

Proverbs 20:5 “Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water, But a man of understanding will draw it out.”

The Tension in Theology

By B. D. Tate

Introduction

Have you noticed we don't agree? I am amazed at all the different places Christians of good heart find themselves. Like the colors of the rainbow is the diversity of opinions over the scriptures. Not only do denominations not agree but hardly one person agrees with another in depth.

Why do we have such monstrous divergence? We're not talking just small amounts there is a large range, a broad road, a massive highway of beliefs all claiming to be proper interpretations of Bible truth. How is it possible? Some have resigned it to human capacities to justify, rationalize, and reason fallibly and of course we are talking about the other guy. Many claim it is poor scholarship, unfaithfulness to context, and a willful spirit.

Then the broad road includes a whole scope of interpretations based on reason, experience, and even some tradition over the scriptural text claiming that the Bible itself is fallible. Like opening Pandora's Box so it is to deny scripture's testimony in any one place. When this occurs what then are the constraints? Where do we draw a limit for authority sustaining our beliefs?

When does it become anything goes? It is when scripture is no longer authoritative or when it is piece mill applied. We are all guilty of emphasizing some scriptures over against others. Quite frankly the Bible is too big, too much, too deep for any of us together, let any one alone.

Proverbs 27:17 “As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.”

Certainly we must all realize that our finite understanding is dependent upon the contribution of others. Like the four blind men who described what it was like to touch an elephant. One touched the tail, another the trunk, another the ear, still another the leg, each adamantly insisting they were correct; yet, each totally different. Obviously the need to collaborate and bring their descriptions together would give them a far better grasp of what an elephant is. This is simple enough but the struggle I'm describing thus far isn't about touching different parts entirely, no, it is about addressing the same places. We are describing the same issues, teachings, scriptures, and coming away adamantly insisting we are correct and finding so many disagreements. The result of which is an impasse.

The impasse has many aspects. There is the human pride of being right. There is the assumption of seeing things the way they are. There is the semantics problem of meaning. There are preconceived ideas. Not to be forgotten is our own background, upbringing, imprinting, and embracing of truth because of what we were taught and by whom. In other words virtues such as loyalty, faithfulness, trust, emotional attachment, to

a person, a church, and a teaching are sometimes the hindrance to understanding and openness to truth. “My father is a great man, he couldn’t be wrong!” Replace father with any person, a church pastor, a church, a denomination, etc. and you get the picture.

The impasse causes us to withdraw from, distrust, disassociate, discontinue discussion, and emotionally distance from others. We all need affirmation, confirmation, a sense of belonging, a place of agreement; it’s not hard to understand why our differences lead to denominations, independent churches, and isolation for individuals. As my father once jested, “I’m still looking for a Bible I can agree with...” (As is the case for Jehovah’s Witnesses, they just changed it make it agree with their beliefs).

I think we struggle so much with our beliefs because we are ignorant, easily confused, and easily misled—all of us. I think this is the “sheep” syndrome that Jesus referred to when He proclaimed He was the “good” shepherd. Sheep may be cute to some but they are not the sharpest animal God created. Shepherds must be diligent to watch out for them for they easily stray away. Furthermore, they must drink from still waters because rushing waters will carry them away. They are easily led and easily lost—that speaks to us.

This is compounded by the fact that we compare ourselves among ourselves. There are smart sheep, intelligent sheep, well educated sheep, very arrogant sheep, who think they are no longer sheep, they are now shepherds. When did they stop being a sheep? When did their heart stop being deceitful and desperately wicked? I remember hearing one Seminary professor make the claim, “We are all seeking truth!” Maybe so, I just find it hard to believe. Remember Pilate’s lamentation to Jesus? “What is truth?” What some consider truth is very relative while others are absolutely positive they know it all.

There is another phenomenon that happens among us. We get the idea that since we’ve got a handle on truth, as we see it, in one area that we have a handle on it in others. I’m a big fan of Focus on the Family for example, there are a lot of solid, inspired, and faithfully true teachings regarding the family and marriage in that ministry. However, that doesn’t mean they are strong everywhere else. Some find certain preachers to be their favorite on the television or radio because they have learned so much. The problem is that we can become so enamored by one pastor that we’ll swallow everything they teach, hook, line, and sinker. Can one person really have the corner on the market? Can one person be so deep that everything they teach or believe IS gospel?

Paul admonished us not to become partial like this I Cor. 3:4-6 “For when one says, ‘I am of Paul,’ and another, ‘I am of Apollos,’ are you not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.”

We might not be saying I am of a particular person but is there much difference in saying, “I’m Baptist?” or “I’m Methodist,” or “Whatever?” It helps us to understand in part where someone is, to appreciate their background or current place, but doesn’t it also hinder our walk as well? We do this in other ways when we proclaim this person’s book or that person’s message or ministry as great. I’m not condemning this practice I’m trying to point out the difficulty we have in searching for truth. We become labels, we label, and sectarianism is the result.

