

ALL THINGS IN CHRIST

In all wisdom and prudence making known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Him the plan for the fullness of the times

***TO HEAD UP THE ALL THINGS IN THE CHRIST,
the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth, in Him...***

(Ephesians 1:8b-10)

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Mercy to All

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At the outset, I must state that some of what follows might sound a bit negative to some, especially to those who see the church rising in glory in these last days. Personally, I see the glory of the church in the next age. I guess it is a question of whether we see a glass half empty or half full.

However, I want to be clear that I do not see what follows as negative at all but the most positive message of all time. God has devised a most glorious plan that on the surface looks like abject failure, but it is far from it. What looks like failure is actually for the glory of God, so that at the end of the day, no man will boast in himself; all will boast in Christ Jesus, the Son of God and the Son of Man, the Savior of the world, none excluded.

What follows is presented as an encouragement, and I pray all who read it will be encouraged that **God truly is love and that He truly loves the world and that love never fails.**

Billions upon Billions Lost in Hell?

It is undeniable that many people believe in a literal *hell* as a place of eternal torment, even torture, for lost humanity that, by some accounts, totals billions upon billions of humans created to be in the image of God. According to this thinking, even now there are billions toasting in God's torturous *hell* with no chance of ever being reconciled to God. Although they are *dead*, they somehow still live in human bodies that are not destroyed by a literal fire that tortures them but never consumes their bodies.

Aren't the wages of sin death (Romans 6.23)? Wasn't the maximum penalty under God's law given to Moses literal death and nothing else? Has God changed His law to require eternal torture for the lost? Is not **Jesus Christ the Righteous the propitiation for our sins; not only ours only, but also for those of the whole world** (1 John 2.1-2). Isn't ***the free gift of God life in Christ Jesus our Lord?***

As they say, these lost ones had free will, and they exercised their will by rejecting God's Son, so God has no choice but to banish them to an eternal existence away from His presence in which they will be tormented and tortured with fire forever and ever and ever. After all, He is mad at most of humanity and must take out His vengeance on them. Never mind that **God is love** (1 John 4.9).

Some say that love does not trump God's justice. They even go so far as to say that God's love demands that He banish most of the world, the world that He created and loves, to a never-ending existence that is worse than what has been devised by the worst terrorists and torturers that have ever lived on earth. Then, to cap it off, some, including one very famous preacher, say that those who make it into heaven will rejoice as they look upon the lost, including some of their loved ones, being tormented in their hell. After all, this is justice and all to the glory of God. Really?

It grieves my heart when I think of such thinking passed off as truth. The most diabolical quality of fallen man has been taken and made into a god in that image, all the while declaring that this is according to Scripture; and that this is the heart of God that Scripture declares is love.

In essence, this line of teaching is declaring that through the death of His Son, the Savior of the world, the Lamb that takes away the sin of the world, God cannot save all mankind, in fact, cannot and will not save most of mankind, and that His Son's death on the cross was a failure. Why? Because many say that it is up to man's free will to choose to be saved.

Think about it! Adam's one transgression was an absolute, 100% success in bringing death and sin into the very fiber of all born of the human race, and yet, Christ's one act of perfect righteousness, ordained by God Himself, is unable to save all born of the human race; only a relatively few will be saved by most accounts. If this were true, then we would have to conclude that God is rather weak and impotent; His plan of salvation is mostly a failure and is totally dependent on man, not God.

God Will Have All

But let it be shouted from the rooftops that our God is not weak nor is He impotent in the plan of salvation or in anything else, for that matter. He is the Savior of the world! God the Father sent His Son to save the world, the whole world that He loves. Man can fail and does fail at many things, but God cannot fail at anything that He sets out to do, and He has set out to perfect mankind into His image and likeness.

If He does fail, then how can He be God, the Supreme and Sovereign of His creation? We would have to declare that Scripture lies because we are told that He ***works all things after the counsel [plan] of His will*** (Ephesians 1.11), that it is ***God our Savior, Who will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth*** (1 Timothy 2.4 KJV), and ***that we rely on the living God*** [not a dead god], ***Who is the Saviour of all mankind, especially*** [not exclusively] ***of believers*** (1 Timothy 4.10 CV [added by writer]).

Did you catch the greatness of these words: Who ***will*** have all men to be saved? Who do you want to exclude from this all? Surely, God has not excluded anyone, so why do so many who profess to hold to the name of Christ declare a doctrine that is diametrically opposed to God's word, which is spirit and life (John 6.63)?

It is amazing how so many people read these verses and declare them to be true with one huge exception: They only apply to ones who exercise their free will to choose Christ as their Savior.

Where in any of the verses cited so far is the concept of man's free will? Actually, where in the entire Bible is there a word about man must exercise his will if he is to be saved? It is God's will that is worked out in the salvation of mankind. It is God who wills salvation, not man who wills. This is why He had to send His Son to die for the sin of the world. Only His Son could meet the righteous demands of God.

Consider these verses:

As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulcher; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes. (Romans 3.10-18 KJV)

This is God's indictment of mankind. None are righteous. None understand. None do good. None seek after God. **NONE!** Another way of stating this last truth is that mankind does not have the will or desire to seek after God. None seek! If none seek after God, then if it is left up to man's will to be saved then none will be saved. Period!

Just in case some might think that they are special in this regard because they somehow "made a choice for Christ," let us be reminded: ***For there is no respect of persons with God*** (Romans 2.11 KJV). We are *all* included in this none.

If we would just step back a bit, put aside the tradition of men and take God at His word, we would see that His plan of salvation for all mankind is the most glorious love story between the Creator and His creation. It is a love story that leaves none, absolutely none of His creatures, out of His purpose and plan. All are not included at the same time, but all will eventually come in, for this is the plan of God worked out in the eons to reconcile and restore all.

For God!

Now, there is one more Scripture that proves the point and serves as the springboard for what follows.

(30) For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, (31) so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. (32) For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all. (33) Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! (34) For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? (35) Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? (36) For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11.30-36 NASB)

In Romans 9-11, Paul wrote much about Israel and their being set aside with their rejection of Christ. They stumbled but did not fall in such a way that they have been thrust out of God's plan of salvation. A partial hardening has come upon them until the fullness of the nations has come in, and so all Israel will be saved (Romans 11.11, 25-26).

Within this section of Scripture, we discover one of the most profound truths that blows the roof off of this notion that man has a free will that will seek after God and be saved. Consider several translations of the same verse.

For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all. (Romans 11.32 KJV)

For God confined all in unbelief leading to disobedience, so that He should show mercy to all. (Romans 11.32 ALT)

For God hath shut up all unto disobedience, that he might have mercy upon all. (Romans 11.32 ASV)

For God did shut up together the whole to unbelief, that to the whole He might do kindness. (Romans 11.32 YLT)

For God has locked up all in the prison of unbelief, that upon all alike He may have mercy. (Romans 11.32 WNT)

For God locks up all together in stubbornness, that He should be merciful to all. (Romans 11.32 CV)

The first thing to note is that in all the translations presented, God alone is the one taking the action. ***For God!***

The second thing to note is that the subject of the action includes *all*, which is the whole of humanity. *All together, the whole!*

Strong's Concordance states that the Greek word for *all* in this verse is *pas*, which refers to all forms of the word, such as "all, any, every, the whole." There are no exceptions in this *all*, just as there are no exceptions in there is none righteous, none who understand, none who are good, and none who seek after God, as well as ***all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*** (Romans 3.23).

The third thing to note is what all are together locked up *in* or, as one translation implies, imprisoned. All of us, without exception, are locked up *in* unbelief or stubbornness.

