

Series: Calvinism-What Does the Bible Say?

Lesson: Responding to the Good News of Jesus

1. In **Romans 1:16**, the Bible clearly states, *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”*
2. The gospel of Christ is said to be the power of God. What is the good news?
 - According to **1 Corinthians 15:1-4**, it is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.
 - Our sin has alienated us from a holy God.
 - How can we go from alienation **from** God to reconciliation **with** God? Only one way – turning in faith to God’s provision – Jesus!
3. Calvinism is a man-made theological system that teaches that due to man’s total depravity, he **cannot** respond to the gospel of Christ, he cannot choose to believe on Christ. They equate total **depravity** with total **inability** to accept God’s gift of Jesus.
 - Why would anyone believe this? Because the foundation of this theological system demands it.
 - It teaches that God predestined vast multitudes to eternal damnation without allowing them any choice. Also, God chose an elect few to salvation. He has limited His grace and mercy to a select few. But what does the Bible teach?
4. The Bible teaches that every person can and should respond in faith to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Why is this?

I. Because it is necessary for our salvation.

- A. The Bible is clear: We are lost in our sins and in need of a Savior. Jesus died on the cross to save us from our sins and then triumphed over death. We simply need to turn to Him in faith. He then saves us. Sound simple? It is!
 - *“And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” Acts 16:31*
 - *“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Romans 10:13*
 - *“And that from a child thou has known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” 2 Timothy 3:15*
 - *“For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3:26*
 - We turn in faith to Jesus Christ and He saves and regenerates us by His Spirit.
 - *“In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also **after** that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.” Ephesians 1:13*
- B. Calvinism reverses the Biblical order.
 - It teaches that the elect are regenerated by God’s Spirit and then after this they place their faith in Christ. But, not one verse in the Bible can be cited that clearly states this.

- By placing faith **after** regeneration, they remove from the lost the only way God has provided for them to avail themselves of the grace of God.
- C. **Romans 10:13-14** makes it clear that in order for lost people to be saved, they must hear the gospel.
- A Calvinist would read this verse, “How shall they believe in him of whom they have not been regenerated? And how shall they be regenerated unless God sovereignly elects them?”
 - This is why God commanded that the gospel should go to every creature. Does this not mean that every person **can** be saved?
“Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” 1 Timothy 2:4
- D. You can know beyond any shadow of a doubt, God wants you to be saved.

II. Because God commands every person to repent and believe on Christ.

- A. What is repentance? It is a turning. Turning from sin, self, and unbelief to Jesus Christ.
- *“For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye **turned** to God from idols to serve the living and true God.” 1 Thessalonians 1:9*
 - *“And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and **turned** unto the Lord.” Acts 11:21*
- B. How many people does God command to repent and turn to Christ? Everyone.
- *“And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent.” Acts 17:30*
 - According to **Acts 22:15** Paul was to be a witness unto **all** men of what he had seen and heard.
 - Paul was commissioned by God to preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ and to make **all** men see the great mystery of Christ and the gospel. **Ephesians 3:8-9**
 - Paul took this commission seriously and sought to obey it. **Acts 20:20-21**
- C. Would God command people to repent if they were incapable of doing it?
- This is exactly what the Calvinist teaches – God commands people to do what they cannot do without His grace, and then God withholds the grace they need and then punishes them eternally for failing to obey and turn to Christ. He pleads and strives with mankind to repent knowing full well they can’t.
 - If this is true, the entire history of God’s dealing with man as recorded in the Bible loses credibility. This makes a mockery of God’s Word, of His mercy and love and it libels God’s character.
 - A Calvinist may say: “He’s pleading with the elect” – that would be useless and senseless since God has already predestined them to salvation and will affect it sovereignly before any faith is exercised by them.
- D. God is not playing games with mankind – He truly desires for every person to be saved, has commanded them to repent and turn to Christ and has commissioned us to tell the world this message.

III. Because God has given every person the ability to respond.

- A. Is mankind sinful and depraved? Absolutely – through and through. Is sin universal? Certainly! Mankind is enslaved by sin and by nature does not of his own initiative seek after God.
- But is mankind incapable of hearing the gospel preached and being convicted of their sin and believing the good news of Christ? Certainly not.
- B. God has revealed Himself to every person on this earth through creation and through the giving of a moral conscience. **Romans 1:20 & 2:14-15**
- According to **Acts 17:26-27**, people have the ability to seek the Lord.
 - God sent His Holy Spirit to reprove the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. **John 16:8**
 - According to **Titus 2:11**, the grace to believe the gospel has been given to all men.
- C. Salvation is said to be the gift of God – mankind cannot will it, cannot work for it, and cannot earn it, but certainly he can receive it. To believe the gospel and receive Christ requires no work or worth on man's part.
- Sinful mankind cannot contribute one thing to his salvation, but he can **receive** the salvation freely offered in Christ. **Revelation 22:17**
 - The Roman believers are good examples. They were slaves to sin, but responded to the gospel that was preached. **Romans 6:17**
- D. The Bible is very clear. The reason why people do not respond to the gospel is **not** because they are incapable, but rather they are not **willing**. **Matthew 22:37**
- *“For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.
He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.
And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”*
John 3:17-19
 - Why will people spend eternity in hell separated from God and eternally condemned?
 - According to Calvinism – because God predestined and elected them to eternal torment. They are totally depraved and can't believe the gospel and God elected them to eternal torment.
 - But according to the words of Jesus, it's because people love their sin and refuse to believe on Him.

In Conclusion:

1. **John 3:16** sums it up beautifully.
 - How does God feel about the world? **He loves it!**
 - To what extent? **He gave His Son.**
 - What gift is God offering the world? **Everlasting life.**
 - How does a person receive it? **Believe on Christ.**

2. Only a man-made complex theological system could confuse the simplicity of that verse. You understand it, I understand it, a child understands it.
3. God isn't playing semantic word games with you. He means it. He loves you and wants you to be saved. He's already made the first move by sending His Son Jesus Christ to die for your sin (**2 Corinthians 5:19**). Now the choice is yours. As Jesus said in **John 3:18**, "Believe" or "Believe not."
4. One author wrote, "If there is anything the Bible shows, it is that God **does** hold men responsible for their actions. God's 'thou shalt' is spoken to free persons, not to puppets."

Series: Calvinism-What Does the Bible Say?

Lesson: Becoming One of God's Elect – 1 Thessalonians 1

1. In **1 Thessalonians 1:4**, “election” means “selection.” If you are elected by God, you are selected or chosen by God. These people were chosen by God Almighty!
2. But what was the basis of God's choice? There is a theological system called Calvinism. It explains election this way:
 - Unconditional Election – before the foundation of the world, according to the sovereign pleasure of His own will, God chose, from the whole human race, a certain number of persons to redemption in Christ. Everyone else is damned eternally. Why is this? Calvinism says, it is simply God's choice.
 - Can you imagine God creating billions of people who were totally depraved as far as swimming is concerned? God throws them all in the ocean and then decides to rescue a small fraction of them while leaving the rest of them to drown in eternal death. Then God declares that it is their fault they drowned.
 - “Those, therefore, whom God passes by, He reprobates, and that for no other cause but because He is pleased to exclude them from the inheritance which He predestines to His children...whose pleasure it is to inflict punishment...”
John Calvin
3. I encourage anyone who has been caught in the web of Calvin's twisted theological teachings to please consider carefully what the Bible says.
4. How did these Gentile, pagan, idolatrous Thessalonians become part of God's elect? The Bible leaves us no doubt. The apostle Paul will explain. In verse 5, the word “*For...*” links it together with verse 4. It will explain how they became part of God's elect.
 - I. **First, they heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. vs. 5**
 - A. What good news did Paul share with these people?
 - Paul preached the good news of Jesus. **Acts 17:1-3**
 - He reasoned with them. Why would you need to persuade and reason with somebody who was already elected before the foundation of the world as Calvin taught?
 - B. The Bible is clear – people cannot be saved, cannot believe, cannot become part of God's elect until they **hear** the good news of Jesus (**Romans 10:13-14.**) The first step is they must hear.
 - This is why Paul was a man on a mission. He knew the gospel could save anybody, but first it had to be heard. **Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 1:21**
 - The gospel “...*is the power of God to salvation to every one that believeth.*”
 - II. **Second, they turned to the Lord. vs. 9**
 - A. For three weeks Paul reasoned with these people out of the Bible about Jesus Christ. Paul taught that there is no other way to be forgiven of your sins and be reconciled to a holy God.
 - Paul proclaimed, “Your idols are worthless and vain. Jesus alone is Lord.”

- These people had a choice they were faced with. Either turn to the Lord or hang on to their idolatrous belief system. They made a decision of the will to turn to the Lord.
- B. Scripture repeatedly depicts God as appealing to man's reason, conscience, and will in order to persuade him to repent and turn to the Lord. **Matthew 9:13; Acts 17:30**
- C. Calvinism teaches that God forces the elect to turn to Him and the non-elect cannot turn to the Lord. One Calvinist writes, "He **makes me**, who really did not love Jesus, want to love Him and believe in Him."
- This not only denies Scripture, it denies common logic. People can't be **made** to love or to change their minds without the willingness to do so. The willingness must come from the will that was already there, it can't be created out of thin air.
 - Any meaningful change of attitude or belief, the human will **must** be involved.
 - God has given to man the ability to make a genuine choice. He offers salvation to all without discrimination, but He cannot make people turn to Him, for that would violate their free will, destroying their ability to truly love and serve God.
 - Calvinism denies man's free will.
 - "...to deny God's foreknowledge is to deny His omniscience...But we must go further: not only...did His omniscient eye see Adam eating of the forbidden fruit, but He decreed beforehand that he should do so."
Calvinist Arthur Pink
 - This is absolutely ludicrous – hundreds of times God tested the faith and obedience of individuals and nations. What is the point if they have no free will to make a genuine choice, and if God has already determined what they will and must do?
- D. These Thessalonians made a choice – they turned to God from idols.
- "From the third chapter of Genesis on, the Scriptures shout 'free will.' The whole volume talks about choices, the Book of Wisdom (Proverbs). Having a free will makes sense of God's free love... Suppose you met someone who...showed real love for you – going out of his way to do special things for you...telling you they loved you. Then you found out that they had no choice – they were programmed to 'be loving.' ...well, it would be a terrible disappointment. It would all seem so artificial, so meaningless, so empty. And it would be. Man was given a choice...Having this choice defined man as a human being: to eat or not to eat, to obey or disobey, to love or not to love. Man was not a robot. Man was able to love by his own free choice (without which love is not love)." **John R. Cross, *Delivered from the Power of Darkness***

III. Third, they received the Word of God by faith. vs. 6; cf. 2:13; Acts 17:4

- A. These people received Paul's message about Jesus Christ as the Word of God and exercised believing faith. **2:13**
- Calvinists teach, "Faith is a work."