There is one more final element to all of this I want to express that is the result of sectarianism. We become fixed, dogmatic, self assured, cocky, even arrogant, and at the same time determined to be right, defensive, threatened, protective, and argumentative. With this positional thinking or experience we cross over the ideas and concepts to attack the persons espousing them. The idea isn't wrong the person is. The concept isn't idiotic the one teaching it is. Fellowship is lost and community cut off as each circles the wagons so to speak to keep the others out. We set up camps and associations, connections, with those we see eye to eye with. We denounce and deny the authenticity and authority of those we disagree with. How many times have we heard terms like, "Full Gospel Church," or "The Church of God?" We have our banners, we have our codes, and we have our lines and recognitions of deviant people and teachings.

We have boxed ourselves in so that we don't compromise, pollute, or become tainted by heretics, the cults, and false teachers. I understand that we are to protect, guard, and be prepared to give a defense of the faith. I understand that we are to refute false teaching my point is that we become so threatened by them, we don't engage in discourse any more. We are going to be surprised that many of our brethren, born of God, saved, have been in those other camps. Even cults have captured true children of God through their techniques and persuasion. How then does iron sharpen iron when we don't meet? When we don't engage or talk to those who disagree with us there is no fulfillment of helping each other learn, grow, and struggle through.

At the same time, it is difficult to engage in discussion with those we disagree with because emotional barriers exist. "I just can't talk to so and so I run into a roadblock." Or, "The dogmatic unbending, self assured cockiness, is unbearable." There is no give, no openness, and no dialog; it is just a one way street of superior thinking or position on their part. There is no acknowledgment of self deception, no sense of possibly being wrong, and no appreciation that one could actually see it differently and be Biblical. The temptation for a child of God, experienced in the Word, years of study, much prayer and thought, traveled, exceptional mind and debater, is somewhere to cross a line that means he/she is no longer susceptible to error. As if growing in Christ means learning how to be right about everything. That maturity spiritually means having the answers, having sound doctrine, being abreast of truth, a person who has it together. My experience has been somewhat the opposite. The closer I walk with God, the more filled with the Spirit I feel, the more sin I see in me—the more wrong I am. I've been a Christian for over thirty years and I'm still waiting to arrive where instruction and reproof are not the way of life (Of course I'm arguing that day will never arrive).

Yes, we are to teach and practice sound doctrine. That doesn't mean that we have arrived and no longer need a teacher ourselves. Truth stands alone and need not be attended by any one person—because God is truth. If a matter is truthful whether or not we see it, defend it, or think we own it is immaterial. The line that gets crossed is ownership. We think we own the idea, concept, doctrine, teaching, or truth. What do we have that we didn't receive? And if we received it, why would we think we must defend it? It's God's truth not ours. And if it is God's truth what makes us think we got it all? We all acknowledge Paul's teaching from I Cor. 13:9 & 12 "For we know in part and we prophesy in part." And then, "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face, now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known."

Somehow we know more than in part. Somehow we see more than in a mirror dimly. We know what we know, we are sure of it, we see it clearly, we are spiritual, we are mature...yet Paul the apostle who wrote much of the New Testament under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit said this about himself too—the “we” included Paul.

A check and a guard, do we really believe we know in part? Do we really believe we see only dimly? When we compare ourselves to others we are convinced then that we know more and see more clearly. We cross over and start declaring heresies of those who are basing what they believe in the Bible. We cross over and declare others mishandling the Word of truth because we know more than in part that we are not mishandling it. It is ugly stuff when we are so certain that we begin to put down the others as false, erroneous, stupid, irrational, accusing them of being pernicious.

I find myself emotionally charged when engaged in discourse, reading, or studying issues that I find hard to believe or understand. I can feel it tensing up within me, I’m threatened, and I’m bothered, angered, bewildered why anyone would embrace such an opposing view. The more I seek to grasp the other’s position the more uncomfortable I feel. It is a burden, a struggle; I’d rather not take it on. My reluctance is real, my personal pain or anguish is real; where does it come from? Is it pride? Is it insecurity? Is it iron sharpening iron? When we think of iron sharpening iron wouldn’t there be sparks? Wouldn’t iron sharpening iron create much friction? However, I’m comfortable where I am, besides the fact that I’ve studied it before...

I share this to say that no one has all the truth. I remember being rebuffed by a brother in Christ when in college with those very words. I can still feel the dismay over thinking it through. I hadn’t realized that my religious training led me to believe we did have ALL the truth. As I see the scriptures today, the more I think I know, the more I realize I don’t. God is too much; I am grateful for the nuggets and for the revelation that I hold onto now. Even so, I must keep from becoming closed about them. I can know in part, I can see dimly and I am grateful; yet, to claim that is all there is is misguided.

