world too readily prone to think so anyway.

All this might be true but that does not suggest that it isn’t reasonable, since it is the best we have to offer. Even the Church agrees that people find their own ideologies, their own lifestyles, and their own worldview “reasonable” but not because it is the source of their own happiness. Without God, says the Church, mankind is depraved and in bondage—caught in the matrix—of evil! The Church might maintain that what is reasonable to “fallen” mankind is somehow linked to sin. We will not argue this point here.

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I see things differently. We will set aside for the time the part evil plays in manipulating men's minds to make something sound reasonable that later they regret, and we will set aside the postmodern idea that a search for happiness is reasonable. What is reasonable for one is not necessarily reasonable for another. Such a quest is too personal to encourage relationships and community. [This can be discussed at another time].

Be Yourself

Going back to our talk about law and justice: within the annals of mankind's greatest achievements there is the record of a few virtuous souls who have invested their lives in providing for the rest of us reasonable forms of justice if we want them, a reasonable happiness of sorts. But are we saying that their contribution to law and justice is not "reasonable" because we are beastly beings that need to be controlled? No! Wise statesmen have observed that true government opens the way to free us to be who we are. We find man's justice reasonable only as it represents what our humanity represents.

As believers in Christ, we are brand new persons now in a most natural and essential way. We are best served in life as we discover that we are being made in God's image and we live up to that image with an immanent God at work among us. A Christian, therefore, is encouraged by Paul to accept their relationship with Christ as reasonable, as I discuss later in this work on Romans 12:1-2.

By here it is necessary to generalize this truth equating reasonableness with what is natural by looking at 3 aspects of thought, 3 points of logic, that underline our sense of reasonableness. As philosophical as this is, it is important to, at least, attempt to define the 3 legs of this tripod upon which what we find reasonable rests. Reasonableness is, itself, reasonable because it allows us to be ourselves in relation to everyone else. It's that simple. Here is where we launch our study.

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Cats & Dogs

I am not a cat lover because they tear up furniture and window screens with their nails. As a general rule, they will not befriend you but only brush up against you when it benefits them. Many are finicky eaters. And if you fail to get a male cat spayed and allow him in your house, he will mark his territory—your rooms—with urine because that's what cats do! The fact that we think we can go on vacation leaving them alone in our homes or we don't have to walk them in the dead of winter is small change—as far as I am concerned.

But, if you want a happy feline, you have to let a cat be a cat. Redirect their interests; do not deny them. Feed them the expensive food. Buy a Climber overlaid with carpet for scratching and do take them to the vet! But, still, a cat won't love you for it! My point is that cats find their behavior "reasonable" [or would if they had that kind of a brain] because they are CATS!. A dog would find most of this unreasonable. My point being that reasonableness is associated with what is natural.

But before we ask what is natural for us as believers, it seems appropriate—reasonable—to ask, "What is natural for us as *human beings*?"

I'm Human, First

Why does one person find something logical or right while another thinks it absolutely wrong? This is not a debate about the best flavored ice cream. My question is more: how can a person allow a full-term infant to die as an aborted fetus or encourage young children to be surgically or chemically altered to mask their gender or be driven by a life ending hate and find it "reasonable"? Some forms of behavior contrast so sharply with those of another that 2 people do not even appear to come from the same species.

Why are some things beyond compromise? Why is it that with some issues, we cannot "meet in the middle"? Asked

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another way: what is it about human nature that makes us at times appear so radically different from each other that “human” no longer seems sufficient to describe us. How is “humanity” blessed—or cursed—with such a variety of thought and purpose that we tend to splinter into cliques, denominations, societies, tribes, and the like, rather than see ourselves as one human race? How can some humans do things as unconscionable as cannibalism or genocide in the name of a religious fervor that is created to justify the otherwise unjustifiable?

Other species can be identified by their commonality but not *Homo Sapiens*. Other species are programmed by instinct to be the way they are but we are capable of learning different and various forms of behavior—some unthinkable.

We do, therefore, have something in common: the ability to reason or to define reasonableness—in Descartes’ famous statement “I think therefore I am.” Descartes captured what is essentially human about us. We, as living creatures, “think.” Descartes calls himself “a thinking thing.” Thinking is for him, “an activity of the soul” “And here I discover,” says Descartes, “what properly belongs to myself. I am only, properly speaking, [a] thinking thing; that is, mind and reason.”

In his “Discourse on Method” he reasoned that, “Good sense is of all things in the world the most equally distributed, for everybody thinks himself so abundantly provided with it ... The power of forming a good judgment, and of distinguishing the truth from the false... is by nature equal in all men....” I sense a tinge of sarcasm in his words but it is true: we all are reasoning beings; so, we all do what we do because to us it seems reasonable.

Relatability

The tripod I spoke of earlier [the 3 aspects] of reasonableness [Descartes’ mind and reason] has not been previously postulated exactly this way. Yet, in a *prima facie* approach, if I can show through example that it is in fact observable, it might be useful in

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analyzing our own thought process and perhaps help us redefine within our own minds and hearts what we once thought unreasonable to be reasonable—and visa-versa.

The first aspect of our thinking process that makes an idea sound reasonable is “relatability.” Being able to relate to it, to see yesteryears’ experiences or studies as confirmation of an idea currently being taught or embraced, gives it relatability, and therefore makes it sound more reasonable. This could be an academic education, or the lessons learned by peer interaction, or simply in our emotional and intellectual development [home life] as children. Because we are learners, things make more sense and sound more reasonable when they support or fit in with what we already know or think we know. It’s like finding a missing piece to a puzzle we have been working which we now can snap in place!

Our upbringing and other influences—nurture with nature—comes together in our experiences to literally “train” our thinking. The Psalmist’s teaching in Psalm 1:1 is most astute: “Blessed is the man that walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful.” Where we walk, we find ourselves standing and where we stand, we eventually find ourselves sitting. This is a picture of someone who has slowly had their thinking morphed or transmogrified [almost magically] into a way of seeing reason they did not have before they took this journey. Notice the Psalmist says the first step was taking wrong *counsel* which became the *way* of seeing things and finally it is where they sit or live.

Knowledge is cumulative like building a puzzle. Like anything made of building blocks or needing to be constructed, learning is accomplished in stages. This is the whole idea behind spiritual edification “Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace,” admonished Paul, “and things wherewith one may edify another.” [Romans 14:19]. When Paul said his farewell in Ephesus he concluded “And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to *build you up* ...” [Acts 20:32]. To the Corinthians he wrote

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“let every man take heed how he builds thereupon” [1 Corinthians 3:10].

A good example is learning the alphabet not as 26 letters all at once. We break them up into groups of 3, 5, 7 or 9 letters. That’s how I learned the Greek and Hebrew alphabets. This is how we learn; this is the process of building one idea on another by relating them to one another as a whole—in this case the Alphabet.

We have been using the idea of reasonableness to encapsulate this idea. We are saying that reasonableness reflects or is influenced by learning. Pay attention to what you feed your own mind because like radiation on the body it has a cumulative affect. We are all vulnerable to bad influences and if we train our thoughts and our consciences the wrong way, our thoughts will find the wrong thing logical and reasonable. This we should guard against.

But shouldn’t we expand our minds, see the world, become street wise or learn the ways of the world in order to help others out of spiritual danger? Only if it is your calling by God!

In this work, we will look at scriptural examples that will make this more relevant for the believer. Those who are not believers in Christ or who are not living the message or provisions of the Cross may find what we are saying to be *unreasonable*.

Measurability

The second aspect of logic which gives reasonableness to knowledge is *measurability*. Measurability is just another word for “everything has a price.” Our minds and our hearts [thoughts and emotions] tend to place a *value* on everything we

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are embracing as part of our experience. This is far more extensive than most realize.

Graham Ward, an English theologian and Anglican priest, wrote about the present civilized world that people are consumers who see everything as a commodity upon which they place a value. Ward wrote, "...not only of all objects, but of all values (moral, aesthetic, and spiritual). We have produced a culture of fetishes...."

He concluded, "... everything ... is measured and priced....." He noted that "The pleasure of not getting what [we] want [the operative word] drives consumerism."

The electronic store has become a young man's toy store. Free markets only work if there is a healthy spending with low inflation which means people are buying things! We are encouraged to buy, buy, buy, buy bigger, buy newer, buy improved, buy because it is of limited supply. On a cable network 1 out of 3 hours of programming is pure commercial.

People are being "bred" to purchase things they want—not necessarily need. We are always being told that we deserve better! It all seems like too much apartment store fun to not co-operate especially when we are told that it is good for the economy.

We may also put a value on people. We would rather be rich than poor. We like Mr. "So-and-So" in church more than Mr. "What's his name." This, even though we know the Scriptures call for complete unity [John 17:21]. Divisions and schisms are based on valuing one group over another. The German word, *schadenfreude*, feeling pleasure in another's misfortune, is another form of jealousy, comparing our worth to theirs. So, comparisons become another way of deciding the importance of someone in our social order. Paul wrote the Corinthians "For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they *measuring* themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise." [2 Corinthians 10:12].

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Jesus advised us to , “Lay up ... treasures in heaven....” [Matthew 6:20] or value what heaven offers more than earthly commodities. What we may fail to understand in a rush to get near the front of the sales line for that going out of business sale, for example, is that our understanding of what is most reasonable is clearly linked to what we most value!

Measuring the value of things is a general principle of logic; science could never uncover the secrets of nature without it—knowing how long, how heavy, how old, how powerful, how fast something is. Measurements always measure value. We owned a 1968 Chevelle once with a 327 engine which was a bit more powerful than the 307 put in most '68 Chevelles [I was told]. Measurements are one key way to distinguish quality and therefore help someone decide which is better for them. This is logic at work.

But are we saying don't consider worth? Don't become a consumer or it's a sin to buy the latest smart phone? Is it wrong to decide on buying that new brand of laundry detergent because it is improved? Of course not! But, perhaps, finish using the old one you already bought? It is difficult to see the importance of limiting an interest in personal pleasures and the value of money in a Biblical context unless the Spirit explains it. Some people have money; but with others, money has them! We will look at more examples in Scripture in this work as it defines reasonableness to our way of thinking. Remember Romans 12:1! What Jesus was saying in His sermon on the mount [Matthew 6:20] is critical. Our focus needs to be on Him and not on our own wants. “Blessed are the poor in Spirit.” [Matthew 5:3].

We are pointing out that as believers in Christ reasonableness needs to see greater worth and value in service to Him [Romans 12:1] because reason as a function of thinking will place a value on Christ's yoke [Matthew 11:29]. Will it be of greater worth to us than material things? As Paul summarized, “While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.” [2 Corinthians 4:18].

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Definability

Hopefully, you are seeing where we are going in writing this book. We live in a world of ideas which may sound right but after closer analysis some of these ideas might fail the test of reasonableness for you. Other persons might be sold on their value but you have found cause to discard them as outside the way you think.

In this work we are analyzing this mind and heart process by looking closer at the 3 aspects of reasonableness: first, Can you relate to whatever you are being counseled to do? Is this idea/counsel supported by your life-style? Does it follow what you already know about yourself? Secondly, what's it worth to you? Can you honestly value what you are being told is important to do? Can you say, "I will get behind this idea to promote it so others will follow me as I follow it?"

There is a third question that reason asks: When you are asked to do something, can you explain back what it is exactly you are being asked to do? What is it about this idea that stands out head and shoulders above other ideas that might oppose it or offer a different solution or path through life? What exactly is this idea or thought that you are considering? Based on the simple, clear, and emphatic understanding of this idea, is it still reasonable to follow?

Every thought, if we are asked to embrace it, must be clearly defined and understood without any deception or ambiguity. If someone proposes you follow them, you have a right to know exactly where it is you are going and how you plan to get there: what is expected of you. Always be aware of the sophist or the rhetorician who puts style and the ability to win a debate and sell you on an idea over what that idea really is or if it can be reified.

If you are told that you will learn as you go, it may indicate something not well thought out. But more to our point

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here: it might prove to be something outside your comfort zone, a change in how you have been living, who you are—as a believer in Christ.

An idea, a logos—we might use the Biblical word “logos” here which refers to our Lord Jesus in John 1:1—any logos, which does not represent Christ or misrepresents Him, should always be rejected as unreasonable [Romans 12:1]. For a believer, the Christian life is well defined—*following Christ*—because He is the “same yesterday, today, and forever.” [Hebrews 13:8]. No suggested course of action or counsel should be acceptable if it is not well-understood or defined, if it is still being developed or if it does not come with a level of clarity you can get behind.

Much of life is crisis-managed because we employ “half-baked” [Hosea 7:8] ideas, not completely thought out or planned. These often prove to be courses of action that we simply walk away from leaving them incomplete. Jesus cautioned “whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.” And then He asked us to count the cost or make such a decision as a life decision not just a temporary interest: “For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it” [Luke 14:27-28]. If someone’s counsel is stressful for us because it cannot hold our true interests, it is proving unreasonable.

We use the word “definability” because for anything to be considered logical or reasonable [our word] it has to be described in a way the distinguishes it from all things similar, from counterfeits, and the like. I went in on a small wager with a nephew when my favorite football team was playing his favorite team in the “Super Bowl” to determine the best team that year. The “loser” would buy the winner a team jersey of whatever player they chose. I lost and he wanted the jersey for his team’s center. I checked online and found one for 20 dollars and another for 65 dollars [if memory serves on these prices. I only know one was far more costly]. The difference was because the cheaper one was a “knock-off” which looked the same until I investigated the

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difference and found out the genuine team jersey was the 65 dollar one, which I bought for him.

What if there were no way of distinguishing the two apart! Could that have happened to Eve in the Garden when she found the forbidden fruit just as delicious and pleasant as all the other fruit she could enjoy? Is it possible she might have reasoned that there is no real difference other than this fruit makes me wise! Perhaps, God could have put oranges and apples on the other trees and had this one grow persimmons. Can we tell the difference between our Lord's leadership and the world's? I am reminded of the Poem by Matilda C Edwards: "The Church Walking With The World" One stanza goes: "Then the sons of the World and the Sons of the Church/
Walked closely hand and heart,/ And only the Master, who knoweth all,/ Could tell the two apart." May this never be!!

Our Bible has a well-thought out and distinct message centered on Christ and the Cross. Following Him is not some vague idea proposed by imaginative dreamers but is the plan of God drawn up in eternity past [Psalm 74:12; 1 Peter 1:20]. In this work, we are pointing out that God's plan for our salvation is well-defined, well-planned, unique because He alone planned and executed it, and unchanging because it works on the principle of God's "grace." This makes accepting His salvation and following Christ, for the believer, a very reasonable thing to do! [I keep referencing Romans 12:1 because this verse is what this work is about.]

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“Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.” - Luke 18:17

This chapter is not intended to replace sound counseling or advice in the bringing up of children, but I do want to talk about their understanding of Santa Claus on December 25. As adults, we understand that an old man sliding down a chimney,—especially if he's the size of this man—and not getting stuck and then distributing presents to every home in the world, especially those with children [and not only those with chimneys] is a very unreasonable thing to believe—not to mention the flying reindeer! But we are not children under the age of five.

On my fifth Christmas my younger sister was 8 months old and my other sister who is three years older than me was helping mom wrap some gifts for the baby. The next thing I knew my older sister appeared at the foot of the stairs, calling me to come down and help wrap gifts, but I was troubled. Let Santa Claus catch us and we get nothing for Christmas. This was my childish mind. I remember the time I heard mom on Christmas Eve at the door saying good night to Santa Claus. He had apparently just dropped off our gifts. I scooted down the stairs in a hurry and literally leaped across the room to peer through the window to catch him before he was out of sight, but I concluded that I had just missed him. Open boxes on the couch on Christmas Eve were never a sign to me of anything. I was too young to realize that mom had just unboxed the presents. (For those who are wondering with me why my baby sister's presents were wrapped—at least early on—I can only guess it might have something to do with babies ripping up things. But

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mom always left all presents around the tree in plain sight, as I remember.)

What is it about a child's mind that makes a story like this so real? I found Santa Claus a very reasonable explanation of why presents were under the tree those early years. If I referred to the definition that I gave about reasonableness, I see that there are some difficulties with using it to explain the mind of a child. Number one, as adults, we find past education to be an important part of our current understanding of life, but children that are only four or five years old do not have much of a previous education to fall back on. What they do have is a mom and hopefully a dad that love them and everything they have learned they have learned through these people.

As far as measurability goes, young children have no concept of measurements. Take for example time. When our youngest son was four years old and I was watching him, I used to tell him that we would do something special when the clock saw the number one and then followed by three zeros which is 10 o'clock in the morning [we had a digital clock]. Until then I would rest having worked all night. Young children still need to learn to tell time and that's just one measurement that literally needs to be learned and they haven't learned it yet. What this means is that Santa Claus visiting millions of houses in the span of 24 hours is not illogical to them. They believe it if it's the story mom and dad told them.

As far as definability goes, children know only what they can see, touch, feel, hold—concrete objects, not abstract ideas. Santa can be imagined because he's the man that brings the toys and children know what a toy is. What is reasonable to a child is believable. Besides, they, most likely, met him in the mall.

This also makes all the Bible stories reasonable: Jonah and the whale, Daniel in the lions' den, and the three Hebrew children in the fire are all important stories as long as they understand that a whale swims in the water like a fish, lions are big cats and very dangerous, and they know what fire is. I mention these Old Testament stories because we can observe that the Ancients because they were pre-logic were more like

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children in the way they understood life. This is not to say that these Bible stories are made up for moral effect. We maintain that they really happened because of our faith, but non-believers, as Stephen Meyer pointed out, need to duplicate the events to make them historically believable.

Hebrew Thought

A scholar by the name of Thorleif Bowman raised this issue in his book, "Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek" and it is worth a brief look. Some of Bowman's work remains controversial—possibly because scholarship never seriously thought to learn either language by contrasting it with the other: Greek and Hebrew. Our reference here is to the "childlike" nature of the language. Bowman wrote, "Greek thinking is clear logical knowing, Israelite thinking is deep psychological understanding." What, I believe, Bowman is pointing out is that Greek thinkers, like the philosophers, poets, and playwrights were able to depersonalize or abstract an idea out by observing it. Hebrew thought is far more personal. For them truth is empirical in that they experience it not just observe it. We might say that the Ancients were "tied to the land." Hebrew thought is directed toward events, living history. It is tied up in community and relationships. R. C. Harrison points out in his *Old Testament Survey* that, "...the theological concepts of the old testament do not lend themselves with particular readiness to any attempt at systematization...." [page 479]. For an organized topical look at Christian theology scholars depend largely on the New Testament writers in the Greek.

Bowman noted differences in the Hebrew language compared to the Greek which would nuance a word differently from the Greek. This is a dynamic often lost in a translation simply because other languages do not carry the same interpretation. For example, the Ancients tracked "time" not by the movement of the sun, moon and stars, as we might, but by their illumination. It is not incidental that Genesis 1:5 reads "God called the *light* Day, and the *darkness* he called Night." We would

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have referenced the sun as a heavenly body visible during our “day.” And in verse 14 “Let there be *lights* in the ... heaven for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years.” Bowman observed, “the Israelites understood time as something qualitative” [the intensity of the light] not quantitative [a measurement of time like 24 hours in a day].

Another example is in describing a moment of time. Malachi prophesied, “Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall *suddenly* come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.” [Malachi 3:1]. We recall Paul taught our Lord’s return will be “in a moment, in the *twinkling* of an eye, at the last trump:” [1 Corinthians 15:52]. A “twinkling” is the smallest amount of time which cannot be further divided. [If this were a modern word we might reference a single Planck unit of time]. Bowman noted that “suddenly” does not represent a duration but a “beat” and is better understood as a “heart-beat” In a heart beat that trumpet will blare and announce His parousia! Before the “Age of Reason” events were not measured in units of time.

Reverend Edersheim in his book on “The Temple” noted that “Formally, the Sabbath commenced at sunset on Friday, the day being reckoned by the Hebrews from sunset to sunset. As *no special hour for this was fixed*, it must, of course, have varied, not only at different seasons, but in different localities.” A Jewish priest would position himself on the north wall of the Temple in Jerusalem and note the exact moment the sun slipped out of sight to blow the ram’s horn and announce sunset. Edersheim added, “if the sun was not visible, sunset was to be reckoned from when the fowls went to roost.” Different cities began their new day at varying times because the sun set at different times in different locals [as it would in Los Angeles and New York City in America].

We pointed out that Hebrew as a patriarchal society puts a great emphasis on community and relationships. E. Richard and Richard James in “Misreading Scripture with Individual Eyes” wrote, “... to understand ancient Mediterranean ...

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cultures, you need to understand ... kinship, ... patronage, honor, shame, and boundaries. " These are cultural values measuring *worth*.

Richard Trench, who wrote about New Testament Synonyms, looked at the New Testament idea translating the Old: It speaks of a "piety in the fulfillment of human relations, as toward parents or others (Euripides, *Elect.* 253, 254) implying 'worship' (that is 'worth ship') ." Isaiah 32:8, for example, in the Greek, translates, "The godly have devised wise measures, and this counsel shall stand." This phrase in the language of the Old Testament reads, "The noble counsel noble things." This is displayed in their generosity, The Good Samaritan in Jesus' parable is an excellent example of such godly nobility [Luke 10:33].

The Old Testament word for *truth* as another example—unlike Greek—is not a consenting to the validity of something written or said; truth is more personal. It consents to *the person saying it!* It is relational. Truth stems from truthful persons; it is trust in a person's faithfulness and reliability.

"Believing" in the Old Testament phrase is believing *in* not just believing. In Genesis 15:6 and Exodus 14:31, for example, most translations correctly read "in". Truth had to be practiced to be known as truth. Paul exhorted all to "believe *in thine heart* ... with the heart man believes unto righteousness" [Romans 10:9, 10]. In Hebrew, there is no reason to invent the word "promise". Throughout the text, a promise is nothing more than something spoken by someone who can be trusted. In 2 Chronicles 1:9 the King James reads, "O LORD God, let thy *promise* unto David my father be established" where the ESV correctly understood *word*: "O LORD God, let your *word* to David my father be now fulfilled"

Why take you down this path?

We have been observing that a patriarchal society, a collectivistic culture, sees the value in oral traditions and the lessons learned by previous generations because their education is more practical and applied to every day life and not given to rhetoric and logic. So Paul's word "reasonable" in Romans 12:1,

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which means “pertaining to logic,” would work fine for the Athenians but less likely for Peter’s parishioners in Judea.

So, if I imagine Moses at the burning bush reasoning with God over his returning into Egypt. I picture a different conversation than God saying, “Let me explain why I chose you and all about your qualifications.” No! God said “Go! Now!” And when Moses wanted a “reason” God might have said, “Because it’s *me*, telling you!” When God answered Moses question, “Who shall I say sent me” [Exodus 3:13, 14], God responded “I am that I am.” God was appealing to His authority as the only God. This doesn’t subtract from what we understand in the Name “I am.” It adds to it! It underscores the importance of letting God be God and we his obedient servants. I also recall Peter on Simon’s roof arguing with the Lord until the Lord told him, “...get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them.” [Acts 10:20].

This suggests that when God told Israel through Isaiah “Come now and let us reason together” [Isaiah 1:18] it was more a Father-child conversation than a debate between equals.

Child Logic

An uncle of mine one day was conversing with a child, probably 6 or 7 maybe a bit younger—he didn’t say. The topic was rain and the benefit of the rain to give plants and grass and trees a drink. To which the young lad puzzled, “Why does it rain on the sidewalk?” Uhm!

We must admit that children are also “thinking things,” as Descartes reflected. This lad, like Mickey mentioned earlier, showed us that already some children are asking questions about their environment that makes them sound quite intelligent—and they are! Perhaps, he was beginning to question the reality of a Santa Claus, as well.

When my older sister asked me to join her regarding our baby sister’s Christmas presents, all she had to say to get my cooperation was, “There is no Santa Claus.” I immediately

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believed her, though, moments earlier I was arguing *for* his existence.

Once in grade school, children begin to transition into the world of logic [they're learning academically] even if their reasoning might seem more cute than sensible. When a Kindergarten class on December 7 was asked what day it was, a little girl happily answered, "This is the day Pearl Harbor died."

"And where is Pearl Harbor," the teacher asked, no doubt breaking into a warm smile.

A young boy bellowed, "Pearl Harbor is in Heaven!"

Perhaps, he was more correct than the map, because a secular education should release a child's imagination not imprison it in cold-hard facts. The facts provide a foundation for their thoughts but shouldn't be the entire edifice. One day I was bouncing a rubber ball with the neighbor lad [I was a young teen, he was, again, very young]. I was careful to make catching it a possibility standing close enough to require a single bounce to reach him. The ball came up and popped him in the nose sending him indoors crying while I asked his older sister to go in and tell him how sorry I was that this happened. [Perhaps, I should have anticipated this possibility. Talk about brain development!] Moments later she returned to the street to tell me, "He blamed *the ball!*"

Something needs to be said about a child's innate ability to forgive while grown-ups carry grudges—some for life. You are, no doubt, quick to say, "He didn't forgive *you*." Not so fast! If this young man retains this very spiritual view of life, someday in marriage when he and his bride might have had a knock-down, drag out, fight but he blames the circumstance and feels that she and he should join forces to change things, then he will have once again blamed the ball instead of her. That is the spirit of forgiveness even if it doesn't fit the psychological definition.

We tend to outgrow a respect for our elders or, perhaps, the culture is losing its patriarchal identity and it is becoming "every man for himself." Authority figures in, so-called, civilized

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countries are becoming cultural anachronisms. Children are being raised with a view to their independence from the social mores of the previous generation. More and more I hear of parents who plan to let their children choose which church they wish to attend as adults—if any at all—and this sounds reasonable to them because logic is the thinking process of an individual and not a culture. Children are, however, by nature, more likely than not to respect loving authority despite their “why’s.”

Becoming Children

What did Jesus mean when he warned, “Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein” [Luke 18:17]? According to Matthew, Jesus taught, “Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” [Matthew 18:3]. These two thoughts might be a little different. As children we accept Christ according to Luke’s Gospel, and as children we follow our Lord, according to Matthew. This might be the primary truth behind Romans 12:1!

The commentary reads, “The child is held up as an ideal, not of innocence, purity, faith, but of humility and unconcern for social status. Jesus advocates humility of mind, not childishness of thought.” Luke used the word for “infant” while Matthew and Mark used the word meaning “a young child” which we have been discussing here. Perhaps, the commentary is right about humility and a lack of interest in social status, but these seem too restrictive, almost as if the commentator was thinking of areas in his life that need to be addressed. Let us broaden the discussion in terms of Romans 12:1-2—finding service to the Lord a reasonable thing to be and do.

The simplest explanation, then, would be that like children that accept authority [yes, sometimes with discipline] we serve the Lord because He called us to serve Him. Peter’s “Μηδᾱμῶς” [“Not so, Lord!!”] in Acts 10:14 was talking back. Bad idea!! Arguing against Authority? Say you’re sorry and simply

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obey, young man!! This would be the simplest explanation that encapsulates humility.

But we must soon look at this as the human adults that we are. “Do not be children [immature, childlike] in your thinking,” Paul admonished in 1 Corinthians 14:20. Perhaps, becoming “like” a child is not the same as becoming “childlike.” It is obvious that some traits of young children are worth keeping into adulthood and others—not so much. Perhaps the Scripture is telling us to have a child’s heart but not their mind. This is a very good topic to discuss in a small group of believers. Christians know the difference because the Spirit of God has been educating them but they may need to engage in conversation over these verses to bring that knowledge to the fore. Sometimes the Lord teaches us by the very words that we, ourselves, speak.

In addition if you have ever raised a child or been one yourself, you know something about this subject. We may continue in this work to give you things to think about that might help you in your quest. For one: what about a childlike faith?

Childlike Faith

The New Living Translation, to my knowledge, in Psalm 116:6 is the only verse that references a childlike faith [though it is popular in Christian discourse]: “The LORD protects those of *childlike faith*,” This verse actually reads, “The Lord guards/ watches the *simple*.”

But does this mean that there is no such thing as a childlike faith? Not at all! The faith or trust of a child for their parents is—to use the Hebrew word in this Psalm—simple. Simple means open-minded; we might even say gullible, easily persuaded, seduced, or deceived. But in young children, this is a good thing because it means they are eager to learn, to accept knowledge, to believe the wisdom of a loving parent. And they can be trained and corrected [2 Timothy 3:16].

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Part of me misses the simplicity of a faith that doesn't need to be affirmed by Greek words and theological studies. It seems that God remembers those days, as well: "When Israel was a child ..." [Hosea 11:1]. He "took them [lovingly] by the arm," to lead them out of bondage. Sound familiar?! [John 10:28].

Yet, I don't believe in Santa anymore. It seems that most of the time I am in deep thought seeking confirmation of what the preacher once asked me to take by faith. And I tend to think this is the way I should be: "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." [2 Timothy 2:15].

The simple fact is that young minds because they are at the beginning must accept certain basic truths *by faith*. And they will, they do! Not everything needs to be documented, much less proven, to young minds as long as the source of the knowledge is true. Not everything *can* be proven —something we have been saying. Young children need to trust the arithmetic when they are told $1 + 1 = 2$. The calculus for this equation is far above them. No child raises their hand and asks for proof. Everyone steps in the middle of this stream because the head waters are oceanic or a mountainous source of information far higher than we can go. Even science admits as much. "When Isaac Newton developed his wonderful law of gravity," said Michael Behe, Professor of Biology at Lehigh University in Pennsylvania, and an advocate of the principle of intelligent design, "He was asked what the heck is gravity. he responded, 'I feigned no hypotheses.' [hipotesi non-fingo] " Professor Behe concluded, "design seems to point *beyond* nature."

