

The Faithfulness Of God (Part 3)

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 10-Oct-09; Sermon #FT09-12

We will begin this sermon by turning to Ephesians 1 where I left off the other day, expounding on Paul's statement regarding "heavenly places in Christ." I said then that Christianity is an "other worldly religion." "Heavenly places" identifies the source of our election and calling. It is where our leadership is headquartered, and from which our guidance is given, and the standards are set. We are to live life in this present evil world all the while focusing on the "*other*" world, guided and activated by faith, not by sight. Paul stated this in Colossians 1:1-4 which I will read to you just to remind you what he said.

Colossians 3:1-4 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

Ephesians 1:3-5 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.

Verse 4 is one of the clearest statements in the entire Bible as to what God and our purpose in life should be—" . . . that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love." That word "holy" comes from a root that means "to cut," and thus to separate one thing from another. So generally we understand "holy" as being something that is separate; in this case, separate from the world.

The meaning or the definition or the use of even that Hebrew term was at least fairly common to the time when maybe big cow herds ceased to be a thing, but the cowboys would talk about cutting cattle away from a herd. What they meant is that they were going to separate certain ones away from the herd for whatever purpose they wanted. Well, we are to be cut away from the herd that is the world.

That word also carried another implication within it, and that is it can mean "a cut above." In other words, indicating not just different, but better, purer, cleaner, according to the standards of God and not just the standards of men. Both of those senses are applicable to us, that we are cut out from the world to be separate.

We are also cut out to be above, greater, purer, cleaner than others, according to the standards of God. Our purpose is to become incorruptible, undefiled, and holy. It is interesting, because *God* is holy. In other words, we are to strive to match the character, the maturity, the cleanliness of the One who is the source of what we are doing. So this is our focus, and if it is, God's blessing that comes to us "in Christ" will be of great value.

We must come to believe and accept this as a fact so that we can live at peace, because this "cutting away" causes certain difficulties that you are well aware of, but one of the most interesting ones is found in the book of Galatians. This is something that we have to believe, and we have to accept, and we have to deal with it.

Galatians 5:16-17 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

The apostle Paul explained it another way in a great bit of detail. In Romans 7 he defined the difference as "the law of my mind" on the one hand, and "the law of sin and death" on the other. They were just as contrary to one another when he wrote Romans as when he wrote Galatians, and he tells of the struggle he had making the choices he wanted to make, or knew that he should make. So what we have to believe and accept is that we have become, in a sense, double-minded.

There are two natures within us: (1) the carnal nature that remains over from the time that we were born, and (2) then the spiritual nature that God implants within us. So there is one spiritual, and one carnal, and they are at war with one another. It is almost as if we have two parallel existences, two outlooks on life, and each one struggling to dominate, and always confronting us with choices. You can see that God did this deliberately to make us choose, and we *must* choose to take the correct fork, or the result will be a created evil within ourselves. I will explain that in just a minute.

It is God's Holy Spirit that enables us to make the right choices. If we do, a sense of good well-being is produced, but the alternative, if we make the wrong choice, is guilt and an unsettling sense of failure, that we did not live up to what we are supposed to.

So these two natures are a reality, and we have to accept that fact as truth, and we have to deal with it in life, and the best way to deal with it in one sense is to make the right choice all the time. Now we all know that is very difficult to do, but I can explain it very simply: Just make the right choice, and you will have a sense of well-being. The wrong choice is going to bring a guilty conscience.

If our heart is truly in heavenly places where the Father and the Son dwell, growth and a sense of satisfaction occur whenever we do make the right choice. It is interesting that it was just a little bit later, actually in Ephesians 4:30, that the apostle Paul said, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit." That is what happens whenever we make the wrong choice.

