

# ***SEEING GOD***



## ***THROUGH NATURE***

***By***

***Ron Christian***

***God's "Handiwork" Reveals God Himself***

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

***As author of this short paper, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to Shirley Ruiz, who dedicated her great skills, abounding energy, and time in typing this short manuscript. She has given of her time, talents, energy and interest in typing nearly all of my many books, freely and gladly. Because of her generosity for decades, I believe many lives will be "touched" with the Good News of God's Love!***

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....2**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS.....3**

**"DISCLAIMER AND SHORT INTRODUCTION!".....4**

**"MAY 7, 2008!".....7**

**"FIRST, THE BEAUTY OF NATURE!".....9**

**"SECOND, THE AMAZING ORDER IN NATURE!"..... 11**

**"THIRD, THE PHENOMENAL POWER IN NATURE!"..... 13**

**"THE FOURTH ASPECT OF NATURE THAT IS QUICKLY DISCERNABLE IS THE VASTNESS,  
THE BIGNESS, AND THE MAGNITUDE OF NATURE.".....51**

**"THE FIFTH ASPECT OF NATURE IS THE AMAZING VARIETY IN NATURE.".....53**

## **“DISCLAIMER AND SHORT INTRODUCTION!”**

*Even though I have read scores of books, preached hundreds of sermons, prepared many lessons for countless Sunday School Adult Classes, have written 20 books (compiled 13 other booklets of the writings of a dozen other writers), and I have spent over 50 years (presently in 2008) seeking God (very imperfectly) as a born-again Christian believer, I make NO claims at being great as a preacher, teacher, writer, compiler, researcher, scholar, etc. I have long been a mere (ordinary) Christian trying to “think a few of God’s thoughts”, trying to “feel a little of God’s compassion”, trying to “act obediently to God’s revealed will” for my personal life.*

*Sad to say, I have often failed my Lord; I have often had to confess my weaknesses and sins to my Saviour. I have often been amazed at the number of times God has expressed His forgiving grace and love to me. I have many times, over a half century, been “lost in wonder, love, and praise” (not as a scientist, for I am “far from being a brilliant scientist”) but just as a common person.*

*I have beheld the “revelation of God through Nature”, particularly when I “do” my “jogging in the early morning”. I recorded these thoughts (of the revelation of God through His “handiwork” – Nature) in my personal Journal, and, of course, at the time, I recorded these ideas theological in orientation), I had no intention that anyone but perhaps my wife, would read the “journal entries.” These “thoughts” in my mind seemed to “demand” a “written expression”, so I found that I rather quickly penned these following pages, because of my “thoughts about God revealed through Nature”, thoughts that came to me while I was jogging one early May Morning (2008), when I was 63 years old.*

*I am aware that there probably will be a few (theological) ideas in the following paper that wiser men/women than I will probably not agree with. That is alright, for who of us finite and mortal humans can pretend that we possess all the truth about God and His world, and who of us (even “professional” theologians) can claim, even after years of “study”, that we comprehend all the mysteries of this world or the “deep things of God”? However, as fellow believers, it is important that we try to “maintain the unity of the Faith in the bond of peace.” When we disagree on “some theological points,” let us at least “agree to disagree agreeably” and let us “focus on Christ” and on His Cross and Resurrection! God is, by definition, “incomprehensible”, but He has chosen to reveal Himself in many*

**ways - very importantly in the Old Testament writings, and most importantly in the Incarnation. However, along with these more important revelations of God, the Living God has also chosen to make Himself known through nature - what He has created!**

**NOTE: Since I wrote the above "Disclaimer" (and the original notes about God's revelation of Himself through Nature - after my experience of jogging one early morning in May 2008 ) - I found myself enthralled with thoughts about God, thoughts that I had long contemplated at various times. I "felt compelled" to organize some of those thoughts, particularly about the implications and the practical applications, regarding the Power of God. Therefore, at several different times, for the next two weeks, (following my initial journal entries on the five ways God's characteristics are revealed in Nature), I explored my own long-contemplated thoughts regarding one of the characteristics of God, which is, in some ways, revealed in Nature. The results are "Many additional pages" in my one-time "short paper" on "Seeing God Through Nature."**

**My original "short paper" (i.e., my original "journal entry" in early May 2008) became a more expanded paper, after I added considerably more material (i.e., ideas describing in some detail the implications and applications regarding God's Power which is, in great ways, physically demonstrated in Nature). Of course, there is much more to be said about the Power of God, beyond what is demonstrated in the physical aspects of His Power.**

**I enjoyed making comments and sharing rather obvious insights about God's revelation of Himself in Nature in five specific ways: (1) Beauty, (2) Order, (3) Power, (4) Magnitude, and (5) Variety. So much more could be written about all five of these aspects in Nature. All five of them reveal something wonderful about our great Creator God.**

**Why have I added so much more material to my "short paper" (i.e., to my original "journal entry"), and centered most of my thoughts on the Power of God? For two reasons: (1) Frankly, I had no other (more than obvious) insights to share on the four subjects of Nature's revelation of God through beauty, order, magnitude, variety (although each of these deserve far more in-depth discussion than what I presently am able to provide), (2) The subject of God's Power has long captivated my attention - partly as God's Power, physically, is manifested (which I "touch on" in my paper), but more particularly and more importantly as God's Power relates to Man's Will (and the many implications of that relationship). Many acknowledge the conflicts and the debates that have "ragged" for centuries between theologians who, on one hand, have emphasized the Sovereign Power (Divine Will), and**

***theologians who, on the other hand, have strongly emphasized the uniqueness of man as a "Free Moral Agent".***

***Because I believe that the Bible describes both the powerful sovereign activity of Almighty God, and the genuine exercise of authentic "Free Will", I have thought for many years that Christians, who possess both a "tender heart" and a "tough mind", can find a meaningful "balance" in these important truths, without compromising the "dynamics" of either of these realities. Therefore, I spend the vast majority of the space in this present "paper" (which started out as a simple "journal entry") considering the "dynamics" of God's Power (beyond the visible, physical world) discussing;***

- (1) God's omnipotence,***
- (2) God's omniscience,***
- (3) Authentic "Free Moral Agency" in Humankind,***
- (4) The Spirit's relationship to every individual in trying to bring individuals to the "foot of the Cross" in repentance and faith, without at the same time "violating" the sacred God-given gift of "Free Moral Agency?"***

**“MAY 7, 2008!”**

***This morning while I was jogging, I beheld the beauty of nature (trees, etc., along the running path), and I thought of the Scripture that talks about the manifestation of God through the works of His Hands (Creation). Almighty God made all things in Nature. A couple of weeks ago, Venita and I saw the two hour movie by popular Ben Stein entitled “Expelled” – powerful challenge against Darwinism and Evolution, and exposing the fact that many professors are being “expelled” (fired) because they verily mention the possibility of “Intelligent Design” (a Creator behind Creation) as an explanation for order in Creation (Nature). This film exposes the “Stupidity” of atheistic “explanations” (theories) for Nature! Outlandish suggestions as to how life possibly began!***

***This is a powerful documentary film! Ben Stein (with some humor, which is characteristic of him) “hits” these atheistic and agnostic scientists very hard! “Evolution” is a “sacred cow” (god) in our modern American society – and this atheistic theory is taught as “Unquestionable Fact” to millions of our American children in public schools. I have very little respect left for our public schools, for children cannot mention God or Jesus or the Bible or Prayer or the Ten Commandments. Teachers who would mention these words would be reprimanded, and if they continued to “teach morality”, they would be fired (“expelled”). Our American Education system from kindergarten through college is largely dominated by secular teachers who disregard God and the Christian Religion as “irrelevant”, “unscientific”, “uneducated”, “superstitious”, and even “harmful”! This is very different from the days in early America when, in the public schools, the Bible was taught daily and prayer was offered in the morning as the right way to start a day at public school!***

***I am so thankful for the countless “Christian Home Schools” in America, and for our Christian Day Schools throughout America, (presently there are about 33,000 of these schools!). Our Fort Collins, Colorado, Free Methodist Church ministered to hundreds of students for about 15 years. My wife, for a few of those years, led “Choice City Christian School”. The school existed altogether from 1987-2002. For one year now (2007-2008), Megan & Lucas Berrong (my grandchildren) have enjoyed Home Schooling, using the Christian curriculum called A Beka Curriculum (amazing Christ-centered approach, with lots of Bible lessons). This is a wonderful way to grow daily in the Christian Faith, with Christian integration in all subjects!***

***Yes, the film "Expelled" revealed the evidence that is overwhelming for our "Intelligent Design". The Bible says, "The Fool hath said in his heart 'there is NO God'". One has to be totally irrational ("stupid") to deny the existence of a Divine Creator. About 2000 years ago (before the invention of telescopes, etc.), the apostle Paul (one of the most brilliant minds of all time) wrote this: "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse." (Romans 1:19-20)***

***This is to say, that the invisible God has revealed Himself and one of the ways He has revealed Himself is through Nature (His creation). So much could be said about how God has revealed Himself, but one sure (rational and reasonable) way is through the various features and characteristics of Nature. As I was jogging this morning, five simple and obvious characteristics of Nature came to my attention and mind.***

***I have often thought of these five characteristics of Nature (which reveal something about the Creator of Nature).***

***First, the exquisite Beauty of Nature;***

***Second, the amazing Order in Nature;***

***Third, the phenomenal Power in Nature;***

***Fourth, the mind-boggling Magnitude of Nature and the Universe;***

***Fifth, the remarkable Variety of plants and animals, etc., in Nature.***

**“FIRST, THE BEAUTY OF NATURE!”**

*It does not take unusual intelligence to conclude that God is one who is infinitely beautiful, as evidenced by the amazing beauty as seen in the “works of His Hands.” Even though the Fall of Man has “marred”, in some ways perhaps not quickly discerned, the original beauty of God’s original and unfallen world, nevertheless the world, even after that tragic historic “Fall of Man”, is filled with the splendor of God’s beauty. “Fallen Man” has tragically continued to pollute and to desecrate this planet, but, in spite of the initial Fall of Man and in spite of the continuing desecration of the earth’s beauty by self-indulgent sinners, the world of God’s beautiful creation continues to manifest the glory of its Creator!*

*But, the beauty of the earth (affected adversely by the Fall of Man in the Garden of Eden, and challenged by the thoughtless actions of a Fallen Race of creatures), nevertheless continues to be maintained and preserved and renewed by the Beautiful Creator of the World.*