Which brings me to what we can trust, what we can rely on, what I believe God placed in scripture to help us with this problem. The problem of so much diversity, of disagreement, of arrogance and pride, of owning our understandings, of cutting others off, of being threatened, of declaring authority and being right, while all the time knowing in part, and seeing dimly. God knew we’d be in this malaise of human opinion and divergence. God knew that our sin nature would insidiously mislead us. God knew that our understandings of scripture would lead to fights, separations, and caustic behavior. What can we trust? What can we rely on? What is the help?

The Answer: God placed tension in scripture to keep us on the straight and narrow rather than on the broad wide road.

Chapter I

Theology of Tension

The **Theology of Tension** or another way of describing it would be there are always two sides of the coin. There is always the left and the right of a matter. There are

always two tensions pulling at each other. It doesn't matter what the issue is, for the most part, there are two sides of it. There is male and female, up and down, right and left, liberal and conservative, east and west, north and south, for example. When one side is removed and the tension broken that's when we get into trouble.

There was a crisis that occurred back when Ronald Reagan was president. An American airliner was shot down flying over Russian air space. It had taken off from Alaska in route to Seoul, South Korea. The Russians claimed it was a spy plane and shot it down with over two hundred passengers on it. The reason I bring it up now is what happened to the airliner and why it was over Russian air space. Automatic pilot in those days as it was explained to me works like this: There is a beam broadcast from Alaska to Seoul and the plane's guidance system flies along that beam. The plane doesn't remain on the line perfectly it will fly along until it detects it on its left and then the guidance system will correct to fly closer to it. Then the plane may in time fly across the beam and find itself on the other side. The guidance system will detect the beam now on the right and make corrections again to fly closer to it. This process will continue all the along the flight pattern, back and forth, left and then right. If the guidance system fails by removing the tension it will drift to the left or to the right. In this case the plane drifted way to the right flying over Russian air space and was shot down for the purposes already mentioned.

I think this is a great way to understand the purpose of the tensions found in scripture. The tensions are created when scripture seemingly opposes, contradicts, or challenges our understanding, against itself. On the one hand the Bible teaches this; on the other hand it appears to be teaching something different. What do we do with such things? The Divinity of Christ for example, there are passages that clearly indicate His divinity and passages that clearly indicate His humanity. Many of us have struggled trying to figure out how both situations can be true. Many on the other hand dismiss one or the other removing the tension. If we keep the tension as God intended, we come to a place of seeing the God/Man of Jesus Christ, he was fully human and fully divine. If we remove the tension we will find ourselves off target, out in left or right field, missing God and the way to go in.

In truth, right now ALL of us are flat wrong in some area of our believing, thinking, and teaching. We may not believe it about ourselves, but we certainly believe it about others. If it is true about others then it is true about us. We all should consider what we believe to be the place we are at now. With all of our heart and understanding recognizing that we possess hearts that are deceitful and desperately wicked, for which the scripture warns us NOT to lean on our own understanding, we are pursuing the truth, seeking to be in God's will, and setting our eyes on Jesus. To think that we've somehow arrived at THE truth and have full understanding of any one teaching, issue, or area of life is foolish.

The following principle comes from experience in feeling the tension that scripture brings us to if we remain faithful to the whole counsel of God's Word. We will often find ourselves between themes. These themes can be related to as found in Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

To everything *there is* a season, A time for every purpose under heaven:

- 2 A time to be born, And a time to die; A time to plant, And a time to pluck *what is planted*;
- 3 A time to kill, And a time to heal; A time to break down, And a time to build up;
- 4 A time to weep, And a time to laugh; A time to mourn, And a time to dance;
- 5 A time to cast away stones, And a time to gather stones; A time to embrace, And a time to refrain from embracing;
- 6 A time to gain, And a time to lose; A time to keep, And a time to throw away;
- 7 A time to tear, And a time to sew; A time to keep silence, And a time to speak;
- 8 A time to love, And a time to hate; A time of war, And a time of peace.

Most of these are opposing each other and the scriptures contain many more especially in the area of spiritual life and teaching. I share then a principle that should be used as a tool. We should recognize the tensions and then remain in them. When we remove the tension in order to come to an answer we have acted prematurely. In truth, our theology and beliefs will be underdeveloped having short circuited the work of the Holy Spirit to bring understanding and insight. We will have jumped the gun so to speak to espouse our own positions and dogma. Let the tension remain; keep both sides as faithful realizing that in God's wisdom they are invariably both true. The question is how are both opposing issues true? Sometimes our human understanding will never grasp it; it is a spiritual answer from the Spirit life. The carnal mind wants to control it, bring it down to human concepts when in reality the answer cannot be discern accept through the Spirit.

The Theology of Tension

The Bible has many tensions and they are there because God placed them to keep us on target. It is in the tension that we are safe. It is also in the tension that understanding and revelations will come to us. By remaining in the tension we are always acknowledging scripture. We are affirming things even if we don't understand them. It keeps us safe from going to the left or the right on an issue.