Dr. John Lenox from Oxford University professed, "I believe there's an intelligence behind the universe. I'm a mathematician and all mathematicians ... believe in the rational intelligibility of the universe. What do they base that on? ... All the pioneers of mathematics were believers in God."

How can a scientist believe in God? You ask. C. S. Lewis chimed in, "Because they expected law and nature, and they expected law and nature because they believed in the legislator."

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So to the degree that God is unknowable and we are studying the works of His hands, we are stepping into the water downstream from where it all began. Our knowledge has to begin with faith. Even “Atheism is a belief “ Professor Lenox revealed. To those who do not believe in the Creator-God, faith is pure assumption. To us, believers, it is heart-knowledge because it is based on the revelation of His Word [Romans 10:9-10].

We not only begin by faith, we continue by faith. Paul affirmed that “the righteousness of God [is] revealed from faith to faith” [Romans 1:17]. As Peter joined in “to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ’ [2 Peter 1:1] and then he went on, “add to your faith ... knowledge;” [2 Peter 1:5].

We never lose our need for faith. Paul reminded us: “The just shall *live* by faith” [Romans 1:17]. I think the best description of such a faith is child-like.

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"I hope you will put up with me in a little foolishness. Yes, please put up with me!" 2 Corinthians 1:11 NIV

As long as I can remember I have enjoyed spending time in deep thought asking questions that no one—that I am aware of—would think to ask. It is as though a large part of my life has been spent researching ideas that have no immediate relevance and would encourage no one in their Christian walk. [Of course, I, personally, don't believe my quest to be irrelevant!]

I discovered that when I am introduced to a learned, bonafide, degree carrying, scholar of the faith and try to engage him in brief conversation over some "biblical" word, his face goes comatose and he seems to awaken only after I am interrupted by someone else that wants his time. At a Ministerial Retreat in the Poconos in '69 during a question and answer session, I asked a question (I don't recall it). The instructor, well known as "Mister Sunday School" in the denomination organizing the event took my question whereupon there was a strained silence before he went on with the next question. He never did answer mine. One professor-type simply called my idea unsupportable and walked away. Another shared with me that those matters used to interest him, but now all he wanted to do was talk about Jesus. That I could accept as a very mild rebuke of sorts.

Perhaps, this is why I can manage to cut a phone conversation short by bring up one of my rambling brain teasers only to hear a friend on the line yawn or has to leave to use the restroom—among other reasons. Even family don't want me to

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monopolize conversations at get togethers—their code for “don’t talk about whatever it is you talk about!”

There was the occasional Sunday when after the service someone was a little thrown by my “sermon” because either it made them think and gave them a headache (That is what they said) or they were upset interpreting my message to mean their translation of choice was a poor one (usually King James)—something, on my part, never intentionally verbalized or even thought. Occasionally, in a sympathetic spirit, someone would throw a hint saying “Wow, I didn’t know that verse said all that!” Someone wanting to encourage me pointed out I might be a better fit in a Seminary setting. [This incidentally was not God’s choice for my life.]

So after everyone has gone—hung up, walked away or gone home and I am alone with my thoughts, I discuss matters within myself. I’m doing this now. I often meditate myself to sleep planning tomorrow’s blog or the next section of a book, and the like. If any of my thoughts are something I should or want to talk to God about, I have learned that *He* has been listening!

So here I am in my study researching again what I already researched—just meditating, rethinking my rethought thoughts. It is as if the final word on some subjects is just out of my intellectual reach! The trivia I collect this way would fill a book, but—I know—no one wants to know.

What!?

I can appreciate a believer’s discouragement if they think someone is showing the congregation how smart they are. Dr. Eshbaugh, who had just earned his PhD in Textual Criticism at that time cautioned me about being “one-up” on the people. One of his parishioners did express concern to me that his sermons went over their head.

Dr. Eshbaugh’s dissertation was to show the probability of Paul’s papyri, P46, [known as the Chester Beatty manuscript]

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being closest to the “autograph”, the original one Paul wrote. P46 was the most devoid of the historical changes made in a growing church theology during the early centuries of the Faith. Some manuscripts indeed did reflect those theological concerns. I know: who cares!!! But that’s the point: we, preachers, might be educated beyond the emphatic, clear, and simple message of Scripture which has to do with our salvation and which all believers are encouraged in their faith hearing again.

Biblical languages and words are sometimes difficult to explain. Most preachers are not honest about their research when they take to the Bema of Final Thoughts. At the pulpit it must be “Thus, saith the Lord!” Or people will be confused and in doubt. But the preacher lives with his doubts—not about his faith but—about interpretations and translations and theological positions and the like, because the language of Scripture might not support the emphasis the church requires for denominational stability. [For the concerned: This was always the area of difficulty for me because I was honest about my theological “doubts.”]

I think it appropriate—all this being said—to exhort the believers, “Let’s be reasonable!”

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Romans 12:1 reads in the King James Version: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your *reasonable* service.”

We are asked to give ourselves to the Lord’s service because to Him it sounds reasonable. But is it reasonable in our thinking? In Romans 12:2 “reasonable” seems defined as anything from God that He considers: good, acceptable, and perfect. Good because thereby He supplies whatever we need; acceptable to us as something that brings significance to our lives and blessings; and perfect because it is why He created us the way He created us in the first place. It fits our personality, our abilities, our interests ...us!

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The word “reasonable” is the Greek term “logical” and if you look at the Greek spelling, this word is the word “log-os” with a “k” in the ending [l-o-g-i-k-a-n in Greek]. The language swapped out an “os” ending for a “kan” ending and needed the “i” to connect this ending to the root of the word. The “k” in the Greek spelling indicates “*what the word pertains to...*” Reasonable, then, is what pertains to “logic” [but we can go one better shortly.]

Take, for example, the word Pneumatikon in 1 Corinthians 12:1 translated “spiritual gifts” We can see hear the word spirit, “pneuma” from which we get lung related ailments like “pneumonia.” The Greek word “pneuma” for “spirit” is well known. But here we put the “k” on the ending and a little “ti” to connect them: pneuma-ti-k-on because it simply means “relating to the Spirit—the Holy Spirit—in 1 Corinthians 12:1.

The word “reasonable,” now, can be given a second look because Jesus *is* the “Logos”! We are saying logical to God is whatever pertains to the *Logos*, and according to John 1:1 this is *Jesus*. So, I guess, if Jesus said it or leads us there or commands it—you get the point—“it” is reasonable.

I should have left well enough alone here and closed in prayer because this does make perfect sense to a believer. But it doesn’t make any sense to a non-believer and I wanted to know ...*Why!* Here is where you hang up on me? But if you want to read on, let’s first, underline my problem with “logic.”

Human Thought

Some people don’t believe in God at all. But there’s the rub: *why not?* I recently watched a YouTube video in which the narrator convinced Elon Musk’s A.I., Grok IV, that a belief in God is reasonable to have for the creation of life. Their conversation was limited to logic and observable phenomena.

For millennia going back as far as we might—even before there was anything in writing—people were religious, which means, they believed in “a’ god or ‘the’ gods. When did

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we lose this innate source of inspiration! Answer: when “logic” was introduced by the Greeks!

Perhaps, when knowledge increased man began to see himself as god-like. If God is omniscient and man believes that eventually he will, himself and by himself, discover the solution to every problem [which is the boast of scientific materialism], he becomes his own god. God, the one true God, is still there, but now a person does not give God a thought. A personal God who wishes a relationship with them is no longer a concern. At this point agnosticism and then atheism begins to make some sense to the modern mind. I am asking, however, what is it about our “way” of thinking, the principle of logic, that brings some to the conclusion that God doesn’t exist.

Spiritually Discerned

Another obvious answer is that God needs to explain what only God can explain. In other words: there are truths *spiritually* discerned. I am simply rephrasing this biblical truth, that, if God needs to explain His truth and man cannot in a natural sense derive it from observation or experience, this must mean that God is—to the non-believer—*illogical*.

1 Corinthians 2:14 in the Amplified Bible reads, “But the natural [unbelieving] man does not accept the things [the teachings and revelations] of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness [absurd and *illogical*] to him; and he is *incapable* of understanding them, because they are spiritually discerned and appreciated”

But this is my point: *Why* are they foolishness to him and *why* is he incapable of understanding? In 1 Corinthians 2:14 Paul uses the word “natural” which is another ‘k’ word. He is saying, as *pertains to* a person’s nature, they are not capable of knowing spiritual things. How astute of this Apostle to the Gentiles! Does this mean that man’s brain is not wired to receive divine insight by revelation? Or does it simply mean that God shared already with the “natural man” all He could [what we have called “natural revelation”] and the rest is rather “personal” with Him? A revelation *from* God is a revelation *of* God; He is self-revealing,

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which is personal and intimate. Where in Scripture does God talk about His environment, heaven, where He lives and the angelic beings that dwell with Him? The Bible is all about *Him!* ... and His relationship with us!

Book knowledge can get me only so far if I want to understand my wife better. I may be wrong, but courses in female psychology, which, in reality, profiles women, might be a personal affront to her. The best way to get to know her is in the loving relationship we promised each other at the wedding.

Now you begin to see what I meant by people looking for a way out of a conversation with me. But I think the question “why” is legitimate in a theological sense because God made us “in His image.” If it wasn’t to form a relationship with us and to be known by us, why would He go through the trouble to create us in the first place! Adam and Eve disobeyed God while still at the time in a perfect state in a perfect garden in a perfect relationship with God! Was there something about being *human* that made forbidden fruit so tantalizing that she just had to have it! Or was the snake that good at his craft! Or both!

Adam's Sin

Are we saying that when Adam sinned, the human mind was somehow altered and mankind would no longer be able to understand God? A reasonable God was suddenly unreasonable in His demands. The forbidden apple caused the human brain (*homo sapiens*) to mutate so that it no longer could relate to God? Of course not! [You might visit the supplement at the end of this book on “Adam & Eve.”]

It wasn’t man’s *brain* that was affected as much as his *heart*. In the Old Testament, good and bad are moral matters of the heart and not the head. Adam’s “fall” was a spiritual matter not a physical one! We can understand the disconnect between God and man better by revisiting Jesus’ parable of the laborers.

The Parable of The Laborers

“...many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.” - Matthew 19:30

What is reasonable, or logical, to us is not necessarily reasonable to God. In fact the Bible is filled with—what we have affectionately called—paradoxes where God acts in a way that appears (the Lord forgive me for saying this) absurd or, at least, bewildering. In logic a paradox is said to be self-contradictory, for example, the classic: “This statement is false.” Or as Jesus taught through the parable of the Laborers [and it is true]: “The last shall be first,” or “To be greatest be servant of all,” [Matthew 23:11] or “the foolish are chosen to confound the wise,” [1 Corinthians 1:27] and the like. The dictionary defines a paradox as “a seemingly absurd or self-contradictory statement ... that when ... explained ... proves to be ... true:” Some of Jesus’ parables appear to be riddles. The parable of the laborers is a good example. A number of workers are hired at different times during the day for the same wage. When the early hires find out that fellows who worked fewer hours received the same pay they went ballistic. The owner of the vineyard called each one’s pay a gift thereby justifying all receiving the same. This became for the disciples a lesson in God’s grace which is not earned but freely given. If we earn something, it is expected as pay not a gift! Here’s how Jesus said it.

Jesus used this story after Peter [Matthew 19:27:30] reminded the Savior of their dedication to Him. They left home and career for Him! Jesus assured them, this did not go unnoticed by God and then written in Matthew 20:1-2 He shared

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this parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like ... a man ... [who] hire[d] laborers into his vineyard ... for a penny [a day’s wages]....” Throughout the day he continued to enlist more workers, some joining the team near quitting time and working only an hour or two. And then each one found in their pay envelope the *same* amount [a single penny for a day’s wages]. The few who endured the heat of the sun all day thought this *unreasonable*. The late comers, who worked fewer hours, should have received *less*.

The complaint went “These last have wrought [worked] but one hour, and you have made them equal unto *us* [plural], which have borne the burden and heat of the day.” [Matthew 20:12].

Jesus, however, found their griping *unreasonable*, saying [to one of them], “Friend, I do you no wrong: [they were not defrauded, tricked or robbed]. Did not you agree with me for a penny [a single day’s wages]?” [Matthew 20:13]. In verse 15 Jesus affirms that He is in the right and then He shared this principle with us to underscore the message of God’s grace: “So the last shall be first, and the first last.”

The Last Is First

This is a perfect example of a description of God’s grace in action that does not recognize achievement [merit]. It is “fair” to say that in a human sense we probably don’t understand His reasoning. In this parable, what mattered to this early hire was not his *place in line* to receive their pay (if, indeed, that is what Jesus meant about first and last) but the *amount* of that pay! I, for one, would gladly and patiently wait to get paid standing at the *end* of the line, as long as my envelope reflected what I thought was *reasonable*. These earlier hires rationalized that Jesus was unfair on three counts:

1. People here don’t give equal pay for unequal work. It is socially unacceptable to do so and everyone knows this!

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[Now you know why we never discuss paychecks or bonuses at work with one another.]

- Why did Jesus talk about calling the last one in line to the front? Perhaps, Jesus called “last” those who were *hired first* and He was paying the late comers *first* to make this very point that God’s grace is not tied to merit. Some scholarship maintains that because the last hire of the day *publicly* received his denarius [the word translated ‘penny’] in front of all, the others were upset by this blatant display—to their reasoning—of unfairness even before they received their coin. Perhaps, they anticipated receiving more than a single denarius—even though they knew that was all that was promised them.
2. There was more than one early hire. The Bible speaks of workers in the plural in verse 2. The one worker Jesus spoke with in verse 13 was representative of a choir of disgruntled co-workers. Their collective complaint was viewing their denarius as a wage and not a gift.
 - This parable cannot be stretched to treat the paycheck as a symbol for rewards. If this were so, we might complain about sacrificing our lives for Christ only to receive the same as the thief on the Cross. Jesus’ action teaches *grace* not reward.
 - There was more than one who endured the heat of the long 12 hour day. In a modern sense, they unionized. They came as a group to the owner of the vineyard and Jesus spoke to their representative. There is always strength and support in numbers.
 3. Lastly there is a personal aspect to each one’s ire, as Peter noted: “what shall we have therefore?” [Matthew 19:27]. “What’s in it for me!”

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- Richard Trench in his interpretation of the parables of Jesus tells us this was not the question Peter should have asked. "It put the relation to their Lord on the wrong footing." Trench explained and then added, "There was a tendency in it [Peter's question] to bring their obedience to a calculation of so much work, so much reward" [*The Parables of Our Lord*, 138].

It is here Richard Trench interprets the reason for Jesus bringing this parable. Trench wrote that Jesus "went on to crush the evil in the bud before it should unfold itself further. 'Not of works lest any man should boast;' this was the truth which they were in danger of missing, and which he [Jesus] would now by the parable enforce; and if nothing of works, but all of grace for all, (see Romans 4:1-4) then no glorying of one over another, no claim as of right on the part of any" [Ibid. 138-9].

But why do *we*, also, find their complaint *reasonable*? Admit it! Why is it natural to think this way? And the answer is that their complaint is humanly *relatable*.

The problem is that the logic of grace is outside the realm of human reasoning [Romans 11:33: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out"]. Believers, by their faith, learn to accept God's ways and forfeit their own to His will [Romans 12:2]. "The [thoughts] which be of ... men" [Matthew 16:23], Jesus taught, are in opposition to all the Savior represented and proclaimed. Jesus' grace becomes offensive and foolish to the natural mind [1 Corinthians 1:23] and more instrumental to the Devil's craft [being "drawn away of one's own desires, and enticed" - James 1:14] than any value to God.

Think of what that denarius actually represented in the Savior's mind in sharing this parable" Again, Trench said it best "What the Lord said to Abram, he says to each and to all, 'I am thy exceeding great reward;' [Genesis 15:1] and He has no other reward to impart to any save only this, namely, *Himself*. To 'see

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Him as He is' [1 John 3:2], this is His one reward, the penny unto all." [Ibid. 147-8].

It is probably natural for us to think that God's gifts are material or something God does for us, such as: healings, guidance, and protection. These are services or God's ministry to us, but grace is far more. Most people provide a service and then disappear until we call on them again, and, perhaps, some Christians imagine this is how prayer works—but it doesn't! God does what He does because His gift is the gift of His presence and a deepening relationship with us. No one can have more of Him than another. As one friend of mine puts it: We are all His favorites. "Everyone gets a penny." said Jesus.

Psalm 1:1

We often say that the sources of sin are three: The world, the flesh, and the devil. But consider these three from the parable of the laborers:

1. The culture they lived in and were a part of. This was their world. No doubt this was not their first day as a wage-earner for most of them; so they had come to expect a certain "return" on their labors. The earliest hires had to expect more because they labored more hours.
2. The company they kept. They came as a group when the owner of the vineyard found himself in a public argument over wages with the one who took the leadership. If the other workers saw no problem with their pay and this one man stood alone, it would have been less likely he would have complained. He anticipated (if he didn't simply know already) that the others had his back.
3. Selfish ambitions. His complaint was the voice of a selfish interest—the flesh or as Peter said [Matthew 19:27] "What's in it for me!"

Consider Psalm 1:1. This first verse is climactic, that is to say, a person begins by listening to advice that is worldly.

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Having accepted worldly counsel he meets up with persons of like mind. This defines the company he keeps. This turns him into a scoffer, a self-ambitious and presumptuous person with whom God cannot reason. The world gets his heart, his friends corrupt his thoughts and his mouth tells the tale.

The Living Bible reads:

“Oh, the joys of those”

1. who do not follow evil men’s advice [the culture we live in],
2. who do not hang around with sinners, [the company we keep],
3. scoffing at the things of God. [Selfish ambitions: Proverbs 21 verse 24 defines scoffing as presumptuous, proud, insolent desires].

How does one prevent this from happening in their own life and experience? Verse 2 tells us: By keeping our minds in God’s Word. “But they delight in doing everything God wants them to, and day and night are always meditating on his laws and thinking about ways to follow him more closely.” How important it is to focus our thoughts on God’s goodness and grace [as we read in Philippians 4:8 things that are true, honest, just, lovely, of a good report, virtuous and praise worthy].

Jesus and the Culture

But here, too, Jesus broke the rules. Jesus’ decision was not *merit* based. Jesus didn’t do the math and there is a reason why He didn’t—because for God money is no object. We live on a scale between wealth and poverty, but the Savior didn’t! He was simply following the plan of His Father who supplied whatever He might need from God’s own endless provision. Beside, there is no such thing as money where He comes from. This is the reason He could send His disciples out proclaiming the coming kingdom without any money! Mark wrote, “[He] commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only; no scrip, no bread, no money in their purse” [Mark 6:8]. If we really rely on God’s grace, this will begin to make sense to us.

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The scale of rich to poor becomes irrelevant. Grace doesn't care that my neighbor, the billionaire, owns a yacht bigger than my house. Grace never makes such comparisons or puts any value in favoritism. So, when Jesus gave each worker enough money to purchase their evening meal and have a restful night's sleep "on Him" He fulfilled the love of God, and that was all He meant to do.

Jesus found it reasonable to tell us to rejoice in persecution. He saw it as a blessing [Matthew 5:11-12] and an understandable life-style for a "cross-bearer" [Matthew 16:24]. Jesus probably didn't flinch nor show any doubt when he told us to choose Him over family—if it came to it. He used the word "hate" [Luke 14:26] which might sound unreasonable, especially since He also enjoined us to *love* our enemies! [Luke 6:27]. I suppose now the idea of equal pay regardless of how many hours one works is not sounding so strange. He was turning our logic on its head! "He that is greatest among you shall be your servant" [Matthew 23:11].

In Luke 18:22 He answered a rich, young man who seemingly wanted to know the secret to eternal life, "Sell all that you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." Jesus told him lovingly. Now, where is the logic in that!

There is a place among believers for such a discussion as this parable brings to the table and that is Romans 12:1 where Paul talks about our service (our labor in His harvest). We will not grasp the meaning of reasonable service, however, until we understand God's grace because we serve Him.

Learning Grace

Grace by its very definition as a gift of God favors no recipient over another; it, therefore, cannot be based on merit, race, creed, gender, class, nor any other condition, characteristic, or achievement of man. Grace is absolutely and unconditionally *free*. This is a radical departure from the human mindset that tends to calculate the merit or worth of everyone. First impressions naturally recommend a level of favoritism. We are

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taught to value some people over others. We do not love strangers the way we love family.

Every trip to a store reminds us that there is a price or value placed on everything. They call us consumers to encourage us to consume whatever we buy; so that, we will be back for more. From the time as children we dropped our first penny into our very own piggy bank we began learning to value things differently (howbeit, children don't want to save pennies as much as they want to spend them). When I began work at an investment firm in the city, I was comfortable with my pay, primarily, perhaps, because I didn't know I was underpaid. They knew and they decided to bring my salary up to what was called "fair market value" for what I did.

There is a competitive spirit in us, too, that we encourage. We feed a cultural pride that wants to win. But the goal in this effort is a trophy or recognition that only winners receive. Paul picked up on this in His letters encouraging us to finish the race and win a crown of righteousness [2 Timothy 4:8; Hebrews 12:1]. But the analogy falls short of the truth in that we can all run and win, if we finish the marathon. The crown is an achievement given to everyone who completes the course—not just the one who comes in first.

Jesus, also, used the word "reward" [Matthew 5:12 "great is your reward in heaven:"] but He was not talking about degrees of achievement or something only some in heaven receive. This word speaks of a "wage earned" in Luke 10:7 where Jesus explained "the laborer is worthy of his hire [wage]." He was simply telling His Jewish compatriots that no one will be left out who faithfully serves God.

Paul challenged our understanding when in Romans 4:4 he argued, "Now to him that works is the reward [wage] not reckoned of grace, but of debt." So, although it seems reasonable even to us, based alone on the definition of the word, *hire*, that all the workers should *not* have received the same amount. Yet, when we give this word God's definition as an expression of His grace, it does.

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Here is where our discussion must begin. Jesus used the word “wage” but He was talking about “grace.” There is, even in English, a definition of wage meaning “a gift in recognition of service” which suggests that common words in a Christian’s vocabulary are being nuanced differently somehow in the heart of God and God finds this perfectly ... reasonable.

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“We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters.” - 1 John 3:16 NLT

Here is our verse again: ““I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” [Romans 12:1].

Paul spoke of our sacrifice as—and here is our word—reasonable [the Greek word “logical”]. Paul beseeched the believers in Rome: to “present [their] bodies [lives] a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which [he said] is [their] *reasonable* service. [Romans 12:1].

Paul uses interesting language in this verse. The word translated in the King James “beseech” is a term from which we get the word “Paraclete” describing the Holy Spirit’s work in us [John 14:16, 26]. This speaks of more than comfort. He is our advocate according to 1 John 2:1. This word also speaks of admonition in Luke 3:18; It is encouragement in Romans 12:8, instruction or teaching in Titus 1:9 and consolation in 2 Corinthians 2:7.

The word “beseech” is modified by the word—in the King James—“mercies,” which speaks of a sympathy for those who are suffering. It is the intercessory prayer of the Christian heart. It is at times understood to be closer to our word “pity” because it is more about sympathetic feels and not actions. I still marvel at the Biblical use of the plural as we have here: pities or “bowels of” mercies. Maybe it’s a Jewish thing. The plural,

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according to the Hebrew Grammar, is used sometimes as an intensive focus. It may also show amplification or completion. In Psalm 21:7 we are not only blessed with a blessing, but abundantly blessed with blessings [plural]. There is a word used in our Bible that is often interpreted as bowels [plural] of compassion. The New Testament Dictionary calls these the seat of the tenderest affections: compassion, kindness, benevolence. Paul wrote the Church at Philippi [Philippians 1:8]: “God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels [the compassionate heart] of Jesus Christ.” [The Greek philosophers didn’t know this meaning.] Here in Romans 12 Paul wants to draw our attention to our Lord’s total commitment to our Salvation! There is no other way in which to show our gratitude other than, in turn, giving our lives for Him! This, to God, sounds reasonable.

Is it not a sound interpretation to say that Paul is admonishing or encouraging [not scolding] the Roman church to take a long look at the heart of the Savior who gave His life for us—dare we do less than give ours for Him!

The word “body” echoes back to Romans 6:13, “yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.”

We are living sacrifices. We are not asked to die for Him. We are asked the harder thing: to live for Him. It might be mentioned that this “sacrifice” because it is the whole body is a burnt offering. It is a sign of total devotion and service to God which distinguishes it from all the other sacrifices for sin, trespasses, need of reconciliation [Peace offering], etc. “You shall love the Lord, your God with *all* your heart, soul, and might” [Deuteronomy 6:5]. Another unique thing of the burnt offering is that even Gentiles could offer these [Isaiah 56:7]. They speak of grace inclusive of all nations and peoples who come. In Exodus 29:42 it must burn continuously because our devotion and faithfulness to God shall be unending.

The word “Holy” means that God will not share our lives with any other. We are His only!

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It is worth our effort to look into Romans 12:1 and Paul's word for *reasonable*. It is obvious already without any in depth study of this text that it must mean what is reasonable *to God* not man. Paul actually wrote: "acceptable unto God." The word reasonable in the Greek refers to what works as advertised. "Reasonable milk" (there is such a thing in Greek) is nourishing [1 Peter 2:2]. In the Classical Greek before the Bible was written, this word meant "logical" or an argument that was eloquent and truthful as opposed to rhetorical [designed only to convince people of an idea without regard for the truth]. So, in Greek thought which includes the language of the New Testament, only truth is reasonable. To persuade someone to believe a lie, to use deception, is not the purpose behind a study in logic—and, therefore, not reasonable.

In Romans 12:1 what is reasonable to God has to be the service He is calling us into because it fits our lives. This word "logical" in the Greek pertains to the Logos, which for us is Jesus Christ [John 1:1]. It is not a stretch to say that reasonable pertains then to the yoke we share with Christ because it is *easy* [it fits the purpose for which we were created]. For believers *not* serving our Lord is a hard life because they are trying to be someone they are not! [Matthew 11:30; Acts 9:5].

What if, first, we ask whether enlistment into God's service is reasonable—but—from a *human perspective*. Is serving Christ logical? Or what if, simply, we want a "reason" to serve Him, especially one that we can share with inquiring hearts, according to 1 Peter 3:15 "to give an answer... a reason for the hope that is in you [and me]...." Perhaps, it is worth our effort to understand the criteria *non-believers* use to determine what is logical or reasonable. Let me phrase this query in apologetic terms: What if we think God is unnecessarily misunderstood and we want to defend His honor, is it possible to support God's actions—even in a natural sense—as reasonable. God gets a "bad rap" among the very people for whose salvation we may have been praying, and not always because of religious hypocrisy. I

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suppose one of the biggest concerns of the non-believer has to be our talk of a “Hell” alight with the tortuous flames of an unspeakable judgment only God could have dreamed up. Where’s the love in this! [There is a supplement to this topic in the back of this book.]

Perhaps, we need to be verbally more supportive of His divine interests. Is Calvary misunderstood? Like sowing seed: some falls on hard ground and rocks and among thorn bushes, but some finds good ground where it will take root. But we must sow it for this to happen!

There are some unspoken benefits to a society having true believers around that the non-believer might not be aware of. We are, after all, the “salt of the earth” [Matthew 5:13]. Christians tend to be far more charitable and how often when even non-believers are in pain do they welcome our prayers! Christianity has been accused of starting wars—religious wars—but true Christianity whose leader is the Prince of Peace, in truth, ends them.

This inquiry is intended only to understand the non-believer. Perhaps, we might be more compassionate and less argumentative accordingly. We have not minimized the importance here of the Spirit’s work in drawing men and women to Christ. N. T. Wright wrote, “Paul found that when he told his story, when he proclaimed that this Jesus was indeed the world’s true Lord, people (to their great surprise, no doubt) found this announcement making itself at home in their minds and hearts, generating the belief that it was true, and transforming their lives with a strange new presence and power.”

Logic

There is value in identifying human reasoning so when we encounter it—even in our own selves—we can recognize it and deal with it in faith. There are three conditions generally considered to determine if something is a logical answer in a

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natural or human sense. Here is where things start sounding philosophical. There are three conditions when taken together that give us an adequate description of something we might consider to be reasonable, and so, these explain in a general sense why many non-believers are non-believers or how someone from the same planet as we might seem worlds apart from us on certain subjects.

1. **Permanently true.** Everyone does not have the same knowledge base from which to draw their conclusions or what they consider “reasonable.” We all work from the premise that there are certain things they can be known. Not everyone knows everything, therefore, what is reasonable to one is not reasonable to another.

There are certain principles by which everyone governs their thoughts and actions, but those principles differ from one person to another. These are foundational to the direction one’s life will take and the perspective one has when trials come. Reasonableness requires explanations be built on fundamental truths or ideas held inviolable. In Luke 6:47-49 Jesus called His words to His disciples a rock upon which to build a life. So, like a house built on a rock will withstand the destructive force of the storm, followers of Christ can live victoriously through any crisis. His commandments are foundational because they will never change, be edited, and cannot be improved upon. They are fixed in His character as a just, holy, and merciful God! This is a primary condition upon which the reasonableness of our faith is founded. Following Christ and His commandments is, for the believer, reasonable because as the Psalmist wrote, “His commandments are sure (steadfast and faithful)” [Psalm 11:7]. Paul agreed, “the foundation of God stands sure,” [2 Timothy 2:19].

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What is true today cannot become false tomorrow. For God to be God He must be the same yesterday, today and forever—by definition! For believers, God is truth [John 14:6] because He cannot change: “For I am the LORD, I change not” [Malachi 3:5]. His covenant is eternal, also: “My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.” [Psalm 89:34].

