

With Whom Does the Lord Dwell?
By Ward Fenley

Isaiah 57:15-21 "For so says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity; whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, even with the contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. (16) For I will not contend forever, nor will I be always angry; for the spirit should fail before Me, and the souls I have made. (17) For the iniquity of his covetousness I was angry and struck him; I hid Myself, and was angry, and he went on turning away in the way of his heart. (18) I have seen his ways, and will heal him. I will also lead him, and restore comforts to him and to his mourners. (19) I create the fruit of the lips; peace, peace, to him far off, and to him near, says Jehovah; and I will heal him. (20) But the wicked are like the troubled sea, which cannot rest, and its waters cast up mire and dirt. (21) There is no peace, says my God, to the wicked."

Do you notice that none of this speaks of humanity's sufficiency or ability or will power? Instead, God sees the wicked and self-righteous (covetous) ways of humanity and then says, "I have seen his ways, and will heal him. I will also lead him." It is God's doing, from beginning to end. The context forbids the text to be interpreted as saying, "I have seen his *good* ways and will heal him." The phrase immediately preceding "I have seen his ways" is, "he went on turning the way of his heart." And of course the way of his heart, that natural way of humanity, is always self-righteousness, or the way that *seems* right: "There is a way that seems right unto a man, but the end thereof is the way of death." Yet God says, "I have seen his [self-righteous] way and will heal him." Much like Hosea's "I will heal their backsliding and I will love them freely."

So the next time we contemplate the nasty and vile idea that God chose us *because* we chose Him, let the above correct the heart and show us the error of that human-centered thinking. Paul writes to the Ephesians, "In love He predestined us to be His children according to the good pleasure of His will." Paul could have said, "In love He predestined us to be His children, according to the good choice we made," or "according to the good pleasure of *our* will." Rather, Paul says, "according to the good pleasure of *His* will." Why did God choose us and predestine us? "According to the good pleasure of His will." To put it bluntly: because He wanted to...in love. That's true grace. For if it was because He foresaw our good choice for Him, then it is no longer God's good pleasure and love that caused Him to do it, but rather because we made some good choice or because of the choice of our will. But what does Paul say? "It is not of him who wills nor of him who runs but of God who shows mercy." Now, the gainsayer will mock this and reason that this was speaking only to the first century or merely to Israel. Yet, humanity is humanity. Israel is simply a representation of the froward ways of humanity and its fruitless endeavors to justify itself and judge others based upon its own futile light. Yet Christ says, "If the light that be in you is darkness, how great is that darkness." And the Wise Man says, "Most men will proclaim their own goodness." But Paul contradicts this way of reasoning: "There is none good, no not one."

Why did God choose to love us?

"I have seen his ways, and I will heal Him." "I have loved them freely and will heal their backsliding." God loved us based upon no internal condition of ourselves but based solely upon the condition of His love. Yes, you read that correctly. God chose to love us because He loved us. Is that nonsense?

Deuteronomy 7:7-8 The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: (8) But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

If we look carefully at this passage, we will see the reason God set His love upon Israel: "The LORD did not set His love upon you nor choose you because...but because the LORD loved you." That is, "The LORD set His love upon you and chose you...because the LORD loved you." But again, why? "So that you might not say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand has gotten me this wealth' " (Deuteronomy 8:17). Or as the prophet writes, " 'Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD" (Zechariah 4:6).

"No flesh will glory in His presence." If we are God's children, it is solely by His love and grace and based upon nothing we have willed by our power. David says to God, "Your people shall be willing in the day of *Your* power." If we came to Christ, it is because He made us willing. We would never will ourselves to come to Him. But again, the gainsayer will respond, "But that's not love, to make someone willing." We must remember the little baby crawling across the grass toward the busy street, about to have its bowels and brains splattered about the street by oncoming traffic. Does the loving parent simply "woo" the baby? Does the loving parent simply "let the child make its own decision?" No matter how much wooing or pleading, or even yelling the so-called loving parent does, the child will certainly crawl headlong into death. The Psalmist likens this baby to the deaf adder:

Psalms 58:3-5 The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray from the womb, speaking lies. (4) Their poison is like the poison of a snake; like the deaf adder, he stops his ear, (5) which will not listen to the charmer's voice, a skillful caster of spells.

There is a way that seems right.

If God were unloving like the skillful charmer, He would simply let the baby go to its own demise. But the love of God goes and fetches that baby. What loving father would simply let the baby "learn its lesson?" The baby, like the deaf adder, will not hear, no matter how much wooing the parent does. The parent must physically carry

the baby back to its safe haven. "All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned every one to his own way." That is, "there is a way that seems right unto a man, but the end is the way of death." The noise and movement of big cars and trucks is appealing to the little baby. So are the pleasantries of human self-sufficiency and self-righteousness. It seems so right. "If we are good boys and girls we will go to heaven." It feels and seems so proper. But God says, "all our righteousness is like a menstrual rag." And even Paul viewed his righteousness as "dung." The Moral Majority and the Religious Right, in all their pomp and arrogance, deride the homosexual and the murderer all the while settled in the complacency of their pride and blind self-sufficiency. It is that subtle deception that is the "way that seems right," but their end is death.

There is no difference.

To exalt oneself in self-righteousness against the so-called "mortal sins" is to die slowly and painlessly. Rome contrived the "venial" vs. "mortal" comparison. But Protestants, while claiming to despise this comparison have perpetuated this deception, convincing the religious masses of Baptists, Wesleyans, Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witness, Mormons, and the rest of religions of self-sufficiency that some sins are worse than others. But God says, "a proud look is an abomination." What then if *all* "sin" is actually "missing the mark," as *Hamartano* implies? What if, as James says, "If we have transgressed one, we have transgressed them all" (James 2:10)? What if there is no difference? Paul places himself in the same miserable plight as all others:

Romans 3:9-23 What then? Do we excel? No, in no way; for we have before charged both Jews and Greeks all with being under sin, (10) as it is written: "There is none righteous, no not one; (11) there is none that understands, there is none that seeks after God." (12) "They are all gone out of the way, they have together become unprofitable, there is none that does good, no, not one." (13) "Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they have used deceit, the poison of asps is under their lips; (14) whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness;" (15) "their feet are swift to shed blood; (16) destruction and misery are in their way, (17) and the way of peace they did not know." (18) "There is no fear of God before their eyes." (19) But we know that whatever things the Law says, it says to those who are under the Law; so that every mouth may be stopped and all the world may be under judgment before God, (20) because by the works of the Law none of all flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law is the knowledge of sin. (21) But now a righteousness of God has been revealed apart from Law, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets; (22) even the righteousness of God through the faith of Jesus Christ, toward all and upon all those who believe. For there is no difference, (23) for all have sinned (Gr. *Hamartano*) and come short of the glory of God.

To you it has been given.

How do we, in good conscience, establish some will power or some inherent ability to come to Jesus with this indictment? Paul razes all types of exalted thinking, and those thoughts that "exalt themselves against the knowledge of God." The

knowledge of God! "Let him who glories, glory in this: that he knows and understands me." But Paul is clear: "There is none who understands." So how can we glory that we know and understand God if there is none who understands? The disciples received this humbling response to their question about why Christ spoke to them in parables: "Because to you it has been given to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. To them it has not been given." If any of us are to understand anything of the glory and knowledge of God, it is because it has been given to us. These are called "spiritual things." But don't we all have innate abilities to perceive spiritual things?

1 Corinthians 2:14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

The Moral Majority and the Religious Right would love to have the natural man be under the "Ten Commandments." They would love to have the non-religious subject to the law of God. But Paul's theology resounds in the negative:

Romans 8:7-9 because the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the Law of God, neither indeed can it be. (8) So then they who are in the flesh cannot please God. (9) But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.

So Paul, along with his Romans 3 indictment, places us in a peculiarly dismal situation. According to Paul, we all fall under the categories of "natural," "carnal," "none who understands," "none who seek God," Yet, then Paul speaks of those in whom "the Spirit of God dwells..." But God cannot dwell with evil: "For You are not a God that enjoys wickedness; nor shall evil dwell with You" (Psalm 5:4). We are all bad trees. And bad trees cannot produce good fruit:

Luke 6:43 For a good tree does not bring forth corrupt fruit, neither does a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

Paul says nothing of us being good trees. Paul only charges all with evil and corruption. "What then? Are we better than they?" Paul rhetorically asks. He says, "For there is no difference. For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." So then, how do we become good trees?

