

God The Father (Part 3)

The Father's Sovereign Purpose Is to Make Us Christ-like

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In the first sermon in this series on God the Father, I emphasized the Fatherhood within the Godhead, the author of Creation, and a few of His natural attributes.

In the second sermon, I emphasized that the Father was revealed by His Son, and that Jesus Christ is essential in all relationships with the Father.

In this third, and last, sermon in the series on God the Father, I am going to emphasize that the sovereign purpose of the Father is to make us Christ-like! This fits in perfectly with the Days of Unleavened Bread. The purpose of these days is for us to become Christ-like, by ridding ourselves of sin, with the help of the Holy Spirit and God the Father and His Son.

The Father's love mysteriously weaves all of our circumstances together into a tapestry of beauty that derives meaning out of all our life, even those circumstances that are the most difficult and trial ridden areas of our lives.

The Father's love is a love with a purpose, an enduring plan, where He set His love on us and has already laid out the steps He will take. It is an awe-inspiring love, an eternal love, a love too large to be measured. It is that sovereign love of the Father that Paul relates in Romans 8.

Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

This is possibly one of the most encouraging scriptures in the entire Bible. "Those who love God," are those who are Christ-like! Those who hate God are anti-Christ! There is not just one anti-Christ in the world but there are many. That is anyone who goes against Christ and God the Father.

The words in this verse are some of the most undervalued and overlooked in God's inspired written word. Paul begins this principle with a statement of absolute confidence: "We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

Paul's statement "we know" is essentially important because Paul says that this is where we start; it is the first principle. The first thing we know, the basic assumption in our lives, is that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him.

We start with that fact as due north on our moral compass. This is the point that we keep coming back to and setting our course by. Every circumstance relates backward or forward to this point of reference. We begin to understand reality, and life, from this point forward. This point is set when God begins to call us. At that point we begin to know that God exists and His purpose for us, and what we need to do about it.

We know this is true, regardless of how the winds of circumstance blow today or tomorrow. We know this is true, regardless of whether we are successful or unsuccessful, whether we are sick or well. This is the truth that has been revealed to us at that initial calling.

Paul adds two very valuable stipulations, as conditions under which this principle is true: it is true for the ones loving God, and for the ones being called according to His purpose.

Consider what Paul does not say here. He does not say, "all things are good." Because in a world full of suffering, pain, rejection, untimely death and destruction, there is no way he could say that all things are good.

Instead, a good and wonderful divine Father works all things, good or bad, together for good for the ones loving God, the ones being called according to His purpose.

In this case, "loving" is a present active participle. It is present, continuing and it is active. Those called have a committed obedience to His commandments. It is not just 'loving ones', but specifically the ones loving God." The focal point of that love is crucial: God Himself. That is what we focus on and that is where the direction of what we know must go. God works all things together for good to the ones loving God.

What does Paul's first stipulation mean in a practical sense?

To get at Paul's meaning here, consider the story of Joseph at the end of Genesis. Joseph was the glory boy of Jacob's household. He wore and flaunted the coat of many colors, the gift of a father to his favorite son.

So, his brothers threw him in a pit, and then sold him as a slave in Egypt. I am sure there have been many brothers in life who have wanted to do something like this to their

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brother who was favored by their father. But these brothers actually did it. He was falsely accused of rape and was imprisoned. God miraculously rescued him, and he became the second in command of all of Egypt. God was with Joseph, and all things worked together for the good for him.

God put Joseph in that place to equip Pharaoh and Egypt to supply food to the world during a seven-year famine foretold by Joseph. Years later, during the terrible famine, Joseph again meets his brothers, and here is how Joseph dispels the whole tale of treachery against him. Notice his focal point after all of this.

Genesis 50:20 But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.

Joseph wisely interpreted the events of his life by seeing God first, and then his circumstances. Joseph's eyes were filled with who God was as the preserver of life, not just of his own life, but the lives of many that were affected at that time.

So, Joseph saw the wickedness of the men at work, the very same evil that is hammered on us every day, either through the sins we have inherited from our forefathers or the myriad of dysfunctional relationships tarnished by sin, as we go through this physical life.

But, while that evil is at work warring against us, we have a choice: to see God first, and consider our circumstances in His light. When we behold God, and know Him in His perfect sovereign love for His adopted children, we realize that all our circumstances are being woven together by God for a good end, both for us and for others as well. We cannot be so narrow minded as to only see our lives as the recipient of the good that God works out.