*Sometimes, the Spirit uses the ‘light of truth’, which is revealed in the ‘sense of Beauty’ which the ‘heathen’ keenly feel, in their desperate ‘search for reality.’ There is evidence that there is a ‘universal appreciation for the Beautiful’ among all persons, regardless of their region or culture or circumstance. From which (or from whom) comes this ‘sense of appreciation’ for the Beautiful in Nature (and appreciation for ‘Order’ and ‘Power’ in Nature)? It comes from the Creator God who has placed deep within the ‘bosom’ of every human being a ‘love of beauty’! It is not hard for the Spirit of God to direct the ‘sincere pagan’, who delights himself in the ‘beauty of nature’, to the ‘Giver and Source of Beauty’. Contrasting his own ‘ugliness’ with the ‘beauty of nature’, and contrasting his own ‘inner chaos’ with the ‘neat orderliness of nature’, and contrasting his own ‘moral and physical impotence’ with the ‘power of nature’, the ‘sincere pagan’ is ‘made ready’ (by God’s ‘prevenient grace’) to open his life to the ‘convicting work of the Holy Spirit’. Thus, it is very ‘conceivable’ that many ‘pagans’ find themselves ‘prostrate’ in repentance and faith and trust and soul surrender before the ‘God of Nature’ (whose Beauty and Order and Power are very manifest to the ‘sensitive pagan worshipper’).*

*One thing, among many things that could be said about God is this: the God who created such a beautiful world has to be very beautiful, and the place (Heaven) where He dwells must be indescribably beautiful! (“The river cannot run higher than its source.”) The world (even in its “fallen state”) is very beautiful, and if this world (with its flaws) is universally recognized by all humankind as very*

***beautiful, surely the "source" of all this beauty is Himself infinitely beautiful. Surely, the Beautiful God's dwelling must be appropriate for the presence of that God - truly and perfectly beautiful! Beautiful beyond description - a place (Heaven) more beautiful than what is inadequately described in the last verses of the book of Revelation! Moreover, those who serve that indescribably "Beautiful God", shall some wonderful day (after physical death) go to live in that Beautiful Place forever! "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." (John 14:1-3)***

**“SECOND, THE AMAZING ORDER IN NATURE!”**

*Scientists, more than anyone else, can speak about – witness to – the astounding precision in the movement of the planets around our sun, in the Milky Way Galaxy, “as a starter” before talking about the order in the vastness of the incomprehensibly big universe which God “spoke into existence.” Future “events” in the movements of planets, etc. hundreds of years from now can be “calculated” accurately, all because the Creator is a “God of Order”, not a God of carelessness and chaos. Creation’s activities are predictable, providing the very basis for science (which depends on observation and predictability).*

*But, scientists who profoundly respect the fact of predictability and order in God’s universe and our place in that universe – our earth – will also witness to the fact that, strangely enough, God has allowed for certain “Randomness” (unpredictability) in His vast universe (and even in our earth). Only an informed scientist can clearly communicate and describe the detailed nature (dynamics) of that “Randomness” in various “branches of science,” but the fact remains that, even though most of Nature is predictable and certain, there is some of Nature that is “Random” (unpredictable).*

*The God of Order has ways that He normally “functions” – through “Laws of Nature” – but at times God chooses to work unpredictably (i.e., bypassing His “Laws of Nature” which are very observable and predictable) to do unpredictable and “out-of-the-ordinary” works in our world, works that are unexpected and beyond human ability to understand, works that manifest a divine and redemptive purpose for mankind, works which are the manifestation of God’s heart of love, works that from a human viewpoint appear “random” and “strange” but from God’s viewpoint are divine fulfillment of divine purposes for human salvation.*

*What humans call “random” (out-of-the-ordinary, beyond the “Laws of nature”,) God calls fulfillment of His divine will, for the purpose of human redemption and salvation. The “random” acts of God – sometimes called Miracles – happen rather infrequently, for the “God of Order” usually (it seems) acts through what humankind has come to call the “laws of nature.” However, occasionally, in God’s timing, according to God’s will, all for redemptive purposes in an attempt to rescue a “Fallen Human Race”, God does the “miraculous” thing (event). The “God Who Acts” calls a special people (Israelites), starting with Abraham. The many “out-of-the-ordinary-acts of God” in the Old Testament (the “random acts”, the “miracles”, “the supernatural events”) are all part of God’s plan to “rescue the*

***human race" from sin and Satan and hell! The greatest acts of "Supernatural Power" all for redemptive purposes, center, of course, on Jesus Christ (his virgin birth, his sinless life, his sacrificial death, the powerful resurrection, his glorious ascension). In one word - ("God Becoming a Man") is INCARNATION!***

***God is a God of great order, but God is not only one who has established the Laws of Nature, but God is one who, motivated by redemptive purposes for the salvation of fallen mankind, can transcend the "so-called laws of nature" and perform mighty (unpredictable) Miracles (God's Random Acts for righteous and Man-loving purposes)! So God is both a God of Order, and (when He wisely and lovingly chooses) a God of Random (Miracles).***

**“THIRD, THE PHENOMENAL POWER IN NATURE!”**

*Before the forces of nature (lightning, wind, tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, volcanoes), humans are puny in power and very vulnerable to the destruction found inherently in Nature. The electrical power (electricity) in one large flash of lightning not only frightens humankind, but this degree of electricity is so powerful that it could light an entire city! What changed in Nature (as it relates to the forces and often times destructive power of Nature) at the time of the historic “Fall of Man” in the Garden of Eden, no one really knows. It seems certain, to me, based on the revealed love of God for all persons, that God never intended any of His beautiful creatures to die because of the powerful forces of Nature. God is not the author of tragic deaths (because of Nature’s powerful forces), but instead God is the author of life. God takes no delight in the death (the premature death) of any of His creatures.*

*However, the death of many who die from the forces of Nature can be understood, it is certain that God loves all persons. He grieves the most when His creatures are wiped out by storms of all kinds. He weeps with those who weep! It is not God who is the agent of death. The Bible indicates that it is the enemy of man’s soul who is the agent of death! This world, at the time of the Fall, became affected with death and chaos, and ever since that time millions of God’s creatures have died at the “hands” of Nature’s forces – storms of all kinds! Satan, through all kinds of methods, wishes to exert his evil force (perhaps even through the forces of Nature over which he has apparently some control) to destroy as much of humankind as he can. Of course, humanity has little control over Nature, but humanity, through Satan’s agency, destroys itself directly through warfare. Of course, Satan uses evil dictators (like Joseph Stalin and Adolf Hitler) to carry out his purposes to kill and to maim millions of humans (about 100 million, at least, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century).*

*Yes, Satan has terrible power, which he has exercised directly through evil dictators who have incited and provoked wars, which resulted in the death of countless vulnerable persons. Possibly (although there is still a mystery that clouds this area of inquiry) – just possibly Satan uses what power has been allowed to him to bring death to millions through the forces of Nature. One title given to Satan is “the prince of the power of the air.” What a frightening title, which may indicate that (since the Fall of Mankind); Satan has gained at least some measure and degree of power over the forces of Nature! How much power over our fallen world that Satan gained, when humankind fell from grace, no one, of course, precisely knows? Nevertheless, it seems (from the title given to Satan,*

**just noted) that Satan is able to wreak havoc upon humanity, at times through the forces of Nature!**

**When accidents happen, or when widespread destruction and death happen because of a tornado, one of two responses usually is given. Either, the impersonal forces of Nature simply acted against unfortunate people who happened to be in the path of the tornado. Probably most Christians affirm this belief. On the other hand, unbelievers cynically and bitterly call these calamities "Acts of God." When calamities happen, usually Insurance Companies attribute these disasters as "Acts of God"!**

**William Barclay writes, "I read of a minister who visited a mother who had lost a daughter in most tragic circumstances. When the accident was being investigated, one of the chief investigators used a certain phrase; he was a man with long experience in such matters. He said that the accident was so impossible of explanation that all he could say was that it was 'an act of God'. It is difficult to imagine a more terrible and a more blasphemous phrase...It is NOT an act of God. When a child or a young couple dies too soon, when there is a fatal accident, maybe due to someone's mistake or misjudgment, that is NOT an act of God, neither is it the WILL of God. It is, in fact, the precise opposite. It is against the WILL of God, and God is just as grieved about it as we are...it is exactly and precisely what God did NOT will. It is due to some human failure or to some human selfishness.**

**God gave men free will because there could be neither goodness nor love without free will, and exactly for that reason, the action of men can run right counter to the WILL of God. I do not think that anyone can calculate the vast amount of damage that has been done by suggesting that terrible and tragic events in life are the WILL of God. Quite clearly, Jesus did NOT think sickness, illness, and untimely death the WILL of God. Quite clearly, He thought them the reverse of the Will of God. They were the very things that He had come to help and to overcome."**

**But, in light of Satan being called "the prince of the power of the air", why not consider that Satan decided to use his power, which he, at times, exercises in the earth's atmosphere, to bring death and destruction upon God's creation and creatures?**

**Gregory Boyd, a highly respected (evangelical) theologian and writer, wrote: "Under the leadership of Satan (or some corresponding figure), these (fallen) angels work to afflict the world with earthquakes, famines, hailstorms, diseases,**

*temptations and many other things that are not part of God's design for creation...The angels-turned-demons in charge of various natural functions are now bent on wreaking havoc with the creation. Everything from plagues to earthquakes to famines to rain storms could therefore be attributed to demonic activity."*

*God loves His physical world (though it is a "fallen world"), and He loves His creatures (though they are members of a fallen and rebellious race, all descendants of Adam and Eve). God takes no pleasure when Nature's forces (sometimes, perhaps, at the disposal of Satan) bring death to human beings! Above all, as shown by the cross, God is a God of love, and ultimate power belongs to God, as demonstrated by the exercise of God's greatest power when God raised His Son from the dead (the Resurrection of Christ). All love and all power ultimately belong to God Almighty!*

*Before proceeding further in our discussion, it is important to think about the following ideas: Even though a partial mystery surrounds the causes and the origins of all premature deaths on this earth, I do not believe that the One who said He is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life" is the author or cause of premature deaths and tragedies (diseases, martyrdoms, accidents, abortions, natural disasters, fatalities during a just war).*

*I believe that; based on God's justice, God will be the "Great Compensator" in Heaven. God will not be "in debt" to anyone in heaven! For every loss one suffers on earth, God will more than make up for that loss in heaven. God knows how to richly reward the faithful ones in heaven.*

*The Bible (God's Word) declares many times that God is almighty, that His power is manifested in both the creation of the universe with its countless stars, and in the sustenance (maintenance, support, and continuance) of the universe. God is all-powerful - with one important and serious exception! God created humans with the frightening and yet wonderful capacity to choose! God (The All-Powerful One) deliberately limited Himself, by allowing the 'crown of His creation' - the human being - to exercise the will to choose between moral alternatives. The Holy Spirit would strongly influence the human conscience to choose the "right" and to "reject" the wrong, but the Spirit would not "force" the divine will upon any human being. The 'mystery of the human will' cannot be truly understood, i.e., why some persons choose rightly and other persons choose wrongly.*

*When God created humans, He did not want 'robots' that simply did what the Creator forced or willed upon the creatures. Neither did God create man as*