According to *Strong's Concordance*, the Greek word translated *concluded* (a very strange rendering!), *confined*, *locks up*, and *shuts up* means "to shut together, that is, to include or embrace." The Greek word translated *stubbornness*, *disobedience*, and *unbelief*, according to *Strong's* means "disbelief (obstinate and rebellious); disobedient, unbelief." The *Concordant*

Greek Text English Sublinear, which is an ultra-literal translation, has taken the words *together-locks* and *the all* and made them *locks up all together*, and has taken the word *un-persuadableness* and made it *stubbornness*.

Most people probably understand the import of the word *unbelief*, but the word *stubbornness*, as derived from *un-persuadableness*, adds another dimension to the meaning. No one can be persuaded. But persuaded in respect to what? Well, if there is none righteous and none seek after God, then it must be that man cannot be persuaded in respect to living a righteous, good, God-seeking life. In other words, man's will is not capable of being persuaded when it comes to salvation and the things of God.

The stubbornness or unbelief of mankind is not some aberration in God's plan. God Himself ordained it this way. He brought this creation called *man* into being to be stubborn, to be *un-persuaded* through his own will. Why? So that God could show His mercy to His entire creation through His divine will! God's will is always intended to trump man's will. We could say, God shuts up free will!

Please do not lose the import of this. It was God's full intention to lock up all in stubbornness, even before the ages. It wasn't that mankind failed apart from God's will, so He had no choice but to lock up all and then come up with some corrective measure to bring it back, as if it all caught Him by surprise. No! No! How could a whole race be brought into being on this planet we call *earth* and all of them, absolutely all (100%) of them have been (are, will be) stubborn or in unbelief? By some estimates this earth has had from 50 billion to 110 billion people living on it. According to some, it means that there have been about 50 billion free-will agents on this earth that had the capacity to choose good and to believe, and yet, most did not or will not choose such a path.

Some say that mankind (Adam) had to be tested. Did God not know that Adam would not only fail the test but that all that followed him would also fail? So, if we take the low end of the number, then 50 billion failed (probably something less than this to account for believers), and the number grows every day that a new human is born. Sounds pretty hopeless to me!

Do you mean to say that a God who is Supreme and Sovereign over all His creation and one who is perfect in all His ways, created that many people and not one of them, that is, not one single person, ever, could be persuaded to be obedient and believe according to his or her own free will. If this thought is left to stand alone, we would have to conclude that when God created man He failed colossally.

Ah, but God did not fail, for His plan is a colossal success. Mankind was brought forth to be stubborn, so that God's Son could die for the sin of the world and take sin away to the grave.

Sin was imputed to all mankind through Adam, and righteousness (or, justification for life) was imputed to all mankind through the last Adam, Christ (Romans 5).

The indictment of mankind is that all are stubborn, and in this stubbornness, God Himself locks up all mankind together. No one can get out of this lock box! We are all shut up together. None

of us can be persuaded. But here is the encouraging part: God Himself locks us all up, so that He alone should be merciful to all. He will treat all alike, ***for there is no partiality with God*** (Romans 2.11).

In other words, He alone is the one to release all humanity from this prison of stubbornness or unbelief. He has the key to unlock it, and it is belief in His Son, which is the faith of the Son of God that *all* will eventually receive as a gift of God, so that all are saved, in their own era, either at the former (first) resurrection, the latter (second) resurrection (Great White Throne, lake of fire), or at the consummation of the eons.

A prisoner has no way out unless the jailer unlocks the door, and this is the picture all of us must see in order to understand this whole matter of the salvation of all mankind.

No wonder Paul had to declare: ***O, the depth of the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How inscrutable are His judgments, and untraceable His ways! For, who knew the mind of the Lord? or, who became His adviser? or, who gives to Him first, and it will be repaid Him?***

Paul netted it all out, and it was none of mankind and all of God. Seeing that out of Him and through Him and for Him is all: to Him be the glory for the eons!

Oh, let us give up our pride and arrogance and be humbled before the Almighty God Who is the Savior of all! He alone is responsible for our salvation, and He alone will bring about the salvation of all mankind through His beloved Son. He alone will bring all to bow the knee by His Spirit, for no one can say "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12.3).

Every Knee

That in the name of Jesus every knee should be bowing, celestial and terrestrial and subterranean (Philippians 2.10 CV).

Paul did not just make up these words. As one who knew Hebrew Scripture, Paul knew the heart of God for mankind, as spoken through Isaiah the prophet.

"I have sworn by Myself, the word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness and will not turn back, that to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance." (Isaiah 45.23 NASB)

The Lord has sworn by Himself. What has He sworn? Exactly what Paul declared: Every knee will bow! His word has gone forth, and it will not turn back to Him. God's word is like pure gold refined in fire. His word is righteous, and what He has sent forth according to His word will happen. Every knee will bow, not by force but by the mercy and grace of God, and by His Spirit.

Destined to Fail

It seems as if God brought forth man with the express purpose that he fail, at least according to his own strength or will. This may sound negative, but it is not intended to be. Failure sums up the history of mankind, and it is all by the design and sovereign will of God. But let us be abundantly clear that what man does in his carnal flesh fails, but all that God does by His Spirit succeeds to His glory.

It seems that in God's wisdom failure is absolutely essential to bring mankind; that is, all of us, you and me, to the end of ourselves, so that Christ may be all in all and ultimately God the Father may be *All* in all. No man will ever boast before the throne of God. We will never boast in our own so-called *free will*. We will never boast that we brought anything to the table in bringing about God's purpose. As Paul wrote: ***But HE WHO BOASTS IS TO BOAST IN THE LORD*** (2 Corinthians 10.17).

Just as the Lamb of God was slain from before the disruption, or the foundation of the world, so was it ordained of God that mankind would fail and fall short of His glory. Not only would he fail but that he had to fail, and this is in accord with the plan of God. Simply, man was not given the ability to succeed on his own.

For apart from Me you can do nothing. (John 15.5)

Let us no longer be blinded by the god of this age. All mankind, without exception, is a failure and absolutely no one deserves the grace and mercy of God. No one! We all miss the mark and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3.23).

Many who believe in the Lord Jesus think that they made a choice for Christ because the preacher told them they had to or else they would roast in hell forever and ever. We may have had some legitimate emotional response that is still real to us to this day. We may have made an altar call or walked the aisle out of obedience. But if we were truly saved of God, and the Spirit of God took up residence in us, then it had nothing to do with our aisle walk or with our free will to put one foot before the other. It was all by the grace of God that broke into our life and overwhelmed our unbelief, our stubbornness toward God.

Paul declared: **Yet the grace of our Lord overwhelms, with faith and love in Christ Jesus** (1 Timothy 1.14 CV).

John declared: **But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God** (John 1.12-13 NASB)

But of God answers the whole matter of who is directing the grand drama of mankind. It was not your will that saved you but the will of God that declares that He wills that all men are to be saved.

As Jesus said: **Every one whom the Father gives me will come to me, and him who comes to me I will never on any account drive away** (John 6.37 WNT).

It is the faith of the Son of God that draws man, not his faith. It is the grace of God that overwhelms man's unbelief.

What and how much has been given to the Son? All things!

All things are delivered to me of my Father: and no man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him. (Luke 10.22 KJV)

In these two verses, please note that the action is on the part of the Father and the Son. You will search in vain for any action on the part of man. The Father gives and the Son reveals.

Man's Failure for God's Greatest Glory

Now, let us continue along this line of failure.

When we read Scripture, there seems to be failure on all levels. God alone is ***the Supreme in authority in the kingdom of mortals, and to whom He is willing is He giving it, and low one of mortals is He setting over it*** (Daniel 4.17 CV). And yet, mankind on all levels fails, even in that which God Himself calls into being according to His will.

