

right doctrine that speaks to one's spiritual condition.

## FAITH VERSUS WORKS

*The necessity of obediently conforming one's life and actions to the requirements of the Mosaic Covenant is one of the most important controversies discussed in the pages of the New Testament. It is especially important in Paul's writings. (It is the primary issue being discussed in Galatians, one of the important issues in Romans, an important part of the discussion of Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians, and it is mentioned in passing in most of Paul's other letters.) When one becomes clear on the various issues that surround this controversy, he achieves greater clarity in his understanding of the gospel itself. In the notes that follow, I will attempt to articulate Paul's (and Jesus's) perspective on all of the various issues by approaching them from a few different angles. It may prove somewhat repetitious. But the issues are so complex, multifaceted, and tangled that I hope it will prove to be as clarifying as it is tedious.*

### *Important Concepts For Understanding the Issues Surrounding "Faith" and "Works"*

*If we are to understand the issues that surround the question of whether "works of the Law" have any role in one's salvation, we must understand some important concepts and make some important distinctions. In this section of the notes I explain some of these concepts and make some of these distinctions.*

#### WHAT IS MEANT BY "WORKS"

*The terms "works" and "works of the Law" are not always employed univocally. That is, each does not always mean exactly the same thing each and every time it is used. The term "work" always means a "deed" or an "action." And a "work of the Law," therefore, is always an "action taken in an effort to obey the Mosaic Covenant." Beyond that, each term can mean something a little different in each different context.*

134. In the New Testament, a "work of the Law" is an action taken or a deed that is done in an effort to do what the Mosaic Covenant requires.
135. There are at least two ways that the term "work" is used in the New Testament:
  - 135.1. The term "work" can be used as a shorthand for a "work of the Law." When it is used in this way, it will have all the flexibility of meaning and nuance that the fuller phrase "work of the Law" has. [See note below on "What Are Included in 'Works of the Law'?" for an explanation of some of that flexibility.]
  - 135.2. The term "work" can be used to indicate some kind of deed or action other than a "work of the Law." Notably, it can be used to indicate a "work of belief" (i.e., a "work of faith"). That latter is a deed or action that follows naturally from the fact that one believes and is committed to the truth of the gospel.
    - 135.2.1. Logically, it could also be used to indicate a "work of love," a "work of goodness," a "work of righteousness" (or, for that matter, a "work of unrighteousness"), a "work of service," or any other sort of deed or action that one could imagine. In each and

every context in which the term is employed, it is very important that one be clear about what class of actions or deeds is in view when the term “work” is used.

#### THE BASIS FOR MERCY VIS À VIS CONDITIONS FOR MERCY

136. Three important concepts that we need to understand clearly are the following: (i) the basis upon which one is granted *aionic* Life, (ii) a necessary condition for receiving *aionic* Life, and (iii) a sufficient condition for receiving *aionic* Life.

136.1. If X is the basis upon which I will be granted *aionic* Life, then X is a full and adequate explanation for *WHY* God will grant *aionic* Life to me.

136.1.1. According to Paul’s gospel, God’s sovereign choice to show me mercy is the ultimate basis for my receiving *aionic* Life. God’s choice to act toward me in mercy is the ultimate explanation for *WHY* I will receive the blessing of *aionic* Life. However, it can also be said that Jesus’ choice of me, accompanied by his crucifixion, his propitiation, his redemption, and his intercession on my behalf is also part of the basis upon which I will be granted *aionic* Life. All that Jesus has done or will do on behalf of those who belong to him contributes to a full and complete explanation for why I will be granted *aionic* Life.

136.1.1.1. In brief, the basis for my salvation is the sovereign choice of God to grant me mercy in connection with the work of Jesus on my behalf. Or, alternatively, it is the sovereign choice of God to respond positively to Jesus’ appeal for mercy on my behalf.

136.2. If X is a necessary condition for my receiving *aionic* Life, then if X is not the case (that is, if X is not a fulfilled condition), then I will not receive *aionic* Life from God. [In other words, if it is necessary for X to be true before I can receive *aionic* Life, the X is a necessary condition.]

136.2.1. According to Paul’s gospel, the only necessary condition for my receiving *aionic* Life is the presence in me of a “sanctified heart” (which typically, but not necessarily, manifests itself in my believing the truth with regard to Jesus being the Messiah). If there *does* exist a “sanctified heart” in me (or, if I *do* believe the truth about Jesus out of a sanctified heart), then I will, in fact, receive *aionic* Life; but if there *does not* exist a “sanctified heart” in me (or, if I *do not* believe the truth about Jesus out of a sanctified heart), then I will not, in fact, receive *aionic* Life. [The latter clause is what qualifies a “sanctified heart” as a necessary condition for *aionic* Life.]

136.2.2. NOTE: X can be a *necessary condition* for my receiving *aionic* Life without its being

the *basis* for my receiving *aionic* Life. However, X cannot be the *basis* for my receiving *aionic* Life without also being a *necessary condition* for my receiving *aionic* Life.

- 136.2.2.1. God's choice to act in mercy toward me is as much a necessary condition for my receiving *aionic* Life as is the presence in me of a sanctified heart. Both conditions must be met in order for me to receive Life, and they are independent of one another. It is logically possible for me to have a sanctified heart and for God to fail to choose to grant mercy to me. But while this is logically possible, it would be in violation of all that God has promised in and through his gospel. God has promised that he will grant Life to everyone who manifests a sanctified heart.

*While the basis for my salvation (namely, God's sovereign choice of me in connection with all that Jesus has done or will do on my behalf) can be construed as a necessary condition of my salvation, yet it is different from other necessary conditions for my salvation in this respect: it is a condition that has already been met by God himself. God chose me before the foundation of the world. God sent his Son Jesus into the world to die for me and to intercede for me in his capacity as my high priest. While these are all necessary in order for me to be saved, they are not things that need to be true about me (about what I do or who I am), they are things that God has put in place outside of me. Note, therefore, that the basis of my salvation is something that God does. It is a necessary condition that God meets on our behalf. The other necessary condition of my salvation is something that I must meet. In order that I be saved, it is necessary that I be a certain sort of person—namely, one who is sanctified.*

- 136.3. If X is a sufficient condition for my receiving *aionic* Life, then if X is the case (that is, if X is a fulfilled condition), then I will necessarily receive *aionic* Life from God; no other condition need also be met before I will get *aionic* Life.

- 136.3.1. According to Paul's gospel, given that God has seen to it to create the basis for my receiving *aionic* Life, then we can think of my having a "sanctified heart" as a sufficient condition for my receiving *aionic* Life. In other words, in order for me to receive *aionic* Life, it suffices that there be present in me a "sanctified heart" (which will, typically, but not necessarily, manifest itself in my believing the truth with regard to Jesus being the Messiah). If there exists a "sanctified heart" in me (or if I do believe the truth about Jesus out of a sanctified heart), then I will, in fact, receive *aionic* Life. Nothing else need be true of me besides that.

*This sounds like I am contradicting what I just said above. But note that in this note I am assuming that all the necessary conditions for my receiving eternal Life that constitute the BASIS of my salvation have already been met by God himself. Hence, because God has already fulfilled every other condition necessary for salvation, only one yet remains for me to fulfill in order to get eternal Life. Namely, that I give evidence of being sanctified by God in my inner being. Since showing evidence of sanctification is the only necessary condition that yet remains, in order for me to get eternal Life, it suffices that I show evidence of sanctification. In other words, in the light of what God has already done to lay the basis for my salvation, having a "sanctified heart" is a sufficient condition for me being*

*saved. Strictly speaking, it is NOT a sufficient condition (as we saw in the note above). But, for all practice purposes it is, because all the other necessary conditions have been fulfilled by God.*

136.3.1.1. Therefore, in the sense I have just described, having a sanctified heart is both a necessary and a sufficient condition for receiving Life.

136.3.1.2. If having a sanctified heart is a sufficient condition for receiving Life, then conformity to the religious requirements of the Law (Mosaic Covenant) such that I live like a Jew is not necessary in order to receive Life (assuming that one can have a sanctified heart without manifesting obedience to the religious requirements of the Law).

(A) Hence, a Gentile with a sanctified heart—who is living like a Gentile, and not like a Jew—can receive Life from God.

#### WHAT ARE INCLUDED IN “WORKS OF THE LAW”?

*When the New Testament (Paul, especially) speaks of “works of the Law,” to what that phrase refers is dependent upon the particular context within which it occurs. Therefore, whether “works of the Law” stand in opposition to “belief” depends upon what is meant by “works of the Law” in a particular context and upon exactly what issue is being addressed in that context.*

137. One can find three different ways in which the phrase “works of the Law” is used in the New Testament:

137.1. In some contexts, the phrase “works of the Law” is used to refer to any and every requirement that can be found in the Mosaic Covenant.

137.1.1. In this case, “works of the Law” include obedience to the moral requirements contained in the Law.

137.1.1.1. So, for example, obedience to instructions like “Do not murder”, “Do not steal”, “Do not bear false witness”, “Do not commit adultery”, etc.

137.1.2. But, it is not limited to moral requirements. It includes all the religious (both individual and communal) requirements and the requirements regarding social life as a people as well.

137.2. In other contexts, the phrase “works of the Law” is used to refer more narrowly to just those requirements found in the Mosaic Covenant (or the Torah generally) that constitute the distinctive religious way of life of Jews who keep the Mosaic Covenant.

137.2.1. So, for example: circumcision, Sabbath observance, dietary regulations, and observance of Jewish festivals.

137.2.1.1. This aspect of the Mosaic Covenant that makes the Jewish way of life distinctive consists of requirements that are not inherently moral in nature, but are strict-

ly religious in nature.

- 137.3. In still other contexts, the phrase “works of the Law” seems to be used, even more narrowly, to refer to the offering up of animal sacrifices and/or the temple rituals that went along with those sacrifices—offerings and rituals that were required by the Mosaic Covenant. These offerings, of course, constituted a very important and central part of the Jew’s distinctive way of life under the Mosaic Covenant.

#### WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO “KEEP” THE LAW

*A common understanding of the role that God intended for his Law is that it leads us to come to an understanding that we are sinners who stand condemned. The typical explanation runs like this: God knew that Israel (and analogously every human being) was incapable of “keeping” the Law. Hence, God commanded Israel to “keep” the Law, not because he expected them to do so, but in order that they might come to see—from their own experience—that they were incapable of “keeping” the Law. While this common understanding contains a very important insight into what Paul does teach concerning the Law, it is an incomplete and somewhat distorted understanding of his teaching. Paul would never say that we are INCAPABLE of keeping God’s Law. Consistent with what should be clear from the Torah itself, Paul understands that God fully expected Israel to “keep” his Law. However, Paul knew that it was in the very process of “keeping” the Law that one gained a profound understanding of his own innate sinfulness. The following notes are intended to clarify this perspective.*

138. A common misunderstanding of the Bible is to construe the notion of “keeping” the Law as synonymous with obeying the Law. That is not strictly correct.

- 138.1. To “keep” the Law (i.e., the Covenant that God made with Israel at Mt. Sinai in the time of Moses = the Mosaic Covenant) is to value it enough to want to preserve it, remember it, give heed to it, and, generally, to ensure that it is available to actively govern one’s life and behavior. The core idea is this: at heart, the one who “keeps” the Law is one who values and treasures it.

*A keepsake is something that one values enough that, rather than dispose of it or throw it aside, he takes steps to protect it, preserve it, and sustain it. The one who “keeps” the Law is one who values God’s covenant enough that, rather than dispose of it or cast it aside, he takes steps to protect it, preserve it, and sustain it.*

- 138.1.1. Included implicitly in the notion of “keeping” God’s Law is the notion of striving to live one’s life in conformity to its commands. If one treasures and values God’s covenant, as the notion of “keeping” it entails, then one will of necessity desire to live as it requires one to live. So, “keeping” the Law entails striving to obey the Law, but the meaning of the phrase “to keep the Law” is not, strictly speaking, identical in meaning to the phrase “to obey the Law.” The phrases are not synonymous. They mean different things.

- 138.1.2. A very important ramification of the above point is this: keeping the Law does not mean strict, total, and absolute obedience to each and every jot and tittle of the

Law. God's stated desire that Israel "keep" his Covenant is his desire that they value and treasure his Covenant and, therefore, act like they value and treasure it. But one could value and treasure God's covenant without being absolutely flawless in his obedience to each and everything that it required. God's stated desire is not that Israel be absolutely and completely flawless in meeting the requirements of the Law. His stated desire is that Israel be true and authentic in their desire to honor God and his covenant by striving to do what the Law requires.

- 138.1.2.1. In other words, it is entirely possible for a person to be said to have "kept" God's covenant who did not flawlessly meet each and every one of its requirements. For, ultimately, the issue is not one's performance. Ultimately, the issue is one's attitude toward God and the things of God (as those get expressed through choices and actions).
- 138.1.2.2. Built into the Law itself was a provision for moral failure. If one transgressed a commandment of the Law (e.g., one failed to love his neighbor [a moral commandment]), other instructions in the Law taught him what was required of him as a response to his moral failure. Namely, he was to offer up a particular offering in a particular sort of way. By offering up just what God required in response to his moral failure, the person was successfully "keeping" the Law, even though he had transgressed a commandment of the Law. In other words, he valued God and his covenant enough that when he transgressed God's Torah, he responded in just the sort of way that God had instructed him to respond. Hence, clearly one can be a moral failure at the same time that he is a keeper of the Law. What God had asked of Israel is that they "keep" his Law, not that they be morally perfect and perform moral goodness flawlessly.
- 138.2. From the above, we can see what Paul had in mind when he taught that "through the Law comes the knowledge of sin." He did not mean to suggest that it is through one's FAILURE to "keep" the Law that a person comes to understand his own sinfulness. Rather, it is through one's SUCCESS at "keeping" the Law that a person comes to understand his own sinfulness. Only when one earnestly strives to obey the Law (i.e., when one "keeps" the Law) can one discover how utterly void of moral goodness he is. His attempts to obey the Law confront him with all the many ways that he is not a morally good person, with how utterly powerless he is to actually be good. He may be able to meet the religious requirements of the Law. But with respect to the truly moral requirements, he is completely incapable of meeting them. And even if he offers up every offering that the

Law requires in response to his moral failings (thereby keeping the Law), such offerings do not make him a good person. Rather, those very offerings stand as clear evidence that he is NOT a good person. (If he were a good person, he would have no need to offer up such offerings.) Hence, it is through one's SUCCESS at keeping the Law that one confronts his FAILURE at being a good and worthy person.

•What I am saying here about what the Bible means by “keeping” the Law could also be said about what the biblical authors usually mean by “doing” or “practicing” the Law. Those phrases do not typically entail moral perfection and flawless performance of the Law's requirements any more than “keeping” the Law does.

### *Mistaken Beliefs among Paul's Contemporaries Regarding the Law*

#### NOTES ON MISTAKEN BELIEFS

There were a number of different mistaken beliefs and/or mindsets that Paul's Jewish contemporaries—conditioned as they were to obey the Law—were inclined to have. All of these false beliefs and faulty mindsets contributed to his Jewish contemporaries being mistaken about the role of the Law in their salvation—that is, about the relationship between obedience to the Law and the blessing of aionic Life. Paul confronts and opposes all of these different beliefs and mindsets at one point or another in his letters in the New Testament. If we can identify and analyze these false beliefs and mindsets and understand why Paul rejected them as dangerous, we will better understand Paul's gospel and better understand what Paul believed to be the truth about God's purposes. All of these false beliefs or mindsets are anti-gospel. That is, they are inimical to the gospel and tend to lead to a rejection of it. That rejection took two different forms in Paul's day. Sometimes it took the form of out and out unbelief—a refusal to believe the gospel. But other times it involved ostensible belief in the gospel, but it was belief in a distorted and corrupted version of the gospel. Either way, it involved a rejection of the true gospel taught by Paul.

139. When Paul insists that a person is saved by *pistis* (belief/faith) and NOT by “works of the Law,” he is attempting to counter one or more of seven different mistakes. The first three mistakes, while different, overlap and are interrelated. These first three mistakes are the mistaken beliefs that obedience to the Law and/or zealous support for Law-obedience is (i) a sufficient condition for receiving aionic Life, (ii) the basis (or, part of the basis) upon which one is granted aionic Life, or (iii) a necessary condition for receiving aionic Life. The fourth mistaken belief is the belief that because the Law is universal in its scope and relevance, it, therefore, must certainly be obeyed by anyone who seeks to receive aionic Life from God. The fifth mistaken belief is the two-fold belief that God can only grant aionic Life to a person who deserves it and that it is obedience to God's Law that renders a person deserving. The sixth mistaken belief is that God's ultimate provision and basis for extending mercy was the system of animal sacrifices included in the Law. And, finally, the seventh mistaken belief is that mankind, while imperfect and flawed, is not hopelessly damnable.

• All of these mistakes are mistakes that could be made either at the level of one's conscious, explicitly articulated beliefs or at the level of one's unconscious, tacit beliefs. What Paul opposes in his writings are not always, or necessarily, doctrines that are explicitly

held and promoted by others. Often, Paul's opponents would ostensibly embrace doctrines that were identical to Paul's. But while they embraced identical doctrines in theory, in practice they held very different attitudes and a very different mindset. In other words, their mindset and understanding, insofar as these were exhibited through their choices, actions, attitudes, etc., were fundamentally different from that of one who embraced Paul's understanding of the gospel. Their different mindset arose out of implicit assumptions that ran contrary to what Paul held to be true.

- The choices that human beings make and the lives they lead do not arise out of their conscious explicit beliefs; they arise out of an underlying implicit understanding of things. If one's implicit understanding of things is wrong, then his whole life will be wrong, regardless of how accurate his explicit, ostensible beliefs might be. Paul earnestly desired that those to whom he wrote might come to embrace, at the level of their real, working, implicit understanding of God and his promises and purposes, that which was accurate and true. It was not sufficient that they give an explicit nod to what is true. It was critical that they embrace what is true from the depth of who they were, with they result that they live their lives on the basis of it. It is out of that desire that Paul wrote his letters.

- The complaint is sometimes raised against Paul that the Pharisees (or Jews) did not actually believe what Paul accuses them of believing. Such an objection, of course, can only be based on their writings. But their writings—by their very nature—do not reflect the actual, real, working beliefs of the Pharisees (or Jews). They reflect their ostensible, explicit beliefs. Paul is never primarily interested in the explicit, ostensible beliefs of his opponents. His concern is what they ACTUALLY believe as evidenced by the way they live their lives. Accordingly, none of us today can legitimately object that the Pharisees (or Jews) did not actually believe what Paul accuses them of believing. We are in no position to know what their actual working beliefs were. But Paul WAS in such a position. He understood the Phariseism of his day, intimately.

140. One tendency of the Jews in biblical times was to consider their zealous support for and promotion of Law-obedience to be a *sufficient condition* for their receiving the blessing of Abraham, *aionic* Life. In other words, their tendency was to believe that, because they zealously supported and promoted Law-obedience they would, by virtue of that fact itself, be granted *aionic* Life. Paul (and Jesus) contended that such a belief was false.

140.1. Often this took the form of thinking that simply being a Jew was a sufficient condition for their being granted *aionic* Life. However, with this, there was an underlying assumption that every Jew was *ipso facto* a zealous supporter of and promoter of Law-obedience. They would likely concede that a Jew who rejected Law-obedience altogether was, by virtue of that fact, rejecting his very identity as a Jew. And, as a consequence, such an individual could not expect to be granted *aionic* Life.