*simply a higher animal form, no different from any other animal except in complexity biologically, an animal like all animals who lives by instinct (a stimulus-response mechanism). No, God created man "in His own image." As God is a Being who thinks and feels and chooses, so each human would have the capacity to think, to feel, and to choose (decide between options).*

*So, God is known as a God of Power, because God manifested His power (legitimately) in countless ways in Nature (our own world and more expansively in the spectacular universe which He made for His own glory). However, even though God's infinite power is faintly (but genuinely) manifested in the "works of His Hands" (Nature), it is true that God's power is greater than the human mind can conceive or discover.*

*But God chose when He created human beings, to put a certain limit on His own divine power! Hard to imagine that God would do this, but the fact of the matter is (both from Scripture and from universal human experience) He did just that! He chose not to exercise His unlimited divine and eternal power, when He created humans, in that He allowed persons to say "Yes" or "No" to God's revealed will for humanity. Of course, our first parents, created with that frightening capacity of "free will", tragically made the wrong choice - plunging the entire human race into a morally perverted (rebellious) state.*

*Only through accepting the atoning blood of Christ can a fallen person be forgiven of his gross sins, and be restored to a right relationship with God (justification), and be gradually brought into fuller harmony with the will and ways and power of God (sanctification).*

*If God is all-powerful, why does He not exercise that power to force every human being to become a Christian, so that every human being can ultimately die in righteousness and go to the place of eternal bliss (heaven)? Again, the answer can be found in the fact that the Almighty One limits the use of His power, because He deeply respects the God-created "divine image" in every person. That "divine image" is especially marked by the capacity of "free choice" - the "will to decide personal destiny."*

*God's power over inanimate nature (the world's orbit, and the movements of the multiplied stars in the Universe) is total and complete. But, because God by nature and personality is total love, and love means relationship, the triune God (Father, Son, and Spirit) chose at a moment in time to create a creature like God in a most significant way - namely, a creature that, like God, had the capacity to*

***love. Love is the greatest reality of God, for "God is love." Love means centering on another being, so God's love was centered on humankind.***

***As God was free to love, so man was created with the capacity to love. But love by nature involves the exercise of "free will." Man was created with the frightening, yet wonderful, capacity to choose right or wrong. To choose rightly is to choose to love his Creator, and to demonstrate that love for the Creator, by obeying the wishes and the will of the Creator. To choose wrongly is to choose to reject the love of the Creator for the creature, issuing forth in disobedience to the will of the Creator, becoming a sinful rebel, running from the blessed presence of the Creator. Tragically, our first parents chose wrongly, in the beginning of God's "Human Experiment"! They were objects of God's great creation, subjects of God's great love, partners in God's great plan for the world, recipients of God's great gifts of life, health and happiness and yet, in spite of God's overtures of love and unspeakably great gifts of life, Adam and Eve "blew it all"! They doubted God's integrity, and disobeyed God's explicit commands, and, as a result, lost their special status in God's beautiful Garden, and consequently were driven from that original Garden, eventually to die under sin's curse! God could have created "robots" - creatures with no personal ability to choose between moral alternatives, under the total and inflexible will of the Master Creator!***

***But God instead chose to make "free moral agents", with the capacity to genuinely choose between "right" and "wrong", and with the capacity to "love the Lord God", or to "disobey and rebel against the Lord God." God took a "great risk" in creating a different kind of animal, an animal like many other animals biologically, but an animal altogether different from all other animals. A biological being with a mind able to think similarly to the Creator's mind, and a being with a heart able to feel similarity to the Creator's heart of compassion, and a being with a will able to choose similarly to the Creator's will of righteousness and justice!***

***Very imperfectly, but genuinely, humans have the capacity (as creatures made "in God's image") to "think some of God's thoughts", to "feel some of God's compassion", to "choose some of God's righteous and just plans and purposes"!***

***As stated before, God is all-powerful, but the fact that humans have the capacity to choose wrongly (tragically making decisions against God's will) demonstrates vividly that God has limited the full exercise of His omnipotence (i.e., His infinite power). God values the creation and expression of "human will" (free will, ability genuinely to choose between moral alternatives) so very much, that He was willing to "take the risk" in creating such a unique creature (who, God knew***

*before creation, would have the ability either to walk obediently and in love with the Creator, or to walk away from the Creator in disobedience and rebellion). God, of course, created humans with the expectation that persons (made in God's image) would choose gladly to love and to obey the Creator, thus enjoying sweet communion and peace and human-divine fellowship forever.*

*But, in case mankind would wrongly choose (which, I think, was "unthinkable" to the God of Love who loved the "crown of His creation" so very much), God, "before the foundation of the world," had a "back-up plan" by which, at great cost to God, He could rescue a fallen human race! Of course, when man dreadfully exercised his "free will" wrongly, (through Satanic temptation), God put that "back-up plan" into operation. That plan (gradually revealed) was consummated in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.*

*This entire discussion regarding the operation of God's great Power (faintly but amazingly demonstrated through Nature which is observable), I say this Divine Power has an important characteristic, namely, God's Power has a certain "self-imposed restraint". God restrained Himself in the full exercise of His Almighty Power, when He chose to create a being in the Universe that has the frightening capacity to say "Yes" or "No" to its Creator! Nothing else and no one else (that we know of) has that ability, in the Universe!*

*Humans who dwell on this tiny planet, have the unbelievable ability to tragically harden their hearts, and close their minds, and "put a fist" in the face of their Creator!*

*The Bible teaches through countless examples, and human experience confirms, that God (who created humankind, and who restrained the exercise of His power in the process of creation of humans), has two Wills. By this, I mean that God has a "Perfect Will" and a "Permissive Will."*

*Highly respected theologian, Robert Shank, makes this distinction very clearly. He notes:*

*"All that occurs in the universe is within the permissive will of God. Neither men nor angels nor devils can go beyond the limits of God's permissive will. But it is by no means true that all that occurs is in accord with the perfect will of God.*

*"One may argue that, since the world is filled with greed, lust, violence, debauchery, hatred, and impenitence, God evidently wishes it to be so and is well pleased. But the Scriptures declare otherwise. Although God allows these things to exist in the world, He has revealed His displeasure and wrath with respect to all*

*such things and has commanded all men to repent. Thus, it is evident that there are two aspects of the will of God with respect to sin: his permissive will allows it; but His perfect will forbids it and will bring all sin into judgment.*

*"There are two aspects of the will of God for men with respect to salvation. Numerous Scriptures reveal God's perfect will to 'have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth'. (I Timothy 2:4); but the fact that not all men are saved reflects God's permissive will. If a man is saved, it is in accordance with God's perfect will that all men should be saved; if a man is lost, it is in accordance with God's permissive will that men, being free moral agents rather than mere puppets, may refuse to obey Him.*

*The latitude between God's perfect will and His permissive will is the area within which men function with freedom as responsible moral intelligences, accountable before God in solemn judgment. God is at work in humanity 'bringing many sons unto glory' (Hebrews 2:10) through the redemptive process rooted in His grace and wrought in Christ. But as moral intelligences created in His image, men must of their own free will concur in God's redemptive process if they are to share His everlasting glory as His sons. The fact that men are responsible, as free moral agents, is a corollary of the fact that the will of God has two aspects, rather than one.*

*The fact that the will of God has two aspects, rather than one, is fully apparent in numerous passages of Scripture. Consider the following: 'If any man wills to do His will, he shall know...' (John 7:17). 'Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father...' (Matthew 7:21). 'But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel (bouclé, purpose) of God for them, being not baptized of John'. (Luke 7:30)*

*According to the Scriptures, men may choose to do God's will, or not to do His will. Since everything that happens is necessarily within the bounds of God's will, yet (according to the Scriptures) much that happens is contrary to the will of God, it is evident that the will of God has two aspects, rather than one."*

*Because God chose to create humans with the capacity to choose wrongly, one must conclude that God will not force the wrongdoer back on the "path of righteousness". In other words, even though God will try hard to get the wrongdoer to turn from his "evil ways" (through the conscience of the wrongdoer, the clear warnings of the scriptures, and the counsel and influence of faithful followers of Christ). God will "permit" the wrongdoer, to continue on his "road towards ultimate destruction."*

**God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, and God wills that none should perish but that all persons come to repentance, but because God created humans with a "free will" (a genuine ability to choose either to follow God or to run away from God), not even God who is "all-powerful" can force anyone to repent and to be saved and to choose eternal life! God has a "perfect will" (or desire for all humankind) – the salvation of every person. But, because each person has a "free will" (as an inherent quality of his unique creation); God has to exercise what can properly be called a "permissive will." In other words, even though God is the God of infinite power, God has to allow (permit) "free moral agents" (humans) to choose wrongly – and to suffer the consequences of death!**

**In the exercise of man's "free will" (i.e., making moral choices because of clear moral options), does God know "ahead of time" what choice a man will make? Many, if not most, Christians believe that, based on the belief in God's omniscience (perfect knowledge), God must know all things – even knowledge "ahead of time" regarding an individual's moral decision.**

**But, just as God restrains himself in the expression of God's power (to allow the genuine exercise of man's God-given "free will"), could it also be true to say that God limits the expression of His omniscience (knowledge) in order to allow persons freedom to "make up their minds" concerning moral decisions? The Bible indicates that, while God surely is aware of all the possible moral options surrounding a decision, God waits to see what the actual decision will be, as a human weighs all the factors surrounding a decision. And the Bible gives illustrations of God being "shocked", "surprised", "saddened", "angered", or "very pleased" with a person's decision, or a group's decision!**

**Because of the marvel of man's unique creation (with the distinguishing mark of "free moral agency", which no other creature, as far as we know, experiences in God's vast creation) it seems, from carefully reading Holy Scripture, that God limits Himself – limits the full expression of His infinite power, and limits the full expression of His infinite knowledge. He allows humankind to make decisions, without God forcing His own will upon humankind – even though God's will is always good, perfect, and beneficial to every human soul!**

**Further, Scripture seems to illustrate the fact that even though God by nature possesses all knowledge and wisdom, nevertheless God allows, Himself to wait until man makes a moral decision, at which time God genuinely then Himself becomes fully knowledgeable of the decision. Some theologians (and other Christians) teach that God has all foreknowledge of human decisions, that is, that**

**God knows "ahead of time" what the moral decisions are that every human will make.**

**But, how can there be the expression of "true free will" in decision-making, if God knows ahead of time what decisions will be made?\_ Doesn't God have to allow the true expression of "free will", and thereby limit His exercise of Omniscience (perfect knowledge), in light of the fact that God chose to make man as a "free moral agent"?**

**Highly-respected Biblical commentator of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Adam Clarke, convincingly notes that, in order for humans genuinely to exercise their God-given capacity of "Free Moral Agency", God must restrain Himself both in the full exercise of His omnipotence and His omniscience. Clark's insightful comments, especially on the application of God's Foreknowledge in God's relationship to human beings, are both interesting and helpful.**