Everything seems so strange when one looks at history and at what is around us today. Why is there so much failure? Why does God allow so much failure? Why does He let it go on so long before He will step in and make everything right? Why is there so much evil? Why must people die? There are a thousand and one questions that could be asked and are asked every day.

If we telescope out from the world system (*kosmos*) in which we live and look at the overall condition of mankind, we must conclude that man's history is marked by failure.

Here is some good news: **Mankind's failure is for God's greatest glory.** If we see this, we will see that mankind must fail on all levels and all fronts, so that God alone will receive all the glory as *All* in all. Our boast will be in the Son of God who will bring about God's purpose. Failure is by God's design! But here is more good news: **Woven through what looks like the greatest of failures is the golden thread of God's handiwork.**

Surely, everything that God does is a success. We know that the entire family of God from all economies or eras throughout all the generations is being connected together and growing into a holy temple in the Lord, and that many are being built together into a dwelling of God in Spirit of which Christ Jesus Himself is the chief cornerstone and the capstone (Ephesians 2.21-22).

Let it be indelibly written on our hearts that God's plan of the eons (ages) is being carried out exactly as God purposed and is being executed precisely according to God's timing. Nothing

that has happened, is happening, or will happen is outside the will of God. Nothing! And, no man can change it. God alone is the Supreme, and His will *will* be done.

We can look around us and wonder if God's will is truly being worked out; but we do not have to wonder if we believe that God alone is Supreme, that He is operating *all* in accord with the counsel or plan of His will (Ephesians 1.12), and that out of Him and through Him and to Him is *all*. **ALL!**

Satan, the Adversary

Consider the adversary of God and its relation to mankind. So many people place the blame for failure on this archenemy. They see it as the anointed messenger (angel) that started out good but turned evil; however, this is not true. Satan was evil from the start. John tells us that ***for the devil [adversary] has sinned from the beginning*** (1 John 3.8). In other words, it did not turn into a sinning messenger after being created; rather, it was created evil; it was created to be a sinning messenger.

This may be hard for some to accept, but may the Spirit of God open eyes.

Speaking of God, Isaiah gave us a truth that many have not fully understood: ***Former of light and Creator of darkness, Maker of good and Creator of evil*** (Isaiah 45.7 CV).

Do you understand the significance of this word? God is the Creator of evil. He alone is responsible for evil. Consider Solomon's wisdom: ***The Lord has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil*** (Proverbs 16.4). God is not evil in any sense of the word. He is merely the Creator. He could be likened to a chef baking a cake. The chef can bake a cake without ever eating it. He knows what went into the cake, and it comes out in the form he planned for it, but if he never takes a bite of it, he has no idea what the cake tastes like. Likewise, God does not partake of evil in any manner whatsoever, but He is still its Creator, for all comes forth from Him.

For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.
(Romans 11.36 NASB)

What is evil? Is it not the antagonist of good? Only God is good (Matthew 19.17)!

Consequently, Satan was created to be the adversary of God, so that mankind would have a stark contrast to God. By having a contrast, mankind would come to know the one true God of love and light, in whom there is no darkness (1 John 1.5). God is the one who created evil and the one who created Satan to be His evil antagonist. Every step that God has taken has been followed by Satan. Satan is like a shadow; for every step God takes in the light, there is a shadow of darkness cast upon creation in general and mankind in specific. This is by God's design. If it were not so, how would we know good from evil, or light from dark, or love from hate, or peace from war, or life from death? Mankind needs the contrast to know God. This is the glorious wisdom of God that answers the age-old question of why things are as they are. It is God's doing until the consummation when God will be *All* in all.

You might retort that mankind was never created to know evil; but who says? Scripture surely does not state this. On the contrary, God placed the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden with full expectation that Adam and Eve would partake of the tree. It was no accident that the tree was placed in full view of mankind's parents and that the serpent of old was waiting for its moment of deception. After all, if we accept that God is Supreme and Sovereign, and all things come through Him, then we must conclude that the whole drama played out in the garden was written and directed by God.

Some proclaim that prior to his fall, Adam was in the age of innocence, and that he had to be tested to see if he would obey God's one command. If this is true, then it sure sounds like a formula for failure. Adam was the new kid on the block. Satan, the old serpent, had been around awhile and was not ignorant of God's ways. The eternal God knows all and sees all, and He knew that in their current state Adam, and especially Eve, were no match for the old devil. Besides, God put Adam and Eve in the garden with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil staring them in the face, as if to say, "Go ahead and eat!" Adam had no experience with death, so how was he to know what it meant to die? The serpent probably knew something of it, but how could the first man have known something he had never experienced?

Adam was simply outgunned and destined to fail. Plus, Eve was out of his body, bone of his bones, and flesh of his flesh. Based on God's absolute law of love, Adam had to love his body. He had to follow his wife in eating of the forbidden fruit because he loved her as his own body. This is what Paul tells us in his Ephesians epistle as he compares Christ and His Body to Adam and his body. ***For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it*** (Ephesians 5.29). Of course, there are many types and antitypes in the account of Adam and Eve, but in its primal presentation, it reveals failure as ordained by God. Adam had no choice but to sin because God had given him no choice in the matter. If he had left Eve on her own, Adam would have broken the much higher law of love.

After our first parents partook of the tree, what did God declare? ***"Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil"*** (Genesis 3.22). Man was created to be perfected into the image of God, and this requires that he have knowledge of both good and evil. But this knowing was only the beginning of the process to conform mankind into the image of the Son. It was God's full intention that mankind would not only partake of this tree but also live by this tree, at least for 6,000 years.

However, mankind requires more than mere knowledge of good and evil. He must experience both. He must have the contrast of the two, just as he must experience the countless contrasts found throughout God's creation (e.g., light and dark, love and hate, victory and defeat, peace and war, life and death, health and sickness, up and down, hot and cold, soft and hard, wet and dry, to name a few). Adam and Eve were not instantaneously created in the image of God. They were not created as some super-human, perfected beings.

Some state that Adam and Eve were created perfect and that they were in the image of God right from the start. If this were so, they never would have partaken of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They would have been intelligent enough to know that when the serpent said they would not die that it was a lie. But they fell for the lie, and death entered into

all mankind from that day forward. Then why was Eve first deceived by the serpent, and then Adam followed? The answer is that they were not created perfect; they had to be *perfected*, as all of us do, and that requires failure.

The Futility of Mankind

We have been so indoctrinated with so much tradition of men that it is probably hard for most believers to imagine that mankind, who was created to be in God's image and likeness, was predetermined to fail.

One would think that God is so invested in a creation that He made to be in His image that He would go all out to prevent it from failing, even programming its genetic pool if need be, so it would not fail. Many theologians, teachers, pastors, and preachers declare *ad nauseam* that God did not want robots, so He gave mankind a free will to make their own choices. In other words, mankind can choose to believe or not to believe in God. Salvation is entirely dependent on mankind and not on God who, by the way, is ***the Savior of all mankind*** (1 Timothy 4.10) and ***wills that all mankind be saved*** (1 Timothy 2.4).

If mankind has a free will to be saved, then answer this one question: Did Paul, the apostle of the nations, the chief or foremost among all sinners (1 Timothy 1.16), who was severed from his mother's womb and called by His grace (Galatians 1.15), have a choice in the matter on the road to Damascus? On that infamous road, according to his own testimony, Paul was ***ignorant and in unbelief, and yet the grace of our Lord overwhelmed his ignorance and unbelief, with faith and love in Christ Jesus*** (1 Timothy 1.13-14). Do you read of any free will in regard to salvation in Paul's testimony or in any of his epistles, for that matter? Even where he exhorted the brethren to be carrying your own salvation into effect, Paul wrote: ***For it is God Who is operating in you to will as well as to work for the sake of His delight*** (Philippians 2.13). Notice that it is God who operates in you *to will*. Where is there a free will independent of God in Paul's words? There is none. We are totally dependent on God even to please Him.