140.1.1. Some Jews of the time believed that zealous support for and promotion of Law-obedience would be sufficient to their obtaining *aionic* Life in and of itself. Their assumption was that God would be pleased by an individual's fervent support for and advocacy for obedience to his Law—irrespective of whether that individual himself obeyed the Law. Hence, they believed that God would consider the person who *championed* Law-obedience to be righteous and would grant him *aionic* Life. By the same token, God would oppose and condemn anyone who made himself a detractor

of Law-obedience.

- 140.1.1.1. To this mindset, Paul makes the following point: the fact that a person would “champion” Law-obedience is not, in and of itself, particularly significant nor pleasing to God. What is significant to God is when a person is himself obedient to the Law, not when he supports or champions obedience to the Law. The person who champions obedience to the Law, while not actually obeying the Law, is an evil pretender. He is not an authentically sanctified individual.
- 140.1.1.2. This is the primary point that Paul is pressing in Romans 2:11–29.
- 140.1.2. Many Jews of the time likely recognized (as Paul himself counseled) that zealous support for and promotion of Law-obedience—without actual personal obedience to the Law— would most certainly NOT result in *aionic* Life. Therefore, the perspective of these Jews, cannot be characterized as holding this mistaken belief: that zealous *support* for Law-obedience met a sufficient condition for receiving *aionic* Life. Rather, the mistaken belief they held was this: that their personal *obedience* to the Law is what met a *sufficient condition* for receiving *aionic* Life. In other words, they believed that *aionic* Life would be granted to anyone who lived a life that successfully conformed to what the Law required.
- 140.2. This mistaken belief likely took two different forms:
  - 140.2.1. Zealous support for Law-obedience (or, alternatively, personal obedience to the Law) was a sufficient condition for being granted *aionic* Life because such a person deserved the blessing of *aionic* Life.
  - 140.2.2. Zealous support for Law-obedience (or, alternatively, personal obedience to the Law) was a sufficient condition for being granted *aionic* Life because such a person would receive mercy from God and, as a gift of mercy, God would grant the blessing of *aionic* Life.
    - 140.2.2.1. According to Paul, this belief is wrong. When it takes the form of personal obedience to the Law being a sufficient condition for obtaining Life, it is only subtly wrong. But while it is only subtly wrong, it is tragically wrong nonetheless.
- 140.3. Paul insisted that this perspective—even in its least objectionable form (namely, that obedience to the Law was a sufficient condition for God granting mercy)—was false, because it completely misunderstood God's purposes. In particular, it misunderstood what God had purposed to do in and through his *messiah*, Jesus. In God's eternal purposes, the basis for his granting mercy and *aionic* Life was centered in all that Jesus the Messiah did

on our behalf. Especially, it is centered in Jesus' interceding for us and securing mercy from God on our behalf. Therefore, Jesus' choice to serve as an individual's advocate is a necessary condition that must be met in order for an individual to be saved into Life. Hence, Law-obedience is not a sufficient condition for being saved. One must also receive the approval of Jesus the Messiah in the form of his choosing to act as that person's advocate and intercessor.

140.3.1. And for whom will Jesus choose to serve as such an advocate? In God's eternal purposes, there is ultimately one and only one condition placed on being an individual for whom Jesus will serve as advocate (and thereby secure the divine mercy that results in *aionic* Life). Namely, the one who shows evidence of a *sanctified heart* is the one for whom Jesus will choose to intercede. According to Paul, the *typical* evidence that one is sanctified in his inner core (and, therefore, meets the one absolutely necessary condition for being saved from death into *aionic* Life through Jesus' intercession) is the fact that he embraces the truth that Jesus is God's *messiah*. Living a life of conformity to what the Mosaic Law requires—as valuable and important as that can be—would not result in Jesus' interceding for him, unless it was accompanied by a sanctified heart that embraced the truth about Jesus being the Messiah. Hence, Law-obedience *per se* is not sufficient to save a person. It is necessary to show evidence of a sanctified heart—and, typically, that means that it is necessary to believe the truth about Jesus.

140.3.2. In this sense, no human being can ever attain Life (and be saved from death) by his "works of the Law." That is to say, one's Law-obedience alone—no matter how blameless he is by the standard of the Law—is not sufficient to secure for him the mercy from God that will grant him Life.

141. A second tendency of the Jews in biblical times was to manifest an implicit mindset that obedience to the Law was the basis (or, was part of the basis) upon which one would be granted *aionic* Life. Paul (and Jesus) contended that such a belief was false.

*Note that what was said above with respect to the first false belief would apply to this false belief as well. Specifically, one might consider his zealous support for the Law—rather than his actual personal obedience to it—as the basis for his receiving *aionic* Life. Or, he might hold this belief as an unconscious, working belief rather than an explicit belief. (Indeed, he might explicitly deny that he believes it and yet, at the same time, show by his actions that it is his true working belief.) Also, this belief could take one of two forms: it could involve his believing that Law-obedience is the basis upon which he deserves *aionic* Life, or it could involve his believing that Law-obedience is the basis upon which he will be granted *aionic* Life as a gift of divine mercy.*

141.1. Paul insisted that the one and only way that any human being will ever receive *aionic* Life is as a result of, and on the basis of, God's sovereign choice to grant mercy—specifically,

his sovereign choice to grant *aionic* Life as a merciful gift to whomever he wills. The reason why a particular individual will be granted Life, then, is none other than the fact that God has mercifully chosen to do so.

- 141.1.1. No human being will ever be granted *aionic* Life apart from God's sovereign choice to do so as a merciful gift to that individual—a mercy which, according to God's ordained purposes, will be granted in response to Jesus' advocacy and intercession.
- 141.1.2. Accordingly, it is certainly the case that no human being will ever be granted *aionic* Life on the basis of his obedience to the Law. In other words, the reason WHY God granted Life to a particular individual will never be because that individual was obedient to the Law. Granted, certain individuals who keep or have kept the Law will receive *aionic* Life in accord with their obedience to the Law. But the reason WHY God will grant Life to them is not because they obeyed the Law. Rather, the reason WHY he will grant Life to them is simply because he has sovereignly chosen to be merciful to them.

*A person's obedience to the Law can never compel God to grant mercy and Life to him. God would be fully within his rights to condemn to death a depraved sinner who committed his life to obeying the Law. The fact that a depraved sinner has obeyed the Law does not make him a good person, worthy of being rewarded with Life. Rather—in the event that God should choose to extend mercy to such an individual—it merely makes him a fit recipient of God's mercy.*

- 141.1.3. In this sense, no human being can ever attain Life (and be saved from death) by his “works of the Law.” To be specific, one's “works of the Law” can never serve as the BASIS for his receiving *aionic* Life. One's Law-obedience is never the reason WHY God will grant him Life.

*For any individual under the Mosaic Covenant prior to the time when Jesus came and revealed himself to be the Messiah, Law-obedience was typically the condition that, if fulfilled, would result in God's granting him mercy and Life. But even then, at that time, his Law-obedience was not the BASIS for his receiving mercy and Life. Rather, the BASIS for his receiving mercy was God's sovereign choice to extend mercy in response to the advocacy of Jesus. The individual's Law-obedience was merely the condition that God had placed on his receiving mercy—for that time, place, condition, and circumstance. (For, in connection with the Law of Moses, God had said, in effect, “if you will keep my covenant, you shall be granted Life.”)*

- 141.1.3.1. The above, I think, is the perspective that lies behind what Paul is saying in Romans 3:19–20.
- 141.2. Paul clearly maintained that God's intention, from the very beginning, was to sovereignly choose to grant *aionic* Life to whomever he willed, as an act of MERCY.
  - 141.2.1. The ultimate condition that God would place on receiving his mercy was for an individual to be open and receptive to the truth of God—most especially to the truth about Jesus. But God had always intended that this open receptivity to the truth

[=pistis = belief] be a condition for receiving mercy, not that it be the basis upon which one would receive mercy.

- 141.2.1.1. Such receptivity to the truth [=pistis = belief] does not and cannot make a person *deserving* of [or *worthy* of] the blessing of *aionic* Life. At best, it makes him a fit recipient of God's mercy.
- 141.2.2. Given the nature of a human being's inherent moral unworthiness, faithful obedience to the requirements of the Mosaic Covenant is not sufficient to overcome or compensate for what his moral depravity deserves. Accordingly, no human being could ever be granted *aionic* life as a deserved "reward" for his faithfulness in "keeping" the Law. Even complete blamelessness in one's keeping the Covenant would not be good enough to make a person worthy of *aionic* Life.
- 141.2.3. Due to the human tendency to view oneself (by self-deception) as "righteous," the Jews of biblical times tended toward this very mistaken mindset—namely, that their faithful obedience to the Covenant made them "worthy" of *aionic* Life.

*Jesus and the apostles spoke forcefully against just such a mistaken mindset.*

*It WAS, however, a mindset more than it was an explicit belief or doctrine. The Jews of biblical times were not ignorant of the universal need for God's mercy. Hence, it is highly unlikely that many of them would have explicitly taught that we "earn" or make ourselves "worthy" of *aionic* Life through faithful obedience to the Covenant. Hence, it would not be at all surprising if the extant literature—insofar as it reflects the teaching of first-century Phariseism—does not reflect any explicit teaching that espouses a doctrine of eternal Life through self-achieved righteousness and worthiness (rather than mercy).*

*Some people would criticize my reading of Paul's (and Jesus') criticism of the Pharisees here as being a misrepresentation of what the Pharisees actually taught and believed. They argue that either (i) I am misunderstanding Paul, or (ii) Paul himself is misrepresenting contemporary Pharisaical views. These criticisms are unfounded. Paul's response to his contemporaries is not a response to their conscious beliefs—that is, it is not a response to their explicit teaching and their formal doctrine. Rather, Paul is responding to their unconscious, working beliefs—to their ultimately real attitudes and mindset. Realistically, we would not expect any Jewish teacher to explicitly teach that one is saved by showing himself worthy of God's blessing due to his self-made righteousness—a righteousness in which God plays no part at all. But just because a self-respecting Pharisee would never explicitly admit to such a doctrine does not rule out the possibility that it was their actual mindset, attitude, and self-concept. What concerns Paul—and is the target of his rebuke and warning—is the real mindset of the Pharisees. He does not target the theology and doctrine that they explicitly, ostensibly espouse. He targets the implicit theology and doctrine that they actually embrace. Therefore, an absence of evidence that any Pharisee ever taught a doctrine explicitly, is not proof that Paul has misrepresented Phariseism. He is responding to the real working mindset of the Pharisees, not their official doctrines and creeds. Paul was clearly in a better position than we are to know the real working mindset of the Pharisees.*

142. A third tendency of the Jews in biblical times was to consider obedience to the Law to be a necessary condition for receiving *aionic* Life. In other words, their tendency was to believe that, apart from obedience to the Law, no one could ever be granted *aionic* Life. Paul con-

tended that such a belief was false.

*Most of what we said above with respect to the first tendency would also apply to this tendency. Specifically, one might have considered his zealous support for the Law—instead of his actual personal obedience to the Law—as the necessary condition for one’s receiving aionic Life. Or, one might hold this belief as an unconscious, working belief rather than an explicit belief. (Indeed, he might explicitly deny that he believes it at the same time that it is his real working belief.) Also, the belief could take one of two forms: it could take the form of his Law obedience being the necessary condition for being deemed worthy or deserving of aionic Life, or it could take the form of his Law obedience being the necessary condition for receiving aionic Life as a gift of divine mercy.*

142.1. To the extent that a Jew in biblical times conceded that the basis of Life and mercy was the sovereign choice of God, this third mindset involved the belief that God’s sovereign choice to extend mercy was directed only toward those who fulfilled a certain qualifying condition. That condition, so they thought, involved a life of conformity to what the Law required. Specifically, the necessary condition for receiving mercy from God and obtaining *aionic* Life was living a life of total and strict obedience to all that the Law required.

142.1.1. Paul insisted that this perspective completely misunderstood God's purposes. In particular, it misunderstood what God had purposed to do in and through his *messiah*, Jesus. In God’s eternal purposes, there is ultimately only one qualifying condition for receiving the divine mercy that results in Life—namely, the presence of a sanctified heart. And the typical manifestation of a sanctified heart was belief that Jesus is God’s *messiah* (along with all that that entailed). Ultimately, living one’s life in conformity to what the Mosaic Law requires is not a necessary part of the qualifying condition for receiving God’s divine mercy and Life. Therefore, it is a serious mistake to insist that keeping the Law is a universally necessary condition for receiving the divine mercy that results in *aionic* Life.

142.1.2. Eternal (*aionic*) Life is promised to anyone and everyone who embraces the truth that Jesus is the Messiah and all that that truth entails. That is the gospel message in its typical form. This needs to be further clarified, qualified, and filled out in the way that these notes have done above; but there is no further condition to the effect that a person must live a life of faithful obedience to the requirements of the Mosaic Covenant in order to inherit *aionic* Life. In this sense, therefore, “works of the Law” are not a necessary condition placed on salvation from death. Rather, one is saved by “belief” alone. For, assuming it stems from authentic sanctification, belief in Jesus is a sufficient condition for being granted Life.

142.1.3. From before the foundation of the world, God’s intention for what would ultimately indicate those individuals who would be granted the blessing of Abraham was a ready acceptance of the truth about Jesus, God’s *messiah*. (Or, *more accurately*, the ul-

timate indicator is a heart that is willing and ready to submit to God's truth and, hence, is willing and ready to accept the truth about Jesus.) It was never God's intention to make faithful obedience to the requirements of the Mosaic Covenant the final and ultimate indicator of who would be granted the blessing of Abraham, *aionic* Life.

- 142.1.4. Granted, insofar as his people Israel were under the Mosaic Covenant, obedience to the Law could, and DID, serve as a condition God placed on receiving mercy. But it was not, in and of itself, intended to be the ultimate condition for receiving mercy. Hence, it is not a necessary condition. The ultimate condition that God intended was the condition of being open and receptive to the truth about Jesus. Therefore, the only truly *necessary* condition for receiving mercy is the condition that one have a heart that is receptive to God's truth concerning his Messiah.

*Anyone who had the sort of heart that desired to honor, respect, and submit to the requirements of God's Covenant had a heart that would be similarly open and receptive to the truth about Jesus being the messiah. Hence, faithfulness to "keep" God's covenant could serve as a condition for receiving God's mercy. But it could do so, not because it was the ultimate condition placed on God's mercy, but rather because it disclosed a heart that ultimately would fulfill the one condition that was a necessary condition. The ultimate reality that marks an individual as destined to receive God's mercy and the blessing of *aionic* Life is sanctification by the Spirit of God. One can be sanctified by the Spirit of God in a context where that sanctification will manifest itself through Law-obedience. But, after the revelation of Jesus the Messiah, one will be sanctified by the Spirit of God in a context where that sanctification will typically manifest itself through belief in Jesus—something other than Law-obedience. Clearly, then, Law-obedience is NOT a condition that God has placed on receiving *aionic* Life for every human being throughout all time and in every place. And, indeed, as we seen in these notes, it is not a NECESSARY condition at all.*

- 142.1.5. It is for this very reason that a Gentile can be granted *aionic* Life even though he is totally ignorant of the requirements of the Mosaic Covenant. A Gentile who responds positively to the message about Jesus will be granted *aionic* Life in spite of the fact that he does not "keep" the Mosaic Covenant. Hence, it is not necessary for a Gentile to live like a Jew (in his obedience to the Law) in order to receive the blessing of Abraham (*aionic* Life).

- 142.1.5.1. This is the position that Paul is arguing for passionately in the book of Galatians.

- 142.2. It was a misunderstanding of the *Torah* that led the Jews of biblical times to think that obedience to the Mosaic Covenant was a necessary condition (indeed, that it was the ultimate condition) that God had placed on receiving the blessing of Abraham (*aionic* Life). It is completely understandable that they made such a mistake; but it was a mistake nonetheless.

- 142.2.1. This misunderstanding seems to be what lies behind the insistence of the former Pharisees who had come to believe in Jesus in Acts 15:5, "It is necessary to circumcise them [the Gentiles] and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses." See also Acts 15:1.

*If God required Jews to "keep" the Mosaic Covenant in order to be right with their God, why would he not require it of Gentiles in order for them to be right with the God of Israel? It is certainly reasonable to reach such a conclusion. However, this conclusion is not right; it is not what God had in mind. It fails to recognize the special and unique nature of the Jews' role in God's purposes. Accordingly, it fails to recognize the true role that God intended for the Law to play. And, therefore, it fails to recognize the ultimate basis for God's acceptance of a human being, having mistakenly concluded that Law-obedience was it.*

143. A fourth tendency of the Jews in biblical times was to consider the Law (the Mosaic Covenant) to be universal in its scope and relevance. Paul (implicitly, at least) rejects this notion. As Paul understands it, the Law is for the Jews, not the Gentiles. Hence, Gentiles can be saved by the mercy of God through Jesus, *apart from "works of the Law."* For the Law (the Mosaic Covenant) is not a covenant between God and Gentiles. It is a covenant between God and Jews.

*It is likely that this tendency is another contributing factor to the misunderstanding that certain Jewish-followers express in Acts 15:1, 5.*

- 143.1. As Paul understands it, the Mosaic Covenant was a covenant that God made especially with a special people group, Israel. In the context of the Mosaic Covenant, God (i) was making unique promises to them, (ii) had a unique role for them, and (iii) had special obligations for them. The Mosaic Covenant spells out the terms of that unique relationship between the creator (as the God of Israel) and Israel (as his unique people). *Strictly speaking, therefore, the Mosaic Covenant has no direct relevance to anyone except the people of Israel.*

*While it has no "direct" relevance, the Mosaic Covenant does have indirect relevance to Gentiles. Some of the requirements of the Mosaic Covenant involve the obligation to be "righteous" and "godly" people. However, that is a requirement that pertains universally to every human being. The creator expects each and every human being as a human being to be "righteous" and "godly." Accordingly, to the extent that the requirements of the Law spell out, in specific terms, what God expects the godliness and righteousness of the Jews to look like, to that extent the requirements of the Law also pertain to Gentiles. For the godliness and righteousness that God expects of Gentiles will look exactly like the godliness and righteousness that he expects of the Jews. But such requirements do not pertain to Gentiles because they are commanded in the Law, as if the Law were applicable to Gentiles. Rather, they pertain to Gentiles because such requirements overlap with requirements that exist for each and every human being as a human being.*

- 143.1.1. The role of the Mosaic Covenant, therefore, was to determine who was and who was not a faithful member of the people of Israel, the chosen people of God. The Jew who took God's covenant seriously by striving to live his life in faithful obedience to its requirements was a "true" Jew. He demonstrated himself to be a member

in good standing of the people of Israel. The individual Jew who failed to take God's covenant seriously, the Jew who disregarded what the Mosaic Covenant required—this individual was not a member in good standing of the people of Israel. He was cut off from the people of Israel and from the blessings that had been promised to them.

143.1.2. By its very nature, the Mosaic Covenant is a “national” Covenant. That is, it is a covenant between God and a *people group*. Many of the requirements of the Mosaic Covenant involve requirements with respect to how Israel as an entire people group is to organize itself and conduct its affairs as a group. Accordingly, it is not possible for an individual by himself to fulfill all the requirements of the Covenant. Either the entire people group is directed toward and focused on keeping the Covenant, or the Covenant is not being kept. One isolated individual by himself cannot fulfill the terms of God's Covenant with Israel.

• As a consequence of the “national” character of the Law, a Jew who understands the true nature of the Mosaic Covenant will feel a certain sort of freedom from keeping the Covenant so long as the people as a whole have not decided to get serious about keeping the Covenant. Since the individual alone is not able to keep the Covenant, he realizes that the Covenant will not be kept until such time as the whole “nation” is on board.

