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My goal in writing this newsletter is that you be encouraged. One might ask, “How can one be encouraged in a society so inundated with uncertainty?” The answer: Sense can be made of the present simply by applying truth to the past. I, Bob Warren, draw much comfort from this fact.

God has stated that obedience to His truth results in peace, joy, and contentment. He has also affirmed that indifference toward His precepts leads to misery, hopelessness, and despair. Daily we witness the latter scenario through the majority of individuals we meet. Many people wonder where God is in all the chaos—even questioning His existence. Yet, God exists, and is very much in charge. History proves this undeniable reality.

The nation of Israel sinned when the judges ruled (when “*every man did what was right in his own eyes*”—Judges 17:6). Insurmountable problems ensued before the nation repented and God provided a deliverer. Israel also forgot God in the days of the kings and reaped “*the whirlwind*” (Hosea 8:7). Rome controlled Jerusalem during Jesus’ First Coming only as a result of Israel’s past sins. Clearly, the Jews are the most persecuted people on the earth due to their indifference toward God’s truth. They have proven the futility of worshipping the letter instead of the God Who wrote the letter.

America is where she is today due to her unresponsiveness to God’s absolutes. Never, in the history of this country, has error grown at such an accelerated rate. Hence, the foundations of what we have believed to be “truth” are challenged at every turn. Yet, “*If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?*” (Psalm 11:3)—the “*foundations*” of truth being the subject the Psalmist is referencing. What is truth? This remarkably important question is answered incorrectly among many “professing” believers because something other than truth has become their standard for daily living. When such a state is allowed to rule, man’s morality dictates his theology and chaos reigns. We are witnessing the fruit of this blunder within so-called Christianity, and the price is a powerless, compromised gospel that makes Jesus a joke to many people who might otherwise believe. Christians are commonly viewed as ignorant, uneducated bigots who have lost their way! Yet, we are the only “religion” possessing the answer to the world’s evils. The Answer is Jesus, the Foundation of our faith, Who professed to be the very Source of truth (John 14:6) and proved it by exiting the grave.

Christendom went awry when drawing a large crowd eclipsed the value of unadulterated truth (doctrine), for doctrine unveils error and exposes sin (2Timothy 3:16). Hence, institutions bent on appealing to the masses avoid doctrine to their own demise—teaching a pragmatic theology inundated with error.

Someday, man will understand that man cannot fix man. Only God fixes man after man chooses (while depraved) to repent and believe. Hence, the remedy to the bedlam of today is transformed hearts—not a transformed government, bank account, or series of circumstances. Only transformed hearts know what government officials to elect, how to properly handle their monetary resources, and what their present state of affairs can produce when perceived from “the view above.” We as a nation have lost our way due to a deficiency of truth, the only resource that allows an individual to view life from the heavenly perspective! As a result of the nation’s sinful state, we have begun to reap the whirlwind. The silver lining is that true followers of Christ have never been more valuable to this country. I am convinced, therefore, that the best years of ministry are yet future for the passionate pursuer of God’s heart. Unsurprisingly, we have had more people visit The Hill this past year than in any of the previous thirty-five. Yet, all we have taught is a steady diet of doctrine, having discovered that believers (even in their teenage years) are excited to dig as deeply as possible into the vastness of God’s truth.

Beginning Tuesday, August 20, I begin teaching arguably the most debated portion of God’s Word—Romans 9-11. We hope you can join us either in person or online. Every verse will be studied, making sure that our conclusions are in agreement with all the verses in God’s Word rather than a select few

interpreted out of context. Researching such stimulating subject matter has been amazingly fascinating! Consequently, an excerpt from the upcoming study will serve as this edition of *Thoughts From the Hill*.

Thoughts from the Hill

No Fear

Many believers fear Romans 9-11 due to the seemingly endless debate surrounding its content. Yet, Romans 9-11 is easily understood when taken through the full counsel of God's Word.

God's Amazing Messianic Plan

Because Romans 9-11 is a continuation of Paul's rebuttal to the unbelieving Jews' questions of Romans 3:1-8, he paints a word picture of a tree, an "*olive tree*" (Romans 11:17, 24), the trunk of which is God's amazing messianic plan established through Jesus Christ. God, being "*love*" (1John 4:8), desires to bless mankind. Hence, the tree is a tree of blessing. This tree, naturally, possesses a "*root*" (Romans 11:16-18) and "*branches*" (Romans 11:16-24). Paul, in Romans 9-11, explains masterfully the composition of the "*root*" and "*branches*" of this remarkable "*olive tree*" (Romans 11:17, 24).