2. **Relatably true** : Our minds love to learn by comparing ideas or arranging facts in some order or relating a present truth we are learning to one already known that supports our worldview. This aspect of truth might be called comparability like fitting pieces in a puzzle. If we are asked to believe something that doesn't fit in with what we already know but contradicts what we already know, it is like a puzzle piece that belongs to another picture.

We use here the idea of relatability to include comparability because we cannot fit a piece in place until first we relate it to the surrounding pieces. Any learning to make sense to us must be relatable—both in terms of our experience and the knowledge we already have. It is very confusing, at the least, if we discover something true that contradicts what we thought we already knew!

To the degree a person is culturally assimilated and particular traditions and practices define how they live, they will see their way of life as reasonable because they have accepted the reasoning and explanations defined by that culture. They comply with its social norms because of the support it represents in living a certain level of comfort. Well-to-do individuals tend to cluster in neighborhoods, in this way giving reasonableness to their own lifestyle even if it does not represent Christ.

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This is what makes Christian fellowship *not* based on any social status *paramount* in accepting Christ's directives as reasonable. Paul succinctly said it perfectly, "our citizenship is in heaven!" [Philippians 3:20]. And he went on to add that even our bodies will be conformed to His when He returns for us. But here and now this social identity must be recognized and maintained in Christian fellowship to retain a sense of reasonableness in the promise.

3. **Measurably True:** Pythagoras believed that numbers were not only the way to truth, but truth itself. Through mathematics, one could attain harmony and live an easier life. It might sound strange to say that all truth is measurable, but we are talking about *natural* truth not spiritual truth. This is the problem with spiritual truths; they are eternal and infinite as God is, like the Fruit of the Spirit "against which there is no law or restrictions." We live in time [something heaven has no need of] which means we live now with decay and death as well as growth and birth. Life is often explained in terms of how much, how old, how well, or how effective something is.

To say it differently, it is very difficult to wrap our minds around the concept of the eternal or the infinite. Even the Old Testament word for "forever" means an indefinite period of time but yet limited. We even talk about eternity as time without end, but that's not what it is. If there was time in Heaven we might want to keep our watches on and our calendars handy but eternity means we will not need them there.

When the Greek philosophers asked to define a justice based on mercy or a happiness based on personal desires, they concluded that the key virtue that ties them

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together is “moderation” [our Bible word, temperance]. To them, some pleasure, some wealth, and some fame, measured and not extreme, was socially acceptable. As appalling as it sounds, in this way, prostitution and pedophilia were legitimized in myth and society. Moderation even offers an excuse for bad behavior because “we are managing it ... and besides it’s not that bad!” With God all His attributes and the Fruit of the Spirit are “without law” [Galatians 5:23] or unrestricted. God’s love does not need to be managed or moderated. God’s peace does not exist at all in times of violence. Some things cannot be moderated. A man’s faithfulness to his wife is not measurable in God’s reasoning—as if the occasional dalliance is expected, as it was in Ancient Greece.

We also measure the worth or value of things to determine their importance to us. What is very meaningful to one, has no value to another: One man’s trash is another man’s treasure. We might not realize it at first but reasonableness is a measurable quantity in the world of logic. We are put on alert to the fact that God’s grace does not work this way, as we might have discovered in the parable of the laborers we referenced earlier. We might use a continuum to make comparisons or a taxonomical tree to show where the piece fits in the puzzle we are examining. But both these are simply tools of logic to help us measure or relate to some aspect of life. This is not necessarily how God’s Truth works.

The Continuum

We have come to recognize that not everything is black and white and truth can be complex; there might be a degree of truth in something. For this we postulate a spectrum to determine how much or how little of some characteristic is true. Autism, for example, is now referred to as an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) because not every autistic person has the same behavioral

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patterns. People also find it reasonable to compare themselves with others less fortunate in some way as a form of pride or self-praise. The Corinthians employed this aspect of logic when they wanted to prove themselves spiritual. Knowing that no one is perfect, they put themselves on this line along side some who clearly needed to repent. They did this to show themselves more spiritual [2 Corinthians 10:12]. Paul knew this was unwise. Paul, instead, encouraged them to learn what “the Holy Spirit teaches; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” [1 Corinthians 2:13].

It is also natural for us to value some persons over others. No one would consider this an unreasonable thing to do but look at the New Testament idea of “honoring.” If we honor friends over enemies, does that mean they deserve more of our love as Christians? [Matthew 5:43-46]. Jesus cautioned, “For if you love them which love you, what reward have you?” In our way of thinking, placing value on others [and not just a mother and father, Matthew 15:6] is a reasonable way of honoring friendships over others. In 21 uses of this word, “honor,” in our New Testament in 16 verses, only three suggest someone other than God or parent: Acts 28:6-10: the people on the Island of Melita honored Paul thinking him a god; 1 Timothy 5:3: widows over 60 were to be cared for as valued prayer warriors; and 1 Peter 2:17: Peter makes the blanket statement to honor everyone especially those in government. It is clear here that the value we put on others is suppose to be set at priceless.

The Bible does not want us to draw a line, a continuum, from “I like you” to “I hate you” and then place everyone we know somewhere on that line. Nor are we to set a value on a relationship to determine whether or not another believer is welcome into our fellowship. Comparing people sounds reasonable because we assume incorrectly that we are discovering truth about them. Comparing is a logical tool for inventing reasons but this does not represent God’s grace. Everyone should receive a day’s wages in our vineyard.

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Introducing God's Reasoning

Let's use measuring to "grade" our own Christian walk compared to how good, acceptable or pleasing, and perfect our life in Christ has become *to us*. I will borrow from my own commentary on Romans here. Serving the Lord is reasonable because:

♦ **It is Good** - Gramma used to say, "Eat your dinner, it's good for you." And I always knew what she meant. Follow Jesus, it's good for you! The best thing we can do as believers is follow the Savior wherever He leads. His will is nourishment for the Soul [Acts 9:31]. Later a brief look at the Beatitudes in this regard should be helpful explaining—or at least presenting in clearer detail—the divine logic by which we, as believers, are now to govern our lives.

♦ **It is Pleasing** - When what pleases God pleases us, we have arrived at a renewed mind. "Delight yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart" [Psalm 37:3]. Nothing can possibly bring us happiness or satisfaction or fulfillment except living in His will [Matthew 5:3ff]. His will is our happiness [Matthew 5:3-12].

♦ **It is Perfect** - We are being transformed into His image which is the image God intended for us on creation day. We were made for His will! Nothing fits so right as when we are obeying our Lord. His will is to perfect us [Romans 8:29; Philippians 1:6].

Part of the problem with a God who is infinitely merciful and loving is that He can now expect the same of us—even though we think it more reasonable to say we are growing or getting better at it, but we are still sinners [I have a problem with this reasoning but that's another book].

The Westminster Confession

Because this is a philosophical treatise we can talk about eternity—not as measureless time because it has nothing to do with measurements or time. So, if an eternal God thinks eternal

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thoughts and makes eternal plans, is there any significant difference between a moment of time and a lifetime? No! Both are an invisible blip on the line of God's existence which extends forever into the past and future. Even the terms "past" and "future" mean nothing.

If this is where God lives and how He reasons—in eternal and infinite terms—we should not be surprised to hear Him say, "And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee," He asked, "but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in *all* [a-l-l] his ways, and to *love* him, and to serve the LORD thy God *with all* [a-l-l or whole] thy heart and with all thy soul," [Deuteronomy 10:12; Matthew 22:37].

I surmise few will receive what I want to ask next: whether or not salvation can be discarded after a person shows signs of accepting it. Such as inquiry relates to time and has no significance in the logic of heaven.

How so?

How much time must elapse before we think we have observed this person's apostasy? It would be doubtful if one would make that appraisal after—say—this person responded to an altar call and then left the church to rob a bank. We probably would say that they never were saved. We do not know if God is still reeling in this fish; maybe our Lord gave him some line to tire him out. We cannot read the heart! Only God can! [Acts 15:8].

Maybe this person lived 50 years as a faithful churchgoer before robbing the bank! Does that mean he lost his salvation? Perhaps he had spent half a century pretending to be Christian or religious for political advantage or to silence his wife. And maybe God keeps the fish on His hook for decades before reeling him in. God does not concern Himself with "time." He is eternal.

Such words as eternal and infinite speak to what is beyond our predicting, relating to, comparing and measuring. And it is here where God lives. The language of the Westminster Confession teaches there is "one only living and true God, who

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is infinite in being and perfection ... without ... parts... immutable ... eternal, incomprehensible, almighty ... most holy...most absolute..." God's attributes cannot be measured or compared. His grace follows only His guiding holiness. He is transcendent. So with God we must relate to Him by faith, trust, and faithfulness.

Anything that is to be associated with God as an attribute or gift escapes the searching eye of man's logic and must be accepted by faith because everything He does—and is—is with an eternal purpose in mind and all that He gives is from a limitless supply.

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“The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.” - Deuteronomy 29:29

As Christians, because we are still very human, we have questions for which we have no answers—and in a natural or logical sense, never will. The most basic reason why this is true is because God is eternal and everything about him, his love, justice, holiness, are also infinite and unchanging. We cannot in a natural sense understand, for example, His love for us that shows no favoritism and cannot be diminished. We place conditions upon our love; we love family more than we love strangers.

Divine grace, an unmerited, unearned, unsolicited, unreciprocated, and unlimited salvation that some have but others don't is unexplainable in the terms of human reason because such a grace breaks the rule of our logic. It defies all measuring by which we might determine God's love and care toward us. As we know: it has nothing to do with our works or personal effort. We cannot understand why we are saved and others we know show every sign of not being children of God. Our reasoning, as we have been saying, when it comes to grace has no response other than a simple faith in accepting it.

This is probably why some believers intellectually wrestle with the belief in the eternal flames of God's judgment or God's wrath. They gravitate in some way toward a universalism that, if not accepting all into heaven, or if not theologizing a purgatory as an intermediate step for the repentant after death before heaven, they at least want to believe that not everyone has

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to hear and accept the message of the Cross to be saved from Hell. But our Bible makes it undeniably clear that Christ alone is the way to the Father and not everyone will find that narrow path.

Salvation

This “Message of the Cross” or why the Savior needed to be both Divine and Human and to suffer such a public cruelty—this message, itself—defies human logic. It is not that Christ’s death was unfair, as Francis Turretin, a 17th Century, Italian theologian, pointed out, but it remains very much, as Paul told Timothy “a mystery” [1 Timothy 3:16]. No human mind, no matter how genius, ever even speculated about a salvation from sin the way God’s plan was carried out in Christ. Nonetheless, theories of the Atonement abound!

The reason is because we think in terms of our observable reality and our personal experiences. Mythologies reveal this truth in blatantly obvious ways through gods, themselves created: belligerent, hateful beings, jealous, raping women, and often enraged if not appeased by sacrifices. Study about the House of Atreus in Greek mythology.

Our Salvation has to be by faith because there is no other way to receive it. If God tested our knowledge of His salvation against what He actually provided, how, and why, who would pass! Beside, passing is not required. Believing alone is! John Stott said it simply and best:

We may not know, we cannot tell,
What pains he had to bear;
But we believe it was for us
He hung and suffered there.

Science

We appreciate the scientific method of learning because it is the natural way we think or reason. To make sense an idea needs to be logically consistent [coherent with the rest of our reality],

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mathematically probable, and, most importantly, naturally observable. We build all knowledge on these 3 premises without realizing it. And we are satisfied that we know something even if it is still a mystery because we come to expect or accept it as “known” if these conditions are met.

A couple examples will suffice to make this clearer: birth and death. If asked where babies come from, after a healthy smile, we give the obvious answer because “logically” this is how it works every time. When a couple are intimate and the seed is fertilized we anticipate a birth because that is how it is always observed as a natural process. We don’t expect a calf to be born to a human couple, either. The mystery of birth seems to be explained because we know the way babies come to be although the mystery of life itself and what happens during gestation or how it happens is a marvel beyond the scope of our knowledge because it is the very essence of being “alive” which we accept because of the frequency of its repeat occurrence.. Science goes deeper and deeper into the explanation thanks to atomic microscopes and man’s knowledge of proteins but we are still looking at something that is a mystery.

Death is equally mysterious. As the Bible says, “it is appointed unto man once to die” [Hebrews 9:27] and we know of no one who hasn’t, who is still alive after hundreds of years. This is a logical conclusion because it is observably consistent and repeated over and over again. But death, itself, makes no sense because the body in some regards rejuvenates itself. Why not totally! Science is still looking for the cause of cell degeneration because it should be something correctable. Some people hold out hope that in the future science will have the answer to an extended life—maybe forever?

So these 3 aspects of human reasoning define the process known as thinking for human beings: We say we know something because it is

1. Definite or permanent: What always happened under certain conditions can be expected to happen under these same conditions. The event occurs the same way like each Spring the trees leaf and the flowers bloom.

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The Bible says “While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.” [Genesis 8:22].

This is why the natural mind accepts reincarnation as more reasonable than resurrection. Plato, for example, believed in the soul's immortality with reincarnation which was known as metempsychosis. He thought that life and death was like the seasons in nature. A few individuals could break this cycle by themselves becoming gods—like Hercules. In Hindi this is known as “samsara.” In Buddhism the process is driven by karma, the law of cause and effect, where actions in this and past lives influence future rebirths. To believe that life goes in cycles is a reasonable view because it explains the continuation of life.

The Bible teaches a “resurrection” which Greeks found strange [Acts 17:18]. A resurrection is the end of death breaking the cycle which violates this principle of logic. A cycle or repeatable occurrence represents the parameters or conditions which logically define all natural reality. How brilliant God's wisdom given to Paul in recognizing a true salvation: “If you believe in your heart that God *raised* Him [Jesus] from the dead” you will be saved! [Romans 10:9]. This simplistic verse speaks to the truth that the temporal is logically cyclical because it needs to observe an idea being reproducible; so, in the natural mind, reason accepts reincarnation as more probable. But God is not temporal. He lives in eternity and there resurrection is a most reasonable promise! [1 Corinthians 15:35-47].

2. Observable or relatable: In a scientific sense, seeing is believing or what is a part of real life. The five senses

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play a critical role in scientific materialism. What we cannot see, taste, touch, smell, or hear cannot be known.

3. Measurable or mathematically possible: If I claimed to have taken a 5 minute flight from America to Europe, you would call this a lie because knowing the air speed planes fly at, the math doesn't work. Science measures everything: how fast, how massive, how small or how far away, etc. If something is material, it has mass or force and therefore size.

An eternal God whose supply of grace is infinite, who is omnipresent and omniscient and omnipotent—such a God—has no discernible size. Eternal life has escaped the boundary of time. Man is a spiritual being. Man's soul lives beyond the natural body. None of these ideas—as true and Biblical as they are—can be explained in terms of our natural reality; so, we seek for another reality in which reasonableness can be understood and all things are knowable. As Paul reminds us, He has “raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” [Ephesians 2:6].

Some Unanswered Questions

We seek more answers than, it appears, God wants to provide in this life. Perhaps, our way of reasoning is not His: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD” [Isaiah 55:8]. If this be true, and I think likely, some of our theology has been the result of our own logical conclusions not based on Scripture. What we need to understand is that when we use our reasoning, we are projecting—not just our own thoughts but—our own experiences and observations as proof of what we assume God meant. That's how logic works.

We define spirituality in terms of our own faith walk implying that if this is how God works with me, it must be how He works with everyone. Consequently those who enjoy a lively

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worship service, as an example, assume those who don't to be spiritually asleep or even dead. While those who like a more quiet experience in worship see the lively ones as wild and out of control. It is a short step to incorporating the difference in denominational doctrine. Personal convictions are just that—between God and you [Romans 14:22]. God always reserves the right as Counselor [Isaiah 9:6; John 16:8] to discuss our faith with us in the privacy of our own needs, conscience, and calling [Isaiah 1:18]. Gregg Strawbridge in his brief work, *Infant Baptism Does the Bible Teach It?* wrote “As [C. S.] Lewis implies, and the Bible prescribes, it is the duty of every Christian to be diligent in study and charitable to those who cannot see it as we do.”

There are many conclusions over the centuries that Christians, in one group or another, have made that have no known Biblical basis—some even contradict the Biblical message, some marginalize the message by toning down its emphasis, and some are merely peripheral and can only serve to divide the Church.

Water Baptism

We must guard against an under-active faith which refuses to accept God at His Word but must know His reasoning behind it. Take, for example, the following question: Where do babies go when they die? The church has instituted an entire ritual of Paedobaptism in answer to this question which in turn is justified as theologically correct because it assumes to deal with original sin. According to Gregg Strawbridge “For there was manifestly [according to a Baptist historian], ‘no society, during that long period of fifteen centuries, but what was in the habit of baptizing infants.’”

God covenanted with Abraham and his descendants with the sign of male circumcision. God went into this covenant simply by asking for Abraham's trust in Him—and not requiring him to do anything other than the circumcision. The parallel with our Faith in Christ through the New Covenant [Ephesians 2:7-8] and water baptism seems too obvious to be overlooked. Perhaps, we are observing how God operates in not only

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covenanting with us but providing an action on our part that indicates our commitment to that covenant as well as an ongoing sign of that commitment. Recall the rainbow after the flood: "a token of a covenant between [God] and the earth." [Genesis 9:13].

As Greg Strawbridge puts it, "Rituals which involve a symbolic act, such as baptism, are connected to Biblical covenants between God and man. In virtually every case Biblical covenants include signs which visibly represent the realities behind the covenant promises."

Add to all this the cultural leanings of a "collectivistic" society in which family concerns are valued over individual interests. In a patriarchal society, for example, it makes sense to have the Truth when revealed to the head of the household to be shared and accepted by his family. There is no surprise in reading Luke pointing out that entire households were being water baptized in this way. Nothing, however is said here about the mode of baptism or the age of the individuals being baptized.

In Mark 16:16 Jesus told His disciples when He sent them out heralding the Good News of the coming Kingdom, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believes not shall be damned." The logic in this statement suggest that "believing" comes first or is in some way essential to salvation having a greater importance than the baptism. Jesus did not say, "He that is not baptized will be damned." I think we can agree with Strawbridge, "Please understand then that these God-ordained ritual acts are not magical, but they are sacramental. They are visible promises of God's redemptive purposes to save and sanctify a people, His church (Ephesians. 5:25-27). We know," he continued, "from Biblical and church history that not every person who partakes of such covenant signs also has the reality signified in the symbol."

But even here, nothing is said about infants; in fact, since the disciples are heralding the Gospel message we can assume they are talking to adults. The logic to include children is in the language of a collective or patriarchic society in the words

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“entire household” which in some cases by the sheer numbers of those who accepted the Gospel had to include babies and small children. Covenantal language is inclusive; yet, the dynamic of a relationship with Christ is always personal.

All this is, perhaps, is our overthinking it. We must encourage water baptism whether by sprinkling or immersion of those who believe. And if a couple want to bring their young child to Christ [Matthew 19:14] to dedicate their infant, or bring them in ceremony with the sprinkling of water, it must be obvious that parental oversight has not therein been abrogated. Has original sin been dealt with? Some say that it has through water baptism and some say Christ’s death alone. Either way, we can be assured that God’s grace has an answer for our concerns for the spiritual well-being of our children. We would do well, as parents, to stay true to the Lord and stay in prayer for our sons and daughters as long as God gives us breath.

Logic's Part

Human reasoning or logic has a part to play in our understanding spiritual things but usually in analogous ways. Because we are child-like in our ability to comprehend eternal truths, God must use parables, anthropomorphic expressions, and words that can only approximate the divine idea.

Parables are in essence metaphors used to tell God’s story. God’s revelation is the story within the story, the Bible in the Bible. The marriage of a man and woman, for example, to depict the mystery of our Union as believers with Christ. “A man ... shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one... This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.” [Ephesians 5:31-32]. Or how God intends to establish His Kingdom: “The Kingdom of Heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field....” [Matthew 13:24].

Professor Trench wrote in his work on *The Parables*, “the parable or other analogy to spiritual truth, approximated from the world of nature or man, is not merely illustration, but also in some sort proof. Their power lies deeper than this.... The world of nature, being throughout a witness for the world of spirit. All

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lovers of truth readily acknowledge these mysterious harmonies, and the force of arguments derived from them. The things on earth are copies of the things in heaven.”

As Hebrews 10:1 explains regarding the Torah, “The law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image” [the sacrifices point to Christ’s death]. This invites us to study Torah law, ceremonial and moral, for insight into the holiness and the heart of God [not just judgment in a penal sense] that subsequently required His crucifixion to save us from what the Law determined was sin against God.

The Bible also is replete with anthropomorphic expression—so much so, that some scholars consider them actual Theophanies or Christophanies [appearance of God in bodily form]. This goes beyond physical appearances [Genesis 18:1], it is represented, more so, in referencing God’s anger [Exodus 4:24; Malachi 2:3], remorse [Genesis 6:6], compassion [Psalm 111:4] and love [Isaiah 43:4]. In Isaiah 49:15 God compares in parabolic fashion His love to that of a woman toward her nursing new born. God’s is stronger! Mothers because of maternal instinct would far better understand this analogy than would others. Human characteristics aid in our understanding because this is coherent logically with human behavior (though in these end times this might be changing). But these are only approximations not the whole story to tell about—what we anthropomorphically refer to as—the heart of God. His love exceeds our human description of it.

Some scholars, knowing that God is a Spirit and cannot feel “physical” pain, are reluctant to ascribe to Him emotional pain as well. We fail to appreciate the full force of God’s anger and His affection toward His creation. So, He employs the parable or analogy to impress such truth upon our hearts and minds [Hosea 11:3, 4, 9, 10]. This is how God could bluster in Malachi 2:3, “I will... spread dung upon your faces” [feces in the faces].

Lastly, we are often ascribing the natural use of a word to explain its use in a context where it doesn’t seem to belong because its Biblical use is far more heavenly. There are over 700

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words in the New Testament alone that first appear in its pages—not to mention all the Old Testament terms whose picturesque use are left to the Spirit of God to explain. There are some key examples worth studying in more depth: agape love, The Fruit of the Spirit, one Old Testament word for love: CHESED. In Isaiah 40:6 it is described as the glorious beauty of a field of wild flowers in bloom. But even here, God's glory is more magnificent, in full display in His compassion and mercies for His creation. We might go further in saying that the most magnificent glorious display of His love was on the Cross.

You can see why I am reluctant to pass off the judgment of God as either vengeful or wrathful, as simply explained in judicial terms derived from man's courts. There appear similarities but some gaping differences. Regarding our justification, our defense attorney [advocate: 1 John 2:1] assumed *upon himself* our guilt and punishment. And then the Judge invited us home to live with Him under the provisions of adoption. Why He did all this is, little doubt, connected to His holiness or Who He is as our God—something not yet perfectly clear to us. We accept it humbly and gratefully by faith.

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“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.” - 2 Timothy 3:1

Modernism appears to have a different logic but it doesn't. What is different is the changing culture that redefines the family; a materialistic worldview that does not honor God, and an educational system that indoctrinates young minds to accept these as part of life.

Logic is still logic. People still accept cultural drift unnoticed; they still value social values and morals though they are not what they once were, and the education system is still molding young minds by giving social change justification and purpose.

This is how they relate to their world, measure or place a value on what is in it, and define their personal happiness and significance. The logic hasn't change; the people have!

Isaiah 5:20 alluded to such a time: “[They] call [redefine] evil [as] good, and good [as] evil; that put [relate to the] darkness [the nighttime] for [over the day] light, and [day] light [has become] for [them] darkness [a time to sleep]; that put [value] bitter [what was once detested] for sweet [what was once cherished], and sweet for bitter!”

What was once unreasonable culturally has now become not only acceptable but reasonably so.

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Changing Culture

Again, it is the civilized world that seems in a hurry to shed Christianity like a worn garment that cannot keep them warm any longer. In season 2, episode 13 of *Grey's Anatomy*, the TV series [2006] one young patient is diagnosed with hermaphroditism and the lead surgeon was being asked to perform reassignment surgery on this youth. It was introduced in this episode, I believe, in order to alter the cultural consciousness. Now years later it is the T in LGBTQ. This should be a medical concern not a cultural one but even some state laws are being passed to make it easier for teens to identify as their biological opposite, and all this is sounding "reasonable" to many.

Many modern sitcoms also feature gay relationships including gay marriages—both men and women—to encourage cultural acceptance. June in America is now "Pride Month." Even the name "Pride" was designed to bring this issue out in the open and gain national recognition. Many churches find it far easier to accept the social changes than take a biblical stance that limits the marriage bond to Adam and his Eve. Some scholars, who accept gay relations as a vital and reasonable part of modern civilized culture, have reinterpreted key scriptural references to the sexual relationship to exclude gayness as a "sin."

One American city is now designating itself as a transgender sanctuary city. This suggests that transgenders are being persecuted or victimized in some way, which was something I had no knowledge of. I add this note to point out that much of what we accept as reasonable depends in large part on what we consider factual. To the degree we are falsely informed or not informed at all is like having a few pieces to a puzzle we cannot put together but we still need to guess at the picture.

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Cultural Drift

Cultural integration of any ideology is required for a society to find that ideology “reasonable” and accept it. This satisfies the requirement of permanence because the ideology is now part of the fabric of the society, its norms and moral code as well. It is left only to codify all this in law. It satisfies relatability because the ideology has been accepted by the members of that society. It is measured in terms of its cultural value. What is reasonable now is traditional.

Traditional practices have profound cultural significance, so much so, that some cultures honor them long after they no longer have any religious or practical meaning. The Canadian Government, for example, is cracking down on FGM [circumcising young girls] in Northern Tanzania. There may still be tribal cultures that practice this even though not for any medical reason. What gave the practice reasonableness? Centuries of Tribal tradition.

It is now impossible to distinguish cultural traditions from religious ones although religion is, more often than not, merely ritualized traditions. Religious festivals are created to celebrate customs—not change them. You can understand how anyone participating in them would find the social practices behind the celebrations ... well, *reasonable*. Logic now has left the world of truth and has entered the realm of social acceptance. This is how pre-christian cultures could invest so much devotion in myths. To them they were not stories told to children.

Look at something as sacred as the marriage bed [Hebrews 13:4] and how it has been scorned as a sign of fidelity and made into a symbol of pleasure. Pornography is easily accessible. Sneaking a copy of National Geographic for a boy to query the pictures is a mild, almost fond, memory of a bygone day. Now, any tablet or smart phone will open up a world of forbidden access to young minds, and it is, by and large, thought of as a part of one’s sexual education. It is as if the voices of morality have been silenced because these voices were now outdated cultural alarms no longer heard.

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Not even the sacredness of life is immune to cultural change. Many pagan societies turned cannibalism into a ritual that gave the practice reasonableness. Abortion clinics are advertised as Family Planning Centers. *Row vs Wade* was instituted to insure “personal privacy and family responsibility” not a license to practice infanticide. President Clinton called the law, “support policies to make abortion ‘rare.’” It is no longer rare. Young women now can enjoy their casual relations and if an accidental pregnancy results the clinic is just down the street. Now, there are pills for that. “There were an estimated 204 abortions for every 1,000 live births nationwide, or roughly one reported abortion for every five newborn children in 2021.” Over 600,000 yearly since 2012, according to the USA Facts website. It has been slightly fewer since. How many abortions is rare? How many is reasonable? Although American people wanted any woman with medical advice to be protected from physical or psychological harm from an unwanted conception, probably the average person did not envision the day when abortions would become so prevalent—and for reasons other than why the law was written in the first place.

2 Timothy 3:1–2

The Apostle Paul envisioned a time when biblical values once introduced through a vibrant Christian witness would succumb to social change when the world at the end of time reaches a state of total apostasy [Revelation 16:9-11]. Paul might have foreseen this coming in his letter to Timothy. His language is crass, a naked description with all decency torn away [In the parlance of the Old Testament, their skirts have been raised! Deuteronomy 22:30]. Our interest here is not to parse his words but to express a concern, whether or not, this is a cultural shift from what used to be. How might this society compare with what we remember as children? “People,” Paul foretold, “will love only themselves [instead of being neighborly and communal] and [love] ... money [life will be all about getting more, perhaps, to buy pleasure]. They will be boastful [claiming to promise what they cannot deliver] and proud [valuing themselves as more important than their fellows], scoffing at

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God [turning Christian beliefs into satire and jokes], disobedient to their parents [not simply failing to listen but contumacious and incorrigible], and ungrateful [believing instead to be entitled: Matthew 15:5]. They will consider nothing sacred. They will be unloving [without paternal instinct or natural affection—not wanting children] and truce breakers [unable to reconcile or compromise for the sake of peace]; they will slander others [spread rumors and lies about those they do not favor] and have no self-control [no form of discipline or reform affects them]. They will be vicious [malignant, wild, savage] and hate those who are good. They will betray their friends, recklessly [without considering the consequences of their actions], blind with pride, and loving pleasure rather than God.”

This was hard to say. How “hard” will it be to live in such a world—even “dangerous”? [2 Timothy 3:1 perilous times]. This change in social and cultural values cannot happen overnight nor does it represent the misguided mischief of the few. This is a society that has come to a slow boil and their world never felt the heat! If this does describe a godless society or a world that has redefined morality and given pleasure the status of happiness, this would explain how a devotion to God and a dedication to duty could be replaceable with self-interest and a disregard for even the 10 commandments which had been accepted cross-culture for millennia as basic ethical human behavior in community.