Here are a few verses of scripture that reflect the tension and our needing to stay on track within it:

De 5:32 "Therefore you shall be careful to do as the LORD your God has commanded you; **you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.**

De 28:14 "So you shall not turn aside from any of the words which I command you this day, **to the right or the left**, to go after other gods to serve them.

Jos 1:7 "Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn **from it to the right hand or to the left**, that you may prosper wherever you go.

Pr 4:27 Do not turn to **the right or the left**; Remove your foot from evil.

And the most outstanding is Jesus' teaching us about the narrow and straight path:

Mt 7:13, 14 "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide *is* the gate and broad *is* the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.

14 "Because narrow *is* the gate and difficult *is* the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

The NIV renders 14:

But small is the gate and ***narrow the road*** that leads to life, and only a few find it.

The narrow road depicts a path that has broad and wide areas to the left and to the right, areas we do not want to walk in. Another way of looking at the tensions found in scripture are the ***apparent contradictions*** that skeptics and other detractors like to bring out in order to discredit the word of God. They would call them contradictions; yet, in every case there are reasonable and sometimes awesome explanations. These explanations or revelations only come when the tension is embraced and both sides of the apparent contradictions are affirmed. When the tension presents itself we need to stay faithful to the messages although to us they appear to be in opposition. The apparent oppositions provide the tension that keeps us on the straight and narrow. We must ask the question in every case, "How can both of these passages that appear to contradict, oppose, or counter each other, be true?" Fundamentally, we believe the Bible IS the Word of God, meaning that we believe it is perfect, without errors, and faithful. Therefore, we must resist the temptation to relieve the tension by explaining it away. When we remove the tension we have stopped the possibility of revelation knowledge coming to us. In essence, by choosing one side or the other we begin to turn to the left or to the right and not stay on the straight and narrow.

Chapter II

Applying It: Predestination Verses Free Will

I want to begin to apply this **Theology of Tension** in the scripture in order to show or demonstrate how I see it working. I believe many denominations, sects, and separated churches of differing kinds can somewhat be explained by how this tension is removed, ignored, and/or misapplied. It is not necessarily the answer for all of our differences but it helps to understand some of them. When the tension is removed either to the left of the matter or to the right we are certainly going to be on opposite ends in what we believe. Even when we apply the tension, I would guess that there would be a range of results that also created differences.

When we do stay in the tension of scripture this means that we are ultimately going to have to ask this question: "**How do these seemly opposing verses both remain faithful to reveal who God is?**" Or in other words, "**How can these apparently contradicting verses both be true?**"

Predestination Verses Free Will

The tension in scripture about these apparently opposing issues is tremendous. We find many scriptures that seem to express the complete sovereignty of God and many that seem to express man's dominion, responsibility and choice. There is no question that this tension has caused many to struggle with how *God's will interfaces with human will*.

If we remove the tension by declaring that God is sovereign completely thereby removing any significance to human influence or self determination, we will become ardent predestinates. If we remove God's sovereignty and control of human affairs by declaring that human will is what governs and God is sidelined so to speak, then we become ardent as free will proponents. As opponents of both sides of this issue there is truth being presented and ignored.

Here is a well known example of this tension in scripture regarding God's sovereignty as in predestination and His mercy as opposed to free will, God loving all, and through Jesus, saving all.

Rom. 9:13 As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated." {#Mal 1:2,3}

Ro 9:15 For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." {#Ex 33:19}

"I Will Have Mercy On Those I Will Have Mercy On, Jacob I Loved, Esau I Have Hated." (Rom. 9:13 & 15)

"I will have mercy on those I will have mercy on..." declares God's own sovereignty and power. No one can oppose God; therefore, when we see verses like this one we are very much tempted to see God has complete control and *untouched by our human influence*--as if free will is not real.

Sometimes the Word of God simply shocks us with very bold statements like this one:

Joh 6:53 Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, **unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood**, you have no life in you. There are many other bold and attention getting verses that rock us to the core sometimes...

Like when Jesus said,

"Mt 5:30 **And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off** and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

No one is going to eat Jesus' flesh or drink His blood neither is anyone actually

going to cut their right hand off! This of course puts us in a bind that is impossible for us to get out of; we can't fulfill what is required.

These “shock” verses make me ask a question: “Is God testing us to see if we'll stay faithful to what we do know of Him?” We know clearly that God loves everyone and has set before all of us dominion in the earth (John 3:16 & Gen. 1:24). It seems that the tension is a test or at least a challenge for us until the purpose of these opposing themes is revealed. When we choose one or the other to emphasize we get into error. We simply ignore revelation to run with revelation and it doesn't work very well.

"I Will Have Mercy On Those I Will Have Mercy On, Jacob I Loved, Esau I Have Hated."