• In part, I think we can understand Paul's freedom to disregard the Covenant in order “to live like a Gentile when among Gentiles” in the light of this truth about the Covenant. The majority of Jews of Paul's day were in rebellion against their God and were not at all inclined to take God's covenant seriously. (As least, not in a way that God would find acceptable.) As individuals, they were not taking God's Law seriously in the right sort of way. And as a people group, they most certainly were not taking it seriously in the right sort of way. Paul knew that the day would come when God would pour out his Spirit on all of TRUE Israel and, being wholly sanctified, the Israel of that day would all agree together to keep God's covenant. When that day arrived, if Paul were still around, he would most assuredly be eager to keep the Covenant with all of his kinsmen. But that day had not yet arrived while Paul was still alive. His kinsmen had not taken on the project of faithfully fulfilling their obligations as the people of God. Accordingly, Paul felt free to disregard the Mosaic Covenant and to live like a Gentile when among the Gentiles for the sake of spreading the gospel message to them. Paul seemed to understand that he was living during the time that Jesus characterized as “the time of the Gentiles” [Luke 21:24].

143.1.3. In general, the Jew who believes in the gospel of Jesus the Messiah (and therefore knows and understands that his acceptance by God hinges on his belief in Jesus, and not on his performance relative to Law-obedience) is “free” from the non-moral requirements of the Mosaic Covenant. He is free not to live his life in conformity to those non-moral requirements. Yet, at the same time, he is equally free to live in strict and total conformity to those same non-moral requirements. He is free to do whatever wisdom, goodness, love, and circumstances dictate with respect to the non-moral requirements of the Law.

•No human being is ever “free” from the moral requirements of the Mosaic Covenant. It is NEVER permissible to disregard the dic-

tates of righteousness, goodness, godliness, love, and wisdom. A human being would be morally obligated to pursue the moral requirements of the Mosaic Covenant even if the Mosaic Covenant had never been given by God. Those moral requirements are part and parcel of what it means to be a human being created in the "image of God." Mankind did not need a Law to inform them of such requirements.

•Because his ultimate status as one who will be granted divine mercy is not at stake, a Jew has the freedom not to live like a Jew—that is, not to live in conformity to the distinctive requirements that the Mosaic Covenant places on Jews. As love, goodness, righteousness, or wisdom direct, he is free to disregard those non-moral requirements (so long as his doing so is not a manifestation of rebellion against God).

143.1.4. Paul NEVER suggests that it would be WRONG for a Jesus-believing Jew to take God's covenant seriously by striving to live his life in faithful obedience to all that it requires. Quite to the contrary, it would appear that Paul himself would take great delight in living in faithful obedience to all that the Law required—assuming he would not be undermining the truth of the gospel by doing so, and assuming his actions would not get in the way of others hearing and receiving the gospel message. Under normal circumstances, Paul would fully expect a Jew to fulfill his unique obligations as a Jew. The individual Jew's belief in Jesus did not negate his special obligations as a Jew.

• It is a common misunderstanding of Paul's position that he suggests exactly what I have denied that he suggests in the note above. Specifically, that Paul held that it would be wrong—contrary to the gospel—for a Jew who believed that Jesus was the Messiah to go on living a life of obedience to the Law. For such a Jesus-believing Jew to live a life committed to doing "works of the Law" would amount to his undermining the truth that "belief" is a sufficient condition for salvation. And to undermine the truth of the gospel in this way would be an egregious offense against God. But, contrary to what many assert, this is NOT what Paul believes. For Paul, it is not necessarily wrong for a Jew to live like a Jew. He did not see a Jesus-believing Jew's living in strict conformity to the requirements of the Mosaic Covenant as faithless, or as disobedient to the truth of the gospel. Understanding Paul to be saying the opposite results from misunderstanding Paul's teaching with regard to belief vis à vis "works of the Law" in N.T. books like Galatians. But what Paul is arguing in Galatians is not that it is a betrayal of the gospel for a Jew to live like a Jew. What is a betrayal of the gospel is for a Jew (or misguided Gentile) to insist that a Gentile—in order to be a bona fide follower of the Messiah who will inherit eternal Life—must live like a Jew. Hence, Paul does insist that it is wrong, and an egregious denial of the truth of the gospel, for anyone to maintain that a person must "keep" the Mosaic Covenant (including all of the distinctive non-moral obligations placed on the Jews) in order to be granted aionic Life. However, Paul never suggests that it is wrong and an egregious denial of the truth of the gospel to maintain that a Jew must "keep" all of the Mosaic Covenant in order for him to be a member in good-standing of the Jewish people. Hence, Paul's perspective is NOT that there is anything wrong with a person's choosing to live in faithful obedience to all that the Law requires. Rather, his perspective is that there is something terribly wrong with a person's insisting that others (notably Gentiles) must live in faithful obedience to all that the Law requires in order to receive aionic Life.

144. A fifth tendency of the Jews in biblical times was to believe that God could never grant aionic Life to an individual unless that individual was deserving of it. Additionally, they tended to believe that the life that was intrinsically deserving of God's blessing was a life of obedience to what the Mosaic Covenant required. (For that was the very purpose of God's Torah to his

people Israel—so that they might know how to live lives that were intrinsically pleasing to God and deserving of his blessing.) Hence, no man can be granted the gift of *aionic* Life who does not keep the Law and strive to obediently conform to its requirements.

- 144.1. Now most of the Jews of biblical times would ostensibly have conceded the fact that *aionic* Life can only come to a sinful human being as a gift of divine mercy. Yet, at the same time, their tendency (as it has also been for many Christians down through history) was to believe that God would never give *aionic* Life to anyone who was not worthy of it. The fact that these two beliefs lay in contradiction with one another did not deter them (just as it does not deter Christians today). For Paul, the truth lies on the side of divine mercy. *Aionic* Life can only be obtained as a gift of mercy. It can never be deserved or earned.
- 144.1.1. The mistake made by Paul's contemporaries likely stemmed from their failure to understand the distinction between being "pleasing" to God and being "worthy of God's blessing." It can rightly be said that God would never give *aionic* Life to one who was not pleasing (to him). If one does not think too carefully and too deeply about what that means, he can easily think that it follows that God would never give *aionic* Life to one who was not worthy (of it). However, being "pleasing" to God and being "worthy of God's blessing" are two very different concepts. The former does not entail the latter. One can, in fact, be "pleasing" to God without being worthy of his blessing.
- 144.1.1.1. Being "pleasing" to God without being worthy of God's blessing is exactly what the New Testament espouses to be at the heart of the gospel. The "righteous" man who pleases God does so because (i) he has repented and turned his heart toward God, (ii) he has a broken and contrite heart, (iii) he has an authentic desire to honor, know, love, serve, and obey God, (iv) he possesses every attribute described in the Beatitudes, etc. It is easy to see why such a man would be pleasing to God in a way that the unrighteous man (who is unrepentant, self-deceived, arrogant, rebellious, etc.) would not be. But while the righteous man (so defined) is more positively inclined toward God than is the unrighteous man, he is nevertheless still an evil, morally depraved, rebel against God at the deepest-most level of his being. And he still manifests all sorts of evil as a consequence of his depravity. Accordingly, the righteous man who is pleasing to God is NOT an objectively and unqualifiedly GOOD man. Rather, he is fundamentally evil. And as such, this righteous man is not, and cannot be, WORTHY of *aionic* Life.

- 144.1.1.2. Because the Jews contemporary to Jesus and Paul tended to blur the distinction between being pleasing to God and being worthy of his blessing, they tended to believe the following: God would not grant his merciful gift of *aionic* Life to any human being who did not live a life that was intrinsically pleasing to him, and this—in their minds—is tantamount to saying that God would not grant his merciful gift of *aionic* Life to any human being who was not worthy of it. (While the latter clause is a flagrant contradiction, it is a belief that is commonly held today, no less than in the time of Jesus and Paul.)
- 144.2. The truth, according to Paul, is that no sinful human being this side of eternity could ever possibly be worthy of God's blessing. Each and every human being is too fundamentally evil and depraved to ever be unqualifiedly worthy (no matter how earnestly, sincerely, and successfully he obeys God's Law). Therefore, no human being could ever deserve *aionic* Life. And neither could God's gift of mercy ever be based on the fact that an individual has been unqualifiedly deserving of it.
- 144.2.1. One frequent misunderstanding of Paul is to construe him to be saying this: while outward obedience to what the Law requires can never make a person unqualifiedly deserving, yet obedience to what the Law requires that stems from a Spirit-produced transformation of one's inner being *would, in fact*, make a person unqualifiedly deserving. Now it is true that the latter would make a person *pleasing* to God in a way that mere outward obedience would not. But it would not make him objectively *worthy* or unqualifiedly *deserving*. Works of obedience performed from a sanctified heart are, indeed, pleasing to God. But they are NOT objectively good. They do not display the sort of pure, objective goodness that would obligate God to bless a person. Even though they stem from a sanctified heart, they are nonetheless the actions of a fundamentally evil and depraved sinner. And, as such, they are not inherently, intrinsically, nor sufficiently *deserving* of God's blessing.
- 144.2.1.1. It is important to understand that, for Paul, God sanctifies his chosen ones in order to mark them as individuals to whom he purposes to grant MERCY. He does NOT sanctify his chosen ones in order to make them *good enough* to be deserving of his blessing. No "holy one" will receive the blessing of Abraham because he is somehow worthy of it—no matter how "sanctified" he has become. Each and every "holy one" will receive the blessing of Abraham because God has chosen to extend him mercy.
- 144.2.2. God's intention, from before the beginning of created reality, was to grant *aionic*

Life as an act of mercy. To show mercy is (by definition) to be good to someone who does not deserve to receive goodness. By its very nature, therefore, *one cannot be worthy of or deserving of mercy*. By the same token, mercy is to be good to someone to whom one is not indebted or beholden. Paul's concern throughout his teaching is that it be perfectly clear that, according to the gospel he proclaims, *aionic* Life is given strictly as a gift of mercy. Paul is careful to oppose any understanding of the gospel that begins from the attitude or mindset that one's Law-obedience has somehow rendered him deserving of the divine mercy that grants *aionic* Life, or that his Law-obedience has somehow obligated God to act in mercy toward him. Paul insists that, in our understanding of the gospel, we not lose sight of the fact that *aionic* Life comes to us as a gift of God's mercy, pure and simple.

- 144.2.3. The level at which this mistake is most evident is at the attitudinal level, not at the level of explicit doctrinal belief. Paul is primarily concerned that the follower of Jesus—at the level of his actual working understanding—might fail to appreciate the gift of mercy that is granted to him through Jesus.
  - 144.2.3.1. Some of Paul's contemporary Jesus-followers would espouse doctrines that were identical to those that Paul espoused and taught, but, at the same time, they would exhibit various attitudes and mindsets that betrayed the fact that their actual, working understanding was that Law-obedience somehow earned or elicited God's gift of mercy. Paul sees this as a very important flaw in their actual, working understanding. (Even though there may be no discernible flaw at all in the understanding that they explicitly articulate.) And, in some cases, he feared it might even be a fatal flaw.
  - 144.2.3.2. If a Jew did explicitly believe and teach that Law-obedience made one *deserving* of God's mercy, his teaching would, of course, be explicitly inimical to Paul's teaching. But such teaching was likely very rare. Indeed, it is very possible that no such teaching ever existed. That the ultimate outcome of our lives depends utterly on the mercy of God seems to have been widely understood and believed by the first century Jews. It seems highly improbable, therefore, that any Jew of that day would explicitly espouse a doctrine contrary to this perspective—namely, that we “earned” *aionic* Life through Law-obedience. But, while this may not have been taught explicitly, it was often implicitly and tacitly assumed in one way or another. It is just such an implicit assumption that Paul feels compelled to identify and correct.

- 144.2.4. The nub of the above discussion comes to this: Paul does not want the fact that *aionic* Life is a gift of mercy to be undermined, diminished, or eclipsed in any way by one's mistaken notion that his Law-keeping makes him somehow deserving of God's mercy.
145. A sixth tendency of the Jews in biblical times was to believe that, when God entered into his Covenant with the people of Israel (the Mosaic Covenant), he provided the BASIS upon which they could obtain mercy from him—namely, on the basis of a system of sacrificial offerings. They tended to believe that God would grant *aionic* Life as a gift of his divine mercy on the BASIS of the animal sacrifices prescribed by the Law.
- 145.1. While it is, in fact, true that the system of animal sacrifices required in and by the Mosaic Covenant did serve as the means whereby Jews under the Mosaic Covenant appealed to God for mercy, it was never the case that those animal sacrifices formed the basis upon which God would grant them mercy. From before the beginning of created reality, the one and only basis upon which God would ever grant mercy to anyone was the sovereign choice of God to grant mercy to him, and that divine choice would always be expressed through a divine response to the intercession of Jesus the Messiah, our true high priest, who appealed to God for mercy through the sacrifice of his own life.
- 145.1.1. The animal sacrifices required by the Mosaic Covenant, therefore, were merely placeholders. They did little more than anticipate the true sacrifice that formed a part of the real basis upon which God will grant mercy (namely, Jesus' crucifixion on the cross).
146. A seventh tendency of the Jews in biblical times (as it has been for mankind from the very beginning) was to FAIL to understand how profoundly and incurably evil they were, and to fail to understand how hopelessly damnable they were.
- 146.1. They typically did understand that they were imperfect and morally flawed; but they tended not to see themselves as deeply and hopelessly evil.
- 146.2. Correspondingly, they did not see their moral imperfection as a grave and serious problem. They did not see themselves as hopelessly under the curse of death, for they did not see their ultimate destiny as being hopelessly out of their control.
- 146.2.1. Why? Because they saw the problem of their existence as simply having chosen badly. The solution to their problem was a simple matter of choosing to do better. All that was needed was for them to decide to perform better with respect to their obedience to God's Law. Such a perspective, of course, requires that they view

themselves as inherently capable of being good and of living a life that made them worthy.

146.3. This was perhaps the most important difference between Paul's and Jesus's perspective and that of their contemporaries. Jesus and Paul had the belief (the insight) that evil and corruption ran deep into the being of each and every individual human being.

146.3.1. Paul's (and Jesus') perspective was not commonly accepted by their contemporaries. Neither has it been commonly accepted by subsequent generations of Jews or Christians. It is the most striking distinctive in the teachings of Jesus, the apostles, and the New Testament. Everything else that the New Testament teaches arises out of this fundamentally unique perspective.

146.3.1.1. No other philosophy or religion in the whole history of ideas attributes human imperfection to a depth of human evil and depravity that is comparable in degree to that proposed by Jesus, Paul, and the Bible generally. Paul, for example, sees human evil (1) as utterly contrary to God and the things of God, (2) as utterly and completely intractable, (3) as utterly and completely contemptible, and (4) as beyond any human remedy. No other system of thought takes the same dim and hopeless view of human sin.

146.3.2. Hence, the most fundamental difference between Jesus and Paul, on the one hand, and their contemporary Jews, on the other hand, was their understanding of the state of the human being. Jesus and Paul understood humankind to be deeply and incurably evil and hostile to God. Their contemporaries in Judaism did not understand mankind in this same vein.

• *Paul believed and taught (e.g., Romans 3:20, 5:20, and 7:7 ff and Gal. 3:19) that one of the important roles that the Mosaic Covenant played in God's purposes was to make manifest to the individual who sought to keep God's Law how deep, intractable, and incurable was the evil and moral depravity that resided in his very being.*

• *This remains one of the most striking differences between thoughtful, biblically-informed, conservative Jews today and biblical Jesus-believers. The former do not tend to view mankind as being deeply and incurably evil in the same way and to the same degree as biblical Jesus-believers do. That explains, in part, why such modern Jews continue to find it implausible that the Messiah would be crucified. The notion that God would ask his Messiah to be the canvas upon which God would picture what a human being deserves for his evil makes no sense to someone who does not believe human beings are desperately and deeply wicked.*

146.3.2.1. All other differences between Jesus and Paul and their contemporaries flows directly from the fact that they view the condition of mankind differently. Obtaining the blessing of God by obeying the Mosaic Law seems like a much more plausible proposition to a person who does not find human evil to be an intractable problem in the very nature of every human being. But to Jesus and

Paul—for whom human evil IS an intractable problem—proving oneself worthy before God by keeping his Law is an utterly unthinkable proposition.

## TABLE SUMMARY OF MISTAKEN BELIEFS

**Mistaken Beliefs Among Paul’s Contemporaries Regarding the Law**  
As It Might Pertain to Receiving the Blessing of Abraham, *Aionic* / Eternal Life

Number	Description	Relevant Biblical Passages
1	<p>Zealous support for and promotion of Law-obedience is a <i>sufficient</i> condition for receiving eternal life</p> <p>Failing to acknowledge that the Law requires personal obedience to its demands—it is not enough merely to support and promote the idea of Law-obedience.</p> <p>And, further, failing to acknowledge that the following are <i>necessary</i> conditions for receiving eternal Life: (i) the death and intercession of Christ on one’s behalf, and (ii) a changed heart manifesting itself in “keeping” (guarding) the Law properly and/or belief that Jesus is the Messiah</p>	<p>Rom 2:12–29</p> <p>Matt 23:1–39</p>
2	<p>Obedience to the Law is the <i>basis</i> for receiving eternal life</p> <p>Failing to grasp that the <i>basis</i> for receiving eternal life is the sovereign choice of God to extend <i>mercy</i> in connection with the intercessory role of Jesus, our true high priest</p>	<p>Acts 13:39</p> <p>Rom 3:21–26 (esp., 3:24-26)</p> <p>Rom 3:28</p> <p>Rom 9:10–12</p> <p>Gal. 2:16, 3:17–18, 3:21</p>
3	<p>Obedience to the Law is a <i>necessary</i> condition for receiving eternal life</p> <p>Failing to grasp that the <i>only necessary</i> condition for receiving eternal life is a changed heart that manifests itself in an openness and receptivity to God and to the things of God—particularly to the truth about Jesus being God’s Messiah</p>	<p>Acts 15:1, 5</p> <p>Rom 3:28</p> <p>1Cor 9:19–23</p> <p>Gal. 2:3, 2:15–21, 3:11, 3:17–18, 3:21, 3:23–27</p> <p>Phil 3:9</p>

<p>4</p>	<p>Obedience to the Law is a <b>universal obligation</b></p> <p>Failing to acknowledge that the Law is a unique covenant that God made strictly with the <i>people of Israel, as a nation</i> (not as individuals), and that <u>only</u> the <i>moral</i> commandments contained within the Law involve a <b>universal obligation</b> because they capture a moral obligation that precedes and transcends the covenant made between God and the Jews</p>	<p>Acts 15:1, 5 Gal. 2:11–13</p>
<p>5</p>	<p>One can be granted eternal life only if he is <b>deserving</b> of it (and Law-obedience is what will make him deserving of it)</p> <p>Failing to grasp the fact that a human being's inherent depravity means that there is <b>nothing</b> he could ever do to <i>deserve</i> any blessing from God whatsoever.</p>	<p>Luke 18:9–14 Rom 7:1–12 (esp. 7:9)</p>
<p>6</p>	<p>The <b>basis</b> for receiving eternal life are <b>the animal sacrifices</b> offered up in obedience to the Law</p> <p>Failing to acknowledge that the <b>basis</b> for receiving eternal life is <i>God's sovereign choice</i> to extend mercy to a person in response to <i>Jesus' intercession</i> on his behalf by way of <i>the sacrifice of his own life as a propitiatory offering</i></p>	<p>Heb 9:1–10:22</p>
<p>7</p>	<p>Human beings are <b>not</b> as profoundly and incurably <b>evil</b> as the Bible says they are; it is utterly plausible that one might, through obedience to the Law, prove himself worthy of the blessing of eternal life</p> <p>Failing to acknowledge the <b>intractable and incurable nature of human evil</b>, they failed to grasp that one could never make himself worthy of eternal life through Law-obedience, that the Law could only ever make it manifest that one is <b>worthy of God's wrath</b></p>	<p>Matt 23:25–33 Rom 3:20, 4:13–15, 5:20, 7:7–25a Gal 3:10, 3:19, 3:22 1Tim 1:8–11</p>

\*Some passages are listed as relevant to more than one mistaken belief in the table above. In certain cases, it seems likely that more than one mistaken belief underlies the particular fallacious perspective of Paul's contemporaries.