**"Therefore it does not follow that, because God can do all things, therefore he must do all things. God is omniscient, and can know all things; but does it follow from this that He must know all things? Is He not as free in the volitions of his wisdom, as he is in the volitions of His power?"**

*The contingent, as absolute, or the absolute as contingent? God has ordained some things as certain; these He knows as certain. He has ordained other things as contingent; these He knows as contingent. It would be absurd to say that He foreknows a thing as only contingent, which He has made certain. And it would be as absurd to say that He foreknows a thing to be certain, which in his own eternal counsel He has made contingent. By absolutely certain, I mean a thing which must be, in that order, time, place, and form in which Divine wisdom has ordained it to be; and that it can be no otherwise than this infinite counsel has ordained.*

*By contingent, I mean such things as the infinite wisdom of God has thought proper to poise on the possibility of being or not being, leaving it to the will of intelligent being to turn the scale. Or, contingencies are such possibilities, amid the succession of events, as the infinite wisdom of God has left to the will of intelligent beings to determine whether any such event shall take place or not. To deny this would involve the most palpable contradictions, and the most monstrous absurdities. If there be no such things as contingencies in the world, then everything is fixed and determined by an unalterable decree and purpose of God; and not only all free agency is destroyed, but all agency of every kind, except that of the Creator Himself; for on this ground God is the only operator, either in time or eternity: all created beings are only instruments, and do nothing but as impelled and acted upon by this almighty and sole Agent.*

*Consequently, every act is his own for if He has purposed them all as absolutely certain, having nothing contingent in them, then any free agency and God alone is the sole actor. Hence the blasphemous, though, from the premises, fair conclusion, that God is the author of all the evil and sin that are in the world; and hence follows that absurdity, that, as God can do nothing that is wrong, whatever is, is right. Sin is no more sin; a vicious human action is no crime, if God have decreed it, and by his foreknowledge and will impelled the creature to act it. On this ground, there can be no punishment for delinquencies; for if everything would be done as God has predetermined, and his determinations must necessarily be all right, then neither the instrument nor the agent has done wrong. Thus all vice and virtue, praise and blame, merit and demerit, guilt and innocence, are at once confounded, and all distinctions of this kind confounded with them.*

*Now, allowing the doctrine of the contingency of human actions (and it must be allowed in order to shun the above absurdities and blasphemies,) then we see every intelligent creature accountable for its own works, and for the use it makes of the power with which God has endued it; and, to grant all this consistently, we must also grant that God foresees nothing as absolutely and inevitably certain which He has made contingent; and, because He has designed it to be contingent, therefore He cannot know it as absolutely and inevitably certain. I conclude that God, although omniscient, is not obliged, in consequence of this to know all He can know; no more than He is obliged, because He is omnipotent, to do all that He can do.”*

*Because humankind, against God’s perfect will, fell into sin, resulting in gross wickedness on the earth, Genesis 6:6 says God was sorry He had made humankind. Notes Gregory A. Boyd, “Doesn’t the fact that God (genuinely) regretted the way things turned out – to the point of starting over – suggests that it wasn’t a foregone conclusion at the time God created human beings that they would fall into the state of wickedness?”*

*(If God “predestined” the Fall of Mankind – that is, knew ahead of time “that the “Fall” would happen, and, indeed, actually “willed” and “desired” the “Fall”, any reasonable person – Christian or non-Christian – would have to obviously conclude that God is the “Agent” or “Source” of gross evil and wickedness!). God deeply regretted the “Fall”; He did NOT originate (will) the “Fall”. He did NOT know before Creation, that Man would Fall.*

*God appointed Saul as the first king of Israel, with the full intention of Saul being an obedient king – a king that God intended to bless (along with his household for many generations – I Samuel 13:13). God did not know “ahead of time” that Saul would become so wicked that God would have to remove him from the kingship, and appoint*

*David instead. Because of the reality of man's (genuine) free will, God must limit the exercise of His omniscience, thus waiting until a person's actual decision is made "in time." Otherwise, "strict divine control and determinism" is **the only other option. If God is pictured in the Bible as genuinely surprised, grieved and angered at a person's wrong moral choice, then it is a genuine emotion of God. God is a God of integrity, whose emotions and reactions regarding humankind's decisions are honest and truthful. That is, God waits for a person, in the light of two or more moral options, which are presented to a person, to "make up his mind." One decision is good (right), and the opposite decision is bad (wrong).***

*God hopes and wishes that a human being will make the right decision, and God knows "ahead of time" what the likelihood will be in terms of the human choice. But, because God made creatures as true (genuine) "free moral agents", God cannot use His divine power to "force a decision", nor does He absolutely "know ahead of time" what the decision will be (i.e., there is no absolute and precise predetermination and foreknowledge when God deals with human beings who were created with the frightening capacity of genuine "free moral choice").*

*God sincerely wanted King Saul to succeed, to live obediently, and to be blessed by God as a result – as well as Saul's descendants. God thought Saul would be true to his calling as the King of Israel – and God was deeply grieved when Saul turned out altogether differently – a moral failure that would be hard to match! God did not desire or predetermine Saul's failure, and (because God was genuinely grieved when Saul miserably failed) it must be said that God did not foreknow Saul's failure.*

*Both God's omnipotence (power) and God's omniscience (knowledge) had to be (genuinely) limited when God chose to make creatures "in God's image" – with the genuine ability to choose between moral alternatives. God is honest (genuine) in the expressions of His emotions (of shock and disappointment, grief, anger, gladness and joy), as God reacts and responds to man's moral decisions, thus demonstrating that God does NOT know "ahead of time" what a person's moral decisions will precisely be! The decision God thought a person would make, sometimes is different – and some human decisions even amazes, surprises, and angers God!*

*The many "conditional" phrases and statements in the Bible, that "frames" the promises God gives to persons or to groups of persons (such as II Chronicles 7:14 and countless other "conditional" passages of Scriptures), indicates that God recognizes and respects the reality of human "free will and choice," and acknowledges that God Himself does not know "ahead of time" precisely and*

***definitely what choice (good or bad) human "deciders" will make! God (who is intrinsically good) obviously anticipates that (given the beauty of good and the misery of evil) humankind (individuals or groups of people like the Israelites) will choose the "right path" and reject the "wrong path". But, time after time, God is saddened (and oftentimes surprised) that His own "chosen people" (the Jews) "hardened their hearts", "stiffened their necks", "closed their ears," and "ran after evil and licentiousness."***

***God (as well as Jesus, weeping over Jerusalem in the New Testament) yearned over his backslidden people (note the Old Testament prophets, like Hosea - with a "lover's heart", hardly able to bear their unfaithfulness and backslidden state, which included the misery of sin's terrible consequences)! God certainly did NOT predestinate (determine, according to His sovereign, mysterious divine will) the 'evil choice' of Israel's rejection of God's covenant of grace and love! If such a "will" existed in God's heart regarding Israel, the human race (with a universal "sense of justice", though limited and tainted by "original sin") would have greater "integrity" than God Himself!***

***God is not a God who wills evil on anyone. "God cannot be tempted by evil, neither tempts anyone," says James (the brother of Jesus) in the New Testament. No, God did not will (desire or predetermine) the tragic "Fall" of the human race (in the Garden of Eden), and neither did God "will" the rebellious and tragic rejection by God's People of God's loving covenant, given to His "chosen people" (Israel).***

***God did not predetermine the "rebellion of Israel" throughout Jewish history (Old Testament). God did not know "ahead of time" that His people would coldly "turn their back" on Him, and instead choose to worship pagan gods (idols). God (the Lover of Mankind, and the Covenant-Maker with Israel) was "horrified" with Israel's rebellion, and "heart-broken" at their faithlessness in running after pagan gods! If God knew "ahead of time" (based on the idea of divine "foreknowledge" of all human events), then why does God show surprise and grief when humans (or groups of humans like the Israelites) make the wrong decisions?***

***God is genuine, authentic, true, honest, and transparent in all his actions, attitudes, responses, reactions and words! God is not a hypocrite - a "play actor", a "fake", a "deceiver". "God is of purer eyes than to behold evil!" God is pure in His motives, sincere in His actions, genuine in His emotions. If God is portrayed in Scripture as "surprised", "grief-stricken and heart-broken", as "deeply offended at man's evil actions", and "outrightly angry in the most holy way because His love has been offended and His loved ones are being gravely hurt by sin's tragic***

**consequences" – then these Scriptural portrayals of God are absolutely accurate, and they are reflections of reality.**

**Our loving God (Holy Spirit) does everything, short of coercion (i.e., forcing His divine will upon humans), to influence His creatures (whom He dearly loves) to choose the "right" and to reject the "wrong" during times of moral decisions. What more can God do than what He has already done to help us humans to "steer clear of evil", to take the "pathway of righteousness, holiness and life and fulfillment, ultimate happiness and eternal bliss"? He has given us the Scriptures, the works of Nature, conscience, godly counselors, the loving and powerful Holy Spirit, etc.! Because He has given us humans the most sacred gift imaginable, – a "free will" – God Himself has limited Himself in the full exercise of His omnipotence (power), and the full expression of His omniscience (knowledge).**

**God restrains His power, to allow humans freely to choose between moral alternatives (right and wrong). He refuses to "force" any person (even Hitler and Stalin) to choose compassion rather than cruelty! Further, because God has made creatures that can make serious choices, according to their understanding of "moral alternatives", (rather than "robots" that have no such moral choice), God must wait to discover what actual choice a person (or groups of persons like the Israelites) makes! Of course, God (the omniscient One) obviously knows everything that can possibly be known surrounding an impending human decision. Of course, our all-wise God knows all the options and possibilities and even the "likelihoods" surrounding a decision! But, tragically, because the heart of man is "desperately wicked" (according to Scripture), sometimes a person or a group of persons (like Israel) makes decisions that are completely different from what God honestly expected.**

**Notes Gregory Boyd: "Sometimes God tells us that things turn out differently than He expected. For example, in Isaiah 5 the Lord describes Israel as his vineyard and Himself as its loving owner. He explains that, as the owner of the vineyard, He 'expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes' (v. 2). He then asks, 'What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?' (v. 4) Because it unexpectedly failed to yield grapes, the Lord sadly concludes, 'I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured' (v. 5)."**

**The eternal God had a "perfect will" for Israel – to be God's healthy and God-honoring "vineyard" (good grapes). But, as is true of all persons (including God's covenant people), God gives choices, and therefore the "free will" of humankind must be exercised. (God could have made a different "kind" of world, but the**