I will just insert here an aside. It was this very thing that was working within me that made me have to preach those "Born Again" sermons. I came to see what Jesus said in John 3 was not to be taken physically in any manner, shape, or form, and it was to be taken in like manner to what He said just before that when He said, "I will be a temple." It is to be taken and understood spiritually. I began to realize that nowhere in the New Testament does God perceive us as a fetus in a womb. If I did not change my teaching, I would not be teaching the truth.

What Jesus taught in John 3 is every bit as miraculous a spiritual event as any one of His healings. It is a birth from being spiritually dead to spiritual life, and as Paul said, it is *new* creation. It is akin to Adam and Eve when God breathed into them (breath is a type of spirit) and they became living souls—instantaneous adults prepared to make choices as responsible adults. So how God perceives us is what matters in order that we have a correct perception of ourselves. His view is that we are adults of free moral agency, capable of cooperating with Him to build character, capable of gathering facts, judging, and by faith choosing between two realities.

Our receiving of God's blessings did not begin with His calling of us, nor did it begin when we accepted Jesus Christ as our Savior. It did not even begin with the work of Jesus Christ on earth. It began with God electing to do so. Now notice when Paul said it began.

Ephesians 1:4 . . . just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.

It began in eternity, before time as we know it. This is a staggering thought. Now the Bible is the revelation of what God has done, what God is doing, and what God *will* do in regard to His plan for mankind. The plain and simple and yet profound truth is that those

who enjoy the spiritual blessings in heavenly places do so because they have been personally chosen by the very God of creation to do so. This wonderful epistle of Ephesians begins with this thought to purposely stir our appreciation, to help us to build trust.

Now the decision to build an institution called the church was made before creation was made. One reason this statement is made is so that we can understand that God is faithfully carrying out His purpose, and His purpose was firmly made before He began. Who knows, it may have been billions of years ago, but God has not been turned away from that purpose. He is continuing, billions of years later, to carry out that purpose.

Know of a surety that God is not making things up as He goes along. He is not playing His program by ear, and we are now part of that program, completely apart from any contribution that we have made to earn it. We do not understand these things by accident, and this is an incredible truth made especially profound when we read that God deliberately has chosen the foolish, the weak, the base, and the despised of the world in order to purposely and with intent confound the mighty. And while doing this, it also humbles us by means of the realization that we have been so spiritually gifted all out of proportion to what we are humanly; it ought to make us pause to consider what David said in Psalm 8:4: "What is man, that You are mindful of him?"

When we consider ourselves against the mass of mankind and all of mankind's wonderful accomplishments, it appears that we must be near the bottom of the barrel by comparison; or as Richard Plache used to say, "the cream of the crud." But we have been given these gifts, and they have not.

What we are talking about here in Ephesians 1:4 is not the only place that this appears in Scripture.

II Thessalonians 2:13-15 But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.

I Peter 1:2 Elect [that is you and me] according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ:

We are elect according to the foreknowledge of God, set apart by the Spirit for the purpose of obedience and being forgiven.

Now we are going to go to I Corinthians 2.

I Corinthians 2:7-10 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 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.

I Corinthians 2:12-13 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.

There is a time element in many places, and from this we can understand that we believe, for this reason only—namely, because God elected us and willed that we have His Spirit. The spirit was given so that we could grasp spiritual truth, and thus live by faith.

We are going to turn to a scripture that we have seen a couple of times, but it is worth repeating because it impacts upon this message.

II Corinthians 4:3-6 But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

I believe that the NKJV version does not use the word "veiled" as the KJV does.

Actually, the NKJV version is worded better. We are *not* veiled. Veiled indicates to blur, to make obscure rather than distinct. Now Satan's purpose is to make God's truth ambiguous and vague, but because God has personally intervened in our life by His election and calling, His truth has shined into our hearts in a meaningful light-changing way. How "meaningful" we will continue to unveil here as we turn to Revelation 13.

Revelation 13:8 All who dwell on the earth will worship him [the Beast], whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

First, a reminder that Jesus Christ was slain from the foundation of the world; and as we saw in Ephesians, God has called us from the foundation of the world.