## *Application of the N.T. Understanding of the Gospel to Various Questions in Various Circumstances—Particularly With Regard to “Works” and “Faith” in Salvation*

Contrary to the simplistic Sunday School presentation of the gospel that seeks to portray the gospel as “so simple a child could understand it,” the gospel revealed by Jesus the Messiah expounds a divine plan and purpose that is significantly complex and that involves a number and variety of different elements. There are many distinct truths that must be grasped and rightly related to one another if one is to grasp the overall gospel message in its true coherence. In order to gain a mastering of the gospel message, these various composite truths must be untangled and separated from one another and then reconnected in just the right way to reproduce the understanding of God’s purposes that Jesus and his apostles possessed and proclaimed. Furthermore, it is only out of an accurate and coherent understanding of God’s saving purposes that the gospel message can be applied to any specific circumstance or to any specific question. The purpose of the notes below is to show such a process at work in the New Testament. We consider a sampling of different questions and circumstances and examine how Jesus and the apostles would apply their understanding of the gospel to answer them. Since a significant amount of New Testament teaching concerns itself with the respective roles of “faith” [=belief] and “works” in God’s plan of salvation, that will be the focus of these notes. It is particularly important to note how the concepts of “works” and “faith”—as they are employed in the New Testament—are not univocal concepts. That is, they do not have exactly the same meaning everywhere they are used. With respect to each of them, sometimes they mean one thing, sometimes another. They take on significantly different meanings—from one context to the next—depending upon what issue is that is being addressed.

Contrary to a popular misunderstanding, the New Testament does not propose that “works” (in any and every sense in which the term might be used) are bad and that “faith” (in any and every sense in which the term might be used) is good. The tendency to rather simplistically pit “faith” against “works” does nothing to clarify the gospel message; it leads, rather, to confusion with regard to the gospel. Unfortunately, more than one Christians tradition has made just such a simplistic opposition of “faith” to “works” a central feature of its doctrinal system.

### SOME SAMPLE CASES: HOW JESUS OR THE APOSTLES WOULD RESPOND TO VARIOUS QUESTIONS

147. QUESTION #1 > Will a person be saved if he believes in Jesus?

147.1. ANSWER > It depends. If a person’s belief in Jesus arises out of a heart that is being sanctified by the Spirit of God, then that person will indeed be saved. If a person’s belief in Jesus arises out of something other than a heart that is being sanctified by the Spirit of God, then that person will not be saved.

148. QUESTION #2 > Can a person be saved without believing in Jesus?

148.1. ANSWER > Yes. Belief in Jesus “saves” a person only to the extent that it indicates that sanctification is occurring in one’s inner being. It is the fact that one evidences being sanctified by God that meets a necessary condition for salvation. Belief fulfills a necessary condition for salvation if and only if it arises out of the fact that one is being sanctified. It is the fact of being sanctified that is absolutely necessary for salvation, not belief. Hence, if a person does not believe in Jesus, but he clearly does manifest other evidence

that he is being sanctified, then that person will be saved without believing in Jesus.

149. QUESTION #3 > Will an ethnic Jew be saved simply by virtue of the fact that he is ethnically Jewish?

149.1. ANSWER > No. Being ethnically Jewish, in and of itself, can never guarantee that a person will be saved. What God has always desired from his people Israel is that they be individuals who want to know, love, honor, and obey him. Just because one has Jewish parents who raised him in the religious culture of Judaism does not mean that that person is governed by a desire to know and obey God. What matters, therefore, is the inner life of the individual Jew (Is he a person who desires to know, love, honor, and obey God?), not his "outward" ethnicity.

150. QUESTION #4 > Will a person (Jew) be saved if he zealously advocates for and supports obedience to the Mosaic Covenant?

150.1. ANSWER > No. God clearly is not satisfied by a Jew zealously supporting the abstract idea of obedience to God's Law. What God desires is for each individual to engage in actual, concrete, personal obedience to his Law. Actual personal obedience to God's Law can (in the right circumstances) save a person. Mere cheerleading for obedience to the Law would never be enough. Actual personal obedience to God's Law can be an indicator that the person is being inwardly sanctified by God; mere cheerleading alone offers no clear indication of inward sanctification (and it can indicate the opposite).

151. QUESTION #5 > Will a person be saved if he obeys the Mosaic Covenant?

151.1. ANSWER > It depends. If a person's obedience to the Mosaic Covenant arises out of a heart that is being sanctified by the Spirit of God, then that person will indeed be saved. However, his salvation is not *on the basis of* his obedience to the Covenant. Rather, his salvation will be based on the advocacy of Jesus (whether the person knows that or not). His Law-obedience is simply the evidence that he is being sanctified by God. If a person's obedience to the Mosaic Covenant arises out of something other than a heart that is being sanctified by the Spirit of God, then that person will not be saved—in spite of his Law-obedience.

152. QUESTION #5A > Will a person be saved if he conforms his outward behavior to what the Mosaic Covenant requires?

152.1. ANSWER > God never intended the instructions he included in the Mosaic Covenant (Torah) to be instructions with regard to mere outward behavior. From the very beginning, what God wanted from his people was a righteousness that was present in the very

inner core of who the individual was. In giving his Torah, God's desire was for individuals who were confronted by its commands to choose to BE righteous individuals in the way described by his Torah. He did not expect, nor desire, that a person merely act like a righteous person would act—that is, that he simply perform the role of a righteous person. Rather, he desired that the individual BE a righteous person, where his righteous behavior flowed naturally out of his inward commitments to righteousness. Therefore, if and when obedience to the Mosaic Covenant does result in an individual's salvation, it will not be because of mere outward obedience on his part. It will be because of obedience that arises from deep within the heart of that person.

*The New Testament concept of a "hypocrite" is one who presumes to offer outward conformity to the demands of the Law, but who is not genuinely a righteous, Law-keeping individual in the inner commitments of his heart. In other words, a "hypocrite" is one who strives to ACT like a righteous man without actually BEING a righteous man. So, we can translate the above question like this: Will a person be saved if he is hypocritically obedient to the Mosaic Covenant? The answer is NO. God's covenant is instructing us to offer God authentic, inward obedience, not hypocritical obedience.*

153. QUESTION #5B > Will a person be saved if he conforms his behavior and practices to what Pharisaism requires?

153.1. ANSWER > Pharisaism institutionalized the response to the Mosaic Covenant of a person who is not sanctified. Accordingly, Pharisaism promoted mere outward conformity to what the Law required, not obedience flowing out of righteous inwardness. Hence, everything that Jesus or Paul would say in answer to Question #5A, they would say in answer to this question. But, beyond that, they would also point out the following: As a culture, Pharisees—in their self-deception—tended to count themselves righteous and worthy on account of their meticulous observance of minor details of the Law at the same time that they passed over and even ignored weightier, more morally substantive aspects of the Law. By in large, therefore, doing what Pharisaism required would typically not constitute the sort of obedience to the Law that would result in one's salvation. In the end, it would all depend upon the heart of the particular individual in view. The individual who seeks to honor God out of a sanctified heart by obeying the Law as Pharisaism instructed him to obey it would indeed be saved—but his salvation would result from the state of his heart, not from his meticulous Pharisaical obedience.

153.1.1. NOTE: What was true of Pharisaism as a cultural institution was not necessarily true of each and every individual Pharisee. What can appear in the N.T. to be a blanket condemnation of all Pharisees is, more accurately, a condemnation of the character and driving force behind the movement, taken as a whole. There is plenty of room for individuals within the movement to be authentically righteous and

sanctified individuals, to be individuals who do not share in the self-righteous delusion and hypocrisy that tended to color the movement as a whole.

154. QUESTION #5C > Will a person be saved if he conforms his behavior and practices to what Pharisaism requires and believes that Jesus is the Messiah?

154.1. ANSWER > It depends. If a person's belief in Jesus and his Pharisaical obedience to the Law both arise out of a heart that is being sanctified by the Spirit of God, then that person will indeed be saved. If a person's belief in Jesus and his Pharisaical obedience to the Law both arise out of something other than a heart that is being sanctified by the Spirit of God, then that person will not be saved. The bottom line is this: it is the fact that one evidences being sanctified by God that meets a necessary condition for salvation. If either his Pharisaical obedience or his belief in Jesus arise from (and hence give authentic evidence of) a person's sanctification, then that person will be saved. If neither arise from his sanctification, then he will not be saved.

155. QUESTION #5D > Can a person be saved by obeying the Mosaic Covenant the way God intended for a person to obey it without believing in Jesus?

155.1. ANSWER > It depends on why this person does not believe in Jesus. Does he not believe in Jesus because he is not being sanctified and he rejects the truth about Jesus out of an unrighteous, hardened heart against God? Or does he not believe in Jesus for some other reason? If it is the former, then he cannot be saved. If it is the latter, then he could be saved even though he does not believe in Jesus.

155.1.1. God never intended for Law-obedience to serve as the basis upon which a person is granted Life. It was always God's intention that his own sovereign decision to grant mercy in response to Jesus's sacrificial death and accompanying appeal for mercy be the basis upon which a person is granted Life. Hence, to fail to acknowledge (believe in) Jesus is to fail to acknowledge the one and only basis upon which Life is granted. Salvation will come on no other basis but Jesus.

155.1.1.1. Granted, a Jew does not, strictly speaking, have to believe that Jesus is the Messiah to be saved. For a Jew who keeps the Law out of an authentically sanctified heart can and will be granted Life *on the basis of Jesus' sacrificial death and intercession* even when that particular Jew has never actually believed in and acknowledged Jesus.

*Such a Jew is being saved on the basis of someone (Jesus the Messiah) whom he has never acknowledged. Obviously, it would be appropriate for him to acknowledge and believe in the one who makes his salvation possible. While salvation is possible without believing in Jesus, possession of the Truth is not possible without believing in Jesus.*

155.1.2. An appeal that Jesus and/or Paul makes to each and every Jew is this: *The death of Jesus, God's Messiah, was an essential part of the basis that God established for his granting mercy and Life. Therefore, do not let Jesus' death stand in the way of your acknowledging the truth about who Jesus is. If you are to know the truth, you must come to acknowledge that Jesus is the Messiah.*

156. QUESTION #5E > Can a person be saved who obeys the Mosaic Covenant in the way that God intended for a person to obey it in addition to believing in Jesus?

156.1. ANSWER > Assuming that his belief in Jesus results from his being sanctified and is, therefore, evidence of his sanctification, then such a person will most certainly be saved. In such a case, his obedience to the Law out of a sanctified heart would be *an additional evidence* of his sanctification (alongside his belief in Jesus), not some sort of counterindication of it. Indeed, contrary to a common misunderstanding of the N.T., a commitment to doing "works of the Law" is not always and necessarily a bad thing. It does not have to be a choice that is tantamount to rejecting the gospel of grace. The right sort of obedience to the Mosaic Covenant is perfectly compatible with authentic belief in Jesus, and vice versa.

157. QUESTION #5F > Can a person be saved if he conforms his behavior and practices to what Pharisaism requires and yet does not believe in Jesus?

157.1. ANSWER > It depends. It depends on whether or not his Pharisaical obedience stems from a sanctified heart. And it depends on whether his unbelief stems from a hardness against the truth that results from a heart that is not sanctified. If his Pharisaical obedience is the manifestation of a sanctified heart and his unbelief is due to any other reason than a lack of sanctification, then such a person will be saved. But if either the nature of his Pharisaical obedience or the nature of his unbelief is indicative of a lack of sanctification, then such a person will not be saved.

*The inward spiritual state of an individual can never be ambiguous. You could never have Pharisaical obedience of such a nature that it presents clear and unambiguous evidence of sanctification and then, at the same time, have unbelief that clearly and unambiguously gives evidence that he is not sanctified. Such a state would be impossible.*

157.1.1. A Pharisee who did everything that Pharisaism instructed him to do but who, when confronted by supernatural sign-miracles that Jesus performed in connection with his claim to be the Messiah, REFUSED to believe that Jesus was the Messiah is—in all probability—giving evidence that he is not being sanctified. HENCE, in the context of the Pharisaism of Jesus' and Paul's day, when a particular Pharisee refused to believe the truth about Jesus, his "works of the Law" did not "count" for obedi-

ence in God's eyes because they clearly did not arise out of authentic, inward holiness. That they did not arise from authentic, inward holiness was made evident by the fact that that particular individual refused to believe the truth about Jesus.

158. QUESTION #6 > Can a person be saved without obeying the Mosaic Covenant?

158.1. ANSWER > The one and only necessary condition that one must meet in order to be saved is his having a sanctified heart. The ultimately definitive evidence that one has a sanctified heart is that one has authentically embraced the truth about Jesus as a result of that sanctified heart. Hence, one could say that belief in Jesus is the only necessary condition that one must meet in order to be saved. Obedience to the Mosaic Covenant, while, historically, a condition that God did place on salvation, it is not ultimately a *necessary* condition that he placed on salvation. Hence, it is possible for a person to be saved without obeying the Mosaic Covenant.

159. QUESTION #6A > Can a Gentile who believes in Jesus be a faithful follower of Jesus and not be committed to keeping the Mosaic Covenant?

159.1. ANSWER > Yes. The Mosaic Covenant has a very specific role in God's purposes that has direct relevance only to the Jews. No Gentile has any obligation to keep the Mosaic Covenant. His one and only obligation is to believe in Jesus from a genuinely sanctified heart. Therefore, keeping the Mosaic Covenant is not a condition that Jesus would place on Gentiles if they want to be his disciple. A Gentile can be a *bona fide* disciple of Jesus, therefore, without being committed to doing what the Mosaic Covenant requires.

160. QUESTION #6B > Can a Jew who believes in Jesus be a faithful follower of Jesus and not be committed to keeping the Mosaic Covenant?

160.1. ANSWER > No. The Mosaic Covenant has a very specific role in God's purposes that has direct relevance to the Jews. God made a perpetual covenant with the Jews whom he chose to be "his people." He required of them that they "keep" the Covenant that he made with them. Jesus, the Messiah, clearly taught and encouraged his disciples to take their obligation to "keep" the Covenant seriously. Therefore, as a Jew, one is not and cannot be a faithful follower of Jesus, if he is not committed to keeping the Mosaic Covenant.

160.1.1. However, the above answer needs to be clarified in two important respects:

160.1.1.1. The answer assumes that we are inquiring with respect to a Jew who has been nurtured and enculturated in such a way that he identifies himself as a member of the chosen people of God, he values and treasures that identification, and he is vitally interested in preserving that identification. One who is born of Jewish

parentage but—due to lack of enculturation—does not value being identified with the people of God, is not a Jew in the sense assumed by the question. A Jew who does not embrace his identity as a Jew in the sense described here, is— for the purposes of this question—in the same place as a Gentile. He is not in view by this question.

160.1.1.2. The answer assumes that we appreciate the following fact: one can fail to obey what some of the commandments in the Covenant require without having failed to “keep” the Covenant. To “keep” the Covenant is to honor his Covenant in the way that I choose to relate to it because I love God and want to honor him. In certain circumstances, a person can deliberately disobey a commandment contained in the Covenant and do so in such a way, and for such a reason, that he is NOT dishonoring God or his Covenant by doing so. So, for example, when Paul chose to disobey certain requirements of the Covenant in order that his peculiar Jewishness not create an obstacle to Gentiles’ hearing his presentation of the gospel of Jesus, Paul was NOT failing to “keep” the Covenant. He had all the respect in the world for the Covenant of God with Israel (hence, he was “keeping” it). But he found himself in a situation where the best way to honor it, was to disregard certain of its requirements. His “honoring” of it consisted of his caring to understand its role so accurately that he knew when to “obey” the greater command (“love your neighbor as yourself”) at the expense of the lesser command (“do not eat ...”).

161. QUESTION #6C > Can a person be saved if he violates one of the substantive moral requirements in the Mosaic Law?

161.1. ANSWER > Yes. The basis for eternal Life is not the genuine goodness of the person being saved from death; it is the sovereign choice of God to extend mercy to him. By definition, mercy is a blessing extended to a person who is not good (righteous) and is not deserving of any blessing from God. Hence, it follows that a person need not be good (righteous) in order to receive God’s blessing of eternal Life. Furthermore, it follows that a failure to be good (righteous) will not necessarily disqualify a person from being granted Life by God. By definition, moral failure cannot disqualify a person from being shown mercy. It is the fact that the person does not deserve the blessing that God gives to him that makes the gift of eternal Life an act of mercy. Therefore, a person *can* be saved if he violates one of the substantive moral requirements in the Mosaic Law.

161.1.1. While doing good is a necessary result of being good, doing good is not a necessary

condition for receiving mercy. Mercy, by definition, is a blessing extended to a person who is not good and is not deserving of any blessing from God. Hence, it follows that one need not be good to receive God's merciful blessing. Therefore, it follows that it is not necessary to do works of goodness in order to receive mercy from God

161.1.1.1. God grants the blessing of eternal life to individuals who are immoral sinners. These are the only sorts of people who will ever be granted eternal Life; for these are the only sorts of people who exist.

161.1.2. There does exist a significant moral difference between the person who is sanctified and the person who is not sanctified. The sanctified person "hungers and thirsts after righteousness." He longs to be a good and righteous person and, therefore, he strives to be good in every way that he can. The unsanctified person does NOT "hunger and thirst after righteousness." Hence, he does NOT long to be a good and righteous person and, therefore, he does not strive to be good in every way that he can.

161.1.2.1. While various righteous acts will certainly be evident in the life of one who is destined to receive God's mercy and Life, no righteous deed is, strictly speaking, necessary for mercy. What is necessary for mercy is sanctification. Sanctification will necessarily lead to a longing to be righteous. Hence, a longing to be righteous is a necessary condition for mercy, but the flawless performance of righteous deeds is not.

162. QUESTION #7 > If one can be saved without obeying the Mosaic Covenant, what is the purpose for anyone committing himself to doing what the Mosaic Covenant requires?

162.1. ANSWER > It is not possible for a Jew to be a member in good-standing of the people of God if he does not keep the Covenant, and, hence, if he does not commit himself to doing what the Covenant requires. A Jew will not necessarily need to obey the Covenant to be saved; but he will need to obey the Covenant to truly be a member of the chosen people of God, Israel. The reason, therefore, for committing oneself to doing what the Law requires is so that one can qualify as a member of Israel, the people of God.

163. QUESTION #7A > If the purpose of the Mosaic Covenant is not to serve as the basis of individual salvation (since one can be saved without obeying the Mosaic Covenant), then what is God's purpose for the Mosaic Covenant?