**world He created included the "crown of His creation" – humans like God with the power of "free moral choice"!)**

**God, in spite of the "Fall" which resulted in man's "inclinations" toward wrong, gave grace and mercy and moral ability to "fallen man", such that man could choose in such a way that his choices would please his Creator and God. God anticipated and expected (Isaiah 5) humankind, (Adam and Eve, and Israel corporately) to choose the right and to reject the wrong! God did not predestine (predetermine) Adam's fall or Israel's rejection of its covenant. God knew "ahead of time" what all the possibilities were (surrounding these and all other moral decisions), but God did not precisely "foreknow" the actual moral decisions of Adam or Israel or any other person or groups.**

**As stated, several times before, Scripture portrays God as (honestly and authentically) "surprised" by the choice that some persons (or group of persons like the Israelites) make, regarding serious "moral alternatives." God honestly thought one decision would be made (a good and righteous decision), and the opposite (tragic) decision was made instead! God's love was deeply offended, and His just wrath was provoked, as a result of evil and God-rejecting decisions! God yearns to reestablish His relationship with Israel, and the terms of divine love (similar to the terms of human love) are incorporated in an attempt to woo the alienated "wife" back to her "husband" (note the book of Hosea).**

**If God's love continues to be scorned and refused, and if all of God's overtures of reconciliation are rejected, God has no recourse other than eventually to heap terrible judgment upon an unrepentant and rebellious people! "Mercy spurned is judgment earned!" God's love is very patient and tender (for God is the broken-hearted Lover of Mankind), but if love is not eventually reciprocated by the sinner (in the form of deep repentance over the sin of faithlessness towards God), then final "divorce" (eternal separation) is the ultimate penalty for sin!**

**God took a "great risk"; a risk that He believed was worthwhile when He created a creature made in His own image, a creature like God who would have the capacity to fellowship in love with the Creator and in love with fellow creatures, and a creature with the potential of enjoying God's presence in Heaven forever! Man experiences a great risk (as a "free moral agent"), but man also experiences a God-given great potential (i.e., by his response to God's grace, he is able ultimately to experience the fellowship of God forever in heaven)!**

**As mentioned before, even though God is described as the "all-wise" and "all-knowing" God, we must state (again) that God (because He created "free moral**

**agents") has to allow the exercise of true (human) freedom in choosing moral alternatives - without imposing or forcing His own "moral agenda" or "moral will"! Moreover, also, the self-imposed limitation of God's omnipotence (power) is closely "tied" to the self-imposed limitation of God's omniscience (knowledge). Again, let it be stated (even though many Christian believers probably will "take exception" to this conclusion) that, while God surely knows all that it is possible to know regarding the "issues" surrounding a "moral decision", nevertheless, God Himself has to wait to discover what the actual decision "turns out to be" (good or bad; pleasing to God or displeasing to God; helpful towards others or harmful towards others; wise or foolish).**

**Notes Gregory Boyd, "Three times the Lord expresses shock over Israel's ungodly behavior by saying that they were doing things 'which I did not command or decree, nor did it enter my mind' (Jeremiah 19:5; see also Jeremiah 7:31; 32:35)."**

**He further notes, "Scripture teaches us that God literally finds out HOW people will choose when they choose. God made us self-determining agents and prior to our determining ourselves in one direction or another the only reality that exists for God to know concerning our future action is the possible directions we may take. It is also interesting to note that many times the outcomes of these tests were not what God hoped. The fact that God tested people 'to know' their behavior suggests that he didn't know what they'd choose ahead of time, and that it was, from God's vantage point, genuinely possible for these people to pass (or fail) the test."**

**Yes, Nature reveals that the God who created all things is a powerful God! God's power, however, was limited by God Himself (indicated by strong evidence) when, as a God of total integrity, He allowed Satan to gain some "power" over Nature (before, or perhaps at the time of the historic "Fall" in the Garden - Genesis 1-3). Satan has, as one of his frightening titles, "the prince of the power of the air." Many thinkers believe that Satan's evil and destructive power is manifested when he wreaks deadly havoc on the earth through all kinds of storms (hurricanes, tornados, floods, etc.).**

**Further, God placed a limitation on His own power when He chose to create a human race, which was equipped with the wonderful, yet frightening, capability of "free moral choice". Because of man's unique creation (different from all other creatures in 'Kind', for humans are made "in God's image"), God would have to allow man's distinctive quality - that is his, "free will" - to be "tested", in order to demonstrate man's love for and loyalty to his Creator. Even though the "all-knowing" God knows everything that is possible to know concerning all issues**

*surrounding all persons' moral decisions, God nevertheless (out of profound respect for the "crown of His creation") must Himself wait to discover the actual outcome of every moral decision. Again, "Scripture teaches us that God literally finds out HOW people will choose when they choose."*

*While maintaining a profound respect for the omnipotence (power) and the omniscience (knowledge) of God, it is important to affirm the fact that God is so powerful and so loving that He created a being (personality) who, like none other creature, can exercise a spiritual quality - the "power" to make moral decisions which can result in living a moral and godly life on this planet, and eventually to enjoy an indescribably beautiful and blissful life hereafter! To make all this possible (for humankind), God, in love, created a creature who could love in much the same way his Creator loves! But loving (in the human realm) intrinsically involves the exercise of "free will" - so God limited Himself in the expression of His Power, in order to allow His creatures "freely to love" (to become like God, who is perfect love).*

*If there is anything that is most clear in Scriptures and illustrated vividly, not only in the Bible, but also throughout the general history of humankind, it is the fact that much of what has happened among humankind has not been in the past and is not presently pleasing to God. That is, the evil that exists on every hand deeply grieves a broken-hearted God of holy love, and provokes holy anger in His heart because of what sin and Satan have done to millions of precious souls! All of this "sad reality" testifies to the fact that, while God has a perfect will" (the salvation of every person), God also has a "permissive will." God "permits" humans to misuse the greatest gift they have ("free moral agency"), to choose evil and to reject goodness and righteousness and holiness and health and ultimate happiness in heaven. The creature God made with the capacity to choose love (fulfilling his God-given and God-ordained destiny), can, sadly, choose self-centeredness (which brings alienation from humans on earth, and from God ultimately and finally in hell). The person, who chooses God as the true "center" of his life, is the person who eventually and wonderfully learns to love God supremely, to love his fellowmen sincerely, and to love himself subordinately as a servant to God and to others. He, who loses himself, in worship of God and in service to his fellowmen, is he who finds the true meaning of his earthly existence!*

*He who chooses to live a God-centered, love-filled life is a "double winner"! He who practices love here on earth, experiences the very purpose of his God-given creation - to be like the God of Creation who is "Perfect Love"! A love-filled person*

***is a God-centered person – a true person! God is love, and, therefore, the person who pursues a “life of love” is a God-like person! That person is a winner in time and in eternity, for God created humans with the wonderful capacity to “choose” love as a way of life, and the reward for living a life of love on earth is a “heaven full of love” after the love-filled person dies! Glory! Glory! What is the purpose for which God created humans?***

***Love God supremely, for “God is love”. To love fellow human beings sincerely and unselfishly (for God created humanity to be a “Community of love”). When a person loves, it is evidence that he has expressed his “free will” properly – responding to God’s grace initiatives and to God’s Holy Spirit, who has the power to “shed abroad God’s love into the human heart.” (Romans 5:5) What is the purpose for which God created humankind? “To love and to be loved” (the essence of human existence, and the true purpose of the divine-human relationship)! This love relationship (between humans and God) is possible only because God created humankind with genuine “free moral agency.”***

***The Scriptures clearly indicate that God has a plan for the entire human race, namely, that every human creature should repent of his/her sins, and thus be forgiven of all sin, resulting in abundant life here on earth and eternal life in heaven. This is God’s saving plan for every single human being – without exception. God has a “perfect will” – that all persons should truly repent (that is, make a “moral u-turn”), and turn to God in total faith for spiritual healing and salvation. God is NOT willing that any person should perish (be lost from God eternally), but that all should repent and be saved for time and eternity. (Note 2 Peter 3:9) God “desires (wills) all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (I Timothy 2:4)***

***The “perfect” will of God and the “perfect” saving actions of God are clearly revealed in the Scriptures. The God who supposedly “predestines some individuals to be saved eternally and other individuals to be lost eternally” is NOT the “loving God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Jesus, more than anyone or anything, best reveals the “eternal heart of God” and the “heart of God” that Jesus reveals is a “heart of compassion, mercy, grace, forgiveness, love and salvation.”***

***God’s “perfect will” is that all persons should repent and be saved eternally! He does not “will” or “desire” that any should perish! What kind of God would we have, who rules this world, who likewise chooses to save some persons and to damn some other persons eternally? Certainly not a fair, just, loving and compassionate God, but a God who was arbitrary, unpredictable, vengeful, cruel, unjust, fearful, horrifying (the***

*opposite of a loving Heavenly Father who wishes to take everyone to His heavenly house)!*

*The Scriptures state certain indisputable facts relating to the salvation of humankind:*

- (1) God loves all persons and desires (wills) the salvation of every person. God is NOT willing that any person should perish. (2 Peter 3:9; I Timothy 2:4) His “perfect will” (desire) is the salvation of all persons – through repentance and trust (faith).*
- (2) God calls every person to repentance, through His Holy Spirit who convicts all persons of their sins and who draws all persons to the source of healing (the Tri-une God, who manifested Himself in Christ Jesus).*
- (3) While no person is automatically saved (because all are sinners), nevertheless all persons are “savable” (i.e., all persons are able to respond to the Spirit’s call to repentance, because of the “initiating grace” of God that makes it possible for all sinners to repent and to turn to God in true faith).*
- (4) All persons (because of “free will”) have the capacity (tragically) to resist the convicting power of the Spirit, thus refusing to repent and to be saved. Many in Jesus’ time (and during Paul’s ministry in Acts) refused to yield to the call to repentance. Thus, God “permits” all persons to choose evil rather than good, hell rather than heaven.*
- (5) At the “heart” of God’s saving (eternal) plan for man’s salvation is Jesus Christ, whose atoning death provides the offer of forgiveness to every human being. Christ’s atonement was unlimited, that is, no person was excluded. The blood He shed is sufficient to wash away the sins of all persons, of all times, under all conditions.*
- (6) God has a “perfect will” (salvation for all persons), but God also has a “permissive will” (i.e., God, out of profound respect for the human person who possesses “free moral agency”, will not “force his divine will” for salvation upon any person). God’s loving “saving grace” can tragically be “resisted”, and a rebel (whom God desperately willed and desired to be saved), can continue, throughout his entire earthly life, to resist the Holy Spirit of grace, and therefore he can ultimately be lost in hell! God is not willing that anyone should perish, but some will finally perish in hell,*

*because they refused to repent of sin and refused to submit to the God of love! God never willed that any human be in hell! Nevertheless, He permits any person to choose death rather than life! God respects the choice of every person! He takes no delight in the death of the wicked. It was never His "perfect will" that any one should perish, but God has a "permissive will" - because He respects the exercise of the "human will"!*