We find here that there are people's names who are *not* written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Revelation 17:8 The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition. And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.

Notice the Book of Life: "whose names were *not* written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world." Now because it was said from that, I think it implies very strongly that there are those whose names *are* written in the Lamb's Book of Life from the foundation of the world. Guess who *that* is. We will continue to unfold that.

God has chosen us to be delivered from the hopeless chaos and the bewildering and violent confusion of this world "according to the good pleasure of His will," as it says in Ephesians 1. We had nothing to do with His choice of us anymore than Jacob did in the Romans 9 illustration. Paul said, "Great is the mystery of godliness." The Bible does not give us specific answers to questions about our election and calling that are undoubtedly going to arise. The Bible does not pretend to give us a detailed answer or a long philosophical explanation. It does not have to because its truth comes from God. He is not required to answer us. We answer to Him. He does, though, expect us to believe it, and deal with it as a working part of our trust in Him, and thus we are commanded to live by faith.

The fact that some are elected by God to receive salvation at this time raises a very interesting issue that really bugs human nature, and this is the matter of equality. Human nature demands that everybody be treated equally. You might remember from the French Revolution that one of its slogans was "Liberty, Fraternity, Equality."

When people begin to learn of election of some and not of others, they say that God is not fair. They might say, "I'm just as good as they are." They may even say they do not want to worship a God who picks and chooses like this. They believe it is cruel of Him to pass right on by some; and then because these demands are not met, it produces within them envy, anger, despondency, and often a very strong competitive spirit in order to rise above their feelings of inadequacy and jealousy. But it is true. God does not deal with everybody equally. Now God *does* treat everybody fairly, justly, but He does not treat everybody equally in every area of life. Can we accept this? Consider this in terms of election.

Let us go to II Peter 3:9. This is a familiar scripture.

II Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

With that thought in mind, we are going to go back to Romans.

Romans 9:13 As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated."

Can we say that God treated them equally, when out of His own mouth He said, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated"? Neither one of them had been born yet, but God did not treat them with equality.

Romans 9:14-24 What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth." Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" But indeed, O man, who

are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?" Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, [Does that seem fair?] and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory [That is you and me!], even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

First, God tells us that He is not willing that any should perish. But brethren, that does not mean that all will be saved. It also does not mean, if and when He calls them, He will *gift* them equally. This is a little bit more of the same thing, but in a different area. So let us go to I Corinthians 12:4-11 and then to verse 18, because this applies directly to you and me. We *have* been elected. We *have* been called, and we have been gifted, but we need to consider, brethren, is everybody gifted equally? This is part and parcel of our calling from God.

I Corinthians 12:4-11 There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.

I Corinthians 12:18 But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.

You see, it pleased God to elect you, and call you, and give you something that He is withholding from others who may be far better (if we can put it that way) than you, yet He has chosen you and is treating you more equally than He did others. Is that not true? Yes it is. And now we find when we are in the church, Paul carries that one step further, and we find that everybody in the church is not gifted equally either.

There is no doubt that all of us have some measure of all of those gifts, because they are necessary for salvation that all be given some of them, but some are given gifts by God in much greater proportion than they are to others, and He does it according to the good pleasure of *His* will for the good of the church. That is very plain.

I Corinthians 12:28-29 And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. [And then Paul asks the question:] Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles?

So both election and gifting are purposely distributed by God. Let us look at a place where this caused a measure of trouble. You are familiar with it. It is in Numbers 16.

Numbers 16:1-4 Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men; and they rose up before Moses with some of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, representatives of the congregation, men of renown. They gathered together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LOORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LOORD?" So when Moses heard it, he fell on his face.