We have been arguing in this treatise that one of the basic aspects of reasonableness is cultural because it satisfies the condition of *relatability*. In English: “everybody’s doing it!” Social changes that become part of the norm or are commonly accepted lifestyles *define* “reasonableness.” What this includes are the morals and ethical standards expected to be practiced within that society. Cultural change is never overnight because it requires often a new vocabulary that represents it. Ideas such as virtue, justice, and happiness take on the nuance that supports that culture. This is probably why words go out of use or meanings change. [For example, “gay” used to mean lighthearted but now is more about homosexuality.] Even *lawfare*, a new word signifying the use of law practiced against

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political opponents begins to sound “reasonable” when a culture endorses it as legitimate.

How Much Is Too Much?

Or we might ask: “How much is too much?” How much is no longer reasonable? Socrates is credited with saying, “All things in moderation.” On one website we read “as long as our choices are governed by reason and it is not used as an excuse for bad behavior, moderation is the North Star to a healthy, productive life.” But there’s the rub, who defines “reason” and “bad”? The ready answer is the culture.

This chapter is intended to suggest, *prima-facie*, that cultural changes can be infused into a society by fiat or judicial opinion as well as through movies and by tradition. This is why many practices once thought anathema are after a time reasonable.

Society’s definition of mores and norms are, in terms of their cultural perspective, considered reasonable. It is not difficult any longer to justify a lifestyle ... even a wrong one. This, to me, is rationalization. Rationalization is a rhetorical use of logic to justify some action as reasonable. Sadly, there are those who do not see that they are embracing what is false. They think they are on an honest quest for truth. Evil counsel, according to Psalm 1:1 becomes a way of life and then an established argument against truth. To borrow a StarTrek Next Generation idea from the “Borg,” they have been “assimilated.”

Some things I value, when I know I am not alone in “my” opinion, I begin to wonder if their value is, in fact, not my own but a thought imposed upon me by others. I have been influenced by news anchors and reporters, commentators, and the few voices that yell the loudest. I tend to like certain authors of non-fiction and am more likely to accept as truth what they argue—even to the point of persuasion concerning something I may have, at first, thought wrong. My personality is in this regard vulnerable. Another example is: I would rather seek to

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understand a family member, whose thoughts I initially did not accept, than in disagreement push forward my own opinion.

It is incumbent on us individually to audit our values in prayer and the light of God's Word to make sure we have not compromised our witness. If I root for the local team over another at a sporting event, is this simply the yell of the crowd echoed through me or is it a genuine interest of mine in their winning? And what about my faith? Is it the pastor's and only mine by proxy or do I really "own" my faith even if no one else ever had the same conviction?

God's Thoughts

“For I know the plans I have for you” — this is the LORD’s declaration — “plans for your well-being, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.” - Jeremiah 29:11 CSB

The problem with God is His logic. “For who hath known the mind of the Lord?” [Romans 11:33-34]. His reasons for what He does, why and how He does them are beyond our immediate comprehension. When He planned our salvation, He knew it would take His Son’s death, an idea never even hinted at in mythological lore. The Gnostics in Paul’s day, for example, who spun mysterious yarns about divine emanations [manifestations of God] to explain evil and how to find salvation, according to David Brakke, Professor of History at Ohio State, believed, “God is complex, full of thoughts ... God is ultimately unknowable to human beings” [Gnosticism, 18-19].

This is a sad conclusion not shared by simple faith. God *is* knowable! But we are in the very early moments of our eternity with Him as believers. “For now,” Paul testified, “... I know *in part*; but then shall I know even as also I am known” [1 Corinthians 13:12]. God’s promise is that some day “they [believers] shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD” [Jeremiah 31:34]. It was sin that damaged our hearts; so, we needed a transplant: “A new heart also will I give you,” the Lord promised through Christ [Ezekiel 36:26; Psalm 51:10]

God's Thoughts

and forgiveness: “For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” [Jeremiah 31:34].

If I may say it this way: God’s person and attributes are advanced courses in faith. Meanwhile by sharing in our Lord’s ministry [in the yoke together with Him; following Him] we learn *about* Him by learning *from* Him [Matthew 11:29-30]. Meanwhile, the Lord assuringly reveals, “I know the thoughts that I think toward you ... thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you hope” [Jeremiah 29:11].

Purposeful Not Consequential

God had a single idea in creating man and woman. If we assume His omniscience and foreknowledge, for which it is unthinkable not to, and if God makes no mistakes, nor changes His mind or His plans for us, we must contend the only possibility is one single plan stretching from Eden to the New Jerusalem [Genesis to Revelation]. No event in history—personal, national, or global—would have been outside His providence. Professor Adonis Vidu in his work, *“Atonement, Law and Justice”* wrote, “All of God’s attributes are in the background of all of his actions; ... all of his actions will exhibit a unity and consistency worthy of perfect agency. ... (Christ’s) temptation, teaching, obedience, miracles, crucifixion, descent into hell, resurrection, glorification, ascension, (and His parousia) His return, cannot be read as stand-alone (acts) They are all part of a single pattern which stretches *from creation to eschatological glorification*. [Italics added]” [Vidu, 243, 248].

God’s actions are purposeful, not consequential; so, life is going somewhere. Simply said, God has a plan for us. By “consequential” we mean without purpose or one thing happening as a result of something previously happening. In the Bible there is a difference in the words used to distinguish purpose from what happens as a consequence of a previous action. The second idea is described best in the well-known Greek adage: Whatever a man sows, that he will reap. [Galatians

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6:8] and is represented often by the word “thus” or “consequently” as in Matthew 7:17 and Revelation 3:16.

The first word meaning “in order that” speaks of God doing something purposefully. God states His purpose or plan, for example, in Jesus’ prayer just before His death, which is worth looking at here [John 17:1-3]. Jesus unwraps His purpose in the Cross by saying “in order that” 3 times in beginning His prayer. His ultimate purpose is that we might know His Father as He does. “After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, [in order] *that* your Son may glorify you. 2 For you granted him authority over all people [in order] *that* he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. 3 Now this is eternal life: [in order] *that* they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”

Our God is goal oriented and not as Professor Hall wrote of mythological gods, “absent intention, absent appraisal, absent source, absent destiny.” Our relationship with God is not temporal as some imagine life in general to be. People set goals *in* life [what they want to be or do in so many years] but, unless they think like God, they do not set a goal *for* life [living this life in preparation for an eternity with God].

Here is no place for a lesson in language but a person’s language says a lot about how that person thinks or how they process ideas. Only Christians have discovered that God thinks “linearly” rather than “circularly.” Circular thinking speaks of the ability to understand life only in terms of its repetitive nature. Only what happens over and over again can be learned because it can be seen as not changing beyond whatever it is. God’s purpose for our lives is progressive. Look at Romans 12:2 in the NLT. It describes the plan of God for the believer noting the transforming power of God at work: “Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn [be coming] to know [approve] God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.” Paul wrote to the Corinthians

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3:18, "We ... are [being] changed into the same image [of Christ] from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

This ultimately necessitates a bodily resurrection! No other religion, as the Christian's faith, believes in an end time bodily resurrection [linear]. Myths spin stories of cycles of life through reincarnations that end only when one reaches "perfection" [circular]. The Greeks at Mar's Hill in Acts 17 enjoyed listening to new ideas, a perfect setting for evangelizing. They listened intently until Paul spoke of the resurrection. We read in verse 32, "And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear you again of this matter." Many could not understand the logic behind the concept.

God, indeed, thinks differently and knowing this should encourage us to value our faith in Him and His purposes.

Eternal not Temporal

We do not live in eternity yet; so, it is impossible to think in those terms. Human logic is limited to time; so, we can only imagine time and space as bounded—having a starting point and an end point. But God, who is the "Ancient of Days" [Daniel 7:9, 13, 22], is so called because He has always been from eternity past. I lovingly ask the question: Why did He wait so long to make Adam? Because no matter where the time line begins for His creation, there was already an eternity that has "past." (The word 'past' itself suggests time that has already expired and is not an accurate descriptive, but it is all we have.) We sometimes talk about eternity as timeless or time without end, as we already noted, but eternity is more than timeless.

Because God is an eternal being He dwells outside the purview of our natural knowledge. God is not a force to be measured or a process to be discovered or a state or condition to be studied. This denies the natural mind ability to know God. He is spiritually known. How do we describe Him, theologically? How do we distinguish Him from all other beings—from His creation. The natural man cannot and that is why man's religious thoughts turn mythological and he creates God in his own

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image. Professor Steven Tuck in his lectures on *"The Mysterious Etruscans"* wrote, "The Greek philosopher Xenophanes said that if horses had gods, their gods would look like horses. The forms and powers of deities reflect the societies that worship them" [Episode #7]. Paul wrote, "[the religious man without God] changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things" [Romans 1:23].

Unchanging

In programming computers, programmers write what they call functions which by definition can return only a single value. The function is defined in terms of this single value returned. We used to write—what we called—a "get" function which would return that specific "something" we wanted to obtain. Let's say I wrote a function to get a user's name and it returned his address or hair color sometimes and sometimes it would give the user's name. This is no function because it cannot be trusted—in a sense—to work properly. "Get" functions are processes that must return whatever it is they were written to retrieve or obtain. This limited behavior is what defines it; so, if my function was known as `getUserName`, we never expect to get their address or to find out from this function that their eyes are blue.

So everything has to be defined in terms of what it specifically and peculiarly means. If I defined a human as a living being or animal that walks on two legs, I didn't limit my definition because monkeys can do that. In fact, in philosophy one of the most puzzling questions has been "What is a human being?" What one word might describe the quintessential me as a human? Philosophy seems to leave this as an open debate. When we moved into the modern age, the view of what was natural for me—what lifestyle might contribute to my psychological and physiological health—was reviewed and underwent a dramatic *re*interpretation.

Compare this with the christian's view, being '*human*' is being in the '*image of God*.' The idea that my humanness, who I am at the center of my being, is not evolving but is created in the

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image of a holy God! And if I am made in the image of a Holy God, which is the biblical message, I have meaning to my life which more importantly brings God out of the shadows of history to become visible to me in relationship.

Because God is eternal, my relationship with Him is eternal. 'Who we are' or 'what we are' is not limited to this life; I anticipate an eternal life after this life. All things were created by him, and *for* him: [Colossians 1:16], which includes you and me! So, if we are His [created *for* Him] and He is eternal, God's plan must make us eternal, too. His love has to be eternal, too—unlimited and immeasurable—because He cannot change. How could an eternal God love us eternally unless we, too, will live forever with Him? Heaven is outside of time; so. Heaven is also where every provision is infinite in supply. We will never need more; so, there will be no need of scales, or rulers. Probably the word "enough" and the phrase "too much" will not be needed. This denies logic the right to set amounts or define things by amount [Ephesians 2:7].

Philippians 2:6-8

Borrowing from my book: *If It Be Possible*: What makes God's plan for the salvation of mankind so remarkable is its very *illogic*. In Philippians 2:6-8 we read that God humbled Himself—something, in itself, that would have been unrecognizable among the gods on Olympus or the gods of the Nile. But our God did three things which by the mind of man [in Pagan thought] cannot be done because they contradict the mythological understanding who the "gods" are.

(1) God was incarnate although God is, by definition, a *Spirit*. In mythology gods are not incarnate but anthropomorphized. They take on human expression but are not human. In fact god cannot be commensurately hypostatized. Perhaps, the biggest mystery of Godliness was when He was "manifested in the flesh [1 Timothy 3:16]. He came in the *likeness* of man, "growing in wisdom"[Luke 23:40] and learning

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obedience through suffering [Hebrew 5:8]. How does this square in man's philosophy with divine omniscience! Secondly,

(2) Whoever thought God might *die*—let alone for our sin! And thirdly,

(3) Paul taught that God's Son while being God, became a *servant* [Philippians 2:7]—a paradox, to be sure. Jesus once referenced this "illogic" with a question: "David therefore himself called him Lord; and whence is he then his son?" [Mark 12:37].

Where the thinking person makes their mistake is assuming that human logic is the only form of reason. If they cannot understand an idea or if they conclude that it is, in some way, contradictory, it has to be mythological or just a religious story contrived to imprison the minds of the masses. That God could not have a plan for mankind that expresses a genius outside their purview is arrogantly presumptuous on their part.

The Greeks before the Savior's birth in telling the stories of their gods honored the mantra "Know yourself; Nothing to excess" which means: "know your place; you are not god!" The Greeks of the Classical period in their language recognized that the gods deserved a place of honor and devotion above mankind. Humanity was there to serve them—not the gods there to serve humanity. We have come to believe they were wrong about some things, but they are excused because Jesus had not died yet [Romans 3:25-26]. Nonetheless, in our theologizing, we must remain humbly cognizant of our intellectual limitations. We learn about God; we do not discover Him. God is not a force but a being with whom we live in relationship [Galatians 2:20].

If you have been attempting to follow my thinking process and have struggled to appreciate—what might by now be—my ramblings, then, you are making my next point for me! All learning is based on previous learning. Like laying block for a foundation we must strike a plumb line to keep our blocks level and straight in a row. But we also need that cornerstone where we begin.

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We are familiar with the scripture, Isaiah 28:16, “Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; Whoever believes will not act hastily.” This prophecy is about Jesus. He is the cornerstone. It is His teaching we must begin with and experience, if we are to line up the rest of life’s experiences and learning in a straight line against His life—in relationship with Him.

This brief work has attempted to explain reasonableness in human terms in order to enlighten us to the simple fact that God’s way of thinking does not fall within the scope of our reasoning. This is why we begin by trusting Him and His wisdom. We are learning what Paul meant in Romans 12:1 by “reasonable service” as we line up the experiences of life in the act of following the Savior. And we learn that God does not think like man does. We come to accept the fact that our minds were not equipped to explain God to the extent we want to know Him. As we serve Him, we find Him true and faithful. We find life fulfilling and meaningful, We find peace in the storm and that we can sing His praises even in crisis. But we cannot explain how He provides this!

We know God’s voice, although, we cannot describe it to the spiritually deaf. We know that our faith is not opinion but the beginning of knowledge—as limited as it might seem to be. We know heaven is real though we have never been there. And even if we had, we would not be able to describe it to others. Most people would not accept our witness, anyway. Israel ask for a sign which Jesus gave them through healings, deliverance from demonic forces, and even bringing some back to life. It was this very act—raising Lazarus—that infuriated the Sanhedrin to ask Pilate to crucify Him!

No!

Our knowledge of Heaven for now is what faith gives us and it is sufficient. We may daydream of God’s kingdom as we long to be there with Jesus and reunited with loved ones, but the details of His promise in John 14 are too glorious to be explained.

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Meanwhile, God's Word was given us for this life, for this time, to serve Him. I am guessing some of what I am saying is new to you, and this is Okay because I am proposing a philosophical treatise to explain how our brains work different from God's thoughts.

We both already knew this to be true but I am seeking a deeper understanding.

Why?

Faith

We should know that faith in God is not an option but a necessity [Romans 10:9-10] because no human logic is going to be sufficient to make sense out of God's grace. The early years of Christianity after the apostles passed on God's Word to us were years filled with council meetings and religious factions all proposing what kind of person Jesus had to be to necessitate His crucifixion for sin. Because God alone could bring about our salvation and it had to be through His Son's crucifixion, by faith we embrace this truth. Scholars have theories why He had to die. I might have my own, but unfortunately whatever logic I come up with—or you come up with—will, little doubt, lead us, as my wife says, into the cornfield where good ideas often get lost. But we should go there, nevertheless.

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“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” - 1

Timothy 3:16

A mystery in Scripture is not something unsolvable but something not yet revealed—or explained. God isn’t enjoying sharing riddles with us as if to boast of His intelligence over our dumbness. When we are not prepared to accept what God has to say to us, His truth remains a mystery. Accepting what God reveals is a learning experience but it is important to understand what that means in terms of how our minds work, what part our faith must play in the experience, and what this experience means in terms of our relationship with Him.

In the modern world we tend to view learning as an academic exercise balancing comprehension and memorization. We take exams to measure how much was retained—even if years later very little can be remembered about the class or subject. Even in Bible college and seminary, the same approach to learning is understood. If I learn New Testament Greek—that is memorize vocabulary and some endings of Greek words—I must know Bible. Or if I can read a commentary or know how to present myself in the pulpit or—the big one—I know the denominational creed and believe it, I am ready for ordination. But this is an academic exercise. It is not Bible learning. It is pure academia and does not speak to how much of God’s Word has become a part of my life, my Christian “walk” before Him [Genesis 5:24].

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In this life I learn by arranging ideas in some order by comparing them. This can aid my desire to know the Lord by, for one, choosing a version of the Bible from which to memorize Scripture. I can choose those verses that particularly speak to my experience as a believer. And I can learn the Scriptures by comparing verse with verse, as John Calvin noted, “The Scriptures are their own interpreter.” Paul spoke of “comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” And, thereby let the Holy Spirit teach me [1 Corinthians 2:13]. All of these use my logical ability and interest in puzzle solving and relate to the Spirit’s work in me.

Relatability also means that Christian fellowship has a role to play in my knowing God. Paul taught that we share a common faith [Romans 1:12] and Peter agreed [2 Peter 1:1] which means God can use us in instructing each other. Paul encouraged the Galatians “Now the one who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with the one who teaches it” [Galatians 6:6 NET]. The words, “teach” and “share” are the same word meaning to partner together in fellowship. There is no lectern here where one person does all the talking. Here there is a circle of believers contributing in turn to the general discussion over the Word of God. This is a reasonable way to learn about the ways of God because we can relate to one another’s experiences, and this is how we learn. Just be careful to stay on subject about the Word.

We learn in steps but these are various experiences intended by God to increase faith [Romans 1:17] and perfect holiness in us. God’s ministry to the saints, Paul taught, was given to bring us into the full “unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” He does not want us to remain children in these matters but to “grow up into him in all things” [Ephesians 4:13-15]. It is reasonable to expect learning to take time. A person with well-defined muscles and strength did not reach that goal in one trip to the gym and likewise we must stay in fellowship and the Word and let the Spirit of God feed us on the Word. “Desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” [1 Peter 2:2]. It is reasonable to

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God to allow us the space and time to learn His Word. If there is so much to learn and we are overwhelmed, or some truth is still out of our reach intellectually and we struggle to understand it, then we must guard against discouragement or failing to appreciate how God works in us, creatures in time: “[that we] may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ’ [Ephesians 4:15].

But, perhaps, the most important aspect of truth that we can call a reasonable idea is God’s requirement that we remain faithful. An alcoholic can lose years of progress with one shot of whiskey. A recovering sex addict can slide all the way back into his or her past by one trip to a porn site or the red-light district of the city. We are stewards of the mysteries of God, and Paul taught, “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.” [1 Corinthians 4:2]. From a logical perspective, from a learning perspective, faithfulness is the aspect of permanency. There is no serious understanding of God’s Word or His calling and guidance without our faithfulness to follow it. Faithfulness on our part is a reasonable idea.

Academia

We place great importance on academic learning. We have come to appreciate the training of the mind to retain and process knowledge as a necessary companion to wisdom. Some might say that book knowledge is what the house of true wisdom is made of. The mind is the front door to the soul where we live. So we value classroom time and hitting the books and paying tuition as a necessary achievement. People mortgage house and future to put their children through this time honored birthright called “higher” education. Come to think of it: You’re reading a book right now that I wrote hoping you would read it and take something from it. So, I don’t want to disparage book learning. My Greek instructor commented once, “King does all right if you give him a text book and a teacher.” I took that as a compliment.

But when we are talking about learning the Bible, is it different from learning science or engineering or medicine? From

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God's perspective, *Yes*, it is different. With God, learning is coming to know Him more perfectly. Academics fills the mind but true Bible learning transforms it! [Romans 12:2]. Learning with God means a change in perspective on what is reasonable.. We are learning to trust and appreciate our Lord's leadership in ways that academics will never teach us [Psalm 25:4]. We are coming to know Him.

When I began learning to write computer programs I was working as a night auditor at a local hotel and wanting to create a program that would generate a housekeeping report the quick and easy way (in color, of course) by pressing the "return" key. I was writing the code and finding it hard to understand the library of functions already provided me to use for the graphic side of things. [Without graphics everything would be just letters and numbers; but I wanted charts, and table graphs in color.] I was lost; so, I called my computer engineering son and he told me what to type—a letter, number, and symbol at a time. When I was done, I "ran" the program and it worked! I asked him, "Son, how does this function work?" And he said, "Dad, You don't need to know that—only that it does!" And he said goodnight and hung up. This is not unlike God because most of what He tells us to do goes unexplained. We only know that obeying Him works! This is called living by faith. Our trust in Him is central to our Christian learning more than a thousand verses of Scripture memorized. We are not learning Bible as much as we are learning *Him* and how reasonable He is.

Learning is Arranging

Any learning that is new is an isolated idea until it is fit into place in our experience or existing set of knowledge. This is often what being reconciled with the past is all about. Or what is meant by "closure." We might need that one more piece of knowledge to forgive someone even if they are not capable of accepting that forgiveness. What God is teaching us might seem so painfully wrong until we discover, it turns out, that it was the missing thing needed for God to continue perfecting His work in us. And how grateful we are now for Christ, our Cornerstone,

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because we will find that our experience in Christ lines up perfectly with everything we know about our Savior.

This brings us to the three aspects of logic since we come to understand only those ideas which are logical. And logic, as already noted, depends on the accumulation of learning—of experience. Let's review the three aspects of logic as tools of learning.

First, we learn by comparing or arranging ideas like puzzle pieces in order to see where this idea fits into all we have learned so far. This might be clearer when learning is academic. When we learned the alphabet, we set it to music and sang it in the order it appears in our dictionary. So when we finally opened a dictionary, we knew which page to look on for a word we wanted defined. We learned to speak by listening to a guardian or parent who was talking to us not realizing intuitively we were comparing what was inside our head to what we heard. We learned to count by first learning the order of the numbers. 5 plus 2 equaling 7 is not a rote snippet of memorization. It is a logical sum because 5 and 2 and 7 are arranged on a line with single value increments, like on an abacus; and we learned in our head to advance the pointer first 5 clicks and then 2 more and it landed at 7. Memorization alone is not total learning; comprehension now plays its part in using this arithmetic in various applications. In a sense we took a concrete idea and abstracted it across many uses. We were told as children that 2 apples and 5 apples equals 7 apples, but how many oranges are there in total if Joe has 2 and you have 5. What works for apples works for oranges, too. And it works equally well in Cartesian equations.

What if learning were only memorization, that is to say, without comprehension? Some persons are slow learners or have an impossible time learning because of the inability to comprehend what is being taught. I was once asked to tutor a student who struggled to comprehend what they were reading, and we would repeat the lesson over and over to obtain even some understanding of the subject. Conversely, I had a course in computer science in which the professor required no

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memorization at all. We could actually look up snippets of code or algorithms during a test for the answers. He wanted us to comprehend not memorize coding.

No idea is affectively comprehended if the idea is like a ship adrift on a horizonless sea. If it is an idea that has no boundary, no definition, no particular meaning or application. And like our puzzle piece, it needs to have a set place where it belongs—now in our knowledge database. Most likely if I asked you to remember a word—say, firetruck—and I would then ask the next day to tell me what the word was, you would more likely remember it because you related it to some experience or memory—perhaps, a child’s interest you once had to become a fireman. The next day you would recall the word easily. If however I asked you to remember the Greek Word ‘hapax,’ which means “once for all” [one time only] and it is used in grammar to refer to words used only once in our Bible, you might not be able to recall it unless you found a way to associate it to something you already knew. One such use of this word is in Hebrews 9:29 “Christ was **once** offered to bear the sins of many” Our Savior was crucified hapax for sin, meaning He would never die for sin again. It was, indeed, finished. Perhaps, there is something here worth remembering!

Learning to Count

Another tool for learning is our ability to count. In fact, we probably measure everything from an expiration date on a jar of mayonnaise, to shoe size, to the date, to how long it will take you to read this book, should you decide to go on. Our lives are tethered to time; this body will wear out eventually (before God gives us a new incorruptible one). We might not realize that everything we do has to do with numbers. Even the example above “once” is a number! The pages of every book are numbered for an intelligent reason which corresponds [relates to] the Table of Contents and the Index of the book..

Science wouldn’t exist without math and math doesn’t exist without numbers—counting. Some of learning requires some form of counting: How much? How far? How old? How

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little or few? How Great is our God! This last one was a bit tricky because God's greatness is infinite! And I can't count that high. We even have a definition of "trust" that means that you can "count" on someone. That means each and every time you call on them they will be there for you. I can only think of my Lord filling that role.

How might we learn without numbers? True science is pure math according to Pythagorus, and I think he was on to something. Did you look at your pay envelope when you received it (or check your bank account on pay day)? What did you think about the amount of your pay? What if you didn't have numbers or could't count! I use to work at the front desk of a local hotel [another hotel than mentioned earlier] with a co-worker originally from Venezuela. She spoke perfect English and I was learning a little Spanish. But that aside, she had to count the draw (the shift receipts) at the end of her shift and the coins were a problem for her because she didn't know what a nickel or a dime was! 'Nuff said. I think I made my point.

Perhaps, we could remove counting from the Scripture and find out if it is easier or harder to learn. First, however, chapter and verse has to go. And you have to remove words that depend on counting like: forever, always, and, of course all the numbers, which I am told, have sacred significance, like" 3, 7, 10, and 12. And the question "When?" I have always wanted to get rid of that word because God is always prophesying the "what" of the future without the "when." Jesus, at His ascension, reminded His disciples, "...It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power" [Acts 1:6-7]. But times and seasons are what we always want to know, especially if we are dispensationalists! [I am not.] But learning the Bible history requires knowing dates. Whenever we compare 2 things which are otherwise similar in some regard: 2 sins, 2 ministries, 2 friends, whatever, one is usually more or less whatever the other is. These comparisons might be ill-advised or meaningless but our minds naturally gravitate toward making them, nonetheless, because it's logical.

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You might recall from Chapter 2 on Hebrew thought that the ancient Jewish way of keeping track of time was related to the sun, moon and stars, their movement. They have no clocks. They were a bit “weak” when it came to counting. If numerology is credible—and there is a revived interest in it—it is less an arithmetic study and probably more a study of the independent significance of each number. I think it is not coincidence that God decided on 12 Tribes of Israel [especially since Jacob’s son, Joseph, was not one of them but Joseph’s 2 sons became 2 of the tribes adding to 13] And there were 12 apostles [again: minus 1 who was replaced in Acts 1 even though God added Paul amounting to 13 original?] There are some interesting numbers repeated in Scripture leading us to think maybe they have particular significance to God. And if so, they must be significant to Christ, His Son.] None of this is logical—only traditional—because these numbers are not added or subtracted to produce significant sums. Arithmetic is not in play.

Learning to Define

The third tool for learning is what I had called permanency. This is easy to explain by assuming the opposite: What if nothing ever stayed the same—even this key board I am using started to morph from QWERTY to QWERTZ to an AZERTY keyboard. (All the keys are there but in a different order!) and then it started back again! I wouldn’t be able to use it. What if I went to the freezer to get some ice cream and it was melted because the Freezer morphed into an oven (Perhaps, this has happened for some.) Let’s try something more realistic [and ladies, please take no offense] what if my wife carrying one of our unborn children suddenly wanted something she never wanted before and after I got it for her she didn’t want it anymore? And then someone naively tells me, “You have to be more understanding. What if when the astronauts went to the moon, it wasn’t there because it moved unexpectedly and we had to go looking for it in a universe of stars. Speaking of outer space, what if we just couldn’t trust the earth to take 364+ days to circle the sun or the earth to rotate once in 24 hours. What if there were no “constants”? To the degree things are changing or in flux we

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cannot effectively learn about them. What if Calvary was no longer the way to salvation because God simply changed His mind and now you couldn't "count" on Him any longer?

This is what we mean by permanence: things are what they are and not undergoing some change into something else. Even things that do change, like growing children, can be defined by the person they are and not the hormonal processes going on inside them. In other words, we need to see everything in terms of some rule or definition or law by which we recognize them even while they undergo some change. Within every atom (We called them cations and anions; I majored in chemistry in one college) a lot of chaos is happening with electrons and quartz and other stuff but aside from a nuclear boom happening whatever the atom was is what the atom remains; so we get to give it an atomic number and put it into our chart of the elements in numerical order compared to the other atoms—all the aspects of learning rolled up into one lesson. The point is things in flux to be correctly observed or defined must be in some way unchanging.

How does this translate into learning God?

A Covenantal God

We learn in Scripture that God makes covenants with us—an aspect of His character that is undervalued theologically; for, it is His covenant that speaks to His faithfulness and, in turn, to His unchangingness or unchangeableness. This is not God in contract with us as is the case in pagan religious thought.

In tribal cultures and pantheism sacrifices were made—as we noted before—as a quid-pro-quo with some deity or to appease their wrath. I give you this bull that you might bless my son's marriage—and such like. Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter, Iphigenia, to Artemis, goddess of the hunt, to appease her jealousy over his, Agamemnon's, hunting skill which put the goddess to shame. He needed the goddess to guarantee him quiet seas going to Troy in Asia Minor to retrieve his sister-in-

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law, Helen [long story]. Through prayer we become participants in God's adventures—He does not become a participant in ours!

A covenant is not a contractual arrangement but a defined relationship with God requiring faithfulness on our part as He is on His. The covenant is defined in terms of His promises and a single "token" that functions as a reminder to us of the covenant [Genesis 9:13; 17:11; Exodus 31:16-17; 1 Corinthians 11:24].

To understand God, we must honor the covenant we make with Him. Because it is relational in scope, a believer enters into a trust relationship with God; they are His! [Genesis 17:7; Malachi 3:16-17; 1 Peter 2:9] which is what the redemption of a kinsman redeemer is about [Acts 20:28; Ephesians 1:14].