*There is no greater (and more thrilling) revelation in "reality" than the reality that is clearly given in I John 4 (and many other similar Scriptures) - namely, that the true and only and living God is a "God of Love." God inherently and intrinsically, is "Love." He is, by nature, "Love." This is to say that God can do nothing, or be nothing, that is contrary or contradictory to His "Holy Love." This is to say that every characteristic, trait, and manifestation of God's character is consistent with "Holy Love." When God is angry, such anger is a "Holy Anger" - a proper manifestation of "Holy Love". There is no vindictiveness, arbitrariness, injustice, or favoritism in the expression of His "Holy Anger"! He does everything, which is totally consistent with justice, fairness, equity, and integrity. No "hidden motives" or "selfish plans" can be found in the heart of the living God! He loves everyone with an everlasting love!*

*God in human form (Jesus) provided the only way by which all persons could be forgiven and reconciled to the Creator (and this plan of His love was extremely costly). God in love provides "prevenient grace" (i.e., "the grace that goes before") to every person, making it possible for every person to call upon the Lord for personal salvation. God in love has given the blessed Holy Spirit to the world of human need, in order that the Spirit may convict men of sin, and may strongly influence all sinners to repent of their sins and to humbly turn to Christ for spiritual healing and restoration and regeneration. God, while strongly "drawing all men" to Christ because of His intention to save all persons, nevertheless - in the name of love and because of the very inherent nature of love - refuses to "force" or to "compel" any person to become a believer and follower of Jesus Christ (i.e., to become a true Christian).*

*A young man who wishes to become married to a young woman, whom he deeply loves, knows that he has only limited "power" in relating to his "beloved". He, of course, can use the "power of influence", the gentle "power of persuasion", the "power of words", the "power of subtle appeal", the "power of loving actions," and even (if he is a Christian) the "power of prayer." However, because of the inherent nature of love, he cannot use the "power of coercion." He cannot "force his will on her will." He cannot make her say "Yes" to his proposal to marry him! He can plead with her, beg her, and even wait for her, but he cannot "control her will", manipulate her, threaten her, or ultimately force her to say "Yes" to his proposal. She has her own independent "will" - the God-given*

*(frightening, but wonderful) capacity to make her own decision, and largely determine to her own destiny!*

*Marriage (based on the commitment of mutual love) depends upon the exercise of “positive volition” on the part of two “free will agents” (man and woman who freely give themselves to each other, initially at the “marriage altar” and, of course, throughout the couple’s entire married life).*

*This human reality (of the marriage relationship) is an imperfect, but genuine, reflection of the divine-human relationship, which is based on God’s nature - the nature of eternal love.*

*From the beginning of this section on the fact that “Nature reveals that the Creator of Nature has great Power”, we have explored the meaning of God’s Power as it relates to several things, including the relationship between God’s Power and Man’s “free will.” It is important, as part of our discussion regarding the applications and implications of God’s Power in relationship to God’s dealings with the human race, to list a few brief descriptions of what God’s Power means, and what it does NOT mean, in God’s “connection” with the human race.*

*The following are some ways in which God has manifested His Almighty Power, in loving ways towards the human race. It is important for us humans always to remember that anything God has done or will do is an expression of His inherent nature – the nature of “Holy Love” – and this, of course, includes God’s manifestation of His Divine Power. He never expresses His Power (even when He commands “Holy Wars” in the Old Testament) in loveless ways, but only by the “motivations of His Holy Love.” In other words, all of God’s Power is “Loving Power” –never cruel, arbitrary, unjust, selfish or self-serving power. There is no evil in the heart of God!*

- (1) The “Loving Power” of God was manifested when: He chose to speak the Universe and our own beautiful world into existence. God designed this world (much different from all other planets in our Solar System) in such a manner that humans can live comfortably on this planet – a planet perfectly compatible for human living!*
  
- (2) The “Loving Power” of God was manifested when: God created a human race – “in His own image” – biologically similar to other higher forms of animals, but altogether different “in kind”, with amazing spiritual and eternal qualities, the greatest of which is*

*man's capacity to fellowship with the Creator Himself – on earth and eventually in heaven eternally!*

- (3) *The "Loving Power of God" was manifested when: He created human beings, not as "robots" with no "freedom", but as unique creatures with genuine "freedom" to make decisions based on clearly given moral alternatives!*
  
- (4) *The "Loving Power" of God was brilliantly manifested when: (after a long process of "unfolding salvation history" in the Old Testament) God, "in the fullness of time" brought Jesus Christ into the world to die a redemptive death, followed by a powerful resurrection, all for the purpose of providing a "just way" to "justify" unjust sinners!*
  
- (5) *The "Loving Power" of God was manifested when: the "powerful wind" – the "wind of the mighty Holy Spirit" – was given by God on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). This God-given power – released on the world for all time, until the end of human history, is one of the greatest manifestations of God's "Loving Power". Because of this "outpoured gift" from heaven's God, it is wonderfully possible for every human being (of all times, in all places, under all conditions) to receive (to some degree) the "light which lighteth every man who comes into the world." (John 1) The "Loving Power" of God's Holy Spirit touches the life of every person on the planet earth (even among the masses of pagans who have not yet been fortunate enough to clearly hear the Gospel of Christ.*
  
- (6) *The "Loving Power" of God was manifested when: He established His world-wide Church (composed of all true followers of Christ) – to provide a center for Christian Growth, and a "corporate witness" in the world by preaching the Gospel and by healing the sick, etc.*
  
- (7) *The "Loving Power" of God was manifested when: He gave "assurance of salvation" to all who truly repent and who believe in God – as God reveals Himself to all persons in the world, with differing "degrees" of spiritual truth – the "light which lightens every man who comes into the world". (John 1)*

- (8) *The “Loving Power” of God was manifested when: God promised believers strength for the (sometimes very difficult) “spiritual pilgrimage” throughout humankind’s personal and corporate life. Many times the Bible uses very encouraging words to describe God’s loving “nature” of His human creatures: sustenance, comfort, restoration, healing, forgiveness, guidance, strength, companionship, and so much more!*
- (9) *The “Loving Power” of God was manifested when: God (Christ) promised not only strength and comfort for life’s “spiritual pilgrimage”, but also assurance that (for believers) the best is yet to be. What powerful words of assurance, which Jesus spoke to those who follow Him: “Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.” (John 14:1-3, RSV)*
- (10) *The “Loving Power” of God will be manifested in the future: at the “End of this Age”, as taught, not only graphically and mysteriously in the last book of the Bible (Revelation), but also taught many other places in the Bible! What is taught that will happen “in the end” in terms of an amazing demonstration of the “Loving Power” of God? Without going into detail, what is clearly taught is that Christ shall vanquish all of the evil powers and kingdoms of Satan! All wrong will be punished, and all righteousness shall be rewarded! A Kingdom of Universal righteousness, holiness, justice and compassion will be established, and Satan and his evil followers (demons and unrepentant sinners) shall be vanquished from the presence of the “God of Love” forever! “The wrongs of earth will be righted.” Christ shall “balance the books”, morally speaking, and Christ shall “compensate” those who suffered unjustly on earth! Christ shall “separate the sheep from the goats”, the “wheat from the tares.” Just punishment will be rendered to the wicked, and just rewards shall be given to the righteous!*

***Even when God executes judgment upon the unrepentant souls on earth (at the Final Judgment – Matthew 25), such “final exacting of divine judgment” is the result of “Holy Love”! How***

*can this be? Simply because God has a profound respect for “Human Will”.*

*It is clearly revealed in Scripture that:*

- (1) God loves all persons, and He is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” There is no such thing as God’s “mysterious will” that results in God choosing (electing) to save a select number of humans, with His corresponding “will” to damn the remainder of the human race to hell! Such a “doctrine” of “divine election” (predestination of both the “elect” and the “damned”, all for the “glory of Almighty, Sovereign God”) is most horrifying and unbiblical, and this doctrine denies all universal sense of justice! The God of the Bible is a God of Absolute Love, not a God of Arbitrary Injustice and cruelty (in spite of the assertions of some misguided theologians who attempt inaccurately to “defend the sovereignty of God”).*
- (2) Jesus died for all persons, and no one is excluded in His atoning sacrifice. Not a “limited atonement” for only God’s elected ones, but an “unlimited atonement” for the sins of the entire world!*
- (3) The Holy Spirit calls every person to repentance, not simply the “elect ones.”*
- (4) The God of Love gives “prevenient grace” to every person (i.e., God gives “initiating grace”), preparing every sinner’s heart with the “ability” to positively respond in repentance and faith, to the Spirit’s “call to salvation.” However, as has been repeatedly noted in this paper, the Spirit who makes every person “savable” (capable of being saved by God, through the positive response of “turning from sin” and “turning to Christ in faith”), is the same Spirit who can be “resisted” by unrepentant sinners. These sinners do not resist the Spirit’s call to salvation because they were “predestined” by God from all eternity to be damned, but rather because they chose to exercise their “free will” negatively in rejection of God’s love, mercy, and forgiveness!*

**No one will ever "figure out" the full dynamics of humankind's "frightening mechanism" called "free moral agency", but God definitely respects the "power of human free will" - with "good" or "bad" consequences! There is abundant evidence, from Scripture and from common human experience through the ages and in our own contemporary world, that the exercise of human "free will" is real (genuine). Look at the present world - filled with positive results or with negative consequences, from either the proper use or the improper use of man's "powerful free will"!**

**Previously (in this paper), in trying to summarize our thoughts regarding the Power of God (as possibly first introduced to most persons, generally, through God's Power that is revealed in Nature), I stated that, because God by nature is inherently "Holy Love", all manifestations of God's Power are manifestations of "Loving Power." God, in exercising His Power in many different ways, never exercises "brutal power" or "cruel power" or "discriminatory power" like arbitrary "predestination" of persons to either "election to eternal life" or "election to eternal damnation"!**

**Along with my list of ways that God has manifested His "Loving Power", I noted that (1) God loves all persons; (2) Jesus died for all persons - unlimited atonement; (3) The Spirit calls all persons to salvation because of what Christ has "accomplished" for every one, on the cross and through the empty tomb; (4) The God of "Loving Power" has made it possible, through His "initiating grace" ("prevenient grace") - a gracious gift to every human being - for every person to call upon God, in repentance and faith. All persons are in a "Savable" condition (because of Christ's atoning death and because of God's gracious gift of "prevenient grace" - the grace that prepares a sinner's heart to make it possible for him to be open to the Spirit's convictions and awakening and offer of salvation). All persons (sinners) are "Savable", but, of course, no person is automatically "Saved".**

- (5) ***Even though salvation is a "pure gift" of God, made possible because of the very costly price of Jesus' sinless blood, this gift, which is offered to every person (in one manner or another throughout the world), must be received – similar to the way a "human gift" is received. No sinner can earn, purchase, or deserve God's gift of forgiveness and reconciliation and regeneration, but a gift must be nevertheless received – on the "terms of the Giver". That means "a humble, contrite spirit which God will never despise." These responses toward God (when He offers the gift of eternal life) certainly do NOT constitute "human work" or "human merits."***