When some great evil befalls us as the result of living in this evil world, such as a painful disease, a terrible loss by death, a gnawing failure, a deep depression, a drought, a famine, or anything bad—we must ask the Father to fill our eyes with Him first, that we may see the circumstances in His light and in the light of His overall plan and purpose for us.

God's purpose and plan for each of us is outlined in Romans 8

Romans 8:29-30. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among

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many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

The sovereign God of the universe has a specific plan for each of us! Our lives have been marked from before the beginning to follow the will of God. Nothing happens in the lives of the saints by accident or chance, but only according to the will of God. What a powerful control and confidence we can see in God the Father.

All trials and troubles have been planned and purposed in our lives. Our lives are not random, nor guided by some mysterious fate—they are lovingly designed by our attentive Father specifically for us. That is how important we are to the Father

This plan of God is unfolded by Paul in five successive verbs. Each verb is in the aorist tense, implying that each action has already taken place as a completed event by the will of God. This is not what God might do; it is what He has done or what is so sure of happening that it is already God's completed work.

His purpose begins with the first verb "He foreknew," meaning "to know before, to take note of, and to fix the regard upon." This first step of God's purpose is that God set His love on us, to be adopted as sons by Him. This is when God chose before time to adopt us as a son in His family. This was His sovereign choice as the adopting Father. We had nothing to do with His choice. He foreknew us as sons.

Not only did our Father foreknow us as sons, but He also predestined us to become conformed to the image of His Son (to become Christ-like). This means He is going to see it through and it is so sure to happen it is as if it has already been done. This is the next step in God's unfolding plan. The verb here "predestined" means to mark out with a boundary before hand. In our lives God has marked us out and put boundaries around us and limited what anyone outside of that boundary can do to us.

Just as a new house is marked-out by stakes to define where the foundation is laid—so also our character and life is marked-out by a predetermined boundary line. God wills this, both for our organized development and for our own protection. No one can enter within our boundary line without the Father's approval. He puts a hedge around us just as He did around Job.

Job 1:9 So Satan answered the LORD and said, "Does Job fear God for nothing?"

Satan means, "*is Job so protected that nothing can be done or he cannot be tempted?*"

Job 1:10 "Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land.

So we see there that God does put a hedge around people who He is working with and not even Satan could break through that hedge without God allowing it. But this hedge may not remain permanent if we stray from the Truth, or do things that seem right in our own eyes. This may be seen in what happened to Jerusalem and what happened to what used to be the largest organization harboring God's people in recent history. Think about our previous affiliation with an organization that housed the Church of God while you read this with me:

Isaiah 5:3-5 And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, [symbolic of the church] Judge, please, between Me and My vineyard. What more could have been done to My vineyard That I have not done in it? Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, Did it bring forth wild grapes? And now, please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned; And break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.

When that large organization began to produce wild grapes in the form of rebellious people and false doctrine, God broke it down.

The Father's sovereign purpose is to make us Christ-like. God knows what He wants our character to look like, and His plan is to remold us in the character of His first-born Son. We are marked out and set apart as vessels of Christ's life. God has adopted us to become just like our older brother.

This is what Paul means in Romans 8:29 when he adds, "that He might be the first-born among many brethren." Christ's life is the forerunner and His teaching and character is the model and the boundary defining Godly character. God's purpose is to replicate that character by the power of the Holy Spirit imparted to all who follow Christ. We cannot become Christ-like if we do not follow Him.

His purpose is to conform us to Christ's character by instilling the mind of Christ in us.

I Corinthians 2:9-16 But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him." But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

There we see the "we know" not in the Gnostic sense, but the fact that we have to first, upon our calling, know where we are headed, and what God has in mind for us. The Father's ultimate purpose is to replicate Christ's character in millions of different types of personalities and backgrounds. Of course, He is only working with the first fruits at this time. Each member of the family of God is, and will be, a unique individual; and although different in personality, all unified in righteous character. The only way this unification can become a reality is if we become Christ-like.

In this way, there will be a consistent family relationship defined by a common holiness and character, and Christ is the first-born among many. Christ is the model, and God the Father has adopted us to mold us according to the model of Christ, that Christ be seen in and through us. The heading in I John 4 is "seeing God through love".