God's Covenants are everlasting and in a real sense they are extensions of a single covenant made with Adam and fulfilled in Christ [Genesis 3:15; Romans 5:15]. An earlier covenant was never broken when a new one was made, The older covenant was simply fulfilled but not in itself but fulfilled now in the newer covenant, ultimately culminating in Christ [Matthew 5:17]. The forgiveness of sins promised in the Mosaic covenant by law was now provided by Christ's death [Romans 3:25; Hebrews 8:12-13].

Perhaps, we might say that when God made a covenant with Adam, He made it with all mankind—with us. [Genesis 3:15]. In like manner when He made a covenant with Abraham, He made it with all Israel [Genesis 17:9]—and we are his children by faith [Romans 4:12, 16]. The Mosaic Covenant was for all of us because it was schooling us in the need for a Savior [Galatians 3:24]. And when He made one with Jesus at Calvary, He provided for our eternal salvation by faith [Hebrews 8:6].

God's covenant is a promise of His faithfulness and His faithfulness in the form of His grace must be reflected in our faithfulness. "We love him, because he first loved us." [1 John 4:19]. The ultimate metaphor for all of this is embodied in marriage oneness and our marriage with Christ [Ephesians 5:32].

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“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” - Romans 12:2

By way of summary, there are three aspects of the logical mind that give sense and reasonableness to an idea we might want to know. We attempted to show that we learn when

1. An idea retains some form or shape or condition by which we may define or understand it. Anything in flux or ever changing is unlearnable and there is no reason to retain it. What matters here for the Christian is that God changes not and His promises remain “Yea and Amen” [2 Corinthians 1:20]. “Amen” is the Old Testament idea of steadfastness or unchanging. The Plan of God was, by design, written *prior* to our creation and has remained in place and will remain in place forever as the New Covenant in Christ [Hebrews 13:20]. It would be unreasonable of God to ask us to be faithful to Him were He not faithful to us ...but He is faithful!
2. An idea must be weighed or valued or measured in some way. We interpret this to mean: how important is it in our understanding and in God’s? “On a scale of 1 to 10 ...” goes the saying.... We often compare ideas to determine which is best in some way. If we cannot determine the importance or value of an idea, it cannot be retained as a reasonable piece of knowledge because it might be incidental to something else far more

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important that should have—to use a Biblical word—the preeminence [Colossians 1:18 - spoken of Christ].

3. We are able to place an idea in its proper place or location within the storehouse of our current knowledge. If an idea doesn't belong or it contradicts—if it is not a piece to the puzzle of—what I already know, or think I know, it cannot be seen as reasonable. On the TV program, Sesame Street, years ago: “One of these things is not like the other” was a game taught children giving them this principle of logic. One of these things is not like the other: love, compassion, mercy, partisanship. One of these things is not like the other: Long-suffering, intolerance, sweet reasonableness, gentleness. One of these things is not reasonable or fitting a believer: humility, meekness, love of self, service to God.

As an aside: One may ask why God created us this way because it limits our learning to the natural world. God forbid trying to communicate outside this parameter [Deuteronomy 29:29]. Deuteronomy 18:10-12 lists forbidden practices attempting to go beyond the boundary of natural knowledge. These include divination, a key practice in pagan sacrifices but *not* Levitical. I would propose simply God limited us to enhance the importance of *faith* or trust in Him, and, therefore, His grace!

But we are quite capable of understanding and appreciating the wisdom God does give us! These three aspects of reasonableness, which we require to learn, were brought to mind when we read Paul to the Romans say, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your *reasonable* service” [Romans 12:1-2].

How is God's desire for our service to Him *reasonable*? How is it reasonable for a believer to surrender their life—not for a short time, not in part, but—in total and for all time to God's Will? The answer lies in the logic in three traits that define His will for us: *good*, *acceptable*, and *perfect*. And these three coincide remarkably well to the three aspects of how we understand and learn: what is unchanged, relatable, and answers to the question

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How important is it? How much of me should I give? How much of my time? How much do I value His will? (As we have been studying in this brief work.)

1. **Good** - God's Will is in substance and nature unchangingly and purely *good*. How should we understand James 1:17 "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." His Will for us is as faithful as it is true with "no variableness, neither shadow of turning." God, Himself is good, Asaph wrote in Psalm 73:1. Goodness is the indispensable quality of a holy and loving God—a God who changes not [Malachi 3:6].

His Will is reasonable because it is always and only good, never varying or diminishing or becoming other than purely good. His goodness is who He is and remains constant and steadfast, unrepentant in love and mercy. Even Darius, King of the Persians when he saw Daniel was not eaten by the Lions in the den, realized that "God is the living God, And steadfast forever; His kingdom is the one which shall not be destroyed, And His dominion shall endure to the end [always]" [Daniel 6:26]. His mercies are sure [Isaiah 55:3]. His Spirit our guarantee [2 Corinthians 1:22]. Great is His faithfulness [Lamentations 3:23]. Our trust can be in Him; so strong is our assurance that we are completely at peace no matter where His will leads us [Isaiah 26:3]. We find His Will definable, unchanging.

2. **Acceptable** - The word is well-pleasing, not only to God but to the believer who obeys. We serve Him not under duress or fear but gladly, joyously, happily. We are David crying, "Show me Your ways, O LORD; Teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, For You are

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the God of my salvation; On You I wait all the day.” [Psalm 25:4-5]. We have toyed with our own wills; we have listened to other voices who claimed wisdom; we tried other ways, foolishly. There is no pleasure that can quench that inner thirst for a meaningful life and happiness but the joy of pleasing our Lord.

His will is reasonable because we have proven there is none other as His will that brings a sure happiness. Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount called us *blessed* [happy] when we serve and follow Him [Matthew 5:3-12]. It is a joy no longer dependent on circumstances for meaning. We find it relatable. We might also say that because we are blessed as we are doing His will, we value it above all else.

3. **Perfect** - His will is complete. How much of my life does it encompass? How much of me does it require? Every part and all of me. It has transformed my thinking, given me a new mind, a new perspective, divine insight into God’s heart, and a clearer and ever expanding understanding of God’s Word— and of Himself, also. I hear Paul exclaiming with a resolute conviction, “I am alive in Him; yet not I, but Christ is alive in me: and the life which I now live in this flesh I live because of the faithfulness of God’s Son, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”

His Will is reasonable because it answers to every need, every concern, every desire, every want, every dream I have ever had or might have. We find His will most valuable—measurable? Beyond measure!. We could also say that His will is relatable because it is so fitting for who we are in Him.

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Be Logical

Can we view God's Will in logical terms? Can we relate to it in our present experience in Christ? Is it valued by us above all things? And can we say, His will is unidirectional or clearly mapped out in Scripture?

It would be presumptuous of us to think that we were capable of anticipating what God plans next for our lives individually or the world globally. The language of the Scriptures was given by God as a gift to simple faith regardless of one's level of intellectual brilliance. The purpose behind that gift, according to Peter, was to equip us to live a godly life: "According as his divine power has given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that has called us to glory and virtue:" [2 Peter 1:3].

This does not deny our humanness or how our minds tend to work, since God is the Creator of the human mind. We are still quite human in how we exercise our mental processes, how we define logic and reasonableness. The difference is: Now we do so for God's service.

Scholarship might contend that man's mind has been distorted or corrupted through Adam's sin and salvation restores it. But God's new covenant in Christ—as affirmed throughout Scripture—changed the heart [Jeremiah 31:33], the spiritual aspect of our being by which we may once again converse with God. The mind required *transformation* as we have noted and we know this change is happening when we perceive the true value of God's Will in our lives.

We drew on this distinction maintaining that upon salvation we get a new heart but now we are asked to employ it in service to God. God, and Paul, find this a reasonable request. God changes the heart and now we are instructed to avoid being conformed to this present age [don't let it happen]. By submitting to God's will, we allow our minds to be permanently changed [which is what the word "transformed" signifies]. The wording of Romans 12:2 clarifies that obtaining the Christian mindset is not a fad or a cultural adaptation but a radically new

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and different way of thinking and perceiving God's will as good, acceptable, and perfect in every respect. His will is now ours. His life, ours. His cross, ours. His heart, ours. As Paul testified to the Galatians [Galatians 2:20].

It is because Paul spoke of "reasonableness" that we indulged ourselves in this philosophical inquiry to determine if this transformed mind was still tethered to time and space or if now we view life only in terms of its eternal value. Does our logic still require certain conditions of reasonableness be met:

1. Is His faithfulness in covenant reflected in ours? We must be faithful as He is faithful,
2. Can we relate to it? His will must become our way of life and
3. What's it worth to us? We must prioritize and value it above all else.

The Sermon on the Mount

Some scholars like to limit the audience for certain texts to those spoken of in the context. So, Isaiah 43 would have been written specifically and exclusively to Israel and not for the Church. This prevents us from interpreting the Scripture in the light of personal experiences and keeps it theologically pure, in a sense. [The jury is still out in my mind.] But is this what we want to say about the Beatitudes? Were these verses in Matthew 5 & 6 written to the 12 only or for all of us? [Remember they were sent out by 2's without money or food!]. Are all Christians encouraged to be "poor in spirit" if they want to be happy or is this an idea limited to the 12 disciples? How broadly can we interpret these verses [Matthew 5:3-12]?

There are many ways to view Jesus' Sermon on the Mount—I suppose, as many as there are preachers—but we would be closing our ears to Jesus' message if His words in some sense couldn't inspire our service to Him. How else might we

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interpret Jesus' call to follow Him if the Beatitudes played no role in Christian character development? What kind of Biblical ministry could we claim to be engaged in if the Beatitudes did not profile our hearts, thoughts, or actions? If knowing God is learning Jesus and if learning Him is following Him, shouldn't these 8 "Blessings" be a part of our experience as believers—if, indeed, we want to know Him?

There is an additional question some may ask: Is the blessing in the poverty or mourning, or hunger, ... or in the persecution? Or is the blessing Heaven's reward for living a life of poverty, etc.? Is the blessing in being meek or when we inherit the earth? And we might ask: Since these blessings are synonymous with our happiness in Scripture, what exactly are we talking about? What is happiness? Can we honestly say in a poverty of spirit, "I am happy"? Does mourning or grieving bring happiness! It would seem more reasonable to think that happiness comes *after* the mourning ends and the comforting begins at Jesus' return. But this is how we would relate to this truth logically *before* Christ in a perfectly human way!

Yet, [spoiler alert!] we will argue here for the intrinsic link between our happiness in Christ *in this life* even in times of grief! Happiness needs to be understood and there is also a distinction to be made between happiness and joy we need to investigate.

Happiness

We argued already for the acceptance of God's will, as the Greek defines this in Romans 12:2 as fully well-pleasing and what in itself contains our happiness not as a focus or goal but as a natural reaction to following God's Will.

There is also a difference—worth mentioning—between happiness and joy. Joy is relational; joy is shared. Joy is a celebratory spirit we have together with others of like sentiment. Joy is a festival of praise from believers in thanksgiving for the Cross. Happiness is a personal perspective. Happiness must contend with the circumstances of this life and is more often than not dependent on them. But as we shall contend: our source

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of happiness as believers comes because God is in the circumstance with us [He is in the boat with us in the storm] which gives us a different view and outlook on our circumstance than we would have otherwise.

The context of joy in Scripture is Christian community. The joy that we have in the Lord as a Fruit of the Spirit is what brings us together in a celebratory way. We are celebrating the work of Christ on our behalf and in us. There's a sense in which joy can be tied to our testimonies. Paul sees our joy like righteousness and peace as gifts of God that characterize, describe, the Kingdom of Heaven [Romans 14:17]. This makes joy a heartfelt experience shared by believers when they fellowship and share the good things God is doing among them. Joy must be shared to be evidenced—say in a fellowship meeting or praise service.

Happiness, often seen as God's blessing, is experienced in the circumstances of life and is tied to them. Happiness is not shared. Happiness is a private experience between each believer and their Lord. What varies is not the happiness, but the circumstance in which it is experienced. This is why the Beatitudes themselves, whether poverty or mourning or hunger, etc. are the *context* for happiness. In heaven "happiness," as such, will probably have no relevance or meaning because in heaven the poverty, mourning and hunger will have no place and a joy, unspeakable and full of glory, will eclipse it all.

To understand happiness we must get a bit poetic. Kamala (played by Famke Janssen) in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (Season 5, Episode 21) in "The Perfect Mate," plays a beautiful empathic ... [transformed] woman who has been conditioned since childhood to become the "perfect mate." Might this in some respect be a metaphor of our spiritual relationship with Christ, for whom, we are being prepared as His bride [Ephesians 5:32; Revelation 21:2]. She was being metamorphosed as we are being "transformed [2 Corinthians 3:18]. She confessed: "To feel the inner strength of someone. To realize that being with him is opening your mind and heart to

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endless new possibilities. To hear yourself say, 'I like myself when I'm with him.'"

Is there a description of "happiness" in these words? We might say: "To feel the spiritual strength that Christ gives. To realize that being with Him is opening our minds and hearts to eternally new possibilities in following Him. To hear ourselves say, 'I like myself when I'm with him.'"

Well, happiness might, also, be represented in the person who experienced what Abram Maslow called "self-actualization." Maslow's description is anathema in most theological circles because it suggests self-reliance; but here, to the contrary, we are suggesting a happiness based on a total reliance on *God*. I take some liberty in borrowing from Maslow's idea and call it "*Christ*-actualization." Might these describe being transformed into *His* Image?

God has given each believer "a new heart" [Ezekiel 36:26] which, we can theorize is a "happy" heart—the Beatitudes have to be aspects of the New Covenant in Christ. How could they not be! It is most appropriate to think in terms of this change in our nature [Ephesians 4:24]. Could this indicate a "blessed" or happy believer, someone who can laugh where others sulk; rejoice where others complain; sing praises where others see only gloom and doom? "And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them." [Acts 16:25]. The astute student may find the Beatitudes [the beautiful attitudes] in these characteristics.. These 15 aspects of the Christian perspective are rich in meaning for the believer. Let us start this way: The Christian, who is happy in relation to their Lord's leadership:

1. Lives contentedly with God's provisions. A contented heart [Philippians 4:11 "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."].
2. Does not generalize persons or profile them in groups but accepts others, openly and simply, based on God's grace and not based on race, status, importance, opinion, age, gender, etc. An accepting and welcoming heart

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[Romans 15:7 “receive ye one another, as Christ also received us “].

3. Has a healthy understanding of their own importance, strength, abilities, and calling. A humble heart [Galatians 6:4 “let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone,”].
4. Has a simplicity or natural spontaneity in responding to others’ needs. A compassionate and benevolent heart [Romans 12:9-11 “kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love”].
5. Is passionate about serving the Lord without regard for circumstances or surrounding conditions and will go where God leads them. A meek heart [Romans 8:38-39; 12:11 “fervent in spirit; serving the Lord”].
6. Lives with a sense of expectation in serving God. Fresh and rich emotional reactions. Does not live despondent nor sees a situation as hopeless. A hopeful heart[1 Corinthians 13:7 “Love ...Bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”].
7. Has a healthy perspective on life that retains a thankful heart toward God in all situations without projecting fault. A thankful heart [Colossians 2:7 “abounding therein with thanksgiving”].
8. Has an empathetic understanding heart that will weep and rejoice with others over their heartaches and blessings. An understanding heart [Romans 12:15 “Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.”].
9. Enjoys meaningful fellowship around God’s Word with other believers. A like-minded, united heart [Hebrews 10:25 “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together,”].
10. Practices forgiveness unhesitatingly; able to appreciate all as individual persons. Able to show mercy, allows for reconciliation. A merciful heart [2 Corinthians 2:10;

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Ephesians 4:31-32 “be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another”].

11. Abhors evil with a strong moral commitment A pure heart [Job 1:8 “one that fears God, and eschews evil”].
12. Is not argumentative, adversarial or litigious. A peaceful heart [Matthew 12:19 “He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets.”].
13. Is not offended, intimidated, or defensive but courageous, strong of heart. A courageous heart [Deuteronomy 31:6; Job 17:9; Psalm 27:14; Acts 28:15 “Paul ... thanked God, and took courage”].
14. Is creative—does not fear problems but sees them as challenges. A stout heart [Philippians 4:13 “I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me.”].
15. Shows an agape love for all peoples. A loving heart [Matthew 22:39 “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”].

How carefully did the Savior chose His words in outlining the 8 blessings? Could there have been a 9th one? How might His words be nuanced to help us, who have not walked with Him those few years, get a true sense of His message? Admittedly, when He sent them out without purse or an extra pair of sandals [Luke 10:4], nor even food [Mark 6:8] telling them, instead, to pray for daily provisions [Matthew 6:11], we might have taken a step back hoping that would not be true also of our lives—especially in America! And Jesus added, according to Luke [10:4], not to “greet anyone on the road”—a way of saying, “Don’t be distracted! Stay with your mission!” The entire 6th chapter of Matthew underscores the faithfulness of God to supply whatever we need for this journey; so, I should hope these verses *do* include us!

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Nuanced

The language of Jesus' Beatitudes had to be carefully worded. For those who knew the language, Jesus couldn't have said it clearer or with more emphasis.

In Matthew 5:11 the words "revile" and "persecute" are the same experience. To persecute means to hunt down or pursue. They followed Jesus' disciples about like stalkers, all the while Jesus' followers are being ridiculed, treated disgracefully, made fun of, insulted and slandered by those who sought to discredit their message and turn the people off to it. It was nothing personal. I've heard that before! Their attack was against our Lord and His followers by association with the Savior. Jesus added that we are in good company with the Old Testament prophets who also endured this kind of abuse [verse 12].

If we did not have an independent source of happiness in such circumstances, we would succumb to the incessant attacks and, little doubt, soon retreat into obscurity. And then where would our witness be? The Lord has to supply to our hearts the ability to sing His praises anywhere at anytime, unconditioned on circumstances. David wrote, "Yet the LORD will command his lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me." [Psalm 42:8]. Job asked, "Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night." [Job 35:10].

But it is not just anyone who sings, it is the poor in spirit, whose dependence is absolutely on God [verse 3]. It is those who know His comfort because they carry His burdens, not their own [verse 4]. Who are gentle of spirit because they have learned to let our Lord decide the course [verse 5]; whose care is passionate [verse 6] and not for themselves but for others [verse 7]. There is no part of them that seeks personal advantage in their caring, that has hidden motives of self-interest [verse 8]. Their song is from the heart because they are at peace; following "The Prince of Peace" [verse 9].

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Characteristics

Being the observant reader that you are, you have, no doubt, noticed that our discussion has had far more to do with the condition of a believer's heart, a believer's perspective, attitudes, and desires than their deeds or works or actions. We have been putting the spotlight on the "New" you as a believer being created in our Lord's image, not by making note of what a believer does but who they are in Christ. Peter referred to this as being "partakers of the divine nature," having the same mind in common with Christ [Philippians 2:5]. We are not listing here ministries or gifts or works. We are describing the fundamental change that has occurred when by faith we accepted Christ into our hearts as our Lord and Savior [Romans 10:9-10].

It is because of the change in our hearts [Ezekiel 36:26] godly behavior is said to now befit us in place of what we use to do. But note, the Spirit encourages us to act properly; He doesn't scold us into it [2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 John 3:3]. In Psalm 33:1, the Psalmist proclaimed, "Shout for joy in the LORD, O you righteous! Praise *befits* the upright.' The Hebrew term, "befits" indicates an action that is "becoming" for the upright. The word comes from a word meaning "at home" leading us to understand the nuance of this term suggests praising the Lord fulfills us in some way; it brings us happiness. Another example? "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns." [Isaiah 52:7]. We are most at home in our ministries when we are sharing the good news! Sharing Christ is a primary source of our happiness even when ridiculed [Matthew 5:11].

All this should encourage us to allow the Spirit to lead us. We should not be worried that serving our Lord is unreasonable; rather our heart cries out, "Serving Him is the most sensible thing I have ever done!"

The Greek term in Ephesians 5:3-4 points out forms of behavior that are more in line with the "New You." The Greek term is not as poetic a word. It means to stand out. Paul is saying

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—if I may use an analogy—dogs don’t meow; they bark. That is one of their outstanding features by which we identify them over cats. Meowing is not befitting or doesn’t fit dogs! I’ll leave you to apply this. Believers who do not act like believers, if they are true believers, are going to be most miserable. So we are encouraged to be like God has made us. I think this is Peter’s word “virtue” in 2 Peter 1:5 which the ESV footnotes, “excellence.” Peter is not challenging our faith or belittling it by crediting our salvation to works—No! Peter is not setting faith aside, he is building on in: “*add* to your faith...!”

Let’s talk a bit more about the heart, where faith resides.

The Heart

It is not unreasonable of God to perfect His image in us as believers, whether through suffering [Hebrews 5:8], discipline [Hebrews 12:10], or in the quietude of our prayer time with Him [Psalm 46:10; Isaiah 30:15]. All this is a work of love which began with our salvation to align our hearts to love Him [“with all thy heart” Mark 12:30] and know His love for us to give us a future hope—an eternity with Him [Jeremiah 29:11].

It is important to emphasize the role “the heart” plays in theological thought—in our Bible and the plan of God. Perhaps, we should be a little less concerned with our “nature,” since we have a new one [Colossians 3:10] through a new birth [John 3:3]. It is the heart that is center stage in the Biblical record.

Paul informed us that “with the heart man believes unto righteousness;” [Romans 10:10]. We knew this. We knew that salvation is not a matter of intellectualism or head knowledge; else, the thief next to Jesus at Golgotha wouldn’t be with the Savior today in Paradise. What we don’t seem to focus on is the importance of the “heart” in our relationship with God. It was Solomon’s “heart” that strayed [1 Kings 11:4]. It is the heart God called wicked [Jeremiah 17:9]. On the other hand: David had a heart after God’s [Acts 13:22]. And God opened Lydia’s heart to hear and accept Paul’s Gospel [Acts 16:14]. God is the heart-knower [Acts 15:8].

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If Christianity would focus more on the heart and less on the intellect, it might be far more united [Philippians 2:2]. With one spirit and one heart Christendom would be of one purpose, one interest, one passion—the Gospel—and as such could return to the real message in Acts 2:1. The glossolalia of Acts 1:4 was only the vehicle to deliver what was really important to God—His message!

This said, we can look briefly at the Beatitudes [the beautiful attitudes] as profiling the condition of the heart of a follower of Christ. I use the word attitude because it incorporates both thinking and feeling that leads to behavior. We are not asked, however, to reason with our heads but with our hearts—heart knowledge based on Faith or what God has revealed to us through His Word.

It is to the “heart” we apply the 3 principle features of reasonableness in order to understand God’s reasoning: living the Beatitudes; valuing the Beatitudes first above all; and meditating on them [read all about them] in God’s Word. As we do, they will make more and more sense and we will come to say, “How did I ever think to live any other way!!” I call this “happiness.”

The Sermon on The Mount

The greatest benefit of Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount is to be acquired in the presence of an open hostility to Christianity. Jesus’ wisdom here could be summed in 15 words: “Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:38). As Archbishop Sheen taught, *“The Sermon on the Mount is so much at variance with all that our world holds dear that the world will crucify anyone who tries to live up to its values.”* [Bishop Fulton J. Sheen]

Jesus described this disciple as happy or blessed, inviting them to “Rejoice, and be exceeding glad” in Matthew 5:11-12 because this disciple was the same disciple Jesus described in verses 3-10? Followers of the Savior, who are being pursued and ridiculed, are well prepared to accept it if they are poor of spirit ... peacemakers. This echoes Paul’s heart in

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Philippians 3:10 where with deep yearning he panted, "That I may know him and ... the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death."

I cannot presume to know all the Savior meant in these few verses. I must leave this to a thousand preachers. But is it possible that there is an order to these verses, that the first qualification of discipleship, for carrying a cross for Christ, has to be humility: *poor in spirit*? And if this be true, is it far fetched to review these 8 in that order adding each characteristic, built upon the previous one, until we reach the jubilation of the persecuted? I have zoomed out high above these verses to imagine I see the following links:

1. *Poor in spirit*: True happiness begins when a believer realizes how destitute they are without God. They realize that this life is a passage way to the next and all things have a spiritual significance. They surrender to His will unreservedly; they have abandoned all person dreams and ambitions to follow Him. They want His yoke upon them! They are a Matthew who left the receipt of customs, a dangerous decision since this was Rome's money! They have become more dependent on the Lord and less self reliant.
2. *Those who mourn*: They have taken to heart God's concerns and burdens realizing that carrying these is true communion with Him. Did Jesus weep alone over Jerusalem? When He asked for prayer that His Father would call laborers into His harvest, did they pray with Him? It is not without reason, He wants us to have a heart after His own. Only those who are surrendered to His will are available to pray with Him. They have become more prayerful and less critical.
3. *The meek*: These then find themselves more and more desirous of giving God His way in their lives. But our hearts are not only sensitive to the Savior's burdens for souls, our hearts now must be responsive to His directing regardless where He leads. They are becoming more His servant, and less independent.

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4. *Who hunger and thirst to be righteous:* They are passionate about living and experiencing God's Word in community with others. All selfishness must be purged. All carnality mortified. They are becoming more caring and less selfish. It is more about others and less about ... *me*.
5. *Who are merciful:* God is transforming them into givers instead of takers. They are becoming now more giving and less wanting for themselves.
6. *Who are pure in heart:* When it is all about others first, it is all about Jesus first. They begin to see through the haze of personal motives and discover in their heart only Christ. They are becoming more genuine a person with a single focus and less hypocritical.
7. *Who are peacemakers:* These people, the meek and merciful, the righteous and pure in heart are the only true peacemakers. They have become more peaceful and less divisive, less partisan, more united.
8. *Who are persecuted for righteousness' sake:* Oh the Joy of identifying with the Savior! They pray for continued boldness to speak the Word. They have become more courageous to witness and less intimidated or afraid.

I ask, "Does this not sound reasonable?" Peter understood: "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified." [1 Peter 4:14].

The Justice of God

“But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believes in Jesus.” - Romans 3:21-26

In preparing a Bible study on Romans 3:21-26 which speaks of “The Glory of God” [verse 23] it became immediately evident that this text only introduces a divine plan that is completed in 2 Corinthians 3:18. Just as Jesus’ *resurrection* is as vital a part of our Salvation as is our Lord’s *crucifixion*, our salvation is only the beginning of a pilgrimage—from Glory to Glory—to our becoming like Christ.

These are 2 scriptures which belong together because as N. T Wright noted The God of the Covenant is also the God of Creation. The God that justifies us is the God who transforms us. We were created for God’s Glory but with the fall of Adam and Eve [Romans 3:23] that Divine plan was paused “through the forbearance of God” [verse 25] until Christ “freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” should come “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood” [verse 24-25].

With His salvation His Spirit could bring us, as believers, up to the level of His holiness “to be partakers of the divine nature” [2 Peter 1:4] which God desired in us [2

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Corinthians 3:18]. This was a work of “The Righteousness of God” which in a coherent way that would not contradict His nature or character “He might be just,” [verse 26] and perfecting holiness in us, “He is the justifier of him which believes in Jesus [verse 26].

The overarching theme in this entire account is God in the role as Judge. The Swahili translation of Genesis 18:25 has Abraham say, when interceding for Lot, his nephew, to be delivered from the evil in Sodom, “God forbid; that the Judge of the whole world should not do justice!” [Genesis 18:25]. These words also ring true here in Romans 3:21-26 because the “Righteousness of God” is in large part, correctly understood as “The Justice of God.” Romans 3:21-26 has been appropriately called “The Marrow of Christian Theology” because it places the world, past, present and future, before the Judge with Christ for the defense, the mediator, and brings the Cross into perspective as the turning point in history—or as Dorothy Sayers once wrote, “From the beginning of time until now, this is the only thing that has ever really happened. When you understand this, you will understand all prophecies, and all history” [“Man Born to Be King, page 290].

The Weeds

I seem to live “in the weeds” of the Biblical text because to get to the other side of a Truth I must go in before I can go through and out on the other side where I can say with any degree of certainty that “I have covered the ground.” Within this most sacred and revelatory portion of Truth about Jesus’ death and God’s part in it [Romans 3:21-26] we come across words that will not yield willingly to Classical interpretation: The glory of the Lord, The Righteousness of God, Christ, who is our redemption, propitiation, and reconciliation [inseparable truths in the person of the Savior]. Other ideas take on a particularly Biblical nuance like grace and faith. This brings to mind Paul’s caution: “the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for

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they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” [1 Corinthians 2:14].

Richard Trench in his *Synonyms of the Greek New Testament* admits, “There are three grand circles of images [redemption, propitiation, and reconciliation], by aid of which are set forth to us in the Scriptures of the New Testament the inestimable benefits of Christ’s death and passion. Transcending, as these benefits do, all human thought, and failing to find anywhere a perfectly adequate expression in human language, they must still be set forth by the help of language, and through the means of human relations” [Section LXXXVII].

I have titled this “Finding God Reasonable” which brings us to this greatest of mysteries here in Romans 3:25 Jesus’ divine appointment which Paul revealed was “God ... manifest in the flesh...” [1 Timothy 3:16]. Here we discover that we now know less than we did when our minds cared little for details or coherency or nuances or how the truth sounds when translated or an Old Testament understanding or even, if Peter and Paul saw things differently. [We already know that English will not be the language of heaven!]

Recall the 3 aspects of reasonableness—we can rewrite them here in relevant terms. We can define reasonable any Biblical truth that we can *experience* [*For me to live is Christ* as in Galatians 2:20], highly *value* or consider it of great worth to us’ it is an honored truth in our life which we practice or live by [*I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ* as in Philippians 3:8] and are assured is in the *Biblical text*. well taught, well understood and well represented [*For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified* as in 1 Corinthians 2:2].

Some day, no doubt, in heaven Jesus will provide answers to the most perplexing parts of God’s plan for our present lives and we will then say, “Wow! Of course! Simple. Reasonable! Why didn’t I think of it!?”