- Scripture is clear – faith is **not** a work. It is the antithesis of work.
Romans 4:5, 16
 - Faith and works are contrasted in Scripture. **Romans 9:30-32**
- B. The elect are those who have been justified by God. **Romans 8:33**
- How does one get justified before God? Faith in Jesus Christ.
Romans 3:28, 5:1
 - Nobody is part of God’s elect until he chooses to place his faith in Jesus Christ.
- C. The Bible teaches that faith is an absolutely essential element in any relationship and transaction between God and man. **Hebrews 11:6; Matthew 9:29**
- When Jesus went into His own country, the Bible says, “*And he could there do no mighty work.*”
 - Why is it that Jesus could do no mighty work? Was it because of God’s sovereign plan? The Bible declares it was because of their unbelief.
Mark 6:1-6; Matthew 13:57-58
- D. Jesus repeatedly offered salvation to all who would believe and receive Him. **John 5:24, 7:37, 10:9, 11:26; Revelation 22:17** – What does “whosoever” mean?
- Webster’s Dictionary defines it as, “Whoever, whatever person: an emphatic form.”
 - There are no alternate meanings. It always means whoever or whatever person. It means everyone without exception. Calvin says the offer of **John 3:16** is effective only for a select few.
 - Calvinism redefines "whosoever" to mean "the elect," but there is no basis for this and they do not apply this meaning to the word on a consistent basis. They only apply it this way when it fits their doctrinal system.
- E. Obviously, this is unbiblical, and it contradicts the character of God that we see in the Scriptures. God is pictured as being merciful to all.
Romans 11:30-32
- God may refuse mercy and harden someone’s heart in response to their wickedness and unbelief, but never is God seen arbitrarily hardening someone in regards to salvation.
 - Nowhere in the Bible does it teach that God's love is limited to a select few. Surely it would be stated clearly somewhere so as to avoid confusion.
 - God’s choice of Jacob and rejection of Esau had to do with the promised seed line, not eternal salvation (it had to do with position, not salvation.) Jacob was given the **position** of the chosen seed, but this did not negate Esau's free will to choose whether or not to place his faith in God.
 - God hardened Pharaoh in his unbelief in regards to letting Israel go, not his eternal salvation.

In Conclusion:

1. The Calvinistic doctrine of unconditional election is nowhere explained in the Scripture and is of human invention. Calvinists become obsessed with this and begin to read their doctrine of unconditional election into virtually every text. **Romans 9** is a perfect example.
 - The entire point of this passage is that God can harden unbelieving Israel for a time and pour out His grace and mercy on the Gentiles if it pleases Him.
 - And the very reason for this is found in the responses of Israel and the Gentiles (**9:30-33**), not an eternal decree.
 - The only eternal decree is that God would pour out His grace for a time on the Gentiles. **Ephesians 3:1-11**
 - Free will is clearly evidenced in all of this. **Romans 11:19-23**
 - **Romans 9** has nothing to do with God hardening individual's hearts in regards to His offer of salvation. It has to do with God hardening Israel nationally so that He might have mercy upon **all**. **Romans 10:12, 11:11-12, 31-32**
2. Our God is without partiality (**James 3:17**) and is no respecter of persons (**Acts 10:34**). We are all equally worthy of His condemnation and equally unworthy of His grace. God is pictured in the Bible as being merciful to all. **2 Peter 3:9; 1 Timothy 2:4**
 - Not one place in 1300 pages of Calvin's "Institutes" does he expound upon God's love for mankind or attempt to explain how a God who is love could take pleasure in damning billions of people whom He could have saved if He so desired.
3. God **does** love you and you **can** be one of God's elect.
 - Will you turn from your sin, in faith to God, and accept His Son Jesus Christ as your Savior?

Series: Calvinism-What Does the Bible Say?

Lesson: Christ's Atonement: Available to All

1. The Bible teaches we have rebelled against God and violated His righteous, moral law, over and over again. We are all guilty. Any effort to atone for our sins ourselves is futile.
2. This is where the doctrine of the atonement of Jesus Christ becomes so precious.
 - In **Romans 5:11**, “the atonement” is referring to that specific thing which Christ did to save sinners. Christ’s atonement is the difference between heaven and hell.
3. In this message, we will answer three questions from the Bible concerning Christ’s atonement.

I. What does Christ’s atonement mean to you?

- A. It means Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice for your sins. **1 Corinthians 5:7; Hebrews 10:12**
 - Christ kept the law, spotlessly. He was not dying for His sins, but for your sin and mine. **1 Peter 2:24, 3:18**
 - The wages of sin is death and Christ was paying that penalty. **Hebrews 9:26**
- B. It means Christ died as your Substitute. **Matthew 20:28; 1 Timothy 2:6; Romans 5:6, 8**
 - In **Matthew 20:28**, the word “many” doesn’t mean a select number and some are excluded. “Many” simply means a large number. The Bible sometimes uses “many” in the sense of all mankind.
Example: **Romans 5:15**
 - This makes possible our redemption from the bondage of Satan, death, and hell. **Colossians 1:13-14**
- C. It means Christ took the wrath of God for your sins. **1 John 2:2**
 - This means that through His death and our acceptance of His death as our Substitute, the wrath of a righteous God is turned away. This is what propitiation means.
- D. It means that you, as a sinner, can be reconciled to a holy God. **Colossians 1:20-21**
 - The enmity between God and man can be removed. This is all because of Christ’s atoning work on the cross.

II. Is Christ’s atoning work available to all?

- A. We have learned about a man-made theological system called Calvinism. Calvinism teaches a limited atonement. Christ only died for those that God elected before the foundation of the world. The rest of humanity? Christ didn’t die for them.
- B. But the real issue is, what does the Bible say? The Bible clearly teaches that Christ died for all people. **Isaiah 53:6; 1 Timothy 2:6; Hebrews 2:9; 1 John 2:2, 4:14; John 6:51**

- His atonement is not limited to only an elect few. His sacrificial death is sufficient to save anyone and everyone.
- C. The Bible says, “...*in Adam all die...*” **Romans 5:12** teaches that the permeation of sin is universal.
- Christ is called the Son of Man, the second man, the last Adam.
 - Through the first Adam came the universal **problem** of sin and death. Through the last Adam (Christ) has come the universal **solution**.
 - “*In Christ shall all be made alive.*” The key is you must be **in Christ**. All that are in Christ overcome sin and death and are placed in the spiritual family of Christ.
 - You get in Christ by placing your faith in Christ. **Philippians 3:9**
 - Christ’s atoning work is available to all who will believe. Why? Because all have sinned. **Romans 3:22-23**

III. If Christ died for all, why aren’t all men saved?

- A. One Calvinist wrote, “If Christ died for all men and all men are not saved, the cross of Christ is of no effect. Calvary is a sham.”
- This is like saying the Word of God is a sham because all men disobey it.
- B. We mustn’t confuse the **provision** of a Savior with the **applying** of salvation.
- **Illustration:** The blood of the Passover Lamb became efficacious only after it was applied to the doorpost per God’s instructions. The death of the lamb saved no one: the blood had to be applied. **Exodus 12:7, 12-13**
 - Christ has made a **universal** provision for sin, but there must be an **individual** application. **1 Timothy 4:10**
- C. How do you apply Christ’s atoning work on the cross to your heart? **Faith!**
- Salvation always follows and results from faith.
 - The Biblical reason all men are not saved; in spite of Christ having died for all, is that not all believe the gospel. “*Whosoever*” implies that some won’t. **Acts 10:43, 16:31; Romans 10:13**
 - **Illustration:** Brazen serpent in **John 3:14-16**.
- D. Christ has paid the full penalty for sin through His death on the cross and now offers the gift of eternal life. **Romans 6:23**
- But a gift, by its very nature, can be received or rejected.
 - Nobody will spend eternity in the lake of fire because of their sins. They will be there for rejecting Christ and the salvation He obtained and freely offers to all. **2 Corinthians 5:19**

In Conclusion:

1. There is no such thing as a limited atonement. This is a man-made doctrine from hell that flies in the face of scores and scores of clear Scriptures.
2. No one can complain that God created human beings for hell. He created them all for His glorious presence. God made a way whereby He could be just and yet justify all sinners so they could be forgiven and spend eternity in His presence. **Romans 3:26**
3. Will you apply Christ’s atonement to your heart by believing on Jesus?

God's Grace Abounding Toward Sinners

Romans 5

Introduction:

1. Have you ever been late on a bill and you couldn't pay it when it was due? Maybe you said, "Can I have a grace period?" What does this mean?
 - It means the bill is due, I owe it, and you have every right to demand it, but, "Could I have grace? Could you withhold the judgment that I deserve?"
2. In a Biblical sense, grace goes even **beyond** withholding judgment. Grace bestows favor, approval, and acceptance when judgment is deserved.
3. Grace is a major theme of Paul's epistles to the church. The word grace is used 119 times in the New Testament, with 92 of those being used by the apostle Paul.
 - In our text, Romans 5, the word "grace" is used six times.
4. Why is there so much emphasis on grace? Because grace is the difference between heaven and hell. Thankfully God's grace is available to all people today. **Titus 2:11**
5. But here is the key: every person must personally receive God's grace.
 - Calvinism teaches a doctrine called "irresistible grace."
 - The truth is, grace **can** be resisted, but it can and should be received. Why is this?