In the context of declaring the foolishness of God is wiser than men, consider how Paul viewed the whole matter of salvation.

But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.... (1 Corinthians 1.30 NASB)

By God's doing you are in Christ! Not by your doing, not by your will, not by your wisdom, not by anything that comes from *you*! Either God does it or it does not happen; pure and simple.

Saul (prior to his encounter with Christ) was heading to Damascus to wreak havoc and death on the ecclesia of God. He willed that the Way had to be destroyed, but what happened to his will? His will was trumped by the will of the Lord. In a split second he was blinded by the blinding glory of the risen Christ. ***"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And Saul said, "Who are You, Lord?"*** And the shocking answer came: ***"I am Jesus whom you are persecuting"*** (Acts 9.4-6).

Was Saul walking on that road that day wondering how he was to be saved? Was he pondering how to ask the Lord into his heart? Was he seeking some meeting of a local ecclesia, so that he could walk the aisle, make an altar call, and tell everyone that he had accepted Christ into his heart? No! Such thinking was totally foreign to Saul's thinking on that day. He set out to destroy those who had been called of the Lord. To him, the One called Jesus was an enemy of his entire belief system and teaching.

How was he saved on that road? He was saved by the grace of the Lord that overwhelmed his ignorance and unbelief! Saul had no time to rationalize what was happening to him. He had no time to stand in the midst of the light and refuse the One speaking to him. Simply, he had no choice in the matter. It was a settled matter; a matter settled from the risen Christ seated at the right hand of His Father in heaven. He was called and chosen by the will of God. He was ***extricated out of the present wicked eon, according to the will of our God and Father, to Whom be the glory for the eons of the eons*** (Galatians 1.4-5 CV). Again, the will of God is what was operative in Paul's life.

In his epistles, Paul acknowledged that it was not even his faith that saved him or anyone else's faith, for that matter.

I am crucified with Christ, and no longer live, I, but Christ lives in me; but in that I now live in flesh, I live by faith, the faith of the Son of God, who has loved me and given himself for me. (Galatians 2.20 DNT)

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2.20 KJV)

For ye are saved by grace, through faith; and this not of yourselves; it is God's gift.... (Ephesians 2.8 DNT)

For by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this [is] not from you; [it is] the gift of God.... (Ephesians 2.8 ALT)

Notice that in each case, it is not Paul's faith or our faith but the faith of the Son, and that this faith is not of yourselves but a gift from God. Thus, the whole matter is based on a faith that is received. How can we say that our so-called *free will* saved us? Of course, many seem to take this view, but it is not based on Scripture.

Christendom has placed man at the center of his destiny and made him the hero or villain in his fate, when God alone has set the destiny of His entire creation, and He alone will receive all the glory. If He does not, then He is not the Supreme; man is.

God has allowed man to fail on all levels and all fronts, for without failure man will never truly know God. Further, if man succeeded in his own might, it would be to his own glory and not to God's glory. The boast would be in man.

Adam failed and *death passed through into all mankind, on which all sinned* (Romans 5.12 CV). Every human that has followed Adam has failed since all sin. What is sin? It is missing the mark, making a mistake, failing of the ideal.

The Ancient World Failed

Consider the condition of mankind, especially of the ancient world, as described by Paul in Romans 1.18-23. Mankind is without excuse, for God has revealed Himself to His creatures through His creation. God manifest in His creation was to lead mankind to worship the Creator. What did mankind do when they saw these invisible attributes of God? They sought to worship what they perceived.

In other words, mankind did exactly what they were supposed to do, and that is worship, but they failed by worshipping the created rather than the Creator. Mankind failed to see the invisible God and took what they could see and worshipped it instead. The result was that God turned mankind over to the lusts of their heart. Mankind failed!

Every human that has followed Adam has failed, even the greatest of God's people. Just look at the history of the men recorded in Scripture and you will see men of great fleshly weakness. Who can argue that Ishmael, who came from the loins of Abraham, was not a failure when we look at the daily crisis and the dark clouds looming over the Middle East? Yet, through their failures, God triumphed every step of the way and will yet triumph. Why? Because each failure revealed the absolute futility of man's way and the absolute perfection of God's way! It revealed the very character of God in the midst of evil.

Until man comes to see the futility of living without God, there will be evil; there will be darkness; there will be hatred; there will be war; and there will be death. But **God knows that all of mankind will not and cannot come to the point of futility on their own.**

In other words, we (all of us) could never figure it out on our own. Never! Just consider the 6,000-year history of mankind. We could say that the last century and even the last few decades have been a technological miracle as man's genius has reached heights that have never been seen in the 6,000 years of history.

However, on a moral and righteous level mankind's history is a failure. Man has not been able to overcome the evil heart of man; he has not been able to dispel darkness; he has not been able to make a world of total love for one another; he has not been able to govern righteously; he has not been able to stop war; and, most of all, he has not been able to overcome death.

Simply, mankind has not been able to reach the heights of glory. All of this is in spite of all the tremendous technological advances and enlightenment that have occurred, even in the last one hundred years. Man is an abject failure when it comes to his heart.

Have you considered the countless number of laws that governments put into place in our age of great enlightenment? One state a few years ago enacted 900 new laws in one session of their assembly. Do we honestly think that all these laws are to allow us to have what we call

free will, as if we can exercise our will as we please and when we please? This is what *free will* demands, and yet, none of us can truly exercise our will in this fashion. Why are there laws? To constrain our will! We are constrained all the time. Don't you think that the Almighty can constrain our will to win us over to His love? Think about it!

The Nation of Israel Failed

Over 2,000 years after Adam failed; God brought forth a special creation, a specific group of people that are called God's people, the ancient nation of Israel according to the flesh. The Lord entered into a covenant relationship with His people, and called them to be His wife and to be wed to the land of promise.

In His wisdom, God brought forth a nation chosen to be His nation above all the nations of the earth, called out from among the nations as a peculiar people, the apple of His eye and the wife of the Lord. They were called to be above all the nations, with the blessing of God flowing through them, a royal priesthood and a holy nation set apart unto God. The nations were to learn of God and His ways through them, and to know the blessing of God. If Israel was at peace with God, then the nations of the world would be at peace as well.

But what happened? They failed and their glorious destiny came apart each step of the way. It came apart at Mount Sinai as Moses was up on the mountain receiving the commands of God and the sons of Israel worshipped a golden calf; it came apart as they approached the Promised Land and doubted God and listened to the fear of man instead of holding to the promise; it came apart when they demanded a king; it came apart when they joined themselves with the nations of the world and became more vile and evil than the worst of the nations; it came apart when they became adulterous whores running after other nations; it came apart when they worshipped false idols; it came apart when they shook their fists at God and declared they had no king but Caesar; and it came apart when they demanded the crucifixion of their Messiah.

What a sordid history for God's people! They have had a failed history, and yet God called them out of Egypt to be His people. Why did they fail? Because they were not given the ability to succeed! God did not put His Spirit in them to lead them. His Spirit was in their midst (Isaiah 63.11; Haggai 2.5), so in many respects, they were not equipped to do what God had commanded. He meant for them to fail, for if He wanted to give them a better opportunity for success He could have had a Pentecost in their day in which He poured out His Spirit on them and filled them. But God did not do this in order to fulfill His purpose.

Did God stop loving His people and not plan for their redemption? Of course not! In the fullness of time, God sent His Son, the Messiah of Israel, to this earth. He is called **Jesus** because He had a very specific mission.

Now she shall be bringing forth a Son, and you shall be calling His name Jesus, for He shall be saving His people from their sins. (Matthew 1.21 CV)

At His first advent, did He succeed in saving His Jewish brethren from their sins? Did they accept His offer? Absolutely not! Instead they made the most profane demand that God's people could ever make—kill God's Son.

Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Crucify Him!" (Matthew 27.22 NASB)

Can you imagine that this came from the mouth of God's chosen nation? Perhaps it is difficult to imagine, yet this was a fulfillment of Scripture.

To His own He came, and those who are His own accepted Him not. (John 1.11 CV)

Jesus did not save all of the Jews according to the flesh that surrounded Him at His first advent. Some were saved from their sins; others remained against God's Son and in darkness. He healed the sick, cast out demons, raised the dead, gave promise to the poor, yet He was rejected by the ones whose forefathers were led through the wilderness by the Rock. Jesus came to save His people, yet only some repented and acknowledged that He is the Messiah. Worse yet, those He came to save knew who He was (Matthew 21.38-39), and demanded that He be crucified and His blood be on them and their children (Matthew 27.25).

Instead of embracing Him, the very ones He came to save demanded His death as if He were a common criminal. He turned from being the Savior of His people to being the Savior of the world, the Lamb slain for the sin of the world.

As the Savior of His people, why didn't He go all out to change their minds? From all appearances, His ministry to His blood brethren was a failure, but it was a failure according to Scripture. It is recorded that He spoke in parables, so that they would not understand. He explained the parables only to a handful of those closest to Him. Some were given light, but many were left in darkness, that is, in blindness.

God purposely blinded them and hardened their hearts (Matthew 13.10-17; John 12.40; Romans 11.7-10). In the divine drama (play) of God, this act in God's play outwardly appeared to be a failure, even a tragedy, as if Jesus' mission to the lost sheep of the house of Israel would not succeed in that day.

(10) And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" (11) Jesus answered them, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven [the secrets of the kingdom of the heavens] but to them it has not been granted. (12) "For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. (13) "Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. (14) "In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, 'YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE; (15) FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES, OTHERWISE THEY

WOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I WOULD HEAL THEM.' (Matthew 13.10-15 NASB)

As the last act of our present wicked age is being played out, those that call themselves Jews of the state of Israel are in unbelief, even apostasy, and aligned with the nations and merchants of the world, fully enmeshed in Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth (Revelation 17.5). No wonder Jesus cried over Jerusalem. Surely, He not only looked back, but He looked forward to what His people were, had become, and yet would be.

(37) "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. (38) "Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! (Matthew 23.37-38 NASB)

Again, outwardly, it appears that Jesus' ministry to the ones He came to deliver into His Kingdom failed. He had to walk out of their house and leave them. However, there is a huge difference in this apparent failure. As the Son of God, Jesus only did what the Father commanded. He only spoke what the Father spoke; He only taught what the Father taught; and He only did what the Father did. When He spoke parables with full expectation that the Israelites would not hear, this was in the will of His Father.

However, it still leaves us with the pressing question: Why did they have to fail so miserably? Surely, God could have kept them from going into such apostasy. He could have opened the eyes of their heart to understand. He could have spoken to them in plain language. Surely, He could keep them from any future apostasy. Then why didn't He do it? Why won't He do it? Be patient, we will get back to the answer.

The Embryonic Ecclesia

In Matthew, we see this failure over and over again. We even see His closest disciples not understanding and Jesus having to rebuke them for lack of faith. The few gentile proselytes brought into the picture seem to have had more faith than all of Israel (Matthew 8.10; Luke 7.9). We see the disciples vying to be the greatest in the Kingdom and one who denies Him three times. Apparent failure all about!

This small, motley group of twelve men became part of a mighty move of God on the day of Pentecost. As the tongues of fire fell upon them, they became empowered to take the evangel of the Kingdom to their fellow brethren and they did in large measure. But, it did not take very long for the ecclesia to slide into darkness. Studying the history of the church from the 6th to the 16th centuries reveals a very sad and dark story of failure.

Earnest of the Spirit

There are two important points that need to be understood regarding the ecclesia that grew out of Pentecost in 33 AD that answer why, again, outwardly it appears as if the ecclesia has failed.

First, even though on the day of Pentecost the Spirit of God was poured out upon the ecclesia, it was only an earnest of the Spirit that was received. During the Pentecostal Age, those who have been given the faith of the Son of God to believe have also been given an earnest of the Spirit of God (2 Corinthians 1.22; 5.5; Ephesians 1.14).

Second, Pentecost was celebrated with leavened bread (Leviticus 23.17), which indicates that God never intended for the Pentecostal Age to be a huge success. Leaven is corruption, which has been manifested throughout this age as God has called out a people to Himself. Thus, failure was built into the Pentecostal Age. Similarly, this is seen in the parable of the leaven (Luke 13.21).

Now, this fact alone should humble us who are now in the ecclesia of God nearly two millennia beyond Pentecost.

The Present Ecclesia

Before throwing too many stones at our early brethren, we need to examine the condition of the ecclesia in our own day to see if we are living in a glass house. How much different are we? Have we somehow figured out how not to fail? The Body of Christ, which is supposed to be joined to the living Head, started out holding to its Head, but unfortunately it has progressively joined forces with the world. It has grown into Christendom, something huge that has many heads and filled with doctrines of demons.

Are we holding to the unity of the spirit? Have we attained to the unity of the faith (Ephesians 4)? Are we truly ambassadors of Christ (2 Corinthians 5.18-21)? Have we successfully embraced the word of the conciliation in our lives, or have we fostered discord and dissent? Are we functioning as one body, or are we fractured into countless splinters? Are we walking by faith, or are walking by sight, sound, feeling, etc.? Are we separated from the evil world around us, or have we joined forces with it? Are we different from the world, or are we like the world?

Well, many questions of this sort could be asked, but what does Scripture tell us?

(1) But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, (2) by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, (3) men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. (4) For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; (5) for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer. (1 Timothy 4.1-5 NASB)

(1) But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. (2) For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, (3) unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, (4) treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, (5) holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these. (6) For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down

with sins, led on by various impulses, (7) always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. (2 Timothy 3.1-7 NASB)

(3) For the era will be when they will not tolerate sound teaching, but, their hearing being tickled, they will heap up for themselves teachers in accord with their own desires, and, indeed, (4) they will be turning their hearing away from the truth, yet will be turned aside to myths. (2 Timothy 4.3-4 CV)

How many of the Lord's people today have turned aside to myths? Just consider the myths surrounding hell, death, afterlife, and soul immortality, to name a few things that many hold to in these last days. They are doctrines of demons. Or, we could add the Hollywood-type emphasis on end-time events and even the "rapture." To this we could add prosperity and blessing teaching, anointing oils, to name a few more. What about riches? The world seeks for wealth and so does Christendom. Has anyone thought about Laodicea lately (Revelation 3.14-22)? Just consider the mass marketing of Jesus through Christendom's publishing industry. It has become a great enterprise motivated by profit. All one has to do is walk into almost any so-called Christian bookstore in the United States to see this great marketing enterprise.

What about power? So many today are looking for outward manifestations of power and, at the same time, are buying guns to protect themselves in case there are riots in the streets and shortages of food. Others want to destroy our nation's enemies with the latest and greatest technological weaponry. How much different is this from the Lord's disciples who wanted to call fire down upon a Samaritan village that did not receive Jesus, on account of which Jesus rebuked them (Luke 9.54-55).

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm." (John 18.36 NASB)

Can anyone argue the fact that today there is so much diverse and contrary teaching being given in the name of Jesus that it leaves one's head spinning trying to decipher what is true and what is false? To make matters worse, many preachers claim they are preaching "the word," and the unsuspecting pew sitters or radio and television listeners do not know if it is "the word" or not, because they have not studied the Word to prove it.

When a pastor tells his congregation that they must tithe to him otherwise they will be *cursed*, then we must run out of the house of Babylon. When a preacher tells his audience that billions are going to an eternal hell to be tortured and everyone claps their hands in glee, then something is dreadfully wrong. When the resurrection and transfiguration are put on the back burner of most teaching and people are told that when they die they go straight to heaven, receive their reward and are with Jesus for eternity, then something is amiss, for according to Scripture our hope is in the resurrection and transfiguration, and this is totally dependent on the presence of the Lord. When preachers say that they are preaching "the word," what they are actually doing is taking words from Scripture and pulling them together to tell a story that matches their tradition or interpretative bias. It is a mosaic of words to paint a picture that they have in mind, but not necessarily what the Spirit of God has inspired.

I am not casting stones at my brethren in Christ who hold views contrary to Scripture (or, mine for that matter), for I too have held many of these views and even this day am trying to rid myself of baggage that has accumulated over many years. I am not there yet, but I keep pressing on in pursuit of the truth. It is far too easy to accept a teaching that sounds right, and yet it is from the enemy's tool bag or from our own carnal minds that never rise above the dust of the earth. We need to remind ourselves that the devil disguises himself as an angel of light, and where is this disguise most manifested? In the doctrine or teaching of Christendom!

We must guard ourselves against Babel and the doctrines of demons found in spiritual Babylon, the counterfeit to the spiritual Jerusalem of God. What are we to do? ***Come of her My people*** (Revelation 18.4)! We must not allow ourselves to give in to the temptation to accept that which tickles or pleases our ear. We must press on in the Word of God, seeking for His truth that will truly set us free, and not leave us in bondage or lead us into apostasy.

For many years I have been crying out to know the truth. When I share this with some, not all, I am greeted with disdain rather than encouragement. There are so many interpretations of Scripture that God's people have long discarded the thought that God has absolute, spiritual truth, and they have bought into the relativism of the world. After all, they say that it is good to have many views of the same Scriptures. It makes us well-rounded! I don't care to be well-rounded, which to me is like saying I want to be fat; I want to know the truth. Besides, they say: "No one man has a lock on the truth. How can you expect to come into it?" According to this thinking we might as well leave our Bibles on our coffee tables as dust collectors.

When you challenge some traditional, institutionalized teaching, such as billions upon billions of lost humanity being thrust into an eternal oven to be toasted forever and ever with no chance of reprieve, you are given a book or a paper by some well-known commentator who refutes the salvation or reconciliation of all, as if he is the last word on the matter. In fact, this has happened to me thrice on the matter of God is the Savior of all mankind, and the eventual salvation of all mankind. I was directed to the same article written by the same author by one person in the United States, and then a few months later, a person in Europe directed me to the same article. I guess this particular commentator must be right since I was given two witnesses from two continents. Hardly! The one writing the article created a god in the image of the worst torturers, and then said that it is the justice of God. God is love has been rejected as the one truth that explains it all.

One caveat: I realize that we ***worship in spirit and truth***, and the two are required for us to have proper balance. After all, ***the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life*** (John 4.23-24; 2 Corinthians 3.6).

Cutting the Word of Truth

Who is heeding Paul's exhortation to Timothy?

Have a pattern of sound words, which you hear from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 1.13 CV)

A sound pattern is more than taking words and piecing them together to support one's position or message that one wants to sell to the people. It is holding to the proper framework of Scripture. It is like a puzzle with every piece of the puzzle being framed together until the whole picture comes into view. To do this, there needs to be a correct cutting of the word. It is also like an enigma or a riddle that must be solved.

Endeavor to present yourself to God qualified, an unashamed worker, correctly cutting the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2.15 CV)

To get the puzzle pieces, we need to cut the Word in such a way that it will form the proper picture; otherwise, the pieces will never fit, and we will have to force them together. Have you ever tried to force the pieces of a puzzle together that do not fit? The result is that the picture does not look right when we are done, or worse yet, we are not able to finish the puzzle. We end up with an incomplete picture. This is what some, who love the Lord, are unwittingly doing in our day.

When my father worked on puzzles and pieces did not fit together, he would take his pocket knife and cut the pieces to fit. This is not the type of cutting that Paul meant. Essentially, my dad was destroying the puzzle. This is exactly what many do when they do not cut the Word properly; they take words and cut them to fit, but they do not fit. If we are honest with one another, most all of us have done this to some degree, and many do it all the time without any hesitation.

When this is done, the whole picture or framework of Scripture is ruined, and worse, something that is not even logical is created. If many of the preachers today would step back and logically analyze what they are saying, they would discover that they make no sense and contradict Scripture after Scripture.

There is another analogy to be made with a puzzle, and that pertains to losing a piece of the puzzle. If a piece is lost, then the picture cannot be completed. The same thing happens with the Word if we leave out pieces that help to properly frame God's purpose and plan. And this is what is done so often, particularly with words that are difficult to fit in the puzzle. They are often ignored altogether.

We need to be seekers of the truth of Scripture, not merely of the words of Scripture. We need to keep searching and when a piece does not fit, rather than forcing it into our mindset or our traditions and biases, or leaving it out completely, we need to examine it carefully to see why it does not fit.

All of this is to state the obvious: There is as much failure today throughout Christendom as there was for Israel. Probably, the biggest difference is not so much in the content of the failure but in the packaging of it. With all the glitz and marketing of this day and age, the failure is easier to hide and gloss over. After all, success is often measured by the outward and not by the inward or the heart.

Apostasy must come, and it has come. Falling away from the faith must come, and it has come. Following after doctrines of demons must come, and it has come. Not cutting the word properly must come, and it has come. The era when ***they will not tolerate sound teaching, but, their hearing being tickled, they will heap up for themselves teachers in accord with their own desires, and, indeed, they will be turning their hearing away from the truth, yet will be turned aside to myths*** must come, and it has come.

Systematizing of the Deception

According to Paul, the Body of Christ is to mature until we attain to the unity of the faith and of the realization of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature of the complement of the Christ, that we may by no means still be minors, surging hither and thither and being carried about by every wind of teaching, by human caprice, ***by craftiness with a view to the systematizing of the deception*** (Ephesians 4.13-14 CV).

Only an adversary could devise a way to systematize the deception. This has been one of Satan's greatest achievements. He has not only succeeded in taking what is false but in taking it and packaging it into a systematic framework and then passing it off as the truth of Scripture. It appears as light but at its very core is darkness.

Systematizing is not merely accepting something false; it is building an entire framework based on a deception, so that everything is seen through this deception. For example, if it is held that every believer immediately goes to heaven *in* death, then this becomes a framework by which all other Scripture related to such things as death, life, soul, resurrection, and judgment is explained. When Paul wrote that he would rather be out of the body *and* at home with the Lord, such a framework holds that Paul taught that when a believer dies he goes to heaven immediately, which is contrary to Paul's expectation of the *out-resurrection* (Philippians 3.11). The result is that the one thing that is essential to the hope of believers is systematically put in a lower place of importance, ignored, or distorted.

