



THE  
INESCAPABLE  
GOD

BY RYAN PHIPPS





THE  
INESCAPABLE  
GOD

BY RYAN PHIPPS



# FAIRNESS

There is a certain fast-food chain that houses dedicated indoor play areas for children. Every now and then, I take my kids there.

They rush into the secure, climate-controlled environment, filled with tube-slides and other climbing contraptions, surrounded by walls of transparent glass. Outside, I sit undisturbed, monitoring their safety while eating a cheeseburger and fries, experiencing a peace that passes all understanding.

And if that's not already wonderful enough—while playing, they expel supernova-like bursts of energy, causing them to collapse into a deep sleep on the ride home.

Everyone wins. What would I do without this place?

On a recent visit, we arrived only to discover that I had forgotten to bring socks for my kids to wear in the play area.

The rules for the play area are clear, posted on a giant sign just inside that reads, "All Children In Play Area Must Wear Socks."

"Rules are for bending." I thought to myself, so I

sent them forth, sockless to play.

I went into the dining area to get our food, and it was taking a while, so I went back to look in through the glass to check on my children.

There, I saw them frozen in terror, standing in front of one of the employees who was saying something to them.

I walked back into the play area and asked the employee, "Is something wrong?" She responded, "They have to wear socks to play in here, so I was telling them!"

I glanced around at the rest of the room. It was filled with other children, not a single one of

them wearing socks.

Before I could catch myself, out of my mouth slipped a question in sharp tones; “Is it only my children who have to wear socks or do they all have to?”

She snarked back, “Right now, sir, I’m talking about your children. There are socks for sale at the counter for a dollar.”

She never said anything to the other children—only my own.

I looked around and counted all the kids in the room. There were twelve, including mine, so I stormed out of the play area, walked up to the



counter, and said, “I’d like to buy twelve pairs of socks, please.”

The man behind the register said, “Wow. I’ve never seen anyone buy that many before!”

I handed him the money, he handed me the socks, and I took them back into the play area. Once inside, I started tossing them to each of the parents in the room.

A few of them even started applauding.

I believe in fairness.



# PREDESTINATION

In Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, there's a familiar passage that is difficult to quantify. It's difficult because it appears to single out some and cast others aside.

The passage reads;

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.*

*In love, he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him, we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us.*

*With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.*

*—Ephesians 1*

If you are familiar with a doctrinal position called, “predestination,” this passage is where the word originates.

Predestination is the belief that God, in God’s sovereignty, predestines some for eternal life, and others for eternal punishment.

Those who are marked for eternal life are called, “The Elect” and those who are not, “The Un-Elect” or “The Non-Elect.”

Of course, the doctrine of predestination is based on more passages than just this one, but this is one of the passages that often gets quoted when expounding on it.

Whereas some people use this a passage to exclude people, I see it as saying something entirely different, namely because of the last verse, that says,

*With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment —to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.*

To bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

It begs the question, if “all things” are being

brought in, how can that only mean “some things”?





# BLANKNESS

The Greek philosopher Xenophanes once wrote,

*The Ethiopians say that their God is flat-nosed and black, while the Thracians say that God has blue eyes and red hair. Yet if cattle or horses or lions had hands and could draw, or if they could sculpt like men, then the horses would draw God like horses, and the cattle like cattle; and each, they would shape the body of God in the likeness, each kind, of their own.*

—Xenophanes

Isn't that exactly what we are each guilty of?  
We project all that we are onto the divine, then,  
when we think of the divine and how it thinks  
of us, it is just as we are.

In other words, if I'm impatient, then God  
must also be impatient.

If I'm judgmental, then God must also be  
judgmental.

If I despise a certain people group, then God  
must also despise them.

Cue the battle hymn of every war fought in the  
name of faith, where each side believes that in  
eradicating the other that they are performing

the very will of God.

But in spite of our dearly held beliefs, wouldn't God have to be what God is, regardless of what we believed that God to be?

It is imperative when we sit down to read the scriptures and try to discern truth from them, that we go to them in blankness.

We must set aside our predispositions if we're ever to see what the words of God are saying to us. Only then can we ask the right questions.

In blankness, sometimes the scriptures say things that we have to be willing to see, even if they don't confirm our biases.

That being said, I would posit that the phrase, “all things” in this passage means just that— all things.

Another passage written by the same author in The Book Of Colossians mirrors it this way;

*We look at Jesus and see God's original purpose in everything created. For everything above and below, visible and invisible, got started in him and finds its purpose in him.*

*He was there before any of it came into existence and holds it all together right up to this moment. And when it comes to the church, he organizes and holds it together, like a head does a body.*

*From beginning to end he's there, spacious and roomy. Everything finds its proper place in him without crowding. Not only that, but all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of him.*

—*Colossians 1*

What does that (and the passage from Ephesians) say if we read it without bias or preconditioning? Could that be who God really is whether we choose to believe it or not?

At the root of each of us, even if it's buried under layers of bias, is the idea that fairness is a

good thing, that unity is a good thing, that justice is a good thing, that we ought not to be partial, and that everybody deserves to be treated equally. This is the kind of God behind the world— good to all, good for all, bringing all into unity.

And if we truly are predestined to something, maybe we're predestined to that?







## A B O U T T H E A U T H O R

Ryan Phipps is the Senior Minister at Church In Bethesda in Bethesda, Maryland.

Raised in the church, becoming a pastor was the one thing Ryan vowed he would never do. After spending many years away from faith, he found that for all of its flaws, the church can still occupy a unique place of good in the world if it is willing to evolve with reason and empathy.

He is also the host of Meditations For The Metro, a podcast of daily devotions for people with busy lives.

Ryan is an INTJ on the MBTI and a 5w4 on the Enneagram.





WHAT IF ALL YOU BELIEVED  
DIDN'T CHANGE A THING?

WHAT IF THERE IS  
NO ESCAPE?