***According to Ephesians 2:8-10, we are saved "by God's grace", through the "human response of faith and trust" for the purpose of living a godly life, full of "good works of love" for the glory of God and for the good of others. (There is some "amplifications" of these verses, but I think this is an accurate interpretation of these three verses).***

***So, given a rather "broad view" of the extent of the exercise of God's "Loving Power", what is God's central "focus" in the use of His "Loving Power"? Scripture indicates that God's Power was powerfully demonstrated when, after His Son's atoning death, God raised His Son from the dead! And why did He raise His Son from the dead? God raised His Son from the dead to "Vindicate the Righteousness of Christ"! Christ the sinless One proved to Satan and to his demonic force that righteousness is stronger than wickedness that life is stronger than death, that truth is stronger than falsehood and deception, and that the Church will ultimately triumph over the "strongholds of evil".***

***Yes, God's "Loving Power" was amazingly and conclusively demonstrated when He raised His Son from the dead. But the costly death and glorious resurrection of Jesus provided the "foundation" for the establishment of Christ's Church (the "blood-washed" people of God). What more could God do than what He has done? Creation; the atoning death and glorious resurrection of Christ; the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost; the giving of "prevenient grace" to all persons which makes possible the salvation of all sinners who are depraved by sin in every part of their human constitution; the granting of forgiveness and reconciliation to every repentant sinner; the giving of assurance to every believer that the Spirit will preserve every believer throughout his life's long "spiritual pilgrimage"; and the giving of the promise to every person who perseveres in faithful living that***

**he/she will be "crowned with the crown of eternal life" in heaven some wonderful day!**

**Yes, the aforementioned gifts from the God of "Loving Power" are most amazing! But, as has often been emphasized in this lengthy part of the paper (on God's Power), there is one reality that God profoundly respects - namely, the God-granted power (capacity) of "human choice". Even though God has done all that He (the Almighty God) can do - to rescue lost mankind from a miserable life of sinful bondage on earth and an indescribable condemnation in a godless existence after this human "state of affairs"- God's "hands are tied" if a human being (sinner) continues to reject (resist) all of the Spirit's overtures of love and repeated calls to repentance! "Prevenient grace" (i.e., the grace that "goes before" to prepare sinners for a greater openness to Christ's offer of salvation) is a gracious gift of God. Without that "Initiating Grace", no sinner could possibly be able to even respond to the Spirit's call to repentance.**

**Salvation (from start to finish) is all of God, for grace in any measure and any kind originates alone with God. God is the Giver of the "gift of grace" (i.e., "Common Grace", Saving Grace, Keeping Grace, Sanctifying Grace, Dying Grace, etc.). God is the Giver, and Man (sinner or Christian) is the recipient, receiver, and respondent. Even though, objectively speaking, salvation comes alone from God (made possible because of Christ's "Finished Work"), salvation, subjectively speaking (that is, salvation which is enjoyed by a sinner) depends upon the positive exercise of man's "Free Will"! God is All-Powerful (as we have tried often to demonstrate in this paper), but God Himself is limited in the exercise of His Power when men refuse to yield to God, and reject salvation!**

**A respected Christian writer, Suzanne de Dietrich, clearly states what we have been repeatedly stating throughout this section of the paper (on the Power of God): "The thing that makes us uniquely human is that, unlike the other creatures, we are able to say 'yes' and 'no' to God. Man does not do the will of his Creator by necessity. The stars in the sky follow their prescribed orbits, the animals of the field obey their instincts, but man has the unique and frightening ability - he can refuse to be obedient to his Creator. For God does not want slaves, but sons."**

**I have thought often of some of the great mysteries of life, which we as humans (and especially Christians) encounter. Life "in Christ" (for a true believer) is full of "wonder, love, and praise" and is just what Christ said it would be - an "abundant life". But, this being said it is nevertheless true that life is challenged with many**

***“mysteries”. The “mystery of unanswered prayer”, the “mystery of human personality”, the “mystery of unexplained and unmerited human suffering”, the “mystery of the creation of the world”, “the mystery of iniquity”, the “mystery of ‘holy wars’ recorded in the Old Testament by a God of absolute Love”, the “mystery of life after death”, the great “mystery of the sovereign ways of an all-holy God”, and many other mysteries. At best, we humans (even studied and mature Christians) will be able to understand only a “little bit” of all the mysteries of reality, especially during the brief time in which our eternal spirits inhabit these “tents of clay”.***

***The Bible says that, on earth, we mortals see much of reality very dimly. “For now (during our ‘earthly pilgrimage’) we see in a mirror dimly, but then (in heaven) face to face. Now I know in part (only a little of total reality); then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood.” (I Corinthians 13:12)***

***But one of the greatest “mysteries” that I have often encountered (when I have seriously contemplated life and God and eternity) is the “mystery of the human will”. When I think of the various ways (ten of which I earlier listed) in which the “Loving Power” of God has been manifested to mankind, I stand amazed that any human being (including myself, for I too have been guilty) could “turn his/her back” on such a caring and loving God – a God who has done everything “short of coercion” to save humanity from the bondage of sin, to enjoy the freedom of true life! What more can He do than what He has already done (and continues to do) through His blessed and tender and convicting and convincing Holy Spirit!***

***But the fact of reality continues to be evident (all because God created humans “in His own image”) – the Almighty God, who exerts His unlimited power and control and authority in all parts of His universe and His planet called Earth, cannot Force His sovereign will and His saving purpose upon any human being! Man alone has the ability to “harden his heart”, “stiffen his neck”, “close his mind”, “retain his will”, “stop his ears”, and “choose his own self-centered life-style.” Man can “ignore all the Spirit-placed roadblocks” along life’s pathway, to alert the sinner of the way to destruction that he is treading.***

***Just “short of coercion”, the Spirit of God is doing everything within His power to keep every soul out of hell, and to take every soul to heaven! God is not willing that any person should perish, but that all persons should come to repentance. But, even though the Bible makes it very clear that God has only good intentions (and a “perfect will”) for all persons– nevertheless, the “wicked, self-centered will” of some persons “truncates” and “overrides” the “perfect will” of God!***

***There are tragically and mysteriously, some persons who "choose to do their own thing" rather than to do "God's will"! Sin is most terrible, for sin blinds people to reality. Sin deceives people and makes them believe that the "pleasures of sin" are more wonderful than the "pleasures of God"; that the ways of the devil are the ways of life rather than the ways of death; that the ways of self-centeredness are more satisfying than the ways of self-surrender and service; that the ways of the world, which give glamour and power and wealth, are far better than the ways of simplicity, generosity, and obscure servanthood. Yes, there are "pleasures in sin for a season", but only for "a season" - to be followed by regret and remorse and shame and loneliness, guilt, loss, and ultimately spiritual death!***

***Perhaps the "mystery of all mysteries" in this earthly life is why any human being (a never-dying soul who will stand before God eventually to be judged) would allow himself/herself to be deceived by sin and by Satan - at a time when the Powerful Spirit is "trying so hard" to persuade every person (through several "means") to forsake his/her self-centered (pride-filled) life, and to turn in repentance and in faith to Christ Himself (who said that He was "the Way, the Truth, the Life")!***

***But, in spite of everything God has done (Creation, Incarnation, Giving of Spirit, written Word, Influential Church, Conscience, Nature, etc.), God Almighty (who exercises His power most phenomenally) reaches the limits of His power when a human being (made in God's wonderful "image") continues to "hold out" on God's offer of forgiveness and love and reconciliation and abundant life and eventual eternal life in heaven! "The mystery of sin", combined with the "mystery of human free will", results in great and irrevocable tragedies, in the lives of unbelievers who choose to "turn down" every offer of "new life in Christ" to the very end of their earthly lives!***

***There comes a time in the life of every (self-conscious) human being when he/she is confronted by the Holy Spirit - for the purpose of conviction of sin and a call to repentance and faith. The Spirit awakens persons (sinners) to the fact that the direction of their lives is "dead wrong"! There is a desperate need to turn from a life of self-centeredness (the essence of all sins) to a life of Christ-centeredness (the essence of true life). Man is "dead in trespasses and sins", and the "mother" of all sin is self-centeredness (selfish pride). The Spirit yearns with self-centered persons (who are "dead in trespasses and sins") to turn from sin (repentance) and to turn to Christ (faith, trust, surrender to Christ as the center of one's life).***

***There are only two kinds of persons in life - those whose lives are guided primarily by selfish interests (self-centered), and those who (imperfectly but genuinely) are***

*seeking to turn their lives towards God and towards godly purposes (unselfish motivation). Perhaps it is obvious that those who are self-centered are nevertheless sometimes seemingly unselfish in their motivations and actions (because of God's "common grace" that operates universally in the human race, even among non-Christians). Moreover, true Christians will quickly acknowledge that they sometimes (unfortunately) resort to selfish (carnal) actions and attitudes in their relationships. (One of my friends and my minister for a dozen years, said that one of his regular prayers, in the privacy of his early morning devotions, is a prayer to the Holy Spirit that the Spirit would (daily)*

- 1. Crucify all sin and selfishness in his life,*
- 2. Cleanse him of all sin, by the blood of Christ,*
- 3. Control him in what he said and did in all his daily interactions. A most practical prayer which I have adopted. Why? Because sincere Christians know that, even though they wish always to be self-surrendered and Christ-centered, it is too easy to be diverted, by sin and temptation, from the general direction of their life which is Christ-centeredness).*

*Those who exercise their human will to follow God, (as best as they understand Him), will certainly enjoy the glories of heaven when they leave this earthly life with their limited understanding of God and of God's Son that they had while on earth. In heaven, many largely ignorant persons will be enlightened as to the glories of Christ - the center of heaven's glory - for all eternity! Growth in knowledge, love, and service forever in heaven! If they served God on earth (having a positive will in worship of God, as best that they knew on earth), they will also serve Him in heaven, but with the glorious personal knowledge of God's Son - Jesus Christ!*

*On earth, there are people who belong to Christ without their even knowing it! Why? Because God Almighty - the All-Knowing God - looks not only at the 'head' of a person (i.e., the partial and inaccurate knowledge), but God "focuses" on what determines the spiritual condition of a person - namely, his HEART and his WILL!*

*C.S. Lewis (the greatest Christian apologist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) saw this truth clearly: "There are other people who are slowly becoming Christians though they do not yet call themselves so. There are people who do not accept the full Christian doctrine about Christ, but who are so strongly attracted by Him that*

***they are His in a much deeper sense than they themselves, understand. There are people in other religions who are being led by God's secret influence to concentrate on those parts of their religion which are in agreement with Christianity, and who thus belong to Christ without knowing it. For example, a Buddhist of good will may be led to concentrate more and more on the Buddhist teaching about mercy and to leave in the background (though he might still say he believed) the Buddhist teaching on certain other points. Many of the good Pagans long before Christ's birth may have been in this position."***