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Imitators of Christ

In the meanwhile, as we become more like Christ, we, too, will find God's answer to sin and suffering most reasonable but it necessitates this transformation, not only in our nature [2 Corinthians 3:18; 2 Peter 1:4] but correspondingly, in our thinking [Romans 12:2]. As believers, we are living this change and, oddly enough, we can measure our progress by discovering how closely we imitate Christ in the Beatitudes [the beautiful attitudes].

"Become imitators of me," Paul exhorts us, "as I am of Christ" [1 Corinthians 11:1]. Jesus spoke of being His followers in another sense. The word Jesus used "to follow" Him in Matthew 9:9 speaks to the Savior's leadership, while Paul's word to the Corinthians speaks to Paul's character, lifestyle, and relationship with Christ. This is more in line with Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. I didn't see this as clearly until I pastored a Baptist church in the early 90's where they put the emphasis on the will of God for my life meaning to become like Christ in distinction from an emphasis on a specific calling to serve the Lord in some ministry. To them [correctly so] The Lord's ministry "to" us and "in" us must be first before His ministry "through" us.

The Law

Here is where Paul begins this most critical theological text Romans 3:21-22: "But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference."

For the sake of simplicity, we may read "justification" instead of "righteousness," as William Craig has admirably presented, because it gives us a well accepted judicial interpretation throughout the text ["just and justifier" in verse 26]. But I like a good sauce on my pasta, a point I made in my book on *Essays in Righteousness* where I also give N. T. Wright's

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meaning of “God’s Covenant Faithfulness.” To interpret this text with Wright’s meaning in mind is not wrong but it is more “weeds” that we need not walk through in order to put the focus on the other terms in this text that deserve some attention.

In Romans 3:22 Paul points out that God’s righteousness is “in” and “upon” us, who have faith in Him. It is contrasted with law giving it “legal” significance. Our salvation has nothing to do with our effort to obey a moral or legal code, even the Torah, because we should have discovered that holiness cannot be legislated.

The word “law” in Roman 3:21 written twice carries 2 separate meanings [as is correctly noted in Swahili, “Wala *sheria* wala *torati*, Torah”]. In the Greek the first reference is to “law” in general [lower case ‘l’] mentioned for the sake of the gentile believers, of whom it is said, in Romans 2:14-15, for conscience sake, follow the principle of law even though they don’t know the Jewish “Torah.” The Torah is the second reference in our verse [Romans 3:21] written specifically for enquiring Jews who argue for a salvation based on following Torah law. The prophets affirm this! “the righteousness of God without ~~the~~ law [Galatians 5:23] is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets” [Romans 3:21].

But there is more to this idea of “no law” than just the inadequacy in written form to govern all forms of evil. Law speaks of restriction, moderation, imposed limits and boundaries which the 9 Fruit of the Spirit *do not recognize*. “Against such there is no law.” Law is not a heavenly word!

Now

You can hear in Paul’s word “*now*” [which might be called a particle of entreaty or exhortation] echoing Isaiah 49:8 to the Corinthians, “Behold, *now* is the accepted time; behold, *now* is the day of salvation” [2 Corinthians 6:2]. “Behold” is, itself, [if following Hebrew thought] an interjection pointing to this fact and spoken with emphasis that Salvation has at last come in Christ!

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In God's jurisprudence neither natural law nor Torah law matter in rescuing us from sin and reconciling us to God. God's justice is solely an action of His grace and embraced by faith. Faith is required because we cannot earn our salvation, nor are we fully aware of how God is working in us.

It is the message of God's grace that must affirm that between Gentile and Jew, any nation, ethos, race, or culture, "there is no distinction" [Romans 3:22]. "For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him" [Romans 10:12]. Salvation is offered to all through grace by faith in Christ [Ephesian 2:7].

Paul proclaims the exciting news, "apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been revealed, attested by the Law..." (Romans 3:21) In other words: the declaration of our acquittal before the judgment seat of God is a judicial action! The law has been satisfied and there is no other indictment possible! [Romans 8:1].

The Fall

Romans 3:23 reads "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" [King James' version]. We like the phrase "fallen short of the Glory" in most translations because the word "sinned" comes from a word meaning to "miss the mark" [as in throwing a spear]. This picturesque interpretation suggests that mankind didn't quite "reach" the *Glory of God*. Swahili is clearer: "For all people have sinned and lack the glory of God." All humanity because of sin is consequently altogether destitute of [failed to obtain] God's Glory.

Exploring Romans 3:23: In context ["All have sinned"] in Swahili, as it is in Greek, suggests a state of being. The theologians label this "The Fall." Fallen mankind, in other words, is devoid of God's glory, as a *consequence* of sin. All humanity lacks God's Glory *altogether* and the use of the word "come" in the present tense [in the King James] suggests a *life* of continual sin, because mankind has been alienated from the

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Spirit of God. Without God's Spirit the process of becoming like Christ, or following Christ, remains impossible.

Paul could not have been plainer: "... hav[ing] previously charged both Jews and Greeks ... all under sin. As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God." [Romans 3:9-11].

This verb "to previously charge, accuse or concluded, prove" is only found here in all of Greek. Paul is saying that in a formal term he has already shown that everyone already stands before God as sinners. There is no one who is righteous [innocent]. Verse 11 is our focus in this work: no one reflects on this truth to where they would seek God out to change them.

Job lamented, "Nor is there any mediator between us, *Who* may lay his hand on us both." [Job 9:33]. A.I. interpreted this, "The disagreement is so intense or personal that no one can reach or touch both sides in a meaningful or neutral way." But we might echo Paul in Romans 7:25 "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord" as he wrote to Timothy " For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" [1 Timothy 2:5].

The Glory of God

According to 2 Corinthians 3:18 the very glory that was absent in our lives [Romans 3:23] is God's instrument to transform us into Christ's image. Jesus crucifixion and resurrection provides now the means by which God's glory can return to our hearts [Romans 6:11]. The Glory had departed [Ezekiel 10:18] but has now returned [Ezekiel 43:4, 5] thanks to Christ.

But what exactly is God's Glory? This is another one of those words with a Biblical meaning that the natural mind does not comprehend. To the philosopher, glory was opinion, conjecture, imagination, supposition as opposed to what one learns by observation or through the 5 senses. For the philosopher, this word did not mean what it means to us in our Bible!

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It is worth space here to mention the Old Testament term which carries some weight. It is unimaginable that Paul's use of this word would not raise in his mind the Old Testament term which came from a word meaning weighty as a measure of value like weighing gold—the more you have, the richer you are. It came to signify persons we honor for their value to us as persons in our lives with whom we have a relationship [Exodus 20:12]. It then came to emphasize God's excellence—how awe-inspiring His works. "Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!" [Psalm 107:8]. "Give glory to the LORD " [Jeremiah 13:16].

The work of God that is His signature piece, His masterpiece, is neither circumcision ... nor uncircumcision [not religion or ritual], but a new creation" [Galatian 6:15] and the Amplified adds "which is the result of a new birth—a spiritual transformation—a new nature in Christ Jesus." And while we are on 6:15, see Romans also where Paul exclaimed "We are not under the law, but under grace"

Image of Christ

We can understand this more fully looking into 2 Corinthians 3:18 where "the Glory of God" is referred to as "the Glory of the Lord," The Father reflected in the Son. "He that has seen me," Jesus told Philip, "has seen the Father;" [John 14:9]. "Beholding" our Lord's Glory in this chapter is analogous to Moses' face to face relationship with the Lord in his day. Our faces [hearts] are not covered because we have a relationship with God now as Moses had. Moses talked with God face to face [Exodus 33:11], we talk to God heart to heart [2 Corinthians 3:3].

As we follow/learn/fellowship with Christ [Matthew 11:29; Philippians 3:10] we are said to "gaze at the glory of the Lord as in a mirror," according to Paul, and we "are being changed to resemble Him [modeled after Him], from glory to glory." As believers we are not hiding our faces from God because we want to look upon Him, be with Him, follow Him [Hebrews 2:9].

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Paul, obviously, is *not* describing the moment of salvation in 2 Corinthians 3:18 because salvation is, in reality, timeless and immediate in a new birth [John 1:12]. Paul's wording "from Glory to Glory," like Psalm 84:7 ["from strength to strength"] suggests a journey. We are reminded of Philippians 1:6 "The Spirit, who has begun a work in you will complete it at Jesus' return." ... when "we shall be like him" [1 John 3:2]. We are reminded of John Bunyan's inspirational allegory, *Pilgrim's Progress*. It seems appropriate to see our transformation as a process [as we live for Christ] in our actions [Romans 13:14] and in our understanding [Romans 12:2].

Without the New Birth, this would not be possible because it marks the moment God's Spirit, Who is doing this work in us, comes to dwell in us: "The Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it does not perceive him, nor does it know him: but you know him; for he dwells ... [now] ... in you." [John 14:17].

It is the result of this transformation that Jesus' Mountain Sermon makes total sense to a believer. Otherwise, in the natural mind, it would appear incoherent and unreasonable.

Our Redemption

Romans 3:24 reads, "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:"

Paul never refers to Jesus as our Redeemer. The Father retains that title [Psalm 19:14; 78:35]. Jesus is our Redemption. Redemption is a freedom from captivity or bondage through the payment of a ransom: "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ" [1 Peter 1:18, 19].

Isaiah prophesied, "For thus saith the LORD, Ye have sold yourselves for nought; and ye shall be redeemed without money" Isaiah 52:3; cp 45:13]. The Lord pointed out that the Babylonian Exile could not in reality "redeem" Judah; God "owes" no man anything. He, God, will provide for Judah's

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salvation by Himself, for Himself. Matthew Henry wrote, “He is in debt to no one.” It is of interest to us that our Lord would raise this matter because theologians were greatly perplexed over who should receive the price for our ransom. We know it is the Father, alone! [Isaiah 43:25].

Redemption should be viewed as not only forgiveness but deliverance from sin. Paul saw our redemption in the person of Christ in His death and resurrection: “Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.” [Colossians 1:13-14].

Our Reconciliation

Our redemption is because Jesus became a propitiation for our sins. It is the Greek word, “Hilasterion.” In Swahili it is “reconciliation.” In Swahili in Leviticus 16 the Day of Atonement is interpreted as The Festival of Reconciliation.

Hilasterion is generally accepted as propitiatory, that is, God’s anger against sin needs to be placated. God now reconciles with us who believe because Jesus’ crucifixion “satisfied” His anger [Isaiah 53:11]. “In due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from *wrath* through Him. For if when we were *enemies* we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.” [Romans 5:6-10]. Words like “wrath” and “enemies” with God make God’s justice undeniable a punishment for sin.

Important to our discussion here is the word “propitiation” in Romans 3:25: “God has set forth Jesus *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his

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righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.”

There has been much discussion around this word since it is only found 1 other place in the New Testament in Hebrews 9:5 where it is taken literally as the “Mercy-seat” over the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle in the wilderness under Moses. When we enquire further, the writer tells us “This is not the time to go into detail.” So what did Paul mean in Romans 3:25?

Grammatically, our word is “Hilasterion,” a word, perhaps, that should not be translated but defined by its context. It is here associating with redemption and justification. It comes from a word in Greek literature that refers to a conciliatory act. It may represent 2 different perspectives: *the place where* this act takes place, that is, “the mercy sea in our Old Testament [in the New Testament this might have meant “The Cross”] or *the means by which* it is done, the instrument by which, reconciliation with God occurs, namely *Jesus’ self-sacrifice*. Jesus, Himself, would be the offering, as we read in Ezekiel 44:27 and 1 John 2:2 and 4:10.

Modern scholars lean toward the second interpretation although the Church has symbolized “The Cross” in everything from pendants to the picture on book covers. The Cross has become a symbol or shorthand way of referencing everything about Jesus’ death. It bears great theological significance.

Our Propitiation

Trench clothed the naked term, reconciliation, in a Scriptural garb that had cultural meaning for Paul: “With reconciliation,” Trench explained, “is connected all that language of Scripture which describes sin as a state of enmity (enemies) with God (Romans. 8:7; Ephesians. 2:15-16; James 4:4), and sinners as enemies to Him and alienated from Him (Romans 5:10; Colossians. 1:21); which sets forth Christ on the cross as the Peace, and the maker of peace between God and man (Ephesians 2:14; Colossians. 1:20); all such invitations as this, ‘Be ye reconciled with God’ (2 Corinthians 5:20).”

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Whatever propitiation means, therefore, it has to maintain its union with reconciliation and redemption. We know that all 3 terms speak of Christ; He Himself is our *peace* - reconciliation [Ephesians 2:14]. "Christ Jesus, ... became for us ... *redemption*" [1 Corinthians 1:30] and right here in Romans 3:25: "Whom God hath set forth to be a *propitiation* through faith in his blood."

The danger in Swahili is that because propitiation can mean "to appease God's wrath" if misunderstood, outside the Christian message, can mean a sacrifice made to avert misfortune. There is also in Christian teaching a merging of the word expiation with propitiation, the purging of sin or freedom from sin along with forgiveness or a sense in which God's judgment and wrath was directed at the defilement itself and not the penitent or the repentant.

"Propitiation in the biblical sense means *satisfying divine justice* so that mercy can be extended. God initiates the reconciliation Himself — in the gospel, He provides the sacrifice (Christ), unlike in mythology where humans must figure out how to placate the god." [A. I.]

Much is also made, understandably and correctly so, of our being enemies of God before salvation [Romans 8:7; James 4:4]. Propitiation, then, speaks to that ruptured relationship being in a sense healed [Psalm 107:20]. This is more than a quarrel or difference of opinion or an opposition based on policy or lifestyle; it speaks of a natural repulsion, but the Scripture everywhere puts this onus on man not God [Philippians 3:18]. "For if, when *we were* [God's] *enemies*, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life" [Romans 5:10].

John declared, "He [Jesus] is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for *the sins of the whole world*" [1 John 2:2]. If misinterpreted, this sounds like a universal salvation but *it is not!* We were enemies of God; God was never our enemy! Since "propitiation" can speak to the end of hostilities, it is spoke here of a provision made through Jesus' death now available to all [the whole world] because of Grace

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but, as Paul spoke elsewhere, “through faith” [Romans 3:22, 25, 26; Ephesians 2:8]. Later we must outline the use of the sacrifice, specifically, in Torah law, in Scripture, to contrast it with pagan sacrifices.

Jesus, in the very act of executing justice, in Isaiah’s words: “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him” [Isiah 53:11] God, in the person of His Son, redeemed us from the sin that brought such a judgment and thus provided the means for our reconciliation with God. There is in this salvific triad a threefold work of the Son of God on the Cross:

1. A **propitiatory** act against sin and Satan. Colossians 2:14-15 “Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; *And* having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.”
2. A **redemptive** act toward us. Galatians 3:13 “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hanged on a tree:”
3. A **reconciliatory** act toward His Father. Romans 5:10 “For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.”

All three together explain the death of Christ and can be harmonized, especially if we observe that the chief difference among them is that each work of God in Christ is directed toward a *different* person. Paul summarized, “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom [Isaiah 55:11], and righteousness [a propitiatory sacrifice], and sanctification [holy and separated unto God, no longer enemies, reconciled], and redemption [delivered from sin] ” [1 Corinthians 1:30].

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Not Unjust

Was this fair or just?

Yes

François Turretini (17 October 1623 – 28 September 1687; also known as Francis Turretin) was a Genevan-Italian Reformed scholastic theologian who looked at divine justice from the underside of the tapestry: **five reasons** for maintaining why we can say that Jesus' substitutionary or sacrificial death in our stead was *not unjust*.

In Turretin's words: There was no injustice made:

1. **Not to Christ**, for he voluntarily took the punishment upon himself, and had the right to decide concerning his own life and death, and also power to raise himself from the dead. Jesus had power over his own life, so that he may rightfully determine respecting it. "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have the right to lay it down, and I have the right to **take it up again**. I have received this command from my Father." (John 10:18)
2. **Not to God's justice and holiness** the judge, for he willed and commanded it. Jesus voluntarily took the burden on himself. "I have come to do your will." (Hebrews 10:9) For the Surety (substitution) satisfied this by suffering the punishment which demanded it.
3. **Not to the Torah law**, for its honor has been maintained by the perfect fulfillment of all its demands. Through the righteousness of the Mediator; and by our legal and mystical union, he becomes one with us, and we with him. He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." [Luke 44:24].
 - Because Jesus was incarnate, sin was punished in the same nature in which it was guilty. "Now since the children have flesh and blood in

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common, Jesus also shared in these, so that through his death he might destroy the one holding the power of death — that is, the devil.” [Hebrews 2:14]

4. **Not to the universe** [reasonableness], by depriving an innocent person of life, for Christ, freed from death, lives forevermore. If Jesus could be held by death, then he could free no one from its dominion, but He rose from the dead [1 Corinthians 15:17]. “Jesus Christ ... was appointed to be the powerful Son of God according to the Spirit of holiness by the resurrection of the dead.” [Romans 1:3-4]
5. **Not to the Saints** of God. for they are converted and made holy by Christ to live forever. Jesus did not die for His own sins because He was sinless. Being polluted by no sin, he might not have to offer sacrifice for himself, but for us only. “For this is the kind of high priest we need: holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.” [Hebrews 7:26]

The Simplicity of God

The Cross is simultaneously a judicial act and a gracious act, perfectly uniting God’s justice and mercy, enacting a justice that at the same time justifies. Adonis Vidu wrote in *The Law and Atonement*, “He is at the same time or in the same action both just and merciful.” [page 248]. The Psalmist affirmed, “He is gracious, compassionate, and righteous [with mercy and justice].” (Psalm 112:4)” God executes justice with both fairness and compassion.

But does not forgiveness come without punishment? If I forgive you of a debt you owe me, doesn’t this mean that you now don’t owe me anymore? Why must someone else pay it!

Perhaps one of the peskiest controversial issues raised thanks to a discussion of retributive justice is: How can something be called a “free” gift of grace if it “cost” Christ His life? If I gave my son in exchange for anything of value to give

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away, it still was not free. The Father offers His Son in payment for our salvation; then, He turns around and offers us that same salvation, it was not free. It cost Him His Son.

But if God was *in* His Son, then, we can say, *God* was crucified! He “gave himself for our sins.” (Galatians 1:4; Titus 2:14) In our understanding of law, if someone offers themselves to die in order to allow another to go free, in every sense, it becomes the ultimate price paid—the ultimate *free* gift. “No one has greater love than this: to lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13) Unlike the pagan idea behind the sacrifice, Jesus’ death was not humans appeasing an angry deity, but God providing the atonement *Himself* [Isaiah 43:25].

“Paul and John saw love in the cross,” John Stott in his book, *The Cross of Christ*, adding this stipulation, “because they understood it respectively as a death for sinners (Romans 5:8) and as a propitiation for sins (1 John 4:10).” He clarified, “...the cross can be seen as a proof of God’s love *only* (emphasis added) when it is at the same time seen as a proof of his (God’s) justice” [Page 216] Mercy and justice are two different names for God’s only moral attribute: His love.

Orestes

We must guard against using human logic in explaining spiritual truths unless there is clearly a biblical overlap. The mythological story of Orestes is an example.

Orestes killed his mother, Clytemnestra, who killed his father, Agamemnon, who killed his daughter [Orestes’ sister] Iphigenia because Artemis, goddess of the hunt was angry with Agamemnon possibly for boasting of his hunting prowess over hers. She demanded the sacrifice of his daughter, Iphigenia, before the goddess would provide favorable winds on his journey to Troy to rescue his sister-in-law, Helen.

This story, *Oresteia*, brings to a conclusion the violence of 5 generations of incest and parricide in the family of Tantalus, Orestes’ great-great grandfather. Orestes was indicted by the 3 Furies for murdering his mother. “The Furies (Erinyes - avengers

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of perjury, homicide, and unfilial conduct, etc.) are ancient spirits of vengeance who punish matricide above all else,” according to A. I.

The goddess, Athena, as judge, conducted his trial before a jury of 24 in which at least half [12] had to acquit to avoid punishment. Orestes was acquitted by Athena arguing that justice should be *restorative* and not retributive, else this family, the Atreus clan] will continue a war of revenge. [Atreus was Agamemnon’s dad and the son of Pelops, the son of Tantalus]

This form of Platonic justice later influenced Christian soteriology arguing that a divine ransom was in like manner a form of justice [erroneously argued paid to Satan] through the Savior’s death restoring the sinner.

“The point of the courts,” Professor Vidu maintains, “is not to uphold the law for the sake of law but to mediate and arbitrate between competing interests.” [Page 10ff].

“Plato and Aristotle ascribe importance to law, neither regards the law as a universal fit for every person and situation. Instead, both advocate the importance of discerning the particulars of each situation in the name of equity. ... Thus, although law is connected to justice, and justice is understood fundamentally as order, neither Plato nor Aristotle approaches a legalism that demands retribution in the name of a universal principle. The law is nothing but a means, a historically conditioned means, for the achievement of virtue.” [Page 14].

In the language of today’s jurisprudence: A legal plea deal is far better than vigilante justice. In Greek mythology, says Professor Vidu, “the gods are regarded as being more than willing to relax the law, precisely in the interest of justice (as peace and order).”

“It is not at all surprising,” Vidu concludes, “that the dominant patristic conception of the atonement, the so-called ransom theory, would be at home in such a culture. ... In this case the [church] fathers were simply echoing, as one should expect, a common understanding of justice, which pushed

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retribution into the background while foregrounding peace and forgiveness.”

When Roman law joined Hellenic thought, the ancient world they governed did not follow any principle like Islamic Sharia law or Jewish Halacha (Torah) law which would be propitiatory or seek justice by someone always being punished for breaking law. Such was thought too violent and not promoting a peaceful as well as just solution. To ransom mankind, in keeping with such Hellenistic reasoning, God had to pull off an ingenious deception. Wresting His creation by force from the grip of a devil who stole it in the Garden incident was not thought theologically in keeping with His divine character: “With violence being excluded as an option,” Dr. Vidu tells us, “some bargain had to be struck with the devil.” [Page 17].

But we know from the language of Scripture that Jesus’ passion revealed a punitive side to God’s justice, especially in the language of Isaiah 53. Orestes’ tale of justice aside God remains merciful even if it required the Savior’s death. This is a Biblical or divine logic or reasoning that was never dependent on Greek jurisprudence to make sense. Every believer because of their 3 fold source of reasoning: experiencing salvation, valuing their relationship with Christ, and God’s revelation of the Biblical message of Christ’s death and resurrection, see Jesus’ death and resurrection as most logical, not only as regards this life, but the world to come.

Even though there are biblical accounts of unconscionable acts of human violence, the God of the Ancient Hebrews is rather known instead for His *mercy*—something Paul picked up on in discussing divine grace and saving faith: “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.” [Romans 9:15].

That God Himself would provide for our Salvation was foreign to Greek and Roman thought as I pointed out in my short work *“If It Be Possible.”* The Computer diagramed this contrast between the One true God of Scriptures who died for sin and Artemis in this story [from ChatGPT when I asked to contrast the sacrifice of Christ with the Greek and Roman

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sacrifices: The God of Scripture is unlike Greek and Roman gods, who act more like incorrigible children wanting their own way or else.”

The Greek Goddess, Artemis, Compared to Yahweh		
Aspect	Artemis in Greek Myth	God in Romans 3:23-26
Reason for anger	Artemis was offended because Agamemnon killed her sacred deer and boasted he was a better hunter.	God is justly opposed to human sin because it violates His holy character and moral law.
Nature of wrath	Emotional, personal pride wounded; reaction is arbitrary and tied to her honor.	Righteous, moral opposition to sin — consistent with His justice and holiness.
Condition for appeasement	Artemis demands a costly and emotionally painful act (sacrifice of Iphigenia) to restore her favor.	God requires justice to be satisfied — the penalty for sin must be paid.
Who provides the offering	The human (Agamemnon) must come up with the sacrifice to meet Artemis' demands.	God Himself provides the offering — Jesus Christ — as an act of love and justice.
Goal of appeasement	To let the fleet sail to Troy — a pragmatic outcome, not moral restoration.	To declare sinners righteous and restore relationship, while upholding His justice.
Relationship dynamic	Human tries to manipulate or pacify an unpredictable deity.	God takes the initiative to reconcile humanity to Himself.
Moral framework	No consistent moral law; gods can act unjustly and selfishly.	Justice and mercy are both rooted in God's unchanging moral nature.

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The Sacrifices

The 7 types of sacrifices in Leviticus and the Torah, in general, suggest a more merciful God and ritualized lessons in His forgiveness and mercy rather than a sacrificial system designed to pacify the anger of an enraged God.

1. The Burnt offering to represent our devotion and service to the Lord [Romans 12:1; Leviticus 2:12]
2. The Sin offering and its promise of redemption. [Leviticus 5:7] accompanied by the burnt offering. These were brought on the "Day of Atonement" [Yom Kippur] Leviticus 16:23:27. This offering is clearly specified in Romans 3:25 in the use of the word Hilasterion. As a substitutionary offering it more represents on God's part [John 3:16] more a conciliatory act with a view to making peace than just placating wrath. On a national level, this would parallel a spiritual revival as in Josiah's day [2 Kings 23:24].

The Greek and Roman sacrifice was the pagan idea of propitiating gods that never did value mankind. In Greek mythology the creation of man was an afterthought! In the Old Testament, it is a God who loves us that wills to reconcile. It will take the death of His Son which they both willingly offer. Jesus became a merciful High priest who. By the offering of Himself reconciled us to God [Hebrews 2:17].

3. The Trespass offering speaks of our ransom. In Isaiah 53:10 "an offering for sin," is the Trespass offering. [Mark 10:45; 1 John 1:9]. It represented an individual cry for mercy unlike the Sin offering that often was offered for the nation as a whole. This was the guilt offering for

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all acts done with or without intent [Leviticus 5:15]. This offering represents more the penitent heart [Psalm 51:17].

4. The Peace offering was voluntary [Psalm 51:4; Hebrews 13:20]. It was an offering of thanksgiving—something unheard of in paganism. In our day, perhaps, a praise time [Ephesians 5:19-20].
5. The Grain offering without leaven as a gift of first fruits to God offered with the Burnt offering of devotion [Leviticus 2:11-13]. This might be representative of our new life in Christ [Hebrews 10:22].
6. The Drink offering [Exodus 29:14] speaks of fellowship with God. We might enjoy this offering at times of rich Christian fellowship [1 John 1:7].
7. The Incense offering speaks of a dedicated prayer life or communion with God [Revelation 8:1-4].

These 7 sacrifices could respectively represent our

1. Faithful service to the Lord as He gave His life for us,
2. Prayer of revival or the Spirit's outpouring as prophesied by Joel at Jesus' ascension,
3. Personal desire to put on Christ [Romans 13:14],
4. Praise and worship,
5. The new life in Christ,
6. Christian fellowship, and
7. A dedicated prayer life.

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Never confused ritualistic sacrifices in pagan worship with what the Old Testament sacrifices foreshadowed: "For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect" [Hebrews 10:1]. But Jesus death and resurrection does!

Swahili has a word for vicarious sacrifice and an expiatory offering. According to A.I. "In both Islamic and African traditional contexts, [this] is an offering given in place of the guilty person to remove guilt, appease wrath, or restore favor with a deity or spirit." This is how they might see Romans 3:25: "God sent Jesus to be *a sacrifice to take away sins.*" Or in Hebrews 10:10: "By that will, we have been *made holy through the offering* of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." This appears more expiatory than propitiatory. Removing the sin is more the part of a loving God than a wrathful one.

This is unlike Greek and Roman mythologies where the gods act more like incorrigible children wanting their own way or else, jealous, lustful, vindictive, ejusdem generis. Someone failed to honor them, bested them, or violated their pride like with Artemis in the Agamemnon [Orestaea] story. Sacrifices and offerings often serve as bribes to restore favor or a contractual arrangement: who do for me because of what I did for you [Do Et Des, "give the god what they want so they'll give you what you want."]

Thought using A. I. Should be done with great prayer caution, there is some validity to this computer entry: [God's] wrath is a settled opposition to *sin*, not an emotional tantrum. God's justice flows from His holiness — not personal wounded pride."

Faith

Faith and believing in Christ is not a matter of knowing doctrine. Salvation must be "through faith" Romans 3:25 which makes "faith" an active part of our Christian walk. "We walk by faith

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and not by sight” [2 Corinthians 5:7] We can list some of the many reasons:

1. Salvation is by grace not works [not earned, not through effort; Grace, therefore, requires faith [Romans 4:16; Ephesians 2:7-8].
2. God’s Plan is in part mysterious [1 Timothy 3:16].
3. God’s plan is in this life unknowable [Isaiah 53:1; 55:11; Deuteronomy 29:29].
4. Language is generally weak and not designed effectively to entirely explain God’s plan. [“propitiation”? Romans 3:25 & Hebrews 9:5].
5. God’s plan is eternal and only part of it applies to us now. [2 Corinthians 4:18].
6. We live by hope requires Faith as grace does [Titus 3:7, Hebrews 11:1].
7. Faith as trust is relational; trust characterizes reconciliation/love with God. [Isaiah 43:10].
8. Somethings are knowable but only by experience/ growth/maturity which requires an initial step of faith [John 14:1; 1 Corinthians 13:12].
9. All knowledge is built on faith [Genesis 1:1].
10. Heart knowledge depends on faith [Acts 16:14; Romans 10:9].
11. Faith is faithfulness/trustworthiness required for commitment to God’s Covenant [Romans 4:18.
12. Waiting on God requires faith [Psalm 37:4-7].

Just scanning these dozen characteristics of our salvation tells us that faith is not a religious concept but a necessary part of a Christian’s life in Christ [1 John 5:11; Galatians 2:20]. Faith is vital because human reasoning and logic is deficient [1 Corinthians 2:14] according to Romans 3:23 because, as we already noted, it rests upon the faulty premise of Adamic disobedience [the Adamic nature]..