What is the result of this "systematizing of the deception" for those who have fallen into it? This systematizing can be likened to putting a frog in a pot of water over a fire. At first, the water is lukewarm which is soothing to the creature, and it is lulled to sleep. When the water gets to the boiling point, the damage has been done, and it is too late for the frog to jump out of the water. In like fashion, some of God's people are being bathed in lukewarm teaching. They are laughing and clapping at teaching that is failing them, and they do not know it. Praise God; He locks up all together, so who of us can cast a stone at our brethren? Let us pray continually for the eyes of our heart, as well as all of our brethren to be enlightened.

What are we to conclude? Failure is written across all the people that God has called and chosen. Failure is written across all mankind and its history.

God Locks Up All in Stubbornness

This leads to the answer to the pressing question of why. Why would God allow this to happen, even to that which holds to the name of His Son on this earth? This leads us back to this matter of stubbornness.

For God locks up all together in stubbornness, that He should be merciful to all. (Romans 11.32 CV)

In the context of Paul's epistle, we might be tempted to think that the locking up is only for Israel, but they are only part of the equation. All the nations (gentiles) are locked up as well, which includes the rest of mankind, even us who once were stubborn toward God. *All* have been stubborn, and *all* will be shown mercy. *All*, from the beginning to the end, from Adam to the last child born of the human race during the eons, must be locked up for God to reach His end and fulfill His purpose, so that no one can boast in self but in God alone who is merciful to all.

If any of us could reach God's end by our own might without any failure, then we would take the glory for ourselves. We would consider ourselves better than all the others who failed. Even the Body of Christ would do this and, in fact, is doing it in this day. Just consider the glee that seems to emanate from some circles of believers at the grotesque notion that the lost are roasting in an eternal fire. It is as if they are saying: "We made the right choice, so we deserve heaven. You made the wrong choice, so you deserve hell; it's your own fault. Burn brother!"

Restating these words: God locks up *all*, leaving *all* in a place of stubbornness (unpersuadable), so that *all* will receive His mercy; and *all* will be included in His grand, ultimate purpose; and *all* will give the glory to God. Let us state this in another way: *No one* will fail to receive His mercy; *no one* will be left out of His grand purpose and plan; and *no one* will take glory for himself. It is to the glory of God. O, the wisdom of God.

(33) O depth of riches, and wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable His judgments, and untraceable His ways! (34) for who did know the mind of the Lord? or who did become His counsellor? (35) or who did first give to Him, and it shall be given back to him again? (36) because of [from, out of] Him, and through Him, and to Him are the all things; to Him is the glory—to the ages. Amen. (Romans 11.33-36 YLT)

Who knew, who became, who gives? The answer is *the God of all!*

The key to understanding this is the word *all*, which means that nothing is left out. In God's wisdom, *all* must fail; *all* must be locked up in disobedience and stubbornness, so that *all* will come to God's end. Do you get it? *All* will come to God's end, to His purpose!

There is no other way for God to reach His end. What is His end? It is that He will be *All in all!* He locks up all for *all*. How can God be all if He annihilates billions of His human creations in the second death, or leaves them to be tormented and tortured in literal flames of fire forever and ever, or allows evil to continue someplace in His creation forever and ever? Think about it!

Out of Him, and through Him, and to Him is *the all*.

There are three clauses in this verse.

First, *all is out of God*. Everything comes forth from God; nothing, absolutely nothing in His creation comes out of any other source but God. He is the Supreme, and all comes out of Him, including the adversary.

Second, *all is through God*. Everything that is and that happens must come through God; nothing, absolutely nothing that happens in His creation can come through any other source but God. He is the Supreme, and all is through Him.

Third, *all is to Him*. Everything in His entire creation is to Him, meaning that all things must return to God, for they are for Him.

How can mankind come to know this great truth and come into the experience of it without experiencing failure? Mankind needs a contrast of who God truly is so that they will know Him, love Him, and serve Him, not out of obligation but out of true love and adoration. In the day that God is *All* in all, all mankind will know God and failure will be no more. God does not fail!

So, a rightful conclusion is that the first Adam failed; the ancients that followed failed; the nation of Israel has failed and will fail; the nations and governments of the world have failed and will fail; and Christendom, in general, but not entirely, has failed and will fail. Again, a reminder, all that comes by God through His Spirit does not and will not fail.

The End from the Beginning

Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, "My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure." (Isaiah 46.10 NASB)

Dear beloved brethren, our God has told us the end from the beginning. His purpose is to be All in all, and nothing will stop Him from becoming *All*. His purpose has been established, and He will accomplish it.

The Creator, the Potter

Have you ever wondered why God would harden the heart of Pharaoh or even take an unbelieving king like Cyrus and make him His anointed?

And the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not listen to them, just as the LORD had spoken to Moses. (Exodus 9.12 NASB)

Thus says the LORD to Cyrus His anointed, Whom I have taken by the right hand, to subdue nations before him and to loose the loins of kings; to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut.... (Isaiah 45.1 NASB)

Paul gives the clearest answer to this question in all Scripture.

(13) Just as it is written, "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED." (14) What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! (15) For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION." (16) So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. (17) For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH."(18) So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. (19) You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" (20) On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? (21) Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use? (Romans 9.13-21 NASB)

Let us consider Paul's argument as presented.

First, why was Jacob chosen over Esau? The simple answer is "because God willed it so." *For though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls* (Romans 9.10-11). We might not like the answer or agree with it, but God always has the first and last say in all things in His creation.

The *Concordant Commentary on the New Testament* by A.E. Knoch states:

"The usual deduction from this is that God is not just. In a man, this would not be right, but it is God's sovereign privilege to display Himself through any of His creatures, in any way best suited to the purpose. Love needed Jacob for its display. Power needed a Pharaoh for its foil. Man cannot turn the tide of God's affections in his favor nor can he stem the torrent of His wrath. **In God's great purpose to eventually bless all mankind**, it is His prerogative to form and use suitable vessels to convey His mercy. Of such was Jacob. Esau was needed to emphasize Jacob's unworthiness. Pharaoh was elevated by God, not that his name might be great, but that God's name might be made known through all the earth. A great man was needed for this, or God could not have made His power known."

Second, mercy is brought back in by quoting the Lord Himself. The Lord will have mercy on whomever He will have mercy. In other words, God calls the shots, not man, when it comes to His mercy.

Third, man's condition does not depend on man's will or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. The word *run* refers to the course that man is on as if on a race course. Notice, Paul again emphasizes *but God*, which is the same wording as *for God*.

Fourth, simply, God will harden hearts as He sees fit to accomplish His plan. He raises up and He tears down to demonstrate His power, not for the sake of a show of force but because He has an ultimate purpose in mind.

Fifth, those questioning Paul's line of reasoning ask: *Why does He find fault? Who resists the will of God?* I see these as rhetorical questions that Paul posed to make a point. He knew that some would argue against what he was saying. They would actually accuse God of finding fault when He brought these things upon people as if He were being unfair. Others might respond: What's the use in even trying if God's will trumps my will? I have personally heard this counter argument many times when trying to reach other believers with what Paul taught.

According to Paul, no man can resist the will of God. Accepting this as the truth answers the question of the salvation of all mankind. It is God's will to save all. Consequently, whose will is strong enough to resist God's purpose to save all mankind; eventually, even the ones whose hearts He hardens must yield to the will of God.

Sixth, God is the Potter and mankind is the clay pot. The Creator has the right to make one vessel a vessel of honor and another for common use. Has the created any right to question the Creator? As the Creator, God has responsibility for His creation. He made it, and He must keep it. It is not in the will of man to have responsibility for his ultimate destiny. God creates and calls forth vessels of honor and dishonor with purpose. After all, let us not forget that He is the God of the living. What is death and failure to the God who sees the end from the beginning? He alone has determined the course of events, as well as the outcome.