When we take this verse on its own and remove the tension (from other verses) we are going to come out in one place; but if we keep the tension we'll find our way to the truth and revelation knowledge of who God really is and how He set things up. To remove the tension (in this case) would be to totally discount free will to stand in the place of God's complete sovereignty—meaning we have none (or very little).

At face value, in a very literal and singular interpretation, this verse is implying that God simply chooses whom He'll have mercy on as if there really is nothing to base it on. It is describing God as already deciding as in predestining Jacob and Esau's future. Many who embrace *Predestination* refer to these verses as proof.

If we let the whole counsel of God's word come to bare and *remain in tension* with it we'll see something different.

For example the following verses bring something to bare on the subject:

Ga 2:6 But from those who seemed to be something—whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; **God shows personal favoritism to no man**—for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me.

And this fundamental truth:

De 30:19 "I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, **that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life**, that both you and your descendants may live;

God shows mercy *without favoritism* and is no respecter of persons; yet this verse seems to say otherwise. God's word in many places sets life and death, blessing and cursing before us subjecting it all *to us* (Deut. 30:19).

Does God predestine people's future? Does God decide to love some and hate others? Do we really have choice?

Here is the answer that comes to me as we remain faithful to the tension this verse presents in light of others:

God does predestine **the righteous and the wicked** in what they'll get and receive in judgment both here on the earth and in the afterlife. It is in His laws of nature (the laws of this world), and the sowing and reaping process He put here (Gal. 6:7).

Pr 2:22 But **the wicked will be cut off** from the earth, and the unfaithful will be uprooted from it.

Pr 3:33 The curse of the LORD is **on the house of the wicked**, But He blesses the home of the just.

The Key To Unlock The Confusion Or Conflict: Positions Verses Persons

If we look at the "wicked" **as positions rather than persons** I think it all makes better sense. The "wicked" are those who do not repent, nor accept Jesus as their Lord. The end result of rejecting Christ is eternal condemnation. The wicked are those who decide to remain so instead of turning to Christ and His gift of righteousness (since we are all born into sin).

The destiny and curse of life is upon wickedness as destiny and blessing is also upon righteousness, **we get to decide which position we're in by what we do with Jesus.**

Video Game Analogy;

God's sovereignty can also be better understood by a video game analogy. The programmer programs the game and within that game there are a multitude of choices and pre-programmed consequences. We could argue that the game is predestined in all its facets. If the game is pre-programmed why would anyone play it? They play it because although they didn't have any say in the programming, they have lots of say about how they play the game itself. The controller gives them choice in a pre-programmed game.

Likewise, God's sovereignty programmed this world.

Ga 6:7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.

Whatever a man sows means that we get to decide how we live our lives in God's world. The world as we know it has fallen from grace, it is sin cursed, and will pass

away. It is because of this, that the blessing of choices has become a trap, a curse, and bondage to us. Sin nature has caused us to use this gift wrongly.

Is God sovereign?

Absolutely God is sovereign; however, God *programmed choice* and gave us the right to it (that too is His sovereignty being expressed in our decisions). When human will is removed from the equation and God's sovereignty is only understood by His complete control, a great misunderstanding emerges. It means we believe that all of life and people's futures are all predetermined and predestined by God. It makes human free will just an illusion. We all know that the world is fallen and sin cursed as a result of human will; yet, somehow we just can't see God's sovereignty being diminished by our choices. God's sovereignty is manifest in and through our choices just as the video game illustrates. The question isn't whether or not God is sovereign. **The question is how does that sovereignty of God work?** How did God in His sovereignty set things up?

In Regards To Jacob And Esau

I reconcile that bold statement that God loves Jacob but hates Esau like this: the *positions* of wickedness and righteousness are determined, what is not determined is which one we'll choose.

Jacob chose in His life to prioritize the things of God, the birthright, and the firstborn blessing of their father. *Esau*, who was entitled to them did not protect, value, or consider them THE priority of his life. In the choices both made their names became associated with those choices. **God in foreknowledge knew the end and expressed it.** That doesn't make God responsible for Jacob or Esau's choices.

God hates unrighteousness and wickedness; God hates sinner's selfishness and He is jealous for our good. There is no real good outside of God's will, purpose, and priorities in our life. We are to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all other things will be added to us (Matt. 6:33).

Esau sold his birthright for Lentil soup. Esau was not protective and ended up having his Father's blessing stolen by Jacob.

God hates the way *Esau valued things*; but we know God loves Esau personally because he sent Jesus to save him (John 3:16).

God loves Jacob as He loves everyone; therefore, this verse is strongly points to the fact that God **loves the priorities of Jacob!** Jacob sought after, planned, meditated, and schemed to get the birthright and the firstborn blessing from their father. This kind of seeking (the desires) after righteousness is what God is after in all of us.