***Yes, those who have been fortunate enough to hear and to receive the Gospel message of Christ's "Finished Work" – these persons are among earth's most privileged persons, and the earth's most responsible persons! "To whom much is given, much is required." He/she, who enjoys the message and the benefits of the message of Christ, is he/she who is most responsible to share the Good News with those who "lie in darkness"!***

***But, after all the "unanswered questions" are laid aside, what is it that determines whether or not a person is on the "right track" that leads to heaven, or on the "wrong track" that leads to hell? Jesus gave us the answer in the Gospels, and the apostles emphasized the same message! Jesus, Paul, and the other early writers all said the same thing – it all boils down to the condition of a person's Heart (Will)! Not how smart one is! Not how religious one is! Not how well to do one is! Not what race one belongs to! Not one's nationality! Not one's tradition, background, status, or orthodoxy! These are not to be despised, but none of these can bring salvation (the forgiveness of sins) and a personal and intimate relationship with God!***

***What is in a man's heart (will) determine the spiritual condition of a man! That is what Jesus (and the apostles) repeatedly taught!***

***"People often see you as you are outside; But Jesus really sees you as you are inside." (Words of a song, which I sang many years ago when I was a college student, on a "Gospel Team Trip")***

***So God – the Holy Spirit – challenges the "Free Will" of every human being, for unless the will of man (sinner) is surrendered to the Tri-une God (Creator of man), the human will continues to be wild and willful and hurtful to one's own self and to everyone who "gets in his way" – and eventually that self-centered volition will bring havoc to himself – partially on earth and totally in eternity!***

***Many years ago, the great leader Joshua confronted Israel with the all-important choice: "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve! As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord!"***

***Every person must make a choice - for time and for eternity - whom he will serve "God or Satan"? Life or Death? Self or Others? Everyone must choose, for Jesus said there is no moral neutrality! As someone once said, "There is no razor edge of neutrality upon which we may balance precariously!"***

***Notes C.S. Lewis: "Their free will is trembling inside them like the needle of a compass. But this is a needle that can choose. It can point to its true north; but it need not. Will the needle swing round, and settle, and point to God? He can help it to do so. He cannot force it. He cannot, so to speak, put out His own hand and pull it into the right position, for then it would not be free will anymore. Will it point North? That is the question on which all hangs."***

***Note: For those who think I have perhaps overlooked important Scriptural passages which strongly emphasize God's sovereignty, I must gladly acknowledge that I have not attempted "to cover the entire subject" regarding God's sovereignty. There are, of course, Scriptural passages that describe God as acting (in the past and in the future) in a "Unilateral" way - that is, God acting 'on His own', without appealing to the elusive will of humans, to accomplish His will for human history. In these "cases", of course, God's power (i.e., His foreknowledge, His predestination and His predetermination) is "unhindered" by the exercise of "contrary human will" to God's "perfect will." However, one important purpose in this "devotionally-oriented" paper ("Seeing God Through Nature") is to briefly share the dynamic of the human\divine love relationship, which glorious reality necessitates the genuine exercise of "free moral agency").***

***"THE FOURTH ASPECT OF NATURE THAT IS QUICKLY DISCERNABLE IS THE VASTNESS, THE BIGNESS, AND THE MAGNITUDE OF NATURE."***

*Of course, the opposite is also true. There are countless examples of the intricate (smallness and tininess) in Nature, as well. For instance, the many invisible and intricate dynamics of the inward workings of the human cell, as well as the invisible and intricate parts of the human DNA, and many other small and invisible aspects of God's very complex world and universe. However, what is most obviously visible is the magnitude of God's creation – starting with our own world, and extending into the vast and incomprehensibly huge universe – a universe that is vaster than any human mind can ever imagine or fathom.*

*Our world's tall mountains, and giant trees, and vast prairies, and expansive oceans, and huge canyons like the "Grand Canyon" – these features of our created world are wonderful, but nevertheless, faint reflections of the magnitude and "bigness" of the One who created all things!*

*God spoke the Universe into existence. It is so big and vast that it would take literally billions of "light years" to go from one "end to the other end"! Yet the Creator has "named" every one of the billions of galaxies (each of which contains millions of stars)!*

*The magnitude of creation (even on this very small planet where we live, let alone the far reaches of the incomprehensibly large universe) is only a reminder of the greatness, the bigness, the incomprehensibly huge God that we serve! Not only is the Universe (including our planet) a revelation of magnitude, but also a revelation of magnificence (exquisite beauty) – as already noted earlier in this "journal entry".*

*Our God is a big God – a God who is able to do anything! The magnitude (bigness) of our God is inseparately connected with the power of God. A God who can create such a huge universe is the same God who is powerful enough to control and to maintain His universe!*

*A great writer in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was J. B. Phillips (who wrote several books and who translated the New Testament most vividly). One famous book he wrote was entitled "Your God Is Too Small." He declares that modern-day man has substituted so many "small gods" (false gods) for the One True and Living and "BIG" God who is described in the Bible and who is manifested (revealed) in the life and person and work of Jesus Christ.*

*Jesus Christ is big enough to encompass the needs of all human beings! His redemptive work on the cross is "big" enough to provide salvation for every human being. His*

*power as revealed in the empty tomb on resurrection morning is “big” enough to deliver every man from the bondage of sinful habit and harmful attitude and dreadful condemnation – and take every converted sinner to an eternal abode of unspeakable happiness! Our God is awesomely big, and no man can comprehend his greatness!*

**“THE FIFTH ASPECT OF NATURE IS THE AMAZING VARIETY IN NATURE.”**

*Even the casual observer, and certainly the serious student of Nature, will easily testify to the fact that everywhere he looks, he is overwhelmed with the vast number of species in the animal world, the plant world, the world of trees and grasses and vegetation of all kinds! Go to a “Botanical Gardens” and witness the vast varieties of flowers. Go to a “Tropical Forest” and walk through (if you can) the vast number of various trees and you will soon become overwhelmed with the number of different kinds of trees – both small and large. You will also doubtless see a large variety of bugs and reptiles and primates and other lower forms of animals. Only scientists have a near estimate of the many different kinds of animals, and the vast assortment of trees and plants that thrive within the “Tropical Forest” areas of our fertile and versatile world!*

*If God created our world, and if this world is full of variety in plants, animals, trees, prairies, fish, etc., God must be a Creator who obviously values and likes variety. That is a “common sense” assumption! Moreover, not only did God create a world with amazing variety in the plant and animal world (and, we should add, in the world of minerals and chemicals), but it is obvious that God also created a world with tremendous variety in the realm of human beings. It may be a trite saying, but it is nevertheless a true saying: “There are no two persons who are created exactly alike!” Even identical twins are somewhat different. God apparently (obviously?) loves variety! Not only is this seen in the animal kingdom, the plant kingdom, and the mineral kingdom, but also it is seen at all times in the life of human beings! The DNA is complex beyond description, and in that unique DNA of each human being is seen the very special “stamp of God”! God created each person with unique physical features, with a special “baggage” of talents and gifts and mental capacities, with a special way of perceiving the world of sense, with a special personality and temperament, and much more!*

*God loves variety and diversity – and God loves each unique person that He has created. Each person has a unique mission to pursue in life, and God stands guard over each person! God seeks to “train” the focus of unique and special people away from the “competitive gaze” towards other unique persons He has made, to instead to focus one’s gaze upon the Creator rather than fellow creatures! God does not want duplicates in His family! While He wants all of His children to learn from one another and to appreciate one another and to support one another, He does not want any of His uniquely created children to compete with one another, or to envy one another, or to be bitter or to destroy one another through actions or attitudes or words. He wants each to thank the Creator (Father) for their distinctive characteristics and personhood, and to serve God with the particular gifts they have received from their loving Creator.*

*Glorifying God, edifying (encouraging) others, fulfilling themselves by using their gifts – this is the purpose of their earthly existence!*

*God loves variety (as demonstrated vividly in Nature and as seen in the vast variety of features in the "Human Family")! Therefore, humans (creatures) are expected to "celebrate God's variety" – that means to enjoy God's vast and varied Creation, and that means even more importantly to celebrate one's own God-created uniqueness as a person, as well as to celebrate the uniqueness of every other created person! I am to thank God for my own uniqueness, and to use my talents, gifts, abilities, intelligence, personality, and temperament all for God's glory and for the edification (encouragement) of others, and for the unselfish fulfillment of my own needs.*

*God surely loves variety in His vast creation. This is seen as one peers through a telescope into the vast reaches of the multi-faceted universe with its vast differences in the stars and galaxies. This is seen when one observes the vast number of different plants and animals on earth. This is seen when one attempts to communicate to fellow human beings, all of whom are considerably different from ones self.*

*But, amidst all the variety in the world (and the frequent changes that accompany that variety), there is One who is steadfast and unchanging and eternal in the essence of His character - and that is God! God visibly demonstrated, through Jesus Christ, that He has always been the same – for Jesus declared the eternal and unchanging essence of God when He declared, "God is Love"! God never has a variation in His eternal personality traits. What a most glorious revelation of reality! At the "heart" of all Reality is God, and "God is Love", and God never varies in His essential character!*

*However, even though God is unchanging in His Love, (which means this is a "friendly" universe, not a "malicious" universe ruled by a multitude of angry gods, like those that the ancient pagans sadly worshipped), it is exciting to know that, since God loves variety in His creation of plants, animals, and humankind, our creative God manifests creativity and variety in the expression of His loving personality. Only God, of course, knows the various ways that He chooses to express His love to humans. I think that, even though God's love is probably very similarly expressed to all His children, there are doubtless unique and varied ways that the Creator expresses His love to each of His creatures. We all know that a loving earthly father expresses His love (which he feels equally for each of his children) in different, unique, special, and varied ways to his different children. Our Heavenly Father loves all His earthly children equally (with no favoritism in that love), even though God distributes gifts in different kinds and in different degrees to His many children.*

*However, the way in which the Heavenly Father expresses His love to His children will obviously be different with each child. The Father knows His children well, for He is the One who created them. Because the temperament, sensitivity, personality, earthly environment, talents, level of spiritual maturity, mental capacity, degree of suffering, vulnerability to various temptations, etc., are all, of course, very different in the life experiences of each of God's children, God, the great understanding Father, will apply His eternal and personalized love uniquely to each person! What a loving and personal and all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-wise God we serve! God is love, and at the heart of the universe is the "Lamb of God" – therefore, God's love is clearly and unmistakably identified and revealed as "Redemptive Love."*

*I thank God that, although there is much more to God's total "Reality" than what can be revealed in Physical Nature, nevertheless there are some important characteristics of God which are at least faintly revealed in Nature: Namely (1) Beauty, (2) Order, (3) Power, (4) Magnitude, (5) Variety.*