This is an example, taken from God's called-out ones, under the Old Covenant. Under the New Covenant God continues to follow the same pattern of assignment and judgment. Korah's group took offense, believing that they were dealt with unfairly by God, but at what they took offense was God's prerogative. This is why Paul said in Romans 9, "Why are you arguing with God? It is His creation, is it not?" It was God's prerogative in the first place; however, they made move to take their offense out against Moses and Aaron as if God was not in the picture at all.

Let us go back to the New Testament again.

I Corinthians 14:18 I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all.

Paul said that he spoke in more languages than all of the Corinthians. Why was he so

gifted? We might speculate, but the Bible gives us no specific answer. The issue here regarding equality is God's sovereignty, and us living by faith. Now David understood. Do you know what he said? He said, "I would rather be a doorkeeper." It shows his humility. He would accept whatever God dealt him, and he would be content and happy within it.

We are going to go back to Romans 9 once again. In Romans 9, the issue with which Paul was dealing there was more serious than the event in Numbers 16, or Paul's gifting that was just mentioned. The issue here is that God is not even electing and calling the bulk of mankind, and some were upset because they felt that those people were lost without even being called. The inference, from the book of Romans, is that it was the Jews in the congregation who were offended because Gentiles were being called and elected, and they were not, and they felt that they were just as good as those Gentiles. The Jews called the Gentiles "a foolish nation," and it offended them.

Today, it is very easy, if somebody knows if you are in the church of God, and you feel you have been elected, that it would offend people. [They might say] "You think you are the only ones." Well, we may truthfully be the only ones that God has elected amongst all the rest, but it is not something to be proud of because we had nothing to do with it. It was completely and totally God's decision to choose you and me.

Our response is to be thankful, to be humbled by it, to be appreciative of it, and to accept it at face value which is awesome indeed. We must deal with it and make the very best use of it we possibly can, knowing that this is in God's power to do whatever He wants to do with His creation. Right now it includes us. As I mentioned earlier, this is hard for some to accept.

Now regarding this, it must first be understood, that despite man's puffed up belief about himself, our God does not owe any man anything. This is where we start our understanding. Nobody is owed by God anything. This is hard for some to accept, and it is man's feelings of self-importance that drives him to believe that he deserves better, that God is treating him unfairly, so why should he have to put up with this? This is a very common carnal reaction when we lose track of who is responsible for what.

A second truth is that God does not force anybody to disbelieve Him and sin against Him, thus bringing the death penalty upon himself. Adam and Eve are good examples. God simply left them to their own devices, and they sinned all on their own. They could have obeyed, but they did not. There is a subtle difference between Him forcing people to disbelieve rather than Him simply not calling them.

Let us go now to Romans 2, and we will add something to this.

Romans 2:13-16 (For not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them) in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.

I just want to point out here that we are fully capable of disbelieving God without Him doing a thing, and we will sin despite the fact that God has given all of mankind a basic conscience that defines right and wrong, even though they do not have the law. God thus retains the right to operate His creation as He sees fit. So absolute pagans know something of God's law. They would not accredit it to God, but they know, in their broadest application, that it is wrong to murder, that it is wrong to commit adultery, and things of that nature.

There are some very definite positive spiritual benefits to us, because God is operating in this manner. The first benefit, brethren, should personally be very important to us. It is that His election of *you* should assure you that God is faithful to His purpose which He began before the foundation of the earth. Because you have been elected and called, you should be able to grasp that He is being faithful to His purpose. Because *you* believe, it is proof that He is being faithful to you personally. He does not make promises He does not keep. You have heard, you believe, and you are obeying. That is a witness against us.

A second benefit is this, and this ought to help us to deal somewhat with apostasy. We all know people who seemed to believe for a time, but then fell away. Are they lost? Not necessarily. It most often means they were not really converted in the first place. In many cases they were fellowshiping on the strength of the spirituality that even the carnal mind is capable of. Man has a spirit. He has a spiritual capability right within him right from birth. We all start off on the wrong side of the track, but for some God removes that impediment so that we can see it from His point of view, from His perception. With those He does not, there is a natural religiosity, and they may sincerely believe, but they are not converted.