I John 4:12-16 No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him

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We know that Jesus Christ abides in the love of the Father. In one sense, we can view "God" in these verses as meaning "the Father," or by extension "the God-head" because they are so unified and so one (the Father and the Son). But it seems more likely to be referring to the Father because the Son is spoken of distinctly and separately as a person here.

Romans 8:30 Moreover whom He predestined, these He [*the Father*] also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

Verse 30 begins by saying, "whom He predestined, these He also called." The verb "called" here not only means "the stage in which God's purpose is first made known to the individual," but also "his subsequent walk through life in obedience to God." It is our subsequent walk through life in obedience to God.

A person's calling is not only God's invitation to them to accept the benefits of salvation, but it is also a process. The context determines whether the term "called" refers to a career or a destination. The call to be a Christian is heard in faith and must be obeyed in faith.

On the physical level, in the way of an illustration, it is similar to receiving a phone call from God, where He offers to proceed forward with His plan to adopt you into His family. It also includes your positive acceptance of all succeeding calls.

Practically speaking, this "call" comes through the preaching, teaching and sharing of God's truth and through the opening of our minds with His Holy Spirit. We receive this trust continually and positively throughout our lives. Our reaction to this calling is patient continuance in living God's way of life and overcoming sin, Satan, the world, and our own human nature. The Holy Spirit is the power behind the calling. Related to the phone call, it is the electricity that carries the call.

As the excitement builds, Paul says in Romans 8:30: "whom He called, these He also justified." When the call of the Father is responded to in faith, then the Father declares the person justified. This is part of the process whereby the Father makes us justified by faith in Christ.

Galatians 2:16, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the

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works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

To have faith in Christ is to believe that He is, and all that He teaches is true, and to act accordingly in obedience. That action is to trust Him, to rely on Him, to love Him and to feel that we do not deserve forgiveness and salvation. It is also casting all our cares and concerns upon him.

To believe is to know that death is something possible at any moment, but only if it is God's will. Faith is to be ready for death by living every day, every hour, yes—even every minute according to the example and teaching of Jesus Christ. We should be asking ourselves every step of the way, "Would Jesus Christ do this or that which I am about to do?"

Now notice in verse 17 that although we may seek to become justified by faith in Christ, we still may be found continuing in sin. Romans 2:13 says, it is the doers of the law are justified.

Romans 2:17 But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not!

The result of this justification should be that we are striving to overcome sin. Nevertheless, our sinning while we are Christians does not mean that Christ is a minister of sin or a minister of sinners. Jesus Christ is the Father's High Priest, a minister of righteousness, as the Father has commanded Him. We are training to be priests and should now be learning to be ministers of righteousness. To do this we must overcome sin, we must become Christ-like. It is not that we have a choice, this is what must be done.

In Romans 8:28-30, we can feel Paul's excitement growing. There is an enthusiasm underlying the revelation of God's wonderful plan, and it is like a crescendo of glory building to the day when we will be glorified with Him!

With an exciting and encouraging finish to the Father's plan, Paul concludes in Romans 8:30: "whom He justified, these He also glorified."

This is the final step in the Father's plan of redemption, making us a full bearer of the shining glory of God, given a perfect spiritual presence in which to house the shining glory of the light of the Father for all eternity in the new heavens and the new earth. The

God the Father (Part 3) by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

glory of the Father shines now in and through the cracks and fissures in our existing earthenware bodies: in the future it will shine with perfect brilliance. How encouraging, and how exciting the words of Paul. as he states that process.

Paul relied heavily upon the imagery of Roman adoption in verses 15-25, and it serves to highlight the pursuing love of the adoptive Father who so very much wants to adopt the son, and has a purpose and plan for that son.

To illustrate this process, consider how a Roman father decided to adopt a son into his family. First, the adopting father makes an independent decision apart from the potential son that he will adopt the potential son (**He foreknew him.**).

His purpose in doing this is to bring the adopted son into his family, that he might be conformed to the character, quality, and destiny of that family (**He predestined the adopted son.**).

He then issues a formal invitation to the potential son, offering him adoption into his family (**He is called at this point.**).

The potential son then responds to the call. If the response is positive and the potential son wants to be adopted, the father then goes through the legal procedure whereby the son is adopted legally (**At this point he is justified.**).

Finally, the adoption is consummated when the adopting father presents the adopted son before all his family and friends as his own son, bearing his own name, one of his own inner family circle (**Here he receives glorification.**).