I. First, because everyone stands in need of God's grace.

1. I've heard people say, "Me and God - we're okay." When you ask "Why?" they respond, "Well, I'm a good and honest person."
 - This is **their** self-evaluation, but God's Word shows otherwise.
2. The Ten Commandments show that you and I have sinned against God countless times and that we stand guilty before a holy God. **Romans 5:12, 15a, 16a, 17a, 18a, 19a**
3. If you think you are going to heaven because you are "good" let me share the cold, hard facts with you - you have sinned against a righteous God, you have offended Him by disobeying His moral law repeatedly, you are dead in your sins, and you deserve the judgment and condemnation of God Almighty.
 - Sin has universally affected every one of us and brought alienation from God. **Colossians 1:21**
4. You and I stand in desperate need of God's grace. Without it, we should all deservedly spend eternity in hell separated from a holy God.
5. Remember the guy who said, "Me and God - we're okay." Unless he repents of that pious, self-righteous attitude, he will never experience God's grace. Why? Because he doesn't understand that he **needs** it.
 - The truth is - we all need it! But here's the good news: God's grace should be received...

II. Second, because God's grace is being universally extended to every person.

1. All throughout this passage, it is like the old "good news - bad news" adage.
 - Verse 15a - we are Adams's descendants and we have all inherited a sin nature, being spiritually dead. Clearly the "many" is referring to everybody (cf. verse 19).
 - Verse 15b - he says, "...much more the grace of God."
 - Verse 18 - all men are under judgment and condemnation, but because Jesus kept God's law in perfect righteousness, the free gift of His grace has come upon **all** men.
 - Verse 20 is absolutely amazing - grace has abounded more than sin has abounded!
2. Think of how pervasively and thoroughly sin has permeated mankind and this world. God's grace is greater! It has **more** abounded!!
 - You may ask, "Can I experience God's grace?"
 - If you are a descendant of Adam, just as sure as you are a sinner and deserving of condemnation, you can experience God's grace.
Romans 10:12-13, 11:32
3. A Calvinist may quote **Romans 9:15** where God said to Moses, *"I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."*
 - This is a quote from **Exodus 33:19** and the context has to do with Moses seeing the glory of God as divine proof that Israel was God's people. It had to do with God being merciful to the seed of Jacob.
 - It has nothing to do with an eternal decree or eternal salvation.
 - The entire context of Romans 9 is that God is showing that He can offer mercy to all Gentile nations and all people if He so chooses. This is exactly what He has done.
4. According to Romans 5, God is giving you an opportunity to get out of the family of Adam and into His family!

III. Third, because God's grace offers righteousness as a gift to sinful man.

1. In verse 15 God is offering a free gift by grace. What is this gift?
 - According to verse 17, it is the gift of righteousness.
2. In our natural, sinful state we all stand guilty and condemned in the courtroom of God.
 - How could I ever be declared righteous and innocent after breaking His law over and over again? God says He is offering it as a free gift by His grace.
3. On what basis can God offer this gift? Through His Son, Jesus Christ. vs. 15, cf. vs. 17, 18, 21
 - Jesus kept God's law in every point. He is the only One that didn't deserve death, yet look at verses 6 & 8. He took the death penalty that I deserve and paid the price in full. He did this willingly out of love.
2 Corinthians 5:14-15
 - God's wrath against sin was poured out on Christ. He took the wrath that I deserve.

4. According to verse 9, now you and I can be justified (this means you are presented before God as righteous and acceptable) because Christ paid our debt.

IV. How do I receive the grace of God?

1. You receive it through simple faith in Jesus Christ. vs. 1-2, cf. 4:5, 4:16, 22-25
 - You cannot work for grace, otherwise it is not grace.
 - Grace **cannot** be earned, but it **must** be received. vs. 17
2. Calvinism teaches that God irresistibly imposes His grace on those He elected before the foundation of the world. All others cannot receive His grace, but rather are predestined to be damned.
 - Man is like a machine - some are programmed to respond to His grace and others are programmed to not respond. Of course, this is ludicrous. If grace is irresistible, why doesn't God impose it on all?
 - If grace is forced, it is not grace by the very definition. Grace is never forced or imposed. It is simply offered freely and then it is either willingly received or rejected. There is not one verse in the Bible that states clearly that grace is irresistible or that God imposes it on the elect who otherwise would not believe the gospel.
 - In **Psalm 81:8-16**, God wanted to extend grace to Israel, but they resisted His grace, therefore judgment came.
3. God's grace and the gift of righteousness are freely offered to all (without partiality and without respect of persons.)
 - Then why are some men not saved? **John 5:40** teaches it is because they will not come to Christ.
 - There are only two possibilities: either God causes men to go to hell or they make their own choice. It can't be both or "God's will" would coincide with that of totally depraved sinners.
4. Faith is the God-appointed means of receiving God's free gift (**Ephesians 2:8-9**), and according to **Romans 10:8 & 17** anybody can choose to exercise faith who hears the message of Jesus Christ.
5. **Psalm 86:15** teaches that God is a God of grace. His grace is always extended on His terms. His terms are very simple. Will you turn from your sin and believe on His Son, Jesus Christ? The moment you do, Christ's righteousness is imparted to you and you are reconciled eternally with God.

Can Lost Mankind Seek God?

Introduction:

1. There is a doctrine taught by Calvinists called "total depravity."
 - Here's the idea: mankind is so totally and completely depraved by sin that there is now a total **inability** of mankind to seek God or to believe God.
 - They believe that God must come and regenerate a person by His Spirit, and then he or she is able to believe on Christ.
2. Of course, there are serious problems with this if Scripture is our final authority.
 - First of all, faith is always seen as preceding regeneration in the Bible. **Ephesians 1:12-14** is one example. A person believes, **then** gets life. **John 20:31**
 - Second, to be regenerated, a person must first be justified (made righteous). Why is this? Because God's justice will not allow Him to put His life into somebody who doesn't have perfect righteousness.
 - Once you are justified (have perfect righteousness), then God can (and does) place His very life inside of you. How are we justified? By faith. It cannot happen apart from faith. **Romans 3:22, 26, 28, 4:5, 22-24, 5:1, 10:4, 9, 13**
3. If you place regeneration **before** faith (as Calvinists do), you only have two options:
 - You either believe that God places His life (regeneration) in sinful, unjustified people.
 - Or you must believe that God justifies a person **before** they ever believe and place their faith in Christ. This would mean the order would be: justification, regeneration, faith. This is **never** the Biblical order.
4. No wonder Calvinism is so speculative; it's called theological confusion. A Calvinist will say, "But we're quoting verses." Yes, but do you have any idea what those verses mean in the **context** in which they are found?
5. For instance, let's consider the question of whether or not a person can make a choice to believe and to seek after God.

Does Romans 3:9-12 teach that individuals can never seek God?

1. A Calvinist will look at verse 11 and say, "See, a person can't seek God." But wait a minute, what is the context?
2. Paul is discussing the fact that the Jewish nation and the Gentile nations have all forsaken God (verse 9). He is not accusing **every** person in **every** nation of **every** sin on this list.
3. This is a **general** description of the wickedness of the nations.
 - **For example:** In verse 18 it says that there is no fear of God before their eyes. But in **Acts 10:2**, a lost Gentile man by the name of Cornelius is said to be "a devout man that feared God with all his house." He is not regenerated until the end of this chapter.
 - Verse 15 says that "Their feet are swift to shed blood." Every lost person is not guilty of murder.
4. Paul is teaching in Romans 3 that Jews and Gentiles are under **equal** condemnation, therefore God can justly offer His mercy to both groups. **Romans 3:29, 10:12, 11:32**

5. **Romans 3:11** must be taken in its **context**. This is not a blanket statement about every individual who ever lived. This is clear from the context. cf. **Acts 17:26-27**

How are people able to seek God?

1. In **Isaiah 55:6-7** God called upon wicked and rebellious Israel (lost people without life - verse 3) to seek Him. If they would seek Him, He would have mercy and pardon them of their sin.
 - According to this passage, God was "findable." Why is this?
2. **Isaiah 45:19** reveals the reason why. Because God had spoken and given them **His Word**. This is why God could say, "Seek me."
 - Left to themselves, they would have never been able to seek and find God. But they **weren't** left to themselves. God said, "My Word is out there - its public - I've made it known."
 - **Romans 2:17-18** - God gave them His Word which gave them the **capacity** to understand and seek Him.
3. Mankind is lost and if left to themselves would never seek after God. But God did something and made the first move toward lost mankind. He sent His Word, and His Word brings life, light, and conviction. **Psalm 19:7-8, 119:130**
4. So a Calvinist may say, "You don't have any ability to find God because none seeketh after God."
 - That may be true if there were no other factors, but that is **not** the end of the story. God sent His Word, and it is a life-giving message. Jesus said that the words He spoke were life. **John 6:63**
5. God has no way of implanting His life in your dead spirit except through His Word. **1 Peter 1:23**
6. God's Spirit does not work in your heart in some unseen, mysterious, spooky way that allows His Word to come in. When God wants to make Himself known in the Bible, He speaks **words** and today those words are in a Book.
7. God's Word (and the gospel of Jesus Christ) gives mankind the **capacity** to seek God.

How Does the Father Draw People to Christ? John 6

Introduction:

1. Can lost mankind seek God? In last week's lesson we answered that question from the Bible.
2. Mankind, in his lost and sinful condition, would never seek God on his own, but God made the first move. God gave His Word to lost mankind.
3. What lost mankind did not have in themselves and in their ability would never have, God's Word provides for them.
4. When God's Word is spoken and proclaimed in truth, the Holy Spirit uses it to bring conviction, light, and life. **Hebrews 4:12; 1 Peter 1:23; Psalms 19:7-8, 119:130**
5. God's Word gives mankind the capacity to seek God.
6. Someone may ask, "But doesn't John 6 say that the Father must draw you before you can come to Christ?"
 - Calvinists say that this passage teaches unconditional election - "Before the foundation of the world, God chose some people to salvation, and only those chosen can come to Jesus."
7. But what does this passage really teach us?