A third benefit is this, and this is a big one. It should help us to understand the exceedingly important truth that salvation is entirely by grace. If everybody was being

saved, it could easily be concluded that God owes salvation to us, and that He is going to save all regardless of the source and quality of their spirituality. Or we might even conclude that He saves us simply because of who and what He is, and that is that He is a big sugar daddy soft-touch who gives everybody everything. Oh, no! We are saved only because He has had mercy on us, while at the same time He demands that we meet defined responsibilities to Him and each other for the purpose of glorifying Him, building character, and proving loyalty. His purpose involves far more than being saved.

Humanly, we have the tendency to think that we are owed things, and that we have rights with God. Brethren, we have no power over Him. He owes us absolutely nothing, but lo and behold, He does want us in His Kingdom in a definite configuration, and brethren, that is awesome to meditate upon.

We are going to go back to Ephesians 1 again.

Ephesians 1:3-6 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places **in Christ**, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

Of course verse 3 says "in Christ." He chose us "in Christ." He chose Christ before the foundation of the world. Does that—"before the foundation of the world"—mean that John Ritenbaugh was chosen to be born in the 20th century, to be converted, and to become a minister of God? There are some who believe this, but I do not. I might add that neither did Herbert Armstrong. I am in no way trying to tell you that such a thing would not be possible for God to do, but at the same time I also believe that He would not do such a thing because it would not be good for His purpose for each of us.

The basic reason I believe that He has not done this is because it eliminates free moral agency, personal responsibility, and personal accountability to God. If He did that, we would be nothing more than puppets on a string or a chess pawn being moved about on a board. This would make God personally guilty of the sins that have been committed, because He would be pulling the strings and making them happen. How could we follow His command to choose if He were pulling the strings? You see, it eliminates free moral agency.

Having worked in construction for more than a decade, I think I understand that when a building is planned for, first an overall concept for the building's purpose is made. Once that is determined, detailed drawings are made to meet every purpose and operation for which the building is intended. Men can do these things, and I believe God is telling us in these simple statements that so does He by means of these verses that we have just read here. He is assuring us that His program is proceeding, and that the operations of its construction are nearing a critical juncture.

We know from His word that we have been chosen to be a part of that building. Have we not? Sure we have, and I believe that He has in mind the kind of person He needed for such and such a position and operation, and then He elected us by His own choice from what was available when a time arrived in the outworking of His construction for that position to be filled. I believe, that in a general way, He has done it, though I also believe, without doubt, that from time to time He has directly intervened in the first processes to make sure that such and such a personality was on hand to do the job He wanted them to do. Thus, He still does not run their lives. They are free moral agents.

In John 14 Jesus alludes to this fact that God is building something.

John 14:1-2 "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions [abodes, offices, places of operation]; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

There in a simple statement is Jesus Christ's responsibility as our High Priest. He is preparing us for an office, for a position in the kingdom of His Father. I do not believe that it would be an act of love on God's part toward us to not allow us the opportunity to grow into functioning to the very best of our ability in the job He is preparing us for. What I believe He did was determine before the foundation of the world that He would build a church, which is also His family, which would be redeemed from sin through faith in the blood of Jesus Christ.

How then can it be said that our names are written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world? The answer is actually very simple. It is because we are "in Christ." Let us note Romans 4:17.

Romans 4:17 (as it is written, "I have made you a father of many nations") in the presence of Him whom he believed—God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did.

God calls things that do not exist as though they did. He does this because that is the way He sees them. I have been telling you that the way God perceives us is what is important, and we need to understand the way *He* looks at us, and what He sees when He looks at us so that we can adjust our understanding to what *He* thinks rather than what *we* think. And so, in regard to this, in His mind these things are as good as accomplished. Jesus was slain from the foundation of the world, and those redeemed through that sacrifice would then be "in Him" as though they had *always* been in Him, because God had things plotted out that He is producing from the very beginning. He is not playing things by ear.