We cannot speak of the Fatherhood of God without mentioning His love, as we see in this adoption process in the physical sense. How much more is God's love to us when His very character is love? The essence of the relationship between the Father and His Son Jesus Christ is love. It is the foundation of their relationship. Likewise, the essence of the relationship between Christ and us is love. It must be or there is no relationship. By the example of Jesus and His teachings we learn the true meaning of love, that is, how to be Christ-like. Without this love there is no plan of God, there is no possibility of salvation, and there is no opportunity for eternal life.

To be truly Christ-like, the essence of our relationship with the Father, with Christ, and with our brethren must be based on this Godly love. This kind of love requires sacrifice and giving. This is the real meaning of what the Days of Unleavened Bread are designed to accomplish. We commonly think of them as being a time to accomplish

ridding ourselves of sin and that is very true, but ultimately they are designed to develop love in us by us becoming Christ-like and developing the love that Christ has for the Father.

Romans 8:31-39 What then shall we say to these things? If God [the Father] is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He [the Father] not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord

The greatest attribute of God is love. It is the one word that best describes the character of God the Father and Jesus Christ. It should also describe our character in a nutshell.

Love is the foundation of the character and law of God. It is the basis of everything that the Father has revealed to human beings in the Holy Scriptures. Only those who have this kind of Godly love will remain in the Father's presence.

In I Corinthians 13:13, Paul called "love" the greatest Christian attribute. It is the first fruit of God's Spirit that He mentions in Galatians 5:22. It is the bond of perfection, binding everything together in perfect harmony. It is the fulfilling of the law. What we seek to accomplish during the Days of Unleavened Bread is the fulfilling of the law through the building and developing of the love of God.

We must bear and share the burdens of our brethren, fulfilling the law of Christ.

Galatians 6:1-2 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

We see there that we have a responsibility to be doing this. This is something that we have to constantly work on, and concentrate on overcoming if we are not bearing one another's burdens and fulfilling that law of love. The sense is that everyone has special temptations and easily besetting sins, which constitute a heavy burden. We should aid each other in regard to these, and help one another to overcome them. Not in the way of constantly correcting each other, but in the way of encouraging one another to overcome these things. We can even word it in a way that we can mention that we are so thankful that God revealed something in us that may help that other person.

Galatians 6:3-5 For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For each one shall bear his own load.

The special law of Christ requires us to love one another. This was the distinguishing law of the Savior; and the saints can in no way better fulfill it than by aiding each other when in need. Conversely, the law of Christ does not allow us to criticize the offender, or to ridicule him, or to rejoice in his failure. We should never be happy that someone else has fallen.

We should help our brothers in Christ who are burdened with problems, and sustain them by our encouragement, our comfort, and our prayers. When we are going through our trials and tribulations, we have a right to expect sympathy and prayers from our brethren, but we do not have a right to complain about others when they do not come forth to help or when others do not seem to live up to our expectations of what we think that they should be doing to help.

Lamentations 3:38-39 Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that woe and well-being proceed? Why should a living man complain, A man for the punishment of his sins?

Here the verse is specifically talking about complaining about how God is working with us. But it is also complaining about how other brethren are working with us and helping us.

Lamentations 3:40 Let us search out and examine our ways, And turn back to the LORD

So we see where our responsibility is when we are going through trials. It is to turn to God, search out and find out and examine what we are doing wrong. Although this is primarily talking about complaining against God about our poor condition as the result of sin, the principle regarding complaining is still applicable to any complaining. Nothing can happen without the permission of God. Then why would we complain when punished for our sins? We have no right to complain because we brought it upon ourselves, if that is the reason we are being afflicted or in trial. Of course, we know that there are many other reasons that we have trials and tribulations.

We receive suffering from the sins of the world. Recently, several times, people have told me that there has been a lot of complaining going on over the telephone to each other and through e-mail. In the years that I have been in God's church I would say that it has been pretty consistent that those in a general sense that spend the most time on the telephone and e-mailing are the ones that tend to gossip the most.

Because they just spend so much time on it they are looking for things to tell somebody else and they slip into these things. This congregation here has become well know for complaining over the telephone and e-mail to others around the country about individuals here in this area. What a shame that is and if it was still going on by the time Passover came I would suggest you would ask yourself, "Was I able to keep Passover in a worthy manner?"

Sin should be lamented not suffering. Let us not murmur at God for that which we have brought upon ourselves. Nor should we complain about how we are being comforted or helped.