Paul begins his masterpiece (Romans 9-11) by mentioning the Jewish "*covenants*" (Romans 9:4) along with names such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Romans 9:6-13) to confirm that the root, made of such sturdy and robust substance, is sufficient to support the massiveness of the tree's trunk and branches. Once the reader comprehends this truth, Romans 9-11 is quite simple.

Must God Cause all Things?

Did God hate Esau (Romans 9:13), never granting him opportunity to be saved? Did God harden Pharaoh's heart (Romans 9:17-18) to prevent him from believing? Did God prepare "*vessels of wrath*" (Romans 9:22) on which to display His wrath, never granting these individuals the freedom to exercise faith in Christ? Those who answer these questions in the affirmative choose to elevate God's sovereignty above His love. In fact, according to their view, God must cause all things if He is to maintain His rightful position as the sovereign Ruler of the universe. If so, all events are a direct result of God's will, making the "war" between Satan and God a sham—actually no war at all, should God be the cause of Satan's every move. Hence, for God to judge Satan under such an arrangement (and He will judge him according to Revelation 20:10) would be totally unjust on God's part. The war between Satan and man would also be bogus, for man's response to Satan's schemes (either good or bad) would not only be a result of God's doing, but also God's will. Thus, for God to hold man responsible for sin He has caused and willed would prove Him doubly unjust.

Should God will and cause all things, He would will and cause everything that occurs—all sickness, misfortune, calamity, hardship, etc. He would also be the source of evil. Where man spends eternity would also be God's choice—never man's. We confirmed the error of this ideology while studying Romans 8:28-30 in *Advancing in Romans 1-8* (a commentary produced by this ministry). We observed in those passages this indisputable fact: Should God determine man's destiny from eternity past (before man is born), man would be justified and glorified at birth—a direct violation of Ephesians 2:3, which states that all persons arrive on the earth "*children of wrath*."

One of the major evils of our day is man's relentless quest for power, fame, and wealth—negating the pursuit of a loving and serving heart that elevates the needs of others above his own. This error that so permeates our society has infiltrated the church. Thus, a powerful God Who wills and causes all things, Who wields His power by forcing a select number of individuals to love Him, is more appealing in some circles than a God Who lovingly grants man the freedom to accept or reject His selfless provision through Christ. Yet, forced love is no love at all. In fact, rape is a crime punishable by imprisonment! God would never compromise His character by forcing Himself on anyone. Hence, those who adhere to the error (contradiction) that God wills and causes all things many times view Romans 11:33 as promoting a God Whose sovereignty prevents finite man from understanding His ways:

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! (Romans 11:33—emphasis added)

Yet, Moses understood “*His ways*”:

He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the sons of Israel. (Psalm 103:7)

The Spirit also “*searches all things, even the depths of God*” for the redeemed:

...for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. (1Corinthians 2:10)

No doubt, Deuteronomy 29:29 teaches that God possesses “*secret things*” that cannot be understood by the mind of finite man. Yet, this passage lines up perfectly with Psalm 103:7 and 1Corinthians 2:10 when examined in context:

The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever..., (Deuteronomy 29:29)

Two facts can be extracted from this verse: (1) God possesses “*secret things*” that belong to Him alone (2) God has “*revealed*” certain things to man.

The challenge for the believer is clear. First, we must guard against allowing any of God’s “*secret things*” to be classified as things that are “*revealed.*” For instance, we can in no way presently comprehend the intricacies of how God spoke into existence the sun, moon, and stars—in fact, any of creation. That knowledge belongs to Him alone, but we can trust that He will share at least a portion of this secret with us once we see Him face to face. If not, He knows best. We will be perfectly satisfied with what we are privileged to comprehend, no matter how much or little.