What about John 6 and the Father's drawing?

1. Let's all read verse 44. What number verse is this? It is number 44. That means there are 43 verses before it and 27 verses after it. That means it is in the middle of a **context**.
2. Verse 45 is enlightening and will help explain verse 44. God gave Israel His Word and told them His will. The prophets taught them that their Messiah would come. How many are taught? It says, "All." How are they taught? By His Word!
 - So, if you believed God's Word, you believed that the Messiah was coming. If you didn't believe God's Word, then you didn't believe a Messiah was coming.
 - So, if people were standing in the crowd that day with Jesus and they didn't believe that Jesus was the Messiah, why didn't they believe it? Because they didn't believe God's Word! It was all there in black and white.
3. Notice the words, "**heard**" and "**learned**" in verse 45. Where did they hear and learn? In the Word of God. Jesus said, "***It is written...***" If he hears and learns of the Father (in the written Word), Jesus said, "He comes unto me."
 - So this reveals how the Father draws people to Christ. It is through His written Word. cf. **John 5:37-47**
 - There is no election before the foundation of the world in John 6.
 - There is no arbitrary drawing of certain individuals.
 - There is no mysterious, hidden working in people's hearts. These kind of ideas must be **forced** upon the text.
 - You have the Father drawing Israel through the writings of the prophets, but in order to be one of those drawn, you have to read, learn, and believe it. This isn't speaking of some exclusive group that the Father mysteriously draws.

- It did not say, "They that the Father **causes** to hear and learn." There is a choice of the will to hear and learn of the Father. Those that hear and learn, the Father gives to the Son.
 - The issue is whether or not a person will **believe** the Father's Word. This meshes with the rest of the Bible. There is nothing in John 6 that indicates that the Father **makes** people believe. He draws through His Word and His Son. **John 1:9, 12:32**
 - Those who will hear and learn His Word (vs. 45), He gives to the Son (vs. 37) and they come to Him and believe His Word, too (vs. 45, 5:46-47).
4. Moses, the prophets, and John the Baptist all testified of the truth. The Father sent them as a witness to who Christ was.
- People who believed **them** - guess what they did when Jesus showed up? They believed **Him**. As they believed God's Word, God kept sending them more light.

How does the Father draw people?

1. He draws them through His Word. He gave them the Word and gave them people to proclaim and teach it to them.
2. Everybody (in Israel) who **believed** the Word was gathered through the ministry of John, Jesus, and the apostles into a believing remnant.
3. This remnant didn't just fall out of heaven, having been zapped by the Father. The remnant was those who were having a positive response to God's Word all along.
4. The Father drew those to Christ who had believed the testimony that He had given them up to that point. Those that believed the Word, God gave them further revelation.
 - God is never seen forcing someone to believe His Word or Jesus' words. It is always pictured and presented as a choice that each person makes. **John 3:17-18, 31-36**
5. **John 6:44** didn't float down from heaven in a vacuum. You must look at it in the context of the chapter and the entire book. God gave His written Word **that people might believe** that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing they might have life through His name. **John 20:31**
6. God does not operate independently of His Word, and He relies on **people** to deliver His Word. **Romans 10:14-17** (Faith does not come from some mysterious working of God in your heart - it comes through the proclamation and hearing of His Word.)

But doesn't God blind people to His Word?

1. God is seen sending a **national** blindness to Israel, but never is God seen doing this arbitrarily.
2. God only does this after His Word and His light have been rejected and spurned.
3. But even when God sends blindness to Israel nationally, individuals within that nation are seen choosing to believe. **John 12:35-42**

In Conclusion:

1. While it is true that mankind does not naturally seek after God, there is more to the story than this.

2. God made the first move. God gave His Word to a lost and sinful world. The Word gives light in the midst of darkness. God never blames Himself as the reason why men don't come to the light. God places the responsibility on mankind and says that they don't come to the light because their deeds are evil (**John 3:19-21**) and they refuse to believe His words (**John 12:44-50**).
3. God has not only given us the light of His Word, but He has also given the world the light of His Son (**John 1:7-9**) and the light of the gospel (**2 Corinthians 4:4**).
4. Because of the light God has given, mankind **can**, in fact, seek God and choose to believe the truth of His Word. This is why Satan is seeking to blind people to the gospel.
5. If God has already blinded the non-elect from the truth of His Word, why would Satan be concerned with blinding people to the gospel?
6. Satan knows that if the gospel is proclaimed in truth, anybody could, in fact, choose to believe it and be delivered from his kingdom of darkness. This is the battle we are in. The church is to take the gospel to this world and Satan is fighting its advancement

God's Grace: Freely Offered to All Titus 2:11, Ephesians 2

Introduction:

1. **Titus 2:11** is one of my favorite verses in the Bible. I love the phrase "**the grace of God.**"
 - It is used 23 times in the Bible, all in the New Testament.
 - All but six are directly related to the apostle Paul, who wrote this book to Titus.
2. Grace simply means that I receive **freely** what I don't deserve.
 - **Illustration:** You have a bill that is due but they give you extra time to pay it. We call it a grace period.
 - **Illustration:** You violate a rule at work that should result in termination, but your boss says to you, "I am going to give you grace." You receive freely another chance.
 - **Illustration:** A policeman pulls you over for doing 50 in a 35. He says, "I could write you a ticket, but I am going to give you grace this time."
3. A marvelous demonstration of **God's** grace is found in Titus 3:3-4. When we deserve **judgment** for our sin, God extends love, kindness, and grace.
4. Is this grace available to only an exclusive group? Read **Titus 2:11** again. God is offering salvation from sin's penalty and sin's power, and this offer is to **all men**. This incredible offer is based upon His grace.
5. Did you know that it was not always this way? God did not always offer His grace indiscriminately to all men everywhere.
6. In Ephesians 2 there is a natural time line that will explain this offer of grace today to all men.

"Time Past" - Ephesians 2:11-12

1. In time past God made a covenant with the nation of Israel. In this covenant were some glorious promises, one of which was the promise of a Redeemer (a Christ, a Messiah).
 - This Messiah would set up an earthly kingdom of eternal duration.
 - God said He would make Israel a kingdom of priests with a King on a throne Who would reign forever.
2. If you were a Jew in time past:
 - You received covenants of **promise** from God.
 - You lived in **hope** of a Redeemer who would one day deliver you.
 - You had God's Word (given through Moses and the prophets.) You weren't **without God.**
3. The point of **Ephesians 2:11-12** is that the Gentile nations did **not** have any of these advantages. They had turned their back on God long ago and been given over to idolatry. **Romans 1:18-32**
4. It was prophesied that when the Redeemer came to Israel and they received Him, God would establish a **new** covenant with Israel, and Israel would bring light and knowledge to all Gentile nations. **Isaiah 59:20-60:3; Ezekiel 37:26-28; Luke 1:68-79; Jeremiah 33:7-9**

- This is why **Matthew 20:28** says that Christ came to give His life a ransom for **many**.
 - **Isaiah 53:8** states, "...for the transgression of *my people* was he stricken." Isaiah's people were Israel.
 - **Matthew 1:21** says, "for he shall save *his people* from their sins." Christ was a Jew. **Romans 1:3, 9:4-5; Hebrews 2:16**
5. It was prophesied **in time past** that Christ would suffer and die for the sins of Israel (the elect) and through the blood He shed be able to remit their sins and institute a new and glorious covenant with them. **Jeremiah 31:31-34; cf. Hebrews 8 & 9**
- Do you see how people can form a belief that Jesus died only for the elect? They misapply Scriptures dealing with Israel in time past.
 - As you look at Israel's "time past" program, you have what theologians call a "limited Redeemer" and "limited redemption."
 - There were some things that God planned to do through the cross-work of Jesus Christ that He never told anybody. He kept it a secret (**1 Corinthians 2:7-8**), **but now** has made it known (**Ephesians 3:1-8**).

“But Now” - Ephesians 2:13-14, 16-17

1. **"But now"** indicates that a change has taken place. Paul explains that God isn't operating today like He did in time past.
 - The plan in time past has been set aside. Why is this? **John 1:11** says, "*He came unto his own, and his own received him not.*"
 - Israel rejected their Redeemer (**Acts 3:14-15**) and the offer of the new covenant. **Acts 3:19- 4:3**
2. What would God's response be to this rejection? It was supposed to be wrath and judgment on Israel and the world. **Psalms 2**
3. Instead, God revealed a secret He had kept hidden from the foundation of the world. Here it is - when Christ died on the cross, He wasn't just dying for the elect's (Israel's) sins. He was dying for the sins of the world.
4. Based on the atoning work of Jesus Christ on the cross for sin, God would offer grace and forgiveness to **every man**, without discrimination.
5. God revealed this through a man named Paul and sent Paul to the nations with this message of hope and reconciliation.
 - Paul was a Jew. He knew the prophetic plan - start at Jerusalem and convince Israel of Christ. Jesus said that salvation is of the Jews (**John 4:22**). It had to start with them so they, in turn, could prove a blessing to all people (**Genesis 12:3**).
 - But when Paul went to Jerusalem, God said, "No. Get out, I'm sending you to the Gentiles with a new message. Through Israel's **fall**, I'm offering the Gentiles salvation and forgiveness of sins directly, apart from Israel." **Acts 22:17-21, 26:16-18**
 - Christ revealed to Paul the wonderful accomplishments of the cross (one example - **2 Corinthians 5:14-21**).
6. Paul received an **"all men"** - **"every man"** ministry. Remember **Titus 2:11**. Compare this with **1 Timothy 2:1, 4, 6, 4:10; Colossians 1:27-28**

7. In **time past** Israel was the elect of God. They were the chosen vessel that God worked through on the earth. **But now** God's grace has appeared to **all men** and all men can be saved. Why? Because it has been revealed that Christ gave Himself a ransom **for all**.
8. We live in the dispensation of grace - God is freely dispensing His grace to anyone who will simply trust His Son as their Savior. Sin has been forever dealt with on the cross. Now it is simply a question of whether or not men will accept God's offer of reconciliation.