To be Christ-like we must fulfill the law. That means live by it and accomplish what it was designed to do.

Matthew 5:17-20 "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. "For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. "Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. "For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

Christ came to complete the design; to fill up what was predicted; and to accomplish what was intended by the law. The word "fulfill" also sometimes means "to teach" or "to inculcate."

We must become Christ-like by also fulfilling the law. In Colossians 1:25, Paul shows us how he fulfilled this responsibility by sacrificial service for Christ.

Colossians 1:24-28 I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

In verse 25, the phrase "to fulfill the word of God" also means, "fully to preach the word of God." In the Greek it reads, "to fill up the word of God;" the meaning is, "to fully teach and spread the gospel."

The Days of Unleavened Bread picture the removal of sin from our lives. Our responsibility can be succinctly stated in two words: "overcome sin." It can also be stated as "become Christ-like" and also stated as "develop the love of God in us". Not that we do, but that God develops that love in us. This is our goal and this is what unleavened bread represents, the absence of sin and the fulfillment of the law of love.

We will go back to Romans 8 again. This chapter is so full of valuable information that has to do with what God is working out with us through Christ. We fulfill the law by becoming free from indwelling sin. Paul speaks of being free from indwelling of sin by the Spirit of the Father and of the Son that dwells in us.

Romans 8:1-4 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful

flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

The self-satisfied person will minimize the law's demands by magnifying his own achievement, whereas the conscientious person will end up in despair at how hard it is to keep from committing sins or from slipping into wrong doing. In the Father's plan, however, the law is to be honored not simply in lip service or in desire, but in reality. The law's righteous requirements are to be fully met. This can only be accomplished by living according to the Spirit, rather than according to the flesh (i.e., rather than according to sinful human nature). Divine aid is needed to meet the divine requirements and God the Father provides that aid.

Romans 8:5-11 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him (the Father) who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He (the Father) who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

Later, in Romans 13:10, Paul depicts love as the fulfillment of the law. Love is the primary item in the fruit of the Spirit. There is a balance between the divine and human elements in our Christian lives. Paul recognizes that we have a life to live; we are not robots, but people accountable for our redeemed life as a stewardship. Our lives are not our own, God has given us these bodies and our lives and these minds so that we can use them wisely as a steward of God's possession.

At the same time, Paul pictures the requirement of the law as fulfilled in us, not by us, as though to remind us that we do not have spiritual power we can control and utilize on our own. Rather, the Father is always channeling that power and never releases it to us, whom He dwells in, for us to use independently of Him. The Holy Spirit is to be used in unity with Jesus Christ and the Father.

He who receives the grace and Spirit of Christ, and continues to live a life of obedience to the divine will, **will have** a resurrection to eternal life. The resurrection of Christ is the pattern after which we will be raised.

To be Christ-like, in the sense that Paul describes, we must let our light shine by living our life as Christ lived His. We must give a true witness of God's way of life—a way of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Basically producing the fruit of the Spirit.

In some cases, the English language is not nearly as precise as the Greek. The word "love" is one of those cases. The English word "love" includes at least several attributes and feelings. In some ways it is one of the most abused words in the English language. We hear the word love being thrown around about anything. But the Greek language is much more specific and precise. It uses at least four words for love, although two are not used in Scripture.

Eros encompasses sexual love—the love that a man and a woman should enjoy within the marriage relationship. Our word 'erogenous zone' comes from that *Eros* in the Greek

Storge is limited in its meaning to the love of parents for children, and vice-versa, and the normal, family love of siblings for each other.

Philia is used in the Bible, and describes warm and tender feelings between people. It can include physical affection that is decent and appropriate. This is the word that Philadelphia comes from

But the Bible uses none of these three words to describe the Father.

Agape is the term the Bible uses to describe Godly love. We have all heard of it many times, but it is a very important love. *Agape* generously embraces concern for the one loved. It represents incomparable benevolence and good will. It excels all other Greek words for "love" in that it even includes love for one's enemies. The real test of *agape* love is whether there can be love for one's enemies.

This kind of love characterizes God's nature and character. We can receive this type of love only from God Himself and His Son, Jesus Christ. Upon repentance we can begin to exhibit this kind of love through the Holy Spirit. Our Christian love must be founded in *agape* love. The other three words used for love are totally inadequate.