In light of the Potter, consider Pharaoh whose heart was hardened by the Lord. Do we not think that after a few plagues that Pharaoh was willing to let God's people go? Surely, he must have thought to himself that enough is enough, but God had another plan that dealt with the heart of the sons of Israel and the Christ that would come 1,500 years later. So God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Does this seem just for one who might have been willing to listen and obey? It is just if we know that God is just; and that He will settle all accounts with men in a just and righteous way at the great white throne. Thrusting Pharaoh into an eternal hell for something that God ordained is hardly justice.

Seventh, all this is necessary so that God's Word will not fail (Romans 9.6), for when His Word goes forth it does not turn back; it accomplishes all that it was intended to accomplish.

At this point, let us turn to the cross, for it is here that *all* comes together. It is here that *all* failure is remedied, and it is here that *all* mankind is saved. Did you grasp these words? *All* mankind is saved!

The Absolute Success of the Cross

We know that the world does not acknowledge the cross for what it truly means. To the world, it is a failure. Christ is merely one of many men who left their mark on the world, but He is in the grave like all the others or perhaps in some after-life state, depending on which pagan view one holds.

If we look at the cross of Calvary from the eyes of man, the cross seems to be a failure.

"He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him" (Matthew 27.42 NASB).

He came to save His brethren, but He could not save all of them at that time, for they were in unbelief; and at the crucial hour, He could not even save Himself from death. From mankind's view, it would appear to be utter failure again for mankind; the Second Man had failed. Mankind's view is always distorted through the lens of sin and death.

But praise God; it is God's view that matters; the view from the heavenly throne of grace and mercy; the view of Him from whom all flows. It was all in His perfect plan and according to His purpose; ***the One Who is operating all in accord with the counsel [plan] of His will*** (Ephesians 1.11).

Let men say that Christ could not save Himself or that God abandoned Him, as if the power of death would forever hold Him in its mighty grip; but Scripture says that God raised His Son from the dead, for it was not possible for death to hold Him.

Please understand that on the cross the Son of God DIED! He did not fake it; He did not avoid it; and He did not spend three days in a fiery place called *hell*. He died as all men die, and He was raised from the dead by His Father, as all men will be raised by the Father.

(22) "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—(23) this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. (24) "But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power. (Acts 2.22-24 NASB)

Let it be shouted from the rooftops and the pulpits of every so-called "church" building that bears the name of Christ: **The death of God's Son on the cross is an absolute, unequivocal 100% success according to the counsel of God's will!**

Most preachers would probably agree that the cross is an absolute success. Unfortunately, their preaching often does not reflect this great truth, for they place exceptions in the finished work of the cross. What has resulted throughout the Christian world? The result is that the majority of the Body of Christ believes that the cross was a failure? If this does not raise a reaction from you, then it is time to wake up.

To a majority of believers, the cross is an absolute success for them because they made "a commitment to Christ." However, it is not a success for the rest of mankind, for they did not make this commitment. In other words, the cross is a success *with limits, with exceptions*, for the success of the cross ultimately depends on man. So that there is no misunderstanding, I reject this line of thinking because of what Scripture reveals to us about all.

Stand in the pulpits of today and proclaim that Christ has saved *all mankind without exception*, and you will most likely be severed from that group of believers or be ignored to the point that you must leave. The big lie is that just like death is not really death but life, so *all* is not really *all* but *all with exceptions*. In the garden, the serpent told Eve ***you surely will not die*** (Genesis 3.4).

Unfortunately, far too many believers have also come to accept this lie. After all, many people see death as not really death but merely as an immediate portal into another existence in heaven or in hell. By the same token, the word *all* is not seen as an all-inclusive word. It is *all* with billions of exceptions. In fact, *all* is not even some but a few in the minds of many. They have very few saved and the majority lost in a fiery oven to be tormented with no chance of escape.

Paul wrote: ***We are working for the good of all, yet specially for the family of faith*** (Galatians 6.10 CV). Why would he make such a statement if all were not included in God's purpose and plan? Surely, he could have simply stated that they were working for all of the family of faith, but he did not state this. Paul worked for the good of *all* because he knew that the cross was an absolute success for *all*.

The most grotesque systematizing of the deception has occurred in relation to the effectiveness of the cross, and many have embraced this deception to the point that brethren who challenge this deception are told they are going to "hell." This in itself is a sad commentary on the failure of God's people.

This is how the deception goes. Adam successfully caused death and sin to enter through into all mankind. There is no exception for any born of Adam's race, which includes all mankind. In other words, Adam's one transgression was an absolute success in bringing death and sin unto all mankind, and those born of Adam's race have no choice in the matter. If they are born of man, they must die as man. Now, this is true.

However, when it comes to Christ's one act of righteousness, it is an entirely different matter. As the deception goes, Christ's one act of righteousness *potentially* leads to life for all, *only if* one believes on his own volition (free will).

In other words, man has a choice in the matter, and unfortunately, most men will not make the choice while in the body, so they will die in their sin and be forever lost.

Is there something odd about this reasoning? Mankind has no choice in the matter of death and sin but now must make a choice in the matter of life. Mankind had no free will in becoming a sinner and ultimately facing death but now has a free will to determine his destiny in heaven or in hell. Does this make any sense to you? Isn't it rather strange that billions upon billions of people, who had the spirit of life breathed into them, made a free will choice to die and have rejected God's promise of life? Why is it that the majority of mankind (not the minority) has chosen, according to their own free will, not to go the way of life? Isn't it far more logical that if man's free will were operative in the matter of salvation that most of all mankind would choose to live? After all, most of mankind seems to fear death. When we fear something we generally desire to stay away from that thing. Think about it!

Consider this question: Why is Adam's one transgression more successful (in a bad sense) than Christ's one righteous act (in a good sense)? Has God ultimately failed? Is God not able to save all mankind? Did He make the ultimate sacrifice knowing that billions of His creatures, made to be perfected into His own image, are going to be cast into a fiery lake to be tormented forever? God is the Supreme and all comes out of Him, through Him, and for Him is all. Are we to conclude that it is His will that there are exceptions to His *all*?

Dear brethren, open your hearts to God's love and search Scripture to see if this is in fact true. If it is true, then we must conclude that God has failed and the cross was not able to undo all that Adam did. Now, some will argue that it is man's failure, not God's, but it is not, for if man fails to reach God's end, it is God who fails. **Man is helpless in his sin, so why do we make man a hero in his own salvation, as if he can save himself?**

So that no one takes these words wrongly, please understand that I am stating that, according to Scripture, this matter of Christ's death *potentially* saving mankind is *a deception of the highest order*. Even worse, it has been woven into the very teaching of Christendom until it has become a systematized deception.

I realize that these are serious allegations, but let us turn to God's Word with an open heart and see what is revealed. To do this, we must accept that the word *all* means exactly *all*, and not all with exceptions or all with some excluded.

One of the greatest deceptions that has been systematized involves the word *all*. Just as death does not mean death to most people, the word *all* does not mean all but something less.

Only in Christ

There is a very dangerous counterfeit that we must guard against that states all mankind will eventually find favor with God, but there are many ways to this favor, only one of which is through God's Son. This must be rejected. **There is only one way to God, and that is through His Son who is the Way, the Truth, the Resurrection, and the Life.** Apart from Christ, there will be no favor with God. In this eon, we must be saved by grace through faith, the faith of the Son of God.

I leave you with these thoughts.

God is love. (1 John 4.8, 16)

He first loved us. (1 John 4.19)

We know love by this; that He laid down His life for us. (1 John 3.16)

God so loves the world. (John 3.16)

Love never fails. (1 Corinthians 13.8)