“The Ages to Come” - Ephesians 2:6-7

1. This offer of grace to all people will not last forever. Remember, this world deserves the wrath and judgment of God. It has been promised and it will come. A grace period doesn't last forever.
2. When this time of grace ends, all those who accepted God's offer of grace through His Son, will be caught up into the heavenlies.
3. We will occupy positions in the heavenlies with Jesus Christ and we will display His love and kindness in the ages to come. We will be trophies of His grace on display for the redeemed of the ages to look at.
 - We will serve the Lord as joint-heirs with Jesus Christ and even oversee the angelic creation. **1 Corinthians 6:2-3**
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 - Through the Body of Christ the heavens will be filled with His glory.
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In Conclusion:

1. As you can see, Paul had an "all men - every man" mission and mandate from the Lord. This is our mission and mandate today.
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3. The point of **Ephesians 2:11-12** is that the Gentile nations did **not** have any of these advantages. They had turned their back on God long ago and been given over to idolatry. **Romans 1:18-32**
4. It was prophesied that when the Redeemer came to Israel and they received Him, God would establish a **new** covenant with Israel, and Israel would bring light and knowledge to all Gentile nations. **Isaiah 59:20-60:3; Ezekiel 37:26-28; Luke 1:68-79; Jeremiah 33:7-9**

- This is why **Matthew 20:28** says that Christ came to give His life a ransom for **many**.
 - **Isaiah 53:8** states, "...for the transgression of *my people* was he stricken." Isaiah's people were Israel.
 - **Matthew 1:21** says, "for he shall save *his people* from their sins." Christ was a Jew. **Romans 1:3, 9:4-5; Hebrews 2:16**
5. It was prophesied **in time past** that Christ would suffer and die for the sins of Israel (the elect) and through the blood He shed be able to remit their sins and institute a new and glorious covenant with them. **Jeremiah 31:31-34; cf. Hebrews 8 & 9**
- Do you see how people can form a belief that Jesus died only for the elect? They misapply Scriptures dealing with Israel in time past.
 - As you look at Israel's "time past" program, you have what theologians call a "limited Redeemer" and "limited redemption."
 - There were some things that God planned to do through the cross-work of Jesus Christ that He never told anybody. He kept it a secret (**1 Corinthians 2:7-8**), **but now** has made it known (**Ephesians 3:1-8**).

“But Now” - Ephesians 2:13-14, 16-17

1. **"But now"** indicates that a change has taken place. Paul explains that God isn't operating today like He did in time past.
 - The plan in time past has been set aside. Why is this? **John 1:11** says, "*He came unto his own, and his own received him not.*"
 - Israel rejected their Redeemer (**Acts 3:14-15**) and the offer of the new covenant. **Acts 3:19- 4:3**
2. What would God's response be to this rejection? It was supposed to be wrath and judgment on Israel and the world. **Psalms 2**
3. Instead, God revealed a secret He had kept hidden from the foundation of the world. Here it is - when Christ died on the cross, He wasn't just dying for the elect's (Israel's) sins. He was dying for the sins of the world.
4. Based on the atoning work of Jesus Christ on the cross for sin, God would offer grace and forgiveness to **every man**, without discrimination.
5. God revealed this through a man named Paul and sent Paul to the nations with this message of hope and reconciliation.
 - Paul was a Jew. He knew the prophetic plan - start at Jerusalem and convince Israel of Christ. Jesus said that salvation is of the Jews (**John 4:22**). It had to start with them so they, in turn, could prove a blessing to all people (**Genesis 12:3**).
 - But when Paul went to Jerusalem, God said, "No. Get out, I'm sending you to the Gentiles with a new message. Through Israel's **fall**, I'm offering the Gentiles salvation and forgiveness of sins directly, apart from Israel." **Acts 22:17-21, 26:16-18**
 - Christ revealed to Paul the wonderful accomplishments of the cross (one example - **2 Corinthians 5:14-21**).
6. Paul received an **"all men"** - **"every man"** ministry. Remember **Titus 2:11**. Compare this with **1 Timothy 2:1, 4, 6, 4:10; Colossians 1:27-28**

7. In **time past** Israel was the elect of God. They were the chosen vessel that God worked through on the earth. **But now** God's grace has appeared to **all men** and all men can be saved. Why? Because it has been revealed that Christ gave Himself a ransom **for all**.
8. We live in the dispensation of grace - God is freely dispensing His grace to anyone who will simply trust His Son as their Savior. Sin has been forever dealt with on the cross. Now it is simply a question of whether or not men will accept God's offer of reconciliation.

“The Ages to Come” - Ephesians 2:6-7

1. This offer of grace to all people will not last forever. Remember, this world deserves the wrath and judgment of God. It has been promised and it will come. A grace period doesn't last forever.
2. When this time of grace ends, all those who accepted God's offer of grace through His Son, will be caught up into the heavenlies.
3. We will occupy positions in the heavenlies with Jesus Christ and we will display His love and kindness in the ages to come. We will be trophies of His grace on display for the redeemed of the ages to look at.
 - We will serve the Lord as joint-heirs with Jesus Christ and even oversee the angelic creation. **1 Corinthians 6:2-3**
4. Those that rejected God's offer of grace will be left behind to face the wrath and judgment of God for seven years.
5. At the end of this time, God will redeem a remnant of Israel. God will sow them unto Him in the earth and they will be the blessing to all nations that God intended for them to be.
 - Through the Body of Christ the heavens will be filled with His glory.
 - Through Israel the earth will be filled with His glory.

In Conclusion:

1. As you can see, Paul had an "all men - every man" mission and mandate from the Lord. This is our mission and mandate today.
2. We must passionately and zealously get this message to the world. Reconciliation with God has been made possible through the finished work of Jesus Christ.

Illustration: You are late on your electric bill with no way to pay it. Somebody from the light company calls your house and tells your child that they have decided to extend a grace period, but you need to call them before the day is over. Your child neglects to tell you the message of grace. What will you be doing that night? Sitting in darkness. Why? Because you never heard the message of grace. People all over this world are sitting in darkness, and the problem isn't with God. He is offering grace and light to them. The problem is with the messengers, the church!

Ages to Come
Ephesians 2:6-7

But Now
Ephesians 2:13

**BELIEVERS
CAUGHT UP**

Israel receives:

- 1. Covenants of promise
- 2. Hope of a Redeemer
- 3. The Word of God



**GRACE & RECONCILIATION
AVAILABLE TO ALL
THROUGH CHRIST**

**GOD'S WRATH
& JUDGMENT
ON THE EARTH**

**ISRAEL AT LAST A
BLESSING TO ALL
NATIONS**

Tribulation

Kingdom of

Time Past
Ephesians 2:11-12

Grace Period

7 years

Christ on earth

**GENTILE NATIONS
GIVEN OVER TO
IDOLATRY AND
WITHOUT HOPE**

**CHRIST
REJECTED BY
ISRAEL**

**ISRAEL'S SINS REMITTED
THE NEW COVENANT ESTABLISHED
KINGDOM OF PRIESTS ON EARTH**

The Truth about Sovereignty

Introduction:

1. When bad things happen, many times you hear Christians say things like, "God is in sovereign control," "Our sovereign God is still on the throne," "It's God's sovereign choice," "It must be His sovereign will."
2. These phrases are thrown around and are supposed to bring some measure of comfort to those who mourn and go through tragedy.
3. What does the Bible really teach about sovereignty? Let me shock you. The word "sovereign" and "sovereignty" are not in our King James Bible.
 - The NIV substitutes the word "sovereign" for the word "God" over 300 times. Instead of "Lord God" they use the term "sovereign Lord."
 - According to the Oxford English Dictionary the name "sovereign Lord" is one of 99 names the Muslims use for their God, Allah.
4. The word sovereign was introduced into the English language by the French-speaking sovereigns who governed England in the 12th century. It was originally a French word.
 - It was almost used exclusively to describe a mortal, political leader, not the transcendent, Almighty God.
 - "Webster's Online Dictionary" defines sovereignty as "supreme power over a body politic," again associating it with governmental authority.
5. The word eventually got introduced into theology in certain religious circles and owes its impetus to John Calvin. He was a Frenchman and would naturally use such a word.
 - The word "sovereign" encapsulates his French training for the priesthood, his denial of free will, and his teachings merging church and state.
6. In this lesson, we will answer from the Bible four important and pertinent questions regarding sovereignty. Tonight we will deal with the first question.

First, is sovereignty a Biblical concept?