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Love is the essential, self-giving nature of the Father. He loved and gave and He loved and suffered, by giving His Son as a sacrifice to cover sin for the redemption of humanity (forsaking His Son was not a pleasant time for Him, and that is an understatement, of course.)

In the Old Testament, not only is God the Creator and Sustainer of Israel, but He deals with her as a father with his child.

Psalm 103:13 ?as a father pities his children, So the LOORD pities those who fear Him.

Fear must be with the understanding that even the Father's chastisements are "as a man chastens his son". But Jesus was perfect, so He needed no chastisement.

The Days of Unleavened Bread represent the manifestation of the proper fear of God. Through fear we are motivated to overcome our sins. Nevertheless, that should not be the only motivator.

Psalm 147:11 The LOORD takes pleasure in those who fear Him, In those who hope in His mercy.

The love of the Father is not discriminate. He loves those who fear him. He forgives us, has compassion for us, and treats us as His children. Though He expects Godliness, he is also understanding of the frailty of his children. All of us are but dust, having been shaped by the Divine Author and Creator.

Our hope lies in the consistency of God's Fatherly compassion. Hope is another motivator to change. Faith is one, but hope is also another motivator.

Webster's Dictionary defines 'hope' in this way:

"Hope is a desire accompanied by the expectation or belief that it will be fulfilled. To hope means to look forward to with confidence of fulfillment, to expect with desire."

But there is more to hope than this academic definition.

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In everyday conversation, people often say 'hope' when they mean wish. When we say, "Let us hope it all works out for the best," it sometimes means we are afraid it will not. But that hope in God the Father and Jesus Christ is one that can be relied upon and we can have confidence and trust in.

When a person is given the opportunity to know God's truth and fails to act on this hope, he becomes like the individual described in the "Parable of the talents" in Matthew 25:25, who refused to produce with the one talent given to him. In an attempt to justify his failure, he replied, "I was afraid." He possessed no vision for the future. He had no hope!

It has been said that as human beings, "We hope vaguely, but dread precisely." I think that accurately states the way our human minds think. It seems we put more effort into dreading than hoping. That is where our stress comes from. Stress comes from the way that we handle a situation, the way we think on it, the way we hope or do not hope on it. We can control the amount of stress that we have. We cannot control the pressures that come upon us but the way we react to those pressures we can certainly control with the help of God.

Speaking generically of hope, a man named O. S. Marden observed that, "The hopeful man sees success where others see failure, sunshine where others see shadows and storm." Our responsibility in having hope in what we have been given by God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ is to have an optimistic attitude and outlook on our future. Because 'all things work together for good to those who love God'. With a statement like that, and a promise like that, how can we not be hopeful? But even an optimistic attitude is not enough. True Godly hope is confident, powerful and bold. It is not afraid and actually casts out fear and doubt. It is positive, assured, and looking ahead to the future. True hope sees the Father's plan progressing constantly, continually and without stopping.

We have spent a great deal of time in the eight chapter of the book of Romans today, and we are not finished with it yet. In verse 24, Paul goes so far as to say, we are saved in this hope.

Romans 8:24-25 For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.

Romans 8 is sometimes referred to as the hope chapter. In verse 24, the phrase, "For

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we were saved in this hope," indicates we are anticipating our resurrection into the Kingdom of God. Meanwhile, we are preserved and sustained through our trials, in this hope. We have no worries, although as physical human beings we do worry.

Moffatt translates this phrase, "We were saved with this hope ahead." Looking to the future, hope sustains us in the midst of trials and enables us to bear them without complaining.

Also, in verse 24, the phrase, "but hope that is seen is not hope," suggests that hope is a complex emotion, made up of an earnest desire, and an expectation of obtaining something. It refers to something anticipated in the future, as of yet unseen. But, when the object is seen or actually in our possession, it is no longer an object of our hope.

For example: We may hope that we get a job, but when we get the job we can no longer hope to get it. Moffatt renders this phrase, "Now when an object of hope is seen, there is no further need to hope."

The final phrase in verse 24 reads, "for why does one still hope for what he sees?" What we possess, we cannot be said to hope for or look forward to with anticipation. For example, when we find something we have lost, some have been known to say, "It was the last place I looked." Well, of course it was. But, we can no longer have hope at that point because there is nothing to drive that hope. There is no earnest desire, there is no need for perseverance.