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God's plan now was to create in us new hearts [Ezekiel 36:26-27] in order that we "will all know [Him]" [Jeremiah 31:34] not in an "book" or theological sense but empirically, in life, capable of receiving the revelation of Truth written in His Word on a faith basis [Romans 10:17] with a new or transformed way of thinking [Romans 12:2]. Instead of seeing is believing [scientific materialism] now believing is seeing [Matthew 21:22].

God Looks the Other Way

Verse 25 ends: "to declare his righteousness for the *remission* of sins that are past, through the *forbearance* of God;"

Paul was not the only one who recognized God's tolerance of sin, something that deeply disturbed Him. (If "disturbed" is the word!) Hosea 11:8 says of Judas' idolatry "mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together." And Paul agreed in Romans 3:25 "God postponed [judgment] enduring mankind's sins until Jesus would die to put an end to them."

The King James word "remission" in Romans 3:25 is not a synonym for forgiveness. It is linked here with the forbearance of God. God *tolerated* sin! God did not say here that He forgave past sins as if to say that until now there would have been no forgiveness. On numerous occasions with various sacrifices forgiveness was granted [Leviticus 4:20, 26, 31, 35, etc.] This truth was so well-known that it became the reason for the sacrifice in Jewish thought: "without shedding of blood is no remission [forgiveness]" [Hebrews 9:22].

When Moses had this conversation with His Lord, the Lord pointed out that forgiveness was not the issue! : "Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now," Moses prayed. "And the LORD said, I have pardoned according to thy word." [Numbers 14:18-19].

In Romans 9, in the analogy of the Potter and the clay, Paul asks, "Shall the thing formed say to him that formed *it*,

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Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay?" [Romans 9:20-21]. This sounds like God was predetermined to have His way with the clay, but there is a fly in the ointment in Romans 9:22. Let me quote the King James Version without the fly and see if you can see what scholarship has noted with perplexity: "What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured [bore the burden of] ... the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction..." the ellipsis represents: "with much long-suffering."

God did not spin the potter's wheel with the thought in mind, "This vessel will be for a chamber pot, but with the next lump of clay I think I will make a Carafe for the president's visit." This sentence gives the word "long-suffering" no meaning here!

The potter suffers long over clay because, and only because, He tries over and over and over and ... again to work this piece of clay into something beautiful but it just will not yield to His hand!

In Romans 9:22 long-suffering is an advancement on Romans 3:25 "forbearance" or tolerating because before Christ came, in terms of wrath and punishment, God overlooked sin. The best English word is "pretermission" meaning for a limited time He would "leave it unaddressed. But there would be no statute of limitation on our crimes against God; He will revisit the matter "declare His justice!" ... But after the Cross! "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent," [Acts 17:30].

A Public Declaration

Paul repeats his declaration of God justice from verse 25, now in verse 26. In chapter 3 he uses the word righteous or just in different forms at least 13 times; faith, belief or unbelief 9 times; and judgment 3 more times. In our verse 21-26 alone, Paul discusses the Righteousness of God 4 times. With such a pronounced emphasis in his trumpet call, how could any preacher find anything else to proclaim if they are disciples of Paul's Gospel? If anyone is following Paul in presenting Christ

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to their world, they must embody the same message, the singular message of Romans 3:21-26.

The King James Version reads, “To declare, *I say*, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believes in Jesus.” The 2 words “*I say*” were added in italics in the King James in an effort to provide emphasis, but in fact Paul changed one word from verse 25. In the previous verse he told us that God’s appointment of Jesus to Calvary was God’s declaration. Here in verse 26 Paul further reveals what Jesus’ appointment to the Cross was all about: to do the just thing and to provide for our justification. This is our declaration as evangelists.

But what is a declaration?

It means to show something to be true by demonstrating it, putting this truth on display where others can judge for themselves. But it has to mean more than this in Scripture because this is a powerful message [Romans 1:16]. It is delivered with all the conviction of heaven at its demand: “So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.” [Isaiah 55:11]. Satan cannot defuse this dynamic voice; he must silence it if he can [Romans 10:14-17].

In addition to this, a declaration is not a private message but a public announcement heralded in the town square in effect. The following is from my commentary on Romans. Why must it be publicly broadcast?

1. Because Satan’s defeat must not be a hidden truth. **Colossians 2:15** “He disarmed the rulers and authorities and disgraced them **publicly**; he triumphed over them in him.”
2. Because God wants all to have opportunity to repent. **2 Peter 3:9** “From His cross there rose the most perfect honor rendered to the righteousness of God. How could His death for our salvation, for the atonement of the world, not be public!? “not willing that any should

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perish, but that **all should come** to repentance.” The Jewish law is now replaced by a new life in Christ.

3. Because the harvest is plenteous. **Matthew 9:37** The Lord needs laborers. The **harvest indeed is plenteous**, but the laborers are few.
4. Because Grace demands it: God commands or requires repentance for all and He shows **no favoritism Acts 17:30** “Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now commands **all people everywhere to repent.**”
5. Because salvation is good news through Christ *only*. Acts 4:12 “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” If Salvation is not publicized, how shall the world hear? **Romans 10:13-15** And **how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?** And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” “For four thousand years, the spectacle presented by mankind to the whole moral universe was, so to speak, a continual scandal. With the exception of some great examples of judgment, divine righteousness seemed to be asleep.....” Our verse confesses, “God passed over the sins “ But now, Hear ye! Hear ye!! He that hath an ear , let him hear!

We have Romans 3:21-26 and the rest of the Pauline corpus to make clear exactly what this Gospel message is! But it may still sound unreasonable to the unsaved ears unless it is appropriately *demonstrated*. Reasons need to be demonstrated or experienced and not just theoretical. Additionally, the Church must prioritize this Gospel message making it more valuable, more important than any other directive or goal in ministry.

In Jesus’ parable of the Sower, the seed was scattered or thrown about appearing haphazardly and without direction, without commitment, without an intelligent plan for planting

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wheat or corn. But nothing could be farther from the truth! It was no happenstance that "... other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit..." [Matthew 13:8].

What appears at first glance for the untrained thinker to be foolish babbling [Acts 17:18] or "strange things" [Acts 17:20] are anything but! What initially sounds philosophical, unreasonable, or illogical, once it reaches the open heart {Acts 14:17; 16:14} begins to make perfect sense [Acts 17:4].

A Reasonable Service

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” - Romans 12:1

Understanding God’s reasons is not as important as accepting by faith that whatever those reasons might be, they are, indeed, most reasonable.

In this brief work, we have attempted to put flesh to the bones by looking at the 3 major aspects or characteristics of what we, as humans, find reasonable and why we so often see things differently in this regard.

We first spoke of relatability. People, though they might little realize it, live their education and upbringing, because it is what they can relate to. What they have already know or think they know is reasonable to them not because it might make sense [it might even be self-contradictory or they may be living with cognitive dissonance] but because it is the life they know! At least until some crisis knocks them off course unto another possible one, they will find every argument they can to show that what they are doing makes sense for them.

Secondly, we spoke of measurability: we may little realize the importance of what we might call “the honor principle” in our lives, honoring some people over others, prioritizing tasks, valuing our time enough to schedule some of our time for more important things—like an education. It is usually no mystery why a concert pianist can play Mozart. I remember one such piano player I met in college. He was sitting at the piano [surprise, surprise!] and I watched his fingers do

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their own thing as if his right hand didn't know what his left hand was doing, but the music made me want to worship God! He valued the opportunity from a child to be able someday to do that. If we value our relationship with Christ we will develop a prayer life, spend time with God's Word and learn to live the Christian life all as a matter of principle. What weight or importance do we give our Christian experience?

And we spoke of definability—knowing what it is we stand for, able to give a reason for our hope in Christ to any who ask [1 Peter 3:15]. This is, what I have called, heart knowledge—something we know even if not in our heads. We know God's promises are *all* true because we, like those in the "Hall of Faith" embrace them: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of *them*, and embraced *them*, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" [Hebrews 11:13].

Relatability

It is in living the message that it becomes reasonable to our thinking as well. We began by labeling this "relatability" and that it is. We can relate to those ideas we have incorporated into our lifestyle, our commitment to truth, and what, in terms of measuring value, are far weightier in importance to us than other principles. But we must also understand them in the light of Scripture as believers in Christ. This faith is now not opinion but heartfelt knowledge. Faith becomes the heart's transceiver for communicating with God in prayer, as well as for receiving, accepting, and incorporating the revelation of Divine truth from the Word of God. The Gospel message has relevance even in a postmodern world. Believers are not being asked to argue or debate Christianity but to live it.

The greatest message that is solely Christian in its origins and scope is *forgiveness*. I was surprised on one occasion hearing from a co-worker, who showed an interest in Christian truth but didn't seem aware of this unique Christian value, forgiveness. He had shown some indiscretion which I didn't

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think rose to the height of banishment and of which he showed great contrition and repentance but he would not go to his religious leadership feeling, for sure, they would excommunicate him. There are fewer social disciplines as painful [2 Corinthians 2:6-8; Galatians 6:1]. And yet our Lord is “just and the justifier” of all those whose faith is in Christ.

This is *forgiveness*, plain and simple. One commonly understood meaning behind our Lord’s prayer, “forgive us, as we forgive...” in Matthew 6:11, is that if we do not forgive others, as Jesus said, “neither will your Father in heaven forgive you!” [Matthew 11:26]. This is a scary idea since we often find forgiveness emotionally hard to accept. We make excuses as to why we need time to integrate the offense into our perspective or accept it without condition, or find a way to get rid of the hate we feel, and the like. If Jesus returns in the meantime or we die ...ouch!!

I don’t think this is what Jesus was saying. I think He was telling us that we forgive because we have been forgiven; our forgiveness of others is now natural because Jesus put this message in our own hearts from Him. Like love: we can love others because now we are loved by Him! [John 15:12].

Measreability

To the degree we, as Christian, do not cherish our salvation with gratitude and thanksgiving extended to our Lord for such an unmerited gift, we will find other things to cherish in its place. We will always fill our days with those tasks most important to do [Matthew 6:21]. We fool ourselves in thinking that an hour on the weekend expresses our devotion to the Lord when the rest of our time is spent in other priorities. How we spend our time is a truer measurement of the value we give to any task, whether it is valued or more important to us than other things to do. It is this measure that is an indicator or meter of how reasonable we consider the idea of doing it.

A Reasonable Service

Definability

In our hearts we know God's Truth, if we have, at least, been reading His Word, the Bible, because we have been gifted at creation with a self-consciousness that will always debate with us as to the rationality and moral value of our actions. And it should be no surprise when God gets in on the conversation [Isaiah 1:18]. When Paul exhorted men to love their wives, as an example, it seems odd that suddenly the woman they couldn't live without now they cannot live with— every time the argument leans toward irreconcilable differences. We should be thankful to Christ that He didn't think that way of us!

No! So much of Scripture is undeniable clear no matter how much we rationalize otherwise. Scholarship has fun with nuances and their theological conclusions but in the moment of crisis we all know none of this matters. We know that prayer works when we ask for His wisdom, [James 1:5] which incidentally, James described as "first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy." [James 3:17]. What part of that statement *don't* we understand!

Putting It All Together

“And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.” - 1Corinthians 15:45

We have suggested in this work that all theology as a scholastic discipline tries to present a reasonable explanation as to why God did what He did to save us. But most of our conclusions are based on human logic which, itself, is only explained through analogy and metaphor. We also borrow from the Old Testament where, though the language lends itself to this theological scheme, it is not systematic. This helps explain how there could be such a disparity in denominational teaching. By lacking a systematic approach to teaching—opting for an historical narrative, instead—the Old Testament can be made to say almost anything by treating the text symbolically.

Depending, then, on the New Testament Greek, we face another problem. The language is koine and only the Bible is written in this Greek dialect. Koiné cannot always be held to the Classical meanings of words; so, we are too often invited into centuries’ long discussions that remain unresolved but, which, nonetheless, become the property of opposing denominational thought. It must be evident with even a casual reading of Scripture that God never intended us to be divided, but we are!

Even though Paul said, for example, that there is only one baptism and one faith [Ephesians 4:5] we have splintered over the means and importance of water baptism. Another example: Scholastics know that there is no Biblical reference to “purgatory.” If Dante is right, only the repentant go through there, which is not much of a consolation for the masses of unrepentant man. We have also expanded the concept of “church

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governance” reasoning that Christianity outgrew its humble beginnings. There is at least a hint of Old Israel in this decision: “Make us a king to judge us like all the nations” [1 Samuel 8:5]. We have preferred our own wisdom at times to God’s or as C. M. Ward years ago, on the “Revival Time” radio program, said: we are “too much administered, not enough led.” I don’t know if we looked lately but there is a strange similarity between the practices of the larger church and the corporate business world. I don’t say it’s wrong but we need to be introspective to be sure we haven’t “left our first love” [Revelation 2:4].

Why Was Jesus Crucified?

Why was Jesus crucified? We don’t know exactly. We know if He came to die, it had to be a crucifixion because it had to be public and bloody [Romans 3:25]. But when we ask, why did He *have to* die, we are asking why did *God* have to become incarnate to be crucified. All we know, for sure, is that it meant enough to God to go there because we meant enough to Him: “God *so* loved...” [John 3:16]. His life and death were linked to ours [Galatians 2:20]. Is this vicarious or substitutionary? The logic dictates this since if He hadn’t died for our sins, we would have died in them.

There was no other way to correct [Matthew 26:39] and no other person who could correct [John 14:6] what Adam did. Paul argued, “... not as the offense, so also is the free gift. For if through the offense of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many.” [Romans 5:15].

Secondly, God took the time to announce His coming through the many sacrifices in the Old Testament. Since they were parabolic in nature, we need to match the New Testament event surrounding Christ’s death with what we think in the sacrificial system in Torah law best represents that event. We have all of the Epistle to the Hebrews to help us. Pagan sacrifices did not share in this revelation at all, although, the very fact that pagan sacrifices existed spoke to man’s need of a savior!

Putting It All Together

By the 16th Century of the Christian Era scholastics were talking about judicial explanations which, in themselves are not unreasonable but, may be weak in explaining the reason[s] for Jesus' death. We must not assume God's definition of fairness and justice has to coincide exactly with ours. Because we are made in His image we can assume that our moral consciousness requiring some form of justice has something in common with His. But we are only saying, "If I were God, this is why I would die for mankind!" We may be close.

Eden

And what did go wrong in Eden? Here's how I might answer this. Adam and Eve were as human as you and I. They were carnal beings, as we are, but without sin. Simply said: humans can be tempted into sinning. If a dog was determined to eat dinner scraps even though their owner forbade it, we would not call it sin nor would we say they were tempted. It's a *dog*! We, however, are self-conscious, moral beings, which makes temptation a real possibility. Adam and Eve needed to be carnal beings which means they could choose to love God or not.

Human beings do not go on instinct as much as learning, We discover love! We were made to learn to love God and recognize His love for us. This is the meaning of relationship.

Adam and Eve also, at their creation, were made "spiritually" alive by the breath of God [Genesis 2:7]. Two things happened in this moment, God breathed *life* into them and they became living *souls*.

My Soul

"My soul" is often used in the Old Testament for the "self." It is written in The Psalms 254 times in 102 Psalms. Psalm 35:9 reads "my soul shall be joyful in the LORD" meaning "I will be joyful in the Lord." This is the person as he relates to his world. He is alive.

Putting It All Together

The soul and body [flesh] are occasionally joined in an experience [Job 14:22; Psalm 84:2; Proverb 11:17; Acts 2:31]. They are obviously separate but for the body to be alive it must house the soul. The soul is one's window to their world around them which the body interacts with.

Man's Spirit

There is a spiritual dimension to man's nature by which he knows or can know God [a vertical relationship]. When I read Romans 1:21 I thought at first I was reading about Adam and Eve! "When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful." No! Paul is talking about their descendants—the rest of mankind. All humans have a spiritual side to their nature that expresses itself in some form of religious behavior. This is a sure sign they have the concept of God's existence drawn from a distant cultural tradition that surfaces as some form of religious duty or dedication. This is the Greek word "piety" which meant in philosophy a fear of the gods. The biblical idea behind Christian piety is better represented by Enoch, who walked with God. This is the word "godliness" in 2 Peter 1:6.

The spiritual dimension in "Fallen" mankind is not just unrealized or underdeveloped in some latent sense. No! It is broken and dysfunctional. Paul explained "you ... were dead in trespasses and sins" [Ephesians 2:1, 5]. Paul taught that "the new man ... is renewed [a complete change] in knowledge after the image of him that created him" [Colossians 3:10]. God would not rehabilitate or repair what was defective. With a new nature comes a new spirit and a new heart. And a new opportunity to converse with God, "liv[ing] according to *God* in the *spirit*" [1 {Peter 4:6}].

Sin Entered

When Adam sinned, any real distinction between soul [the social being who relates to his environment] and spirit [the part of him

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that relates to God] was lost. The “spirit” became only the seat of one’s disposition and passions and had no relationship to God.

There are even New Testament examples describing the spirit as intention or passion, even though the spirit of the believer in Christ is very much alive unto God [Romans 6:11]. It simply became a very Jewish way of thinking: Paul’s spirit *stirred* in him [Acts 17:16], being *pressed* in the spirit [Acts 18:5], or *fervent* in the spirit [Acts 18:25]—all Old Testament ideas only at God’s service.

Renewal

In the New Testament the soul and spirit are also distinguished: “For the word of God *is* quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of *soul* and *spirit*, and of the joints and marrow, and *is* a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the *heart*.” [Hebrews 4:12]. In the Old Testament, the soul is more about “thoughts” and the spirit is more about “intentions.” But notice also the reference to “the heart.” [Romans 10:10].

For believers the spirit becomes our way by faith to converse with God [Matthew 10:20; Romans 1:9; 7:6; 12:11; 1 Corinthians 2:12; 14:14-15]. “And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living *soul*; the last Adam *was made* a quickening *spirit*.” [1Corinthians 15:45]. The spirit is also the “heart.” [Psalm 34:18; 51:10; Romans 2:29] and is where faith thrives: Paul spoke of “the spirit of faith” [2 Corinthians 4:13]. Faith is not logic or opinion or assumption—brain and mind stuff. Faith is Heart-knowledge not head knowledge. Paul prayed, “That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:” [Ephesians 1:17].

As confusing as this all sounds, it really isn’t. Because we have a spirit, we are spiritual beings, and if that spirit is alive, we can converse with God. All this because at salvation He gave us a new heart—a new spirit [Jeremiah 31:34]. Sounds poetic and maybe like an explanation we might give in our limited understanding: we have brand new transmitters that are

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different from the old ones, reengineered by God with a different circuitry. This one works without static or breaking down. Paul was never averse to talking this way where necessary [Romans 3:5].

Also, the language of Scripture is not intended to split human nature into 3 parts. We can correctly assume a single nature that contains all that we are by character and attribute. What we are believing here is that there was a spiritual dimension to Adam and Eve which made them alive in communing with God that was lost when they bit into the fruit of the forbidden tree. Mankind needed new hearts, a new spirit within them [Ezekiel 36:26], to bring them alive once again to God. This was provided through the Savior's death and resurrection and is given to us freely by faith.

Eternity

Let's talk a little about eternity! Oh, we can't? Because we are creatures of time—our logic is time-based. Everything we observe is measurable. Remember, we quoted Ward, back in the Introduction, "Consumers ... see everything as a commodity." This is also why the question about losing our salvation is purely academic in the mind of an eternal God. This life is a blip on the timeline superimposed on the line of eternity which actually only God really sees! We argue the point needlessly. I believe that when we finally [there's a timeline word] reach heaven, all our family and friends that are there will say, "We just got here, too!" ... even though they preceded us in this life by years.

Our hearts tell us we are eternal beings not temporal ones. If God gave it, we will never get our fill of it. Never enough love or beautiful flowers or forest walks or, yes, the Word of God especially the message of our salvation. The heart says that eternity is real even though when we theologize about it our thoughts come out imagining chronologies and prophetic events begging an answer to "when" [Acts 1:6 & 7].

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Logic is Logic

How can we be sure what the truth is if we cannot one hundred percent trust the accuracy of our translations; if all truth is substantially represented in parable and poetic verse; and if a thousand disparate Christian sects are clamoring for our support claiming *they* have the truth! [not to mention the many variations in the Biblical text that are available in the original languages.]

We learn the truth the scientific way—the same way science claims to discover it by employing the 3 principle aspects of reasonableness we outlined in this work. We want to know what is:

1. Empirically knowable [observable & experience]. With Bible truth, likewise, it must be experienced [lived] to be real.
2. Measurably knowable [understood as a quantity or unit of measurement]. With Bible truth we decide its worth or value or priority in our experience.
3. Definably knowable [mathematically reproducible results]. Bible truth is accepted as inspired and cherished by all believers. Seek to know that interpretation that represents the union of all believers [not necessarily church goers or denominations].

We can trust the Holy Spirit who operates under grace to share simple, livable, practical truth with every believer [2 Peter 1:20]. This truth is not academic in nature but sound instruction for real faith and conduct [2 Timothy 3:16]. Paul mentioned 4 uses:

1. for doctrine or teaching, discipleship [a general term regardless of age],
2. for reproof or a dialogue over spiritual matters to give wisdom, direction, support in following the Will of God leads.
3. for correction or to restore the wayward or one who is off course and heading into sinful practices,

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4. for instruction in righteousness or for training the young believer in spiritual matters [all is so new to them].

The Biblical truth or message is a constant, unchanged and unchanging, and applies to all believers. Biblical Truth centers on the Death and Resurrection of the Savior. We may discover that many issues that divide the Body of Christ are peripheral, uninspired, unimpressive, unimportant for Christian growth and edification. They serve only to separate us and should be minimized if personally important [Romans 14:22].

The Heart

I would encourage us to revisit our theological parlance to explain truth in terms of “the heart” more and not “nature.” We do not have 2 natures. This cannot make any psychological sense and only be thought of in terms of an analogy. The word is singular in the Scripture, seldom employed, and references the entire person, their character, disposition, feelings, thoughts, every part. What is better is to talk about the believer as a “new” nature [new creation] but with a carnal aspect to their character still part of their spiritual makeup [the soul]—still vulnerable to temptation ... something that will *not* be part of our new spiritual bodies someday, as Paul excitedly anticipated, “sown a natural body, ... raised a spiritual body.” [1 Corinthians 15:44].

What we fail to appreciate is the value of our flesh in the overall work of God. *Not* yielding to real temptation is a very big thing with God! [Matthew 4:1 & 11; Luke 4:14]. *Not* yielding is evidence that “God is faithful” [1 Corinthians 10:13]. Strangely so, perhaps, we get stronger in spiritual battle every time we say, “No!” by the grace of God. Without carnality, there would be no role for temptations and what would we do with the Fruit of “Temperance” then? [Galatians 5:23]. The thing about this Fruit, Temperance, is that it is foundational to the other 8 and ultimately the clearest expression of Agape, Love! [Galatians 5:22-23]. We do not want to disown these old bodies just yet; for,

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in them, we are learning so much about our Lord in relation to Him [Hebrews 5:8].

Even if the tempter won this round, we are getting up off this mat and rushing him at the bell! [Romans 7:25]. A contrite heart is always God's opportunity [Psalm 51:17]. And please, don't argue for yielding to temptation as if staying contrite is something God likes [Romans 6:1]. He prefers a sorrow that leads to repentance [2 Corinthians 7:10]. What we are noting here is that the cry for mercy is itself the heart's cry of a believer in Christ [Psalm 42:1]. This is not a fear of divine retribution because we know that He loves us: "perfect love casts out fear:" [1 John 4:18]. The believer is "poor in spirit" now *by nature*.

The "heart" is mentioned 830 times in the King James translation. That's close enough to warrant an interest in its importance in our relationship with our Lord! I may come dangerously close to the edge by saying this, but God long ago purposed as a covenantal God to bring into covenant those persons who had a heart after His, who trusted Him implicitly simply because it was He who ask them to covenant with Him and they accepted in faith.

The whole idea of sin in a covenantal relationship is now a matter of heart because God never expected perfect compliance—though a prayerful passion for it—nor did He assume those who covenanted with Him really read and understood the small print [the Bible in its totality]. If the heart is into it, there will be something God's grace can work with; there will be signs of dedication and repentance if unfaithful. There will be a Psalm 51 in our lives which, at the beginning is all God asked for.

The New Covenant, which we "follow" as believers, however, is not a document but a *person*! Professor Lightfoot called this the Gospel in his commentary on Philippians, writing, "though [it] is capable of doctrine exposition, though it is eminently fertile in moral results, yet it's substance is neither a dogmatic system, nor ethical code, but a person and a life." The Bible is more than a theology; it is all about Jesus: His life, His work, and our relation with Him. Some call Jesus the New

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Covenant which has a Pauline ring to it because Paul called Him our Redemption [1 Corinthians 1:30], If we are following the covenant, we are following Christ. And this can only happen when our heart is in it, too!

Well, there is only one thing to add with any conviction about following Christ and serving our Lord:

It is, indeed, logical!!

Supplemental

Adam & Eve

If Adam was made in God's Image, did Adam in some sense corrupt or disfigure that image requiring the Spirit of God to recreate us back into Christ's image? What went wrong in the Garden that modified in some way the person or nature of Adam that would then propagate through all humanity? Is evil now inbred? Are we a different humanity from the Adam God originally formed? Is the "new birth" for a believer a return to that original image Adam was made in? [2 Corinthians 3:18].

This is a supplement to this work because, though my thoughts are—to my reckoning—biblical, my thoughts are my own and *prima facie*. I have wondered about *me* in an investigation into the Biblical text to answer such questions as reflected here. These are, in effect, another introspective journey, which leads to the first aspect of our humanity: we are "self-conscious" beings which includes language [polyglotism], abstract thought, and moral contrition.

Self-consciousness includes a moral conscience and the ability to define a "right" from a "wrong." Science cannot define self-consciousness; science does not know what it is, because it is *life* itself. [I cannot prove it but I think this life is spoken of in Scripture as "the spirit" of a man. Without Christ our spirit is dead to God, that is we lack a conscious relationship with Him.] To define self-consciousness is to define human life. Rob mankind of their ability to live by a moral code and a directed conscience is paramount to robbing them of life, itself, that defines them as "human."

The Tree of the Knowledge of "Good" and "Evil" would have had no meaning to any other life forms. Only Adam was

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created by the breath of God. All other life was merely “spoken” into existence. One might say, in a sense, only Adam and Eve were “formed” like the work of a potter—in this case, from the dust of the ground. This distinction in itself lacks clarity or reason until we follow the couple into their new environment where not only good surrounds them but evil lurks. If our first parents had not been self-conscious beings, if they did not have a conscience and the ability to be contrite, God’s instruction would have been—at a minimum—unfair because they would have eaten the fruit for the taste and not the wisdom, with which Satan tempted them.

But why must we be self-conscious? Ultimately it is a matter of our relationship with God: the ability to *know* in a mutual way, that I love and am loved by ...*God*. Here is where theology tends to lose its way if it does not value an insightful awareness of that relationship. To be able to love, man must be free to love. To be free to love is to be free to choose to love, and this means also to be free *not to*. In this we have the simplest definition of evil—a lack of love for God. And we know what Good is, loving God, as Jesus pointed out “with the whole heart, soul, and strength ...”

There is another dimension to Adam’s and Eve’s humanity that plays a critical role in this moment at that tree. They were [and we are] creatures of *learning*. But, unlike the rest of God’s creation, for us knowledge is *cumulative* and can be *abstract*. By cumulative, we build a knowledge base by adding new lessons on old ones that are coherent or non-contradictory. By abstract, we have the ability to identify the concept behind an idea that can be re-used in numerous contexts and situations. We learn to love a spouse differently from a parent or a child or an enemy—but love is still love. And love might have different expressions or goals in each. This is probably why one of Paul’s favorite words is “to edify” used in various forms written to various churches. When we edify, we engage in a process of building up, step by step, brick by brick, whatever we are building—even if we are building a life or a career..

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It might have been easier on Adam and Eve to be created as infants and have God raise them—like Romulus and Remus raised by a She-wolf. Perhaps, the first parents could have been first “children” and given time to develop an awareness of right from wrong through simple lessons of obedience—with or without discipline. It’s the humane way. But we have no indication of this in Scripture and I do not believe it was ever assumed the case.

But Adam and Eve did have *God*! I cannot believe He left them totally ignorant of the snake’s craft; after all, when Cain was losing it over a rejected sacrifice and decided to project his rage on his brother, God did counsel him about the devil crouching out of sight ready to pounce. Beside, God will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able to bear.” I read that somewhere.

The stage was now set to see if Adam and Eve, who knew what God’s love was all about—at least on a fundamental level—would obey. But there is a problem that by every indication Adam and Eve missed—which even we would miss. There was no suffering in Eden! That meant no discipline either because they had not yet disobeyed. Suffering even taught Jesus in His humanity the importance of obedience to God—and He got it right [Hebrews 5:8]. No suffering meant pure and total luxury which a perfect man or woman should be able to handle. The heaven to come will be luxurious—more so! It will be glorious!! They were living in a world of purest *luxury* [that’s what the word Eden means when translated into Greek]. Everything was, to quote God, “Good.”

Since their sin, the term “luxury” has left a bad taste in God’s mouth [Deuteronomy 32:15; Luke 16:19; Revelation 3:16]. When we strip away all the snake’s rhetoric, all its sophistic lies, it all boils down to the simple truth that there was something in this unknown idea “evil” Eve was beyond curious about. Was she seeking to be a god, herself, or did she seek to find out what it might be like to live without God! There was, apparently, no interest on her part or Adam’s to seek divine counsel on this

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point; in that moment when the future ceased to exist, when all of life was this singularity we called “an apple,” they just bit!

Sound familiar? Absolutely! I have been there! And, no doubt, so have you. This is humanity now, but since we cannot definitively be sure what Adam was before he sinned, we can only imagine the change that must have occurred in his nature that is now in ours. For one, I cannot say he and Eve were not carnal because that’s the part of us Satan likes to poke at [James 1:14]. If He and Eve were not “carnal” they wouldn’t be “human” either and they would have had no interest in that fruit.

What went wrong?

Their spirit went wrong—which is a Biblical term used in the Old Testament to describe intense feels and emotions like grief, rage, the seat of emotion or desire, disposition, and moral character [so says the Hebrew Dictionary]. Here I must pause briefly and share with you Walter Brueggemann’s interpretation of Isaiah 26:9. The entire chapter is worth studying prayerfully.

“With my soul,” says the righteous, “have I desired thee in the night; yea, with *my spirit within me will I seek thee early*: for when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness. [Isaiah 26:9].

Brueggemann wrote, “Righteousness does not consist only in active obedience.” If righteousness was only an act of obedience, would that not be justification by works and not grace? Brueggemann is right! It wasn’t the act that got Adam and Eve expelled. That would have been forgivable. God’s mercy is not in question here.

Brueggemann continues, “Rather, righteousness, as understood *covenantally*, refers to a life, totally committed to communion with Yahweh.” Here is where we possibly misjudge God. As a God of covenant, He does not want *acts* of commitment but a *life* of commitment! That’s what Adam and Eve gave up!

Mankind would now have to await God’s promise given to Ezekiel, “I will give them *one heart*, and I will put a *new spirit*

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within you” [Ezekiel 11:19]. They needed a new heart. God’s Spirit withdrew because all communication was now broken. If you agree with William Craig, Adam and Eve as our proxies, turned God away! We all needed a new heart which would be provided at Calvary. One cannot read Isaiah and Ezekiel without thinking that this became the state of things when Adam and Eve “took their solitary way” [as Milton wrote] out of Eden.

In the Hebrew of our Old Testament—a simple study will show that—the concept of the soul, the spirit, and the heart and mind are all synonymous ideas—unlike the New Testament where they are separated out. I will leave that study to your perusal of a concordance. Before the “Fall” of Adam and now since Jesus died and rose again for the believer, the spirit and the heart have played major roles in our relationship with God! That study, too, I refer to you. In the Old Testament God communicated with the few dedicated to Him through visions, dreams and the occasion “appearance.” In the New Testament for believers He dwells within; so, His voice is more the voice of His peace, our faith in Him, and the Spirit’s conviction. Again: yours to study.

God told us that ultimately He would want to covenant with us for a new heart—that’s all He would need to do to give us a new birth or beginning in Him. We needed a new heart that would know Him. This is important enough to quote:

“But this *shall be* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” [Jeremiah 31:33-34].

All this sheds a new light on suffering because it tends to be an excellent tool in the Potter’s hand to mold us into the vessels of honor He wants. When Job suffered because Satan wanted to tempt him to leave God [“curse God and die,” Job’s

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wife said] Job resolved to trust God no matter what—something like the 3 Hebrew Children in Babylon. Adam and Eve, however, who knew only luxury were tempted—in the absence of suffering, and you know rest of the story. Suffering is not a test or some sadistic side of someone somewhere that enjoys seeing us in pain ...No! Suffering like tribulation is an honorable servant of God's design to teach us truth on a level unknown otherwise. Suffering doesn't mean there is sin present. Jesus "learned obedience through the things He suffered" [Hebrews 5:8]. Perhaps, it is worth adding that "discipline" is the parent's aid in bringing up children not because they are bad but because they are "children."

Well, perhaps, we might ask ourselves why did God take this approach knowing our first parents would do what they did? Some scholars believe God didn't know! I cannot concur. I think God did know and He already knew, too, that Jesus' death would be necessary [Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:20]. God allowed and allows the devil the freedom now to roam the earth looking to devour whom he can. Someday this will end and you can ask God then to explain. I only know that Eve's serpent was Job's Satan and Peter's devil and he is after us, too. But it is a good thing because he drives us into the Savior's arms. Psalm 91:1 reads, "He that dwells [lives] with God "in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" [Ephesians 2:6] in the secret place [unknown to the world] shall abide [spend the nights of fear or pain] under the shadow [in the the arms] of the Almighty."

In this book, I have been talking about God's approach to loving us in this life as a reasonable act, but not necessarily from the natural or temporal perspective but from His, the eternal, perspective. "While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" [2 Corinthians 4:18]. If we think this life is all there is, some of what God expects of us might be less cogent, although, I should hope every believer would agree with me that even if heaven were never promised, it has been a joy serving Him!

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Admittedly, some of Jesus' sayings, if instructive, are hard to interpret and harder to follow. These sayings run the risk of failing the test for reasonableness. I, for one, was hoping that some of these were spurious, or at least, greatly misunderstood by editors of the sacred text. But these stand as genuine—at least from an historical perspective. If we wish to rationalize away these harder truths, perhaps, they were culturally understood and no longer apply to the believer in Christ.

Don't get into a brawl over the Gospel: "Turn the other cheek" [Matthew 5:39]. Jesus sent His disciples out without money or even an extra pair of sandals: "Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes" [Luke 10:4]. .. No luggage! [Mark 6:9]. They will trust Him for daily provisions as they go [Matthew 6:11].

But—spoiler alert—saying none of this is applicable to us will not prove to be true; nor, do we wish it to be the case. The privilege of giving our lives, talents, resources, our all, to Christ in service should never be undervalued. We have been arguing in this work that our heart reflects our treasure [Matthew 6:21] and that what is reasonable is a reflection of its worth to us.

Consider Luke 14:26, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." I should think that a believer who hates his family would, ipso facto, be a self-hater because he has hereby disowned what he should cherish above all relations—beside his Lord, of course. The Amplified Bible attempts to smooth over our Lord's rough statement with this caveat, "in the sense of indifference to or relative disregard for them in comparison with his attitude

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toward God.” Were this the proper nuance, should not our Lord have used words to that effect saying that we should love Him “*more*”?

Throughout this book I have been advocating against using comparisons to arrive at a reasonable interpretation. I have maintained that grace rises above a moderate approach to life requiring us to give “all” in sacrifice to our Lord [Romans 12:1], as He did for us.

But, and here’s the rub, Jesus’ language includes a spouse which suggests an extreme position on the subject. If the Lord were describing a moderate approach to serving Him, would He not have left wife out of those being “hated”? [see Matthew 10:37].

And what about the use of “a cross” to describe such devotion to Christ? [Luke 9:23]. This, alone, is a harsh descriptor because it represents, first of all, Christ’s giving of Himself—His all—for us! It, no doubt, speaks not only of our willingness to submit to martyrdom but a poverty of spirit [Matthew 5:3] that even sees persecution as an honorable and blessed way of life. Our testimony becomes, “For me to live is *Christ*” [Philippians 1:21].

This isn’t the entire story, however. When Paul addresses this matter he sees spousal *love* and not hate, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.” [Ephesians 5:25].

Not to put too fine a point on this but how should we understand James in the light of Jesus’ instruction to His disciples: “... according to the Scripture,” James told us, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself...” [James 2:8]. At the very least, can I not treat my family as a neighbor!

And what about the very word “hate”? I, for one, don’t know how to water this down or chisel away at the edges to sculpt it into something more inspiring. We get our word “wife [woman] hater” from it: misogynous: “mis” is from “miseo,” to hate or a hater of “gyn” from “gyne,” the Greek word for a

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woman or wife. The Greek dictionary interprets this in a *cultural* setting:

"The signification [is] to love less, to postpone in love or esteem, to slight, through oversight of the circumstance, that 'the Orientals, in accordance with their greater excitability, are wont both to feel and to profess love and hate where we Occidentals, with our cooler temperament, feel and express nothing more than interest in, or disregard and indifference to a thing.'"

The Dictionary interprets Romans 9:13 this way: "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hate." God loved Jacob more than Esau! Do we really want to say this? Is our love for God a variable in relation to our love of family? As long as we love Him a bit more, He's satisfied with that!

Many commentaries see John 12:24-26 in this light but the very language of these verses suggests an emphasis that denies a comparative love of God with self: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and *die*, it abides alone: but if it die, it brings forth much fruit. He that loves his life shall lose it; and he that hates his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me; and *where I am, there shall also my servant be....*" [Like Christ... like me] This is a total identification with Christ that banishes self?

I am still failing to appreciate any moderation of my love for God! "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, ... soul, and ... might" [Deuteronomy 6:5].

And what about family! We all have a testimony in this regard. Some believers have been disowned by family after their baptism and a public commitment to follow Christ [Matthew 10:36]. Others of us have left the comforts of the homestead leaving [forsaking?] families we loved to leave them to solve their problems in our absence. Through the years we have been kept informed about their many needs, financial, physical, spiritual, but were too far away and too involved in faithful ministry to the Lord to be able to do anything substantial for them. We were like Peter: "We have forsaken all, and followed you, Lord" [Matthew 19:27]. To which Jesus replied, "Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or

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brethren, or *wife*, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting." [Luke 18:29-30]. And here, even Matthew recognized the "wife" [Matthew 19:29]. It seems apparent that Peter's bride didn't always accompany him about. If they had children, that speaks for itself. But the highway was marked with dangers as well which Peter probably would have spared his family. If this be the case, it sounds more like love than hate!

For many, a spouse is in ministry *with* them—as God originally intended [Genesis 2:18: "a help meet for him"]. For some, a spouse *is* their minister [1 Corinthians 7:14: "the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband"].

Remember the young man who was by all indication independently wealthy, who asked Jesus how to obtain eternal life? All 3 synoptics tell the story [Matthew 19:16-22; Mark 10:17-22; Luke 18:18-23]. All three remember Jesus offering this young ruler a place at the table. But only Mark understood, correctly, that there was also a "cross" to bear [Mark 10:22]. Is not Jesus—by saying "follow me"—asking for our trust regardless of attending conditions? And some of the situations His followers find themselves in are clear indication that they have sold all to be with Him.

Here, I was going to tell my story but no one needs to hear it. I have come to interpret Jesus saying that a love for Him *embraces* [includes] a love for others, including family—primarily a spouse! It is only when we treat our love for them separately from our love for Christ and start drawing comparisons or interpreting Jesus' words to mean that a love for Him is a hatred of them that we abuse this most inspiring text. God's love for us enables us to love others [Romans 5:5]. John agreed, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." [1 John 4:11].

But if this be so, why did Jesus use such language? Why not just say, "Love me with all your heart, you will then be able to love them as you should." Why even talk about "hate"? The answer to these questions must be found in the language of the

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Old Testament and its use of *hate* in Malachi 1:3. Why did God hate Esau? Paul looks into this in Romans 9.

Paul tells us in Romans 9:11 that before the boys were even born God decided to choose Jacob over Esau even though Esau was then firstborn and had the right of inheritance as the firstborn [Deuteronomy 21:17]. This would not be law until Moses led Israel in the wilderness.

God decided specifically that “The elder shall serve the younger” [Romans 9:12]. It is this decision that is interpreted as “hateful” because it speaks of God’s intentional rejection of Esau, though, Esau did not merit that decision.

If we imagine this to be out of character for God or contradictory to His holiness, Paul disagreed! “*Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid*” [Romans 9:14]. Paul reminded us of God’s discussion with Moses about His choices: “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy” [Romans 9:15].

So Paul concluded the matter by pointing out that God’s choice of Jacob over Esau was an expression of His *grace* [not of works]: “So then it is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy” [Romans 9:16].

We can interpret “hate” in this context as simply God deciding to honor Jacob, the deceiver, who tricked his father into giving him his brother’s birthright. Hate speaks of an intentional decision to reject someone. With feeling this means “revulsion” where the person is seen as an enemy. We probably all believe that God knew all along what Jacob was up to and He, God, used this as an expression of His grace—as Romans 9 brings out. But “grace” to the lost appears as “hate” because they cannot understand on what basis God rejected them. This was the Jewish argument with Paul in his Epistle to the Romans.

God’s grace is always without merit or favoritism and if we are instruments of that grace toward others, we, too, minister without favoritism. This doesn’t say that the servant of God does not love his family, but the servant of God has come to realize as a messenger of God’s grace we also must not relegate mercy on a

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merit basis—treating even those we love most as if they didn’t in our hearts deserve priority.

It is like being the manager of a company and hiring your wife to work “for” you—even though, you think of her as working “with” you. Your leadership decisions must be given on another basis than your love for her. Now make the Lord the leader and you have come to work for Him. If your wife also works for the Lord, she, too, will follow the calling He gives her which in a public setting will probably appear like the marriage is not important. We are all called into our Lord’s harvest and side by side husband and wife work to bring in the sheaves. There is no conflict of interest here between their love for their Lord and their love for each other, but from a co-laborers perspective, it is the love for their Lord that is prioritized.

What is most reasonable about this arrangement is the fact that we are giving greater worth and value as regards family to our eternal relationship with God over the temporal one with each other. We see a spouse, for one, as a spiritual being who, first and foremost, belongs to God and whom we now give to Him and not only as our “mate” who through marriage we are joined. When a spouse sees this and participates in it, hate is excluded. We are like Hannah with Samuel when she presented him to the Lord. If we ask her, how reasonable her decision was she would repost, “How is it not!” I interpret Jesus to be instructing us to do this with family: “I will bring him, that he may appear before the LORD, and there abide for ever” [1 Samuel 1:22].

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Jesus' warning about the flames of an eternal hell seem for those who reject Christ an unreasonable—unconscionable—supposition. They cannot understand how a God of love would even imagine such a thing for a short time—let alone, an eternity. But logic begs us reconsider our position on this topic, especially for anyone who might be using this argument to insulate themselves from that inner voice of conscience that wants this talk.

So before outlining the matter, consider what God should or might do if there were a universal salvation—no hell. This was not Paul's issue. Paul established logically that without the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ there would be no cause for faith because we would have no one to believe *in*. [1 Corinthians 15:17]. What we are concluding here is that if there is no Eternal Hell [and final judgment for that matter], Christ's death and resurrection becomes meaningless. He would have died to provide a reconciliation that God intended to give everyone anyway in the end!

What is also of significance is that this condones, and thereby, introduces sin back into God's new world. If we argue He could have just forgiven sin outright or He could have invented another filtration system—kind-of, on the level of purgatory [this is not a critique on this doctrine. Please!]*—again, a way of filtering out sin, this would make Jesus a liar since He claimed there was no other way other than through His crucifixion [Matthew 26:39]. And worse, this makes the Father a liar. And do we really want to put our trust in a lying God? Ouch!*

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This is all the result of assuming Jesus' talk of Gehenna and the flames of Hell are bogus. Like dominoes, every point of Christian theology begins to tumble over! Do you really want to go there, logically!?

Jesus spoke of "Hell" in the Gospel of Luke as a place of unimaginable torments [the word is plural in Luke 16:23]. He warned of a horror that not even man in his ability to invent the unspeakable could conjure up—not even for the last day of October. Man's unquestionable creative genius and delight in pure evil palls in comparison.

Nonetheless, horror movies have become more comical as we become desensitized to the pain of our fellow man or, with true *schadenfreude* glee, we sadistically find vengeful pleasure in their pain. The words roll off the tongue with an almost innate seriousness against anyone who displeases us: "*Go to Hell!*"

The "hell" Jesus spoke of many continue to be blinded to, assuring themselves that scholarship must have misinterpreted the God of love and mercy—to even suggest such a thing. Perhaps, this is why Mr. Alighieri, Dante, wrote about the inferno as a *Divine Comedy*. Dante is guided through Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise—in that order [thank God!]
—interviewing souls in his journey. His account appears, much like Charles Dickens' Scrooge in "*The Christmas Carol*" being escorted through his life to learn the importance of changing his ways or else.

Billy Sunday, whose sermons shut down saloons in his day or Jonathan Edwards, whose sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" drove crowds to the mourner's bench in his day, are now silenced, perhaps, in the hope that a message of God's love is sufficient to get men to recognize their need of God and repent. But, then again, it may not be!

Professor William Cook, in his talk on Dante's work, taught that "Purgatory, unlike heaven or hell, is a place of change. In this way, it resembles earth." Maybe it *is* earth. John, the Beloved, wrote "when He [Jesus] shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath

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this hope in him *purifies* himself [purges himself from sin], even as he is pure [1 John 3:2-3].

In Dante, those in purgatory “repented” whereas those in Hell had not. [In Dante’s theology, repentance, alone, is not sufficient to make Paradise. There has to be purging first of the sins committed]. Christians have reasonable course to debate this but not at the exclusion of the reality Jesus brought to our attention in His story of a rich man and poor Lazarus in Luke 16.

“The rich man and Lazarus,” we were told by some, was a myth taken from the Egyptians. In a mid 3rd century [A.D.] treatise [falsely attributed to Saint Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage] we read: “Fire has been prepared by God for all sinners, in the flames of which, as was indicated by the Son of God Himself, that rich man ... is burned.” Even if this *were* Egyptian religious lore, we must not lose sight of the fact that it is *Jesus* telling it!

There is no biblical prohibition from borrowing from secular thought to bring the truth home to our hearts—Acts 17:28: “For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said....” It was a Greek stoic, I believe, who first said that the “love of money is the mother of all evil.” Paul seemed to think it worthy of notice. He called it the “root” [not “mother”] of all evil [1 Timothy 6:10]. And I doubt it is incidental to the main purpose in Jesus’ story that He contrasted a “poor” man [a beggar] with one of untold wealth.

Some scholars call it a parable—in other words: it is grounded in reality. Perhaps, Job and Lazarus had more in common than sores. Perhaps, this is a general account of two kinds of persons: those that worship God in their need and poverty and those who love to count their coins and live for their wealth. This man was not only rich but he lived luxuriously [a word not held in high esteem in the New Testament]. The rich are more than impoverished upon death when they must leave their money behind. There is no way to buy their way into Paradise, anyway.

He saw Abraham at a distance across a gorge or some canyon that could not be bridged. And there, too, was Lazarus in the Patriarch’s lap. Such a comforting picture but not for this

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“formerly” rich man who was now in torments [plural]. The dictionary likens this word “torment” to “the rack or instrument of torture by which one is forced to divulge the truth.” It is acute pain. In Matthew 4:24 it is found between diseased and those possessed with devils.” I can only imagine that the plural was used because this individual was now in severe pain on a number of levels: physically, emotionally, spiritually. Jesus likened it to flames lapping at his side and he feeling every corona emission circling his form and whipping him around to wait for the next one. And death never comes?! If this is not what the Savior meant, we still must be careful not to use symbolism to explain away the horror of “the flame” [Luke 16:24]. In Matthew 18:8 it is an “everlasting fire,” an *eternal* flame. “The fire is not quenched” speaks, at least, of something—if I may say for emphasis—very final [Mark 9:44].

Scholarship is correct in relating this to Jesus’ talks about Gehenna [Matthew 23:33 where the King James reads “hell” for the Jewish word “Gehenna.”] Every Jew knows the history of the valley of Gehenna, south of Jerusalem. A.I. reads, “it was associated with pagan worship, including child sacrifice, and later became a place where ... dead bodies were burned, making it a powerful symbol of judgment and punishment in Jewish and Christian traditions.” [Muslims, too, know the account.] And this is *Artificial Intelligence* telling us to make note of it!

I’ll leave it to the preacher to go into detail [hopefully he will!] to complete the picture Jesus is painting here of a reality that is presently outside our worse nightmare—only this nightmare, those who reject the Savior, will not wake up from! As Solomon alerted us, “The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that wins souls is wise. Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth: much more the wicked and the sinner” [Proverbs 11:30-31].

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And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Philippians 4:8 NLT

One of the most difficult scriptures to follow is Philippians 4:8 where Paul locks down in a most absolute sense what we should be thinking about or meditating on. I use the phrase “locked down” because, for those who take it seriously, there is no wiggle room, nothing left unsaid, that might give a believer, who wants to honor our Lord and live in Christian harmony with others, more liberty in what they allow their heart or mind to dwell on. Quoting Bishop Lightfoot: “Speaking roughly, the words may be said to be arranged in the descending scale [and] ... that no motive may be omitted.” (More later about this quote.)

Paul is admonishing us to guard our minds as sacred to God as the means by which He often speaks to us? Every wrong thought that lingers as a meditation or devolves into a motive for justifying a temptation stands to drown out the still small voice of the Spirit [1 Kings 19:12].

“Fix your thoughts,” the New Living Translation reads, interpreting the word Paul used to describe the thought process: reasoning, meditating, and figuring things out. Is not our minds and hearts also instruments for God’s use? Paul uncompromisingly urged, “... present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of

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righteousness to God.” [Romans 6:13]. This includes our minds and hearts [Matthew 12:34].

“One final thing,” reads the text. So, this is Paul’s final comment to the church. He leaves us looking up at such a high peak of holiness without sharing how to climb it! This profound Pauline instruction might be hidden above the low hanging clouds of my weakened humanity, my propensity to go in my fantasies to places of a revenge against persons that enraged me, of a self-interest that I rationalized into something important, or of a myriad of temptations entertained happily in my imagination—with no thought of Philippians 4:8! I would be naive to believe that such thoughts are harmless. They inevitably find expression in word and action. And thus, Paul’s thoughtful honesty—as harsh as it might sound!

These are eight aspects of our thought life—all—interconnected. When all are not observed, none are observed! I picture myself in a forest of countless ideas and it is easy to get lost, to dwell too long on something that we can’t seem to get past, a remorse or bitterness that lingers, or a “what if” that will not nor ever could be determined, or the hurt over broken relations, or regret over some lost opportunity.

Dare we leave the comfortable world of theological discussion and a grace that predetermines all things for our good and begin discussing the role we play in “working out our own salvation”? [Philippians 2:12]. Psalm 25:4 [NLT] reads “Show me the right path, O LORD; point out the road for me to follow.” God has marked the way, starting with:

- 1 ***Whatsoever things are true.*** Building one’s life on lies is a foundation of shifting sand. A dream built on anything but truth will collapse into the rubble of a wasted life [Matthew 7:24-27]. Jesus said that He is the truth, John 14:6; For the believer, He must be the center of our thoughts [Matthew 11:29]. This requires humility because pride by definition is deceptively misleading. Pride never tells us the truth; so, to begin with, we need to approach the forest of countless ideas with a degree of humility asking our Lord to show us the way through. Many things can trouble us but being self-aware

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enough to be honest with ourselves takes a prayer life that gives God a chance to speak to us on these matters.

- 2 ***Whatsoever things are honorable.*** *These are thoughts that inspire reverence with both a seriousness and yet respect, not only for our Lord but His church, as well. Our ability to honor others above ourself is an expression of our ultimate desire to honor the Lord [1 Corinthians 10:31]. A lack of respect for God's people, proves that we are not acknowledging what God is truthfully doing among us. Division is often based solely on misinformation and misunderstanding, ignorance, and pride. They are not based on a clear knowledge of "whatsoever things are true." Looking at this thought another way: If my thoughts about others were known, would I be respected by them?*
- 3 ***Whatsoever things are right.*** *What is right is also just and fair. When there is no reverence for God and respect for others, it is easier to pass up judgment on whoever upsets me. Unwarranted criticism thrives on feelings that do not honor our Lord. Selfishness is never fair neither is pride or any judgment built on a lie. But more than all this, justice is always inseparably associated with and part of God's covenant faithfulness and thus what is proper for a believer to meditate on [Psalm 1:1-2]. Life is not fair but our Lord always is! It is wise to rethink somethings so that we see God's involvement in our life and we can ultimately praise Him instead of grumbling [Philippians 4:18]. Blaming God for what happens that is difficult to accept or calling Him unjust is unthinkable for a believer! Thinking right thoughts can only follow a respect for the truth of what God is doing among us.*
- 4 ***Whatsoever things are pure.*** *Purity is biblically the inward disposition of the heart [Proverbs 20:9]. How can a heart that is not pure, where the desire to follow Christ is conditional and full of personal interests that might conflict with our Lord's—how can such a mind—think right thoughts? Impure thoughts include carnal thoughts by definition. Carnality is the offspring of selfishness. In contrast, purity is the offspring of making God's Word the center and content of all our*

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thoughts [Psalm 119:11]. It is the source of pious wisdom that avoids all self-seeking [James 3:17]. Our thoughts and feelings are never kept hidden for long. They inevitably become intent and then how we interpret and react to life.

- 5 **Whatsoever things are lovely.** *The love spoken of here is not “love toward an enemy or a persecutor, but toward another with whom we may enter into christian fellowship. One can easily see the necessity for purity of heart and thought. Right thoughts lead to right relationships. Paul explains better in Romans 12:16 [NLT] “Live in harmony with each other. Don’t be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don’t think you know it all!”*
- 6 **Whatsoever things are admirable.** *Our thoughts should speak well of others, not defamatory or tending toward thinking ill of them. Admiration in action is acceptance [Romans 15:7] of one another..*
- 7 **Think about things that are excellent.** *Excellence is perhaps better understand as a virtuous thought or feeling. It is noteworthy that Paul employs this word only here in his writings as if to carefully avoid it elsewhere, talking about “the things of the Spirit” instead [Romans 8:5, 9] because we are “in the Spirit, not the flesh.” But all this anyway with one caveat:*
- 8 **And worthy of praise.** *Only what is worthy of a life lived that glorifies our God. Even our plans, our dreams, should be His for us. Our thoughts should be thoughts that once expressed herald His love and mercy to our world.*

Bishop Lightfoot spoke of a “descending order.” So, let’s start with the lowest first:

8. **Glorifying God:** *Are my thoughts praiseworthy to God? Would my thoughts sanctify His Name if known? If spoken, would others be encourage to join me in praise and thanksgiving to God for them? If not:*

7. **Virtuous:** *Do my thoughts support my faith? Are they reflective of Christian character If not:*

6. **Praiseworthy:** *If my thoughts went public, would they be*

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scandalous or degrading? If so:

5. **Amiable:** *Do my thoughts reflect my enthusiasm for fellowship with believers? If not:*

4. **Pure:** *Are my motives pure and not focused solely on myself? If not:*

3. **Righteous:** *Irrespective of circumstances, would God approve of what I am thinking? If not:*

2. **Worthy of Honor:** *Do my thoughts magnify my Lord? If not:*

1. **Truthful:** *Is my perspective biblical when I interpret my circumstances? Am I endeavoring to be absolutely honest?*

To summarize:

“And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” [Philippians 4:7].

“You wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You: because he trusts in You.” [Isaiah 26:3]

What Is Truth

“In talking about their gods, the Greeks were talking about themselves.” [Professor Thomas **Noble**] In Romans 1:23 Paul characterizes this as having “changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man...”

Philosophy begins with **Thales** an Ionian from Miletus [modern day Western Turkey] in the 6th Century BC asking, “How did things come into being?” He saw fire, earth, air, and water as the basic components of all things. **Parmenides** around 450 B.C. then surmised that “being” must be motionless, uniform, and eternal—by “eternal” he meant unchanging not in the sense of timeless. This is an attempt at defining “being” [Definition is 1 of 3 requirements of logic or reason. The other two are relatability, how this piece fits into the puzzle of life, and measurability, answering amount: how much or many.] Professor **Noble** explains, ‘we are going to try to pin down in order to understand other things in relation to it.’

On this view “change didn’t really take place” [Noble]. **Parmenides** was addressing **Heraclitus** whose motto was “Panta rhei” [everything flows]. It was **Plato** who was claimed to have said that Heraclitus does not have a language in which to speak.

Anaxagoras [5th century B.C.] said, “Things existed to the degree, and only to the degree, that they were perceived.”

Avicenna [11th century A.D.] asked “How can we know that we know”

Descartes [16th century A.D.] famously said, “I think, therefore I am.”

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“Is language, itself, ambiguous? ... What is the nature of language, and how does it work to communicate what we think we know?” asked Noble.

Pythagorus [late 6th century B.C.] According to Noble we are trying to get above sense perception.

The Greeks have 4 different words for knowledge, then:

1. γινώσκω - acknowledge grounded in personal experience.
 1. “There is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known.” [Matthew 10:26].
2. ἐπίσταμαι Observable knowledge by its consistent and repeatable character. [science]
 1. “...the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, Acts 19:15 (seven sons of *one* Sceva, vagabond jews)
 2. Albert **Einstein** cautioned. Can science be purely objective since we are studying *ourselves*! How can morals be standardized if each of us personally has a voice in making that standard! The second sense is the “epistemic objectivity” or “objective knowledge,” which, in Helm’s words, “*eschews bias, reliance on one-sided information...*”
3. εἶδεν/ὁράω - mental perception as opposed to conjecture or derived knowledge.
 1. “They were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw [perceived] it on this fashion.” [Mark 2:12]
 2. “But these speak evil of those things which they know not [εἶδεν -have no perception of]: but what they know naturally [ἐπίσταμα - practice as common knowledge], as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves.” Jude 10.
4. συνίημι - insight/understanding
 1. “He that received seed into the good ground is he that hears the word, and understands...” [Matthew 13:23]

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“Insight may mark an antithesis to perception, [We walk by faith and not sight- 2 Corinthians 5:7.] whereas knowledge by experience marks in advance upon it. If we contrast perception with observable knowledge, the former refers more to something natural, whereas the latter is acquired knowledge”

Galatians 4:8-9 “Howbeit then, when you knew not [did not perceive or recognize] God, you did service unto them which by nature are no gods. But now, after that ye have known [personal acquaintance with] God] or rather are known of God [God **reveals** Himself by grace - not insight or science], ...”

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