1. Just because the word is not in the Bible does not necessarily mean that it is not a Biblical concept (example: the words "trinity" and "rapture").
2. If the word "sovereign" means supreme power, then yes, God is sovereign. Very few would argue with the fact that God holds supreme power.
 - Jesus said in **Matthew 28:18**, *"All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth."*
 - Yet it is said of the anti-Christ in **2 Thessalonians 2:9** that He is coming after the working of Satan with "all power."
 - So, obviously, Christ **holds** all power, but hasn't fully exercised it all as of yet.
3. So the question becomes, "How and when does God exercise His power?"
4. Jesus had the sovereign power to call legions of angels before His crucifixion, but He chose **not** to exercise His power.
5. Jesus said in **John 18:36**, *"My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should **not** be delivered to the Jews: but **now** is my kingdom not from hence."*

- Did Jesus have sovereign power that would have delivered Him from the Jews? Absolutely, but **at that time** He chose not to exercise it.
6. One day Christ **will** fight and exercise sovereign power over this earth. This is the meaning of the word "omnipotent" and "Almighty." With only one exception, these two words are used exclusively in the book of Revelation.
 - When Christ returns to this earth, **Revelation 11:17** says that Christ will **take to Him** His great power and reign. At this time Christ will take "sovereign control" of this earth. **cf. Revelation 19:6, 15, 21:22; 1 Timothy 6:14-16**
 - God's sovereignty over this earth will be **exercised** at His Second Coming. At this time, the anti-Christ and false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire (**Revelation 19:20**), and Satan is bound in the bottomless pit (**Revelation 20:1-2**).
 - At the present time, Satan **does** have power that he is exercising. **Acts 26:18; 1 Corinthians 15:23-24**
 7. We also discover in Revelation that God's power is controlled by His character and nature. 15:3, 16:7
 8. People who misunderstand God's sovereignty will sometimes say, "God can do whatever He wants to do. He is sovereign." This is a false notion.
 9. God cannot do anything that contradicts His nature and character. **Titus 1:2; James 1:13**
 - **Illustration:** the tragic killings at Virginia Tech. Someone may say, "We have to trust God's sovereign will and plan." This statement leaves you with the idea that God desired and willed that event to occur, that it was part of His "mysterious" plan.
 - This is impossible because it would contradict God's righteous character. Satan is a murderer; senseless, brutal murder is part of Satan's character (**John 8:44**). Then who do you think planned and instigated this event (the mastermind)? **Jeremiah 19:5** is extremely important to read. **cf. Jeremiah 32:35**
 - Can God bring good things **out of** this tragic event? Absolutely. God will freely dispense His grace to those in need who seek Him and turn to Him.
 - But we cannot make God ultimately responsible for the dastardly deeds of sinful man and Satan. They are out of the realm of His righteous nature and character.
 10. God's sovereignty is also controlled and limited by His Word. God has freely and voluntarily limited Himself this way. **Numbers 23:19**
 11. To summarize - while God is sovereign, there are things He cannot do because they contradict His character or His written Word.
 12. Sovereignty is a Biblical concept, but when there is an overemphasis of God's power to the neglect or diminishing of His other attributes (love, mercy, grace, justice, truth, holiness, etc.) you end up with false doctrine. God does not exercise His sovereignty in isolation of His other qualities.
 - When you place an over-emphasis on His sovereignty, you end up with a God who empowers and commissions wicked people to do sinful things that violate His righteous character and loving nature.

- Christian, be very careful how you throw around the word "sovereign." God is not up in heaven pushing buttons and pulling levers and making everything that happens happen. Do not lay at His feet the evil and wicked choices of mankind and Satan.

The Truth about Sovereignty – Part 2

Second, does God have an ultimate purpose and plan?

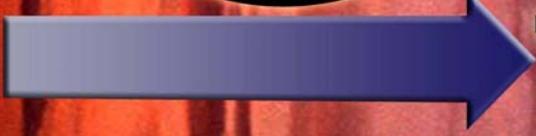
1. The answer in a nutshell is - absolutely! God has an eternal purpose and plan that He is working out. But an unbiblical idea of sovereignty will cause people to get some wacky ideas concerning God's plan.
2. For example, here is a quote from author David Steele in his book, *The Five Points of Calvinism*.
 - "Scripture teaches that all events (both small and great) come about as the result of God's eternal decree. The Lord God rules over heaven and earth with absolute control. Nothing comes to pass apart from His eternal purpose."
3. In this theology, everything happens because God determined before the foundation of the world that it had to happen. Satan and mankind are mere puppets playing out a part to a script already written.
 - You are here tonight, wearing that color shirt because you had no choice. It was eternally decreed, God willed it, and it has to be.
 - The Columbine killings, the murder of the Amish children, the 911 attacks had to happen because God purposed it, He willed it, and He decreed it.
 - This is a gross misunderstanding of sovereignty and is the sovereignty of Islam.
 - Quotes from articles about the fatalism of Islam
 - Fatalism is defined by Webster's as "a doctrine that events are fixed in advance so that human beings are powerless to change them."
 - Book - *The Market Driven Church* by Udo Middelmann - he calls it the "Islamization of Christianity."
4. Does God have a plan for the earth, the heavens, and mankind? Let's look into God's Word and see.
5. In Genesis 2, God worked for six days creating this incredible earth and mankind.
 - According to **Psalm 132:13-14**, God marked a piece of real estate on the earth where He planned on living, dwelling, and resting with mankind forever.
 - The plan was for mankind to have dominion (governorship) over the earth and walk in fellowship with God. This is why mankind was created with volition (the power to choose and make decisions). He would be representing God on the earth and making decisions. **Genesis 1:26-28; Psalm 8:4-9**
 - Adam would name the animals. Adam and Eve would shape their relationship, have babies, make a living, etc. They were created in the image of their Creator; therefore they must be able to make choices and decisions. **Genesis 2:18-25**
6. In Genesis 3, God's rest (**Genesis 2:1-3**) was broken by mankind's choice to sin and rebel against God. Satan usurped man's God-given authority over the earth and Satan became the prince (first in rank or power) of this world. **John 14:30, 16:11**
 - He is also called the "god of this world" in **2 Corinthians 4:4**.
7. But God has a plan. God's plan to live and dwell with mankind in perfect peace will still yet happen (**Revelation 21:3**). Why is this? Because God became a man in the person of Jesus Christ and through His cross-work defeated Satan. He has made it possible for mankind to reclaim all that was lost in Adam.
8. God's plan is to reclaim the earth and the heavens (which have been defiled by sin) and make everything center in and glorify His Son, Jesus Christ. **Ephesians 1:9-11**

- A fatalist may look at this passage and say, "See, God works all things according to the counsel of His will..." But what is the context?
 - Paul draws this idea from **Isaiah 46:9-11**. In this passage, what is God's counsel and purpose? Look at verse 13. It is to accomplish the prophetic program and establish His kingdom in Israel.
 - Paul applies this in Ephesians 1 to God accomplishing His purpose in the mystery program for the church, the body of Christ.
9. God has a plan for this earth and the heavens.
 - God has a plan to glorify His Son throughout this entire earth. The instrument He will use to accomplish His purpose is the nation of Israel.
 - God has a plan to glorify His Son throughout the heavens. The instrument He will use to accomplish His purpose is the church, the body of Christ.
 10. This is God's purpose and plan. Satan won't stop it and sinful mankind won't stop it. There are many sinful, wicked things that happen that God didn't **plan** to happen, but it won't keep His ultimate plan from being accomplished.
 11. In Christ (the Son of man), mankind will regain dominion over this earth.
Psalm 72; Daniel 7:13-14, 27
 12. God has a plan, but when you read about it in the Bible, it is not some fatalistic plan. God did not pre-plot before the foundation of the world every detail of every person's life.
 13. God has an **ultimate** plan and purpose that He is working out, but invites men and women to participate in this plan. They can accept or choose to rebel. This is the subject of our next point.

Revelation

Rapture

**(Mystery)
Age of
Grace**

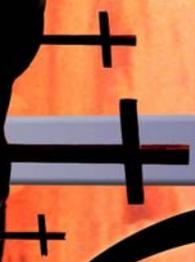


**Old Testament
(The Law)**

Church Age

**Tribulation
7 Years**

**Kingdom
1000 Years**



The Truth about Sovereignty – Part 3

Third, can God's counsel and purpose be rejected?

1. When the Bible speaks of God's counsel, this is simply referring to the fact that God has decided and purposed to do something. The word "counsel" means "volition," God deciding and choosing to do some things.
 - We saw already that mankind was created in the image of God and was therefore created with volition, the ability to make choices and decisions.
2. In an effort to explain tragic situations, a person might say, "We have to trust that this is part of the hidden and mysterious counsel of God. It is part of the counsel of His will."
 - They infer that the counsel of God is a mysterious and hidden thing that we cannot possibly know or understand. Is this a Biblical concept?
3. **Ephesians 1:9** states that God has **made known** the mystery of His will and the good pleasure of His purpose. The phrase "made known" is also translated "declared," and in another place, "I give you to understand."
 - So according to the Bible, God has declared and made known His purpose. He has given it to us to understand.
4. This matches what Paul said in **Acts 20:27**, "*For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.*" What is he referring to? God's Word!
5. God has **revealed** to us His counsel and purpose. How? In His Word.
 - Paul said in **1 Corinthians 2:16**, "*For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.*" How do we have the mind of Christ? We have His Word.
 - Over and over in the Bible, the counsel of God is seen as being synonymous with His Word. **Jeremiah 23:18-22; Isaiah 30:1-2**
 - I hold in my hand the counsel of God. This tells me clearly His purpose and His plan. It tells me what He has done in time past (**Ephesians 2:11**), what He is doing today (**Ephesians 2:13**), and what He will do in the ages to come (**Ephesians 2:7**).
 - God has clearly revealed **today** things that He planned to do in eternity past. **Titus 1:2-3**
 - When someone starts talking about the mysterious and unknown counsel of God, you know you are dealing with someone who either doesn't know his Bible or does not have confidence in his Bible.
6. So when we ask the question, "Can God's counsel be rejected?" the answer is rather obvious. If His Word can be rejected, His counsel can be rejected. They are one and the same.
7. For example, let's compare **Isaiah 46:10** with **Luke 7:30**.
 - God says "*My counsel shall stand,*" but we see men rejecting the counsel of God in **Luke 7:30**. Is this a contradiction? Of course not. The answer is to look in the context.
 - In **Isaiah 46**, God's counsel is referring in context to His plan to establish His kingdom in Jerusalem for the nation of Israel. vs. 13

- So, John the Baptist came and preached to Israel to repent and be baptized in preparation for the prophesied kingdom. Yet we see leaders within the nation of Israel rejecting the counsel of God, refusing to be baptized by John.
 - They refused to participate in the counsel, purpose, and plan of God.
 - Will God ultimately accomplish His prophetic plan that He has purposed to do in Israel? Absolutely! God's purpose will stand. Yet those in Israel can choose to resist it and not participate in it.
 - God has a plan and will see to it that it is accomplished, but He will not force anybody to be a part of it. Mankind was created with volition to make that choice. As you read the Bible, one thing is abundantly clear. God has always desired a people that desire Him.
8. Today God is offering His grace to all people in every nation. This grace period was planned before the foundation of the world, but kept secret until God's time.