163.1. ANSWER > The primary purpose of the Mosaic Covenant is to instruct his chosen people, Israel, to live their lives in such a way that they are distinctive. God wants his people to

stand out as different in the world. They are to be different with respect to their dress, their diets, their adornments, their calendar, their religious observances...in virtually every aspect of their lives. God wants his people's lives to draw attention to their special relationship to God, and thereby draw attention to God himself.

- 163.1.1. One of the most important and substantive ways that God desired for his people to be distinctive was in their commitment to godliness (=righteousness, = goodness). One of the requirements of the Law was that each individual commit himself to living a morally good and righteous life. It is here that we find a subsidiary purpose for the Mosaic Covenant. Because it called upon a person to strive to be good, the Law exposed the fact that each and every individual was profoundly evil and morally depraved at the root level of his being. Hence, one of God's purposes for the Law was that it might reveal this very truth to the person who cared enough to seek to obey the Law. Through the Law, one could come to know and understand that he was a sinner, inherently worthy of death. This was an important part of God's purpose for the Mosaic Covenant. However, it was not THE purpose. God's PRIMARY purpose was to define the terms of a unique covenant-relationship with his chosen people, Israel.

### *Summary of the Necessity of "Faith" and/or "Works of the Law" in Salvation*

*The answers I give to the questions posed below ASSUME the following: God has provided an essential part of the BASIS for salvation when he established Jesus as our true high priest who, through his intercession and advocacy, appeals to God for mercy on the behalf of all who belong to him in view of the propitiatory offering he offered up when he sacrificed his own life (when he was crucified on the cross).*

164. Will a person be saved if he believes the truth that pertains to Jesus?

164.1. Typically, yes, he will be saved; but this is not necessarily the case.

164.2. He WILL be saved by his belief in Jesus if it arises out of an authentically sanctified spirit (heart).

164.2.1. A belief that arises out of an authentically sanctified spirit (heart) will, typically, be characterized by all of the following:

164.2.1.1. A belief that is more than intellectual assent in that it involves a personal, existential commitment to live in the light of that truth.

164.2.1.2. A belief that conforms to the teaching and understanding of Jesus, the apostles, and the Bible.

164.2.1.3. A belief that is accompanied by other marks of a sanctified spirit in that it is ac-

accompanied by actions and deeds (“works”) that flow from a sanctified spirit (e.g., deeds that manifest the attributes described in the Beatitudes) and/or that follow directly from a commitment to the truth about Jesus.

164.3. He will NOT be saved by such belief if it does NOT arise out of an authentically sanctified spirit (heart).

164.3.1. A belief that does NOT arise out of an authentically sanctified spirit (heart) will, typically, be characterized by one or more of the following:

164.3.1.1. A belief that is merely an intellectual assent to the truth about Jesus and does not involve a personal, existential commitment to live in the light of that truth.

164.3.1.2. A belief that is in a significantly different version of the gospel than the version taught by Jesus, by the apostles, and by the Bible because the original version (taught by Jesus, by the apostles, and by the Bible) was not sufficiently interesting, compelling, or attractive.

164.3.1.3. A belief that is not accompanied by other marks of a sanctified spirit in the form of actions and deeds (“works”) that flow from a sanctified spirit and/or from a commitment to the truth of the gospel.

165. Can a person be saved who does not believe the truth that pertains to Jesus?

165.1. Typically, no, he cannot be saved; but this is not necessarily the case.

165.2. If the person’s failure to believe is the result of his having not been sanctified, then he will not be saved.

165.2.1. Typically, a person’s failure to believe is the result of his REJECTING the truth about Jesus, REFUSING to believe it; and, typically, this sort of unbelief characterizes a person who has not been sanctified.

165.3. If the person’s failure to believe does NOT result from his lack of being sanctified—but is the result of something else—then he will be saved (assuming that he has, in fact, been sanctified).

165.3.1. If the person’s failure to believe results from something other than his REJECTING the truth about Jesus and REFUSING to believe it; then, typically, his failure to believe does NOT mean that he lacks sanctification.

166. Will a person be saved if he obeys the Mosaic Law?

166.1. Maybe he will be saved; maybe he will not be saved.

166.2. He will be saved by his obedience to the Mosaic Law if his obedience arises out of an au-

thentically sanctified spirit (heart).

166.2.1. The person whose obedience arises out of an authentically sanctified spirit (heart) will, typically, be characterized by all of the following:

- 166.2.1.1. He also believes the truth about and pertaining to Jesus. At least, if he does not believe the truth about Jesus it is not because he has rejected it and is resistant to it in his heart.
- 166.2.1.2. His striving to obey the Law has resulted in his having a broken and contrite heart, in his having a real and accurate grasp of his own moral condition, and in his having been made humble before both God and man.
- 166.2.1.3. His obedience is not merely perfunctory but is reflective of a desire to know, love, honor, serve, and obey God.
- 166.2.1.4. The primary focus of his Law-obedience is NOT on obeying each and every trivial and inconsequential commandment; it is on obeying the greater, more consequential commandments.
- 166.2.1.5. The primary focus of his Law-obedience is not on performing each requirement to the letter of what it commands; his focus is on doing what is pleasing to God. In other words, The primary focus of his Law-obedience is on obeying the “spirit” of a commandment (that is, the divine intent behind the commandment) and not on obeying the “letter” of the commandment.

166.3. He will NOT be saved by his obedience to the Mosaic Law if his obedience does NOT arise out of an authentically sanctified spirit (heart).

166.3.1. The person whose obedience does NOT arise out of an authentically sanctified spirit (heart) will, typically, be characterized by one or more of the following:

- 166.3.1.1. He has rejected the truth about and pertaining to Jesus.
- 166.3.1.2. He has used his “obedience” to the Law as a basis for self-deception. Rather than being broken, contrite, and humble before God and men, he is proud, self-assured of his righteousness, and convinced that he is deserving of God’s blessing.
- 166.3.1.3. His obedience merely perfunctory; it does not reflect any real desire to know, love, honor, serve, and obey God.
- 166.3.1.4. The primary focus of his Law-obedience is to obey each and every trivial and inconsequential commandment, not to obey the greater, more consequential

commandments.

166.3.1.5. The focus of his obedience is to follow the letter of the Law, not to do what is pleasing to his God.

167. Can a person be saved who does not obey the Mosaic Covenant?

167.1. It depends; for some people, yes, for others, no.

167.2. If the reason the person does not obey the Mosaic Covenant is because he has not been sanctified, then he will not be saved.

167.2.1. Typically, when a lack of sanctification is the reason that a person does not obey the Mosaic Covenant, then his disobedience will involve some sort of REFUSAL to obey the Mosaic Covenant out of some sort of inner hardness toward and rebellion against God.

167.3. If the reason the person does not obey the Mosaic Covenant is NOT because he has not been sanctified, but is for some other reason, then he will be saved.

167.3.1. Typically, when a lack of sanctification is NOT the reason a person does not obey the Mosaic Covenant, then his disobedience will not involve some sort of REFUSAL to obey the Mosaic Covenant out of some sort of inner hardness toward and rebellion against God.

167.3.1.1. For example, consider the Gentile who was not brought up with any expectation that he would obey the Mosaic Covenant, and who—because he has been sanctified—believes that his hope for eternal Life rests in Jesus's advocacy for him, and who—for all these reasons—sees no purpose in obeying a covenant that was not meant for him. If this person did not obey the Mosaic Covenant, it would not be because of an inner hardness toward and rebellion against God. It would not be because he has not been sanctified.

167.3.1.2. For example, consider a Jew, by birth, who was NOT brought up with any expectation that he would obey the Mosaic Covenant, and who—because he has been sanctified—believes that his hope for eternal Life rests in Jesus's advocacy for him, and who sees no purpose in obeying a covenant that he was never taught to appreciate and treasure. If this person did not obey the Mosaic Covenant, it would not be because of an inner hardness toward and rebellion against God. It would not be because he has not been sanctified.

167.3.1.3. For example, consider a Jew, by birth, who was brought up with an expectation that he would obey the Mosaic Covenant, and who—because he has been sancti-

fied—believes that his hope for eternal Life rests in Jesus’s advocacy for him. If this person—for some good, wise, and valid reason—decides, for a time, NOT to obey the Mosaic Covenant, it would not be because of an inner hardness toward and rebellion against God. It would not be because he has not been sanctified.

*Indeed, such a person would not be accused by God of failing to “keep” the Law. Even though he is, for a time, not obeying the Law’s commandments, his disobedience is not due to a failure to value, treasure, honor, and, therefore, “keep” the Law. It is due to an appreciation of what the real role and purpose of God’s Law is. Knowing and understanding the rightful role of the Law allows him, in certain circumstances, to lay obedience to it aside.*

167.3.1.4. For example, consider a Jew, by birth, who was brought up with an expectation that he would obey the Mosaic Covenant, and who—because he has been sanctified—believes that his hope for eternal Life rests in Jesus’s advocacy for him. If this person—for the sake of making known the truth about Jesus to others who might be put off by his Law-obedience (e.g., Gentiles)—decides, for a time, NOT to obey the Mosaic Covenant, it would not be because of an inner hardness toward and rebellion against God. It would not be because he has not been sanctified.

*Indeed, such a person would not be accused by God of failing to “keep” the Law. See the comment accompanying the note just above.*

### *Why Is Justification by Faith Rather Than by Works of the Law?—In Brief*

168. Why, according to the New Testament, is one justified (hence, saved) by faith (belief in Jesus) and not by “works of the Law”?

168.1. Because God never intended that Law-obedience would serve as the basis upon which one would receive mercy and *aionic* Life; neither did he intend that Law-obedience [“works of the Law”] would be a necessary or sufficient condition for one’s receiving mercy and *aionic* Life. The BASIS for one’s receiving mercy and *aionic* Life is Jesus’ intercession on his behalf (in his capacity as the true high priest) in conjunction with God’s sovereign choice to extend mercy, and the ONE NECESSARY CONDITION for one’s receiving *aionic* Life is his inward sanctification and his open receptivity to the truth about Jesus [faith=belief] that results from that sanctification.

## **NOTES ON RIGHTEOUSNESS, MORAL OBLIGATION, AND LEGALISM**

### *Righteousness and Moral Obligation*

## DEFINING 'RIGHTEOUSNESS'

169. The word 'righteousness' is used in at least two very distinct ways in the Bible.

169.1. On the one hand, 'righteousness' (*dikaiosune*) can denote the state that a person is in when—for whatever reasons—God has determined that he will not give that person the condemnation that is his due, but will grant him the blessing that he does not deserve instead.

169.2. On the other hand, 'righteousness' (*dikaiosune*) can denote the moral state or condition of a person who is truly and objectively good (by God's standard of goodness).

169.2.1. When it is used this way, 'righteousness' is simply a synonym of moral goodness. Hence, perfect righteousness would be moral perfection, or perfect moral goodness. Perfect righteousness would be that which God possesses.

169.2.2. Consonant with this meaning of 'righteousness' (*dikaiosune*), a man who is 'righteous' (*dikaios*), is a man who is morally good.

*Throughout this current section on "Notes on Legalism," whenever the word 'righteousness' (dikaiosune) is used, I will be employing it in the latter of the above two senses. In other words, it will always be a synonym for moral goodness. In the N.T., it is righteousness (dikaiosune) in the other sense that predominates. But it is righteousness in the sense of moral goodness that concerns us here in this present section.*

## THE MORAL OBLIGATION TO BE RIGHTEOUS

170. Every human being has a moral obligation to pursue perfect righteousness.

170.1. Given what is meant by perfect righteousness, it could also be said that every human being has a moral obligation to pursue perfect objective goodness. We, by virtue of our humanity itself, are under moral obligation to BE GOOD.

171. If a human being could be perfectly righteous, he would be perfectly worthy of God's approval and God's blessing. However, no human being (with the exception of Jesus) is perfectly righteous. Indeed, human beings, by their very nature, are hopelessly unrighteous.

## *Righteousness as Objective Goodness versus Moral Rules*

### RIGHTEOUSNESS AS OBJECTIVE GOODNESS

172. In the biblical worldview, moral goodness is an objective reality. In any given situation, there are choices and actions that are consistent with moral goodness; and there are choices and

actions that are not consistent with moral goodness. And it is simply objectively true that what is consistent with goodness is always everywhere consistent with goodness, and what is not consistent with goodness is always everywhere not consistent with goodness. Goodness is not different, depending upon what particular person and/or culture that moral judgment concerns. Goodness is always what God would deem it to be. One has acted righteously only to the extent that his actions conform to what God would judge to be righteous.

#### RIGHTEOUSNESS AND MORAL LAW

173. No law, rule, or commandment can ever capture precisely what goodness would require in *any and every* possible circumstance. There always exists the possibility that what is in fact objectively righteous would run counter to what a particular moral commandment specifies. (E.g., Abraham offering his son Isaac up as a human sacrifice to God.)
- 173.1. Accordingly, in the biblical worldview, righteousness is not ultimately defined by obedience to any particular set of moral commandments (rules). Rather, righteousness is defined by obedience to what God would require of us in any particular situation (=what is objectively good or righteous in any particular situation).
- 173.1.1. A particular set of moral commandments might be able to capture what God would typically require of us in most possible situations (and, hence, it might be able to capture the objective truth about what is generally good and righteous in most situations), but it cannot dictate what God would invariably require in absolutely every situation (and, hence, it cannot dictate what is invariably good and right in every situation).
- 173.1.1.1. If we define a “moral absolute” as a law or rule that must always and invariably be obeyed, then the biblical worldview does not necessarily advocate for *moral absolutes*. The biblical worldview clearly does support the *objectivity of moral goodness*, but it does not support *moral absolutes*.

*When modern Christians sound the alarm that modern culture is abandoning its belief in moral absolutes, what they should rather be doing is sounding the alarm that modern culture is abandoning its belief in the objectivity of moral goodness. Their concern is perfectly appropriate. However, to frame it in terms of abandoning moral absolutes is not accurate and precise. The bible itself does not believe in nor advocate for moral absolutes.*

- 173.1.2. Hence, righteousness is not defined by obedience to the Law of Moses where obedience to the Law of Moses is defined by strict adherence to each and every commandment (rule) that is found there.

- 173.1.2.1. And neither is it defined by strict obedience to each and every *moral* commandment contained in the Law of Moses.
- 173.1.2.2. The moral commandments contained in the Law of Moses can only be a general statement with regard to what righteousness will typically look like. They do not and cannot perfectly capture what perfect righteousness would look like. For no set of rules or commandments can perfectly capture the content of objective righteousness.

### *Legalism*

*The term legalism is never used in the Bible. However, it is commonly used to describe the error that is to be avoided by a Jesus-follower. The believer is to avoid "legalism," it is said. But what does it mean to avoid "legalism"? All too often, modern Christians assume that when Paul maintains that we are justified by faith and not by "works of the Law," that his assertion is a denunciation of "legalism." However, this assumption betrays a great deal of confusion. Legalism, inappropriate as it is, is—at best—only one of the problems that Jesus and Paul seek to expose when they criticize Pharisaical righteousness; and it is not the most important problem. (Arguably, it is the least important problem.) In the notes below I seek to bring clarity to the issue of what "legalism" actually is.*

174. The term "legalism" denotes the perspective that righteousness can be defined as flawlessly *keeping the rules*. Legalism differs from the biblical perspective that would take moral rules to be, at best, a general statement of what true objective righteousness would typically look like. Instead, legalism construes moral rules to be absolute; and it defines righteousness as strict compliance with all the moral rules.

*There is a rather shallow and unthinking perspective that some people take. They use the word "legalism" to define any avid pursuit of goodness and righteousness and then adopt a dismissive perspective toward an avid pursuit of goodness as being "legalistic." In other words, they assume that a casual and not particularly eager pursuit of righteousness is to be preferred over a profoundly eager and uncompromising pursuit of righteousness; and they label the latter "legalistic." This has absolutely nothing to do with anything the Bible teaches. From a biblical perspective, it is not possible to be overly eager in one's pursuit of righteousness. The more eager and uncompromising one is in his pursuit of righteousness, the better.*

- 174.1. Some students of the Bible would take the Law of Moses to be the set of rules that define righteousness. Others would take a new set of rules that were instituted by Jesus (the "New Covenant") to be the set of rules that define righteousness. Still others would take a set of rules received from their particular Christian culture to define righteousness.
- 174.2. However, no matter which particular set of rules a person sees to be the appropriate one, if he is a legalist, then he will define righteousness to be strict compliance with that particular set of rules.
  - 174.2.1. According to the legalist, no deviation from that particular set of rules can ever possibly be consistent with righteousness, under any circumstances.

175. It is true that Pharisaism tended to encourage legalism, because the Pharisees tended to define righteousness strictly in terms of doing exactly what the rule said. They were wrong to do this. It is wrong to construe righteousness as meticulous, though merely outward, compliance with a rule. However, their primary error was not legalism. Legalism was a secondary (or tertiary) error that was a symptom of much greater errors that were more fundamental.
- 175.1. The fundamental errors of Pharisaism could be characterized as the following:
- 175.1.1. Self-deception: The Pharisees tended not to view themselves as being as morally depraved and sinful as they actually were. (This is a false self-understanding on the part of the Pharisees; but it is *not* the error of “legalism.”)
- 175.1.2. The Pharisees tended to believe that God would be pleased with their active advocacy for Law-obedience and would overlook their failure to actually be obedient to the Law themselves. (This belief is tragically false, but it is *not* the error of “legalism.”)
- 175.1.3. The Pharisees tended to believe that one could make himself worthy of God’s blessing through his Law-observance. (This is a false belief on the part of the Pharisees; but it is *not* the error of “legalism.”)
- 175.1.4. The Pharisees tended to mistake the relative value of different requirements of the Law. They tended to ignore the greater, weightier, more substantive moral requirements in the Law and focused, instead, on the less substantive religious requirements in the Law. They ignored true righteousness while being meticulous in their religious observance. (This tendency was in error, it is *not* the error of “legalism.”)
- 175.1.5. The Pharisees tended to believe that God would be satisfied with outward compliance with what the Law required, even in the absence of any inner desire to know, love, serve, honor, and obey God. (This tendency is a mistake, but it is *not* the error of “legalism.”)
- 175.1.5.1. This false belief is the closest that Pharisaism gets to embracing “legalism” as I have defined it in these notes, for it does tend to view righteousness as nothing other than outward compliance to certain rules of behavior. However, the mistake that Jesus and/or Paul were criticizing when they critiqued the Pharisees in this regard was not the philosophical mistake of defining righteousness in the wrong way. It was the spiritual mistake of not showing any evidence of being sanctified in their inner being. Hence, they are not strictly speaking concerned about their “legalism.” Rather, they are actually concerned about their

lack of genuine holiness (sanctification).

175.1.5.2. Arguably, an individual could manifest genuine sanctification at the same time that he is guilty of the philosophical mistake of “legalism.” Such a person’s legalism would not be lethal. The error of legalism is relatively unimportant and correctible. Jesus’ and Paul’s concern was the fatal error of being preoccupied with “legalistic” compliance with the rules of the Law as a substitute for true repentance, true holiness, and genuine sanctification. The real problem was not the legalism as such. The real problem was the lack of being sanctified.

176. It should be clear from what has been said above that the issue of the relative role of “works of the Law” and “belief (faith)” in our salvation has little, if anything, to do with “legalism.” Paul and Jesus were not combatting “legalism” among the Jews. They were combatting a set of *other* false beliefs that tended to comprise the working understanding of their contemporaries among the Jews. Those false beliefs derived primarily from a faulty understanding of what was the basis for divine mercy and what were the conditions placed on divine mercy. To a certain extent their false beliefs also derived from a faulty definition of righteousness (e.g., a “legalistic” definition of righteousness). But their faulty definition of righteousness was itself the result of their false understanding of the basis for and the conditions placed on God’s mercy.

### PART III

## Other Significant Elements of Biblical Philosophy

### *Other Significant Concepts and Teaching That Can Be Found Within the Bible*

*Making the distinction between that which is fundamental and that which is not fundamental to the biblical message and worldview can be very difficult in practice. In certain respects, the distinction is somewhat arbitrary. You will notice significant overlap and clear connections between the themes in this portion of the notes and the concepts and themes in the previous sections of the notes. This is what we would expect from an exposition of a coherent worldview. Because the Bible presents a coherent worldview, there is not always a clear difference between that which lies at the essential core of that worldview and that which is more on the non-essential margins.*

## THE MANIFOLD WISDOM OF GOD

### *Different Purposes for the Different Stories of Different Individuals*

177. God does not have exactly the same purpose for the existence of each and every human individual. God has a vast number of different purposes to be accomplished through the lives and stories of all the different human individuals he is creating.

*In Ephesians 3:10, Paul speaks of the "manifold wisdom" of God. What I am discussing here is perfectly consistent with and implicit in what Paul means by the "manifold" wisdom of God there. God's wisdom expresses itself and makes itself evident in absolutely unique ways in the lives of each and every human individual. However, in Ephesians 3:10, Paul is primarily focused on how the wisdom of God manifests itself differently in and through different people groups. He is especially concerned to note how the wisdom of God manifests itself differently in and through the Jews as compared to how it manifests itself in and through the Gentiles.*

177.1. There are, indeed, universal aspects to what God is seeking to accomplish in and through the lives of human individuals. With respect to their rescue from death and how the story of such rescue embodies the mercy of God, every human being's story serves the same purpose. However, there is more to each human life than simply to be a "vessel of mercy prepared for glory." That is, there is more to the purpose of one's life than simply to be a recipient of divine mercy, as important as that is.

177.1.1. Each human life tells a unique story. It is God's purpose to tell a unique story through each individual life and thereby accomplish a unique purpose. God's "wisdom" (in one important sense of the term) consists in the intelligent, creative way in which God expresses and reflects just what he wants to express in and through his scripting of the lives of his creatures.

177.1.1.1. God's wisdom in this sense is "manifold." There are as many different unique ways that God has expressed who he is as there are human individuals. There are as many different purposes being accomplished by God as there are stories being created through the lives of all the individual humans.

177.1.1.2. Each and every human being must understand and appreciate the uniqueness of his story and purpose. To fail to do so is to fail to understand who he is.

178. God does not have exactly the same purpose for the existence of each and every category of human individuals. Not only does God have different purposes to be accomplished through the lives and stories of all the different human individuals he is creating. Those stories and purposes fall into discernible general categories (or species) of lives and stories. In other words, there are significant category distinctions that define real created differences among individuals. God has distinctive purposes in mind for each and every species of human life.

178.1. God is accomplishing different purposes in and through the life of an ethnic African-American from what he is in and through the life of an ethnic Swedish-American. A

different purpose for an ethnic Chinese-American from that of an American cultural mut. All of God's purposes are good.

- 178.2. He is accomplishing different purposes in and through the life of a male from what he is in and through the life of a female. All of God's purposes are good.
- 178.3. He is accomplishing different purposes in and through the life of a human being who lives in poverty from what he is in and through the life of a person of wealth and comfort. All of God's purposes are good.
- 178.4. He is accomplishing different purposes in and through the life of a human being who is well educated from what he is accomplishing in and through the life of a person who is uneducated. All of God's purposes are good.
- 178.5. Exactly the same claim can be made with respect to any and every discernible and real category of human being. All of God's purposes are good.
  - 178.5.1. From the standpoint of a biblical worldview, chauvinism (belief that my way of being a human being is inherently superior to any other way of being a human being) is an ignorant and immoral mindset. It is particularly immoral to be a "respector of persons," that is, to treat people of my (or some privileged) class of persons with more honor, respect, and deference than any other class of persons.

### *Different Purposes for the Different Stories of Different People-Groups*

179. God has distinctive purposes he wants to accomplish in and through the lives and history of different people-groups.
  - 179.1. God is not seeking to accomplish exactly the same purposes in and through the various people-groups he has created. Each people-group is unique.
    - 179.1.1. In an of itself, ethnic "pride" is perfectly appropriate. It becomes perverse only when it becomes chauvinism, a belief in the actual superiority of my ethnic group vis à vis other ethnic groups. In other words, it is not factually false or morally inappropriate to believe that the unique and distinctive purposes that God is accomplishing in and through my people group are good and bring glory to God is a unique and distinctive way.
180. The purposes that God is seeking to accomplish in and through the Jews as an ethnic people-group is unique. No other people group has the special and distinctive role that God has given to the Jews.
  - 180.1. The Bible makes a very explicit distinction between Jews and Gentiles (all non-Jews). This

is an acknowledgment of the absolutely unique status of the Jews as a people-group.

- 180.2. In the “wisdom of God,” what God has set out to embody in and through his dealings with the people-group Israel is significantly different from what he has set out to embody in and through his dealings with the other people-groups that constitute the Gentiles.
  - 180.2.1. Each different Gentile people-group is different. God has somewhat different purposes for each different Gentile people-group. But God’s purposes for the Jews is categorically different from those of any Gentile people-group.
  - 180.2.2. There are many aspects to what God is wanting to embody in and through his dealings with the Jews (in contradistinction to what he wants to embody in his dealings with Gentiles), but, in general terms, the distinction can be described like this: in and through the dealings with the Jews, God wants to reflect and embody his *hesed* (unfailing loyalty to his promises); in and through his dealings with the Gentiles, God wants to reflect his mercy and compassion. God reflects his mercy and compassion in his dealings with the Jews as well. But only through his dealings with the Jews does one see the *hesed* of God in sharp relief.
- 180.3. Paul’s explicit point in Ephesians 3:10 is that we see the multi-faceted manifestation of God’s wisdom when we see the story of how God is saving and rescuing Jews as he draws them to himself and his Son vis à vis the story of how God is saving and rescuing Gentiles as he draws them to himself and his Son.
- 180.4. The distinctive purposes that God is accomplishing through the Jews entails distinctive obligations and responsibilities that have been given to them.
  - 180.4.1. The Jews were chosen by God to be “his people.” No other people group has that unique status and standing in the purposes of God. No Gentile people group can claim to be the “people of God.”

*To be the “people of God” is a concept that has its home in the context of ancient polytheism. Each ethnic group in ancient polytheism believed that they had a unique relationship with a god. That god was their god and they were the people of that god. As the people of that god they were under obligation to be especially and particularly devoted to the “service” of that god. As their god, their god was promising to be especially and particularly committed to promoting the well-being of that people. Their god was promising to protect them, prosper them, keep them safe, etc. It was conditioned, of course, on their doing their part to “serve” the god faithfully. This is the concept that is being employed when the Bible maintains that the Jews are the “people of God.” They have a unique relationship to the transcendent author of reality who has revealed and manifest a persona of himself as a character within the drama of history, namely, as Yahweh, the god of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Yahweh is committed to promoting the well-being of the people of Israel in accordance with a specific set of promises he has explicitly made to them. And Israel is under obligation to “serve” Yahweh in accor-*

dance with a specific set of instructions (Torah) that God has explicitly revealed to them and has particularly required of them.

180.5. The distinctive purposes that God is accomplishing through the Jews is not changed, altered, nor nullified by the entrance of God's Son into history. In other words, the coming of Jesus and the advent of the gospel does not entail that the unique promises that God has made to the Jews as a people-group have been rescinded, set aside, nullified, rendered irrelevant, or in any other way cancelled.

*•In keeping with the above, the distinctive obligations and responsibilities that have been given to the Jews as a people-group have not be rescinded nor cancelled. Therefore, it is meaningful for a Jew who believes in Jesus the Messiah to persist in keeping and honoring Torah in order to remain a Jew in good-standing within the people of Israel. He does not do so in order to attain eternal Life. Belief in Jesus, alone, is sufficient for that. He does so in order to remain a member of that people-group with respect to whom explicit promises remain to be fulfilled by God. Those promises are strictly temporal and historical, not eternal. But they are significant and meaningful promises nonetheless and they reflect significant and meaningful purposes that God is seeking to accomplish in and through Israel.*

*•Traditional, historical Christianity has failed to acknowledge the above biblical teaching and has embraced a faulty and mistaken understanding of God's purposes. Typically, Christians have assumed that the promises of the gospel to the people who believe in Jesus the Messiah have replaced and negated the unique and distinctive promises that God made to his explicitly chosen people, Israel. As a consequence, Christians have put pressure on Jews (who have embraced the truth that Jesus is the Messiah) to ignore and reject the distinctive obligations that have been placed on them as Jews. Such Jews have been accused of "seeking to be justified by works (or Law)" and denounced as unbelievers. This has been a significantly destructive and gravely false teaching on the part of Gentile Christians. It reflects serious ignorance of the "manifold wisdom" of God that is expressed in and by the multitude of different narratives that God is creating through the lives and existence of all the different individuals and people-groups. It is undoubtedly ignorant of the fact that God is the grand narrator and reality is a set of interlocking narratives. "Replacement" theology (the view that eternal life through belief in Jesus REPLACES any and every promise that God made to Israel throughout their history and that the "church" of Jesus the Messiah REPLACES Israel as the people of God) makes sense if God's purposes is simple and single-faceted. It makes no sense if God's purposes are multiple and multi-faceted. If God is simply a problem solver whose only purpose is to make eternal Life possible for his rebellious creatures, then replacement theology makes sense. But if God is an author who is creating a reality with multiple plots, story-lines, sup-plots, themes, etc., then replacement theology is highly unlikely (not to mention the fact that it is a complete distortion of what the Bible actually teaches). In light of this, it seems reasonable that the travesty of replacement theology is due to widespread Christian ignorance of the true nature of God (as author and narrator) and the true nature of reality (as a complex of multi-faceted, interlocking narratives).*

*•It stands to reason that, as the historically chosen people of God who existed under distinctive obligations to Torah, the Jews would develop a very distinctive culture and way of life. Jews would create a very different culture from the Gentiles around them. Gentile Christians created a very distinctive "Christian" culture. Having done so, Christians then expected Jews who had come to believe in the Messiah to forsake their Jewish culture and way of life and completely conform their way of life to the Christian culture that Gentiles had created. This is wrong. It is never right, under any circumstances, to require a believer in Jesus to express his belief through conformity to a particular culture. Every believer must reject the fundamentals of "the world" (the universal, world-wide effects of human sin and depravity on the particular culture in which we find ourselves). But, aside from that, there is no prescribed cultural form within which faith must express itself. Gentiles are wrong, therefore, to denounce Jewish Jesus-believers who do not conform*

*their way of life to Gentile Christian culture but, rather, retain the distinctive elements of Jewish culture in their expression of their belief in Jesus (unless that particular element of Jewish culture is clearly and unmistakably an expression of one's rejection of Jesus and/or the gospel.)*

*•The writings of Paul in the New Testament do not explicitly contain the above points. Paul never envisioned someone rejecting the notion that the Jews were the unique people of God who had both unique promises and purposes as well as unique obligations. Paul and everyone he was writing to assumed that perspective and took it for granted. Such a fact was so well ingrained that Paul had to address the opposite problem: Jews who believed that you could not be a bona fide disciple of Jesus unless you conformed your way of living and being to the Jewish way of life. To these Jews it was unthinkable that there could exist a distinctively Gentile way of being a disciple of Jesus. Paul argues long and hard to make the case that, in Jesus, there is no obligation to be or to live like a Jew. One can be a bona fide follower of Jesus who will inherit eternal life even while remaining thoroughly and unmistakably Gentile. If Paul were writing today, he would be faced with the exact opposite problem. He would have to argue long and hard that, in Jesus, there is no obligation to be or to live like a Gentile. One can be a bona fide follower of Jesus who will inherit eternal life even while remaining thoroughly and unmistakably Jewish. Paul was never faced with the need, in his time and place, to construct such arguments. But had he been faced with just such attitudes, that is exactly what he would have argued. An accurate understanding of the gospel and of faith in Jesus would clearly suggest so.*

## THE INDIVIDUAL IN THE PURPOSES OF GOD

### *The Primacy of the Individual in the Purposes of God*

181. Contrary to a frequent assumption, the locus of God's primary purpose for an individual human existence is in the individual existence of that human individual. God's primary purpose is not to create a community or a *polis*.
  - 181.1. In the biblical worldview, the human individual is the irreducible unit of human existence and human experience.
  - 181.2. In contrast to a classical Greek worldview (e.g., Aristotle) human existence and human experience is not located in and defined by the *polis* (community). It is located in and defined by the individual human being.
    - 181.2.1. A fundamental question that must be addressed by any worldview is this: does the *polis* (community) exist because of and for the sake of human individuals, or does the human individual exist because of and for the sake of the *polis* (community)? The biblical worldview answers this question in favor of the primacy of the individual. Any *polis* (community) exists because of and for the sake of the individual human beings who populate it.
      - 181.2.1.1. In the above sense, biblical philosophy clearly assumes and promotes a sort of

individualism.

(A) *In our present time, it has become quite common to decry the “individualism” that has insinuated itself into modern Western Christianity. It has actually become a trite criticism. The “individualism” being decied is never adequately defined and is typically confused with other evils that are unrelated to individualism per se. More on this later. But it is important to note that, in the foundational sense that it locates the essential unit of human existence in the individual and not in the community, biblical philosophy is individualistic rather than communitarian.*

1. It is noteworthy that the focus on the Bible is clearly on the rescue of individual human beings from death and destruction. The essence of the gospel message itself is the good news that God has invaded history in order to mercifully sanctify and rescue those human individuals whom he chose before the foundation of the world. It is the human individual who is the locus of God’s salvation and, hence, the locus of the most important message in the Bible.

*•The parable Jesus told of the shepherd who leaves 99 of his sheep in the pasture while he goes to look for the one sheep that was lost includes one of the most poignant statements in the Bible of the value of the human individual to both Jesus and God.*

182. There are two distinctly different ways that a human individual can live his life: (1) he can be an individual whose orientation is toward himself ( a SELF-ORIENTATED individual); or (2) he can be an individual whose orientation is toward others (an OTHERS-ORIENTATED individual).

182.1. The SELF-ORIENTED individual is one whose focus is on satisfying and fulfilling his own desires, wishes, inclinations, preferences, purposes, and goals.

182.1.1. Such an individual is a perversion of God’s desire for what he wants and created a human individual to be. Such an individual is evil.

182.2. The OTHERS-ORIENTED individual is one whose focus is on acting in such a way that he promotes the well-being of others. His goal is to do what he can to bring about the satisfaction and fulfillment of the desires, wishes, inclinations, preferences, purposes, and goals of others.

182.2.1. Such an individual is exactly in keeping with God’s desire for what he wants and what he created a human individual to be. Such an individual is righteous.

*•Many Christians—recognizing correctly that it is unrighteous to be a selfish, self-centered, self-oriented individual—assume that “individualism” is the source of this unrighteousness. Individualism fosters self-orientation, they reason. Communitarianism fosters others-orientation. This is false. And they embrace a false dichotomy. They believe that we must choose between self-oriented individ-*

ualism of others-oriented communitarianism. But this is a false dichotomy from the standpoint of biblical philosophy. Right and true philosophy endorses and promotes others-oriented individualism. There is no conflict between individualism and an orientation to others. Jesus was a fiercely independent individual. But he was the MAN FOR OTHERS par excellence.

#### BIBLICAL PHILOSOPHY AS EXISTENTIAL

183. Rightly understood, biblical philosophy is a form of existentialism. As I am using the term, existentialism is an approach to philosophy that emphasizes the critical, central role that the human individual plays in his own existence.
- 183.1. Existentialism does not concern itself with understanding the nature of BEING. Rather, it concerns itself with understanding INDIVIDUAL HUMAN BEING. It does not care to know what EXISTENCE is. It is concerned with what *individual human existence* is. Who am I? What am I? How should I (as an individual human being) live? These are the questions that are central to existentialist philosophies.
- 183.1.1. Existentialism unmistakably puts its emphasis on the individual human being. The whole purpose of philosophy, so far as existentialism is concerned, is to enlighten the human individual with respect to his role in shaping and defining his existence.
- 183.2. The emphasis in most existentialist philosophies is not on what one knows and understands about metaphysical realities. Rather, it is on whom one has decided to be. On what kind of person one has decided to be.
- 183.3. Existentialism emphasizes the free-will choice of the human individual with respect to who and what that individual will be. Each human individual defines and determines who and what he is by the free choices he makes. If I choose to submit to God in the requisite way, I define myself as a child of God. Alternatively, if I refuse to submit to God in the requisite way, I define myself as a child of the Devil. But the definitive, self-defining choice belongs to each and every human individual in and of himself. I, by my choices, will determine who I am and what my destiny will be.

*•The flavor or tenor of the Bible is noteworthy in this regard. The Bible does not read like something interested first and foremost in the project of building a utopian society. Rather, it reads like something preoccupied with the crucial, life-defining choices of individual human beings. There is no theory expounded for which social structures and relationships are most just, loving, and righteous. But there is much detailed exhortation about how an individual should see reality, think about reality, conduct himself in reality, and choose. The individual is exhorted to be wise and not foolish. It is a bizarre reading of the New Testament (and especially the life and teaching of Jesus) when various Christians seek to find some version of socialism, communitarianism, or social justice there. The New Testament clearly and unapologetically promotes repentance on the part of individual human beings in order that they might be rightly oriented toward God and thereby secure mercy and eternal Life for themselves. It is Life for the individual, not Justice for the world in the present age that is the unmistakable focus of the Bible.*

### *Human Individuals as Social Creatures in Biblical Philosophy*

184. There are two distinctly different ways that a philosophy can conceive of the nature of human existence: (1) it can conceive of human existence as independent of relationships with other human beings; or (2) it can conceive of relationships with other human beings as a necessary and ineluctable element of human existence. It seems quite clear that biblical philosophy has the latter conception of human existence. Human existence just is, as a matter of course, a social existence, an existence lived in relation to others.
- 184.1. From the beginning of Genesis (“it is not good for man to be alone”) to the end of Revelation (the new Jerusalem), it is assumed that every human individual will live in society with other human individuals. To live in complete isolation with no human contact is never even entertained as a possibility. It is certainly never offered as a preferable state for a human being.
- 184.2. Not surprisingly, the Bible seems to assume that the social aspect of the human being is an intrinsic part of his created nature and purpose.
185. Since it is in the very nature of a human being to be a social being, there is no inherent contradiction between being a human individual and being others-oriented. To be others-oriented is to fulfill an essential part of one’s INDIVIDUAL *telos*.

*•It is false and perverse to oppose self-orientation among human beings by denying their value, significance, and importance as individuals. It is true, logically, that if a human individual has no true value, significance, and importance, then he has no basis for caring for himself. So, the denial of individual value, significance, and importance is an available strategy to prevent self-love. However, it does so by advocating an utterly perverse and false doctrine. The Bible unmistakably upholds the importance, value, and significance of each and every human individual. Its antidote to perverse self-love is to make clear the relative value of the self-oriented individual vis à vis the others-oriented individual. The former is unrighteous, ignoble, and empty. The latter is righteous, noble, and whole.*

### **THE CORPORATE ELEMENT IN GOD’S PURPOSES**

186. While it is true that God’s primary purpose for human existence lies in each and every human individual, yet God has some secondary purposes that he wishes to accomplish in and through human existence. Namely, God does purpose to create two distinctive corporate bodies—groups of individuals, united by a reality they share in common and living and relating to one another in keeping with that uniting reality.
- 186.1. In other words, building individual human beings into particular communities is, in fact, a secondary purpose of God in human history.

- 186.2. There are two particular “bodies” that are important parts of God’s purpose in history:
- 186.2.1. God has created the people of Israel.
  - 186.2.2. God has created the “body of Christ.”
187. God’s purpose to create these two distinctive communities is not in contradiction to the claim that God’s primary purpose lies in the existence of individual human beings.
- 187.1. God’s purpose is not to build the nation of Israel for its own sake, as an abstraction. His purpose is to create a number of individual Israelites who, because they are rightly oriented toward God and the things of God, do, as a matter of course, live together in a manner that is consistent with the purpose of God to have a nation of righteous individuals over whom he reigns as God. The personal orientation of each and every individual member of the nation is critical to God’s purposes. A godless Israelite who outwardly promotes the community is of no value to God’s real purpose.
  - 187.2. God’s purpose is not to build the “body of Christ” for its own sake, as an abstraction. His purpose is to create a number of individual Jesus-believers who, because they are rightly oriented toward God and the things of God, do, as a matter of course, live together in a manner that is consistent with the purpose of God to have a body of believing individuals over whom Jesus reigns as master and king. The personal orientation of each and every individual member of the body of Christ is critical to God’s purposes. A godless “believer” who outwardly promotes the community of Christ is of no value to God’s real purpose.
  - 187.3. It is instructive to ask the following question—which of the following is God’s primary purpose: (1) to bring rebellious human individuals into a state of heart where their existential commitments involve a commitment to know, love, serve, and honor him? or (2) to build a group of people into a community where specific godly values are expressed in the relationships they have with each other within the community? Clearly, both are included in God’s purposes for mankind. But, if we had to choose just one of the above options, we would certainly have to choose the first. The first option represents the primary purpose of God. God’s secondary purposes only have meaning in the context of the first purpose being achieved. A community built on merely outward forms of relationship (no matter how good, just, and kind) and not built on an inward transformation of the hearts of individuals would simply not fulfill God’s purposes.

## **THE EVIL OF "INDIVIDUALISM"**

188. In our present situation, it has become commonplace, even trite, to decry the “individualism” that has crept into the mindset of “Western” Christians. From the standpoint of these social critics, “individualism” is the boogie man that is responsible for all forms of evil and injustice in the world. And a certain version of Christianity is held to be the root cause of the “individualism” that fosters these evils.
- 188.1. The guilty version of Christianity is alternately identified as “Post-enlightenment Christianity” or “Western Christianity.” It is assumed that it is a perversion of biblical Christianity and biblical philosophy. This is an important challenge. For I have suggested above that biblical philosophy is fundamentally individualistic. This deserves to be sorted out.
189. The problem is this: those who decry the “individualism” that has crept into the mindset of “Western” Christians never (to my knowledge) clearly define what they mean by “individualism.” They never make it clear what they mean by “individualism.”
- 189.1. Most frequently, what these critics are decrying is greed and consumerism. It seems evident, therefore, that what they mean by “individualism” is simply good, old-fashioned selfishness. They are labelling self-centered preoccupation with attending to one’s own needs at the expense of others as “individualism.”
- 189.1.1. As stated above, the self-oriented individual is unrighteous and perverse. Self-centered preoccupation with attending to one’s own needs at the expense of others is clearly evil. But it is not fair to label it “individualism.” Such a label is grossly misleading. It suggests that a philosophy that places emphasis and importance on the human individual somehow necessarily promotes and is the source of selfishness. This is simply false. As we saw above, the Bible encourages people to be others-oriented INDIVIDUALS. In fact, it teaches they we have a moral obligation to be just such individuals. It can certainly not be accused of advocating selfishness.
- 189.2. Perhaps what these critics are decrying is a life lived in isolation, alienated from others. Certainly this is a social reality of many human lives. Perhaps they are using “individualism” as a label that describes the choice of one human being to isolate himself from others.
- 189.2.1. Certainly living in isolation from others is an unrighteous choice. To seek to isolate myself and to avoid meaningful relationships with other human beings is to rebel against one of the created elements of human existence. As stated above, we are social creatures by the design and purpose of God. If I reject that fact, I am rebelling

against the creator who made me. That is the epitome of unrighteousness. But, as evil as such a choice is, it is misleading and false to label such a choice “individualism.” The “evil” of such a state is not that the person is existing as an individual and making individual choices. The “evil” of his choice lies in the unhealthy and false perspective he has on others and his own existence. Isolation is a self-protection. It would be better to label it the evil of “self-protection” than to dub it “individualism.”

189.2.1.1. Such a person’s sin is not “individualism.” His sin is “self-protection” and a failure to manifest love.

189.3. Often the way these critics decry “individualism” in Western Christianity is to accuse Western Christianity of practicing “Lone Ranger Christianity” and to accuse modern Christians of being “Lone Ranger Christians.” The problem with this criticism is that, while it may be rhetorically powerful, it is hopelessly vague and undefined. What is a Lone Ranger Christian? What evil is one attempting to denote by that label? I have never heard it defined or analyzed.

189.3.1. My best and only guess is that they are decrying the fact that Christians are often tolerant of and favorable toward individual effort, enterprise, and achievement and are not insistent that anything that one seeks to accomplish be accomplished in and through teamwork and cooperative effort.

189.3.1.1. This charge is a matter of faulty moral judgment. It assumes that cooperative effort by a group is morally good and any and all achievement by a sole individual is necessarily evil. That is not a moral judgment that is supported by biblical philosophy. It is, at best, the personal prejudice of a certain sub-culture or personality type. There is no biblical teaching that would judge as unrighteous the individual pursuit of individual excellence and/or individual achievement.

*•What was it that Jesus, the Messiah, accomplished if not individual excellence and individual achievement? Jesus did not form a committee to bring salvation to mankind. Jesus acted as a unique individual with a unique and solo mission given to him by his creator.*

189.4. Perhaps what these critics are decrying is the very notion that the human individual is valuable in his own right. Instead, the human individual only finds his meaning, value, and significance through his role and function within a community. It is the community that has value in its own right. The human individual only has value in relation to the community.

- 189.4.1. Certainly the biblical worldview is “individualistic” in the sense that such critics would be decrying “individualism.” Biblical philosophy would be guilty as charged here. The problem is that such “individualism” is hardly an evil. This conception of individualism is TRUE. Individualism in this sense describes the way God actually created human existence to be.
- 189.4.1.1. The “boogie man” of individualism in the sense under consideration here is an impossibility. Man cannot live a non-relational, non-social existence. Even the hermit is one who has chosen a mode of relationship to others. It may not be a healthy relationship; but it is a relationship nonetheless. And the hermit’s individual human existence is defined by the mode of his relationship to others. God created us to be in relationship to other human beings. It is impossible for a human being to be otherwise. He can relate to others in a manner that is healthy and righteous, or in a manner that is unhealthy and unrighteous; but he cannot disconnect himself from others altogether. That would be impossible.
- 189.4.2. When the criticism of individualism is coming from this perspective—from the perspective that the irreducible unit of human existence and of God’s purposes with respect to human existence is the community, rather than the human individual—the philosophical judgment that underlies this criticism is more at home in socialism and communitarianism than it is at home in the biblical worldview.
- 189.5. More often than not, the “rap” against the sins of modern Christians arising from their being too “individualistic” is intended to advance a particular social-political philosophy without being completely honest and transparent about that agenda. To be specific, it is intended to promote some form of socialism or statism as the only truly righteous political, economic, and social system. Socialism and its theoretical cousins—it is assumed—are not “individualistic.” Capitalism and its theoretical cousins—it is maintained—are completely individualistic. So, the claim is made that Christians need to realize that Jesus would want us to reject individualism—which is to say, capitalism—and to support socialistic political agendas.
- 189.5.1. Unless it would be the Kingdom of God with Messiah Jesus as king, the biblical worldview does not promote any specific political, economic, and social system as being wholly and unqualifiedly righteous.
- 189.5.2. If the Bible can be said to prefer any socio-economic system this side of the Kingdom of God (on moral, theological, or spiritual grounds), it is demonstrable no from

of statism (including socialism) is a system that it would prefer.

## UNITY AND THE PEOPLE OF GOD

### *The People of God in Biblical Philosophy*

190. There are two distinct sets of people who are identified as the people of God in biblical philosophy:

190.1. The people of Israel.

190.1.1. In biblical philosophy, ethnic Israel per se is never identified as the people of God. Ethnic Israel is conditionally the people of God, but it is never the people of God in actual fact until a specific point in history.

190.1.1.1. Throughout history, there is a standing invitation offered to ethnic Israel: "repent, return to me, and keep my Covenant and I will be your God, and you will be my people." But ethnic Israel is not and cannot be the true people of God unless and until they respond rightly to this invitation. A people group that has not turned their hearts toward God to honor him and serve him is not the people of God.

•There have always been select individuals in and among ethnic Israel in every generation who have responded to God's invitation and have turned their hearts toward God. The Bible refers to such people as "the Remnant." Hence, there has always been a remnant of ethnic Israel who are rightly related to God in the way that the true people of God should be. But, to date, it has never happened that the entirety of ethnic Israel has turned their hearts to God and become rightly related to him.

190.1.1.2. However, of all the people groups in the world, it is to ethnic Israel and only to ethnic Israel that God has issued this invitation. Similarly, only ethnic Israel has received a promise from God that one day he will "pour out his Spirit" on all of Israel, he will "circumcise the hearts" of all Israel, and thus all Israel "will be saved." When that latter promise of God is fulfilled, then that will be a day in history when all of ethnic Israel has, in truth, become the people of God.

190.1.2. In the case of ethnic Israel, in the day when they become the people of God, the significance of that designation lies in this:

- 190.1.2.1. Yahweh will put them in that physical land that he promised to their father Abraham and secure them in that land.
- 190.1.2.2. Yahweh will protect them from their enemies.
- 190.1.2.3. Yahweh will cause them to prosper.
- 190.1.2.4. Yahweh will make them the center of the whole world for the service and worship of Yahweh. Yahweh will make the people of Israel a “kingdom of priests” that will serve as a mediator in all the other nations’ relationship to Yahweh.
- 190.1.2.5. The people of Israel will have become a wholly sanctified people and culture. The culture they build together will uphold truth, justice, righteousness, and godliness.
- 190.1.2.6. The whole nation will be defined by and devoted to the service of Yahweh.
- 190.1.3. The privilege of being the “people of God” in the sense that that has been promised to the Jews is only relevant and meaningful in the context of human history in this age. This privilege of being the people of God does not transcend the present evil age. It does not continue to be meaningful in the coming eternal Age.
- 190.2. The ultimate, eternal people of God.
  - 190.2.1. In biblical philosophy, the ultimate “people of God” (although they are seldom, if ever, given this designation) is that set of individuals whom God has selected from out of “all the peoples of the earth” to bless with the ultimate blessing of Abraham: Life in the eternal Age to come.
    - 190.2.1.1. The privilege of being the “people of God” in this sense—in contrast to the privilege of being the people of Israel—has eternal, and not merely temporary, transient significance and benefit.
    - 190.2.1.2. The significance of this designation lies in this: those who are of the Elect, who belong to the ultimate people of God, will not be condemned to death but will be granted Life in the Kingdom of God in the final Age.
  - 190.2.2. Various names and concepts are used in the Bible to identify the individuals who comprise the Elect of God.
    - 190.2.2.1. Names which reflect the fact that an individual will receive a promised destiny from God, that is, that he will “inherit” that promise:
      - Child of God
      - Son of God

•Heir

190.2.2.2. Names which reflect the fact that they satisfy those conditions that qualify them to inherit eternal Life:

- One who is “in Christ” / “in Jesus” /
- One who “believes” / a “believer”
- One who is a “disciple (student) of Jesus” / a “follower of Jesus”
- One who is “sanctified” / a “saint” / a “hagios” / a “holy” one
- One who is “righteous”
- One who is “dikaios”

190.2.2.3. Names which reflect the fact that they have been selected for such a destiny:

- One of whom it can be said, “Jesus, the Christ, is for (ἐν) him.
- One who is “chosen” or “elect”, or one who is “called”
- One who is “sanctified” / a “saint” / a “hagios” / a “holy” one

*•From earlier notes, it may be remembered that the term hagios has two facets to its meaning: an objective sense and a subjective sense. In the objective sense it refers to one who has been chosen and “set apart” by God for a privileged destiny—that is, to receive the ultimate blessing. In the subjective sense it refers to one who manifests various qualities of heart that qualify him to receive the ultimate blessing. In the first sense the term reflects the reality that one has been selected by God for this blessing. In the second sense it reflects the reality that one is satisfying the conditions that qualify him for eternal Life.*

190.2.2.4. There may be other phrases and concepts that are used to denote individuals who will inherit eternal Life. Nothing further immediately comes to mind, but given that this is the primary purpose of God (to call into existence individuals who will be granted eternal Life), we can reasonably expect that this will be expressed in a wide variety of different ways.

190.2.3. Various names and concepts are used in the Bible to identify that set of individuals who constitute the ultimate, eternal people of God.

190.2.3.1. The Elect (The Chosen)

- As we have seen earlier, before God brought reality into being, he had conceived of a particular set of individuals that he was going to create whose destiny was to endure into all of eternity and exist in the eternal Kingdom of God in the final age. The set of individuals is called “The Elect,” or “The Chosen.” The label refers to the fact that these individuals have been chosen (or “elect-ed”) to enjoy Life in the eternal Age (the promised blessing of Abraham).

190.2.3.2. The Many

- In the book of Romans, Paul employs an idiom to describe the elect. He calls those individuals who constitute the Elect “the Many.” It is not clear to me exactly where this idiom comes from. I think it likely that it is an allusion to some statement in the Old Testament.

190.2.3.3. The Body of the Messiah (=the “Body of Christ”)

- As we saw in earlier notes, the set of individuals who will be granted Life in the the final Age (that is, the Elect) become evident by their belief in Jesus the Messiah. More importantly, the group of the Elect that will be given Life in the age to come is that set of individuals whom Jesus will choose to belong to him. It is those individuals to whom Jesus (the Messiah) will grant Life. It is those individuals for whom he will advocate (intercede) at the final judgment.

- Like the English word “body,” the Greek word “soma” can be used in a variety of sense. In particular, it can be used to denote the physical body of a human or animal. Or, it can be used to denote the “mass” of something, or even to an entire group of individuals. The latter use of soma is akin to the way we use the word “body” when we speak of a “body of water,” a “body of work,” a “body of knowledge,” the “body politic,” or “this august body” (when referring to a group of people assembled together for some purpose).

*•The question about the use of language in this phrase is this: Is it intended to denote the literal physical body of the Messiah (with the Messiah as its head) where the picture of the Messiah atop a physical body is employed as a metaphor or analogy of the Messiah’s relationship to the set of individual believers who belong to him as well as serving as an analogy of those individuals’ relationship to each other in a kind of “body”? Or, is it intended simply to denote the “group” or “mass” of individuals who belong to Jesus, the Messiah? I am convinced that it is the latter. The primary intention behind the word “soma” (body) in the phrase “the body of Christ” is to denote a “group” or “mass.” Hence, the “body of the Messiah” is the group or mass of people who belong to the Messiah in the sense described above. There can be no question that Paul, at least, does employ an analogy between the physical body and its relationship to its head and the group of believers and their relationship to their head and to each other. However, while the analogy is undoubtedly suggested to Paul by the dual meaning of soma, it would seem that “mass,” and not “physical body” is the primary meaning of the word “soma” in the phrase “body of Christ.” I would argue that, even if soma did not have a dual meaning (that is, even if the same Greek word was not used to denote both a “mass” and a “physical body”), Paul would still draw an analogy between the mass of believers and the physical body, using different words to denote each. It is not the meaning of soma that induces Paul to examine the body-like relation between the individuals who make up the mass of believers. Rather, it is the aptness of the analogy itself that induces Paul to do this. The fact that soma can be used to denote both is merely a coincidence. It may be a coincidence that played a role in suggesting the analogy to Paul, but it is a coincidence nonetheless.*

190.2.3.4. The Ekklesia (unhelpfully translated “church”)

- The term *ekklesia* simply means an assembly. It is the gathering of a group of

people for some specific purpose. In classical Greece, when all the citizens of the city-state gathered together to make decisions with regard to the affairs of the polis, such a gathering was called the *ekklesia*. The term *ekklesia* does not suggest the purpose of the gathering, nor the composition of the gathered body, it simply denotes a gathering of people together. The purpose and composition of the *ekklesia* will depend upon the context.

- The first time the term *ekklesia* occurs in Greek scripture (if my memory serves me well) is in the account of Israel gathered at the foot of Mt. Sinai to “meet” with Yahweh their God. The gathering of the people of Israel is called an *ekklesia*.

- As the term comes to be used throughout the rest of the Scriptures, it takes on the meaning of the grouping of individuals who constitute the “people of God.” When all those individuals to whom God has chosen to grant Life are conceived of as having been gathered into one mass or assembly, they are described as constituting the *ekklesia* of God. Therefore, *ekklesia* means nothing more and nothing less than that set of individuals who comprise the Elect.

- If and when the New Testament speaks of the *ekklesia* at a specific location (e.g., the *ekklesia* at Corinth), it is not because Paul conceives of the community at Corinth to be a “church” (*ekklesia*) in and of itself. Rather, the *ekklesia* at Corinth is shorthand for “that group of particular individuals residing in Corinth who belong to God’s *ekklesia* and who, therefore, function as a concrete community, in mutual relation to one another. “ The *ekklesia* to which they belong transcends their particular geography as well as their time in history. The *ekklesia* of God extends over the whole world and spans the whole course of history. It is what later Christians will come to call the “church universal.” Hence, to use the term as the Bible uses it, it is fallacious to claim that any given locale has an *ekklesia*. It may have a community of people living in relation to one another who are a part of the *ekklesia* of God. But no particular community of people living in relation to one another can justly be labeled “an *ekklesia*,” not in the sense that the Bible uses the term.

- One of the most significant mistakes in all of Christian history is the identification of the *ekklesia* as an institution. Most Christians have, for nearly 1900 years, conceived of the *ekklesia* as an institution with offices, rules of procedure, membership, etc. This is not what God had ever intended his *ekklesia* to

be. God's ekklesia is an abstract reality, not a concrete institution. It is the "mathematical" set of every individual human being who belongs to God's Elect throughout the entirety of human history. It is of little or no consequence whether individuals who belong to God's ekklesia form institutions (in contradistinction to communities) together. Indeed, it is arguable that the institutions that believing individuals have formed throughout history have led to more harm and evil than they have to good.

*•In the light of what the Bible teaches about the morally depraved state of human beings and, hence, of human culture, it shouldn't be surprising that the institutions (churches) we have built have fostered evil in the world. Our institutions are human creations, not divine creations. Accordingly, they are imbued with the evil and depravity of the sinful human beings who created and operate within them. The ekklesia of God is not something that man is building. It is something that God is building. But God is not building the human institutions that we call "churches." We sinful human beings are building them.*

*•Note that when Jesus tells Peter, "on this rock I will build my ekklesia," he is not speaking with reference to the institutional church that man will build. Jesus means the more abstract reality of that gathering of individuals, taken from out of mankind, that God is making his people.*

*•The mistaken notion that Christians have of ekklesia is a clear example of the fallacy of interpreting the Bible in the light of our own assumptions and experience rather than reconstructing the assumptions and experiential backdrop of the biblical authors. We believe we know what "church" means because it is a ubiquitous phenomenon in our culture. We are surrounded by institutions that have buildings as the locus of their activities and programs. Hence, we interpret our Bible in the light of what a "church" is to us. That is a fallacy. Biblical assertions mean what their author(s) intend, not what we—from our standpoint—take them to mean. This is why it is misleading and unhelpful when the translators translate ekklesia as "church." Nothing in our experience would suggest that a "church" is anything other than an institution. It becomes irresistible to think in those terms. But, since that is never what the New Testament means by ekklesia, it is clearly misleading, then, to render it "church."*

#### 190.2.3.5. The Pleroma (The Fullness or The Complete Set)

•The term pleroma is derived from the Greek word from "full." The Pleroma, then, denotes the the "fullness" of something. It denotes a particular thing in its fullness, or completeness.

•The Pleroma is the full complement of those individuals who make up God's Elect.

•Paul uses the term to describe the people of God because he wants to emphasize a particular truth about God and his purposes. In God's project of gathering together a people for himself, God has purposed to include both Jews and Gentiles. The people of God is not an exclusively Jewish group. Neither is it an exclusively Gentile group. If one were to enumerate those individual Jews who to belong to the Elect, he would not have enumerated the "fullness" of God's people. Likewise, he would not have enumerated the "fullness" of God's people if he

had innumerate only those individual Gentiles who to belong to the Elect. The “fullness” or “completeness” (that is, the Pleroma) of God’s people is constituted of both Jews and Gentiles.

- The writings of Paul where the term Pleroma is used are writings where Paul is intent on stressing the inclusion of Gentiles in the people of God.

*•This term (occurring mostly in Ephesians and Colossians) is typically translated “fullness” or “fullness of God (deity)” and is typically understood to denote the ontological nature of Jesus, the Christ. That is, it is taken to denote the fact that Jesus was a being who “contained” within himself the “fullness of God.” He was “fully God” as well as being “fully man.” The interpretation of the term is ignoring the context within which it occurs and ignoring or misconstruing the argument that Paul is making. In those contexts, Paul is not addressing the issues of Christology. Paul is addressing the issue of whether God’s salvation is reserved for the Jews alone, or whether it is inclusive of Gentiles qua Gentiles as well. In his insistence that the set of people who will receive the blessing of Abraham includes both Jews and Gentiles, he uses the term the “Fullness” to designate the full complement of individuals (including Gentiles as well as Jews) who will inherit the blessing. Jews who believe in Jesus do not constitute the FULLNESS of that set of individuals who are the ultimate people of God.*

*•Because of the historical context in which Paul wrote, both he and his readers take it for granted that Jews belong to the people of God. What is problematic (and controversial among them) is whether Gentiles qua Gentiles can be included among the people of God. (God would never let Gentiles who live like Gentiles be numbered among his people!) Paul is emphatic that, in view of their belief in Jesus, God has included among his people Gentiles who live like Gentiles. Today, we have the opposite problem. Our automatic assumption is that God’s people is composed only of Jesus-believers who have forsaken any and all remnants of Jewish culture and have embraced the culture created by Gentile Christianity. If Paul were writing today, he would oppose this modern assumption just as forcefully as he did its opposite in his time.*

#### 190.2.3.6. Ta Panta (The All or The Whole )

- Ta Panta is the neuter plural form of the Greek word pas, a word that means “each, every, all, or whole.” As a consequence, most English translations of the Bible translate this phrase as “everything” or “all things” in all those occurrence in the New Testament that, I believe, are referring to the Elect. Obviously, translating it “all things” obscures that fact that Paul intends it to denote the entire set of God’s Elect. While the phrase certainly can mean “all things” (that is its most natural meaning), it is sometimes used as a technical idiom used to describe “The All,” where the “all” that is in view is the entire set of those people who belong to The Elect.

*•The claim I am making here about Paul’s idiomatic use of Ta Panta is undoubtedly controversial. I am not aware of any grammar or lexicon that acknowledges this use of the neuter plural, ta panta. However, the evidence seems compelling to me that Paul uses it as an idiom in precisely this way. Many of the occurrences of ta panta make sense if it is taken as an idiomatic description of the Elect while those occurrences are highly troubling and problematic if it is taken to mean “all things.” The objection that is most likely to be raised against my reading of it is that the phrase is neuter and, therefore, must refer to things rather than people. However, even our accepted English translations have to acknowledge that sometimes the neuter plural ta panta denotes people (and is translated*

“everyone”) rather than things (where it would be translated “everything”). The clearest example of this is Galatians 3:22. So, obviously, it is within the bounds of acceptable usage for the neuter form to be used to denote people, and only people.

•The primary incentive for Paul to use the term *Ta Panta* is to emphasize that the Elect includes both Jewish individuals and Gentile individuals. It is very much like *Pleroma* in this regard.

190.2.3.7. There may be other phrases and concepts that are used to denote the Elect of God. Nothing further comes to mind, but it is important to note how central this concept is to Biblical Philosophy. Calling into existence a people who belong to God, a people who will be the ultimate fulfillment of his ultimate purposes, is the primary purpose of God in the whole narrative of created reality.

## *Unity*

191. In seeking to understand the concept of “unity” as it is discussed in the Bible, it is necessary to answer a crucial question: When the Bible speaks of “unity” among the people of God, is it describing the nature or quality of the interpersonal relationships among the people of God? Does it primarily describe something about how a member of the people of God would experience his relationship to others? OR, when it speaks of “unity” among the people of God, is it describing an objective reality that is independent of and apart from how one would experience his relationship to other members of the people of God? Does it perhaps describe something that is true irrespective of the quality of his interpersonal relationships?
192. Many within modern Christian culture mistakenly understand “unity” in the Bible to be describing the former alternative in note 190, and not the latter alternative.
- 192.1. As they understand it, “unity” describes something that is brought about through the choices and actions of the people of God themselves. This “unity” is something that the people of God create.
- 192.1.1. This “unity” describes the psycho-emotional experience that one can have because of the nature and quality of his relationships with others—the experience of being loved, respected, and cared for by others and, especially, the experience of feeling total solidarity and belonging in relation to others. “Unity” in this sense would remain a fact only to the extent that certain social and relational realities are maintained through the choices and behaviors of the people of God—namely, only to the extent that the people of God make choices to love and care for one another and exist in agreement and harmony with one another. Any disruption between people would destroy “unity” in this sense.
- 192.2. As they understand it, “unity” is an imperative that has been given the people of God.

The Bible, as they read it, is commanding them: “Be one! Be unified!” And, by that, they understand the Bible to be commanding them to love and care for one another as well as to maintain total harmony and agreement with one another so that they can thereby create the “unity” that God desires to exist among them.

- 192.2.1. This is how they understand Ephesians 4:3, “being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” They understand Paul to be exhorting believers to create the “unity” just described—that is, to create a social environment that makes the experiencing of “unity” possible.
- 192.2.2. The experience of “unity”—that is, the experience of total harmony, agreement, and solidarity with a group of other people—is a very satisfying and emotionally rewarding experience. As such, one can understand why Christian culture would be inclined to such an interpretation of “unity.” To think that God has commanded us to create just such a positive and rewarding experience for ourselves is a very attractive idea. But the “oneness” or “unity” that the Bible describes is not a social environment that we are to enjoy, it is an objective fact that God has created, whether we get to enjoy it or not.
193. When the Bible speaks of “unity,” it is describing the latter alternative in note 190, not the former alternative.
  - 193.1. It is not describing experiential harmony and mutual love and care among the people of God. Rather, it is describing an objective fact. Specifically, it is describing the fact that the members of the people of God share certain life-defining realities in common with one another. Namely, the fact that they share in the same relationship to God, that is established on the same basis, and that entails the same destiny.
    - 193.1.1. Such unity has been pre-ordained, created, and brought into existence by God himself. It is not dependent upon any specific choices by any members of the people of God.
      - 193.1.1.1. Nothing that any member of the people of God might choose to do could destroy this unity that has been created by God.
    - 193.1.2. Such unity is a fact that remains true regardless of what one’s social, relational, and psycho-emotional experience is.
    - 193.1.3. However, certain ways of relating to one another are consonant with this divinely-created unity; other ways of relating are not consonant with this divinely-created unity. To relate to one another in love, out of mutual honor, respect, and regard is

consonant with the fact that the people of God are all “one.” To fail to honor, respect, regard, and love one another is to completely ignore or disregard the fact that the people of God are all “one.” The biblical imperative given to Jesus-followers is to respect the reality that God has created: “The people of God are all one. Respect that fact by thinking and behaving in a way that is consonant with that fact!”

193.1.3.1. In one sense, there is no difference between what the biblical imperative actually means and how Christians tend to construe it: Jesus-followers are to love, honor, respect, and regard one another.

193.1.3.2. But, in another sense, there are significant differences between what the biblical imperative actually means and how Christians tend to construe it:

- The biblical imperative does not command total agreement, total harmony, and complete conformity. In fact, the biblical imperative assumes the opposite. It is certainly the case that there will not exist total harmony and agreement, nor complete conformity, within the people of God. There will exist significant and challenging differences among the people of God. However, those differences should not cause us to disrespect one another, nor fail to love and honor one another, for we are all “one” in spite of real differences. In other words, the biblical imperative is not “Conform !” Rather, the imperative is “Do not allow your differences and the lack of total conformity to prevent you from mutually loving one another!”

- Christian culture has tended to construe the biblical imperative in such a way that it insists on conformity. It has especially insisted upon doctrinal conformity. This is where the notion of creedal orthodoxy comes from. In order to CREATE the “unity” that Christians felt obligated to create (due to their misunderstanding of the divine obligation), they decided that they could create that unity by creating total doctrinal conformity. Hence, creedal orthodoxy is a misunderstanding of the imperative to “strive earnestly to guard the oneness of the Spirit produced by the mutual bond of peace.” (Ephesians 4:3)

*•At various times in Christian culture it has been commonplace to counsel Jesus-followers to avoid engaging in any sort of doctrinal or theological discussion on the grounds that “love unites, doctrine divides.” The perspective here is that, since our obligation to one another as fellow-believers is to love one another, we must avoid any interaction with one another that has the potential to disrupt personal relationships. Since doctrinal or theological controversy has that potential, love demands that we avoid it altogether. This is a complete misunderstanding of what Paul is actually exhorting his readers to do in Ephesians. He is exhorting his readers to love and respect one another ACROSS very real differences that exist and are apparent between them. He is not exhorting them to pretend that*

*the differences do not exist, or to avoid noticing the differences. Nor is he telling them to get rid of the differences. His counsel is that they not allow the differences that they plainly see to stand in the way of or to prevent them from loving each other. Paul does (Ephesians) maintain that maturity of understanding among Jesus-followers will result in "oneness" (or conformity) in their understanding of the gospel. But "love" is not to be withheld until complete agreement is reached. One loves even across disagreement. But one continues talking and thinking (and exhorting) in order that all might come to know completely and accurately what is the truth.*

*•To be clear, then, when Christian culture stresses the importance of "guarding the oneness (unity)," they are stressing the importance of creating a social environment where everyone within the community can experience the psycho-emotional reward that comes from feeling loved, respected, cared for, and in total solidarity with the whole community. Quite frequently, this is tacitly understood to be an end in itself. It is creating unity for the sake of creating unity. This is at odds with what Paul is doing when he stresses the importance of "guarding the oneness (unity)." When Paul stresses the importance of this, he is stressing the importance of not allowing significant cultural differences (especially the differences between Jews and Gentiles) to in any way hinder Jesus-believers from recognizing and acknowledging their need to love one another as fellow-heirs of the ultimate promise of God.*

*•The Bible, unlike many modern Christians, never understands unity and/or the community to be an end in itself. One is not to guard the oneness because oneness is to be achieved. It matters a great deal to Paul what that oneness is and what the basis of the oneness is. One could create oneness around anything. For Paul, the oneness that needs to be guarded is the oneness that God himself has created by his reconciling to himself everyone within his Elect on exactly the same basis: Jesus. To the modern Christians way of thinking, we are to love one another in order to create unity with and for one another. For Paul, we are to love one another BECAUSE we are one with one another. Unity is the reason or motive for our loving one another in the way that we are called to do. It is the basis for our obligation to one another.*

### *The Unity of Israel*

194. All of Israel is "one" because each and every individual who constitutes the people of Israel is (potentially at least) a member of the unique people of God, this side of eternity. That fact, shared in common by every Jew who belongs to Israel, is a bond that unites them.
195. In the Torah, the Israelite is commanded to "love his neighbor as himself." There is a certain obligation that follows from Israel's oneness. Every member of the people of God (the people of Israel) is to love every other member. He is not to restrict or confine his love to a certain subset of the people of Israel, because his oneness extends to every individual who belongs to Israel. For all Israel is one.

### *The Unity of the Body of Christ / The Unity of the Pleroma*

196. All who belong to Jesus are "one" because each and every individual who believes in Jesus and belongs to the circle of his followers is a member of the ultimate people of God. This fact, shared in common by every Jesus-believer, is a bond that unites them.
- 196.1. In particular, it unites them across the Jew-Gentile division. In Jesus, there is no Jew or Gentile. With respect to their final and ultimate destiny, there is not meaningful distinction between Jew and Gentile. But, likewise, there is not distinction in this regard be-

tween male and female or between slave and free. No significant social distinction in the here and now will have any meaning or relevance when it comes to the ultimate destiny of the Jesus-believer.

197. Jesus and the apostles teach that the believer is to “love his brother.” There is a certain obligation that follows from the oneness of the “body of Christ.” Every member of the body of Christ is to love every other member. He is not to restrict or confine his love to a certain subset of the Jesus-believers, because his oneness extends to every individual who is a follower of Jesus. For Christ is one.

197.1. Therefore, among those who follow Jesus, one must not confine his love and respect for Jews, or males, or freemen, or any other subset of the followers of Jesus. He must love and honor all equally, for they are all equal in their destiny and standing before God.

*•It is important to recognize that, while the Jesus-follower is to be motivated to love his “brother” precisely because he is his brother, it does not follow that the Jesus-follower is free not to love those who are not his brother. In fact, the Jesus-follower is under obligation to love every human being (including those who are his enemies) just by virtue of the fact that he is a human being. Love for one’s fellow human being is a different sort of thing and is based on a completely different motive and rationale. While love for one’s brother may look the same as love for one’s fellow human being, they are different realities nonetheless. And the Jesus-follower is under obligation to both realities. I will discuss these obligations further in another part of these notes.*

*•Love for one’s brother is based on the unity that exists among all those who can be called my brother. Love for one’s fellow human being is not based on unity. I am not called to love my enemies because “we (human beings) are all one.” I am called to love my enemy because, as a child of God, I am called to emulate God, my Father. It is precisely because it is not based on oneness that it makes sense to have an obligation to love ALL human beings. Since this obligation to love is not based on oneness, then there is no intrinsic limit on who I am to love.*

197.2. The instruction, in fact, is to “love one another (that is, your brothers) as I (Jesus) have loved you.” The “new Torah” that Jesus gives his disciples is that the extent to which they manifest love for one another needs to be increased. According to the Mosaic Torah, they were to “love their neighbor AS THEMSELVES.” Jesus now alters the standard. You are to “love your neighbor (that is, your brother) AS I HAVE LOVED YOU.” The standard now becomes the self-sacrificing act of Jesus who gave up his very life so that those who belong to him might live. In other words, one must consider the fact that there is no cost that is too much for God to ask him to pay for the sake of his brother.

197.2.1. John makes it clear that this “love for one’s brother” needs to be real and actual, not empty language. As John puts it, “let your love be in deed and in truth, not in words only.”

*The Body of Christ in the Agenda of God*

198. In the book of Ephesians, Paul focuses on the centrality of "the people of God" to God's primary project within created reality. God's purpose in this world is to bring into being a group of individuals who will constitute the people of God.
- 198.1. Those very individuals whom God is gathering to himself is to share in his vision for forming this group of people. The most important contribution any Jesus-follower can make is to prepare himself and others to belong to this people of God. That will and must be the first and most important priority for any Jesus-believer, for it is God's priority. God's central agenda is to form a select group of individuals into the people of God.
- 198.1.1. It is this fact that leads Paul to liken the set of Jesus-followers to the organism of the human body. For, just as all the different parts of the human organism are mutually supportive and nurturing, so should all the different individuals in the "body of Christ" be mutually supportive and nurturing.
- 198.1.1.1. When Paul identifies the set of Jesus-followers as the "body of Christ," he is not speaking literally. He is not suggesting that there exists some mystical, metaphysical organism called "the Body of Christ" to which Jesus-believers belong. Rather, his purpose is to take note of an analogy that exists between the way different "members" (parts) of a human organism (body) are related to one another and the way different "members" (individuals) within the people of God are related to one another. To be specific, the "members" of the human organism are mutually supportive and nurturing of one another just as the "members" of the people of God (the body of Christ) are.
- Nothing in what Paul says requires that we understand Paul to be describing a de facto reality rather than an ideal reality. Paul's point is to describe what OUGHT to be the case among "members" of the people of God, not what is necessarily the case. If "members" of the people of God do not behave in the sort of mutually supportive and nurturing way that makes them resemble the way the "members" of a physical body behave in relation to one another, that does not make Paul a liar. Paul is seeking to encourage his readers to assume a certain attitude and perspective toward one another. He is not asserting that all Jesus-believers do ipso facto have such an attitude and perspective toward one another. Paul is suggesting that God's desire for his people is that they have just such an attitude and perspective toward one another. To not assume such a perspective is to fail to share in God's agenda for this world. If we are committed to supporting, nurturing, and encouraging one another's love and understanding of

God, then we are engaged in building the people of God (the body of Christ). And if we are committed to building the people of God (the body of Christ), then we are committed to exactly that thing that constitutes God's primary agenda. This is as it should be! Hence, if every Jesus-believer operates as he should, then the body of Jesus-believers will function in a manner analogous to the way the members of the human organism relate.

## BIBLICAL SPIRITUALITY

### *Spirituality in the Bible*

199. The concept of "spirituality" is not a very clearly defined concept in modern culture. In order to discuss the nature and role of "spirituality" in the Bible, we need to carefully define our terms and make the appropriate distinctions.

199.1. The fundamental concept of "spirit" seems to be this: the life and actions of a person consist of both a visible, tangible, concrete, physical aspect, and an invisible, intangible, immaterial aspect. The latter is what the term "spirit" seems to denote. A "spirit" is the invisible, intangible, immaterial dimension of the life and experience of a person.

199.1.1. Or, it can be used to denote any invisible, intangible, immaterial force that affects reality. (The "spirit of the Age" is not necessarily a "person.")

*The most striking and prominent idea conveyed by the concept of "spirit" is the invisibility and non-concreteness of its nature. The Greek term pneuma and the Hebrew term ruah are both used to denote the "wind" or a "breath." The concept seems to be that of an imperceptible something that can cause tangible and perceptible effects.*

199.2. In its modern usage, the concept of "spirituality" typically derives its fundamental meaning by reference to the "human spirit."

199.2.1. For some, to speak of "spirituality" is to speak of a particular aspect of a human being and his experience. A human being's experience includes a physical (bodily) aspect, an intellectual aspect, a psycho-emotional aspect, and we could undoubtedly highlight other aspects. All of these aspects are a natural and ordinary part of human experience. Oftentimes, people use "spirituality" to denote the "spiritual" aspect of human experience in contradistinction to one or more of the other aspects of human experience mentioned above. What do they mean by the "spiritual" aspect of human experience? That is not so clear. Different people undoubtedly mean different things by "the spiritual aspect of human experience."