In other words: God is pleased with Jacob and displeased with Esau. God loved the way Jacob prioritized and hated the way Esau did.

God sent His Son to provide everything we need (what is not in Jesus?). What God has done for one He has done for all; however, **we must respond in faith to His awesome grace to receive Christ and the blessings in Him (Eph. 2:8)**. We must be established in grace, convinced, purposed, and focused not being distracted from it. When we live to Jesus and prioritize the things of God first we are acting like Jacob. It is when we lack desire, drive, and focus of His grace that we are acting like Esau. We are to accept, acknowledge and assert the things of God with authority to overcome our sin nature, the world, and evil (Philemon 1:6).

It is the actions that God hates or loves that are at the heart of this verse. It is not God determining whom He'll love personally. How do we know this? It is because we know other verses that say so. For God so loved the world... (John 3:16).

God is also saying that His mercy is not for sale, not for bribe, and not for earning. He shows mercy on whom He shows mercy based on who He is, not on who we are. God shows mercy on the humble but resists the proud for example (Jam. 4:6); we get to decide to be humble or proud.

Anyone who comes to Christ receives forgiveness, mercy, and the gift of righteousness forever (Rom. 5:17)!

Special Note:

God's desire and interest in our lives is for us to seek first His kingdom, not for His immediate good, **but for ours!** God is blessed when we let Him bless us!

The Conclusion:

God hates sin but loves the sinner. God loves all of us the same in Christ Jesus. There is no way this verse should be used to communicate anything different about God and it won't as long as we continue to embrace, affirm, and believe that all scripture is inspired by God for correction, reproof, and instruction in righteousness (II Tim. 3:16). When we keep in the tension that scripture creates it will keep us closer to the straight and narrow way. We may not have the understanding now but if we affirm both sides of a matter revealed in the Word of God, we'll remain in a place where the Spirit can bring deeper understanding and revelation.

Chapter III

The Trinity: Tension Beyond Comprehension

Joh 8:58 Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, **I AM.**"

Joh 14:28 "You have heard Me say to you, 'I am going away and coming back to you.' If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, 'I am going to the Father,' **for My Father is greater than I.**

There are so many verses we could use to illustrate the tension revealed in scripture about Jesus. I chose these because in the first verse Jesus identifies Himself as "I Am." This is clearly a statement by Him referring to the God of Moses, "I Am that I Am." He is literally saying, "I Am Jehovah."

Then in the second verse Jesus speaks of the Father as greater than He is. This would place Him under God, a subordinate, a lesser class being, not Jehovah. If we look at only one side of the revelation we'll come out with Jesus as a special being used by God to accomplish His salvation plan. We'd have to ignore so much other revelation to maintain this position. If we remove the human side of Christ and consider His incarnation purely divine then we'll miss the substitutionary foundations of salvation itself (Phil. 2:5-7). **Both sides of this incredible truth bring so much revelation of who God is and what He has made us through Christ (I John 4:17)!** We'll miss a lot if we remove the tension to declare Jesus either Divine or human but not both.

The definition of the Trinity: The definition is sometimes the very thing that causes us difficulty in understanding the doctrine. *Tertullian*, an early Christian writer who lived in the second century, a scholar, a tendentious debater of radical and uncompromising spirit of the faith:

'He evolved the earliest systematic form of the doctrine of the Trinity, arguing that there is one 'divine "substance" which is articulated or "Administered" into three distinct but continuous "persons": Father, Logos/Son, and Spirit. At the same time, he offered a reflective account of the incarnation, explaining that the person of Christ is a union of two distinct, unconfused "substances," divine and human, in a single "person" {pg 81)

This terminology became *the basis* of all later Latin and western Trinitarian and Christological discourse.

All Is Based On The Interpretation Of Jesus

Central to this doctrine and definition is "*The Interpretation of Jesus.*" The trinity doctrine intersects with the incarnation; furthermore, it builds upon the whole ministry of God sending His Son into the world to save sinners. Jesus is more than just a Savior to mankind; he is the focus for the whole of creation! All things were made by and through him, and for His pleasure they were created (Col.1:16) **Jesus is more than just a divinely used human being, He is God, and as God eternally significant in all ways like the Father and Spirit.**

Jesus is the Logos (wisdom) of God made flesh and being the Logos of God he preexisted. He is divine and creative. Jesus said, "Before Abraham was, I am (John 8:58)." In Jesus, spirit and flesh, divine and human, are one.

The Trinity doctrine became necessary in order to affirm *revelational truth*. The doctrine evolved in the Church through necessity over against opposing views. It was not that the Church decided to have the “Godhead” of three distinct persons who are of one divine “substance.” The Church believed in One God, the Church believed in monotheism. *“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One!”* (Deut. 6:4)

The problem is that strict monotheistic reasoning does not allow for Jesus being divine (it removes the tension). Furthermore, such restrictive interpretations of monotheism cause great difficulty with Jesus’ new revelations. Much of what Jesus taught, much of what the New Testament affirms, **speaks to His divinity**.