Let us go now to Exodus 32. Moses is speaking.

Exodus 32:32-33 Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written." And the LOORD said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book.

This is the earliest reference that we find that God has a book in which He places names. Moses was already in that book, and Moses knew and understood about that book.

We will mention again those verses of Revelation 13:8 and Revelation 17:8.

Revelation 13:8 All who dwell on the earth will worship him [the Beast], whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

Revelation 17:8 The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition. And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.

We will go now to Revelation 3:5.

Revelation 3:5 He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

We have here information from Jesus Christ that the people to whom He was speaking, their names were already in the Book of Life, but He warns that if they did not continue on track, then their names could be erased from the Book of Life.

Now we are going to go to the book of Luke, chapter 2, and begin to explore how it is that people's names can be entered into the Book of Life, and we will look at secular history and learn a little bit from that.

Luke 2:1-3 And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city.

Ancient civilizations, including the Israelites, were doing similar things to what we do in our day. Now depending upon the scale of the operation, they took censuses. The one that the Roman Empire did was a major undertaking, but others, such as an individual community, did them on a smaller scale. They registered a person's name in a book when the person was born. Now why did they do this? For tax collection, of course. They did it for tax collection. Nothing has changed. Of course, there were other community plannings which were going on as well. There is nothing new under the sun.

Psalms 69:28 Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous.

Very interesting there. "The book of the living" gives us another clue as to how the ancients operated things. The process was like this: When a baby was born, its name was entered into the rolls of the living in the community, and when they died, their name was erased from the list of those registered who still lived. Can you begin to see a similarity between what God says He is doing and what people commonly did and are still doing in our communities to this day?

How does a person get his name in God's Book of Life? Well, it is in the same general way an ordinary human gets his name in the community's book of the living: by being born.

Now in our spiritual case, though, it is being spiritually born again through God's

election, calling, and repentance. It follows after baptism, which pictures a burial following death and then a raising to life.

The receiving of God's Spirit makes the person spiritually alive for the first time in the person's life, and that, brethren, is when a person is born again, and that is when his name is entered into the Book of Life. The person is then "in Christ," and it is as though he has been there in the mind of God from the beginning, because Christ was there from the beginning. The person is born again, with a definite purpose in mind.

Brethren, God's family is a *planned* family. Things are not happening haphazardly. And what is our purpose? First, it is to witness for God, glorifying Him and His family by life, while at the same time being prepared to fulfill a role in God's family Kingdom when Jesus Christ is sent to fully establish His rule over Earth and its people.

If we would follow Paul's argument all the way through in Romans 9—11, we would see that shortly after Romans 9:21, before he got to Romans 10, he makes his case, drawing upon Old Testament scriptures to prove that God earlier had said that He would save a remnant of Israel, and add to them an unspecified number of Gentiles as well. Of course this is the church. That remnant about which He was talking is the church. Romans 9, verses 22 through 27 are especially clear on this subject.

Romans 9:22-27 What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? As He says also in Hosea: "I will call them My people, who were not My people, and her beloved, who was not beloved." "And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' there they shall be called sons of the living God." Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant will be saved."

Now by chapter 10, Paul clearly shows that Israel's problem of a lack of conversion is largely their own fault, not God's failure to elect them. First, they misinterpreted Scripture, and then went about vigorously attempting to establish their own righteousness. That is what he said was at the bottom of so many of their problems. They went about in a legalistic way, not having faith in the righteousness of Christ but in their *own* righteousness accumulated by obedience to God's law to some part, and their

traditions to a major part.

And then Paul goes back to proving that those to whom he wrote that the Jews were not God's favorites. He clearly states that in chapter 10, verses 11 through 13, when he said that there is no distinction between the Jew and the Greek, that God responds to either depending upon their faith in Him.