Matthew 12:33 Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit.

What do you have that you did not receive?

Christ has to make the tree good. "But," cries the gainsayer, "we have to receive the seed of the word of God!" True. But John the Baptist leaves us with no ability apart from God: "a man can receive nothing except it be given Him from heaven." Much like Jesus' words to Pilate, "You would have no power at all except it were given you from heaven." And we must understand the "gifting" of receiving Christ not as a Christmas present to receive, but as Mozart was gifted with music. Mozart did not will himself to be a prodigy. God willed him to be a prodigy. So, this "gifting" cannot be received but rather it is...given. Which is why Paul states: "For who makes you to

differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it" (1 Corinthians 4:7)? Have we received Christ, the "spiritual things," and "the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven?" If so, it is because we have had our stubborn and rebellious wills changed by the mighty hand of God. "But we must repent!" Paul writes Timothy, "if perhaps God will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth..." Jeremiah understood this hundreds of years earlier: "After I was turned, I repented."

Who makes us to differ?

God must turn us, humble our hearts, and break the pride of our power. And then, as Paul says, the Spirit of God dwells in us, for it is then that God makes us perfectly holy "in His sight," not necessarily in our sight. For, again, there is no difference. But "who makes us to differ?" If we are holy and forgiven, it is simply before God and by God, for if we compare ourselves, we still are no different. But when broken of all self-righteousness by the power of God, we then become habitable dwelling places for His holiness, not based upon performance, but rather based upon Him causing us to see our lack of performance, and consequently trusting solely in the cross of Christ.

Isaiah 57:15 For so says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity; whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, even with the contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

No flesh shall glory in His presence.

With whom does God dwell? His holiness will not allow Him to dwell with evil and self-righteousness and self-glory. "That no flesh should glory in His presence." The universalist has all dwelling in God's presence. But this violates God's holiness. For if the self-righteous, trusting in their works are in the presence of God, then surely God lies when He says, "No flesh shall glory in His presence." Against this argument the universalist has no retaliation or rebuttal. For unless they are willing to say that God, in allowing the self-righteous to dwell in His presence actually willingly compromises His holiness, they have God's holy arm fighting against their doctrine. God cannot dwell with evil and a boasting heart of self-salvation. His holiness cannot be violated. Therefore, God must break the heart of self-righteousness and self-sufficiency before He can dwell with it. His eyes are too pure to behold evil: "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity," Habakkuk exclaims. But if we are made righteous by the blood of the Son of God, then God dwells with us and rightly places glory where glory is due:

Isaiah 54:17 No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD.

"Their righteousness is of Me." It could not be clearer. The Psalmist prophesied of this same righteousness:

Psalms 71:15-16 My mouth shall show forth Your righteousness and Your salvation all the day; for I do not know how many they are. (16) I will go in the strength of the Lord Jehovah; I will speak of Your righteousness, of Yours alone.

He has worked all our works in us.

This is a standing before God, not a practice of perfecting, as the Moral Majority implies. Righteousness is imputed, not earned. Or if it is earned, it was earned by the finished work of Christ: "I have finished the work which You gave me to do," and "It is finished." Where does the Psalmist speak of us coming to God, our ability, our choosing? He simply utters what God has already done. And if any "works" do proceed from us, it is simply the choosing and power of God to cause us to do those works:

Isaiah 26:12 Jehovah, You will ordain peace for us; for You also have worked all our works in us.

"You have worked all our works in us." Hebrews echoes this same idea:

Hebrews 13:20-21 Now may the God of peace (who brought again our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant) (21) make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

It is God who has to "make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight." How can we ignore this? Even our good works have to be caused by God.

From start to finish, our salvation and even walk of love and light is caused by God. We may raise the obnoxious repetitions of the gainsayers, "So why doesn't He do that in everyone?" Our response, "Why does He choose to do it at all?" And, "The Lord set His love upon you...because He loved you...according to the good pleasure of His will."