Colossians 1:25-27

- God has a special plan and purpose for all those that believe on His Son. God predestinated those who would believe to certain blessings and future glory in the heavens. This is the subject of **Ephesians 1:1-11**.
 - Whether you believe or not will not stop God from accomplishing His heavenly plans for the body of Christ, but He graciously invites you to be a part of it and participate in His plan. **1 Timothy 2:4, 6**
 - Some people choose to believe, other men, as Paul said, put the Word of God from them and judge **themselves** unworthy of everlasting life.
9. It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.
- 1 Corinthians 1:21**
- What is God's purpose and good pleasure for today? To save those that believe.
 - So, how is the counsel of God rejected today? By rejecting His Word and not believing on Jesus Christ.
10. This is the constant theme of God's Word. Will men choose to stand in the counsel of God or reject the counsel of God?
- **Psalm 106:12-13** - How was God's counsel rejected? They no longer believed His words.
 - **Psalm 107:11** - They scorned (contemned) God's counsel (God's plans). How? By rebelling against the words of God.
 - **Proverbs 1:23-30** - They rejected the purpose and plan of God by not hearkening to God. God's counsel will stand (**Proverbs 19:21**), yet they refused His counsel.
 - We have seen this same principle in **Jeremiah 23:18-22** and **Isaiah 30:1-2**.

Concluding thoughts:

1. God has purposed to accomplish an earthly plan for the nation of Israel (**Isaiah 46:9-13**) and a heavenly plan for the body of Christ (**Ephesians 1:1-11**). This is the counsel of His will.
2. These plans are not hidden and mysterious. The prophetic plan has clearly been made known (**Acts 3:20-24**) and now the mystery plan for the Body of Christ has been made known through the apostle Paul (**Ephesians 1:9, 3:1-9**).

3. In eternity, one thing will be left standing, the counsel, purpose, and plan of God. Nothing will hinder God from fulfilling His plans.
4. But for now, Satan is the god of this world (**2 Corinthians 4:4**) and Satan is seeking to fulfill his agenda and desires to use men to accomplish his purposes.
5. All of mankind is faced with a choice, to believe Satan's lies or to believe God's Word.
6. God invites men to participate with Him in His plan. In fact, He pleads with mankind, but gives mankind the volition to choose. What will be your choice?

The Truth about Sovereignty – Part 4

Fourth, does God control every detail of life?

1. There are many who teach that God's sovereignty means that God has set up a prearranged plan for every person and every detail of his/her life. It has all been pre-plotted, and God in His sovereignty sees to it that it all happens as He has decreed it.
 - Quote from David Steele - "The Five Points of Calvinism" - "All events (both small and great) come about as the result of God's eternal decree. The Lord God rules over heaven and earth with absolute control. Nothing comes to pass apart from His eternal purpose."
 - This is what many people mean when they say, "God is in control."
2. But what does the Bible teach? Does the Bible lead us to believe that God in His power controls every detail of every person's life?
3. The Bible, in fact, teaches the opposite. It teaches that mankind, by and large, rebels **against** the will of God. **Isaiah 1:2, 4**
4. This is illustrated quite vividly in **Jeremiah 32:30-35**. God had tried to teach them, but they would not receive His instruction. They did wicked, abominable things that God said never even entered His mind. cf. **Jeremiah 7:31, 19:5**
5. God sent Jeremiah to read all the prophecies of judgment that God had purposed to do to Israel. Why did God want him to do this? God said, "It may be they will repent and I can forgive them." **Jeremiah 36:1-7**
 - Two times God says "*It may be...*" This does not sound like a God who controls every detail of this wicked world. It sounds like a God who gives men His truth and then gives them a choice to either receive it or reject it.
6. This same concept is seen in Jeremiah 26. God commanded Jeremiah to give Israel His Word in hope that they would repent, and God would not have to bring the judgment He had **purposed** against Israel. vs. 1-3, 13
 - Jeremiah then used the example of King Hezekiah in verses 17-19.
 - Hezekiah was the king of Judah that God told "*thou shalt die.*" God made a sovereign choice that he would die and declared it. Hezekiah prayed, God heard his prayer, and God decided to add 15 years to his life. **2 Kings 20:1-6**
7. In **Jeremiah 23:16-22**; God was angry with the prophets because they had not stood in God's counsel or God's words. God said if they had, Israel would have turned from their evil way.
8. Someone may say, "But God is the potter and we are the clay. The potter can do whatever He wants to do with the clay." Let's read **Jeremiah 18:1-11** carefully. Would you like to see an example of Jeremiah 18 in action? Read **Jonah 3:3-10**.
9. Are you starting to get the picture? God's will is **not** always done on earth. This is why Jesus told His disciples to pray, "*Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done **in earth**, as it is in heaven.*" (**Matthew 6:10**) Why pray for it if it is already being done?
 - The Satanic policy of evil currently fills this earth, but Jesus came to give us understanding. **1 John 5:19-20**
 - One day Christ will return and establish His righteous government over this earth. **Jeremiah 23:5-6**

10. Even though a Calvinist would say that God is in control of every detail of life down here on earth, the fact is that we have seen that the Bible simply does not substantiate this kind of thinking.
 - Notice the words Jesus used in **Luke 10:30-31**. The words "*by chance*" mean "accident." Jesus chose to use this phrase.
 - We don't like the word "luck" because it gives us the impression that God is somehow not in control. But what have we learned as we have been studying the Bible? God's actions stem from who He is (His character and nature), not some pre-fixed and pre-plotted plan.
11. 1 Samuel 23 is an interesting text relating to the question, "Does God control every detail of every person's life?"
 - David saves the inhabitants of the city of Keilah from the Philistines.
 - King Saul hears that David is in Keilah and pursues him, planning to surround the city and destroy it if need be.
 - Before Saul gets there, David asks God if the people of Keilah will deliver him up to Saul to save their own necks. The Lord said, "*They will deliver thee up.*"
 - David then acts on this information and escapes Keilah and flees to the wilderness.
 - It's interesting that God said, "*They will deliver thee up*", but yet they never did. Was God wrong? Of course not. God was simply saying, "If you make **a choice** to stay in this city, they will deliver you up."
 - Because David made a wise decision, what God said **would happen**, never had to happen.
12. What does this teach us? Man's actions and choices have consequences. A fatalistic view of sovereignty inherently takes the responsibility **off** of mankind and diminishes the importance of godly decision-making.
13. If we are puppets playing out a script already written, why pray fervently? It won't make an ounce of difference in the final outcome. Why fight sin and sickness and pain? Why send missionaries? Why give sacrificially? Why vote?
14. Proponents of Calvinism can try to manipulate their people with semantic word games, but the bottom line is this - a fatalistic view of sovereignty teaches that man's choices and decisions have no life-changing impact whatsoever. In fact, in this system, you really don't make decisions; God already pre-planned every move you would make.
 - I've heard preachers go so far as to say or imply, "God even planned my failures and sin so I could appreciate His grace and understand it."
 - This is ludicrous (**Romans 6:1**). An understanding of grace comes through the truth of God's Word, not your subjective experiences.
 - God did not plan or pre-plot your sin. We sin because we choose to sin.

Concluding thoughts:

1. The plan of God is not to manipulate the details of your life, but rather to conform you to the image of His Son.
2. How does God accomplish this in our lives? First, when we are saved, He places us in Christ, and places His Spirit within us.

- This allows us to spiritually understand His plan and will as revealed in His Word. God then desires for us to learn His Word and apply it to the details of our lives.
 - This is why we are commanded to walk in the Spirit (**Galatians 5:16**). God leads and guides us through this wicked world as we walk in the Spirit, with our faith resting in an intelligent understanding of His Word.
 - As we do this, we make godly decisions and will ultimately reap eternal glory. But when we walk after the flesh, we make ungodly choices and we reap corruption. **Galatians 6:8**
 - You make a daily choice to either walk in the Spirit, allowing God to control your life or walk after the flesh fulfilling **your** desires.
 - God desires to be an active part of your daily life and guide you by His Word and by His Spirit, but He will not force His fellowship upon you.
3. Your choices are just what they are - **your choices!** Your choices have consequences.
- Joshua told Israel, "*...choose you this day whom ye will serve.*" **Joshua 24:15**
 - Moses told Israel, "*I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.*" **Deuteronomy 30:19**

Do Our Prayers Really Make a Difference? – Part 1

Introduction:

1. Many people have a very unbiblical view of God's sovereignty. We would all agree that God is sovereign (all-powerful), but how does God choose to **exercise** His sovereignty?
2. Some believe that God's sovereignty means that God laid out a pre-fixed, pre-plotted plan for all of mankind before the foundation of the world. The details of every person's destiny were set. God is carrying out His plans to the letter.
3. This kind of fatalistic theology leads people to ask some inevitable questions.
 - Why should I really pray? Do my prayers make any difference? What is the purpose of prayer? Isn't God going to do what He wants to do anyway? Does God really need me to pray?
4. The theology of fatalism can kill a person's prayer life. If God has everything on auto-pilot, let's take a siesta and let it happen.
5. To the contrary, John Wesley said, "God does nothing on the earth save in answer to believing prayer."
 - If this concept is true, I'll lose some sleep for that! I'll change my life-style for that! I'll turn off the TV and even miss a meal for that!!
6. Does a sovereign, all-powerful God need our involvement or not? Is prayer really necessary? Does prayer really make a difference concerning the affairs of this earth? In this lesson we will show from God's Word that it does.

Why do our prayers make a difference?

First, because of God's original plan.

1. In Genesis 1 God created mankind. What was God's purpose? vs. 26-28
 - We see that it was for mankind to take dominion over all the earth.
 - The word "dominion" simply means "to rule." It carries the idea that Adam (and his descendants) was God's manager or steward over the earth.
2. God didn't give away **ownership** of the earth, but He did assign the **governorship** of it to mankind. Psalm 8
3. The word "keep" in **Genesis 2:15** means "to guard or protect." Adam was God's watchman or guardian of the earth. Adam was clearly God's representative on the earth.
4. He took his orders from God, but he was created with volition to make choices and decisions while governing the earth.
 - **Genesis 2:15-17** - the responsibility to dress and keep the garden, but not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
 - **Genesis 2:18-20** - the responsibility to name each animal. Adam obeyed God, deciding on each animal.
 - **Genesis 2:21-24** - the responsibility to take Eve and love her as his wife. Adam obeyed and took Eve unto himself.
5. God made man in His own image (**Genesis 1:27**) and likeness (**Genesis 1:26**).
 - The word "image" means "an illusion, a representative figure, a resemblance."
 - The word "likeness" means "to model, shape; resemblance."

6. Adam was modeled or shaped to resemble God. Why is this? So Adam could represent God on the earth.
 - **Psalm 8:5** teaches that God crowned mankind with glory and honor.
 - When creation looked at Adam, they were supposed to see God.
7. Of course, Adam sinned and fell short of the glory of God. Mankind must now be changed back into God's image by the Holy Spirit from glory to glory.

2 Corinthians 3:18
8. God created the earth to be under the governorship of mankind. When mankind failed to obey God, Satan became "*the god of this world*" and began to implement his satanic policy of evil in this world. **2 Corinthians 4:4**
9. There would now be enmity (hostility) between Satan and mankind. Mankind would struggle to regain his dominion over the earth and Satan would seek to confound man's efforts. **Genesis 3:15**
10. God raised up a nation that was designed to glorify the Lord throughout the entire earth. Through their obedience, Israel would reclaim God's authority on the earth and establish a righteous kingdom. God would be King, and Israel would be a kingdom of priests on the earth. **Exodus 19:3-6**
 - This is why the Psalmist wrote in **Psalm 115:16**, "*The heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord's: but the earth hath he given to the children of men.*"
11. Here is the point: God made a decision at creation. He created mankind and gave them authority and dominion over the earth. Humans were forever to be God's link to authority and activity on the earth.
 - God made a "through humans" decision when He created mankind and gave them dominion or governorship of the earth.
12. So complete and final was God's decision to do things on the earth through human beings, that it meant there was only one way to redeem fallen mankind. There was only one way that God could regain for mankind what man lost in Adam.
 - God would have to become part of the human race and take on flesh and blood. **John 1:1, 14; 1 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 2:14-16**
 - The incarnation was the only answer. God became man. **Philippians 2:6-8**
13. This is why Jesus did not dispute Satan's claims when Satan claimed to possess present power over the kingdoms of this world in **Luke 4:5-8**.
14. Jesus, the Son of **man**, will one day exercise dominion, and seize control of the kingdoms of this world, but Satan wanted Him to short-circuit the Father's plan and take a short cut. It was a clever temptation, but Jesus saw right through it.
15. One day, Christ, the Son of man, will regain total dominion and control of the earth for mankind. **Daniel 7:13-14**

Second, because God has purposed to work through the prayers of His people.

1. Here we have a key that unlocks the reason for the necessity of prayer. God chose, from the time of creation, to work on the earth through humans, not independent of them.
2. God accomplishes His work on the earth through people. He always has and He always will - even at the cost of becoming one Himself.
3. Is God all-powerful? Of course He is. But the Scripture reveals that when it comes to the affairs of the earth, God has **chosen** to work through people.

4. Is this not the story woven throughout the entire Bible?
 - Because of Abraham's prayers, Lot was not destroyed with Sodom. **Genesis 19:27, 29**
 - Because of Moses' prayers, God did not destroy the nation of Israel. **Psalm 106:23**
 - Because of the prophet Elisha's prayers, a woman's son was raised from the dead. **2 Kings 4:32-37**
 - Because of Hannah's prayers, God gave her a son (Samuel). **1 Samuel 1:10, 17-20**
 - Because of Samuel's prayers, God delivered the Israelite's from the Philistines. **1 Samuel 7:5-10**
 - Because of Jesus' prayers, His disciples saw His glory. **Luke 9:28-29, 32**
 - Because of Jesus' prayers, Peter's faith did not fail. **Luke 22:31-32**
 - Because of the disciples' prayers, they were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the Word with boldness. **Acts 4:23-31**
 - Because of believers' prayers, Paul was confident that he would be released from prison (and he was for a time). **Philippians 1:19; Philemon 22**
5. Do you see it? We could go on and on. This is but a brief list of people's prayers moving the hand of God and making a difference on this earth.
6. In our next section we will examine some clear Bible examples of this principle in action.

Do Our Prayers Really Make a Difference? – Part 2

Third, because the Bible gives clear testimony to the life-changing impact of prayer

1. We see clearly that God has purposed to work on the earth in response to the prayers of His people.
2. God's will is accomplished, only as God's people pray.
 - Is it God's will that His Word be declared to the world? We know that it is, yet we are told to pray for it to happen. **2 Thessalonians 3:1**
 - Is it God's will that people surrender to labor in His harvest field? We know that it is, yet we are told to pray for it. **Matthew 9:38**
 - Is it God's will for individuals to be saved? We know that it is (**1 Timothy 2:4**), yet Paul realized that if it was to happen, it would happen in answer to prayer. **Romans 10:1**
 - Is it God's will to establish Israel's kingdom on earth one day? We know that it is, yet Israel was instructed to pray for its establishment. **Matthew 6:10**
 - Either God is playing games with mankind or He truly needs our prayers and involvement.
3. Let's look into God's Word at some clear examples of the life-changing impact of prayer.
 - **1 Kings 18** - This is the story of Elijah praying for rain after 3 1/2 years of drought.
 - According to verse 1, whose idea was it to send rain? Whose will? Whose initiation? Clearly, it was God's.
 - Yet it's interesting that Elijah had to pray seven times before God sent the rain (vs. 42-45). Elijah didn't just walk up the mountain and say, "Let it rain." He labored and travailed in prayer.
 - Was it a coincidence that the rain came **after** Elijah prayed? Absolutely not! We are told in **James 5:17-18** that the rain came in direct answer to his prayers.
 - But why did Elijah need to pray? It is because God has chosen to work through people!
 - Even when it was God Himself initiating and wanting to do this, He still needed a man to pray and ask.
 - **Ephesians 3:20** teaches that God is able to do amazing things, but His power works **in us**. God has chosen to work in and through human beings on this earth.
 - **Exodus 32:7-14** - This is the story of Moses returning to Israel's camp and finding them in gross idolatry.
 - God knew it and saw it and told Moses about it. vs. 7-8
 - What was God's decision? vs. 9-10
 - Moses immediately begins to intercede on behalf of Israel in verses 11-13.
 - What was the result of his prayers? Moses' prayer changed the mind of God towards Israel (vs. 14). cf. **Psalms 106:23**
 - Without Moses' prayer, Israel was doomed - they were dead meat!
 - **2 Kings 20:1-6** - This is the story of King Hezekiah of Judah.

- Verse 1 clearly says, *"Thus saith the Lord..."* This was God's decision and it was given through Isaiah - *"Thou shalt die, and not live."*
- Hezekiah responds with passionate prayer. vs. 2-3
- How did God respond to his prayer? God said He would heal him and add 15 years to his life. vs. 4-6
- Had Hezekiah not prayed, what would have happened?
- **Jonah 3:1-10** - The story of Jonah and the wicked city of Nineveh.
 - God's decision was to destroy Nineveh in 40 days. vs. 1-4
 - How did the people respond to God's Word? They believed God (vs. 5) and they cried out to God in prayer (vs. 8-9).
 - What was the result of their prayers and repentance? God changed His mind and what God said He would do unto them, **He did it not.** vs. 10
- **1 Chronicles 21:14-17** - David had sinned against God, and God is sending judgment.
 - God sends an angel to destroy Jerusalem (vs. 15a). This was God's decision, but in the midst of carrying out God's orders, God stops the angel, changes His mind, and says, "That's enough."
 - Why did God do this? According to verse 15, *"The Lord beheld."* What did God behold? What did God see that made Him stop the angel from carrying out His orders?
 - God saw David and the elders of Israel on their knees praying. vs. 16-17
- **Ezekiel 22:30-31** - Ezekiel was a captive in Babylon who prophesied of Jerusalem's total destruction.
 - What is God saying in this sobering passage? He is saying, "While my justice demanded judgment, my love wanted forgiveness."
 - Had God been able to find a man among the people of the land (vs. 29) to simply seek His face and stand in the gap in prayer, God could have spared this city. It would have allowed God to show mercy.
 - God needed **a man**. God said, *"I sought for a man."* Because there was no man to intercede for this city, God's judgment fell.
 - What does this passage teach us? Many times there are things that God **could do** and **would do**, but He will **not** do, because there is no man to stand in the gap before Him.
- **Philippians 1:19; Philemon 22** - The apostle Paul was in prison, but was released after his first imprisonment.
 - According to Paul, why was he released? Through the prayers of the saints.

In Conclusion:

1. Does God need our prayers? According to the Bible He does! God made a choice of His will at creation to work on the earth in and through human instrumentality.
2. So firm was God's decision, that when it came time to provide a redemption plan for sinful mankind, God Himself was made in the likeness of men.
3. Your prayers are vital to the accomplishing of God's will on the earth.
Revelation 5:8 and **8:3-5** are mind-boggling passages that vividly depict the throne room of heaven and how essential the prayers of the saints are.
4. Christian, as Paul said, *"Pray without ceasing."* **1 Thessalonians 5:17**

5. Like Epaphras, labor fervently in prayer. **Colossians 4:12**
6. Satan will try desperately to convince you that your prayers have no impact and they make no eternal difference, but may we end this lesson with a statement from **James 5:16**:
"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."