Is Jesus God? I have over 66 citations, both Old & New Testament sources that confirm this to be so. **What do we do with scripture that tells us one thing but our monotheistic interpretations tell us another?** This is the tension of this doctrine.

This is the problem: First, we have a Savior who is a human being. Second, we have this same human being making claims to His divinity; third, we are told that there is only One God.

Is Jesus God? Was Jesus human? Was He both? Can He be God and God be in Heaven? Can God speak to God and still be One?

What we have is two undeniable truths: First, Jesus was human, second, that the scriptures affirm that He is divine. **There is the tension!**

The Tension (leads to revelation):

To deny Jesus Christ is human is to deny the testimony found in scripture; To deny that Jesus Christ is divine is to deny the testimony found in scripture; To deny that God is One is to deny the testimony found in scripture; To deny that there are three distinct persons who are divine is to deny the testimony found in scripture; **To affirm them all is Christianity and the Trinity!**

To deny these truths at any point is to find oneself in agreement with the earlier movements, or their present day sects, cults, or schisms.

I firmly believe that to deny any one of these truths involved with the Trinity doctrine **is to make a human effort to relieve the tension**. The tension keeps us on the straight and narrow. **To go to the left or the right is to miss the path or the truth** (Duet. 17:20).

The Trinity:

Let’s not forget some fundamental truths in our understanding about God. One, God is eternal. Two, God is omnipresent. Three, God is omnipotent. There are attributes here that are infinite. How do we comprehend what is un-comprehensible? How do our finite minds, consciousnesses, and feelings grasp God? On the one hand we do

comprehend what God is, what God is like, what God can do. On the other hand, we don't. Both of these things are true. We do and we don't' comprehend the God we believe in—again, a tension.

Eph 3:20 Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us,

We cannot comprehend the expanse of space yet God is greater. We cannot look upon the Sun and yet God is brighter still. We cannot count the sand of the shore and yet God knows the number. We cannot think upon two things at once yet God knows the thoughts of everyone at the same time. We cannot be in two places at once, yet, we believe God is everywhere at the same time. We have a beginning, a birth, yet God has always been and will always be. To these things we must falter in trying to grasp them. **If we do not just accept them we will drive ourselves crazy thing to understand it.** In this sense Jesus said we must be like a child. A child doesn't comprehend but does accept, so must we.

The problem is that we want to understand and comprehend what we don't know; but how do we, finite beings as we are, understand God? It is easy to deny certain things sometimes in order to put other things in a controllable place. With The Trinity, denying its doctrine to me is like denying things we don't understand to place it in a controllable box. We can logically reason $1 + 1 = 2$ yet there are times when the equation equals 1 or 3. The scripture says a husband and wife are two become one. When however, that two becomes one, sometimes it makes 3, or more (family)! The danger can be in trying too hard to comprehend something forcing an understanding. We make it be the way we want it to be or can understand it to be.

The struggle with the Trinity is whether or not we are dealing in *polytheism* or *monotheism*. Are we talking three Gods or One? In our minds, in our perceptions, one is one being, one substance, and one **in** total. Three is three beings, three substances, or three **in total; yet**, there are many things created that do not fall into such simple terms.

Examples:

Water has three forms, ice, liquid, and gas does that mean water is one in three forms or three in three forms?

An apple is one, yet there are three basic parts to its substance——peel-, flesh, and core.

A **Human Being** is one, yet we are a Spirit, have a soul, and live in a body.

There are Three Dimensions, Height, Width,and Depth.

An Egg has **three** parts but is One: Shell, White, and Yoke.

The **Three leaf Clover or Shamrock**, three leaves with one stem unifying it.

Conclusion:

The tension found in understanding and affirming the trinity is huge. If we remove one side or the other we'll find ourselves missing the truth and grace found in Jesus. We'll become monotheistic in the line of Judaism—they missed Christ altogether. We'll find ourselves in the camp of Jehovah's Witnesses who deny the deity of Christ. Remain in the tension and we remain safe in the witness of the Spirit that Jesus is the God/man come among us. Amen.

Chapter IV

The Cross Is The Ultimate Point Of Tension!

There are many ways to explain the cross and Christ I have chosen this one because *it illustrates the tension* that exists in the scriptures. When people want to know why Jesus died on the cross we often give them answers that they generally cannot see for themselves. For example, we might say to such a question, "Well, He died to take away our sins!" This is the truth but how does someone see this?

I have found an answer to that question that most of us can see and understand. In our world we experience almost every day the tension I'm speaking of and it points to the answer. **Furthermore, if genuinely understood it separates the one true path to God from any other religion being offered.**

The tension I speak of in our world is the dynamics between *Justice and Mercy*. Here is the question and then let me unpack what I mean:

If God Is Just AND God Is Merciful, How Does Justice And Mercy Find Peace/Satisfaction In A Sinful Person IN RELATIONSHIP TO GOD?