Romans 8:25 But if we hope for what we do not see, then we eagerly wait for it with perseverance."

In "The Life and Epistles of Paul", the author, Conybeare, says "But if we hope for things not seen, we steadfastly endure the present, and long earnestly for the future."

"Perseverance" here in verse 25 is translated from the Greek *di' hypomones* and also means "patiently", "with endurance", or "with fortitude."

If verse 25 is read with the Father's promise of eternal life as the emphasis, then "patiently" is appropriate, but if our future hardships and sufferings are the emphasis, then "endurance" is appropriate.

The context of this section of scripture emphasizes suffering and future glory, therefore, the meaning here is that "we wait with patient endurance."

Hope is not just watered-down faith! Hebrews 11:1 shows the distinction, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

Faith and hope, though distinct, are vitally united. They come from the same source, are sustained by the same evidence, and are exercised by the same works. Once again, we see the Father as the initiator and author of our hope through His Son.

I Peter 1:3-7 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,

While it is under the relationship of the Father that the New Testament brings out the most tender aspects of God's character, especially His love, His faithfulness, and His watchful care; it also brings out our responsibility of having to show God the reverence, the trust and the loving obedience that children owe to a father. Christ taught us to pray, not only 'Our Father', but 'Our Father who is in heaven', thereby inculcating reverence and humility.

Faith is the perceiving, the hope and the anticipation. Faith comes by hearing; hope comes by experience. Faith has respect to the truth of the word; hope has respect to the truth's fulfillment. In Romans 5 we see the relationship between peace, access and hope.

Romans 5:1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

The first of the blessings conveyed by justification is "peace". Peace in this setting means harmony with God, rather than a one-sided condition in the human mind. The kind of peace in view is "peace with God, the Father." The same expression "with God" is used in John 1:1 to indicate the unity and perfect harmony between the Father and the Son.

Romans 5:2 ?through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

The second blessing is "access." Faith is also mentioned as the essential instrumentality, as in justification itself. Since the word rendered "access" can also mean "approach" or "introduction," we are to think of the Father in His exaltation and glory as the One approached, with His Son Jesus Christ introducing us as those who belong to Him, and therefore to the Father. Paul indicates in Ephesians 3:12 that this access enables us to approach the Father in prayer with freedom and confidence.

Romans 5:3-5 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Paul considered hope from the standpoint of faith, peace, access, grace, and then the hope of the glory of God. So we may say that, just as our present access gives hope of sharing the divine glory, it also gives hope in our sufferings and tribulations. This hope is a dynamic hope, stemming from the glory of the Father and the promises that He has given us.

Paul made it plain that this hope is not just a dutiful wish, because it does not put one to shame. It does not disappoint, because it is coupled with the love of God.

Looking back over the paragraph that Paul wrote here, we see that Paul advances the thought from faith to hope and from hope to love. (This is the same order as in I Corinthians 13:13, "And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.")

The apostle John describes what knowing the glory of our future should do in giving us hope and inspiring us to overcome.

I John 3:2-3 Beloved, now we are children of God [the Father]; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He [-the Father] is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

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True hope fills us with zeal and purpose. It makes us feel alive with spiritual energy. Hope drives us to continue overcoming and growing in grace and knowledge. No matter what negative factors and influences are at work to discourage and frustrate our progress toward God's Kingdom, we are assured that we will be like our Father in heaven if we imitate and become like Jesus Christ.

To live in sin, disobedient to God's commands, is the same as abandoning any hope in the Father. If we have our hope in being exactly like Jesus Christ, in emulating Him, we will be committed to overcoming sin and keeping ourselves from it.

I Timothy 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Savior and the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope,

The Father's goal is to make us Christ-like.

True hope means looking forward confidently with faith to the fulfillment of our heavenly Father's glorious plan for us. Hope serves to purify us in righteousness, truth, and love. It is a motivator, and it is the pure in heart that will see the Father!

To the Elect Lady—the Church of God, that is us, the apostle John said,

II John 3 Grace, mercy, and peace will be with you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

To seek truth and apply it in love in our relationships with the Father, His Son, and other human beings is to be Christ-like! It fulfills the law of the Father and meets His goal to bring future sons into glory! What great hope we have in what the Father is doing in us, through Jesus Christ, and what a wonderful and unified team they make. It makes us so desperately want to be part of that Family and we shall be. God is working out good things in us because we do love Him and for those who love God He works everything out for our good.