Second, we must guard against classifying “*the things*” that have been “*revealed*” as “*The secret things*” of God. We become lazy-minded when this error is allowed to rule, many times belittling those who seek answers to what we have incorrectly categorized as impossible to understand. Can we even begin to imagine the verbal abuse Henry Ford (the inventor of the automobile), Thomas Edison (the inventor of the incandescent light bulb), and the Wright Brothers (who had the audacity to believe that man could fly in a contraption called an airplane) endured as they began thinking outside the box? To a man they did one fundamental thing; they eliminated contradictions in their thinking regarding the subject matter, one contradiction at a time. In fact, only after all contradictions were removed did they reach their desired goal! God’s Word deserves the same treatment (and more) as we pursue a proper view of His heart.

When contradictory notions regarding God’s dealings with man are accepted as fact (such as God being the cause of all things but judging those whom He prevents from believing for not believing), the popular, yet inadequate remedy is to classify such inconsistencies as “*mystery.*” Yet “*mystery*” in Scripture points to truth that God is in the process of revealing (read Daniel 2:19, Ephesians 1:9; 3:3, Colossians 1:27, etc.), truth that totally disassociates itself from irregularity. Hence, any theological position that elevates God’s sovereignty above His love defames His character in the end—for God is, first and foremost, “*love*” (1John 4:8, 16). Yes, He is sovereign; but His sovereignty never, under any circumstance, violates His love. Why, then, this sudden rush within Christendom to elevate sovereignty to such unhealthy heights? The answer is provided in our upcoming study of Romans 9-11. Hope you can join us!

Ministry News

This year has been extremely encouraging. As most of you know, Rick and Donna Underhill were used greatly by God while living on The Hill. I am thankful for their friendship and support, not only to my family, but also to all individuals who passed this way. Yet, God called them to minister in Newburgh, Indiana, and we are excited to see what the Lord does in and through them. Brent Armstrong, Glenna Yuill, and Mike Wyatt have done a tremendous job picking up where Rick and Donna left off, each living

locally and working on a part time basis. The transition has been incredibly easy, for they are uniquely gifted saints who love Jesus and His people. If you have not yet met them, I look forward to that day. They do a wonderful job (the Lord through them, that is) of making what occurs here on The Hill honoring to God and beneficial to the kingdom. Many changes (all good) are occurring, and our staff is being used (along with several key individuals behind the scene) to bring it about. I love to dream, so to associate with believers who dream similarly is heaven on earth! Plus, at least seven Murray State students will live on The Hill this semester! I can hardly wait to see how the Lord uses them.

We are witnessing a shift in the believer's focus due to the turmoil facing our land. Many followers of Christ are increasingly interested in digging deeper, and the Lord has opened various discipleship opportunities. We are booked solid through the fall with retreats here on The Hill, and our winter and spring calendar is filling up quickly. Our summer camp (July 8-14) was the best ever. We had campers (ages 13-18) from at least ten states, and we housed (and fed) 180 people for the entire week. The fact that we had no discipline problems (not one) is a tremendous testimony to the individuals rearing these youth.

Several new features will be added to our website (lifeonthehill.org) over the next few months. As always, you can consult it for updates regarding events and materials. We will soon complete (and make available) the *Advancing in Romans 1-8* commentary. Also, the final (fourth) book of the *God's Heart* series (*God's Heart as it Relates to Election/Atonement/Grace/Perseverance*) will be published in the short term. Don't forget that you can follow our study of Romans 9-11 online throughout the semester.

Words are incapable of expressing what your love and prayers mean to us. We also thank everyone who supports this ministry financially. We continue to stand amazed! Our prayer is that God bless and multiply your seed for sowing as a result of your generosity and thoughtfulness. Know that we strive to properly handle the resources God has placed in our care.

Upcoming Events on the Hill

<u>August 9-10, 2013</u>	Annual Romans Retreat
<u>August 20, 2013</u>	Tuesday night Bible study begins (7:00 pm). Romans 9-11
<u>October 18-20, 2013</u>	Annual Fall Retreat for couples and singles
<u>January 3-5, 2014</u>	Annual College Retreat
<u>January 17-19, 2014</u>	Annual Winter Youth Retreat
<u>February 21-22, 2014</u>	Retreat: How the Contextual, Full Counsel View of Scripture exposes the error within all forms of Arminianism, Calvinism, and Reformed Theology.
<u>April 25-27, 2014</u>	Annual Men's Retreat for fathers, their sons, and single men of all ages
<u>July 6-12, 2014</u>	Annual Summer Camp for youth (ages 13-18)