I think we find an un-resolvable conflict between them concerning us before God's Holiness and Mercifulness.

Ps 33:5 **He loves righteousness and justice**; the earth is full of the goodness of the LORD.

Ps 145:9 The LORD is good to all, and **His tender mercies are over all His works.**

The scripture reveals that God is just and merciful. God loves justice and the earth is full of it. God loves tender mercies and they are over all His works. If we understand what justice is and what mercy is, *there is a conflict and great tension.*

Simply put Justice defined is eye for eye, foot for foot, and life for life--There is no **TRUE** justice otherwise (Ex. 21:24)[We reap what we've sown. Gal. 6:7].

Simply put Mercy defined is that we don't get what we deserve [We don't reap

what we've sown].

The tension is obvious as Mercy *cancel*s out justice and leaves it undone; then Justice *cancel*s out mercy and leaves it undone [we can't have both!]

The question becomes: **“How can they both be satisfied in a Holy God concerning us?”** The conflict is real if we affirm integrity, honesty, and truth. If we let go or remove the truth to “fudge” or ignore reality then the conflict may appear to be solved but Holiness is lost. The only way we (human beings) can solve this dilemma is to cheat. We'd simply forget to reap or allow the circumstances to pan out. In a way it would be like throwing a rock into the water but there'd be no splash or ripples. We don't have cause and effect.

For God who is holy, just, and true no such scenario exists.

Nu 23:19 "God is not a man, **that He should lie**, nor a son of man, **that He should repent**. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?

In God's accounting everything adds up and everything reconciles.

If we don't rationalize, justify, or play games but look intently at these two immutable attributes of God, we have a problem!

If we demand justice or justice is satisfied, there is no mercy. If we demand mercy or mercy is given, then justice is undone.

Look at real life situations: If someone *kills* another... **TRUE** justice means the **KILLER** should be put to death (This is eye for eye, foot for foot, hand for hand, and life for life)!

If someone *cuts off* another's arm **TRUE** justice means the **offender's** arm should be cut off!

If mercy is granted to the murderer then his/her life is spared. The murderer doesn't get what he/she deserves. If the one who cut off another's arm gets mercy then this means his/her arm will not be cut off. Justice demands the arm be cut off. Mercy applied means neither the killer nor the offender, of cutting off a person's arm, get what they deserve.

In which case above will Justice and Mercy both be satisfied? How could both be satisfied?

When **TRUE** justice is rendered it really becomes a **LOSE/LOSE** situation: both people die; both people lose an arm. If **Mercy** is given one person lives and the other doesn't lose their arm but both live with the fact that they destroyed *another's* life! [**The victims receive NO JUSTICE at all!**]

It is Christ in Christianity that solves the problem! It is in the cross *justice* and *mercy* meet; Righteousness and peace *kiss* each other!

“Mercy and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed.”
Psalms 85:10

In Satisfying Justice:

Jesus the righteous Holy One, **substitutes** in our place, *lays down his life for the world*. In dying, **Jesus satisfies God’s holy judgment AGAINST sin** [What we sowed in sin Jesus reaped on the cross in His death!].

In Satisfying Mercy:

Jesus is **raised** from the dead, “...*because I live you shall live also!*” For **ANYONE** who *calls* upon the name of the Lord, **there is mercy**. Through the **blood of Christ**, God’s wrath passes over us, we don’t get what we deserve!

Col. 2: 13 And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses,
14 **having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.**

15 Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.

Through the atonement Jesus offers Himself for the sins of the world fulfilling the law’s requirements against us. Then, rising from the dead He offers new life to anyone who comes to Him. Justice and Mercy have met each other, in the cross, in Christ, In Him. The **Substitution works!** Justice and Mercy have met together and found peace in God through the atoning blood of Jesus! The eternal tension between them is not remove by excluding one over the other; but both are satisfied fulfilling the tension to bring us salvation! Amen.

What Really Matters Is That God IS SATISFIED

Conclusion:

If you can find another way, then what *Jesus* went through in being crucified would have been for nothing. He said, “*Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me!*” [He prayed it three times!] God the Father did NOT let the cup pass from Him.

True Justice and Mercy is something We can understand; and as we do **it points to the Cross!** No other religion satisfies this problem and since **Christ in Christianity** does it provides powerful understanding for **WHY Jesus is THE ONLY WAY TO GOD!**

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. **No one comes to the Father except through Me.**"

The Tension Leads Us To The Born Again Experience! Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is **born again**, he cannot see the kingdom of God." John 3:3

Eternal Security
Faith and Works
Grace and Works
Perfection
Suffering
Evil
God is Love and Just
Hell and Heaven