Romans 10:11-13 For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."

He then reminds the Jews that their disbelief was their own fault, and one of the reasons God moved to call the Gentiles was to provoke the Jews to godly jealousy by electing what the Jews called "a foolish nation" (that is, the Gentiles).

In Romans 11, Paul begins to move toward even more comforting words, declaring that God has not forgotten Israel, and that always He has reserved for Himself at least a remnant according to the election of grace, and that is why Jesus Christ said the church will never die out, because God promised there would always be a remnant—an election according to grace.

In Romans 11:11, he again comforts by saying that Israel's stumbling is not permanent. He implies that it would continue for a while, but a time of reconciling all Israel to God would come. And then in Romans 11:25 he makes a very comforting statement. Paul calls this a mystery what we are talking about here.

Romans 11:25-29 For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins." Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

The story continues, which I will not go into in very great detail. Isaiah 59:20-21 show it is very clear that the Redeemer has not yet come to Zion, and therefore they cannot but

help to understand that Israel's national conversion is yet future because it certainly did not occur when Jesus came in the first century AAD

Isaiah 59:20-21 "The Redeemer will come to Zion, and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob," says the LOORD. "As for Me," says the LOORD, "this is My covenant with them: My Spirit who is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants' descendants," says the LOORD, "from this time and forevermore."

Isaiah 11:11-12 It shall come to pass in that day that the Lord shall set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people who are left, from Assyria and Egypt, from Pathros and Cush, from Elam and Shinar, from Hamath and the islands of the sea. He will set up a banner for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.

There must be at least one hundred Old Testament texts similar in thought to this, and in Jeremiah too. Jeremiah was written before the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon when he made prophecy. Some might say those prophecies were fulfilled during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, but it does not, because those people immediately began to fall away again. The certainty of Israel's conversion is still yet future.

We could go into Ezekiel as well. He gives very much interesting information on this, but we will go to the very famous Ezekiel 37. You know it as "the valley of dry bones" prophecy.

Ezekiel 37:11-12 Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, 'Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!' Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves . . .

He says, "I will open your graves." This is important because it does not apply to the return of Israel to the Promised Land at Christ's return. He is opening graves. These people are dead. They have been buried for millennia of time in many cases.

Ezekiel 37:12-14 Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOOD: "Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel [after they are resurrected. Not coming back from the north, not coming back from the east or the west, or anywhere else, but out of the ground] Then you shall know that I am the LOORD, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the LOORD, have spoken it and performed it," says the LOORD."

Those three verses show anybody with the Spirit of God that God is talking about what we call the second resurrection. These people are resurrected from their graves, and they are given life, and He also says, "I will put My spirit in you," and therefore they are being converted as well as merely being given life. What we see here is also what is going to happen to the Gentiles. Israel becomes the pattern that will continue until God has offered all of mankind salvation. Everybody then will have had an opportunity for salvation. This morning Richard mentioned Revelation 20 ["God of Our Salvation"]. I want to go there and touch on something that was given in his sermon. We can see God is going to elect everybody, but each in his own order. As time unfolds, this will occur.

Revelation 20:11-12 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.

Those two books are opened—the books (plural) are the books of the Bible from which everybody is judged. Everybody must pass before Jesus Christ in judgment, and they will be judged according to those things that pertain to their works.

So in His faithfulness, God will not ignore those who went into their graves not having what God considers a just, fair, and above all a merciful opportunity for salvation. Those graves will be opened, the books will be opened, people will have an opportunity to be judged against the books for a period of time, perhaps one hundred years; but whatever it is, it is going to be long enough, and God is going to be fair to those people in their judgment. Of course names are going to be added into the other book, which is the Book of Life, opened so those names can be entered.

Let us conclude in II Peter 1:2-12. I will just read through them, and that will be the end of this series. This scripture is written:

II Peter 1:1 To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.

II Peter 1:2-12 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth.