

# Grace Evangel Fellowship Pulpit

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## THE GREAT QUESTION

### A Message

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*In expectation that the entire creation itself, also, shall be freed from the slavery of corruption into the glorious freedom of the children of God. For we are aware that the entire creation is groaning and travailing together until now. Yet not only so, but we ourselves also, who have the firstfruit of the spirit, we ourselves also, are groaning in ourselves, awaiting the sonship, the deliverance ["redemption" in the KJV] of our body. For to expectation were we saved. (Romans 8:21-24)*

*Then they remembered that Elohim is their Rock, and El Supreme is their Redeemer. (Psalm 78:35)*

*Christ Jesus, Who is giving Himself a correspondent Ransom for all (the testimony in its own eras) ... (1 Timothy 2:6)*

Let us consider this day the testimony of Gustavus E. Hiller, as recorded in his book "The Great Question." Mr. Hiller lived from 1852-1939 and was the editor of "The Promise" magazine that merged with "Unsearchable Riches" magazine in 1924. Mr. Hiller was born in Germany and pastored German Methodist Churches in Minneapolis, Toledo, Covington, and Louisville. He concluded his long ministry outside the church-system in Indianapolis, among a fellowship in homes known as The Berean Circle.

What follows will largely be excerpts from this work, at times in my own words but without altering the arguments presented by this author.

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My heart is kindled with gratitude toward God. For it has been my desire, for at least ten years, to tell my fellowmen of all shades of religious belief what I have discovered about God's gracious purpose toward mankind. The question, what the outcome of human history shall be, has always been one of real concern to thinking men and women, but in these later days it has become a burning question for all mankind.

I speak of THINKING men and women. For I am well aware that 99 out of every 100 do much prefer reading one of the latest novels, or some discussion that lulls them deeper into their ignorant slumber. But I feel sure that the serious minded, whose attention I hope to attract, will find these words more fascinating than all the novels that were ever written. What else can be so romantic as that which God has done and will do in Christ Jesus?

The time has come when The Great Question should be discussed fearlessly and candidly. In the pulpit and in the denominational press it is being evaded. Let us bring it into the

open. If we believe the doctrine of endless torment is true, let us preach it. But if we believe that it is false, we owe it to God our Saviour and to our fellowmen to make the better view of His Gospel known.

### **The Gospel**

What is the Gospel? Is it not strange that the so-called teachers of the so-called Christian church do not agree in the answer they give to this simple question?

What are the glad tidings? What do they promise us? What is the height and depth, and the length and breadth of Christ's Gospel? Does it promise salvation to all that are lost? Does it give the assurance that everything will be made right that was spoiled by sin?

The so-called gospel of the orthodox traditionalists is a horrible creed, and not glad tidings in the real sense. The view of these teachers is a most hideous travesty of Christ's Gospel.

Did not our heavenly Father express His will to save you, when He sent His Son into the world and gave Him up to die for this very purpose? And is not this PURPOSE of God the main burden of the entire Gospel?

Consider the Berean Jews, and why they were judged to be more noble. First, they listened with courtesy and readiness to what Paul so earnestly and persuasively taught them, and what he claimed the prophetic writings contained. And second, they searched the Scriptures for themselves, to see whether these things were so, thus conserving their freedom, and not even submitting to Paul's preaching until they were convinced that it was according to the Word of God.

It is one of the tricks of the devil to stir up so much noise with minor questions that the music of God's Gospel symphony is no longer heard. In our day God's truth is being distorted, and people are being turned aside by this confusion of tongues in the so-called church. But we still hold that for the honest seeker God has surely provided a way that leads out of this Babylonian muddle.

### **Christianity simply stated**

Several businessmen were once heard talking of religion. One was heard to say, "What bothers me most is the multiplicity of denominations and sects into which so-called Christianity is split up – hundreds of them in this country of ours – all differing from each other in their beliefs and teachings. In the midst of all confusion, how can I know what Christianity really is? The more I hear of it the more I am puzzled. So why should I bother my brain about it at all? I have quit going to church."

How many people all around us in this world are thinking the same thing?

We should feel compelled to enter the conversation, asking a simple question "Would you really like to have true Christianity put before you in a few words, and with such simplicity that you can easily understand it?" And we can continue something like this.

Let me remind you that Jesus, the Founder of the Christian religion, has Himself expressed the essence of His teachings in a few plain words. For He tells us that the law and the prophets, with all their requirements, are comprised in these two commandments. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind and with all thy strength; and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Is that simple and plain and understandable enough?

And when it is acknowledged that this is quite simple indeed, we might ask, “Well my friend, are you keeping these two commandments?”

It is quite unacceptable for one to say they cannot understand what Christianity really is. It begins in earnest striving to be obedient to the words of Jesus. And those who enter upon this course soon learn to understand the Gospel pretty well. They soon learn to know themselves as sinners before God who need the very forgiveness and divine guidance and help which the Gospel so freely offers. They soon learn that God is merciful to us erring mortals, helping us to live as Christians should, and making us to rejoice in the hope of eternal life.

### **God’s creation continues – in love**

Since the beginning God is creating heaven and earth. The creation is not yet completed; it is in the process of becoming ... for it needs redemption.

What this means is brought out in the New Testament in the very brief statement: “God is love.” This necessarily implies that the creation was conceived in love, that it is being carried forward in love, and that whatever God does with it, even in His severest judgments, must be in accord with His love, and proceed from His love. Hence the coming of His Son into the turmoil of this world for the purpose of redeeming it. “God in Christ reconciling the world with Himself.”

If the members of the Roman Catholic Church of Constance, in priestly robes, stood by and looked on with satisfaction, while John Huss was burned at the stake, it can only be accounted for by remembering that they believed in a God who is going to throw all unbelievers into endless hell fire, and therefore must have pleasure in what they were doing to Huss.

And the trouble is that Christians who have believed from their childhood that the majority of God’s human creatures will be thrown into endless torment, cannot read their Bibles with an unprejudiced mind. The false doctrine which they have unquestionably accepted has blinded the eye of their mind to all the Scriptures teaching of God’s purpose to save all.

### **The problem of suffering**

Now consider the suffering we observe all around us in this present age. Paul, having taken all this suffering into account, then considers the wonderful outlook, “reckoning that the sufferings of the present time cannot be compared to the glory that is to follow.” This is the short-cut Gospel solution to the problem of suffering.

Paul goes on to say, “For the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God.” It is true that those who become God’s children, who enter into fellowship with Christ in the age that now is, shall have a special glory which will be made manifest when Christ is revealed. And in this respect they have a distinct advantage over those who die in an unsaved state. But we are reminded that their salvation is secure only because it is a part of that greater plan of God, according to which He purposes to save the entire creation.

Paul does not enter into a discussion of the CAUSE of suffering, but adopts a more direct way by pointing to its wonderful outcome, when all the sufferings will be forgotten. That is not to say the cause of suffering is an idle question. We can hardly avoid asking why

God created a world into which, as He must have known, sin and suffering would enter. But we must admit that in the import of Paul's statement the problem is SOLVED, with one bold stroke, in a most satisfactory manner.

All who come to God's Word are confronted with the declaration that He "wills that all men be saved and come to a realization of the truth," and from Isaiah 50:2, "Is my hand shortened at all that I cannot redeem or have I no power to deliver?"

No one can offer any satisfactory solution of the vexing, awful problem of human suffering save the one that is given us in the hope of universal reconciliation which the Gospel of Jesus Christ, rightly understood, contains.

### **God's sovereignty**

Now let us consider God's sovereignty and His unchangeable purpose.

God is absolutely sovereign in His world. He conceived it; He planned it; and He knows that He has within Himself the will, and the wisdom, and the power to bring what He has undertaken to a glorious conclusion. He is not like the man of whom Jesus says had undertaken the building of a tower without first sitting down and counting the cost.

While the dogmaticians of the traditional church may have considered God's sovereignty and proceeded to develop the horrible doctrine of endless damnation; it is not taught in God's Book.

But let us suppose that God actually predestinated ALL to be saved, and that He has foreordained ways and means by which He is SURE to bring their salvation about; then the doctrine of predestination becomes one of the most blessed truths for our contemplation. Then we rejoice with Paul when he says, in the eleventh chapter of Romans, "For God hath shut up all unto disobedience, that He might have mercy upon all." Then we must cry out, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways, past finding out!"

Thus God has entered upon a great enterprise in undertaking the creation, redemption, and glorification of His world. God's plan will take cycles and ages to bring it to its full consummation. In creating the world and planning out its redemption, God has made for Himself an immense task with many difficulties to overcome. But that our God has made a great problem for Himself; does that not bring God down nearer to us? It surely does!

Now the natural man, we are told, receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them. But we have the mind of Christ.

### **Believers are co-workers**

On account of the natural blindness of the human mind, God could reveal Himself only by gradual stages, and then only to those who were ready to receive His light. And in this process He desired to enlist the help of those whom He could use for this purpose in carrying forward His grand designs. This is one of the most touching features of His creative plan – that we are made worthy of our place in His kingdom by becoming His coworkers.

Now what is it to truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? It means, in the first place, that we receive all that is told us about Jesus Christ in the inspired Word. And this Word tells

us of God's plan to finally abolish the last enemy, which is death; and about Christ's ultimately delivering the finished kingdom to God the Father that He may be all in all.

To believe in Jesus Christ does not only mean receiving all these truths concerning Him, but also to fellowship with Him, in His love, in His peace, and in His work. And let us not pretend that we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ until, by receiving all of these things, we have become new creatures, and thus have resolutely turned away from the beggarly elements of the world.

### **Will God redeem His creation?**

And then we come to the question – will God redeem His own creation? Well first; it is HIS creation. And it being His creation, He cannot abandon it.

Second, God's purpose and plan, when it is known, must be the OUTCOME of, and in ACCORD with, His inmost being, which is love.

And third, since His great plan of creation has been conceived in love and is therefore perfect, it is impossible that He should change it, or abandon what He has undertaken.

Now let us consider some Bible declarations that express the ultimate salvation of all mankind. If we love mankind, as Christ loved it, we should WISH with the deepest anxiety, that the Bible holds forth the hope of universal reconciliation. And it should follow that we are compelled to search the Scriptures with strong eagerness in quest for such teaching. It is surely not becoming to Christians to be coldly indifferent toward the question concerning the fate of humanity.

Why is it that objectors find so many passages of Scripture which, as they think, teach the horrible doctrine of endless damnation, and which they quote with so much gusto, and at the same time ignore the opposite Scriptures that others have found in such abundance? I have come to see, and am deeply convinced, that the promise of universal reconciliation appears in all parts of the Bible, and that this is indeed the paramount message of God's Book; also that this teaching furnishes us the real key to the solution of all world problems; and that its acceptance is the only golden link by which Christians can be united.

### **Passages in support of universal redemption**

1 John 3:2. "We know that, if He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." Of course this will happen according to the principle "every man in his order" (1 Corinthians 15:23), for in the time of which John speaks only those who are now God's children, the firstborn, shall be perfected.

Hebrews 2:8,9. "He should taste of death for every man." So it becomes very clear that when Christ has achieved His complete victory, all humanity through Him will have the full dominion of the created world which was originally promised.

Genesis 12. In God's promise to Abraham He stated, "And in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." This promise is repeated and amplified to Isaac in chapter 26:2-4; "And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." Paul tells us in Galatians 3:16 that this seed is Christ, and we have learned in Hebrews "He tasted death for all men." So we have ALL the families of the earth, ALL the nations of the earth, and ALL men. How this promise is to be fulfilled is told in many passages of the New Testament.

Isaiah 45:23-25. “Unto Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.” This passage becomes all the more important because it is appropriated by Paul in Philippians 2:9-11 where we read, “That in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

John 12:32. “And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Myself.” The meaning of these words every child can understand. If we accept their obvious intent, instead of caviling about them in the futile effort to make them agree with a contradictory dogma, they need no interpretation.

Luke 15. Jesus makes it clear by direct statement and by three wonderful parables that He came for the express purpose of “seeking and saving that which is lost.” The phrase “that which is lost” cannot be understood in any other way than including ALL them that are lost, whether they are in the world or in the abode of lost souls. All are God’s lost sheep, and Jesus tells us that a good shepherd will seek even the one lost sheep until he finds it.

Upon the cross Jesus bears no grudge, has no thought of vengeance in His heart, but only pity. And He becomes the Advocate of His executioners, praying that they be forgiven, basing His plea on the fact that “they know not what they do.” In the absolute sense they knew enough to be guilty, yet they did not know fully and really what they were doing, something that holds true in the case of every sinner.

1 Timothy 2:4-6. “God our Saviour, who wills that all men be saved.” And, “Who gave Himself a ransom for ALL, the testimony to be borne in its own times.”

Romans 5:12-21. Just as sin and death came over all men through Adam ... now by God’s mercy the justification of life by Christ, the second Adam, has come over all men. Where sin abounds, grace abounds more exceedingly. This statement could not be true if grace did not ultimately bring eternal life to all those who through their connection with Adam had been drawn into the death of sin.

1 Corinthians 15:22. “As in Adam all die, so in Christ all shall be made alive.” It is hard for us to abstain from being indignant with those brethren who, in order to save their beloved doctrine of endless punishment, try to reduce the glad promise of this precious verse by arguing that the “all” who are made alive in Christ are not the same “all” that die in Adam. And as we continue reading in this passage, “Every man in his own order.” The time is coming when Christ will have abolished death, so the idea of “eternal death” – an expression that is found nowhere in the Scriptures – becomes a theological fiction.

Colossians 1:13-20. Here we read that the Son is “the firstborn of all creation; for in Him were all things created.” And a bit further down we read, “And through Him to reconcile all things unto Himself.”

Romans 8:29. “For whom He foreknew, He also foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.” These words have been limited by many to those converted in the present age, in order to make Paul’s teaching harmonize with the traditional teaching of endless punishment for those who die in the unconverted state. But then it would follow that the divine image would be realized in comparatively few of those who are created in God’s image; which is a preposterous idea. When we look at Paul’s words more closely, we will find that they are not to be limited to

a few, but that they apply to all men. When the apostle says that “whom He foreknew He also foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son” it is evident that this explains what is said in Genesis 1 – that God created mankind to be brought into His own image. “Whom He foreknew” cannot be limited, for He foreknew all. He foreknew them as redeemed in Christ, since Christ was to “taste death for all men.”

### **God’s wrath**

Now let us consider the meaning of God’s wrath as found within the Bible. There are numerous passages speaking of the terrible judgments that must come upon disobedient men.

It is indeed a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. When God showed me all the meanness, vileness, and ugliness of my natural inward life, I felt that God was judging me, and I found it to be a fearful thing. Yet, why did God put me through that terrible experience? Was it not for the purpose of saving my soul? Is this not an example of what must happen to all, before they can taste the bounteous joys of God’s redeeming grace?

The prophetic books of the Old Testament are full of threatenings to the people of Israel, but also of the promises of redemption that shall come to them at last.

Far be it from me that I should ignore or minimize the evil case of mankind in the present age, or the judgments that await the godless in the coming age. But just as far be it from me that I should doubt God’s will and power to ultimately bring about what He purposed when He laid the foundations of the world.

We are told in the Scriptures that the world at this time lies in the evil one, that Jesus calls the devil the “prince of this world,” and that Paul even designates him as the god of this eon and speaks of the powers of darkness who in this age rule in the very atmosphere which humanity breathes. This is the age in which unrighteousness is rampant.

This age is developing and progressing just as Jesus and His apostles prophesied, and the great crisis is still ahead. Is this pessimism? Yes, when it comes to having confidence in the flesh.

But to believe in God’s goodness, even now, to those who diligently seek Him, and His unchangeable purpose and plan to deliver the whole creation from vanity and bring it into “the liberty of the glory of the Sons of God” is surely not pessimism. It is the only sane optimism.

### **“Aion”**

The main trouble with objectors arises from their misunderstanding of the Biblical expressions “eternity” and “eternal,” and unfortunately the English version of the Bible is largely to blame for this misunderstanding.

“Aion,” or “aionion” in the New Testament, like “olam” in the Old Testament, do not mean endless. How bunglingly the translators of the English Bible dealt with the word “aion.”

Where the Bible speaks of judgment, it deals with judgments either in this age or in the next age after this, but never of endless punishment; for it also speaks of ages that will follow the next age. The judgments of God will endure until they have accomplished their

purpose, and then they come to an end; which of course will be the case when God is all in all as Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15:28.

This causes us to understand the Psalmist in the fullest sense when he says, “His anger is but for a moment; his favor is for a lifetime; weeping may tarry for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.”

Since God is love and can never change His nature, His wrath must also be a manifestation of His love, just as a genuine human father shows his love just as much toward his wayward son when he chastises him. God’s wrath simply manifests the eagerness of His love which desires the salvation of His human children, and therefore is bent on overcoming and abolishing all obstacles that hinder His gracious purpose. His wrath is love in operation, to bring about the salvation of mankind.

### **Judgment**

Consider how Paul deals with a lewd backslider; to be delivered unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh “that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” And Hymenaeus and Alexander were delivered unto Satan that they might be taught not to blaspheme. It is clear that the God who gave up His Son for our redemption will not be mocked by apostate and profane men. But the Scriptures are far from teaching that their damnation will be endless, and they positively tell us that the purpose of their severe penalty is their betterment and their salvation. And in the case of Alexander and Hymenaeus we even learn that Satan is to be their schoolmaster.

Judging means to set right. Its object is always to set right.

Now those that elevate the power of free will object, arguing that salvation is made dependent on a condition. But there is no passage in the Scriptures teaching us that some will never believe.

It is God’s problem, in His pursuit of the sinner, to bring him into the faith that is required. And that He will accomplish this we are assured by the apostle Paul, when he says in Philippians 2 that “in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

God can never be satisfied with a compulsory service. Therefore, the passage just quoted must mean that all will willingly accept Jesus as their Lord.

Of course, He will come to judge the world, for sin must be purged out of humanity. But His judgment is for the purpose of at last redeeming mankind from the curse and bringing His gracious purposes to light.

The world, in its estrangement from God, and in its self-sufficiency, must work itself out; making a full trial of its wisdom, until its bankruptcy becomes evident to all – until its dismal, terrible failure is complete.

### **Man’s will**

Man is not free, whether he lives under one form of government or another. Jesus says in John 8:34, “Whosoever committeth sin is the slave of sin.” The sinner, and such are we all by nature, is the slave of false ideas and prejudices, the slave of his appetites and baneful influences and wrong habits, the slave of the fashions of the world, the slave of all sorts of

fears. And Paul, when referring to his carnal state, scrutinizing his soul life as it then was (Romans 7) confesses: For the good which I would I do not; but the evil which I would not THAT I practice.

God has indeed by creation given man a certain measure of freedom of will. Enough to make him a personality, and to exercise himself as such. Enough to make him a responsible being, and to feel his guilt when he does wrong. Enough for him to get a lot of experience out of his life by butting against the walls by which he is enclosed. Enough to become very devilish, and to make himself very miserable. But not enough, thank God, to utterly destroy himself or to frustrate the gracious purposes of God forever.

The sphere in which the natural man can exercise his will is after all very limited. Can he choose the time and place of his birth? Can he choose his parents, or the fortunes that are to surround his coming into this world? Can he decide whether his childhood home shall be a palace or a hovel? Whether his skin shall be white or yellow or black, or whether he shall be short or tall of stature? Or whether he shall have a brilliant mind with many talents, or whether he shall have only mediocre gifts or be an idiot?

And all his life long he finds himself hedged in by all sorts of conditions from which he would like to free himself and cannot, confronted and opposed as he is by all sorts of obstacles to his designs. The limitations of our will power are good reasons why we ought to be humble, and why pride is very foolish.

God gives to every human being a certain limited sphere in which to exercise his will and to develop his personality, and for this purpose He even permits him to rebel against the Most High. But finally it must appear, in EVERY case, that God's holy will prevails.

We all admire beautiful ideals. But how about the actual conditions that now confront us in the world? As the ideals given us come from God, so their realization must also come from Him. God is the great Teacher and Disciplinarian who trains the human will. It is His aim to LEAD us into suitable humility by getting us to realize that we are nothing in ourselves.

He will succeed, sooner or later, to bring this humbling about in the case of every soul He created. Consider the Prodigal Son who eventually "came to himself." "I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight. I am no more worthy to be called thy son. Make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose and came to his father." Here we have the divine philosophy in a nutshell.

God will never tyrannize the human will. This is not the way of love. But he will know how to bring each soul to the decisive crisis, when it will turn to Him willingly, eagerly, spontaneously, and gladly.

### **God's program**

Now God needed to have a PROGRAM by which to bring His purpose into reality – a plan of procedure according to which He would carry out His thoughts, one after another, so that all things work together toward the ultimate end which He has in view. This program God has revealed to us in His Word.

Beyond our living a godly life, there can hardly be anything that is more pleasing to our heavenly Father than our desire to better understand His higher thoughts and higher

ways. And while there are many things about God's designs which are not laid open to our curiosity, the grand outlines of His program are distinct and plain enough.

But one thing that puzzles some and awes all of us is the question of time and duration. To the earthly mind God's counsel moves forward very slowly; but not so to His own mind. For one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day (2 Peter 3). Here we also read the reason for His longsuffering – "not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

How slow mankind is in understanding, and how much time men take in their sinning and vain programs. And God gives them time, so they can try themselves out. God will take the necessary time, and can afford to take the time, to bring His plan for the redemption of His creation to a victorious conclusion. For has He not ages at His disposal?

### **"Salvation"**

Now let us consider the meaning of salvation in the present time. When I was a child I thought salvation simply meant escaping from the fires of endless torment, and being received into the beautiful mansions of heaven.

But the Bible tells us plainly enough what salvation means. It is expressed with wonderful conciseness in Colossians 1:12,13: "[He] delivered us out of the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love."

Of those who never heard the Gospel we are told in God's Word that they are without God and without hope in the world. But the idea that they are endlessly lost is preposterous.

As to those who were acquainted with the Gospel and repudiated it because they loved darkness rather than light, their punishment will be greater and they will be dealt with by the Holy God according to His wisdom. But we may be sure that they too will be brought to themselves and be taken back to the Father's heart, whose love is unfathomable and has no end.

Those who enter into the blessings of salvation at the present time become a part of the firstfruits of our Saviour-God's great harvest. But woe to those to whom the opportunity is given to receive the truth but who by their indifference and their worldliness lose this opportunity. They may, like Esau, and will by God's grace receive another allotment; but it will be inferior, and it will be later.

### **Holiness**

But consider those who believe and who have privileges to enjoy both in the life that now is and that which is to come. They are children of God, heirs of God, joint-heirs with Christ. But if God has graciously bestowed these great privileges upon us, He can expect, and commands us, to live a life that befits our calling and station as the children of God. We are a people of His own possession, zealous of good works (Titus 2:11-14). God's Word requires holiness of God's children.

When we come to understand what the Bible means by holiness, it becomes to us a thing of great beauty and a source of perennial joy, for God does not lay it upon us as a burden, but offers it by His grace as a privilege to be entered into – to be free from those unclean lusts and affections which must necessarily disturb and trouble our souls as long as we entertain them; and to walk in the Spirit from day to day.

God gives every one of His children grace to live a holy life.

### **Escape from judgment**

But there is something more that is included in the present salvation – to have a part in the rapture we read of in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. It is ours to be witnesses and participants of all the things that He does until God is all in all. While we are yet in this tabernacle we groan, desiring to be clothed with the body that is from heaven where we have our citizenship. And when that great event takes place our salvation will be complete; but not until then. But when this happens, we will escape from the judgments that must come over the unsaved until Christ's redeeming work is finished.

But let us thank God that in His mercy He has still something in store for those who are now lost, and He still purposes to wipe the tears from their faces also. Let us rejoice that our Lord told us about the other sheep, not of this fold, whom He will bring in.

### **God's program in the world**

It is very important that we have a true conception of what God is doing for the world at the present time, besides calling out the ecclesia; the Body of Christ. The god of this eon inspires the present ambitions, strivings, customs, and fashions of the majority of mankind. But in spite of all the evil that still rules in the earthly sphere, God has not abandoned His world, nor any part of it. It remains His creation and the object of His care and His great redemptive plan.

God in His wisdom now gives men who are inspired by the prince of this age space and time to try out their worldly wisdom, in order that they may find out what sort of world they can bring forth. But then God, in Christ, will have His day; showing what sort of a world HE can build. God has not abandoned the plan He laid from the beginning of creation. And to taste the powers of the future age in advance, and to be called into co-workmanship with God in the carrying-out of His stupendous plan – this belongs to the present salvation.

Creation and redemption are inseparable! In the beginning He saw the creation as needing redemption, and He made wondrous provision for this need. He cannot be satisfied with the redemption of a PART of what He has created; but has determined to bring about the reclamation of the whole.

God cannot be the fatherly God which the Gospel presents Him to be if He abandons any part of His creation to the final perdition – He must make His redeeming work co-extensive with His work of creation.

The so-called material world has filled a much larger place in our thinking than belongs to it. Everything in the physical world derives its place and significance from its relation to man created in the image of God. For mankind light and darkness were made. For man's sake was created the sea, the land, birds, fish, animals, climates, seasons, coal, iron, copper, silver, gold, oil, electrical currents, oceans, rivers, lakes, mountains, valleys, and plains. We cannot speak of creation without speaking of humanity. This is why Paul speaks in Romans 8 of all the creation groaning and waiting for the glory of the liberty of the sons of God.

This being true, we cannot separate creation and redemption. According to God's gracious purpose they both began to operate simultaneously from the beginning. They are

intertwined, and they will go hand in hand until what God has in view for humanity is finished.

And it is important to understand that this creative-redemptive process will be carried out in two stages. We are now in stage one, in which sin and death are dominant, and the redemptive forces are hidden. But a higher stage is to follow, where grace and life will reign. Not understanding this brings about a great deal of confusion and delusion among men.

But the attempt to bring these ideals to realization in this stage of human existence leads to such wild revolutionary undertakings as the French reign of terror, and Russian Bolshevism. These ideals cannot be brought into realization by the flesh, because they are not OF the flesh, but of the spirit. To apply a mystic allegory God has given us in nature, mankind is now in its caterpillar stage. You cannot bring forth the butterfly life until the caterpillar life is finished. He will still keep crawling on his many legs, ceaselessly devouring leaves. And yet we know that the butterfly life is hidden within this ugly caterpillar body, and will make its appearance when the proper time arrives.

God's creative work will be finished when redemption is achieved, and when the whole creation which now is subject to vanity is brought "into the liberty of the glory of the sons of God."

The great problem God made for Himself when He created the world – knowing as He did what would happen and what was unavoidable in such a world-scheme as He conceived in His divine wisdom – is how He would proceed to overcome the monstrous presence and power of sin and death. Hence we have that wonderful argument in Romans 5, where Paul draws the parallel between the first Adam – by whom sin entered, and death through sin – and Christ, the second Adam, through whom "justification of life comes over all men."

Sin is something far worse than immorality. Immorality results from sin. God hates death and He desires life in His creation. Therefore, in Christ He has put a scheme of redemption into operation through which death will be overcome by life. When God makes life victorious over death, He – by the same stroke – also does away with sin. Hence God with His redemptive work transcends the region of mere morality. He does this by giving life – eternal, incorruptible life.

We read in Romans 8:19-22 all that is vanity in the creation shall disappear in glory. The resurrection of God's Son is a pledge to our heavenly Father, and to us, that life will be victorious over death, and will swallow up death in all the realms of God's creation.

Once we understand this outlook that is promised, we become more interested in the divine program by which this stupendous result is to be brought to realization.

### **God works in stages**

As God has proceeded with His great plan of redemption by gradual stages, He will also do so in the future. Paul speaks of this eon, and the coming eon, and eons beyond. Therefore we are not surprised to find prophecy speaking of various resurrections. "As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive – but every man in his own order."

Christians in whose souls the resurrection hope is as strong and as vivid as it was in Paul and the other apostles must have a deep desire aroused in their hearts to enter into that

higher and better life which is their promised allotment. Hence, not to have such a desire is a sign of the weakness of our hope.

Our citizenship is in heaven; whence also we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of his glory (Philippians 3:20,21).

Now consider the solidarity of the human race. This unity and solidarity is recognized when Hebrews tells us that “Christ tasted death for all men;” and when John the Baptist proclaims Jesus as “the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world;” and when Paul, in Romans 5, speaks of Adam as the progenitor of mankind from whom sin and death have passed to all men, and of Christ as the redemptive Head of humanity from whom the righteousness of life goes out to all.

The Bible even goes further and speaks of the human race and the angelic world as being interrelated. The elect church of Christ is going to judge the angels, and the angels appear very eager for the outcome of the work of redemption. Jesus tells us there is joy in the presence of the angels over every sinner that repents.

Paul teaches in Romans 8 that the “whole creation is to be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.”

Consider the words; “If one member suffers they all suffer.” This thought forces us to conclude that no part of humanity can be fully saved, or wholly satisfied, until all the other parts are redeemed.

But humanity cannot be saved by mere ideas and ideals, be they ever so lofty. These ideas must first be wrought by the living Spirit of Christ into the souls of men and women. This will not happen in the present age. Jesus expressed this with His words, “How often would I have gathered you, as a hen does her brood, under her wings, but ye would not.”

The people of the world do not want to do what Christ wants them to do. The mass of men and women are bent on gaining their own selfish ends, whether they be pleasure or power. Laws have been passed with the purpose of curbing this selfishness, but they usually prove themselves ropes of sand. They are then replaced by other laws that prove themselves just as ineffective in their turn. In this respect we are like one suffering with a deep-seated, chronic disease, who tries one doctor after the other, and one medicine after another – but is never cured.

The world is rapidly drifting toward the crisis. In Christ’s kingly reign, the peace that we long for will be established, and the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord. But before that, democracies that are filled with hatred and strife cannot make the world safe.

But in the solidarity of the human race we have a pledge that the redemption of the whole world will come. This cannot be expected in this age when selfishness and greed and hatred are rampant but must be brought about in that new order when the world will be ruled by the King. He shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. And not only the earth, but the heavenly places will find redemption as well.

The question was asked, how can any father or mother be satisfied even in heaven as long as any of their children are among the damned? One might reply, I believe they can be satisfied and perfectly happy, for when they are in the heavenly state God will take all concern of their offspring out of their hearts. Such are the monstrous expedients to which men are driven, when they refuse to believe that God is love in the full Gospel sense.

He will have no rest until the one lost sheep is found. Yet men can argue that He will turn the heart of a mother into stone toward her children.

We must get it out of our heads that our future bliss consists merely of sitting around the throne with harps in our hands, enjoying ourselves. And how can we who are saved find joy in thinking that God's vengeful wrath has found its satisfaction in seeing the endless tortures of the damned, for whom there can never be any pity? No, this cannot be. While one member of His great human family suffers, they all suffer; and the work of redemption must go on until God is all in all.

### **Objections**

Let's address a few objections. First, the Bible never uses the term "eternal death." In Revelation 20 we read of the second death. But it cannot be endless, as Christ will utterly abolish death. Furthermore, we must consider that God desires and is determined to have life and not death, peace and not confusion. Hence it follows that He will utterly destroy sin and death and will establish endless life and peace.

We read in 2 Timothy 1:9,10 – "Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel."

As for the rich man and Lazarus, commonly raised as an objection – this was distinctly meant for the Jews to whom Jesus was speaking. We will simply mention that the gulf which Jesus means here is indeed impassible while it lasts, but no longer. The same holds true for the "unquenchable fire," which is unquenchable while it lasts, for no human being can quench it. But God has provided that it dies when it has served its purpose.

The sin against the Holy Ghost will not be forgiven, either in this eon or age, nor in the next age. But that even this Jewish sin will not be held against them endlessly is clear when we read that "all Israel will be saved."

As for philosophical arguments – from the psychological point of view we freely admit that the human soul can become hopelessly hardened, hopelessly in the sense that it cannot even repent. But that it is not possible for God to bring them back to spiritual life is a baseless assumption. As Paul tells us in Romans 11, Israel's conversion, when it takes place, will be like bringing life from the dead. Jehovah promises to take from them the heart of stone.

To say that after death one's fate is unchangeably sealed is hardly worth considering. In what part of Scripture is found such a doctrine? It is entirely imaginary and has no foundation either in God's Word or in the facts of human psychology.

But what is the use of preaching, and praying for the salvation of souls? They will be saved through the blood of the Lamb; they will be saved through the preaching of the Gospel, without hearing which they cannot believe. They will be saved by the prayerful, unceasing efforts of God's children whom He has appointed to be co-workers with Him.

And now you tell me that you propose to quit working because we have the assurance that God will never quit until it is finished?

Faith in the blessed hope of universal redemption must begin with the earnest desire that this hope might be true, just like faith in the saving power of Christ's redeeming blood begins with the realization of the soul's needs. And the next step in acquiring this faith is to get really acquainted with God's Word. When this writer began to get anxious about mankind's future, but was afraid to relinquish his traditional preconceptions, he decided to search through the entire Bible – and he soon found what he sought. God's purpose to redeem the work of His hands is the central message of the Bible.

Do you say that you believe in God's purpose to save you? Then I tell you that I believe more. I believe that God is willing, and able, and sure to save the human race, of which you are only an infinitesimal part. Which faith is the greater and better?

You think that God can save such a good fellow as you are easily enough – but you cannot believe that His redeeming love and wisdom to save millions of others who have not even had the opportunities which you have enjoyed.

With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God. Christ never lost faith in God's ability to do what He has purposed to do for the redemption of the world.

### **The Absoluteness of God's Saving Grace**

One of the difficulties that has hindered the Scriptural promise of universal reconciliation is our failure to rightly understand how human responsibility is related to salvation by grace. Our sense of responsibility under the law brought a full consciousness of our guilt and helplessness; but it can do no more. Our salvation now depends absolutely on God's grace. The doctrine of grace, as taught by the apostles and when rightly understood, drives our thinking irresistibly to the hope of universal reconciliation.

*His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ ... For by grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, that no man should glory. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works ... (Ephesians 2:1-10).*

Here our salvation is represented as our being made alive – to which we of course could contribute nothing whatever. It is not of works – not by anything that we did or can do – but the gift of God. And the purpose of our salvation is that in the ages to come God might show the riches of His grace.

How often do Christians get their part and God's part confused.

So then, if I receive forgiveness, and peace, and a new mind, and the glory to come, wholly as a free gift of God, how can I possibly doubt that God will do the same thing for all fellow sinners. ALL refuse to be saved until the right hour has come, and the *willingness* to be saved also comes from God's grace.

Paul had learned to know himself as one of the greatest sinners before God, and yet God had by a simple sovereign act of grace converted him into a child of God. Paul observed, *"In me as chief [of sinners] might Jesus Christ show forth all his longsuffering, for an*

*example of them that should thereafter believe on Him unto eternal life.” (1 Timothy 1:15,16).*

Nothing can be clearer. If God by His sovereign will and absolute grace saves one sinner, He is bound to save them all.

### **Rewards for faithful service**

How about the rewards that God’s Word promises His children for faithful service?

When one is once brought by grace into this salvation, or into the life of the Spirit, he is lifted into a higher plane of responsibility. Being now, by grace, in possession of new powers, he is by the very gratitude he owes, as well as by the new powers given him, put under obligation to serve God faithfully in everything. By his degree of faithfulness the lower or higher place in God’s everlasting kingdom is decided.

But all these urgings to faithfulness in good works are directed to people to whom God has already granted salvation, as a free gift of grace, and do not affect what God has freely granted once for all. This is startlingly evident from such as examples as the thief on the cross.

### **Why are some saved before others?**

Why does God save some people in this eon, or age, and others not until the future age?

Why was Israel blinded during the present dispensation, and only a remnant of the Jews saved? The answer that Paul gives will be the answer to the broader question. Simply; it has pleased God, in His higher wisdom, to proceed in this way.

In the meantime, we are assured by God’s Word in many places that God’s general grace, which He promised mankind in the covenant made with Noah, is operative everywhere; even among those who have not been called out by special grace. God is not far away from anyone. *“In Him they live, move, and have their being.”* His purpose is fixed to bring all to Himself. Thus, God’s program is moving forward. He does everything in its own time.

In Acts 1 the Lord tells His disciples, *“It is not for you to know times and seasons which the Father appointed by his own authority.”*

God reserves it for His gracious and sovereign will to do what in His wisdom is best, when the proper time arrives, without letting His creatures know everything beforehand.

### **The great Chess Master**

It is not improper to think of God as the Great Chess Master who is playing against a host of opponents. He knows that He will win.

The Master is the overseer of the acts of His workmen, so far as they affect His own great plan. For He cannot permit that to be spoiled. If a workman should willfully, or incidentally, spoil a stone or a piece of timber – He will have it discarded. But that will not deter him from going ahead with his great plan. He will have another stone or piece of timber prepared in the place of that which was spoiled. Such an event would not frustrate the master’s plan itself, nor any part of it.

The Bible speaks of Him as sometimes being surprised by what men do. In the days before the flood when He saw the exceeding wickedness of men, it grieved Him. It gave Him pain to see that the freedom He had given His human creatures had resulted in such violence. The created world is not to Him like a moving picture show which can only reel forth what the director has put into the machine, but it is a *living* world that brings forth of itself things that the Divine Master knows how to use for His purposes. This brings His wisdom into full play; which would not be the case if the character of His creation were such that everything in its unfoldment were absolutely fixed; without any contingency whatever.

Wisdom is that faculty by which He knows how to adjust all things, so they become subservient to His plans and aims; even that which is evil to us for the time being. He can make all things to work together for good unto them that love Him. If obstacles arise in the form of opposition from His creatures, He can overcome them without either doing violence to His creation or spoiling His own plan.

God has put something of Himself into the heart of His whole creation, and into the heart of every human being, that they can never get rid of. Shall we call this the spiritual law of gravity?

### **Preaching the great hope**

Preaching of His gospel shall be the means of calling out from the world those who are to be the firstfruits of the Spirit, and to build the body of Christ.

The word “preaching” as used in the Bible must not be taken in a narrow sense, but in the large sense of publishing, proclaiming, teaching, making known and understood – whether it be by public address or private conversation, or writing – all that God has revealed in Christ Jesus for the benefit of men.

Take the Lord and the apostles as our models. They took the needs of their hearers into account, told them God’s Word accordingly, and depended on the Holy Spirit who was with them to make their message effective.

A minister who cannot believe with all his heart that the Good Shepherd will bring the last sheep home – is not fit to preach “the Gospel of reconciliation.”

### **The coming glory**

God has made the so-called material universe, as it now is, only a temporary schoolhouse in which to bring forth and train His intelligent creatures for the coming glory. He has keyed all His works and attuned every atom to His grand purpose. This is why all nature arises in wrath against man every time he acts contrary to God’s holy will, and that is why the forces of the natural world are ever working in harmony with God’s higher plans.

He will give each human being full freedom to exercise his own genius, and God by His genius will incorporate all that man brings forth into His own great work – so that the glorious outcome will be the product of the cooperation of the Creator and His creatures.

How glorious will it be when God is all in all; when everything and all spirits shall have come into full harmony with God’s will and purpose. What glory will be the result of the redemption that He will have wrought, in delivering the human race from sin and death, and suffering, and ugliness; by the blood of the Lamb and by the transforming power of His Spirit. All things will have been attuned to the purposes of His love.

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This overview contains the thoughts and opinions of the author and is a work in progress as his study of the Scriptures continues. Some things that God has revealed are very clear. That Christ died for our sins; that He was entombed; and that He was roused (1 Corinthians 15:3) is clear. That all are to be ultimately reconciled to God thru the work of Christ is also very clear (1 Corinthians 15:20-28). But on many specifics in the Scriptures there are a variety of interpretations and opinions, and none should conclude they have the complete and final understanding on these matters that are less clear. The reader is encouraged to consider various opinions, but to study and to think for himself. Within the Body of Christ we should study and discuss our understandings so as to mutually reach a more complete understanding of that which God has revealed.

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*Unless otherwise noted, Scriptures are taken from the Concordant Literal  
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